

**UNISON Local Government Service Group
Conference 2023**

Composite booklet

To be read in conjunction with Conference Documents

11-12 June 2023

- A Pay in Further Education**
- B Early Years Funding and Private
Day Nurseries**
- C Securing the legacy and making
2023 the Year of the Black Worker
in Local Government Workplaces**
- D Pay Campaigning and Beating
Industrial Action Thresholds**

Composite A

Pay in Further Education

(Motions 3, 6 and 9)

Despite colleges educating 1.7 million students each year, further education is all too often overlooked by the government.

Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies has clearly shown that colleges lost out more than other education sectors during the austerity decade from 2010. Despite claims funding has increased, college spending per student in 2024 will still be approximately 5% lower than in 2010, while school sixth form spending per student will be 22% below 2010 levels.

Conference notes that since 2010 UNISON has been fighting cuts to funding in colleges, attacks on terms and conditions, annual restructuring, job losses and falling pay. Pay is now estimated to be as much as 35% less in real terms (in some colleges) than just over a decade earlier. The culmination is what we see now - staff shortages on a never-before-seen scale in a sector brought to its knees by a demoralised and overworked staff.

Pay in further education has lagged behind schools for too long and has fell by around 35% since 2010. This has understandably caused a recruitment crisis in the sector. Three quarters of England's 228 colleges have reported recruitment difficulties and yet have subjected staff to successive restructures attacking terms and conditions to balance their budgets.

A UNISON survey of staff in England responsible for supporting SEND learners in early 2022 found that 4 in 5 members were aware of shortages in support staff in their organisation. This is leading to difficulties such as combining class groups and, therefore, large classes; and problems running essential services, such as kitchens and tech support; and learners with additional/special needs being left without support. UNISON members who are learning support assistants report that in some areas learners are sent home when there are not enough teachers. Some members are 'parachuted in' to support learners with volatile behaviours who they have never met – putting them at risk. Many staff also reported that they had been pulled away from their jobs to help run exams. One in four have been asked to take on work that a higher paid member of staff should do and almost one in five had been asked to take on unpaid overtime.

Our report chimes with a similar survey of human resources directors in English colleges who reported 3,293 vacancies. This suggests a vacancy rate of 5.5% - with more than half of these vacancies in support staff roles. Particularly high levels of persistent vacancies are found in learning support roles, student services and facilities and estates roles. Vacancies at this level create pressure on existing staff, have a significant impact on agency fees – money that could be better spent elsewhere - and have a negative impact on learners. Survey responses included several reports of support staff (for example, learning support assistants) moving into hospitality or warehousing as hourly pay has been increased in these areas.

In 2020 a widescale analysis of 1.5 million job adverts by the Skills Network produced a list of the top ten jobs facing the biggest shortages in the UK, and teaching assistants topped the list. Research by Hay Education in 2022 concluded that classroom-based support staff have been the most difficult to hire over the past 12 months (45%) followed by teachers (43%) and other support staff such as administration, recruitment, and office staff (24%).

Conference believes that we do not need any more research or surveys – the picture is clear. In all four nations of the UK more support staff are needed in colleges and without higher pay in the sector we will not be able to get them.

The Association of Colleges most recent recommended pay offer of 2.5% was not only far below inflation but remains a benchmark that is all too often ignored by employers – with some offering even lower. The current fragmented system serves only to entrench low pay in the sector preventing coordinated action on pay as offers are received at different times.

Conference believes the current pay bargaining system is not fit for purpose and only a return to national pay bargaining will address pay issues in the sector.

Senior leaders in colleges have not felt the same wage restraint, which is why UNISON has rightly welcomed the announcement from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) that further education institutions are to be reclassified as public sector rather than private. Colleges in England will need to follow Treasury guidance on senior pay - a move that has been long overdue.

Conference welcomes the decision that Further Education institutions have been reclassified as public sector rather than private sector, and the restrictions placed on excessive salaries for senior management.

However, conference remains concerned that Further Education remains the “poor relation” of the Education Sector, with underfunding at chronic levels. This underfunding has a direct impact upon the health and financial wellbeing of our UNISON members working in colleges. A significant proportion of members are paid below the Real Living Wage and poverty pay is endemic in the sector.

With staff facing such demoralising conditions at work, UNISON Champions in our Colleges has shone a welcome spotlight on support staff working in further education to give recognition to the hard work and dedication shown. Promoting UNISON in the workplace also recruits new members and activists to better deliver our industrial objectives and increase ballot turnout.

Conference welcomes the recent UNISON initiative of “Champion’s in Our Colleges” to highlight the important work our members do. However, the importance of effective campaigns to lift the pay levels in the sector cannot be understated.

Conference notes the recent success of Wirral UNISON in securing a commitment from Wirral Metropolitan College to be a Real Living Wage Employer; this has seen many staff receiving pay rises in excess of 15% this year. This victory was achieved after a ballot for strike action received 96% support for a rolling programme of strike action. During the dispute membership levels increased by in excess of 50%.

This has demonstrated that effective action can deliver results even when funding levels remain low.

In the Northern Region we have been able to achieve turnouts of over 50% in several ballots in the last year and local reps, together with MCT calls and digital media have been vital resources.

Conference therefore instructs the Service Group Executive to conduct a review of pay levels in the FE sector, and the impact of our pay campaigns.

Conference further instructs the Service Group Executive to launch a campaign to call for the Real Living Wage for all FE Colleges.

Conference calls on the local government service group executive to:

- 1) Develop campaigning materials that highlight funding gaps in further education establishments across the UK, similar to the work done on identifying local government and school cuts
- 2) Campaign for national pay bargaining in colleges involving outside organisations and politicians at all levels; Lobby the Westminster Government and devolved Governments for proper national bargaining in the whole of the UK
- 3) Jointly campaign with other stakeholders for increased funding for pay in colleges
- 4) Continue to support branches and regions in coordinating pay negotiations and disputes.
- 5) Conduct a UNISON campaign on the importance of support staff, using a variety of communications, social media and media tools to raise awareness among the public and politicians of the work our members do
- 6) Jointly work with the Self-Organised Groups to demonstrate how low pay has a disproportionate effect on workers with protected characteristics

3 Northern Region
6 Local Government Service Group Executive
9 Wirral

Composite B

Early Years Funding & Private Day Nurseries

(Motions 5 & 7 and amendment 5.1)

Conference notes that in December the Department for Education (DfE) announced that funding to local authorities in England for supported early years places would increase by an average of 3.4% for three and four-year-olds and by 4% for two year olds. However, some local authorities will only receive less than a 1% increase in funding. Typically, those authorities that are receiving the lowest increases are those with higher rates of deprivation. Conference believes this inequality is outrageous and must be opposed.

Most early years and childcare provision is in the private and voluntary sector, with a very high proportion of staff on the national minimum wage or very close to it. Government funding must match pay levels if potential closures and job cuts are to be avoided.

This contrasts with average funding increases to local authorities of 11% in Wales and 8.2% in Scotland. But with January's RPI inflation rate standing at 13.4%, all of these so-called increases represent real terms cuts in funding for early years.

Early years settings were also excluded from the additional £2.3 billion additional funding announced for schools in England in December 2022.

Early years settings are facing a staffing crisis, with staff being unable to afford to stay in the sector despite their professional commitment to young children. The lack of funding has made many private providers unviable, and many settings are simply closing their doors. This obviously puts the jobs of many UNISON local government members at risk.

Conference recognises that our members working in the privately run early years (under 5's) day nursery settings are often working in hostile working environments, with low staffing levels, high stress levels, low pay and poor terms and conditions.

Conference notes that according to the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), nurseries across the UK are being forced to close at an alarming rate due to recruitment and retention problems.

OFSTED data has shown that the number of childcare providers had dropped by 5,400 in the year to the end of August 2022, with closures in 110 local authorities.

Conference notes the government's latest proposal on Family Hubs does not even come close to making up the loss of over 1,300 Sure Start Children's Centres since 2010. It represents a cynical attempt to repackage Sure Start after it was mercilessly undermined for over a decade by underfunding.

Conference believes a long-term investment strategy that provides high-quality, universal and affordable Early Years provision is essential to allow children to reach their potential.

Conference also notes that a survey carried out by the Early Years Alliance found there are growing staff shortages in the Early Years sector. The Early Years Alliance found that 84 per cent of settings are finding it 'difficult' to recruit the right staff, 60 per cent are finding it 'very difficult' and 24 per cent are finding it 'quite difficult'. More than a third of people who answered the survey said they are actively considering leaving the sector.

Conference believes that the current Early Years Funding Formula is not sufficient and is responsible for poor pay and terms and conditions in the sector which in turn leads to difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff.

Generally, UNISON density is low across the sector with most employers not recognising a trade union.

Conference believes this must change and therefore conference resolves to request that the Service Group Executive:

- 1) Develop a campaigning and organising strategy, which could be used by branches and regions, to aid in organising, recruitment and to help win trade union recognition in the private early years day nursery sector. Use of BSOF should also be promoted as part of this strategy;
- 2) Develop a model pay claim for the private Early Years day nursery sector;
- 3) Work through UNISON's structures and Labour Link to seek to lobby relevant politicians in relation to the inadequacy of the Early Years Funding Formula;
- 4) Work through UNISON's structures to explore the possibility of jointly campaigning on the issue of Early Years funding with other relevant trade unions and where appropriate other established organisations which campaign on this issue of Early Years Funding.

This Conference also calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- a) Campaign for substantial emergency additional funding to support the early years sector, working with the devolved nations;
- b) Continue to raise support for the campaign amongst the public by putting across the damaging impact of underfunded childcare on caregivers and wider society;
- c) Campaign for the development of a long-term strategy to improve the pay and conditions of early years staff, including within the private sector;
- d) Support branches and regions to develop a recruitment and organising strategy for early years staff with an emphasis on pay and conditions;
- e) Campaign for a £15 an hour minimum wage for the early years and childcare workforce;
- f) Work with the Living Wage Foundation and living wage accredited councils to discuss how funded early years places in the private and voluntary sectors can move towards paying the Foundation Living Wage;

- g) To work with branches and regions to recruit and retain members and organise activists in the private and voluntary sectors;
- h) Work with politicians at all levels, including councillors, metro mayors, MPs, AMs, MSPs on this issue;
- i) Work with Labour Link to campaign for Labour Party policy on early years to be based on high quality services, better funding, insourcing, improved pay and conditions, career progression and the principle of universality.

5 Local Government Service Group Executive

7 North-West Region

5.1 Northern Region

Composite C

Securing the legacy and making 2023 the year of the Black workers in Local Government workplaces

(Motions 22 and 25 and Amendment 22.1)

Conference notes that UNISON has declared 2023 the Year of Black Workers (YofBW2023).

This conference notes that whilst 2023 is the Year of Black Workers, and its focus of 'Establishing legacy to generate change', this year in and of itself is not the change we seek, it is merely the opportunity to generate change.

Black Workers up and down our society often find themselves in low-paid, insecure work, with poor terms and conditions. Despite the Westminster government denying that Institutional Racism exists in our society, we know that it does.

Our campaign to get employers to reduce the ethnicity pay gap, urgently addressing the cost-of-living crisis, and understanding how Black workers power the UK's economy, will all be central to our campaign activities.

Black workers have an important role to play in challenging racism, injustices and eliminating discrimination, fighting in-work poverty and achieving equal pay. Their experiences and voices must be heard in local government campaigns.

In 2017, an independent review undertaken by Baroness McGregor-Smith found that:

- 1) In terms of opportunities for progression, 29% of Black Caribbean employees reported feeling that they have been overlooked for promotion because of their ethnicity.
- 2) In terms of top management positions, the Black and Black British group did particularly poorly over the period between 2007 and 2012, with the number of Black/Black British people in top management positions decreasing by 42%.
- 3) 30% of those from a Black background reported experiencing or witnessing racial harassment or bullying from management in the last five years.

With UNISON having an estimated 185,000 Black members, it is imperative that we build upon our long history of achievements in tackling inequities in our society by taking concrete action to enable Black members to take the next step in our journey towards justice.

Conference strongly believes that it is the duty of all trade unionists to fight racism. The YofBW2023 provides everyone in the local government service group the opportunity to celebrate our union's long history of achievements, to take forward UNISON's vital work on race equality, to have those uncomfortable conversations and to come up with practical steps for change and focus our minds on challenging racism in the workplace.

YofBW2023 can also be used to highlight the experiences of our Black members, focus on building our organising work to increase meaningful participation of Black activists, particularly young Black activists, who can provide a voice for others in the workplace.

UNISON is far more than just another trade union; UNISON is an organisation that seeks to improve the lives of its members and wider society by challenging the status quo and seeking to generate change.

With this being the case, this conference calls on the Local Government Service Group Executive to:

- a) Work with the National Black Members Committee to release statements endorsing the YofBW2023 and build support for branches to make the YofBW2023 a priority part of their work plan and agenda;
- b) Provide regular materials to branches and regions that both highlight inequalities, and also the campaigns against racism inside and outside the workplace that we can learn from, for example where Black workers have organised and taken action against low pay or to come back in-house or have joined local and national campaigns against racism and inequality;
- c) Work with the National Black Members Committee and other Self-Organised Groups to understand the number of Black members in the service group, and work to encourage those that do not have their ethnicity recorded in their membership data to update this;
- d) Work with the National Black Members Committee and other Self-Organised Groups to analyse and interpret the data captured from (point b), to create and implement a strategic plan to work towards ensuring that Black members are represented proportionately within the structures of the service group from branch to executive levels;
- e) Work with the National Black Members Committee to develop an action plan for supporting Black members to become active within the union and their workplaces;
- f) Provide the necessary support, training, and opportunity for Black members to become involved in marking the Year of Black Workers 2023;
- g) Work with the National Black Members Committee and branches to capture ethnicity pay gap data from employers, and support branches to work with those employers to develop a strategy to reduce the pay gap, with the long-term aim of eradicating it in its entirety
- h) Work with the National Black Members Committee and UNISON's Learning and Organising Service to develop a training and development plan to ensure that all activists within the service group receive training in 'Defining Black' and the 'Race Discrimination Protocol';

- i) Promote UNISON's mentoring scheme and encourage newer and less experienced Black and particularly young Black members/activists to come forward and take part in the scheme. Work with regions to raise awareness amongst Black activists about training on mentoring that can be delivered in the branch and region;
- j) Work with branches and the National Black Members Committee to collect the data around the number of race/equality cases within the service group, analyse the data to identify any commonalities between the cases and work to develop toolkits to tackle these issues;
- k) Support branches within the service group to negotiate with employers to get them to sign UNISON's Race at Work Charter
- l) Work with local government employers to identify and share good practices that are currently in place which support the recruitment, retention, and progression of Black people in local government workplaces and careers.

Furthermore, this conference believes that by taking these steps, UNISON will be able to work towards its mission of 'establishing legacy to generate change', but more importantly, these steps will support branches, the service group and UNISON as a whole to be able to meet the needs of our Black members, and improve our ability to lead the way in the journey towards the more equitable and just society we all want, need and deserve.

22	Local Government Service Group Executive
25	National Black Members Committee
22.1	Camden Local Government

Composite D

Pay Campaigning and Beating Industrial Action Thresholds

(Motions 34, 25 and amendment 34.1)

This conference notes that:

- 1) This Tory government is once again seeking to make public sector workers pay for the latest economic crisis by restricting public sector pay even further when the cost of living continues to rise;
- 2) Prior to the latest cost of living crisis, pay across local government had fallen in real terms by 25% since 2010; We now have 'Pay Free Fridays' where compared to 2010, we work a day a week for free, and now they're coming for our Thursdays too;
- 3) The pay crisis across local government means there is already a crisis in recruitment and retention of staff across many staff groups, resulting in greater pressures on remaining staff;
- 4) UNISON research has shown that the government receives around 50% of the cost of NJC local government pay awards back, through increased direct and indirect tax revenues and reduced spending on benefits and tax credits.

This conference believes that:

- a) Imposing further real terms cuts in pay across local government and school support staff can only exacerbate the staffing crisis caused by underpay and overwork;
- b) The current increase in inflation has largely been caused by an inflationary profit drive, most notably among energy companies;
- c) It's not just energy companies that are profiting though. Last year, Nat West bank recorded profits of £5.1bn and paid the CEO £5.25m. After the Tories ended the cap, city bonuses now average more than the annual pay of our teaching assistant members. The rich are getting richer at our expense;
- d) It is a political choice to restrict local government pay further and such a choice will not resolve the inflationary pressures created by profit-led inflation;
- e) Over the last year, we have seen a massive increase in workers beating the ballot threshold and taking strike action over pay, from the RMT, CWU, NEU, UCU, Aslef, TSSA, PCS, RCN and BMA. Some of our members in Health and Higher Education have also taken strike action, and Local Government members are balloting. This has been an inspiration and has forced the Tories to improve pay offers;

- f) This government will only be forced to give decent pay awards to local government workers if unions can demonstrate they can beat the ballot thresholds and call lawful industrial action, if necessary;
- g) Each branch and region need to beat the ballot thresholds if UNISON is going to be as strong as possible to win better pay;
- h) Each branch and region need to prioritise achieving the required turnout during any ballot period as their number 1 priority;
- i) A political leverage campaign can enhance the impact and success of any industrial action.

This conference also resolves to request that the Local Government Service Group Executive works with the NJC Committee to:

- i) Seek to ensure best practice on beating ballot thresholds, from across UNISON and the wider trade union movement, is shared with branches and regions;
- ii) Seek to ensure each branch and region devise a plan of action to beat the ballot thresholds for employers under NJC pay, terms and conditions;
- iii) Seek to ensure any industrial action across sectors in UNISON is coordinated wherever possible;
- iv) Seek to ensure any industrial action over pay is coordinated, where possible, with other parts of the public sector and other unions fighting for better pay;
- v) Seek to ensure a political leverage campaign is devised;
- vi) Survey all appropriate branches to quantify how many are ballot and strike ready and identify gaps in resources, reporting back in full to the Local Government Service Group Executive and then to Local Government Conference in 2024.

34 Sandwell General UNISON Branch

35 NJC Local Government Committee

34.1 Camden UNISON

35.1 Camden UNISON