



# **Higher Education Service Group Conference**

## **Preliminary Agenda**

**Motions contained in this agenda will be debated on  
Thursday 2 February 2023  
Crowne Plaza Newcastle**

**2023 National Higher Education Conference  
UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

# 2023 National Higher Education Conference

## UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

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### Negotiating and Bargaining

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1. One-off Payment for University Staff - *Leeds University*
2. National Freedom of Information Requests to Strengthen our Campaigns - *Northern Region*
3. Aggregate the ballot - *University Of West Of England*
4. Higher Education, work/life balance, and the Right to Disconnect - *National Young Members' Forum*
5. Securing the legacy of the year of disabled workers in Higher Education workplaces - *National Disabled Members Committee*
6. Make the Real Living Wage the Minimum for Requirements for Pay Agreements - *Cymru/Wales Region*
7. Higher Education Pay 2023-4 - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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### Campaigning

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8. Conversion therapy - spread the word - *National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee*
9. Trial the 4-day work week - *Hull University*
10. Campaigning for Proper Funding for Higher Education as a Public Service - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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### Organising and Recruitment

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11. Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) - *Yorkshire - Humberside Region*
12. Promote UNISON as the union for Higher Education Professional Support Staff - *Newcastle University*

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### Motions Ruled Out of Order

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#### Beyond remit of the Conference

- A) Environment and Climate Change - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*
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#### Conflicts with an Existing Rule

- B) Support with ballots and industrial action - *Leeds University*
  - C) Future Balloting Timetable - *University Of Kent Unison*
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#### Could place the union in legal jeopardy

- D) Trans equality is UNISON business  
Not printed on the advice of the legal officer - *National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee*
  - E) Covid-19 – protecting our members  
Not printed on the advice of the legal officer - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*
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#### Not competent

- F) Improving the representation, progress and success of Black staff in Higher Education - *National Black Members' Committee*
  - G) Hybrid and agile working - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*
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#### Received twice

- H) Improving the representation, progress, and success of Black staff in Higher Education - *National Black Members' Committee*
- I) Campaigning for Proper Funding for Higher Education as a Public Service - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*
- J) Environment and climate change - *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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**Crowne Plaza Newcastle**

**02 Feb 2023 02 Feb 2023**

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## **Negotiating and Bargaining**

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### **1. One-off Payment for University Staff**

The primary role of UNISON, or any Trade Union, is to use the collective power of its members to deliver lasting and significant improvements to pay, pension rights and working conditions.

We cannot help but be mindful of, and worried for the health and wellbeing of our members in HE, facing as they have been for the last three years truly unprecedented challenges: the pandemic – which left many colleagues forced to work from home, in often less than ideal situations, or conversely required that other colleagues go onto campuses in what was manifestly an unsafe time to be out in public; the so-called ‘cost of living crisis’, including massive hikes in utility bills; year upon year of below inflation pay rises.

Yet, while staff are facing ever more difficult choices about which essentials to cut back on, the sector they work in has never been richer: this is not about the failure to make money, rather it is the choices made about the distribution of the wealth created.

Since the declaration of a pandemic and the rapid societal changes invoked by that, many employees in HE have worked from home, for a greater or lesser part of their working week: it is accepted that this number is slowly diminishing as the transfer back to campuses across the country is happening at a steady pace.

This meant that the cost of working – heating, lighting, broadband, as well as sundry office supplies and larger scale equipment – was moved from the employer to the thousands of individuals at kitchen tables and spare bedrooms across the country. At Leeds University, we know that the employer “saved” at least £22m in one year, on these costs, while at the same time refusing to make contributions to the increased bills faced by individuals: in short, a business cost was in part, transferred from the employer to the employee.

Acknowledging that some institutions have already moved to making payments along these lines, but clearly there has been no consistency in the amounts, the manner (vouchers or salary) or even the acceptance of the need. We look to gain acknowledgement and acceptance that it should not be up to thousands of individual staff members, many already struggling to meet daily living costs, to effectively subsidise the work of an increasingly wealthy sector.

Accepting the logistical impossibility of organising a system whereby individuals can invoice their own employer, we propose that UNISON Higher Education Service Group (HESGE) look to establish a one-off extraordinary negotiation with the employers to seek reparation, in the form of a one-off payment to each employee in the sector.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

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Meet with the employers, as early as possible outside of the normal pay negotiation cycle, with a view to negotiating a one-off, non-consolidated payment to all staff, to mitigate the extra financial impact that working from home has had on employees.

*Leeds University*

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### **2. National Freedom of Information Requests to Strengthen our Campaigns**

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives people the right to request information from universities. The Act aims to promote a culture of transparency and accountability, and therefore facilitate better understanding of how the universities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions they do, and how they spend public money and that obtained from student tuitions fees and other income sources.

In the past a FOI was served on a university to find out how much it had spent on a piece of artwork. It turned out to be £1.4 million! £1.4 million stuck on the wall when our members were refused pay to keep up and catch up.

In 2018 Channel 4's Dispatches programme showed that senior university managers had claimed almost £8 million in expenses over a two-year period.

Almost 200 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests sent to institutions around the UK revealed for the first time the claims made by vice-chancellors and their staff.

We should utilise the legislation of FOIs to continue to see how university money is being spent. By highlighting to our members how some universities have prioritised spending for vice chancellors and their executive it can strengthen our evidence in relation to support for cost living pay increases, and in resisting attacks on terms and conditions.

A university's purpose is to provide a quality service to students using their most valuable resource, our members, who deserve fair pay for the hard work they provide.

UNISON in Higher Education has a role, working with regions and supporting branches, in requesting FOI's from university employers as it will take the pressure off individual branches and any possible local reactions from the employers.

We therefore call on the Higher Education National Service Group Executive (HESGE) to:

- 1) Seek to serve FOI's on Universities, seeking information on bonuses, expenses, travel, private health care etc. when deemed appropriate by the HESGE.
- 2) Collate this information to use in national and local pay negotiations and campaigns.

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- 3) Share this information with regions and branches to use in other campaigns on such issues, for example, as terms and conditions.

### *Northern Region*

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#### **3. Aggregate the ballot**

This conference notes that 22 out of the 145 UK Higher Education Institutions, represented by the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), have been taking industrial action for the 22/23 pay round.

This conference believes that in order to demonstrate our true strength to the UCEA, all branches involved in the national pay negotiations must take collective action.

This conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to call for any future pay ballots to be aggregated.

### *University Of West Of England*

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#### **4. Higher Education, work/life balance, and the Right to Disconnect**

Conference notes the significant changes to working patterns and practices that have happened since the pandemic, including a large rise in remote and hybrid working. In the Higher Education sector this has been particularly pronounced, as many universities have moved to offer online teaching and remote access to students, with a knock-on effect on staff.

Conference notes that this change in working practices will impact a sector which already experienced a culture of long hours and low pay, and notes the survey report by Times Higher Education (THE) in 2018 which found that working conditions for HE staff had “a significant impact on familial relationships and friendships”.

Conference notes that in Higher Education, the move to more digital and remote provision for students may put more pressure on some staff, such as administrative and IT support staff. There may also be staff members in HE who are not able to work remotely due to the nature of their job role and are not offered other ways of improving their work/life balance, such as more flexible hours.

Conference believes greater flexibility should be welcomed where this works for staff – for example, some disabled workers may find more home working is a useful adjustment, and workers with children or other caring responsibilities may find that greater flexibility may help them balance caring with their working lives.

However, working from home and flexibility can also present problems for staff, by blurring the line between work time and personal time. Being expected to be permanently available can have a particular impact on younger workers, and workers with caring responsibilities; it can negatively impact mental health and stress levels; and it can mean that staff are not being paid for all the hours they are actually working.

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For this reason, flexible, hybrid and remote working policies need to be actively negotiated and agreed by trade unions, who can meaningfully consult staff, and can negotiate arrangements that work best for the workforce as a whole. Conference notes the 2017 research produced by the TUC which found that unionised workplaces have stronger policies around work/life balance, and that trade unions have expertise in negotiating such policies.

Conference notes that the Right to Disconnect is the right not to engage in email, telephone and other work-related contact outside of paid working hours. The Right to Disconnect has been established through legislation in some countries, eg. France, but can also be negotiated with individual employers through bargaining for robust workplace policies.

Conference believes all workers should have the Right to Disconnect and that UNISON has a key role to play in improving work/life balance for staff in Higher Education.

Conference asks the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- i) Survey HE branches on the policies they have negotiated on work/life balance and the right to disconnect;
- ii) Identify success stories and best practice, and share these as positive case studies;
- iii) Consider producing guidance on the Right to Disconnect in Higher Education, and promote UNISON's existing bargaining guidance on work/life balance and hybrid, remote and flexible working to branches in HE;
- iv) Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) and the National Executive Council (NEC) to support a campaign for legislation on the Right to Disconnect;
- v) Promote UNISON's work improving work/life balance to young members in the Higher Education service group.

### *National Young Members' Forum*

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#### **5. Securing the legacy of the year of disabled workers in Higher Education workplaces**

Conference notes the success of UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers 2022. Throughout the year we saw renewed focus on the experience of disabled members in our union, in the workplace and in society, including those in the Higher Education service group.

We used the year to highlight the important contribution our disabled members make to the union, to improve terms and conditions for disabled workers including in Higher Education workplaces, and to campaign for improved rights for all disabled workers.



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Conference notes the letter sent to all service groups by General Secretary Christina McAnea which called on the Higher Education service group to get fully behind the initiative, including by making the year of disabled workers a standing item on service group executive agendas and encouraging regions and branches to do likewise.

Christina also called of the following actions from the Higher Education service group:

- 1) Encourage all Higher Education branches to elect a disabled members officer or contact and register them for national training.
- 2) Support branches to negotiate with their employer to agree reasonable adjustment passport and disability leave policies, based on UNISON's bargaining guides, and raise these at a national bargaining level where appropriate.
- 3) Work with and support regional and branch disabled members groups.

Conference welcomes the work that the Higher Education Service Group has undertaken to contribute to the success of the Year of Disabled Workers.

Conference acknowledges that tackling systemic and ingrained discrimination against disabled workers will take more than one year and we need to use the success of the year of disabled workers to continue our work and secure a lasting legacy for our members working in Higher Education.

Conference therefore resolves to ask the service group executive to work with the national disabled members committee to:

- a) Seek to carry out an audit of Higher Education branches to assess:
  - 1) where there is no agreed reasonable adjustment passport or policy
  - 2) where there is no agreed paid disability leave policy
  - 3) where there is no elected disabled members officer
- b) Implement a disability equality bargaining strategy for the service group to address these policy gaps using UNISON's two bargaining guides (Disability Leave guide and Reasonable Adjustments Policy and Passport guide) to negotiate locally.
- c) Publicise UNISON's now regular online Disabled Members Officers and Contacts training to Higher Education branches and consider setting a target for the number attending each year.
- d) Circulate UNISON's new Stewards Guide to Representing Disabled Members and our Guide to Representing Deaf (British Sign Language users) Members to activists in Higher Education branches and workplaces.

***National Disabled Members Committee***

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### **6. Make the Real Living Wage the Minimum for Requirements for Pay Agreements**

Conference believes that everyone deserves to be paid a real living wage.

We call upon the National Higher Education Service Group Executive to ensure that in the next round of The New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) negotiations a pay spine is proposed and promoted by UNISON representatives in which the lowest spine point is above the Real Living Wage rate and no spine points are reduced as a result.

*Cymru/Wales Region*

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### **7. Higher Education Pay 2023-4**

Higher education pay has fallen behind. Since 2009 our pay has lost around 28% of its value as a result of below inflation cost-of-living rises year on year. The extreme increase in prices during 2022 has brought this to a crisis point, and UNISON members working in Higher Education are facing real hardship as a result.

After three pay negotiating meetings in 2022 the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) made their final pay offer: a below-inflation pay rise of 3% for most Higher Education staff and between 9% and 3% for those on pay points 3 to 19. They didn't offer any more during the dispute process and imposed this pay increase on 1 August 2022.

With RPI inflation at 11.8% and our pay only increased by 3% this pay rise was a pay cut. The higher increases on the lower spinal points were partly being proposed to keep pay at legal rates, so were a lot less generous than they appeared.

Increasing numbers of UNISON members have been taking strike action for a pay rise that keeps up with inflation. With the cost-of-living crisis and greatly increased bills members simply can't afford to live on the money that the employers imposed. Whatever the outcome of this 2022-3 pay dispute, these price rises are not expected to stop any time soon and so we will still need to bargain for a significant pay rise in 2023-4. Conference believes UNISON should seek to restore the buying power of wages in Higher Education.

Conference calls on the HESGE to negotiate with the joint trade unions in higher education and to produce a joint claim for the following:

A consolidated pay award of a flat rate of £4,000, in addition to whatever employers are legally required to pay to meet the government's minimum wage.

- 1) reform of the pay spine to reinstate differentials between spinal points at the lower end of the pay scale, with a view to achieving a minimum spinal column point of £15 per hour.

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- 2) agreement that all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) become Foundation Living Wage employers, extended to all staff on campus.
- 3) equivalent increases in London Weighting and all other allowances negotiated nationally.
- 4) agreement with the HE employers to oversee the introduction of a maximum 35 hour working week in all HEIs.
- 5) a Scottish sub-committee of New Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (New JNCHES), as provided for in the New JNCHES Framework Agreement, with the main purpose of that sub-committee to be to deal with matters not currently being dealt with at the UK-wide New JNCHES.
- 6) joint employer and union action to eliminate the gender and ethnicity pay gaps, aiming for transparency and full sharing of data at both a national and local level and taking an intersectional approach to achieving pay equality for all staff.
- 7) a national agreement to reduce precarious employment in higher education seeking, as far as possible, for all staff to be employed on permanent contracts.
- 8) a national agreement to bring outsourced workers in higher education back into direct university employment.
- 9) a national agreement on hybrid/flexible working.

In addition, Conference calls on the higher education service group executive to do the following, alongside the national pay negotiations:

- a) In the event that the joint pay claim is not met by the employers, seek to escalate the pay campaign, with a clear plan, in conjunction with sister higher education trade unions. This may include lawful industrial action to strengthen the campaign in accordance with UNISON rules relating to industrial action.
- b) If the joint pay claim is not met in full by the employers for 2023/4, explore the option of a multi-year pay deal for 24/25 onwards with branches within the service group and the other sister trades unions in higher education.
- c) build a campaign for all universities to become accredited Foundation Living Wage employers reminding them of the moral and business case of why they should apply for Foundation Living Wage accreditation and demand that they do so.
- d) work with regions, branches and sister trade unions to achieve a reduction in the gender and ethnicity pay gaps.
- e) work with branches to seek to negotiate an equivalent rise in all appropriate local allowances in all HEIs.

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## *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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### **Campaigning**

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#### **8. Conversion therapy - spread the word**

Conversion therapy refers to the practise of attempting to change a person's sexuality or gender identity. There are many different techniques, both physical and mental, that can include talking therapies and prayer, but more extreme forms can include exorcism, physical violence such as electric shocks and testosterone injections. There is no reliable scientific evidence that the so-called therapy works and sexuality can be changed.

Every major political party in the United Kingdom (UK) pledged to ban the practice as part of their commitment to the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) individuals during the 2019 general election. The Tory government at Westminster started a consultation on the practice which ended in January 2022.

In April 2022, the UK Government announced that it was entirely scrapping plans for a ban, then quickly backtracked and said elements of the ban would go ahead. The current plan is to ban conversion therapy aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation - but not their gender identity. In addition, the proposed law will protect under-18s. However, it won't apply to people over 18 if they've consented and haven't been coerced. This means that LGBT+ people attending higher education institutions are at risk of this abusive practice.

Coercion will be very difficult to define – is a chat with a friendly church leader, coercion? What about if it is accompanied by interventions from other family members? Or if someone gets taken to a camp to learn what a “normal life” is about? When does influencing end and coercion begin?

The backtracking on excluding trans people from the ban on conversion therapy caused a major backlash with 100 organisations calling the decision unacceptable and pulling out of the government's first LGBT+ international conference due to be held this summer. The conference was then cancelled.

A survey by the Ozanne Foundation found that among those that had undergone some form of conversion therapy:

- 1) 68.7% reported having suicidal thoughts
- 2) 59.8% experienced anxiety and depression, requiring medication
- 3) 41.3% experienced anxiety and depression, not requiring medication
- 4) 40.2% said they had self-harmed
- 5) 24.6% said they had suffered from eating disorders

As higher education staff, we need to be aware of these figures as part of safeguarding. We need to understand the harm this practice does and recognise signs of students who could be vulnerable. This is why awareness

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raising within our higher education institutions Higher Education Institution (HEI) is so vital.

Conference notes the adoption by 2022 National Delegate Conference of the motion “Trans equality – Louder and Prouder” which included a commitment that UNISON will continue to campaign for a ban on conversion therapy that covers all LGBT+ people.

It calls on the higher education service group executive to work with the national LGBT+ committee to:

- a) Produce a factsheet containing facts about conversion therapy and UNISON’s policy and circulate this widely within the higher education service group and UNISON members in universities.
- b) Call for conversion therapy to be added to the safeguarding policies of all Higher Education Institutions.

### ***National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee***

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#### **9. Trial the 4-day work week**

Conference believes it is time that Universities actively participated in 4-day work week trials. Universities are centres of research and innovation and many want to be ‘employers of choice’ (employers that people actively want to work for). They are the perfect institutions to try new approaches to work. Findings suggest that a 4-day week enhances employee wellbeing whilst also improving productivity: a win for employees, and a win for employers. The 4-day week is a reduction in the standard working week for the same pay and benefits. It does not mean working the same hours over fewer days.

Conference notes that a recent UK trial led to 86% of companies that took part maintaining the four-day week policy after the trial ended. When done correctly, this approach to work is practical and effective.

It also has a significant, positive environmental impact. Someone who usually works 5 days a week reduces their weekly commute by 20% - this is a big reduction in the carbon footprint of someone who drives or takes public transport to work. Sustainability is high on the agenda for Universities and UNISON, and this policy supports the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Additionally, there are obvious big cost savings for the Universities in terms of utilities and their estate, and for employees too. 4 Day Week, a group campaigning for a shorter working week, have found that a parent with two children working a 4-day work would save £3,232.40 on average per year.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Develop a campaign to encourage Universities to engage with existing 4-day work week trials

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- 2) Encourage Universities to utilise their own academic experts and HR resources to launch their own 4-day work week trials
- 3) Work with other campus unions to ensure trials are launched and involve a diverse range of employees from all staff groups
- 4) Share the evidence from previous and current 4-day week trials as part of the annual national pay bargaining round.

*Hull University*

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### **10. Campaigning for Proper Funding for Higher Education as a Public Service**

Universities are autonomous organisations, delivering higher education and research, with the freedom to manage their own finances, subject to regulation. Each institution is different, with a complex mix of income streams depending on the nature of the students it teaches, the quantity and perceived quality of research it conducts to drive research income, and the way in which each of the UK nations manages fees and funding grants.

The methodology by which universities are funded has evolved over the last few decades. The introduction of tuition fees, and the political desire to turn institutions into businesses, has had a profound effect on the financial stability of many institutions. This has been especially the case with the Covid pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, where inflation threatens to make university income worth a fraction of what it was pre-Covid. All universities are also affected by rapidly increasing prices, in particular, spiralling energy costs.

This has implications for jobs, pay, pensions and working conditions of our members, as well as threatening the academic future of a whole generation of students and potential students.

England

Tuition fees for UK students studying at English universities have been frozen at £9,250. This means that since the introduction of the £9,000 fee in 2012, fees have risen by a mere 2.8% over ten years, whilst the cost of living has risen by at least that every year (except 2020) and the current inflation rate is around 12%, with no real likelihood of coming down in the near future.

Whilst some universities have reacted by ambitious expansion plans and actively recruiting international students, now typically charged fees in excess of £20,000, this strategy is limited and only realistically available to a handful of institutions.

Many universities rely on full time undergraduate fees as their core funding and the failure of fees to keep up with inflation has steadily and now rapidly, meant that real-terms income has plummeted.



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### Scotland

Scottish universities charge tuition fees to students from outside Scotland, so are affected to some extent by the lack of an inflationary increase in regulated fee levels. However, universities in Scotland are heavily dependent on the funding provided by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which in turn is largely provided by the Scottish Government.

Whilst SFC grants have increased in recent years, real-terms funding has not kept up with inflation, and with funding announced for higher and further education as remaining flat in cash terms until 2026-27, estimated to be a real-terms cut of 8% over the period, Scottish universities will need to grow student numbers and rely on reserves to be able to come close to current spending. In reality, Principals will try to hold back spending where possible.

### Wales

Welsh universities are funded through a tertiary commission which channels funding mainly from the Welsh Government. As with English institutions, tuition fees now make up with largest source of income.

For 2022-23, Welsh universities face a £60 million drop in funding, at a time when it is crucial for income to rise, and Welsh universities face a significant drop in the real value of fee income.

### Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive's Department for the Economy is responsible for funding universities in Northern Ireland. The system allocates grants to universities, which are partially to offset smaller fees charged to Northern Ireland domiciled students, in a similar system to that of Wales.

However, fee income and education contracts now make up the major source of funding and again, without a significant rise in the value of the fees charged, universities in Northern Ireland face funding issues similar to those across the rest of the UK.

### Conference Further Notes:

The cumulative effects of decades of tuition fees and marketisation has reinforced divisions between institutions, which we can see right across the UK sector. Larger, traditional universities in the top quarter or third of the league tables are able to grow international student numbers and benefit from lucrative research contracts, charitable donations and business interests. These institutions are clearly guilty of hoarding cash despite their workforces suffering real terms pay cuts for many years.

The other end of the scale sees newer universities which are struggling to maintain expenditure and seeking to make significant cuts to courses, buildings and services as a way of managing the financial pressures under which they find themselves. With no easy way to increase student numbers, in spite of

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massively expanded marketing costs and clearing operations, and unable to compete with those institutions which appear to offer better educational prospects and “experiences”, as judged by league tables and surveys, these institutions are genuinely concerned about the future, without being able to publicly say so.

The June 2022 Office for Students (OfS) report on financial sustainability (for English institutions only) reports that “the aggregate financial position...remains sound, at this time”, but forecasts sourced from institutions will always be optimistic, with plans to grow numbers and income well in excess of the available prospective students. The report recognises, however, that this does not “reflect the picture for individual providers where financial performance and strength vary significantly.”

It is true, as all trade unions have pointed out, that the sector as a whole is sitting on significant sums of money, and some universities have been pressured, with or without strike action, to pay non-consolidated bonuses to partially offset the 2021-22 pay freeze. Where this has been achieved through pressure and campaigning by UNISON branches, we congratulate those wins for our members.

All Vice-Chancellors and Principals will aim to get the most labour from their workforce at the smallest possible cost, but some are holding back real wages so as to be able to invest elsewhere, whilst others are looking to their finance directors, who are telling them that they just can't afford it without making compensating cuts. Financial planners, like trade unions, recognise that genuine increases to wages are won for current and future years. For the vast majority of universities, a 12.3% (RPI at the time of writing) pay increase for university staff, just to keep up with rising prices, will not be matched with similar income growth based on current expectations. Without fighting for it, unions will see university income fall significantly.

A struggling university facing year-on-year financial deficits will face breaching loan covenants and eventually, the real prospect of insolvency.

With the cost-of-living crisis affecting every individual, business and institution, many universities are going to struggle to avoid significant financial issues during 2023 and beyond. A government obsessed with further enriching the wealthy to “drive growth”, at the expense of the poor and public services is unlikely to step in to save struggling universities without massive pressure from those who depend on those services.

In all likelihood, any university close to insolvency would face forced merger or closure as managed by the OfS or devolved national government department. University trade unions have a duty to prevent this happening if we can. This means campaigning for decent wages for all university workers but linking that campaign to the need for all universities to be properly funded, ideally through taxation rather than tuition fees, and ideally managed by accountable and elected governing bodies.



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Where university leaders claim that perfectly reasonable pay rises are unaffordable, that is that they have to impose massive real terms pay cuts on our members, we should demand significantly revised and agreed budgets and genuine action to campaign alongside trade unions, involving students and the wider community, for appropriate government funding.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign for all universities across the UK to pay their workforces properly and to be properly funded to do so.
- 2) Highlight the massive funds available to some institutions and excessive pay of Vice Chancellors and Principals, whilst also recognising that not all universities are in a strong financial position.
- 3) Oppose the marketisation of universities and the inevitable winners and losers it creates, and campaign for an integrated, cooperative higher education service with no wasteful and destructive competition for students.
- 4) Campaign for struggling universities to receive the funding required to stay afloat, to avoid the terrible effects of an institution failing, on jobs, students and the wider community.
- 5) Continue to campaign for free education and an end to all tuition fees for UK domiciled students, with universities funded from general taxation, as a public service.
- 6) Draw up a campaigning plan to assist branches which face the prospect of institutional collapse.

*Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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### **Organising and Recruitment**

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#### Recruitment & Organisation

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#### **11. Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA)**

Conference notes that it has been some years since HERA was introduced as the tool for role analysis in the majority of UK universities as part of the National Framework Agreement. As part of that many UNISON activists were trained and accredited as HERA Role Analysts to support members wishing to have their roles evaluated, remunerated fairly/correctly for work undertaken and often to assist in the correct scoring of new roles, in partnership with employers. Many members are now being called on to take on additional duties as staff are not replaced and it is important that these members are supported by reps who have the relevant knowledge to support them through the process and give them the confidence to ask for their role to be re-evaluated.

It is important that as activists retire or move on that we replenish and refresh our pool of analysts and reps with an understanding of HERA, in order that we are able to advise and support members on issues around their roles and regrading applications/appeals.

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We call on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to undertake the following:

- 1) Carry out a survey of members of their experiences of using the HERA/other analysis schemes in their workplace.
- 2) Use the feedback from the survey to update and reissue UNISON's guidance around HERA and/or other role/analysis schemes in place in HE for Activists.
- 3) Provide training for activists to become Accredited Role Analysts in HERA/other analysis scheme.

### *Yorkshire - Humberside Region*

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## **12. Promote UNISON as the union for Higher Education Professional Support Staff**

Higher Education professional support staff across the country provide a vital service to our universities and students by carrying out hugely varied roles across our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), though too often this work is not given the recognition it deserves by employers.

UNISON has a brilliant membership benefits package. There are opportunities to promote Higher Education more visibly both internally and externally. UNISON have had success in focusing communications, training and other benefits on specific service groups or worker groups such as schools and health care. It's time to make clear UNISON is the union for Higher Education staff.

Conference recognises the need for branded materials aimed specifically at Higher Education workers and targeted information about the benefits of being in UNISON for university staff, to assist our branches with recruitment and organising priorities.

A refresh of the UNISON web page for Higher Education would be welcomed by conference to make key information more accessible for existing and potential future UNISON members.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:-

- 1) Work with national office to produce specific Higher Education focussed leaflets and materials;
- 2) Consider how best to update the Higher Education pages on the National Website;
- 3) Work with the Learning and Organising Service (LAOS) on producing specific Higher Education learning opportunities and;
- 4) Work with regions and branches to build a campaign to promote UNISON as the union for Higher Education professional support staff.

# 2023 National Higher Education Conference

## UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

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### Motions Ruled Out of Order

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Beyond remit of the Conference

#### A) Environment and Climate Change

UNISON HE conference notes:

- 1) The scientific presentations at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) conference in Glasgow in 2021 underlined the grave danger of climate change, but the resulting Glasgow Climate Pact (GCP) failed to put the governments of the world on course to achieve the target, set in Paris in 2015, of keeping the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees celsius, and no more than 2 degrees celsius, above pre industrial levels. Estimates show that even if all the actions proposed in the GCP, including all the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) were achieved, the world is headed for a rise of 2.4 degrees celsius by the end of the century.
- 2) Notwithstanding the failures by the official representatives at COP26, Glasgow saw an inspiring mobilisation from trade unions, including UNISON, and campaigning groups and individuals calling for a more urgent response. This mobilisation was a great example of what unions and environmental activists together working together can achieve and should be continued and deepened.
- 3) Climate change is already having alarming extreme weather impacts, eg, the highest ever temperatures in the UK and devastating floods in Pakistan in summer 2022.
- 4) The global energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine is putting pressure on most nations' energy supplies and contributing to a cost of living crisis for working people, with the cost of living crisis particularly severe in the UK.
- 5) Leaving this government and this economic system to solve the problem is wholly inadequate. Working people need to take the initiative to campaign not only for the decarbonisation of their workplaces, but for significant measures that will allow working people to determine our future. This points to an urgent need for democratic control and ownership of the most polluting and highest carbon-emitting businesses, so as to repurpose them as per a clean, green plan of production based on social need.
- 6) UNISON National Delegate Conference 2022 passed comprehensive policy outlining measures for decarbonising UK public services.

UNISON HE conference believes:

- i) Climate change is a trade union issue at global, national, sector, and workplace levels, requiring education and mobilisation of all trade unionists.

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- ii) The environmental movement will only succeed to the extent that it can mobilise large social forces, and their main ally must be the trade union movement.
- iii) If we don't have a solution that puts the majority at the heart, we will get technocratic fixes at best alongside continued catastrophic climate impacts, untold suffering for millions of people, and a risk to the viability of our planet for humankind. There should be a just transition, with workers in industries impacted negatively by the shift away from fossil fuel use, and their communities, being retrained and fully compensated, and working people democratically involved in all decisions around the shift away from fossil fuels.
- iv) That we must resist any attempts, eg, by the Government, to use the current energy and cost of living crisis to row back on commitments to transition away from fossil fuels.
- v) That the challenges posed to the energy production and supply industries by climate change and war make a powerful argument for the nationalisation of these sectors and their control by democratically elected governments. Private profit must not trump the needs of the majority.
- vi) That universities are often at the front line of researching the detrimental impact of climate change and are well placed to lead by example in terms of ensuring that climate justice is at the heart of their work.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive (HESGE) to:

A) Work nationally with the National Union of Students (NUS), other Higher Education (HE) trade unions, People and Planet, Greener Jobs Alliance, Campaign Against Climate Change, and other relevant organisations to produce negotiating guidance on the steps that universities can take to tackle global warming and the climate emergency and mitigate the effects that are already with us.

B) Work with UNISON nationally and with other unions to pursue legislation to set maximum temperatures and to pursue enhanced health and safety guidance around working during periods of extreme high temperature.

C) Work with UNISON nationally and with other unions to pursue large scale funding for energy saving and efficiency measures, such as home insulation, which will benefit working class people economically and contribute to meeting climate change goals.

D) Produce educational materials and organise education and training courses for members on climate change issues.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive (HESGE) to work with Higher Education branches to:

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- E) Collaborate with Student Unions, other campus unions, and student societies to promote awareness of the climate emergency and action that can be taken to address it, and work with these bodies on all of the points below;
- F) call on their university employers to declare a climate emergency and to work with their campus trade unions and student unions to agree and implement a green university plan;
- G) cooperate with their employers to establish climate action groups of Students' Unions, Trade Unions and all relevant departments within the institutions. These should produce a strategy that commits the institution to taking a holistic approach on climate change;
- H) call on UK Universities to meet net zero carbon emissions as institutions by 2025 through a just transition. This should be achieved by carrying out a climate risk analysis and producing a comprehensive action plan and should incorporate specific actions such as bans on single-use plastic on campus, reducing air travel for work, ensuring green investments and that any new building projects and refurbishments deliver energy efficiency;
- I) call for UK universities to incorporate climate justice integrally into curricula and pedagogy across departments and courses;
- J) call on UK universities to divest from financial investments in institutions, corporations and government bodies that profit from climate and ecological crisis and specifically divest from investments in fossil fuels;
- K) organise independently with Students' Unions, student campaigns, and campus Trade Unions to put pressure on universities and to build a force that can act on climate issues;
- L) adopt the post of Green Reps in all HE branches and elect Green Reps;
- M) facilitate HE-wide meet-ups of Green Reps to share best practice and develop joint campaigns for the HE sector;
- N) support movements of students and young people on climate change, eg, Fridays For Future, and look to join their action where possible.

### *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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Conflicts with an Existing Rule

#### **B Support with ballots and industrial action**

The primary role of UNISON, or any Trade Union, is to use the collective power of its members to deliver lasting and significant improvements to pay, pension rights and working conditions.

That the motion to allow branches to ballot on key matters, such as pay, in a disaggregated manner, which was passed at the last conference held in person, has allowed branches to find our voice in firmly stating our opposition to twelve years of being increasingly exploited, as we fall ever further behind the rate of

## **2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

inflation – even by the most conservative acknowledged version of this measure.

That by leading the way in early 2022, the 9 branches involved became 22 that in August secured a lawful mandate for action; secured greater press coverage, hence raising the profile of our members' difficulties, and we hope paving the way for more productive future negotiations with the employers.

That in highlighting branches that were “near-misses” with regards to the 50% threshold, it allows relevant regional offices and the national office, to be able to target their efforts in the most efficient manner to secure even better results at the next round of ballots.

Conference Further Notes:

The increasing number of branches surpassing or approaching the restrictive 50% threshold in the two disaggregated ballots held on the matter of the national pay negotiations, in the last 12 months.

We note and thank the NEC for its timely decision to increase strike pay available to members and to bring this forward to be a “from day one” measure: it has been invaluable in allowing lower paid members to participate in the fight for their own future conditions.

We further note, at the University of Leeds branch, how this increased activism has resulted in a sharp upturn in recruitment figures for the branch, including an increasing number of younger members and members seeking to be active in the branch.

We also recognise that whether successful at achieving a lawful mandate or not, many branches find that at some point along the path between the initial ballot and picket line or settlement, there are resourcing issues, which almost inevitably fall on the handful of committed activists with time and energy, within each branch, to ensure that all requirements – legal and union-based – are met, all arrangements are made.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

Extend its current commitment to allow the organisation of future industrial action ballots on a disaggregated basis, for the foreseeable future or until decided otherwise by this conference.

Undertake to provide greater levels of concrete support to branches: in the run-up to ballot; assisting the branch in “getting the vote out”; and providing practical assistance to branches that achieve the mandate with all matters relating to the pursuance of lawful industrial action such as, but not limited to, the administration of strike pay to individual members.



## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

### C) Future Balloting Timetable

This HE conference agrees that future ballots of members for industrial action should not take place during July or August. Conference recognises that these months are often impacted by high levels of staff absence which makes it increasingly difficult to connect with members. To accommodate this conference agrees that all future ballots should either be accelerated or delayed to avoid these two summer months.

*University Of Kent Unison Br*

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Could place the union in legal jeopardy

### D) Trans equality is UNISON business

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

*National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee*

### E) Covid-19 – protecting our members

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

*Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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Not competent

### F) Improving the representation, progress and success of Black staff in Higher Education

Conference, UNISON has been at the forefront of driving out racism, tackling and challenging inequality in all its forms in the workplace and broader society.

Black members working in Higher Education have spoken about some of the barriers they experience to development, career progression and representation at senior levels.

The National Black Members are keen to work with the Higher Education Service Group Executive (HESGE) to address some of these issues and work to encourage Black members to stay in HE and research institutes.

Conference we are aware of the Advance Race Equality Charter and what it says about tackling racism in HE. The 2020/21 review of the Race Equality Charter provides the opportunity to ensure the Charter remains 'fit for purpose'.

Some of the research found that staff from Black backgrounds experienced:

- 1) "Feeling that their leadership ability is questioned
- 2) Assumptions are often made that they are in junior positions even when they occupy senior (e.g., professional) roles
- 3) Have reported negative assumptions being made about their abilities
- 4) Report experiences of invisibility, isolation, marginalisation, and racial discrimination in HE

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 5) Report experiencing heavy workloads, disproportionate levels of scrutiny compared with their white counterparts
- 6) Lack of mentoring and support for career development, and difficulties in gaining promotion”.

Conference, we must do everything in our collective power to create an inclusive workplace for our Black members in HE and research institutes.

Conference, UNISON HESGE must be driving this change in HE, and continue to promote UNISON's challenging racism in the workplace and negotiating and recruitment campaign.

- i) Is the pattern of behaviour different for ethnic groups?
- ii) Is the pattern of behaviour different by gender?
- iii) Is there an ethnicity pay gap? How is it being address in HE institutes?
- iv) What is the training and accountability for Black staff? Is it fair and equitable?

Considering the above questions, Conference we call on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- a) Encourage all branches in Higher Education Institutes to sign-up to the Race Equality Charter
- b) Work with the National Black Members Committee to collate good quality data to analysis specific ethnic groups, through members survey's and explore barriers to career progression
- c) Explore how to work with the employer to review policies and practices to identify how member can report issues of discrimination and what actions are taken to address issues highlighted
- d) Discuss how monitoring of outcomes in difference areas like recruitment, promotion and grievances can be achieved.
- e) Write an article in Black Action on the experience of Black staff in HE and how UNISON is supporting and monitoring challenging racism in the workplace and encouraging branches to sign-up to the 'Race Equality Charter'
- f) Report back to the 2025 HE Conference what action the HESGE has taken to address the issues raised in this motion.

***National Black Members' Committee***

### **G) Hybrid and agile working**

Conference notes the massively accelerated pace of change to working arrangements in the sector. The pandemic forced staff and their employers to



## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

rapidly modify working arrangements, with those able to do some work at home doing this often with their own equipment and without the support they would usually have when in the office. At the same time those unable to work from home often faced increased risks to their safety as they were required to keep vital in-person services running in very difficult circumstances.

Despite this conference notes that many staff found the new ability to work from home incredibly useful, providing an additional way to balance work and home commitments. Figures from the TUC indicate that home working has tripled following the pandemic to around 22.4% of workers in 2021 reporting that they work from home most of the time. Conference notes that where home working arrangements have worked well, this is invariably due to proper engagement with staff and trade unions, as well as allowing staff a great deal of flexibility in how they choose to work. On the more negative side, where employers have come out of the pandemic looking for more “agility” and “flexibility” from their workforce this has inevitably meant threats to working conditions and a lack of consideration of equality implications such as the impact on disabled workers and those with caring responsibilities.

Conference further notes that:

- 1) There is a risk that new hybrid working models could eclipse existing provisions such as flexible working requests and the duty to make reasonable adjustments
- 2) Hybrid and agile working models can be attractive to employers as a cost saving measure, which invariably includes a reluctance to invest in the equipment and infrastructure required to properly support staff in working from home, including IT and DSE equipment
- 3) Agile working models where staff lack assigned workstations present significant disability and welfare hurdles, making it difficult to adapt workstations to suit personal circumstances and reasonable adjustments.
- 4) Employers may unfairly exclude lower paid staff from the potential benefits from working from home, assuming that lower paid work automatically means in-person work
- 5) Many hybrid and agile working policies merely replicate the existing difficulties those with caring responsibilities face in balancing working responsibilities with care – merely slightly changing the barriers workers face to doing this. The impact of this also falls disproportionately on women, with a recent study from the Centre for Progressive Policy finding that 47% of women provide an average of 45 hours of unpaid childcare a week, while other studies show that women make up a majority of carers for adults as well
- 6) Employers who impose working arrangements where the flexibility is all one-sided could face major retention issues, with the Chartered Institute Personnel and Development (CIPD) noting recently that multiple surveys have shown

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

that employees are prepared to move jobs on the basis of the hybrid working offer

- 7) Many studies, including from the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, have stressed how working from home may create challenges for career progression with homeworkers (more often women) becoming 'invisible' and left off the career ladder.
- 8) Numerous surveys have highlighted the negative impact on the mental health of workers who found they were unable to 'switch off' from work when working from home.

Conference feels therefore that the current situation presents both significant risks and opportunities when it comes to maintaining and improving the working conditions of our members.

As such, conference resolves:

- A) To pressure UCEA and other employer bodies to agree a best practice approach to hybrid/agile working arrangements that:
  - i) Involves consultation with union representatives from the beginning
  - ii) Stresses the importance of investment in technology and equipment
  - iii) Accounts for the increased risks to disabled workers changes to working practices of this sort pose, making an assessment and mitigation of any equality impact highly important
  - iv) Includes an assessment and a bolstering of support for carers as part of any change
  - v) Is creative about allowing as many groups of staff as possible to benefit from hybrid working, e.g. by allowing frontline staff the ability to undertake training or other administrative tasks from home if they wish to.
  - vi) Continues to provide opportunities for all types of flexible working not just hybrid working for staff ideally from day one of service.
  - vii) Protects those who work from home from becoming invisible in the Workforce and ensures they receive the same opportunities for development and training and career progression.
  - viii) Protects those who work from home from work-related stress and ensure that staff know they have a right to switch off and disconnect from work during their home life.
- B) To call on the service group executive to:
  - a) Work with self-organised groups and the health and safety unit to produce model policies, guidance notes and other briefing materials to help support branches bargaining on hybrid and agile working arrangements

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- b) Publicise best practice case studies which highlight the role UNISON representatives played in negotiations and how they made the case for policies that worked for members
- c) Support branches in putting pressure on employers that have yet to consult on hybrid working models and, where necessary, highlight poor practices including the impact poorly considered and/or imposed hybrid/agile models have on staff morale, wellbeing, health and safety retention and equality metrics’.

### *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

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Received twice

#### **H) Improving the representation, progress, and success of Black staff in Higher Education**

Conference, UNISON has been at the forefront of driving out racism, tackling and challenging in equality in all its forms in the workplace and broader society.

Black members working in Higher Education have spoken about some of the barriers they experience in their development, career progression and lack of representation at senior levels in HE.

The National Black Members Committee are keen to work with the Higher Education Service Group Executive (HESGE) to address some of these issues and work to encourage Black members to stay in HE and research institutes.

Conference, we are aware of the Advance HE Race Equality Charter and what it says about tackling racism in HE. The 2020/21 review of the Race Equality Charter provides the opportunity to ensure the Charter remains ‘fit for purpose’.

Some of the research found that staff from Black backgrounds experienced:

- 1) “Feeling that their leadership ability is questioned
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## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

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- iii) Explore how to work with the employer to review policies and practices to identify how members can report issue of discrimination and what actions are taken to address issues highlighted
- iv) Discuss how monitoring of outcomes in different areas like recruitment, promotion and grievance can be achieved
- v) Write an article in Black Action on the experience of Black staff in HE and how UNISON is supporting and monitoring challenging racism in the workplace and encouraging branches to sign-up to the 'Race Equality Charter'
- vi) Report back to the 2025 Higher Education Conference what action the HESGE has taken to address the issues raised in this motion.

### ***National Black Members' Committee***

#### **I) Campaigning for Proper Funding for Higher Education as a Public Service**

Universities are autonomous organisations, delivering higher education and research, with the freedom to manage their own finances, subject to regulation. Each institution is different, with a complex mix of income streams depending on the nature of the students it teaches, the quantity and perceived quality of research it conducts to drive research income, and the way in which each of the UK nations manages fees and funding grants.

The methodology by which universities are funded has evolved over the last few decades. The introduction of tuition fees, and the political desire to turn institutions into businesses, has had a profound effect on the financial stability

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

of many institutions. This has been especially the case with the Covid pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, where inflation threatens to make university income worth a fraction of what it was pre-Covid. All universities are also affected by rapidly increasing prices, in particular, spiralling energy costs.

This has implications for jobs, pay, pensions and working conditions of our members, as well as threatening the academic future of a whole generation of students and potential students.

### England

Tuition fees for UK students studying at English universities have been frozen at £9,250. This means that since the introduction of the £9,000 fee in 2012, fees have risen by a mere 2.8% over ten years, whilst the cost of living has risen by at least that every year (except 2020) and the current inflation rate is around 12%, with no real likelihood of coming down in the near future.

Whilst some universities have reacted by ambitious expansion plans and actively recruiting international students, now typically charged fees in excess of £20,000, this strategy is limited and only realistically available to a handful of institutions.

Many universities rely on full time undergraduate fees as their core funding and the failure of fees to keep up with inflation has steadily and now rapidly, meant that real-terms income has plummeted.

### Scotland

Scottish universities charge tuition fees to students from outside Scotland, so are affected to some extent by the lack of an inflationary increase in regulated fee levels. However, universities in Scotland are heavily dependent on the funding provided by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which in turn is largely provided by the Scottish Government.

Whilst SFC grants have increased in recent years, real-terms funding has not kept up with inflation, and with funding announced for higher and further education as remaining flat in cash terms until 2026-27, estimated to be a real-terms cut of 8% over the period, Scottish universities will need to grow student numbers and rely on reserves to be able to come close to current spending. In reality, Principals will try to hold back spending where possible.

### Wales

Welsh universities are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which channels funding mainly from the Welsh Government. This is used to partially make up the fee income for Welsh domiciled students to £9,000, but as with English institutions, tuition fees now make up with largest source of income.

## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

For 2022-23, Welsh universities face a £60 million drop in funding from HEFCW, at a time when it is crucial for income to rise, and Welsh universities face a significant drop in the real value of fee income.

### Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive's Department for the Economy is responsible for funding universities in Northern Ireland. The system allocates grants to universities, which are partially to offset smaller fees charged to Northern Ireland domiciled students, in a similar system to that of Wales.

However, fee income and education contracts now make up the major source of funding and again, without a significant rise in the value of the fees charged, universities in Northern Ireland face funding issues similar to those across the rest of the UK.

### Conference Further Notes:

The cumulative effects of decades of tuition fees and marketisation has reinforced divisions between institutions, which we can see right across the UK sector. Larger, traditional universities in the top quarter or third of the league tables are able to grow international student numbers and benefit from lucrative research contracts, charitable donations and business interests. These institutions are clearly guilty of hoarding cash despite their workforces suffering real terms pay cuts for many years.

The other end of the scale sees newer universities which are struggling to maintain expenditure and seeking to make significant cuts to courses, buildings and services as a way of managing the financial pressures under which they find themselves. With no easy way to increase student numbers, in spite of massively expanded marketing costs and clearing operations, and unable to compete with those institutions which appear to offer better educational prospects and "experiences", as judged by league tables and surveys, these institutions are genuinely concerned about the future, without being able to publicly say so.

The June 2022 Office for Students (OfS) report on financial sustainability (for English institutions only) reports that "the aggregate financial position...remains sound, at this time", but forecasts sourced from institutions will always be optimistic, with plans to grow numbers and income well in excess of the available prospective students. The report recognises, however, that this does not "reflect the picture for individual providers where financial performance and strength vary significantly."

It is true, as all trade unions have pointed out, that the sector as a whole is sitting on significant sums of money, and some universities have been pressured, with or without strike action, to pay non-consolidated bonuses to partially offset the 2021-22 pay freeze. Where this has been achieved through pressure and campaigning by UNISON branches, we congratulate those wins for our members.



## 2023 National Higher Education Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

All Vice-Chancellors and Principals will aim to get the most labour from their workforce at the smallest possible cost, but some are holding back real wages so as to be able to invest elsewhere, whilst others are looking to their finance directors, who are telling them that they just can't afford it without making compensating cuts. Financial planners, like trade unions, recognise that genuine increases to wages are won for current and future years. For the vast majority of universities, a 12.3% (RPI at the time of writing) pay increase for university staff, just to keep up with rising prices, will not be matched with similar income growth based on current expectations. Without fighting for it, unions will see university income fall significantly.

A struggling university facing year-on-year financial deficits will face breaching loan covenants and eventually, the real prospect of insolvency.

With the cost-of-living crisis affecting every individual, business and institution, many universities are going to struggle to avoid significant financial issues during 2023 and beyond. A government obsessed with further enriching the wealthy to "drive growth", at the expense of the poor and public services is unlikely to step in to save struggling universities without massive pressure from those who depend on those services.

In all likelihood, any university close to insolvency would face forced merger or closure as managed by the OfS or devolved national government department. University trade unions have a duty to prevent this happening if we can. This means campaigning for decent wages for all university workers but linking that campaign to the need for all universities to be properly funded, ideally through taxation rather than tuition fees, and ideally managed by accountable and elected governing bodies.

Where university leaders claim that perfectly reasonable pay rises are unaffordable, that is that they have to impose massive real terms pay cuts on our members, we should demand significantly revised and agreed budgets and genuine action to campaign alongside trade unions, involving students and the wider community, for appropriate government funding.

Conference calls on the Higher Education Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Continue to campaign for all universities across the UK to pay their workforces properly and to be properly funded to do so.
- 2) Highlight the massive funds available to some institutions and excessive pay of Vice Chancellors and Principals, whilst also recognising that not all universities are in a strong financial position.
- 3) Oppose the marketisation of universities and the inevitable winners and losers it creates, and campaign for an integrated, cooperative higher education service with no wasteful and destructive competition for students.

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- 4) Campaign for struggling universities to receive the funding required to stay afloat, to avoid the terrible effects of an institution failing, on jobs, students and the wider community.
- 5) Continue to campaign for free education and an end to all tuition fees, with universities funded from general taxation, as a public service.
- 6) Continue to demand democratic control of universities with regularly elected leaderships.
- 7) Draw up a campaigning plan to assist branches which face the prospect of institutional collapse.

### *Higher Education Service Group Executive*

#### **J Environment and climate change**

UNISON HE conference notes:

- 1) The scientific presentations at the COP26 conference in Glasgow in 2021 underlined the grave danger of climate change, but the resulting Glasgow Climate Pact (GCP) failed to put the governments of the world on course to achieve the target, set in Paris in 2015, of keeping the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees celsius, and no more than 2 degrees celsius, above pre industrial levels. Estimates show that even if all the actions proposed in the GCP, including all the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) were achieved, the world is headed for a rise of 2.4 degrees celsius by the end of the century.
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and highest carbon-emitting businesses, so as to repurpose them as per a clean, green plan of production based on social need.

- 6) UNISON National Delegate Conference 2022 passed comprehensive policy outlining measures for decarbonising UK public services.

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- ii) The environmental movement will only succeed to the extent that it can mobilise large social forces, and their main ally must be the trade union movement.
- iii) If we don't have a solution that puts the majority at the heart, we will get technocratic fixes at best alongside continued catastrophic climate impacts, untold suffering for millions of people, and a risk to the viability of our planet for humankind. There should be a just transition, with workers in industries impacted negatively by the shift away from fossil fuel use, and their communities, being retrained and fully compensated, and working people democratically involved in all decisions around the shift away from fossil fuels.
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- C) Work with UNISON nationally and with other unions to pursue largescale funding for energy saving and efficiency measures, such as home insulation, which will benefit working class people economically and contribute to meeting climate change goals.
- D) Produce educational materials and organise education and training courses for members on climate change issues.

Conference calls on the HESGE to work with Higher Education branches to:

- D) collaborate with Student Unions, other campus unions, and student societies to promote awareness of the climate emergency and action that can be taken to address it, and work with these bodies on all of the points below;
- E) call on their university employers to declare a climate emergency and to work with their campus trade unions and student unions to agree and implement a green university plan;
- F) cooperate with their employers to establish climate action groups of Students' Unions, Trade Unions and all relevant departments within the institutions. These should produce a strategy that commits the institution to taking a holistic approach on climate change;
- G) call on UK Universities to meet net zero carbon emissions as institutions by 2050 through a just transition. This should be achieved by carrying out a climate risk analysis and producing a comprehensive action plan and should incorporate specific actions such as bans on single-use plastic on campus, reducing air travel for work, ensuring green investments and that any new building projects and refurbishments deliver energy efficiency;
- H) call for UK universities to incorporate climate justice integrally into curricula and pedagogy across departments and courses;
- I) call on UK universities to divest from financial investments in institutions, corporations and government bodies that profit from climate and ecological crisis and specifically divest from investments in fossil fuels;
- J) organise independently with Students' Unions, student campaigns, and campus Trade Unions to put pressure on universities and to build a force that can act on climate issues;
- K) adopt the post of Green Reps in all HE branches and elect Green Reps;
- L) facilitate HE-wide meet-ups of Green Reps to share best practice and develop joint campaigns for the HE sector;
- M) support movements of students and young people on climate change, eg, Fridays For Future, and look to join their action where possible.

***Higher Education Service Group Executive***