

---

## **Recruiting, organising, representing, and retaining members**

---

### **1. RECOGNISING DISABLED MEMBERS**

Conference believes that the work of individual Disabled Members in UNISON needs to be recognised.

UNISON currently has lots of different awards for members including the Learning Initiative Award and the Organising Rep of the Year Award.

Young Member have the Young Member of the Year Award which recognises a Young Member who has made a difference in campaigning, organising or promoting Trade Union values and ideas in the workplace.

Black Members also have the Nelson Mandela Award which is given to those who exemplify Nelson Mandela's values of determination, a desire for unity and strength in the face of injustice.

Yet despite 2022 being the Year of Disabled Workers and assurances from reps on the National Disabled Members Committee (NDMC) we still don't have an award that recognises the important contribution Disabled Members play in our union, in workplaces and in wider society.

UNISON has some amazing Disabled Members. People who have made a real and lasting difference to the lives of disabled workers and disabled people and it is time for them to receive the recognition they deserve.

Conference we need to establish a Disabled Member of the Year Award. An award should be given each year to a Disabled Member who has dedicated time and effort to campaigning for disability equality, tackling disability discrimination and inspiring disabled people to achieve their goals. This could include work in UNISON, in the workplace or in society.

Conference instructs the NDMC to work with the NEC to:

1. Establish a small working group to agree the criteria and nominating and judging process for the Disabled Member of the Year Award.
2. Launch the award at National Delegate Conference 2024.

Present the first Disabled Member of the Year Award at National Disabled Members Conference 2024.

*Newcastle City*

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

### **2. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND YOUNG WORKERS**

Conference notes the important work done by the National Disabled Members Committee in developing and promoting the 2019 'Let's be reasonable' report which showed the difficulties faced by many disabled workers in securing reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

Conference also welcomes the wide range of bargaining guidance, information and resources available to UNISON representatives wanting to negotiate stronger policies on reasonable adjustments in their workplaces. Great strides have been made in implementing initiatives such as 'reasonable adjustment passports', meaning that reasonable adjustments are assessed and identified once and travel with the worker, rather than a new assessment being made every time a worker changes job or workplace.

However, many workers still experience unacceptable delays and difficulties in accessing necessary adjustments, and young workers may have even more difficulty in accessing reasonable adjustments due to various factors:

- a. a lack of information about their rights under the Equality Act 2010 to request reasonable adjustments.
- b. a lack of information as to what adjustments may be available and schemes such as Access to Work.
- c. a lack of confidence in requesting adjustments.
- d. precarious or short-term job contracts where employers may not be responsive to requests.

Conference believes UNISON representatives play a key role in supporting workers in accessing the reasonable adjustments to which they are entitled, and UNISON branches are able to make great improvements for disabled staff by negotiating robust policies on disability and reasonable adjustments.

Conference asks the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Continue to campaign for stronger rights to reasonable adjustments including time limits to respond to reasonable adjustments requests, time limits to implement these and the wider adoption of 'reasonable adjustment passports' by employers.
2. Continue to promote and publicise UNISON's resources on reasonable adjustments, including the Know your Rights leaflet, the Let's be Reasonable report and the Proving Disability and Reasonable Adjustment guide that includes examples of reasonable adjustments.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

3. Work with the National Young Members Forum to publicise UNISON's resources and information on securing reasonable adjustments to young disabled workers.
4. Consider producing guidance on the right to reasonable adjustments at interview and for new starters.
5. Work with Regions, Branches and Service Groups to support and inform bargaining for a more supportive and proactive approach to disability and reasonable adjustments by employers.
6. Share best practice examples of workplace reasonable adjustments, such as reasonable adjustment passports and strong disability policies negotiated by UNISON branches.

*National Young Members' Forum*

### **3. LET'S RAISE AWARENESS**

Conference notes the exceptional Trans ally training scheme that our union has created and delivered to many Unison members. Our Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender + (LGBT+) National committee, it's officers and the Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse caucus must be applauded for the work and effort they have put into the training and its delivery.

This training has been extremely successful in informing members about Transgender issues and helping them understand the bad press the transgender community have had. Those trained gain a good understanding and can become good 'Trans allies' in the workplace.

It is a simple and effective way of delivering information and the training can be passed onto others to further increase the potential of numbers trained.

Conference it is a fantastic and effective method of raising awareness and dealing with misconceptions. The wider union gains a knowledge of the issues and can provide support and be understanding of the Trans community.

This model should be encouraged, and it is believed would be ideal to be used and adapted in relation to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). We have an increasing amount of members who identify with ASD and there is a similar lack of understanding to the issues these members face. Awareness would help other members understand the issues and assist those with ASD and help gain the appropriate advice, reasonable adjustments and allies.

Conference we believe this training should be adapted, if possible, for ASD and clearly there is a scope for other subjects to follow owing to the overwhelming success of the Trans project.

Conference calls on the National Disabled members committee to:

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

1. Contact the National LGBT+ committee and the Transgender, Non-Binary, and gender diverse caucus to seek advice on how they set up the Trans allies training and seek advice on what was required from the wider union.
2. Look into what is required to adapt and deliver the training including contacting the relevant groups for any funding and organising reasons.
3. Look to establish and deliver the training when possible if the actions at 1 and 2 are positive and the adaptation is possible.
4. Report back any progress to the Disabled Member conference 2024.

*East Midlands Region*

### **4. IMPACT OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL TESTING ON DISABLED MEMBERS**

Conference is concerned that an increasing number of employers are introducing 'for cause' drug and alcohol testing policies without due consideration of the impact on disabled employees including our Disabled Members.

These policies allow managers to 'ask' any employee that they believe could be under the influence of drugs or alcohol at work to take a test. Reasons for believing that an employee could be under the influence of drugs or alcohol include but are not limited to:

- a. Fluctuations in mood or energy or increased tiredness
- b. Frequent short-term absence with or without an explanation
- c. Taking longer to complete tasks
- d. Difficulty remembering instructions
- e. Trips, falls or stumbles
- f. Slurred speech

All of these so-called warning signs of drug or alcohol use could be disability related. For example, people with neurological conditions often experience fatigue, slurred speech or lack of balance that leads to falls.

These policies also state that if an employee claims that the reasons for suspicion are linked to their medication, they must provide their manager with a copy of their prescription. This forces Disabled Members to reveal not only that they are disabled but the nature of their condition and details of symptoms which could be quite intrusive.

If a member refuses to take a test, which they are entitled to do, they will be called into a meeting on the next working day to discuss the issue. As this is called an informal fact-finding mission, they have no right to be accompanied. The outcome of this meeting could lead to disciplinary proceedings and dismissal.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

If a member agrees to take a test these are often being administered by companies that we know are unreliable. For example, we are aware of employers who are using companies where cross-contamination was found in their testing labs during COVID.

If the result of the test is positive the member could be subjected to disciplinary proceedings and dismissal. However, there is evidence to show that positive tests can be linked to prescribed or over the counter medication and, in some cases, even everyday things such as hand-sanitiser, tonic water and poppy seeds.

If a Disabled Member wants to dispute the outcome of the test, they are being told by their employers that they will need to pay for this.

Conference understands that there are some jobs, such as those that involved driving or operating machinery, where it may be necessary to carry out drug and alcohol testing, but these policies are being applied to all jobs.

The government guidance states that these types of policies should be part of a contractual health and safety policy and, as such, could be seen as a change of terms and conditions that needs full consultation.

The Health and Safety Executive recommend that these policies should only be introduced for employees who make safety critical decisions such as drivers and pilots. And the TUC has raised concern about these policies and encourages employees affected to contact their union rep for advice and support.

Conference instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC, UNISON's National Health and Safety Committee and the TUC to:

1. Survey Branches to determine how many employers have introduced this type of drug and alcohol testing policy
2. Develop guidance for Branches on how to support Disabled Members who are asked to take a drug or alcohol test
3. Campaign against the introduction of 'for cause' and other similar drug and alcohol testing policies that are not based on evidential need.

*Newcastle City*

---

## **Negotiating and bargaining on behalf of members and promoting equality**

---

### **5. PROGRESSION FOR ALL - BLACK DISABLED WORKERS CAN'T BE LEFT BEHIND**

Conference notes that despite the significant numbers of Black workers in the frontline work force, they are disproportionately underrepresented in managerial and senior levels within their departments and tend to be concentrated in the lower levels.

Some commentators point to the ways in which institutional racism continues to play a key role in Black workers' experiences in the organisation, which means they are often overlooked for development opportunities.

In terms of career progression, evidence points to continual barriers for Black workers to progress to middle and senior management roles within their teams or organisations. This particularly impacts those on fixed-term contracts, causing them to be overlooked and leading to discrimination as a significant number of Black workers are on fixed term contracts.

Every disabled Black worker should have equal opportunities for professional growth and advancement, regardless of their background or employment status within their workplace.

Conference acknowledges that it is our duty and responsibility to address these inequalities and promote inclusivity, diversity, and equality in all aspects within the workplace. We must encourage employers to recognise the immense value and unique perspectives that Black disabled workers bring to their organisation, and to foster their growth and provide equitable opportunities at work. This is crucial to creating a truly diverse and inclusive environment.

Conference believes that we need to work with employers to affirm their commitment to fostering an inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace that values the contributions of all its workers and actively works towards the progression and advancement of Black disabled workers, including those on fixed-term contracts.

We need to take an important step towards a more just and inclusive future for our Black disabled members.

Conference notes that UNISON has produced a useful toolkit as part of the Year of Black Workers. This includes negotiating race equality guides on fair recruitment and selection, redundancy and bullying and harassment.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with regions and branches and other appropriate parts of the union:

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference**  
**Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

1. To encourage employers to sign up to a comprehensive approach to addressing the barriers to progression for Black disabled workers by:
  - a. Conducting a comprehensive review of existing policies and practices related to recruitment, hiring, performance evaluation, and career development of Black disabled workers, with a particular focus on identifying and seeking to eliminate any discriminatory practices or biases.
  - b. Evaluating fixed-term contracts to ensure fair and equitable treatment, with specific attention given to the representation and career advancement of Black disabled workers in these contract types
  - c. Committing to actively combating any barriers and unconscious biases that hinder the progression of Black disabled workers including those on fixed-term contracts.
  - d. Implementing targeted measures, such as anti-bias training, mentoring programmes and leadership development initiatives, to support and empower Black disabled workers in their career progression.
  - e. Regularly monitoring and reporting diversity and equality indicators, including representation, retention, and promotion rates of Black disabled workers, to track progress and identify areas for improvement.
  - f. Adopting clear and transparent communication channels that should be established to ensure that all workers, especially Black disabled workers, are aware of available opportunities for progression, including promotions, internal job postings, and skill development programs.
  - g. Actively seeking out external partnerships and collaborations to promote career advancement opportunities for Black disabled workers, including participating in diversity job fairs, mentoring programs, interview coaching and professional networks.
  - h. Reporting their disability and ethnicity pay gaps and taking steps to ensuring fair recruitment.
  - i. Allocating necessary resources to support this work and reviewing and reporting annually to ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.
2. To circulate UNISON's Year of Black Workers negotiating race equality guides to seek to get these issues on the branch bargaining agenda.

*National Black Members' Caucus*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference**  
**Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**6. ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING AND ADVICE FOR WORKERS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS OR OTHER NERVOUS DISORDER**

Conference, statistics published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) on 26 January 2023 noted that the disability employment rate was 54.3% compared to 81.1% for non-disabled in 2021/22.

While the employment rate reduced slightly to 50.5% for those with mental health conditions, it dipped significantly to 33% for those with a mental illness or other nervous disorder, who are among those disabled people least likely to be in employment.

On average between 2014 and 2021, the ONS noted that disabled people were twice as likely to leave the workforce and three times less likely to enter the workforce, than non-disabled.

The ONS further reported that the number of people reporting a long-term health condition is rising, caused by an 83.7% rise in the number of people reporting mental health conditions (1 million). Conference notes that the ONS distinguishes two categorisations of mental health conditions: common mental health problems (which includes depression, bad nerves, and anxiety) and mental illness or other nervous disorder (which includes mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, manic depression, and other serious mental health problems).

In 2022, research published by the Mental Health Foundation and the London School of Economics and Political Science noted that mental health problems cost the UK economy at least £118 billion a year. Three-quarters of that cost was due to lost productivity of people living with mental health conditions and the costs incurred by unpaid informal carers.

According to research published by the Centre for Mental Health, mental health cost our employers £35 billion in 2016 through sickness absence, staff turnover, and presenteeism.

In 2019, a survey by the Chartered Management Institute reported that whilst most managers manage staff with mental health problems, only 49% had received relevant training. The staff they were managing had conditions ranging from some of the more common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or stress, through to more complex mental health conditions including eating disorders, bipolar, and post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.

Conference believes employers are failing to equip managers and HR professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to support and manage staff experiencing significant mental health problems and mental illness. While many employers provide generic training on managing stress, mindfulness etc. for managers and workers, it falls short of the specific training needed to support workers experiencing more serious mental illness or other nervous disorder. Employers need to go beyond the more generic mental health awareness training provided to respond to the full scale of the issue.



## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

Conference agrees that stewards play a crucial role in supporting their members mental health and well-being. They may be the first port of call for a member who is struggling. But they need to be equipped to support.

Conference commends UNISON for training provided on mental health, however, recognises that talking about mental health with a member can be a difficult conversation for our stewards. In part through fear of triggering negative thoughts and feelings among those members, and in part through feelings of being ill-equipped to respond appropriately and effectively. More so, when representing members with mental illness or other nervous disorder.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC:

1. To review the mental health training available through UNISON that is currently available for stewards, to assess whether it also provides our stewards the knowledge and skills needed to represent members with more serious mental illness or other nervous disorder effectively; and if not, to consider revising the training to incorporate this aspect of mental health.
2. To encourage branches to press their employer for access to a dedicated mental health practitioner who is able to offer advice and guidance to managers and HR professionals on workplace issues involving workers with mental illness or other nervous disorder, within their occupational health provision.

*Scotland Region*

### **7. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND OTHER NON-APPARENT DISABILITIES**

Conference notes the survey done in 2022 by UNISON's National Young Members Forum which found that 80% of UNISON young members had experienced a mental health problem in the previous year.

Conference notes that mental health problems, like many impairments, may be non-apparent, meaning they may not conform to stereotypes of disability and uninformed employers may not respond appropriately to requests for reasonable adjustments.

Many young workers may not be aware of the full protections under the Equality Act to be protected from disability discrimination and to have reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

Conference welcomes the work done by the National Disabled Members Committee in widening awareness of disability rights and supporting UNISON branches in negotiating strong policies on disability, including non-apparent impairments.

Conference asks the National Disabled Members Committee:

1. To work with the National Young Members Forum to campaign on the importance of UNISON and trade unions in securing reasonable adjustments

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

and other support for workers with mental health problems and other non-apparent disabilities.

2. To publicise and promote UNISON's resources on mental health and other non-apparent disabilities, such as the Bargaining on Mental Health Policies guidance.
3. To work with the National Young Members Forum to inform and educate young UNISON members about their employment rights regarding all forms of disability.
4. To share best practice in negotiating policies and achieving individual support for those with non-apparent disabilities.
5. To continue campaigning for increases in mental health provision and funding on the NHS so that help is available more quickly and in more areas.

*National Young Members' Forum*

### **8. WOMEN AND NEURODIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Conference notes that neurodiverse women still fail to get the support they need in the workplace because of out-dated and sexist stereotypes.

Conference further notes that UNISON subscribes to the social model of disability and as such we focus on breaking down barriers and identifying ways of changing the working environment to make it accessible for neurodiverse people.

However, there is a huge lack of understanding about neurodiversity, particularly in relation to women, and there is a place for separate and specific UNISON guidance on neurodiversity in the workplace that includes the barriers faced by neurodiverse women.

Conference instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Consider working with neurodiverse members to develop guidance on neurodiversity in the workplace, which includes specific reference to the challenges faced by women workers with neurodiverse conditions
2. Continue to publicise and promote UNISON's 'Proving Disability and Reasonable Adjustments' guide.

*National Women Members' Caucus*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**9. SICKLE CELL DISEASE NEEDS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

Conference believes that Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is an impairment that must be taken seriously. SCD affects millions of individuals globally and significantly impacts their quality of life.

SCD is an inherited blood disorder that affects the production of red blood cells, causing them to be abnormally crescent-shaped and prone to blockages in blood vessels.

People with SCD experience chronic pain, organ damage, anaemia, and increased susceptibility to infections. SCD also significantly affects physical, mental, and emotional well-being, leading to limitations in daily activities, education, employment, and overall quality of life. This blood disorder is predominantly associated with people from Black African and Caribbean backgrounds.

Sickle cell anaemia requires ongoing treatment, medicines, and hospital stays. It can be so severe it prevents those with it from working. This can lead to financial struggles. Parents of sickle cell children are at risk of job insecurity and may miss out on promotion due to the amount of time needed for appointments or hospital admissions.

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as someone with a physical or mental impairment which has or is likely to last 12 months or more and which has a substantial impact on their normal day to day activities.

Conference notes that SCD is likely to fit the definition of a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010. People with SCD experience frequent and severe pain crises, leading to significant barriers to carrying out daily activities and limiting their physical functioning. Chronic pain management becomes a lifelong struggle, necessitating appropriate support and accommodations to ensure a quality life.

Conference notes the impact SCD has on employment, often resulting in missed workdays due to health complications, causing disruptions in professional pursuits.

Conference also notes that there can be a lot of emotional and psychosocial challenges, such as depression and anxiety, due to the impact of the disease on physical health and overall well-being. Public recognition and support systems are essential in addressing the psychosocial needs and ensuring appropriate mental health care for individuals with SCD.

Conference notes that UNISON's guide 'Proving Disability and Reasonable Adjustments' outlines the rights disabled people such as those with SCD are entitled to in the workplace. The guide also includes a section devoted to SCD and the kind of reasonable adjustments that might be applicable in the workplace.

It is crucial employers take SCD seriously to ensure appropriate support, equal opportunities, and protection against discrimination to those affected by this condition.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

Conference therefore instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to work with National Black Members Committee to:

1. Raise awareness of the impact of SCD on Black workers and of the rights these workers are entitled to as disabled people under the Equality Act 2010
2. Publicise UNISON's 'Proving Disability and Reasonable Adjustments' guide to branches and regions, and in particular the advice on reasonable adjustments for people with SCD
3. Support appropriate campaigns for investment and support for people with SCD.

*National Black Members' Caucus*

### **10. PROSTATE PROBLEMS**

Conference notes that prostate can affect more than one in three men over the age of 50. The prostate is a small gland found only in men, trans women, non-binary people who were assigned male at birth and some intersex people, we also note that data shows that African Caribbean people are more likely to get prostate cancer than white people.

The prostate gland surrounds the urethra and is about the size and shape of a walnut but tends to get bigger as you get older. It can sometimes become swollen or enlarged by conditions such as: prostate enlargement, prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) and prostate cancer.

Conference notes that people with prostate cancer are deemed to be disabled under the Equality Act 2010 as soon as the disease is diagnosed. They are therefore entitled to reasonable adjustments which could include time off for treatment or medical appointments, reduced or changed working hours, access to toilet facilities or reductions in workload, for example.

Most people with the condition don't have any signs or symptoms because the onset is quite slow, that's why it's important to know about the risks. It is common that men will not talk about their personal issues, so we need to encourage people to get tested. It's a simple process of just talking to a nurse or GP.

Conference therefore instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Support appropriate campaigns that encourage people to get tested for prostate problems.
2. Raise awareness of the rights of people with prostate problems in the workplace under the Equality Act 2010, including by circulating UNISON's 'Proving Disability and Reasonable Adjustments' guide and our 'Know Your Rights' leaflet.

*Hillingdon Local Government*

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

### **11. AIR FILTER - COVID-19 WORKPLACE DISENFECTION**

Conference notes that since the pandemic there has been increased focus on building standards including cleaning and ventilation. We are all aware that disabled people are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 with research revealing that 59.5% of all deaths involving COVID-19 during 2020 were amongst people who were disabled and 46% of disabled people experiencing a negative effect on their mental health.

Across the world there is numerous examples of improvement initiatives to indoor air quality to help create an environment that reduces workplace spread of Covid and other viruses such as the installation of HEPA filters or UV Disinfectant lighting. Current UK legislation is for employers to provide a safe working environment but despite all the COVID guidance there is no legal requirement to provide such systems of disinfestation to help make our workplaces even safer. Recently these devices were implemented in England's NHS so there are examples of it in use in other parts of the UK where UNISON members work.

Conference calls on the NDMC to:

1. Collate and share examples of best practice across the UK and the globe around workplace air filtration systems to encourage branches to raise the issue with their employers to introduce such devices in the workplace.
2. Raise the issue with Labour Link to campaign for a legal requirement to introduce such devices within public buildings including workplace settings.

*Scottish Qualifications Authority*

### **12. MAKING HYBRID WORKPLACES MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR DEAF WORKERS**

Conference notes that since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a massive shift to hybrid working, with many of our members now splitting their time between home working and the workplace.

This has resulted in benefits to many disabled workers who can manage their impairment better at home, with short breaks and more flexible start and finish times. However, many Deaf members who are native British Sign Language (BSL) speakers face increased barriers due to online working.

In the workplace, Deaf worker should have access to a BSL interpreter who can interpret conversations with colleagues, clients, and members of the public.

However, when working from home Deaf BSL workers rely on remote BSL interpretation services and are therefore unable to receive phone calls when homeworking. Instead, calls need to be arranged in advance and the worker has to

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

book a remote BSL interpreter and then call their colleague, client or member of the public back.

This can lead to some colleagues feeling it takes too much time or energy to arrange to speak to a Deaf BSL staff member by phone through their own language. This can lead to the worker being left out of key discussions and facing isolation from workmates and from team decision making.

Email is not a substitute because for Deaf native BSL speakers, English is a second language and emails can lead to miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Although some other countries, including the United States, have videophone relay services that allow Deaf workers to receive incoming calls that are simultaneously translated into BSL, this technology is not yet common in the UK. Some organisations individually contract with a video relay company but there is no general ability for Deaf people to be able to make outgoing calls in their own language, and this applies not just to the workplace but to every aspect of Deaf people's lives

Deaf workers also face other barriers when homeworking as part of a hybrid schedule. Online meetings require the Deaf worker to constantly focus on the interpreter or they may miss parts of the meeting, unlike hearing people who can look away from the screen and still hear what's happening. Interruptions that don't go through the chair can also be hard for the interpreter to pick up and the Deaf worker may miss out on important context.

Online meeting platforms often allow interpreters to be "pinned" but they can still move about on the screen, causing confusion and interruption to the meeting for the worker. Deaf workers can find these meetings exhausting and this can reduce their ability to participate as they would like.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Raise awareness of the barriers to communication and to taking part in online meetings that Deaf (native BSL) workers face when working hybrid.
2. Seek to update UNISON's guide to hybrid and home working to include the barriers faced by Deaf workers and ways these can be addressed by employers.
3. Support appropriate campaigns to expand government funded videophone BSL interpretation services for all.

*National Deaf Members' Caucus*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**13. USING THE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CHARTER TO INFLUENCE THE BARGAINING AGENDA**

Conference notes that UNISON Disabled Members has longstanding policy on the precarious state of employment of disabled people in the UK.

Disabled people are still less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people, and those with certain disabilities are even less likely to be in employment. Disabled people are also more likely to be employed in lower paid jobs, are more likely to be employed into roles below their qualifications, skills and experience, and are less likely to gain promotions compared their non-disabled colleagues.

Urgent action to support Disabled people in the workplace is not only necessary but is well overdue.

Conference further notes that UNISON is one of the founding members of the Disability Employment Charter, which describes a series of actions aimed at government and employers to address disability employment issues to improve disabled people's participation in the employment market and lower the persisting disability pay and employment gaps.

UNISON negotiates some of the largest collective bargaining agreements in all four nations that make up the UK. Some of these collective agreements include workforce policies and conditions of service as well as pay.

Conference calls upon the National Disabled Members Committee, taking cognisance of devolved bargaining structures where they exist:

1. To use the Disability Employment Charter to develop a bargaining campaign that regions and branches can use to incorporate relevant Charter actions within their bargaining priorities.
2. To encourage Service Groups at a national level to incorporate relevant actions of the Charter into bargaining priorities.

*Scotland Region*

**14. NEXT STEPS FOR OUR WORK ON THE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CHARTER**

Conference is proud that UNISON is one of the founding members of the Disability Employment Charter which now has 147 organisations signed up to it, including trade unions, disabled people organisations, public service employers, charitable organisations, and private sector employers.

The disability employment charter was founded because of the disadvantage that disabled people experience in the labour market and workplaces. Disabled people are less likely to be employed than non-disabled people, with the disability employment gap consistently at a rate of just below 30 percentage points. The

## 2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC

employment rate of disabled people is 53% compared to 82% of non-disabled people. This is due to a number of factors including disability discrimination, failure to make reasonable adjustments, inaccessible workplaces and structural ableism.

Disabled employees also face a pay gap of almost 20% lower than non-disabled employees. On top of this, disabled people incur approximately £1000 disability associated costs which works out at about 63% of household income after housing costs, according to the disability charity Scope. The cost-of-living crisis has compounded the poverty experienced by disabled people.

The charter outlines the actions that the government needs to take to address the disadvantage disabled people encounter in their working lives asking for:

- a. all employers with 250+ employees to publish data annually on the number of disabled people they employ as a proportion of their workforce; their disability pay gap; and the percentage of disabled employees within each pay quartile.
- b. increase to disabled people's access to employment programmes and apprenticeships; increase the scale, quality and awareness of supported employment programmes and supported internships; and increase the provision of tailored careers advice to disabled people.
- c. Reform of Access to Work (AtW) including removal of the AtW support cap; ensuring application/renewal processes are efficient, personalised, and flexible; entitle disabled jobseekers to 'in principle' indicative awards; facilitate passporting of awards between organisations and from Disabled Student's Allowance to AtW; and increase awareness of AtW support.
- d. Reform of Disability Confident requiring employers at Disability Confident Levels 2 and 3 to meet minimum thresholds regarding the percentage of disabled people in their workforce; and remove accreditation from employers that do not move up within 3 years from Level 1 to Levels 2 or 3.
- e. Leveraging government procurement ensuring award decisions for all public sector contracts take into account the percentage of disabled people in the workforce of tendering organisations; require government contractors to work towards a minimum threshold regarding the percentage of disabled people in their workforce; and take failure to achieve this threshold into account in future contract award decisions.
- f. The government to require employers to notify employees on decisions regarding reasonable adjustment requests within two weeks; make the option to work flexibly from day one the legal default for all jobs; introduce stronger rights to paid disability leave for assessment, rehabilitation and training; and fund an increase in Statutory Sick Pay to the European average.
- g. The government should require employers to consult and negotiate with disabled people and their representatives on disability equality matters; and provide trade union equality representatives and disability champions with statutory rights to time off to perform their role.



## 2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC

- h. The government should create a 'one stop shop' portal to provide information, advice and guidance to employers on recruiting and retaining disabled people, and to disabled people on their employment rights.
- i. The government should take into account increasing disability prevalence in calculating the disability employment gap, and use the 'prevalence corrected' employment gap measure in monitoring national progress on disability employment.

The charter is primarily a campaigning tool that calls on government, rather than employers, to take the kind of legislative and cross-sectoral action that is needed to radically improve the rights of disabled people in the workplace. Employers are asked to sign up to it to show that they want government to take action and to show that they disagree with the Conservative government's usual argument that employers see stronger rights as a "burden on business" or "red tape".

However, some disabled members have reported that their employers have agreed to the principles of the disability employment charter but are reluctant to sign up as the call is on the government to take actions. It is important that we support those branches in making the argument to their employer while also seeking other ways in which the charter can be used, including when it comes to workplace bargaining.

Some disabled members report that their branches have used the employment charter as a bargaining and negotiating tool to improve working conditions for disabled members; with employers reporting on the make-up of the workforce, reporting on disability pay gaps, increasing employment opportunities for disabled people, incorporating commitments to disability equality in procurement process and providing reasonable adjustments more quickly.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Continue to promote the sign up to the disability employment charter.
2. Provide guidance to branches on the arguments to make when seeking employer sign ups and on how the disability employment charter can be adapted for use as a bargaining and negotiating tool to promote disability rights in the workplace.
3. Collate good practice of how branches have utilised the disability employment charter to improve working conditions for disabled members.

*National Disabled Members Committee*

### **15. MIND THE PAY GAP!**

In 2022 Conference passed four motions that mentioned a pay gap, recognising that any pay gap affecting any protected characteristic is unacceptable, and change is

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

needed. Conference recognises that the current cost of living crisis has made the issue even more pressing.

Conference accepts that since gender pay gap reporting was required for organisations with more than 250 employees there has been an improvement – from 18.4% in 2017 down to 14.9% in 2022. It is becoming clear that until organisations are held to account, they will not take responsibility, and they will not take action.

Compare the movement on pay gaps across multiple equality strands:

- a. Disability pay gap - was 12.7% in 2017, but had increased to 17.2% by 2022, meaning disabled people get paid on average £2.05 per hour or £3,700 per year less than non-disabled people.
- b. Ethnicity pay gap – was 4.2% in 2017, and had reduced to 2.3% in 2019, but this masks significant disparities with the London ethnicity pay gap standing at 23.8%, and this is likely to be reflected in other areas of the UK. It is also shameful that no more recent statistics are available.
- c. LGBT+ pay gap – there is very little official data but we know from a YouGov survey in 2019 that lesbian, gay, bi, and trans workers responding reported being paid an average £6,700 per year less than non-LGBT+ colleagues, a 16% pay gap. UNISON's experience is that trans workers are likely to be particularly impacted.

The fact is that organisations rarely collect all the data to enable them to assess the pay gap related to disability, LGBT+, and ethnicity. Workers are often reluctant to declare protected characteristics due to stigma, and the perceived disadvantageous effect on promotion or workplace development. This particularly affects disabled workers, and especially LGBT+ workers who may not be 'out' at work. Even where organisations assure workers of confidentiality to encourage self-declaration, workers are unenthusiastic. In many sectors workers have no confidence that their employer will handle that data with appropriate security and regard and may misuse it.

Conference believes that the first step to addressing the remaining pay gaps is to introduce mandatory reporting for all organisations with more than 250 workers. Conference further recognises that without the relevant diversity data, such reporting will be incomplete, and will not be robust.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Develop workplace guidance on confidential reporting of disability and related equality data, and how to protect workers' data rights.
2. Encourage regions and branches to work with their employers to negotiate to protect workers' data rights in the workplace, and to collect equality data.
3. Raise the disability, LGBT+, and ethnicity pay gaps with regions, branches and service groups so that the drivers of pay gaps can be included in local and national bargaining agendas with employers.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

4. Work with signatories to the Disability Employment Charter and the TUC to campaign for all employees with over 250 employees to publish annually:
  - i. The number of disabled, LGBT+, and Black workers they employ as a proportion of their workforces
  - ii. The percentage of disabled, LGBT+, and Black workers they employ at each level of the organisation
  - iii. The disabled, LGBT+, and Black workers pay gap in the organisation.

*Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus*

---

**Campaigning and promoting UNISON on behalf of members**

---

**16. GET THE VOTE OUT TO GET THE TORIES OUT!**

Conference believes 13 years of Conservative-led government have been a disaster for disabled LGBT+ people and looks forward to the opportunity presented by the next general election for the UK to kick the Tories out of government. However, despite the opinion polls, this is by no means guaranteed. We, as trade unionists, must help to get the vote out if we are to achieve it and with so many constituencies likely to be close, LGBT+ disabled people's votes will be important.

Conference believes disabled people have suffered disproportionately for several years due to cuts imposed by the current government.

Since the Tories came to power under the coalition, and later in their own right, they have systematically attacked and started dismantling the welfare state and institutions, such as the NHS, that disabled people need to live independently. Gutting Remploy: privatisation of NHS blood plasma, which was later sold on to a Chinese company; more than doubling NHS expenditure on private health providers; the Health and Social Care Act; over 40% drop in the number of Learning Disability Nurses; cuts to Mobility Allowance; and life-expectancy down, for first time in decades. This list goes on and on.

They have also abjectly failed to take any real action to ban conversion therapy, particularly when it comes to trans people, and have fed a culture war that demonises trans people, whether in workplaces or in schools. NHS waiting lists for gender identity services are massive, with many trans people still having to go private.

Conference also recalls with horror that former Prime Minister Boris Johnson was found by the Privileges Committee to have deliberately and repeatedly misled parliament about attending illegal parties during the Covid pandemic whilst so many died, with family members unable to see them one last time. There is growing

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

evidence that some government ministers fast-tracked contracts for their friends for often unusable and unsafe PPE, whilst nurses and doctors had to wear binbags in an effort to prevent infection. All whilst the rich were helped to get richer on the backs of everyone else.

Conference demands, loud and clear, that this cannot be allowed to continue and those responsible need to be brought to account.

Yet, we cannot rely on this catalogue of doom, destruction, and despair to bring us the result our public services and disabled LGBT+ people need at a general election. Conference believes the Tories and their friends in the right-wing press will start to sugar coat recent events and the legacy of their 13 years in office. We cannot allow that to happen.

In addition to this, the Tory government have introduced changes that seem designed to suppress votes from people who might want to vote against them. The new photo identification requirements will disproportionately impact younger LGBT+ people and disabled people on low incomes, both of whom are less likely to have the required type of photo identification.

Conference therefore instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National LGBT+ Committee to:

1. Raise awareness of the continued impact of the Conservative-led government on disabled and LGBT+ people.
2. Work through the Labour Link to lobby the Labour party to seek to ensure a future Labour government fully delivers on banning all LGBT+ conversion therapy and on modernising and de-medicalising the Gender Recognition Act.
3. Work with other appropriate parts of the union to encourage disabled people to register to vote.
4. Raise awareness of the new photo identification requirements with disabled members.
5. Work through the Labour Link to encourage our disabled members, via regions and branches where appropriate, to vote in a way that supports public services, equality, and an end to 13 years of Tory misrule.

*Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus*

### **17. DEVELOPING UNISON'S VISION OF A NATIONAL CARE SERVICE**

Conference notes:

- a. Many disabled people across the United Kingdom rely on daily care visits to maintain their independence through care visits and care packages.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

- b. Although the system of requesting and agreeing a care package sits with local authorities, care packages are often delivered by the private sector.
- c. The care sector has been substantially privatised for many years, leading to a patchwork of support depending on the provider and on the postcode the person receiving care lives in.
- d. Unlike the NHS, social care is not free at the point of use. Care Needs Assessments under the Care Act 2014 are normally undertaken by the local authority, which looks at eligible needs and whether an individual meets the threshold for having a level of needs that can be supported through a care package. Many disabled people are left having to pay substantial costs for their care.
- e. Changes being proposed in Scotland under a new National Care Service (Scotland) Bill would remove responsibility for social care from local authorities, leading to a reduction in democratic control and further steps towards the commodification of care in a privatised market.

Conference believes:

- i. Care Assessments should not be about eligibility for care but focus on what support is needed.
- ii. All social care should be provided through UNISON's vision of a National Care Service as a funded, universal, free at the point of delivery service that works in the interests of all; an end to private companies making profit out of care and a commitment to deliver care services primarily through local government.
- iii. Fair work, decent pay and improved status should be the norm for all care workers.
- iv. Our vision also needs to include how care workers are directly employed by disabled people through personal budgets these workers are incorporated in nationally agreed terms, conditions and training, while maintaining disabled people's independence and right to choose.
- v. Equality and human rights and independent living, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, should be central to the assessment and provision of care in the United Kingdom.
- vi. Disabled people have a right to be heard properly during Care Needs Assessments and be actively involved in shaping their care, and support and care packages should be shaped with, not for people.

Conference instructs the National Disabled Members Committee, working with appropriate parts of the union including service groups and the devolved nations to:

- 1. Continue to campaign for UNISON's vision of a properly funded, free at the point of use National Care Service across the United Kingdom and in each devolved nation, and to campaign against attempts to reduce local democratic

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

control and increase marketization of care, including supporting UNISON Scotland's campaign to have the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill withdrawn.

2. Seek opportunities to develop UNISON's vision of a National Care Service to include care workers directly employed by disabled people and a framework for a fairer assessment system
3. Encourage Regional Disabled Members' Committees to work within appropriate structures to lobby elected representatives at local, regional, and national levels to seek support for UNISON's vision of a National Care Service and more inclusive Care Needs Assessments.

*National Disabled Members Committee*

### **18. THE BSL GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION (GCSE): A ROUTE TO TACKLING THE DEAF EMPLOYMENT GAP**

Conference notes that disabled people face barriers to employment. 2022 figures show that 53.3% of disabled people were in work compared to 81.9% for non-disabled people. This gives a shocking "disability employment gap" of 28.5%. Although official government figures do not record the employment gap for Deaf native British Sign Language (BSL) users specifically, a Royal Association for Deaf People report in 2020 found:

- a. Only a quarter (25%) of deaf people said they had access to careers advice in BSL when they were at school.
- b. Over half (60%) said they had not been given progression opportunities during their career
- c. Nearly two-thirds (63%) said they had encountered barriers to career progression.
- d. 63% also felt they had not been given equal opportunities in the workplace.
- e. Just over half (53%) did not feel supported at work.
- f. Conference notes the BSL Act 2022 which recognised BSL as a language and the subsequent introduction of a new BSL GCSE from September 2025.
- g. Conference believes the new GCSE offers opportunities to tackle the Deaf employment gap due to the expected need for new BSL teachers.
- h. Deaf BSL users are in a great position to be able to take up these jobs, reducing the Deaf employment gap.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

However, it is not yet clear what standards will be required for BSL GCSE teachers and there is a need to clarify this and invest in supporting Deaf people to access these jobs.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Support appropriate campaigns calling for acceptable standards in the qualifications, knowledge and experience required by BSL GCSE teachers.
2. Call for government investment in training Deaf people as BSL GCSE teachers.
3. Support appropriate campaigns calling on the government's Office for National Statistics (ONS), together with national and regional employment bodies, to look at ways of adequately capturing employment data on deaf BSL users specifically.

*National Deaf Members' Caucus*

### **19. DISABLED PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO TRAVEL TOO**

Disabled people including our Disabled Members could find themselves losing their Personal Independence Payments (PIP) if they go abroad for a holiday, for work or even to visit family.

Current government guidance says PIP claimants need to inform the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) if they're planning to travel abroad for 28 days or more as this is a change in circumstances. As non-disabled people claiming Tax Credits only have to notify travel abroad that is over 8 weeks the government are already treating disabled people less favourably which is potentially discrimination.

But recent operational changes are making the situation even worse. Although the official government guidance officially refers to 28 days the DWP section of the government website states "You must contact the PIP enquiry line if you go abroad" to report a change of circumstances.

Disabled Members who have contacted the PIP helpline to tell them they are going abroad for just a couple of days have been asked personal and sensitive questions such as Where are you going? Why are you going? And how will you manage your care?

Depending on how you answer the questions you could be told you can travel or told it is a change to your circumstances. And as we know a change of circumstances can lead to your PIP being reviewed, cut, or even stopped.

The website goes on to say that "You could be taken to court or have to pay a penalty if you give wrong information or do not report a change in your circumstances."

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

The inconsistency in the guidance is causing our Disabled Members stress and anxiety as they don't know what they need to report and if they will be penalised for going abroad. A petition has been created on the parliamentary website to stop these inconsistencies. We need 10,000 signatures by 15 November to make the government respond or 100,000 by the same date for the issue to be debated in Parliament. The link to the petition is Amend guidance for PIP claimants on advising the DWP of travel abroad - Petitions (parliament.uk).

Conference disabled people, including our Disabled Members, should have the same right to travel abroad as non-disabled people. Travel does not change a person's care or mobility needs and we shouldn't be treated less favourably than non-disabled people when we want to travel abroad.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC to:

1. Promote the petition on all UNISON's social media and e-newsletters and send it to all Branches to encourage members to sign before 15 November.
2. Launch a campaign to change the rules on reporting travel abroad for PIP claimants to the eight weeks rule that applies to people claiming Tax Credits
3. Work with Labour Link to lobby for a future Labour government will introduce an eight-week rule for PIP claimants travelling abroad.

*Newcastle City*

### **20. ACCESSIBILITY ON THE RAILWAY NETWORK.**

Conference, we all support the RMT in their campaign to maintain ticket offices and the employment of railway personnel. The removal of ticket offices at stations and cuts to railway staff disproportionately affect disabled people. Conference believes that train station offices and railway personnel should not be reduced to protect the safety and wellbeing of disabled passengers.

Conference, we call upon the national disabled members committee to work with the national WET service group to campaign against proposed plans to reduce ticket offices and the reduction of railway personnel, and to petition the government, Network Rail, and railway operators to promote engagement and consultation with relevant service users.

*Yorkshire - Humberside Region*



**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**21. INAPPROPRIATE APPLICATION OF 'DO NOT RESUSCITATE' NOTICES - NEVER AGAIN**

Conference notes that UNISON has campaigned vigorously on behalf of disabled people.

Disabled people across the UK have a right to equal access to health care just like anyone else. Yet the potentially unlawful use of 'Do not Resuscitate' notices for fit and healthy people during the COVID-19 pandemic was discriminatory and put lives in danger.

Covid-19 had a devastating impact on society as a whole but the effect on people with a disability was catastrophic. The number of people who died with Covid-19 who were disabled was more than double than those with no disability. People who have a disability were not only denied essential services, hospital appointments, ability to attend day centres, access to respite, access to food, if they contracted Covid. Many had 'Do not Resuscitate' notices put in place against their will and or knowledge.

This was the case even when the only disability was ASD and there was no physical reason the person would not have responded to treatment the same as any other person. This was brought to light by Mencap and reported in the Guardian newspaper. The Care Quality Commission stated in their review into the application of 'Do not Resuscitate' decisions, that the inappropriate application of 'Do not Resuscitate' notices had caused potentially avoidable deaths. This can never be allowed to happen again. No one has the right to be denied their basic human right to life.

This unacceptable practice cannot be repeated. Please support. This was blatant discrimination supported by the government who approved the NICE guidance regarding using the clinical fragility scale which allowed this situation to come about.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Disabled Committee to:

Campaign and lobby for a UK-wide examination of 'Do not Resuscitate' policy, practice, and procedure across all health care settings to ensure better monitoring and controls are in place in the application of 'Do not Resuscitate' notices to protect disabled people's rights.

*Yorkshire - Humberside Region*

**22. ACCESS TO HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT**

Conference notes that a disproportionate number of disabled people have to attend hospital for appointments and treatments. Why, then is hospital equipment not adequate for use by disabled people? For example, for many disabled people with mobility issues trolleys and examination tables do not go low enough and eye testing equipment is often impossible to access with dignity.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

Conference believes that everyone should be able to access health care facilities easily and with dignity and respect.

Conference, we call upon the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the national health service group, health branches and other relevant parts of the union to campaign for medical equipment to be available to all, regardless of their access requirements, and for this issue to be the subject of a UNISON campaign for better access to health care for disabled members.

*UNISON Northern Ireland*

### **23. ALL DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UK SHOULD HAVE FREE PRESCRIPTIONS**

Conference notes that England remains the only nation in the UK that continues to impose outdated, illogical, and discriminatory charges for medical prescriptions.

Disabled people including our Disabled Members are more likely to require medical prescriptions. They are also more likely to be low paid and the cost-of-living crisis is making it harder than ever for disabled people to pay for their medication. This Government's own research shows that the number of people who have a long-term condition who are not covered by a medical or income-related exemption is approximately 15% of prescription users.

In 2022, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society stated that community pharmacists in England had seen an increase in the number of patients not collecting prescriptions. One pharmacist said it is a "daily experience seeing patients making choices to forgo their own medications or prioritise their limited finance to support a child or more vulnerable family member".

In March 2023, the Prescription Charges Coalition carried out a survey of people with long-term conditions. They found that 1 in 10 were not able to collect their prescriptions in the past 12 months because of the cost. With 15 million people in England living with long-term conditions, this could equate to hundreds of thousands of people going without the medicines they need.

While the Tories decision to U-turn on their decision to start charging for prescriptions to the over-60s they have still pressed ahead with another increase in charges for those that do pay. The cost of a prescription for a single medication is now £9.65. While 12-month prescription pre-payment certificate can reduce the costs for some if people are on several types of medication, they still cost £111.60 which is beyond the reach of many of our Disabled Members.

Research has shown that charging for prescriptions is having a significant impact on the ability of disabled people, including our Disabled Members, in England to stay well. This in turn impacts their quality of life, ability to stay in work, employment opportunities and health outcomes. It is outdated, illogical and discriminatory.

Conference it is clear that the system needs urgent change for disabled people, including our Disabled Members as it does not meet our needs, it puts our health at

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

risk and in the longer-term can cost the NHS more when people are hospitalised because they couldn't afford to pay prescription charges.

Conference calls on National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC to:

1. Launch a campaign to call on the Government to "Scrap the Prescription Tax" in England.
2. Work with Labour Link to lobby for a future Labour government that will follow Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in scrapping prescription charges.

*Northern Region*

### **24. MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS**

Conference 115 people in the UK take their own lives every week and 75% of people who die by suicide are men. It is the biggest cause of death for men under 50 in the UK. In 2020, 75% of those who took their own lives were male. 4,880 men and boys died by suicide, that equates to 12 deaths every day of the year.

While people of all genders can experience mental health problems stigma and gender stereotypes mean men's mental health issues are often go unnoticed. A recent report from Champion Health found that 9% of employees are experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm but that men are half as likely as women to get help.

Societal norms can make it harder for men and boys to admit when they're struggling to cope. According to statistics from NHS only 40% of men said it would take thoughts of suicide or self-harm before they would seek help and 11% of men say they have no friends compared to 7% of women.

Men see mental health issues as a sign of weakness, they don't talk about their problems with their family or friends, and they don't seek professional help. And we know that this is affecting men in our union.

According to the Mental Health Foundation men who don't talk about their emotions are less likely to recognise symptoms of mental health issues in themselves. Men will throw themselves into work, turn alcohol or drugs, and even go missing rather than ask for help with their mental health and 73% of adults that go missing are men.

Surprisingly the pandemic didn't have as adverse an impact on mental health as was expected and suicide and self-harm rates amongst men falling slightly. Research suggests this may be because resilience is a common human response during times of adversity. Unfortunately, rates have already returned to pre-pandemic levels and more.

For too long male mental health has been ignored and not talked about. Symptoms such as irritability, loss of control, risk-taking and sudden bouts of anger are written off as a mid-life crisis when they're actually, a cry for help.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

Every year Men's Mental Health Week takes place in June, usually around the time of UNISON's National Delegate Conference. It aims to raise awareness about the health challenges faced by men and to help promote strategies for better physical and mental well-being and to give all men and boys access to information to help them live healthier, longer and more fulfilling lives.

Mental health can be classed as a disability under the Equality Act, but many employers still don't recognise this, particularly when it comes to male employees. Mental health can impact on our ability to do our jobs and to be active in our union, again we know this impacts more on men who are less likely to seek help and support or talk about their problems. And even if they do want to seek help, they quite often don't know where to go.

We recognise that for shop stewards and reps asking a member about their mental wellbeing can be hard. But if the question is asked more often than it will become standard practice and our male members may be more open to answering honestly.

Conference, we can't force men to get help, but we can let them know that support is available and that talking about mental health is a sign of strength not weakness.

Conference instructs National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC and Service Group Executives to:

1. Develop and deliver a campaign to raise awareness of male mental health issues.
2. Use Men's Mental Health Week in June to promote positive action related to men's mental wellbeing including at National Delegate Conference
3. Provide details of organisations that can help men struggling with mental health issue on the UNISON website.
4. Create an online safe space where men can discuss and share their experiences.
5. Consider how the UNISON College can provide awareness raising of Men's Mental Health

*Northern Region*

### **25. THE 'HEALTH AND DISABILITY' WHITE PAPER; AN ATTACK ON DISABLED PEOPLE'S INCOME AND INDEPENDENCE**

Conference notes the publication of "Transforming Support: The Health and Disability White Paper", published by government in March 2023.

The government claims this new set of policies related to welfare benefits will help more disabled people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work. However, conference believes the opposite is true and that the key changes

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

will push disabled people further into financial hardship, at a time when we are already experiencing the sharp end of a cost-of-living crisis.

Conference notes that this government has presided over 13 years of policies that have punished disabled people through cutting disability premiums and introducing unfair work capability assessments, conditionality, and sanctions. Even for those disabled people in work, the disability pay gap is growing and now stands at a shocking 17.2% or £3,700 less a year than non-disabled workers. Added to this, the government's National Disability Strategy was found to be unlawful and based on an unlawful consultation.

It's perhaps only to be expected that the government's new white paper is mainly a collection of small-scale pilots and re-announcements, while its key proposals are about making more disabled people work longer hours, whatever the pay. This is dressed up as ending work capability assessments but in fact it will make matters worse with individual job centre advisors now being able to decide whether you are entitled to benefits or whether you need to find work or work more hours. There is no mention of an appeal process, and the system seems even more unfair than work capability assessments.

Conference believes that making Personal Independence Payments (PIP) – and Adult Disability Payment in Scotland - the qualifier to exempt you from looking for work- and work-related activity is just a ploy to force more disabled people into work whether or not they are ready for it, and to pay them less money in Universal Credit. In any case, we know that PIP is not a fair system and UNISON's 2018 report "Punished for going to work" makes clear that it needs to be reformed.

Conference strongly believes the proposal to make work coaches the sole decision maker on ability to work is a retrograde step. Work coaches are not disability specialists and the DWP should not be using them to make life changing decisions about disabled people.

The white paper also appears to be changing the nature of PIP, so it is about covering the additional costs of being disabled and not about fostering independence. This is a crucial difference and suggests government are trying to get away with a lower cost service that is about disabled people simply surviving rather than thriving.

Conference believes these proposals will drive disabled people further into poverty, compounding the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Disabled people already live on lower incomes as we are more likely to work part-time or be in low paid jobs. With the added cost of increasingly expensive electricity for vital equipment such as dialysis machines, drip machines, oxygen, and medicine dispensers, as well as additional costs for dietary specific foods not easily found at a food bank, disabled people do not need further attacks on welfare benefits that help us to survive.

Conference therefore instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Seek appropriate opportunities to widely publicise these proposed changes to the benefits system and their potential negative impact on disabled people's income and independence.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

2. Work through UNISON Labour Link to lobby the Labour Party to develop a realistic and supportive plan to reform the welfare benefits system so that it puts the needs and independence of disabled people at its heart.
3. Seek to ensure the experience of disabled people is included in UNISON's work on the cost of livings crisis, including through the Labour Link.

*National Disabled Members Committee*

## **26. NEURODIVERSITY AWARENESS**

Despite the increasing recognition of neurodiversity, many people with neurodivergent conditions continue to face significant challenges in their daily lives. These challenges include stigma, discrimination, and a lack of understanding and support from society at large. This can lead to negative outcomes, such as unemployment, social isolation, and poor mental health.

The purpose of this motion is to raise awareness about neurodiversity and its importance in promoting a more inclusive and accepting society. By increasing awareness and understanding of neurodiversity, we can reduce stigma and discrimination and create a more supportive environment for people with neurodivergent conditions. Members have voiced a fear of revealing their neurodiversity as many have found that after years of working in a post, they suddenly find themselves undergoing capacity at work.

This Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to take the following actions in the next year;

1. Encourage employers to provide training and resources on neurodiversity and how to support individuals with neurodivergent conditions.
2. Promote the inclusion of neurodiverse individuals in all aspects of society, including education, employment, and social activities.
3. Advocate for policies and practices that support neurodiversity, such as accommodations in the workplace and educational initiatives.
4. Raise awareness through public events, social media campaigns and educational initiatives.

By embracing neurodiversity, we can build a more diverse, creative and compassionate world that benefits us all.

*Lothian Health*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**27. HATE CRIME EQUALITY**

Elevating the offence of assault against the disabled community from an assault to an aggravated assault.

We call upon conference to support the motion to elevate the offence of assault against a member of the disabled community from an assault to an aggravated assault by influencing the government to make changes to the law.

Currently there are five categories that are classed as hate crimes.

- a. race or ethnicity
- b. religion or beliefs
- c. sexual orientation
- d. disability, and
- e. transgender identity

Currently only Race and Religion can have an 'aggravated' prosecution under the present statute.

These are crimes where there is demonstrated hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity.

Or

Crimes that have been motivated by hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity.

Someone can be a victim of more than one type of hate crime.

While a crime may be recorded as a 'hate crime', it may only be prosecuted as such if evidence of hostility is submitted as part of the case file.

Hate crimes are personal; they target vulnerable people and send the message 'You are not welcome.' they reinforce stereotypes, long term prejudice and patterns of discrimination against certain groups of people and communities.

Currently only perpetrators of crimes which are defined as hate crimes involving religious or racial motivation can be charged with aggravated assault.

Conference we believe that hate crimes involving the disabled community should also have the elevated charge of aggravated assault available to the police service to charge perpetrators of these crimes.

Gov.UK reports Key results:

In year ending March 2022, there were 155,841 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales, an increase of 26% from year ending March 2021 (124,104 offences)

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

There were 109,843 race hate crimes, 8,730 religious hate crimes, 26,152 sexual orientation hate crimes, 14,242 disability hate crimes and 4,355 transgender hate crimes in year ending March 2022

There were annual increases in all five strands of hate crime, ranging from 19% for race hate crimes to 56% for transgender hate crimes.

Sexual orientation hate crimes increased by 41% (to 26,152), disability hate crimes by 43% (to 14,242) and transgender identity hate crimes by 56% (to 4,355); these percentage increases were much higher than seen in recent years.

We believe disability hate crimes should be treated equally with parity in the way perpetrators can be charged.

Conference instructs the National Disabled members committee to:

1. Raise this issue with the National Executive Council (NEC) and Labour Link
2. Request that the NEC and Labour Link lobby around this unfair issue using the appropriate channels available to them.

*East Midlands Region*

### **28. ABOUT TIME ALL DISABILITIES WERE EQUAL**

This UNISON Disabled Members Conference believes that it is about time all disabilities were recognised and treated by society as equal.

Created in 1968 by a design student called Susanne Koefoed through a design competition by Rehabilitation International and adopted by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Symbol of Access (ISA) has served as a global icon for accessibility for almost 55 years. This sign, the white icon of a person in a wheelchair set against a blue background is known worldwide. This is found on toilet doors, painted onto parking bays and seen on public transport signage and indicates that a facility is accessible for those with disabilities, or solely for their use.

This sign has served a useful purpose, but it does not reflect the disability that affects disabled people across the United Kingdom. In the general population about only 5% of those with disabilities (around 600,000) are wheelchair users but 2.5-3 million are visually impaired, 1.5-6 million have reading difficulties, 8 million are deaf or hard of hearing, 15 million have mental health difficulties and 1 in 3 people over 55 have Arthritis, to name but a small selection.

The symbol has helped so many people in wheelchairs and had such a positive impact on how they navigate around public spaces, but it has also caused a deflection issue for disabled people who don't use wheelchairs. These people already struggle, and they receive public judgement on top of that. People who



## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

question those with invisible disabilities have good intentions, but they are very misinformed. This is an education and awareness challenge.

We need to address this issue now, 55 years is a long time for your disability not to be recognised and those with disabilities are entitled to better recognition, provision and equality.

This Conference believes that it cannot be beyond the wit of human capacity to design a new and representative universal symbol of disability which could be used to indicate access and facilities. In fact, some work has already been done on this issue by interested organisations.

This Conference calls upon the National Disabled Members Committee to liaise with the National Executive Council to take this issue up with: -

1. The Trades Union Congress
2. The United Kingdom and devolved Governments
3. National Disability Organisations throughout the UK

Conference believes that it is about time all disabilities were equal and that these organisations need to be progressing ways to achieve this by adopting an updated symbol for disability.

*Cymru/Wales Region*

### **29. MAKING POLICE SERVICES ACCESSIBLE TO DEAF PEOPLE**

Conference notes that some police services in the UK have specialised Police Link Officer with Deaf People (PLOD). This has helped to make police services more accessible to Deaf people in some areas, but it remains a post code lottery without a consistent service in all parts of the UK.

Turn-over of staff also means that there are vacancies and time required for re-training which can lead to gaps even where the PLOD service exists.

Conference notes that the 999-emergency number is now accessible to Deaf native British Sign Language (BSL) speakers. A videophone system is in operation which allows a Deaf person to phone 999 and use BSL to report their emergency.

Conference notes that for many non-emergency issues such as anti-social behaviour, the 101 non-emergency number is recommended. However, there is no facility for Deaf BSL users to access this number using our own language.

Conference therefore instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Support appropriate campaigns for the 101 non-emergency number to provide a videophone BSL option in line with the 999 service.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

2. Work with the Police and Justice Service Group to campaign for an extension of the PLOD service to all areas of the UK and to investigate ways of encouraging police services to raise the profile and value of PLODs so that this is seen as an important role that officers are attracted to taking on.

*National Deaf Members' Caucus*

**30. PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENTS – WE NEED A FAIR PIP ASSESSMENT PROCESS WHICH IS FIT FOR PURPOSE**

This National Disabled Conference notes with concern that the process of applying for Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) continues to be long, arduous, and stressful with an unacceptably large number of disabled people still being refused benefit through the PIP process.

Conference is further concerned that the staff employed to undertake assessments frequently have little knowledge of, or expertise in, medical and disability issues and that this lack of understanding is compounded by the fact that they often appear to have little empathy with applicants during the PIP interview process. This is particularly the case in the assessment of hidden/non-apparent disabilities which present assessors with conditions with which they are frequently unfamiliar and for which they have received little training. This leads to a situation in which many assessments are entirely inadequate in reflecting the real needs of vulnerable people and in which the information set out on completed forms is all too often based on a very superficial assessment.

Conference recognises that the vast majority of PIPs are awarded to people who have life-long disabilities or are experiencing long term health conditions. Conference is appalled that vulnerable people in this situation are regularly compelled to reapply for PIP and thus be unnecessarily subjected to the acute stress and anxiety which this inevitably causes over the period of the reassessment. Conference further believes that, given the increasing backlog and considerable delays produced by the number of unnecessary reassessments, the time during which they subject to this pressure and worry is entirely unacceptable.

Conference believes that this situation needs to be addressed by the introduction of appropriate life-long PIP awards which properly reflect the needs of people with disabilities and long-term health issues.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Continue to campaign for a PIP assessment system which is adequately resourced so that applicants are properly assessed and no longer subject to unacceptable delays.
2. Call on the Government to ensure that all PIP assessors are adequately trained to recognise and understand all aspects of disability issues - including hidden/non-apparent disabilities.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

3. Campaign for the need for appropriate life-long PIP awards to avoid the situation in which people with long term disabilities and health issues are subjected to continual reassessment.
4. Continue to work with UNISON's There for You charity to provide information to Branch Welfare Officers to assist them in signposting members to support services assisting members going through PIP assessments.
5. Work with UNISON Labour Link in support of a PIP system which is fit for purpose in terms of meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

*Isle of Wight LG*

**31. MORE ACCESSIBLE ACCESS TO WORK PROCESSES NOW!**

Conference notes:

- a. Access to Work is a UK Government scheme to support disabled workers to get into and stay in work.
- b. Access to Work currently relies heavily on paper-based form filling to make a claim, access support, and request further support if a person's needs change.
- c. Access to Work can be applied for over the phone and online, however, subsequent parts of the process require forms to be filled in and posted to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Conference believes:

- i. The process of applying for and claiming money back from Access to Work should be as accessible as possible.
- ii. The processes associated with Access to Work should be brought up to date to meet the variety of needs disabled members have.
- iii. A lack of options beyond filling in and posting forms, calling and emailing the Department for Work and Pensions may be putting some disabled workers off applying for and claiming support they are entitled to.

Conference resolves:

1. To mandate the National Disabled Members' Committee to lobby the Minister for Work and Pensions on the issue of accessibility around Access to Work.
2. To mandate the National Disabled Members' Committee to develop a national campaign which actively encourages Regions and Branches to engage members to understand their views on the scheme which shapes lobbying by National Disabled Members' Committee.

*Community and Voluntary Organisations*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**32. INCLUSIVE CHAIRS GROUPS THAT REPRESENT THE MEMBERS THAT WE SERVE**

UNISON is a growing union that strongly believes in equality, diversity, inclusion and equity and we maximise the benefits of this to increase our bargaining and campaigning strength. We recruit and encourage activism from members of all backgrounds. Despite this, many chairs of national committees, including self-organised groups and service groups executive chairs, do not always reflect how diverse our union is.

Black members can face barriers to being elected into positions of responsibility, including as chairs of national committees. As in any organisation, there are often 'gate keepers' who want to retain positions of power. However, UNISON is a union that has equality at its very heart, and we need to break down any obstacles that exist to Black members' participation in our union.

Some of those barriers include:

- a. Not enough Black members on the committee in question to ensure Black members have a strong enough voice to support Black members getting elected on to the chairs group.
- b. Some regions not encouraging Black members to put themselves forward for elections and consistently sending all white delegations.

Conference notes that UNISON has rules on fair representation for Black members and other under-represented groups, but these are not as strong as the rules on women's proportionality.

Conference believes it is important that regions, self-organised groups and service group executives take a proactive approach and seek to ensure that the chairs groups of national committees fairly represent our Black members.

In the Year of Black Workers 2023, conference instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to work with National Black Members Committee and other appropriate UNISON structures to:

1. Promote opportunities for advancement within our democratic structures for Black disabled members.
2. Formulate guidelines for the national disabled members committee to seek to ensure fair representation of Black members on the committee chairs group
3. Identify and seek to eliminate any barriers that may be preventing Black members from being elected on to the national disabled members committee chairs group.
4. Work with LAOS to deliver training for the national disabled members committee to include understanding unconscious bias, inclusion, and diversity.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

5. Consider ways of supporting Black disabled members with mentoring or peer support to seek to assist them in being able to confidently take up chair roles.
6. Identify best practice in this work and share lessons learned with other self-organised groups and with service groups where appropriate.

*National Black Members' Caucus*

---

**Developing an Efficient and Effective Union**

---

**33. MAKING UNISON TRULY DISABILITY FRIENDLY**

Conference believes that Unison needs to be leading the way in helping to resolve the issues that we face as disabled members and making us feel true participants in the workings of our union.

Conference notes that:

- a. There are at least 9.8m people with a disability in the UK (source: ONS)
- b. Around 21% of working age adults are disabled (source: Gov.UK)
- c. 21% of Unison members = 273,000 disabled Unison members
- d. If 80% of disabilities are non-visible this equates to 218,400 members

We, at this conference understand our own disabilities and the way that we overcome the challenges that life throws at us – whether at work, at home or within our recreational lives - but how well do we understand enough about the challenges that the person sitting beside us might face? We cannot possibly understand, as there are so many types and sub-types of disability that affect us in an individual way.

The way we overcome our disabilities can be complex. We know that the social model of disability gives us clarity about how barriers in our way can stop us from taking a full part in society. But how many of us can say that we are not frustrated by the obstacles and disrespect that we regularly face?

Our reps tell the employer that they should make meetings disability friendly. And yet one of the issues for disabled members is that our own chairs of Unison branches and regional and national meetings may not always consider nor ask what we need as disabled people so that we can fully take part in meetings.

Conference therefore calls on the National Disabled Members National Committee to:

1. Engage with regional disabled members SOGs to formulate a 'train the trainer' package, aimed at educating activists who are chairs of meetings (branch, regional and national) on the different types of disabilities and how they can better deliver disability inclusive meetings.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

2. Engage with Unison College on how to deliver on the training package. This must include the requirement for only volunteers from the regional disabled members SOGs to undertake the training so that disabled members will be lay tutors for this purpose.
3. Urge regions and national committees to take part in this initiative, to include this Chairperson training as a regular feature in their training offers.
4. Urge branches, regions and national committees to support this initiative and undertake this training for Chair people as a priority.

*West Midlands Region*

**34. MAKE OUR UNION DOCUMENTS AND LANGUAGE INCLUSIVE TO NATIONAL READING AGE OF 9**

Conference notes that GOV.UK recommends that written communication is aimed at a reading age of 9 for readability.

As a union we use many terms and specific language that people outside the union don't use every day and don't always understand.

When a disabled person joins the union, it is like being in a place where everyone speaks a different language. This can make it harder to recruit and retain new members.

With so many non-visible disabilities including people who may have more difficulties processing written or heard information it is time to change.

Why do we expect new members and activists to learn so many new terms and ways of doing things, when at its heart democracy should be accessible to all.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC to:

1. Bring UNISON's language and terminology in line with the national reading age and everyday language use as advised by GOV.UK.
2. Create national access standards for all documents, conferences and communication that make unison an example of how to lead the way in inclusion of all disabled workers.

*Surrey County*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**35. PERSONAL ASSISTANT CLAIM FORM**

Conference recognises and applauds the existence of a Personal Assistant claim form.

This is intended for use to pay any facilitator/personal assistant attending conferences/meetings an allowance for time spent facilitating, which is currently paid at £10.42 per hour.

This is paid in addition to any subsistence claimed by the member and their personal assistant.

Unfortunately, the existence of this form and the ability to claim this payment is not as widely known as it should be amongst members, although it is mentioned in the financial handbook. Many Disabled members and their personal assistants are not claiming money they are entitled to through no fault of their own.

Neither is it clear from the form if it is intended to actually be used by branches, or if its use is restricted to National Committees.

Conference believes this could inadvertently lead to branches and national committees discriminating against UNISON disabled members.

Therefore Conference calls upon the Disabled Members Committee to:-

1. work with the NEC to promote the use of the personal assistant claim form amongst branches, national committees and the disabled members community. This needs to include details of who is responsible for paying out the allowance and guidance on the criteria to claim.
2. explore issuing the personal assistant claim form at the point that a personal assistant is registered on the OCS system.

*Derbyshire County*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**MOTIONS RULED OUT OF ORDER**

**Beyond the Remit of Conference**

**UNISON PUBLICATIONS TO BE MADE AVAILABLE IN ACCESSIBLE FORMATS**

Conference notes the success of UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers 2022. Since then, we have seen renewed focus on the experience of disabled members in our union, in the workplace and in society.

In 2022 and 2023 we highlighted the important contribution our disabled members make to the union, to improve terms and conditions for disabled workers, and to campaign for improved rights for all disabled workers.

One such right should be access to all media and publication that is produced by UNISON. It is therefore disappointing to note that UNISON has chosen to cease printing U Magazine. Members who do not have access to, or experience great difficulty in accessing the internet, are now unable to access U Magazine as they will no longer receive it through the post as members used to.

UNISON's own website is only 84% compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 standard set in 2018, but a combination of UNISON's IT policy and licensing terms doesn't permit making a third-party software available to members via the site.

Conference therefore calls upon National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC to:

1. ensure that all articles/publications, including newsletters and other materials are also made available to members in paper form and other format for those that require it
2. ensure there is a way to specify communication preferences within My Unison online, but if the member cannot access the internet for there to be another method of updating communication preferences clearly promoted. This communication preference list should not be limited to post, email, text etc but also include needs such as large print, print on different coloured paper or a different coloured font etc.
3. to regularly remind members to update their preferences in My Unison/ by calling a helpline/ posting a form or providing support to enable materials to reach them in their desired format.

*Eastern Region*



**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION IS A RIGHT: STRENGTHEN THE EQUALITY ACT AND MAKE THE UNION AND WORKPLACES MORE INCLUSIVE**

Conference notes we have had the equality act since 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act for 15 years prior to that. This is clearly positive in many ways, however there is no way to enforce the equality act without reliance on sometimes lengthy and costly court processes.

Wheelchair users are still not guaranteed that offices, public buildings, venues and events will be accessible to them. Many places say they are accessible but upon arriving they are often not accessible. Wheelchair users are so often told 'it's only two steps' or that 'another person was carried in' which is why they say a building has access. There is so little understanding of what makes places truly accessible to many.

There are still very few specific quiet areas or sensory zones where people can take a break away from noise, lighting and people.

There are still very few places with a fully accessible toilet with space for a powerchair to turn and have a carer for support if needed. There are even fewer places that have a changing places toilet where hoists, adult changing tables, adjustable sinks and bidet style toilets are available.

There are still very few places using accessible documentation, for example checking colour contrast for readability, ensuring image descriptions are used.

When giving access needs for events or work, forms often don't cater for people with multiple disabilities or a number of different needs.

It's 2023 and we deserve better treatment as disabled people.

Reasonable adjustments are no longer enough when reasonable includes big business profits over people. Accessibility is a right and we must work to get this right upheld.

We need accountability from government, from employers and from our own union that the equity and inclusion of disabled people will not have to be such a long and hard fight. It should be an expectation.

Our union is in a unique position to improve the rights and access for so many disabled people. As such conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the NEC and other bodies within the union to:

1. Ensure that all buildings booked for national and regional events meet full accessibility standards. Conforming to best practice standards such as BS8300 and not just Doc M or bare minimum.
2. Ensure that there is a precedent set for all documentation to meet the current access standards for documents across the union.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

3. Work with the government and politicians to find a way to have accessibility enshrined in law. No longer relying on terms like reasonable but showing accessibility is a right.
4. Work with the government to ensure there is an agency that can enforce accessibility and address the failings as identified by people so that it is no longer left to individuals to fight these battles alone.
5. Share guidance for activists in campaigning and negotiating for accessibility in the workplace, enabling all our activists to work towards getting more inclusive workplaces for our members.
6. Encourage regions and local branches to train activists in accessible environments.
7. Provide an update on this motion for the next Disabled Members Conference.

*Surrey County*

### **MAKING UNISON INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE**

Conference, as UNISON activists it's vital that we have access to the information we need to support our members. Whether we're representing in the workplace, organising in our Branches, or recruiting in the community, good information is key to everything we do.

Unfortunately, much of UNISON's information can be difficult for us to use because it isn't accessible.

We're not talking about alternative formats such as Braille or Easy Read just about the basics that make information easier for everyone, especially Disabled Members, to use and understand.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) clear print guidelines sets out the basics that should be used for all information. The guidance includes things like:

- a. Always using a minimum 12 point font size and point 14 whenever possible
- b. Using sans serif fonts such as Arial
- c. Not using italics or underlining information which makes it difficult to read.
- d. Always left aligning text – no justifying
- e. Using alt text for images and photos so screen readers can interpret them.
- f. Making sure colour contrasts are good.
- g. Not using watermarks across text

Unfortunately, most of UNISON's information doesn't follow these basic rules and this makes life incredibly difficult for Disabled Members including those with visual impairments, learning disabilities, poor comprehension skills and those who are neurodiverse.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

According to the UNISON website every member is entitled to the latest copy of the UNISON Rule Book but due to its layout and font size even this isn't accessible to all. According to the website you can:

- i. Read the Rule Book Portable Document Format (PDF) online
- ii. Download a PDF version of the rule book
- iii. Order a hard copy

While on the surface this might seem accessible it really isn't. The font in the 2022 version, the latest available at the time of writing, is no more than point size 8. This means the hard copy is unreadable for around 80% of the population. You can only download it as a PDF so you can't adjust the font size unless you have specialist software so that's no good either.

And while you can zoom in online to make the font bigger that would cause scrolling difficulties for Disabled Members with coordination or hand mobility issues. Disabled Members who use screen readers would also struggle as the document is written in columns, which some screen readers can't read, and isn't structured or 'tagged' properly. Online information should always be available as Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) not just as a PDF.

Conference there are lots of ways to make information, including our rule book, more accessible for Disabled Members. Some of these such as large print or British Sign Language (BSL) are often only produced on request but everything we produce should follow basic accessibility standards as a minimum and that includes writing in plain English.

Conference instructs National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National Executive Council (NEC) and Regional Disabled Members Groups to:

1. Develop accessible information guidance that must be followed for all UNISON materials.
2. To advise all Branches and Regions that they must follow the accessible information guidelines for all materials they produce.
3. To raise awareness with members of their right to request and receive information in alternative formats as a reasonable adjustment.

*Northern Region*

### **CHALLENGING POVERTY IN EMPLOYMENT**

Conference, over the past 10 years Unison has worked hard to push the agenda of a real living wage, challenging parity in pay by gender, ethnicity, and disability. The pay gaps in the UK are continuing to grow further and further apart. The covid

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

pandemic has had an impact on this and is used as a cop out by our Tory government to cover up their systematic failures.

We are living in a society where people working 40 hours a week are needing to access benefits to be able to sustain themselves and their families. Given the 2022 energy and cost of living crisis, inflation being the highest in our lifetime, the cost of living continues being driven up and many of our members are struggling to survive.

Conference, some of our members are having to choose whether to use energy or to eat again! This upcoming winter has the potential for more lives to be lost unnecessarily. No member working 40hr weeks, raising a family, or claiming in employment benefits from the government should be in this position. Members still continuing to use food banks to feed their family or themselves.

Statistics are showing that poverty wages in the public services sector for disabled members, are one of the reasons leaving. The higher cost of disability shows that disabled cannot afford to come to work.

Conference there has never been a more important time to push for change. The status quo is not good enough.

Conference asks that:

1. The National Disabled Members Committee to work with Service group executives and Labour Link to push for a real living wage linked to inflation.
2. The National Disabled Members Committee, work with UNISON Welfare 'there for you' to develop a range of support resources and quick link sign postings for support and access to help for this coming winter. Ensuring this is accessible to all and presented in inclusive formats including BSL.
3. National Disabled Members Committee to work with Regional disabled members committees to develop with branches, resources that assist branches to challenge employers and highlight the issues faced by our disabled membership.

*North West Region*

### **DISABLED WOMEN AND INCREASED RISK OF STRESS WITH MENOPAUSE AND MENSTRUAL CYCLE**

Conference notes that recent research data shows the most common reasons given for long-term sickness absence are:

- a. Acute medical conditions, such as cancer or heart problems
- b. Stress
- c. Musculoskeletal injuries
- d. Mental ill health
- e. Back problems

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

Higher stress often indicates lower productivity, which makes the effects of workplace stress everyone's problem. Workplace stress impacts employees, managers and the entire business. It is a fact that women are more likely to report symptoms of stress than men, including headaches and upset stomach. Women are also more likely to have mental health conditions that are made worse by stress, such as depression or anxiety.

Conference believes women as a group have an increased risk due to their menstrual cycle and to the effect of the peri-menopause and menopause. These women are at greater risk of absence from work or developing further health problems as a consequence of stress.

Conference therefore calls upon the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the National Women's Committee to:

1. Circulate UNISON's guide to Menopause in the workplace and model menopause policy to regions and branches, encouraging them to add this to their bargaining agenda with employers.
2. Seek to update the UNISON work related stress to the workplace to toolkit and guidance to highlight the increased risk to women with menstrual cycle health problems and women experiencing the menopause.
3. Support appropriate campaigns for better healthcare information to be available to women experiencing menopause effects at work and increasing awareness of the risks to women.
4. Consider developing a model letter for branches to use to send to employers regarding the need to risk assess women who are showing signs of stress which may be related to menopause.
5. Work with the education team to identify ways of educating reps regarding the effects of the menopause, the high levels of stress that this can involve and how to support women at work.
6. Work with the TUC and via the Labour Link to lobby government and the Labour Party to amend the Equality Act 2010 to include a tenth protected characteristic for those dealing with the effects of the menopause.

*National Women Members' Caucus*

### **SMASH THE GENDER PENSION GAP**

Recent TUC analysis has found that women are more than twice as likely as men to miss out on being in a workplace pension scheme. They are also more likely to suffer from a huge pension's income gap.

## **2023 National Disabled Members' Conference Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

This is due to the impact of the gender pay gap, the unequal division of caring responsibilities, historic issues with the National Insurance system and continuing gaps with pensions auto-enrolment.

Conference notes that the National Insurance system operates in a way that discriminates against part-time workers with multiple employers. These workers are more likely to be women, Black or disabled or with caring responsibilities, and those working in lower paid workplaces, less skilled, or in the gig economy.

The National Insurance system does not reflect the changing world of work and fails workers with multiple employers where each contract's weekly or monthly pay falls below the LEL Lower Earning Limits (LEL) and workers therefore don't pay any NI contributions over many years. This leaves many disabled women workers without entitlement to contributions-related state benefits, and the full state pension. Contributory benefits can therefore be unavailable to workers in multiple jobs with low pay and low hours.

If a worker wants to buy missing years of NI contributions, the amount required is a flat rate of just above £800 per year, again discriminating systematically against the women, Black and disabled workers in particular. They are required to contribute the same lump sum for each missing year that a millionaire would be required to contribute for each missing year. There is no sliding scale.

Although employers are now required by law to enrol workers into a pension automatically, 1.4 million women earn less than the qualifying threshold of £10,000 a year or more. Almost one in nine women are in jobs where their employers do not have to enter them into a workplace pension, while the figure is less than one in 20 for men.

Conference instructs the National Disabled Members Committee to work with the TUC and appropriate parts of the union to:

1. Raise awareness of the gender pension gap and the pay and employment gaps that are the root cause of pension disparities, campaigning for improving childcare and social care, extending shared parental leave, and strengthening rights to work flexibly.
2. Campaign for a fundamental overhaul of the National Insurance system so that it is fairer and corrects the current discrimination against the lowest earners and those in multiple employment.
3. Campaign to seek to ensure low paid disabled women workers are included in pensions auto-enrolment and to increase statutory minimum employer contributions.

*National Women Members' Caucus*

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

**Not Competent**

**MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE**

Conference notes that this year 144 disabled people's organisations and campaigners jointly handed in a petition to the government about accessible transport.

In 2023, there are wheelchair users that cannot leave their home in anything other than an adapted van or taxi due to lack of access to public transport and inaccessibility in the built environment.

National railways are planning to replace some level crossings, which allow disabled people to cross train lines to their community, with stepped bridges that people with mobility impairments can no longer use. This is cutting people off from their own community.

Train companies appear to be moving towards an end to ticket offices and station staff, effectively removing the rights of many disabled people to independent travel. There are stations without vital tactile paving with the government estimating this won't be the case for all stations until 2029. Conference notes that a lack of tactile paving has been found to cause or contribute to a death already.

Bus companies are not consistently fulfilling their duties to prioritise wheelchair areas on buses over those with prams.

There is still over half of the London underground that is inaccessible to many people.

There is still around 1/3 of train stations without step free access.

Conference supports the powerful action of our friends in the transport unions such as the RMT who are fighting these battles alongside us through strike action over keeping guards on trains and against cuts in station staffing.

We know transport can be better. We can see, in other places, level access boarding. Trams in places like Manchester and Blackpool that have level access and enable wheelchair users and other disabled people to travel independently.

Conference calls on the National Disabled Members Committee to:

1. Offer support to transport unions striking over issues that affect disabled travellers.
2. Work with disabled activists and organisations in creating better transport that is accessible to all. For example, being part of the organisations handing in petitions around accessible transport in future.

**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

3. Liaise with government and politicians to keep accessible and inclusive transport on the agenda for change and progress in the UK.
4. Work with the government to quicken the pace of installing vital tactile paving on all stations as a matter of urgency.

*Surrey County*

**HIV HAS CHANGED – AND OUR EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW THIS**

HIV and AIDS remains one of the most stigmatised long-term health conditions. Our members living with HIV often face stigma, discrimination, prejudice, bullying and harassment in the workplace, in healthcare settings, and in their daily lives.

Conference notes that over 100,000 people in the UK are living with HIV, and many of these are LGBT+ people.

Although there is currently no cure for HIV, medical treatment known as antiretroviral therapy (ART), available since the mid-1990s, can help people living with HIV to remain fit and healthy, and prevent them from developing advanced HIV or AIDS.

Conference acknowledges the millions who have died from HIV and AIDS globally, and the work done to treat people living with HIV through development of effective antiretrovirals, as well in advancements in prevention with PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis).

For most people in the UK, especially if diagnosed early, HIV is no longer the “death sentence” it once was and is now considered a chronic but manageable health condition.

People with HIV are automatically covered by the protections accorded to disabled people under the Equality Act 2010, although many employers and workers are not aware of this.

Conference notes the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) campaign 2030: HIV Time’s Up! THT believes the UK can be the first country in the world to end new cases of HIV.

Conference acknowledges there are many people living with HIV who do not know it. THT’s campaign is about finding and testing everyone living with HIV in the UK, so that they can be offered treatment. People with HIV who are on treatment can’t pass the virus on, so this would help us to reach the goal of no new cases.

Now is the time UNISON can help end a global epidemic that has claimed 38 million lives, and support people living with HIV to thrive. By adding our trade union strength to this campaign, we can help end new cases of HIV in the UK by 2030 and reduce stigma for people living with or affected by the virus.

Conference instructs the national disabled members committee, working with the national LGBT+ committee, to:



**2023 National Disabled Members' Conference  
Motions and Amendments to Rule for SOC**

1. Review and consider redeveloping and publicising UNISON's guidance on HIV in the workplace, including adopting best-practice use of language around HIV and AIDS as described in the People First Charter.
2. Raise awareness that people with HIV are entitled to protections under the Equality Act 2010.
3. Encourage branches and regions to negotiate with employers for the adoption of the anti-stigma HIV Friendly Charter currently being developed by National AIDS Trust and partners.
4. Support THT's 2030: HIV Time's Up! campaign.

*Disabled LGBT+ Members Caucus*

**Could place the union in Legal Jeopardy**

**TITLE DISABLED MEMBERS - THE FORGOTTEN?**

*North West Region*