

2022 Energy Service Group Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Brighton Centre

13 Jun 2022

Negotiating and Bargaining

1. Increasing diversity within Energy

Conference picture someone working in the energy sector, and you are likely to mentally summon up an image of a white, middle-aged male. Although a lack of diversity isn't unique to energy, it is an issue that needs solving.

While the situation is improving, it's not changing fast enough; recent events have rightly woken up the world up to racial disparity once more. The good news is, there are things the industry can do to improve diversity, while also providing a better service to its customers.

"According to a recent survey for EqualBy30 carried out by technology company Diversio, women account for 32% of the global energy sector workforce, while racial and ethnic minorities account for 22%. For racial and ethnic minorities, the C-Suites leaders' percentage is even lower, 20%

Diversity and inclusion have been on the energy sectors agenda for a while, but if we want to create a more inclusive workplace, every single person in the energy sector needs to work on tackling biased opinion through training in recruitment.

Few Black students enter the industry, so there's a problem in terms of getting young people from education into the sector. The energy sector is overwhelmingly white, either when you're talking about policy, or roles. It's hard to find Black leaders, it's hard to visualise career progression, and it's hard to map out your career without that.

Energy has an opportunity to think creatively, going beyond their existing recruitment networks and invest in the future. We need to break down the barriers affecting professional development, and help Black members create their own career path in the sector.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to

1. Work with NBMC and Higher Education SGE to encourage more Black students to enter the energy industry.
2. Create a more inclusive organisation by building a culture of inclusivity and engaging with the NBMC on engagement with employers on the following areas:
 - a. Removing gender language from job adverts
 - b. Introducing blind CVs with no racial or socio-economic indicators
 - c. Diverse interview panel
 - d. Introducing Ethnicity Pay Gap monitoring

National Black Members' Committee

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2. Encouraging STEM subject study to increase numbers of women working in technical roles in Energy

Research shows that at GCSE level engagement in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects has a broadly similar gender split. At this level female students are achieving higher or equal average A*-C grades compared to males.

At A Level this drops off with a higher number of males taking up STEM subjects, for example only 20% of A Level physics students are female. Despite this, female students are outperforming males by gaining proportionally higher A*-C grades at A Level.

At Undergraduate level there is an even starker difference - the majority of Engineering and Technology and Computer Science students are male. The proportion of male undergraduates in these subject areas has remained stubbornly above 75% for at least the last five years.

This is a problem because the UK economy is losing talent which could be nurtured and developed. It is a particular problem for the Energy sector. Surveys show the number of women registered as engineers and technicians (i.e. CEng, IEng, EngTech) with professional bodies dropped from 6% to 5% of the total in 2017.

The lack of women in technical roles in Energy contributes to some very wide gender pay gaps in the Energy sector, for example British Gas reported a 43.8% gap in 2021 and EDF reported a gap of 32.7%. This compares with the gap for all employees in 2021 of just over 15%.

UNISON wants to see more women in technical jobs in Energy. Research by Mckinsey's shows that gender diverse organisations outperform those with less diversity. Encouraging females into fields where they have talent will help to stimulate growth in STEM workplaces. It will also have a positive impact on gender pay gap/s.

Early work with girls in schools has demonstrated that it can encourage their participation in STEM subjects and retain those who show a talent. Bursaries and sponsorship are also proven ways to encourage uptake of a subject. Apprenticeships in STEM areas, promoted to women, also encourage uptake. This is important if we are to reduce the gender pay gap.

Conference therefore calls upon the Energy Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Make closing the gender pay gap a priority in bargaining strategies with Energy employers, aiming to get employers to examine their gender pay gap and develop action plans to close gaps, including
 - a) outreach to schools to encourage girls to see the opportunities in a technical job and to study STEM subjects and
 - b) bursaries and apprenticeships promoted to women considering a career in Energy.

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- 2) Work with the National Women's Committee and Labour Link to lobby the UK Government to promote STEM subject study to girls.

National Women's Committee

3. Changes in National Grid

This energy service group Conference notes that significant changes are happening within National Grid that will impact UNISON members who work for the company. These changes include the purchase of WPD (western power distribution) the disposal of its Gas Transmission business and the possible disposal of the electricity system operator function.

As a result of the strategic role that National Grid plays in the energy system in the UK these changes are of significance in how the UK will meet its net zero obligations and how the sector will continue to employ energy workers on decent terms and conditions into the future.

It is therefore important that UNISON nationally continues to support our work as the enlarged National Grid including WPD and with the employer and future employers of the Gas Transmission business and the Electricity System Operator.

We therefore call on the Energy SGE to

1. Ensure that the changes referenced in the body of the motion are responded too and supported by UNISON nationally within its own lay structures so that the changes do not have a negative impact
2. That the National Grid sector continues to receive the level of support it does presently to enable it to manage the transition with the incorporation of WPD and remain a vibrant and strong national sector committee
3. That when it is clear how the Gas Transmission and Electricity System Operator businesses will function, UNISON continues to offer national support to these nationally important entities to ensure we are well placed to grow membership and adjust to the new future in whatever shape that takes.

National Grid Energy

Campaigning

4. Cost Of Living Crisis and Its Impact on Energy Workers

Conference notes that as a result of rapidly increasing wholesale gas prices, the price of energy for consumers and businesses in the UK has also significantly increased.

Further it notes that the energy price cap which regulates the default tariffs has been increased by some 54% by the energy regulator Ofgem. This is the tariff that most consumers are on, and fixed deals are currently more expensive.

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The increases reflect the near quadrupling of wholesale international gas prices and the UK's reliance on Gas as its principal energy source.

The net impact of these increases is going to be a significant increase in fuel poverty and income poverty from these extra costs. Many consumers will simply be unable to pay and will suffer as a consequence, and possibly run up bad debts adding more pressure to the beleaguered retail supply sector in which many UNISON members work. The real impact of this will be felt next winter.

Conference further notes that the actions of the Government and the regulator OFGM has significantly contributed to where we are today. The recent support package announced by the Chancellor shows a total lack of understanding of the severity of the problem and its root causes.

Conference notes that the legacy energy retail suppliers have made significant losses from retail supply for some years leading to thousands of job losses and an unstable environment in which new entrants were allowed to be totally reckless bringing the whole house down and shining a light on the lack of regulatory oversight and an encouragement of risky behaviours in a key public service.

Conference notes that the stream of job losses has not abated, and we oppose the actions of OVO and others who are continuing to remove jobs with no view to the future.

Conference welcomes the position that UNISON has taken in its engagements with key stakeholders over recent years. We have been consistent in calling for much greater regulation, an end to the mutualisation of losses, the introduction of proper penalties for reckless behaviour, a fit and proper person test for owners, the end to crazy incentives for new customers, a requirement to be properly capitalised and hedged and a requirement to help consumers decarbonise.

Only now are Ofgem beginning to realise some of the past mistakes but the remedies it puts forward are too little too late.

This conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE

- 1) To continue to highlight poor practice and reckless behaviours in this industry that have cost energy member their jobs.
- 2) To use all our engagements with key stakeholders like Ofgem to argue for greater regulation and an end to reckless behaviour with no sanction for those who engage in it including criminal prosecution if wrongdoing is found.
- 3) To continue to make clear and sound arguments for the retail energy supply industry to be returned into public ownership with the state buying energy for consumers with a view to securing the best cleanest and most stable price for all consumers and having a key objective of reducing consumption through energy efficiency measures and to provide sustainable employment for energy members with the necessary platform to increase employment to meet decarbonisation objectives.

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- 4) To correct inaccurate statements on the reasons for the crisis and engage with Labour Link to ensure that the knowledge of members in the energy sector is heard and understood.
- 5) To argue for the removal of all charges from the energy bill that are not related to the level of energy consumption and instead to push for these charges to be placed onto general taxation so that it is progressive and not (as is the case today) regressive with lower income consumers having to spend a much higher percentage of their income on energy bills than those with higher incomes.
- 6) To argue for a significant increase in government funding via the taxpayer for measures to enable consumers to be able to decarbonise.
- 7) To update and promote the UNISON 'warm homes' report so that it can continue to be used to argue for a national programme of energy efficiency measures in ways that are affordable and would lead to significant reduction in energy consumption, and bills while creating thousands of energy jobs within unionised suppliers.

Energy Service Group Executive

5. A balanced Energy System fit for the future, employing our members in good jobs!

Conference notes that in November 2021 the UK hosted the COP 26 in Glasgow.

At this COP the UK again committed itself to achieving Net Zero by 2050 which itself is a statutory target which the UK Government should be working towards achieving.

UNISON energy workers know already that achieving Net Zero will be hard to do, but that it is essential we hit that target and that we do it in a way that secures good employment for members, provides affordable clean energy for all and ensures the lights are kept on and homes warm.

Sadly, it is clear that progress on the many measures required to be taken so that we remain on track to achieve Net Zero is now starting to wane. Many of the required changes take years to implement and yet they have barely begun to happen, and budgets set aside or planned, fall well short of what is required.

Conference believes that the Government have not demonstrated that they are serious about achieving net zero and that its warm words have done little to create the right conditions for it to happen. The level of investment needed, the new energy workers required, and the legislative and regulatory framework is not in place at a time when it should be in full swing.

The recent energy price crisis shows just how fragile the UK is to price shocks and its reliance on overseas energy supply and the use of gas to produce electricity. In addition to this, the lack of certainty on energy policy has led to both dithering and delay, but critically it has led to a loss of employment in this sector at a time when it should be increasing.

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This Conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE to:

1. Challenge the Government to set forth credible plans to achieving Net Zero by 2050 and call out the lack of progress made
2. Work with Labour Link and others to develop credible plans to achieving Net Zero ensuring that clean energy remains affordable to all, provides good, unionised employment and is secure and sustainable
3. Enable energy members to contribute to a debate on what a balanced energy policy should be and produce a report outlining the options for this and the roles all energy sources might play in getting to Net Zero.
4. Continue to promote the development of Hydrogen solutions and work with all stakeholders to ensure a sustainable future for our members in the gas industry
5. Highlight the folly of backing heat pumps without a clear plan to support consumers with dedicated financial helps and a credible workforce plan to ensure we have new workers able to deliver the targets set.
6. Promote the concept of energy as a public good and the right to clean energy for all.

Energy Service Group Executive

6. Unlocking the Potential of all in the Energy Industry

Conference notes that energy employers have reported many difficulties in recruiting into a wide range of roles within the energy sector. It is also known that in some parts of the sector the workforce is ageing, and more workers are retiring than being replaced. This is adding to workforce fatigue and an over reliance on excess overtime to plug the gaps.

It has also been known for some time that working in the energy sector is not seen as being the attractive destination that it once was and that it is competing alongside many other areas of employment that have greater success in securing new workers.

It has been estimated that some 400,000 new jobs are required in the sector if the energy industry is going to be able to meet its Net Zero obligations. This is significant number of people that the sector has to attract when it is also competing with other sectors for workers.

To ensure the UK can meet its climate change obligations energy employers will not only need to do more to recruit and retain workers it will also need to do much more to unlock the potential of all its workforce and bring diversity and inclusion to the heart of its ambition.

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This Conference therefore calls on the Energy SGE to:

1. Work with the UNISON self-organised groups to develop a charter that can be used by UNISON reps to engage with employers to develop plans to encourage new workers to enter the industry but also encourage those in customer service roles to progress their career into operational roles linked to net zero.
2. Build on last years energy conference motion on ‘celebrating women in energy’ to ensure we promote the role women play in the energy system and recognise more needs to be done by employers to ensure policies support the development of women.

Energy Service Group Executive

7. Young workers, burnout and the Right to Disconnect: the negative impact of remote digital work on young members' well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic

This Conference notes that, even before the pandemic, mental health and stress at work were among the leading issues raised by young workers.

Conference notes that the pandemic has only exacerbated young workers’ concerns about mental health, whether that is due to working in stressful conditions on the front line, or due to isolation from friends, family and support networks. A UNISON survey of young members in 2020 found that over 85% of young members said their mental health was ‘seriously affected’ or ‘slightly affected’ by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the number of responses from members in the Energy service group was small, this pattern was reflected in their responses.

In particular, the huge rise in working from home in an era of digital connectivity has blurred the boundaries for many between work and home life, with a negative impact on wellbeing and work/life balance.

This Conference notes that the Right to Disconnect is the ability to not engage in work-related electronic communications such as e-mails or messages during non-work hours.

Conference believes that mental health is a workplace issue which must be addressed by trade unions in negotiations with employers and by direct support for affected workers.

Therefore, this Conference asks the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) to campaign and raise the impact of the Right to Disconnect on wellbeing with young members in the Energy service group;
2. Support branches in the Energy Service Group in negotiating with employers to produce clear guidelines and policies on work/life balance and the Right to Disconnect, and consider producing bargaining guidance on this;

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3. Identify and share examples of successful negotiation in Energy branches in establishing policies which support positive work/life balance and staff's Right to Disconnect;
4. Promote UNISON's updated mental health bargaining advice to branches in the Energy Service Group.

National Young Members' Forum

8. Energy Market - Public Ownership of energy retail is key

Since de-regulation we have seen many suppliers come and go within the energy industry and while this was seen as a good thing competitively, there was little thought about the impacts on the energy workforce which has seen thousands of good jobs lost from the suppliers with strong union agreements in place.

While inadequate regulations and licencing set by Ofgem allowed new suppliers to enter the market with the sole purpose of gaining market share as quickly as possible, the focus on whether these companies were financially secure was lacking. As with the financial crash of 2008, this was the perfect storm waiting to happen.

Since the beginning of 2021, we have seen 31 companies exit the market. Leaving the remaining suppliers and more importantly the customer to pick up the pieces. These failures are blamed on rising wholesale prices, particularly for natural gas, which has risen in price by over 300% since the beginning of last year. The recent announcement in February by Ofgem will see the price cap increase by 54%, adding on average between £693 - £708 to household bills depending on payment method.

Compare this to the cap of 4% imposed by the French Government on EDF, while seen as a private company, EDF shares are majority owned by the French Government (over 80%). The impact of losses, between 7 – 8 billion Euros, will not be borne solely by the company itself and the French Govt are stepping up its direct support of the company securing the employment of energy workers.

The impact of lax regulation has massively impacted our members in the industry as we have seen an increase in restructures and work being offshored as companies try to recoup losses. It is getting harder to negotiate decent pay rises for our members and companies are continually looking to weaken terms and conditions. As we move to a greener future and the industry moves away from fossil fuel production, the opportunities for our members to move to green jobs is difficult as those jobs need to be created and run alongside existing roles which still need to be fulfilled.

Yet there is another way as we have partially seen in France, it is taking into public ownership the retail energy supply industry. A single public retailer would be able to negotiate wholesale prices, impacting and protecting consumers from shocking price increases and supply issues. It would be able to look at the long-term future of the industry, implementing and overseeing projects that help the UK reach its climate change goals including clean energy production and improved storage capacity, as well as securing jobs for our members.

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Therefore, conference calls upon the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Work with Labour Link to continue lobbying government for the re-nationalisation of the energy retail market.
2. Work with the NEC to create a national campaign on re-nationalisation of the energy market, with a key mission to provide stable good quality employment for energy workers while linking this in with the cost-of-living crisis.
3. Publicise the call for re-nationalisation of energy retail supply to UNISON Energy members.
4. Call on Labour Link to continue to take the Service Group's policy around energy retail market re-nationalisation into the work of developing the next Labour Party's election manifesto.

EDF Energy (Doxford)

9. Make 2022 the Year of Disabled Workers in Energy workplaces

Conference notes that UNISON has declared 2022 the year of disabled workers, which is a great opportunity for Energy branches to organise, bargain and campaign on the issues that matter to our disabled members and to increase recruitment and retention as a result.

Energy branches can use 2022 to highlight the experience of our disabled members, the value they bring to our union and to Energy workplaces, and to negotiate improved policies with Energy employers, including reasonable adjustment passports and disability leave policies.

Conference notes the resources available on the UNISON website, including:

- 1) Reasonable Adjustment Bargaining Guide, including model policy and 'passport'
- 2) Disability Leave bargaining guide
- 3) Stewards guides to representing disabled members and to representing Deaf (BSL user) members
- 4) Quick Guides to Access to Work and to Reasonable Adjustments
- 5) Becoming a branch disabled members officer

Conference calls on the service group executive to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to:

- a) Include the Year of Disabled Workers in their ongoing work programme
- b) Promote the year of Disabled Workers to Energy regions and branches, encouraging them to include work in this area in their work plans for the year

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- c) Encourage all Energy branches to elect a branch disabled members officer and promote UNISON's national training on becoming a branch disabled members' officer
- d) Include reasonable adjustment passports and disability leave policies on the national negotiating agendas with Energy employers

National Disabled Members Committee

Efficient and Effective Union

10. Recruiting, supporting and developing young activists across the Energy service group

This Conference notes the continuing discrepancy between numbers of young members and numbers of young activists. Conference notes that RMS figures from February 2022 show that only 3.5% of members in the Energy Service Group are aged under 27.

Conference notes the specific barriers to young members in becoming active and involved in UNISON. Young members are more likely to experience low pay and precarious employment. They are less likely to be familiar with the ways that trade unions work and their structures, and to feel intimidated or anxious about attending meetings. Young members who are Black, LGBT+, disabled or women may experience multiple barriers to becoming active.

Conference believes that the full participation of young members is vital to the success of the union in developing a sustainable Energy sector activist base for the future and making sure that the voices of young workers are heard across the sector.

Conference asks the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) to develop a strategy to increase the numbers of young members and activists across the Energy sector;
2. Promote the NYMF's report "Getting Active in UNISON" to Energy branches who want to develop a plan to increase participation and activity by young members;
3. Ask branches across the Energy sector to identify and share both challenges and success stories in recruiting and developing young activists;
4. Encourage and support branches in the Energy Service Group to develop mentoring and buddying schemes to support new young activists, including promoting UNISON's Learning and Organising Service's (LAOS) resources on mentoring and buddying.

National Young Members' Forum

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11. Net zero and LGBT+ members

Conference recalls that the “UNISON Energy workers and the drive to Net Zero and Carbon Neutrality by 2050” motion passed at the 2021 Energy conference highlighted the measures promoted by the service group which would retain and promote members jobs in the energy sector while driving the changes necessary to decarbonise energy and called on the Service Group Executive to promote this work within UNISON to inform the wider membership.

Conference recognises that the self-organised groups have an important role to play in raising awareness of the measures being promoted by the service group. It welcomes the motion ‘Climate change is an LGBT+ issue’ adopted by the 2021 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) conference, which recognised that we are at a defining moment when it comes to climate change. Its impacts are global in scope and unparalleled, and it is evident that on a global level people who are already most vulnerable and marginalised will experience the greatest impacts of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report identified LGBT+ communities as one such group.

Conference also notes that UNISON is part of a broad-based civil society coalition, including the TUC, Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International, which is campaigning for a new ‘failure to prevent’ law that would mandate both companies and the public sector to undertake human rights and environmental due diligence across their supply chains, and would hold companies to account when they fail to prevent human rights abuses and environmental damage in their business. This would increase protection for workers, communities, human rights defenders and the environment.

Conference therefore calls on the service group executive to:

- 1) Work with the national LGBT+ committee to raise awareness amongst LGBT+ members on climate change and the measures being promoted by the service group to decarbonise energy
- 2) Work with other sections of the union as appropriate to produce guidance for branches in Energy on the ethical procurement of any goods or services they purchase (such as equipment and furniture)
- 3) Work with other sections of the union as appropriate to produce guidance for branches in Energy on ways to advocate for ethical procurement policies with employers
- 4) Work with the NEC to support the campaign for a new ‘failure to prevent’ law

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee

12. Trans equality in Energy – louder and prouder!

The toxic debate ignited by the United Kingdom government’s consultation on reforming the Gender Recognition Act underlined the importance of our union,

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including branches in the energy service group, supporting and representing our trans members effectively.

Attacks on trans rights have escalated further in the past year. There has been a sustained attack on Stonewall's trans inclusive Diversity Champions programme, which some employers in energy may be members of, and repeated false claims that Stonewall is misinterpreting the Equality Act's protected characteristic of gender reassignment in its advice to organisations.

The tactics being used, particularly the vilification of trans women, by those campaigning to roll back the existing rights of trans people, including 'gender critical' and anti-trans groups, are almost identical to the tactics seen around the time of Section 28, when gay men were portrayed as sexual predators and a danger to children to spread fear and mistrust.

There is also growing evidence that the concerted international campaign against trans people is linked to far right and religious-right groups. Targeting a minority, and spreading false information to provoke hatred and distrust by preying on people's fears, are classic far right recruitment tactics.

Conference acknowledges that Trans members in the service group may be experiencing discrimination and transphobia and/or feeling that their workplace is not a safe place to disclose their gender identity.

Conference therefore recognises the need for our union, including the energy service group, to become more visible and more vocal – louder and prouder - in supporting and promoting Trans equality.

This must include the Service Group Executive continuing to encourage the negotiation of inclusive language in agreements and policies, and of inclusive practices and procedures, across the service group, but there are some practical steps that branches can take alongside this.

Some workplaces already use pronouns on name badges, ID cards and email signatures, but not many. If more did, this would help alleviate the awkward questions that some Trans and non-binary members can face on a day to day basis, and also allow other members to show their understanding of the importance of respecting people's pronouns. Conference therefore welcomes the UNISON 'Why pronouns are important' factsheet which can be used by branches to raise these issues with employers.

Further, some of our Trans and non-binary members work in contact centres or regularly speak to members of the public by phone as part of their jobs. They can face upsetting assumptions about their gender identity, including hostility and confrontation. Similarly, Trans and non-binary people can face unintentional misgendering on the phone by some staff. Conference therefore welcomes the guidance being produced by the National LGBT+ Committee on the best practice words and phrases for staff to use when dealing with people on the phone, which can then be used to assist in the training of call taking staff and by individual members as a learning resource.

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Conference therefore calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to work with the National LGBT+ Committee and other parts of the union as appropriate to:

1. Explore ways to increase the strength and visibility of UNISON's work to promote Trans equality in the service group.
2. Urge branches to promote the fact sheet 'Why pronouns are important' and to ask employers to adopt a policy that allows all staff to have their pronouns on name badges, ID cards and email signatures.
3. Encourage branches to urge employers to join the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme if they are not already members.
4. Publicise and promote the guidance on best practice in dealing with people on the phone.
5. Promote the UNISON fact sheet 'How to be a Trans ally' and trans ally training widely within the service group.
6. Encourage members in the service group who have been on the Trans ally training to join the Trans ally's network being set up by the National LGBT+ Committee.
7. Promote materials, when available, to help members in the service group to counter the 'gender critical' narrative and provide information on the links between the gender critical movement in the UK and the far right.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee