



**NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

**2024**

**PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

**15-17 FEBRUARY 2024**

**BRIGHTON CONFERENCE CENTRE**



# 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

## Brighton Centre

15 Feb 2024 17 Feb 2024

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### Recruiting and Organising

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#### 1. Flexible working access for all

Flexible working is a way for workers to change their working hours to suit their needs. For example, having the flexibility to change their start and finishing times, compress their weekly hours/ days or even work from home.

There are many reasons why women would need or want flexible working. One reason is that caring responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, even in 2023, and they continue to find it increasingly challenging balancing both caring responsibilities and work; putting them under immense stress and strain.

This gives women the ability to fit their work life around home life, giving greater say over their wellbeing and work life balance.

However, there are some workplaces that still do not see the benefits. Research have found that flexible working generates 43% more revenue for businesses and increases productivity by 20%.

It is also recognised that many women aged 50+ leave the workforce due to medical issues, caring or work life balance. Research shows that 900,000 women aged 45-55 left work due to menopause or medical issues.

Flexible working would encourage more women to remain in work thus helping them with childcare, caring responsibilities and working around any health challenges.

Even though flexible working/hybrid working policies and procedures now exist in most work places post Covid-19 pandemic, some women still find it difficult requesting this or getting a positive outcome. Also, flexible working might be more challenging for those who work around shift patterns.

However, it is vital that all women be aware of their rights for requesting flexible working and achieving a satisfactory outcome.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee:

- 1) To campaign to raise awareness on women's rights to flexible working.
- 2) To work with service groups and branches to promote the importance of negotiating a good flexible working policies for our members with all employers.

***National Women's Committee***

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#### 2. Step Aside, Brother!

Conference, it's a well-known fact that our union is made up of 80% women and that there are 5.5 million unionised workers in the UK. Women make up half the UK

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workforce. So why are women still so underrepresented in our union structures and in our union visibility?

UNISON collectively gives voice to working people from all walks of life, yet our trade union presents itself as a union for older, blue collar, white able-bodied men who have become gate keepers.

How can this be when over the past forty to fifty years, union strength has declined in traditionally male occupied industries. Union strength has rapidly grown in the public sector where more diverse women occupy a larger part of the workforce.

Conference, we constantly talk about the need to do more as a trade union to support women's involvement and reduce the barriers to the participation of women members. We talk about proportionality all the time.

Conference, where are the diverse sisters in our union?

Without equal proportionality, diverse women in our union feel helpless, undervalued, isolated and victimised. This is not what we bargained for!

Proportionality is no longer enough! Equal and proportional involvement and engagement of diverse women in our union is key to our success.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee:

- 1) To work with the NEC to ensure the NEC itself is an inclusive structure that practices, promotes and ensures that women are involved and engage with the union proportionally and equally according to their diverse make up. And that there is training and organisational development to ensure this is culturally embedded in the union.
- 2) To work with the NEC to ensure that branch, regional and self-organised groups have structures that ensure women are involved and engage with the union proportionally and equally according to their diverse make up.
- 3) To work with the NEC to ensure that diverse women are represented in leadership positions within our union structures from the branch level to the NEC.
- 4) To ensure that easily accessible information about the roles that are open to members are available to diverse women.
- 5) To provide information about the advantages of union participation for diverse women.
- 6) To work with regional women's committees and regional staff to provide assurance of support from branches and the regions for women from diverse backgrounds who show interest in top positions or in becoming an activist.
- 7) To look into the possibility of Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) providing confidence building training and a pathway to activism for women.

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- 8) To discuss with self-organised group committees, ways to encourage diverse women to take active role within the union without prejudice and to offer them support.

### ***National Women's Committee***

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### **3. Organising young women in UNISON following the age limit rule change**

Conference notes the rule change passed at National Delegate Conference 2023 which raised the age limit for young members from all those aged 26 and under to all those aged 30 and under.

Conference further notes that this roughly doubles the number of young members in UNISON, and is therefore a unique opportunity to build engagement and activism among young members, particularly young women.

Conference notes the wealth of research showing that young women are severely impacted by the cost of living crisis and that this has a gendered impact, in particular the 2023 research from the Young Women's Trust which showed that young women are struggling more than their male peers with the rising costs of energy, food and housing.

In short, conference believes that young women need trade unions, and trade unions need young women. UNISON should be actively encouraging young women to join and become involved in union activism.

Conference notes the 2020 report from the National Young Members Forum, 'Getting Active in UNISON' which highlighted some of the barriers faced by young women who want to get more active in UNISON.

Conference believes UNISON's National Women's Committee has a vital role to play in developing the next generation of women in trade unions.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Promote awareness of the rule change across UNISON's women's structures in branches and regions
- 2) Liaise with the National Young Members Forum to assess the numbers of young women actively involved in UNISON and to map their membership and involvement;
- 3) Work with the National Young Members Forum to build engagement by young women members with UNISON's women's structures, at branch, regional and national level;
- 4) Work with the National Young Members Forum to identify some of the barriers experienced by young women members in becoming activists, and to develop ways of reducing or eliminating these;
- 5) Consider developing a leadership programme for young women trade unionists in UNISON and identifying funds for a training and mentoring programme which

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supports young women to develop the skills and abilities they need to become lifelong trade unionists.

### *National Young Members' Forum*

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#### **4. Women Health & Safety Reps / Officers in the NHS**

UNISON has approximately 5,000 Health and Safety representatives across the union working hard to defend members' health and safety at work.

Over the past few years health and safety has emerged again as critical for protecting members' rights at work. However, the gender balance of Health and Safety representatives in UNISON does not reflect the gender balance of our union.

Women's health and safety is never more important – whether it is advising on maternity rights, menopause, endometriosis, breast cancer, undergoing cancer treatment, pelvic organ prolapse and any other relevant medical conditions including stress, burnout, carers responsibilities, women's safety equipment, exposure to hazardous substances in their work and at home, for example when cleaning, or in areas where there is a traditional bias towards female working – we need women representing women!

Building women's confidence is an underlined key factor in convincing members to take on the rep role.

Working women are more likely to be exposed to hazards like issues around lifting or exposure to chemicals at work and at home because they have traditionally had greater domestic and caring responsibilities.

Women are:

- 1) more likely to be in low-paid, unsafe work and this may affect their working conditions and the hazards they are exposed to.
- 2) more likely to stay in the same job longer than men so may have a longer exposure to the hazards that are present.
- 3) more likely to work in jobs where trade union representation is weaker and there may be less worker consultation and participation which is an important factor in successful risk prevention.

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

- a) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum to emphasise the key issues for women in the workplace.
- b) Work with the National Health and Safety Forum, and any other relevant body, to encourage women to become health and safety representatives
- c) Maintain and improve our recruitment levels but also to target our 'hard to reach' and lower paid women members. Only by a targeted approach can we

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ensure that we offer the protection and opportunities of UNISON and encourage more women to join us and take on active roles within our union.

- d) Promote and continue to engage with “Be OnTheSafeSide”

*Gateshead Health*

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### **Negotiating and Bargaining**

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#### **5. Work Life Balance and the right to Disconnect**

There have been significant changes to working patterns and practices that have happened since the pandemic, including a large rise in remote and hybrid working. Greater flexibility should be welcomed where this works for staff. Some disabled women and women with caring responsibilities may find more home working is a useful adjustment to give them more control over all aspects of their lives.

However, working from home and flexibility can also present problems for staff, by blurring the line between work time and personal time. Being expected to be permanently available can have a particular impact on workers' mental health and stress levels. Badly considered and implemented moves to home working can also put women at more risk if home is not a safe place to be.

Conference believes that flexible, hybrid and remote working policies need to be actively negotiated and agreed by trade unions. The voices of women must be heard when trade unions talk about work/life balance, as they are more likely to have caring responsibilities which can be affected by new working arrangements.

This needs to include action on the right not to engage in email, telephone and other work-related contact outside of paid working hours. Whilst some countries have enshrined The Right to Disconnect in law, unions should be including this in the bargaining agenda. Right to Disconnect policies can have a positive impact on women workers and those with caring responsibilities, who benefit from a clearly defined separation between working and personal time.

Conference calls on the Nation Women's Committee to work with the other national Self Organised Committees through the Equalities Liaison Committee to promote the inclusion of properly supported work/life balance, including the right to disconnect in Flexible working policies.

*Scotland Region*

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#### **6. Prioritising Women's Health in the Workplace**

Conference believes that too often, women's health is treated as private, and that the 'world of work' is still not designed with women workers in mind, meaning policies aimed at addressing health issues do not respond to actual need.

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Health issues arising from menopause, menstruation, or conditions such as endometriosis, continue to adversely impact women's working lives.

Conference further believes that gendered health considerations should be a core part of workplace health and safety initiatives.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) investigate and report on the needs of women workers in relation to hormonal fluctuations including menopause and menstruation, and other conditions such as endometriosis
- 2) create guidance for branches on how to negotiate for improved policy and workplace guidance / support measures that meet these health needs, to enable dignity at work for women.

### *Scotland Region*

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#### **Campaigning**

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#### **7. Impact of benefit cuts on disabled women**

Conference is well aware that disabled workers are paid £3,700 less than non-disabled workers. But conference notes that disabled women are paid even less than disabled men. According to TUC analysis, disabled women face an even bigger pay gap of over £7,000 a year. The gap also increases as women age.

Conference recognises that there are several reasons for this, and it starts in education. Disabled women are consistently denied equal opportunities in education. Ingrained discrimination and misogyny mean they are pushed out of education earlier than disabled men, which leads to disabled women often lacking vital skills needed in the workforce.

But even where disabled men and women achieve the same qualification, disabled women are still paid less. Disabled women are offered fewer opportunities to progress and end up in lower paid jobs, including part-time work.

The TUC makes clear the pay gap for disabled women is also linked to "unlawful discrimination, structural barriers, a lack of access to flexible working, employers failing to provide reasonable adjustments and negative attitudes".

The Women's Budget Group found that this intersects with higher rates of poverty among women and, according to their figures, 40% of Black women are more likely to be living in poverty, further increasing the likelihood of financial disadvantage for Black disabled women.

Conference notes that the government's new proposals outlined in 'Transforming Support: The health and disability white paper' mean many more disabled people, especially women, will be forced into low paid work, whether they are ready or not.



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This will only plunge disabled women further into poverty. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will become the only way to qualify for the higher rate of benefits. This will increase disabled women's reliance on Universal Credit.

Conference believes government needs to reconsider their approach and ensure that this new system doesn't leave disabled women in an even worse financial position.

Conference instructs the National Women's Committee to work with the National Disabled Members Committee to:

- 1) Highlight the negative and disproportionate repercussions of the government's plans to further reduce access to disability benefits on disabled women
- 2) Press for this issue to be included in UNISON's cost of living campaign materials, amplifying the voices of disabled women
- 3) Raise this issue with the Labour Link with a view to influencing a future Labour government to put the needs of disabled women at the heart of disability benefits and to smash the disability and gender pay gaps.

### ***National Disabled Members Committee***

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#### **8. Impact of Fuel costs on Women**

Conference, many of our women members some of whom are disabled are on low pay, working part time and living on a limited budget.

A significant number of these women work in social care, for the NHS, local authorities, or private care companies.

Conference notes that caring responsibilities also disproportionately fall on women.

The massive increase of household fuel costs, petrol and low mileage costs have thrown some families into poverty, financial debt and even homelessness, while energy companies boast of continuous increases in profits.

Many of our members can no longer afford to use their cars for work or visit their patients in care homes or hospitals due to the high cost of fuel, low mileage allowances, car parking costs at both public and hospital car parks or costs of parking tickets when parking on streets.

Many women, especially disabled women have lost their jobs since Covid, and it has been challenging to find extra hours or extra income because of access issues or lack of reasonable adjustments. For those who are in employment, their earnings are failing to keep up pace with the escalating rate of inflation.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee:

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- 1) To work alongside the NEC and our political funds to lobby government to cap household energy costs to ensure bills continue to reduce.
- 2) To continue to lobby the HMRC to increase mileage allowance from 45p (2020/2022) up to the first 10k travelled to a more reasonable 59p.
- 3) To campaign for employers and local authorities to give dispensation to care staff to be allowed to park on the streets, like parking vouchers that employers can purchase on behalf of staff, where it is necessary to easily access patients.
- 4) To work alongside the NEC and our political funds to lobby the UK government to work on increasing the mileage allowance for all workers who work in the Health and Care professions.

### ***National Women's Committee***

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#### **9. Cost of Living Crisis sees Loan Sharks Thrive**

Conference In the past 3 years over three million people have turned to illegal money lenders (loan Sharks) and as the cost of living continues to bite into 2024. An extra 1 million vulnerable people and families are expected to turn to illegal lenders as the safe high street lenders turn them away due to cost of living crisis.

Conference they are being forced to turn to these illegal money lenders as they see themselves face further financial hardships, with those from marginalised backgrounds disproportionately feeling the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. Research done by not-for-profit organisation Fair4AllFinance has found that the loan sharks have gone upmarket, targeting-lower income workers with a median income of £20,000 - £24,999.

Borrowing and debt is far from gender neutral. Women are more likely than men to claim social security benefits, more likely to be in low-paid, part-time and insecure work, more likely to be providing care for children/family members and more likely to have to make up for cuts to services through unpaid work. As women's incomes are generally lower over their lifetimes this leaves them more vulnerable to short term financial problems or income shocks making them more likely to have to rely on borrowing and debt to make ends meet.

The majority of our Unison members are women who fall into this wage bracket due to nature of their job roles. Many, who are already on tight budgets are now facing not being able to pay their bills, juggling between rent/mortgage, heating /lighting, travel cost for work against food on the table.

These illegal money lenders are known to use tactics of befriending and lulling people into trusting them. Reports have shown that mothers at school gates have been targeted by women offering to loan them money which then emerges that these are loans with high end interest rates, there is still so much stigma around talking about money, debt and financial issues.

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Pre-pandemic, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that women are consistently more vulnerable to poverty and debt. 35% of women reported it was a struggle to keep up with bills some or most of the time, 26% of women said they ran out of money by the end of the month and 29% of women said they would not be able to make ends meet for a month or less if they lost their main source of income. Women have lower financial wellbeing, have fewer retirement plans and smaller pension pots than men as well as being less likely to save regularly (56%) compared to men (63%). More women (52%) have never put their money into an investment product compared to 37% of men.

The Tory governments have implemented years of austerity measures that have gutted public services, and let's not forget Boris Johnson's government cut the £20 per week uplift to Universal credit and is now considering cutting childcare costs by £40. These cuts impact on women who carry the burden of spreading the family income in a growing unequal economic and social environment.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to

- 1) Work with "There For You" around promoting Unison services and sign posting of confidential debt advice, use of credit unions or Employer lending Schemes with women in regions and branches
- 2) Work with LAOS to develop a training package around safe money awareness and budgeting that is easily accessible to all members.
- 3) Work to produce leaflets and Fact sheets around Illegal Money lenders and their rights.
- 4) Work with National Labour Link and the NEC to create campaign for tighter legislation in reporting and prosecuting loan sharks and lenders not authorised by the Financial Services Authority.

***North Cumbria Northumberland &  
Tyne & Wear Health***

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### **10. New Rights for Pregnant Workers and New Parents**

Conference notes and welcomes the new protection from redundancy for pregnant workers and new parents.

Conference thanks Dan Jarvis MP for working in support with UNISON on the new law – the Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Bill – to prevent employers from laying off expectant mothers and new parents, by extending redundancy protections to six months, passed its third reading in February 2023.

As the cost of living continues raising a family is becoming even more expensive, and what new parents need most is job security, but pregnant workers and new parents are too often first in line for redundancy.

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According to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) three in four working mothers say they've experienced pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and 54,000 pregnant women are forced out of their jobs each year.

The law already gives women on maternity leave priority over other employees at risk of redundancy – a woman on maternity leave is “entitled to be offered” any suitable alternative vacancy, where one is available, as soon as her job is at risk of redundancy. But in practice, this is often not happening.

Conference future notes that many maternity protections including protections against discrimination for pregnant women and women on maternity leave, and the right to suitable alternative work on no less favourable terms are under attack through the Retained EU Law Bill.

Without these core protections, UK workers – especially women – will be thrown back to the 1970s, which means the bill is even more urgent. This new law will represent a significant win for UNISON members as well as add greater workplace protections to the statute book.

Conference calls on the NWC to

- 1) Work with UNISON and continue the work with Dan Jarvis MP to ensure the Bill is passed in the House of Lords.
- 2) Encourage other UNISON MP's to support the Bill.

### ***Yorkshire & Humberside Region***

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#### **11. Paid Leave for Pregnancy Loss and End Of Pregnancy**

Conference notes the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which gives parents the right to take up to two weeks' time off work to deal with the death of a child, if the child has died under the age of 18 or is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy, as well as gives the right to Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay to eligible employees.

Conference also notes the consultation ran by the Department for the Economy in 2022 which sought the public's views on proposals to make Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay a “day one right” as well as introducing the same right to leave and pay for parents who experience miscarriage.

Conference notes with concern that this consultation and legislative changes have not been progressed due to the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

Conference believes that Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay should fully include anyone who may experience the loss of a child or the pregnancy loss at any stage of the pregnancy.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

Conference supports the proposed changes to the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 that would include pay as a day one right that creates provision for people who experience miscarriage.

Conference is concerned that for the purpose of the consultation, the term 'miscarriage' refers to unintentional miscarriage. This definition excludes anyone who ends their pregnancy via medical intervention including ectopic and non-viable pregnancies that require termination to save the life of the pregnant person, as well as abortion for non-medical reasons.

Conference is further concerned that the consultation does not create provision for people going through IVF who experience pregnancy loss through failed implantation of the embryo.

Conference instructs the National Women's Committee to campaign and oppose any attempts to exclude intentional miscarriage from bereavement leave legislation and to support the campaign that any changes must include all miscarriages and pregnancy loss whether intentional or otherwise.

***UNISON Northern Ireland***

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### **12. Pregnancy and Family Leave**

Pregnancy and Family Leave

In May 2023, the 'Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act' received royal assent.

When it comes into force, the Act will modify the existing Employment Rights Act 1996 and introduce essential safeguards during pregnancy or family leave.

It will give those who are pregnant or a recent returner from parental leave priority status for redeployment opportunities in a redundancy situation.

We know that 78% of our members identify as women and it is important that anyone who is pregnant or planning a family understands their rights when it comes to pregnancy and family leave in the workplace.

Our regions, branches, stewards and H&S reps need to be made aware of the proposed changes to assist them to provide the most up-to-date advice available on pregnancy and family leave entitlements when supporting members.

We call on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Produce a fact sheet to explain the changes and what parents are entitled to when the Act becomes law.
- 2) Share the fact sheet with Regions, Branches and Women's Officers to raise awareness of the new entitlements.

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- 3) Work with LAOS to develop a training package for Regions to deliver to branches to cascade a consistent message to reps

### *North West Region*

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#### **13. Campaign re Student Loans as Affecting Pregnant and Caring Women**

Women should not have to worry about their student loan when they are absent from work due to pregnancy or childcare. In the Netherlands, payments and interest are paused during maternity leave.

We call upon the National Women's Committee to launch a campaign to seek legal changes to the student loan scheme. Payments and interest should be paused while ex students are absent from work due to maternity leave or childcare.

### *East Midlands Region*

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#### **14. Black Women's Maternity Care**

Conference is extremely concerned that in 2023 Black women are still five times more likely to die in childbirth or shortly afterwards. Women of mixed ethnicity have 3 times the risk, and Asian women almost twice the risk. Black women are also at an increased risk of having a pre-term birth, stillbirth, neonatal death or a baby born with low birth weight. The government acknowledges these facts, along with the fact that the disparity in maternal death between Black women and white women is widening<sup>1</sup>.

Data from 2019-2021 used in a study by Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK (Mbrace UK) found that maternal mortality rates for Black women have been largely unchanged for the last decade or more<sup>2</sup>.

Conference is appalled that despite pledges from the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, and the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention, and Mental Health, Nadine Dorries, the Health Secretary Steve Barclay, said in 2023, "We do not believe a target and strategy is the best approach towards progress"<sup>3</sup>.

Conference applauds the work of the Women and Equalities Committee, which hit back at the Government decision to ultimately not set racial targets and accused NHS leadership of underestimating the extent to which racism plays a role in perpetuating inequalities. Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP, said: "The Government's commitment to ending maternal health disparities is welcome, as is its promise to scope out a review of maternity staff training and update us on the progress of the Maternity Disparities Taskforce. However, I am afraid its response stops short of the significant action we need to end these appalling disparities in maternal deaths."

An article in the Lancet in January 2023 acknowledged that "the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the racial reckoning that took place in the summer of 2020, has placed racial disparities at the forefront of contemporary discourses. Mounting research suggests that Black women bear a disproportionate burden of global

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maternal mortality and morbidity rates. These disparities in maternal health have persisted through the coronavirus pandemic...". Conference believes that epistemic injustice, defined as unfairly preventing someone from properly communicating their ideas or making sense of their experiences, is endemic in the NHS<sup>4</sup>. Examples of this in maternity care include patients having concerns about their health and their pregnancy dismissed or treated as trivial, being passed off as "dramatic", questions being brushed aside or not taken seriously, and practitioners not taking patients' pain seriously. This happens even in severe cases, such as instances where caesarean-section stitches are bleeding and infected.

Conference recognises that the impact on migrant women may be worse. Research by the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) found that exemptions from charging were not working. Vulnerable women were being wrongly invoiced for care and Trusts were aggressively pursuing debts from women who are manifestly unable to pay. This is despite the fact that, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), one in four migrant women is a survivor of sexual violence, and forced migration, or may be a survivor of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Conference believes that the time for action is now, and calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the National Black Members' Committee to gain a deeper understanding of Black women's experiences of maternity and post-natal care.
- 2) To campaign with Maternity Action to protect and improve maternity care and support for Black women.
- 3) To encourage branches and regions to affiliate to Maternity Action and ask that they consider inviting a speaker to their Branch / Region to highlight the work of Maternity Action.
- 4) To work alongside the NEC and our political funds to lobby the UK Government to implement a comprehensive strategy to address the issue.

1 & 2 Government working with midwives, medical experts, and academics to investigate BAME maternal mortality - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

3 Government rejects targets to reduce Black maternal deaths - Voice Online ([voice-online.co.uk](http://voice-online.co.uk))

4 Black women are at greater risk of maternal death in the UK – here's what needs to be done ([theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com))

***National Women's Committee***

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### **15. Black Women's Maternity Care**

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low birth weight. The government acknowledges these facts, along with the fact that the disparity in maternal death between Black women and white women is widening<sup>1</sup>.

Data from 2019-2021 used in a study by Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK (Mbrace UK) found that maternal mortality rates for Black women have been largely unchanged for the last decade or more<sup>2</sup>.

Conference is appalled that despite pledges from the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, and the Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention, and Mental Health, Nadine Dorries, the Health Secretary Steve Barclay, said in 2023, "We do not believe a target and strategy is the best approach towards progress"<sup>3</sup>.

Conference applauds the work of the Women and Equalities Committee, which hit back at the Government decision to ultimately not set racial targets and accused NHS leadership of underestimating the extent to which racism plays a role in perpetuating inequalities. Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP, said: "The Government's commitment to ending maternal health disparities is welcome, as is its promise to scope out a review of maternity staff training and update us on the progress of the Maternity Disparities Taskforce. However, I am afraid its response stops short of the significant action we need to end these appalling disparities in maternal deaths."

An article in the Lancet in January 2023 acknowledged that "the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the racial reckoning that took place in the summer of 2020, has placed racial disparities at the forefront of contemporary discourses. Mounting research suggests that Black women bear a disproportionate burden of global maternal mortality and morbidity rates. These disparities in maternal health have persisted through the coronavirus pandemic...". Conference believes that epistemic injustice, defined as unfairly preventing someone from properly communicating their ideas or making sense of their experiences, is endemic in the NHS<sup>4</sup>. Examples of this in maternity care include patients having concerns about their health and their pregnancy dismissed or treated as trivial, being passed off as "dramatic", questions being brushed aside or not taken seriously, and practitioners not taking patients' pain seriously. This happens even in severe cases, such as instances where c-section stitches are bleeding and infected.

Conference recognises that the impact on migrant women may be worse. Research by the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) found that exemptions from charging were not working. Vulnerable women were being wrongly invoiced for care and Trusts were aggressively pursuing debts from women who are manifestly unable to pay. This is despite the fact that, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), one in four migrant women is a survivor of sexual violence, and forced migration, or may be a survivor of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Conference believes that the time for action is now, and calls on the national women's committee to:

- 1) Work with the National Black Members Committee to gain a deeper understanding of Black women's experiences of maternity and post-natal care.



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- 2) Work with NHS employers to develop comprehensive strategies in respect of diverse recruitment. (probably not realistic, but welcome comments or changes).
- 3) To campaign with Maternity Action to protect and improve maternity care and support for Black women.
- 4) To encourage branches and regions to affiliate to Maternity Action and ask that they consider inviting a speaker to their Branch / Region to highlight the work of Maternity Action.
- 5) Work with Labour Link to lobby the UK Government to implement a comprehensive strategy to address the issue.

1 & 2 Government working with midwives, medical experts, and academics to investigate BAME maternal mortality - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

3 Government rejects targets to reduce Black maternal deaths - Voice Online ([voice-online.co.uk](http://voice-online.co.uk))

4 Black women are at greater risk of maternal death in the UK – here's what needs to be done ([theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com))

### ***South East Region***

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#### **16. Parenthood shouldn't equal poverty**

Conference notes the UNICEF report from September 2023 which found that 70% of UK-based parents of children and new babies felt that life was getting harder for parents. Over two-thirds of parents believe that the Government is not doing enough to support them.

In the UNICEF survey of parents of 0-4-year-olds, 78% reported that the cost of living crisis had negatively impacted their family life, with 61% saying their mental health has been affected. Besides the cost of living, other factors identified as making it harder to be a parent included: a lack of available childcare; less time to spend with their children; fewer local support services for parents and young children; and the rising cost of housing.

The difficulty of accessing childcare is borne out by the Coram's Childcare Survey 2023 which found that only half of local areas offered sufficient childcare for children under two, a decrease of 7% on 2022, and under half offered enough childcare for parents working full-time, a decrease of 11% on last year.

Conference also notes the September 2023 report from the Young Women's Trust which identified the gendered aspects of the cost of living crisis and how it impacts young women, and particularly young mothers, more severely than their male peers. These pressures on young mothers are a contributory factor in the Gender Pay Gap, with 30% of young women forced to remain in low-paying jobs because they can't afford to leave.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

The YWT found that 69% of young single mums are 'filled with dread' when they have to think about their finances. 45% of young mums, whether partnered or single, have taken on new debt over the last year and 70% say it is a struggle to make their money last till the end of the month.

Shockingly, the Young Women's Trust found that 40% of young women with children sometimes have to choose between feeding themselves and feeding their children, with that number rising to 52% of young women with children who were in receipt of benefits.

Conference believes that this crisis is failing parents and failing children, with the Child Poverty Action Group recording that 4.2 million children (29% of all UK children) are now living in poverty.

Conference also recognises that families and childcare responsibilities take many forms, and that it is important not to stereotype families or assume that all families resemble the 'traditional' nuclear family. Conference believes that all parents and children need to be supported in a way which celebrates the many forms that parenthood and family life can exist.

Conference believes that radical action is necessary to address the childcare crisis, to support parents, to enable young people to become parents if they wish to, and to give all children a healthy, secure start in life.

Conference welcomes the work done by the National Women's Committee in campaigning for better childcare provision and more family-friendly policies in the workplace; in supporting the work done by UNISON's local government service group and others in calling for a well-paid, professional and secure childcare workforce; and in highlighting the gendered impact of caring responsibilities.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Promote its work campaigning for better childcare in the UK and for more parent- and family-friendly policies at work;
- 2) Work with UNISON's service groups to promote more child-friendly policies at work, and to consider producing, where necessary, bargaining guidance and model policies aimed at supporting parents in the workplace;
- 3) Work with UNISON's local government service group, and other service groups where relevant, to highlight the importance of childcare being provided by trained, professional childcare workers with good pay and conditions;
- 4) Continue to campaign against the Gender Pay Gap, and to highlight the impact that parenthood, and gendered caring responsibilities, have in disadvantaging women in the workplace generally and with regards to pay in particular;
- 5) Work with the National Young Members Forum to identify specific barriers and issues experienced by young workers who are parents, and to promote UNISON's work around childcare to young members;

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 6) Work with Labour Link to encourage the Labour Party to commit in their manifesto to universal access to pre-school childcare, as a social good.

### *National Young Members' Forum*

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#### **17. Baby Loss Policies - The bare minimum should be a floor not a ceiling**

Please note, in this context, when we refer to Women, the term encompasses women and pregnant people.

Conference notes that there is currently a disparity around attendance management policies for pregnancy losses of less than 24 weeks gestation when compared to pregnancy related illness in an ongoing pregnancy. Our members can unfairly fall through the cracks of these policies following a pregnancy loss, whether through miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, ectopic pregnancy, or during IVF.

In some maternity policies, it can state that employees who suffer a miscarriage are subject to normal attendance management policies rather than exempted as with other pregnancy related issues.

Women absent suffering from pregnancy complications such as morning sickness for example will not trigger the attendance policy as this is protected by legislation but one who is absent following the loss of her baby will.

Conference, this disparity is very unfair.

In some policies there seems to be no provision at all for women absent after undergoing a termination of pregnancy, although those undergoing fertility treatment do get some special consideration as time off related to implantation of a fertilised ovum is also not counted towards attendance management triggers.

Conference, pregnancy loss can be devastating to women both emotionally and physically. We believe that by talking about baby loss openly and honestly, we can help each other feel less alone.

Conference notes that there should be clarity across all public sector workers around pregnancy loss to protect our members from this disparity and potential discrimination:

UNISON's model policy is the gold standard, with provisions for paid time off for partners and the pregnant person following a lost pregnancy. In the Government response to the Independent Pregnancy Loss Review July 2023, it sets out that the NHS should be a "leading example" in offering excellent bereavement support and leave to staff and recommend up to 10 days paid leave for the pregnant person, and 5 days for the partner for any pre-24-week pregnancy loss. It also clearly states that this should be 'floor not a ceiling' so we should be encouraging compassionate care rather than the bare minimum legally required.

We call on the National Women's Committee to:

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 1) Work with the NEC and all the relevant structures in our union to map current policy with a view of implementing UNISON's model policy across all service groups through local agreements and staff sides.
- 2) Work with the NEC and all relevant structures in our union, including Labour Link to promote this issue for our members, to ensure all our members are protected by appropriate, sensitive, and fair workplace policies during this distressing time, without differentiating between miscarriage and other types of pregnancy loss such as termination of pregnancy.

Notes:

The Equality and Human Rights Commission says that sickness absence related to a miscarriage should be treated in the same way as pregnancy related sickness.

The Equality Act Section 18: a person discriminates against a woman if they treat them unfavourably because of the pregnancy or because of illness suffered by them as a result of it.

### *South Tyneside and Wearside Health*

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#### **18. Women suffering the burden of a broken childcare system.**

Conference, we know the childcare system in the UK is in crisis. Wages for those delivering childcare are often too low to live on, but the costs for parents are going up and up. This has a disproportionate impact on not only the women working in the sector but those women who bare the brunt of childcare responsibilities.

In 2022, 98% of paid staff involved in delivering childcare and early years provision were reported by providers to be female and research has found that three in five childcare workers earn less than the real living wage. Concerningly, one in four children with a parent working in social care are living in poverty.

Conference, we know that low pay and insecure work impacts on recruitment into the childcare sector, with many skilled and experienced women workers finding higher paid work in less stressful environments. Recruitment into childcare settings is reportedly the most difficult in the North East, Midlands and East of England and there has been an 87% rise in the number of nurseries closing their doors.

Conference, worryingly, although seven in ten nurseries being against any changes to statutory ratios for two-year-olds, the government pressed on and changed these from 1:4 to 1:5 which will further strain the already damaged system and cause women workers to rethink their career paths. The Government's plans to extend the childcare provision will undoubtedly cause an increase in demand but with not enough investment or transparency in the sector, this will further burden a sector under intense pressure.

Families are struggling to find nursery places for their children and even if they can, the soaring costs of nursery fees mean that for some, almost 80% of their wages are spent on nursery fees alone. Childcare costs are rising in every region, but has hit hardest in the North East with an almost 20% increase over the last five years.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

Conference, we know that the lack of affordable and accessible childcare disproportionately affects women. The TUC calculates that almost 1.5million women are kept out of the labour market because of their caring responsibilities, compared with 230,000 men. Two thirds of women with childcare responsibilities believe they have missed out on career progression; women are the ones expected to adapt workforce participation to carry out family responsibilities; and there are around 870,000 stay-at-home mothers who want to go back to work but can't afford to, while others are leaving their jobs altogether because they can't afford their children's care.

Conference it's time to act – “tackling these issues is integral not only to the wellbeing of our women and workplaces, it is crucial to the functioning of any strong economy”.

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with Regional Women's Groups and service groups to build a body of evidence showing the effects that the broken childcare system is having on women members who not only work in the childcare setting but who are users of childcare and use the results to create a campaign to highlight the impacts.
- 2) Work with the NEC and all appropriate sections of the union and our partners, including Labour Link to lobby for changes to the childcare system
- 3) Report back on the findings to the 2025 Women's Conference.

### ***Northern Region***

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#### **19. Affordable Child Care Facilities**

Conference deplores the ongoing failure of Public Sector Services to engage with childcare issues, which are an increasing barrier to recruitment and retention in an overwhelmingly female workforce.

The lack of adequate pay increases set against a backdrop of the worst cost of living crisis in a generation means that childcare has become even less affordable for many women workers. We pay some of the highest childcare costs in the whole of Europe, second only to Switzerland where standards of living are considerably higher.

Conference notes that 998,000 (78%) women of our 1.3 million members were the majority of these women take on the responsibilities of childcare, and are now being forced into a position where it is no longer financially viable for them to continue to work. Providing affordable and reliable childcare could be a powerful aid to preventing more staff from leaving the public sector services.

Conference therefore calls on the National Women's Committee to:

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

- 1) Embed claims for childcare provision into UNISON's policy and ensure that this provision is also in the LAOS events.
- 2) Support branches to work with Public Sector Services to establish widespread provision of subsidised childcare and holiday play schemes
- 3) Highlight and promote the benefits this would have for recruitment, retention, and staffing levels in our Public Sector Services.
- 4) Equip branches and regions with arguments and information to promote the benefits of direct provision of childcare for Public Sector Services with high quality and affordable. – stop the profiting of private childcare.
- 5) Work with Labour Link committee to get this prioritised on Labours Agenda.

### ***North West Region***

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#### **20. Supporting Infertility Treatment**

Conference notes that Infertility is recognised by the World Health Organisation as a disease of the reproductive system and should be handled at work in the same way as any other health condition.

Research by Fertility Network UK has shown that most people experiencing fertility problems are reluctant to speak to their employer, because they fear it may have a detrimental effect on their career. It is not uncommon for staff to end up reducing their hours or quitting their job if they are unable to balance work and fertility issues.

In the UK, roughly one in six couples (or 3.5 million people) are affected by infertility, with most of these people working.

Unlike ante-natal appointments once pregnant, employers are not currently required to provide paid or unpaid time off to enable employees to attend medical appointments for fertility treatments.

Having workplace policies that will support women going through this will ensure women are not affected detrimentally in the workplace.

Many women have left the job market for not feeling supported at work and many women have been forced out of their jobs, through capability and absence.

More and more women are starting to have children later in life which means their fertility is compromised from the start of their journey to motherhood. And after spending years building a career for themselves, many feel they have to make a choice – career or family.

Black women have higher rates of infertility than white women (7.2% vs. 5.5%). However, despite the higher rate of infertility among Black women they are less likely to use IVF. Whilst there are no definitive explanations for this and more research needs to be undertaken it appears there are more barriers for Black women in accessing IVF services due to living in disadvantaged parts of the UK. Black women are also less likely to have successful fertility treatment with a recent study by Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. Their study showed that Black

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

patients aged 30-34 have an average birth rate of 23% compared to 30% for Mixed and White patients.

In a trade union where the overwhelming majority of members are women, this is not just a workplace issue but a UNISON issue.

Conference instructs the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) promote and build awareness of infertility as a workplace issue nationally.
- 2) To encourage UNISON Branches to campaign for Infertility Policies within their workplaces.
- 3) To campaign for a change in legislation to allow time off for infertility treatment.

***Wirral***

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### **21. Black Women and Mental Health**

Maternal mental health is a crucial aspect of a woman's well-being and can impact on the early experiences of bonding with their child(ren) and their own experience of motherhood. According to 'The Motherhood Group', Black maternal mental health should be a priority focus across government, health and social care policy development and wider society.

Black mothers face unique challenges because of factors such as, racial discrimination, historical trauma, socio-economic disparities, and limited access to culturally appropriate and competent maternal mental care.

This results in Black mothers experiencing higher rates of post-partum depression and anxiety disorders, The Motherhood group believe that 'every mother, including Black Mums deserve the right to have access to adequate support, care, safe spaces and for their voices to be heard'.

However, despite the importance of this issue, government has rejected calls to set a target and strategy to end racial disparities experienced by Black mothers in maternal deaths.

This Conference believes that the advocating for policy change to address the disparities in Black maternal health support for Black women must continue.

This conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work across national, regional, and self-organised group union media platforms, to raise awareness of Black maternal mental health issues.
- 2) Through the Labour Link Committee, lobby the government to address the much-needed policy changes that are required to address the disparities in Black maternal health support.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 3) Explore working with organisations and groups such as 'The Motherhood Group' and access educational resources that can be shared across branches and regions to inform about the importance of Black maternal mental health and highlight the support services and networks that are available.

### *National Black Members' Committee*

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#### **22. Violence Against Black Women and Black Girls is UNISON's Business**

Conference notes that violence against women and girls is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Conference, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a fundamental human rights violation, affecting around one in three women and girls around the world.

The latest figures from the Office of National Statistics show that in England and Wales in the year ending March 2022: ([vawg.gss-data.org.uk](http://vawg.gss-data.org.uk))

- 1) 9% of women aged 16 and over were victims of domestic abuse in the last year.
- 2) 3% of women aged 16 and over were victims of sexual assault in the last year.
- 3) 9% of women aged 16 and over were victims of stalking in the last year.
- 4) 8% of women aged 18 to 74 experienced abuse before the age of 16.
- 5) 2,887 cases of HBA related offences were recorded by the police in the last year.

The Covid pandemic has created what the United Nations has called a "shadow pandemic" of surging violence against women. According to Femicide Census (The Femicide Census | Karen Ingala Smith) one woman is murdered on average every three days in the UK and one in every three women aged 16 to 59 will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

The structural inequality experienced by Black women and Black girls due to both their race and gender mean they often suffer more severe abuse for longer and face more challenges to accessing support than their white counterparts (Siddiqui, 2018). The multiple layers of oppression, including adultification bias as in the case of Child Q and many other Black girls, that they experience at the intersection of race and gender are inextricable from their experiences of gender-based violence: 'abused Black women and Black girls are often subject to intersectional discrimination when inequality based on gender, race, caste, class and/or poverty overlaps and multiplies', additionally, immigration-status related discrimination can worsen this' (Siddiqui, 2018).

Conference we know that a lack of independent income makes it difficult for women to make their own decisions, including impacting their ability to leave abusive partners. According to the TUC, Black women experience systemic, structural inequalities across the labour market that mean they are overrepresented in lower



## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

paid, insecure jobs and at higher risk of being underemployed. One in eight Black women are in insecure jobs compared to one in eighteen white men. Three out of five Black women in self-employment are low paid compared to two out of five white men. One in eight Black women are under-employed compared to one in thirteen white men.

The impact of the 'Hostile Environment' also makes it more likely that Black women will experience violence and less likely that they will be able to access justice and support.

Conference, these data and the high proportion of Black women in UNISON membership highlight the necessity for our trade union to be at the fore when it comes to tackling violence against women and girls.

Conference calls upon the National Women's Committee to work with the National Black Members committee to:

- a) Seek to ensure the needs of Black women and Black girls are considered when the committee is consulted on matters relating to violence against women.
- b) Work with the NEC to take the necessary steps to seek to ensure that Stewards and Branch Officers have access to culturally appropriate, up to date training to enable them to deal appropriately with Black members who are subject to violence.
- c) Encourage branches to work with the National Black Members Committee and other UNISON partners to develop and review workplace policies and practices to raise awareness around and provide support to Black women and Black girls who experience violence.

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

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#### **23. Domestic abuse access for all**

This Women's Conference is appalled that two women are killed each week from Domestic Abuse and many women and children are stuck in abusive situations due to the fact that they cannot access a refuge space.

The reduction in refuge provision for women and children throughout the UK is not only adding to the death of women and children each week it is also creating access problems for women and children.

It is not right that a woman should have to give up her employment to be able to access a safe space in refuge. This is due to the high supported accommodation costs which leaves it an unaffordable choice for women and children in abusive situations. Whilst housing benefit covers some of the cost if you are working this can still leave a large sum of rent for the refuge space to be paid.

It is also not right that due to cuts Women and their children sometimes have to move across the whole of the UK to access refuge spaces and many employers are reluctant to keep jobs open for staff unless they are a national company that can move staff. This leave the woman having to access benefits when they should be

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

able to continue to work whilst in a place of safety. Whilst this is sometimes needed for safety reasons this is not always the case.

A woman should not have to give up her home or her employment due to abuse there should be funding available to ensure that a woman and her children can be safe and be able to remain in their employment.

This conference calls for the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the NEC and UNISON Central to challenge the Government on the Domestic abuse issue and push access for all.
- 2) Set up a campaign about 'Access for all' in refuges challenging the equality of provision for all regardless of income or status
- 3) Inform and encourage Regions and Branches to talk to and challenge their own Local Authority, supported housing provision within the local authority to provide funding for refuge spaces for working women to access
- 4) Encourage branches to write to their Local MP's/MS's/MSP's to push for funding to be provided for working women in refuge

**Cymru/Wales Region**

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### **24. Misogyny and Online Abuse**

Conference notes that the proliferation of misogyny online continues to increase, which has a terrible impact on women and girls. According to Amnesty International, one in five UK women have experienced online abuse or harassment. This type of behaviour silences women and girls and prevents them fully taking part in society, in an age where digital interaction is essential in many parts of our lives.

Misogynistic influencers such as Andrew Tate have dominated the headlines recently, and it is clear that the algorithms of sites such as TikTok and Instagram have assisted this harmful content. The preaching of male dominance and female submission by the likes of Tate is dangerous for women and girls. This toxic masculinity is also negative for men and boys, teaching them that showing emotions are a sign of weakness. It can lead to physical and verbal violence, a negative outcome for all of us.

The social media giants have had free reign for too long and have been slow or unwilling to remove harmful content. The passing of The Online Safety Bill on 19 September 2023 is a welcome piece of legislation that aims to tackle this toxic discourse. However, the tentacles of the misogynist rhetoric are far reaching and need to be considered in all aspects of our everyday conversations and interactions.

Unison as a union of almost 80% women needs to be at the forefront of tackling misogyny in all sectors where we are active, as well as in our own communities and our union. Testimony from delegates attending National Delegates Conference in 2023 highlighted the growing use of misogynistic language and behaviour in schools towards teaching staff and girls. This echoes reports in the press that the influence of misogynist influencers are becoming ever more pervasive in society.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

Several years ago our National Women's Committee lead a highly successful campaign against page 3 media porn. Conference we now need that same energy and focus for a campaign against online misogynistic posts, forums and articles.

The normalisation and spread of this abuse must not be either accepted or allowed to continue. Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with all appropriate sections and groups within our union to campaign to raise awareness of the harm that misogyny in all forms, but especially online, causes.
- 2) Produce guidance for regions and branches to assist and advise our women members when they face this toxic behaviour in the workplace.
- 3) Work with our Labour Link committee to lobby for greater legal control of online abuse.

***Eastern Region***

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### **25. Menopause and Women's Uniforms**

Employers are using COVID as an excuse to avoid addressing the menopause.

UNISON and the TUC have made great strides in breaking down the menopause stigma, however, we feel that this work has now been majorly overshadowed by COVID-19 and employers are once again disregarding the impact the menopause can have on Women, their partners and their families. We find ourselves almost back to square one - powerless in obtaining the rights to work in a healthy and dignified environment.

Whilst every NHS worker across the country is going over and above for our beloved NHS, COVID writes itself firmly into our history books and women across the UK are being left behind to suffer.

Women make up 77% of the workforce in the NHS but research suggests that women are still the minority in senior roles. Without women to influence change, behaviour and culture there is a clear lack of adequate facilities and lack of menopause awareness across the NHS.

Uniforms are just one example demonstrating this. They are made of thick heavy cotton which is uncomfortable, rough and unpleasant in the best conditions. With the removal of fans and air circulation units on wards; the extreme heat, coupled with hot flashes and an added layer of PPE is unbearable.

Conference calls for the National Women's Committee to work with:

UNISON and TUC to call for an:

- 1) An urgent review of women's uniforms in the NHS

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

- 2) An introduction of seasonal uniforms to allow for lighter cotton for periods of hot weather or at times individual women are struggling with symptoms, for uniforms which don't reveal sweat patches.
- 3) Adequate and in-depth research around PPE for women
- 4) A specific discussion about the fitting of both uniforms and PPE for women

**Cymru/Wales Region**

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### **26. Menopause let's get it on every agenda**

Menopause let's get it on every agenda

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for most women. Commonly known as 'the change', it refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased for twelve consecutive months and a person has reached the end of their reproductive life.

It is important to note that not every woman will notice every symptom, or even need help or support. However, 75% of women do experience some symptoms, and 25% could be classed as severe. On average, women continue to experience symptoms for four years after their last period, but around 10 per cent of women continue to experience symptoms for up to 12 years after their last period.

Physical symptoms associated with the onset of the peri-menopause can include: hot flushes, palpitations, night sweats, insomnia and sleep disturbances, fatigue, headaches, joint aches, dry skin and skin irritation, increased perspiration during the day, dry eyes, hair loss, urinary problems, vaginal dryness/itching/discomfort, irregular and/or heavy, painful periods, clots and flooding. There may also be associated psychological symptoms including: depression, anxiety, panic attacks, poor concentration, changes to mood, problems with memory, loss of confidence.

According to the aging workforce study 47% females are aged 45 and over – there is currently little, or no support given to a woman as she makes this transition in life.

Specialist advice and support is essential to maintaining attendance at work. Positive Occupational Health intervention can offer managers a better understanding of their staff complexities, providing additional support for members who are experiencing menopause or living with a partner suffering during this time.

We would like to note that the menopause is not a sickness, it's a natural part of a women ageing, however it is one that can cause temporary and even longer-term disabling events on the individual. The word sickness sends the wrong message when applied to symptoms of the menopause.

This conference calls for National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with the NEC to campaign Central and regional governments to get menopause on the agenda in discussions with employers and legislation and to specifically look at how UNISON can get:

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- a) Employers to take menopause seriously and have detailed menopause policies.
- b) Employers to provide a specialist consultant within Occupational Health.
- c) An additional criteria to the recording of absenteeism to make allowances for episodes of menopause related absence without it being recorded as 'sickness'.
- d) Employers to makes improvements for members to access flexible working opportunities, have more appropriate uniforms and be able to access breaks during work times (circumstances allowing) if there is a sudden onset of uncontrollable symptoms.
- e) Employers to give women back their dignity. We demand to be listened to and treated fairly with recognition for natural but sometimes debilitating life transitions.

### Cymru/Wales Region

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#### **27. Raising Awareness of use of Digital Technology in Domestic Abuse**

This conference knows how much digital technology has changed all our lives. The use of mobile phones, social media, home camera systems does make our communication with work colleagues, friends, and family so much quicker and easier. In the main these are all good methods to keep us safe and in touch. However there has been a growing trend for some women who have experienced coercive and controlling behaviour by partners who use this technology to control women. Tracking their movements, seeing who they are friends with and what they are saying.

A report in the summer from The Culture, Media and Sport Committee of Westminster Parliament called on the Government to do more to tackle technology facilitated abuse. Smart speakers, door alarms, baby monitors are in home devices which are increasing being used to monitor women. The report highlighted that most of the abuse that occurs now will feature "some sort of cyber element". The Committee said that there was a need to do more to tackle this growing trend to help survivors. It is not right that women are told to come offline if they want to remain safe. That is just another restriction placed on women who have a right to be able to use digital technology without the worry that they are being tracked and monitored.

Unison with over a million women members needs to be at the forefront in raising awareness of this issue of digital abuse and we can do so.

Conference calls upon the Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with Branches, Regions, and Self Organised Groups to highlight the dangers of digital technology being used to subject women to coercive and controlling behaviour.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 2) To produce guidance that can help to signpost help and support for members both at home and in the workplace. Either by way of a published hard copy document or electronic copy.

*UNISON Renfrewshire*

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### **28. There Is No Honour In Killing Or Abuse**

This Conference notes that:

Statistics show that there is at least one so called honour based killing per month in the UK with 7,000 recorded incidents of abuse. Although many believe the actual numbers are far higher.

Honour killings and abuse take place when a woman or girl is murdered or abused due to the perpetrators' belief that the victim has brought shame or dishonour upon the family.

In patriarchal societies, the activities of women and girls are very closely monitored. Their virginity and sexual purity are considered to be the responsibility of male relatives.

These crimes are committed within families or community groups with the intention of controlling the behaviour of women and girls. This can include abduction, beatings and rape and is carried out by male family relatives in the name of protecting cultural beliefs or honour.

Victims are alleged to have engaged in "sexually immoral" actions ranging from openly chatting with men who are not related to them, to having sex outside of marriage even though this may have been through rape or sexual assault.

Women are targeted for abuse or murder for a variety of other reasons including refusing to enter into an arranged marriage or seeking a divorce or separation – even from an abusive husband. The mere suspicion that a woman has acted in a manner that could damage her family's name may trigger an attack and these assumptions are generally based on men's feelings and perceptions rather than on objective truth.

Support groups promote the 14th July as a day of memory to remember women who have been murdered or subjected to honour based abuse and other harmful practices.

Conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Lobby and campaign nationally alongside support groups such as Karma Nirvana, True Honour, Savera UK and The Halo Project to campaign and raise awareness.
- 2) Work with regional women's groups and service groups to campaign and highlight the issue and give women who are affected an opportunity to seek support.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 3) Make plans to support and promote the National Day of Memory on July 14th each year.

*West Midlands Region*

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### **29. Workplace Sexual Harassment**

Numerous surveys run over the course of the pandemic have demonstrated an increase in workplace sexual harassment, with most experiences being online. Homeworking has left women workers unsafe and unprotected from sexual harassment at work. Current protections are clearly not enough.

Women have experienced harassment on various online platforms and felt unable to challenge behaviours as they have been delivered in a jokey manner. Women have felt their privacy invaded as colleagues have been able to see their homes. There is a sense that there is a lack of boundaries because we are no longer in a typical work environment.

These risks are not limited to online incidences, with workers in health services feeling unable to address such behaviours through formal policies because efforts were diverted to clinical management issues because of the strain COVID placed on services.

Furthermore, physical working spaces are less populated because of social distancing and work from home guidance, leaving workers feeling more exposed and vulnerable.

In response to these trends, members of the women's committee have developed a toolkit addressing workplace sexual harassment and a presentation has been successfully delivered in Cwm Taf local authorities.

The Cymru Wales Women's committee is calling for National Women's Committee to work with the NEC, UNISON and TUC to:

Produce a toolkit to be rolled out across the union.

- 1) Arrange training for activists and members that is accessible and meets working times of all members to ensure those working shift patterns are able to attend
- 2) For guidance on WTUC resources to be shared, accessed by branches and utilised.
- 3) To encourage regions and branches to raise the matter through the Workforce Partnership Councils with the aim of seeking a cross public sector policy addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

**Cymru Wales Women's Committee**

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### **30. Supporting branches to tackle Sexual Harassment in the workplace**

Conference, sadly, we know that sexual harassment in the workplace is an all too regular occurrence, in fact, recent statistics make for bleak reading; with 45% of women reporting to have experienced sexual harassment at work, and 85% of those

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

women who did report it, believing their claims were not handled correctly by their employers.

In recent months, sexual harassment, and sexual assault against women at work has rarely been out of the headlines. With damning reports about women working in healthcare being sexually assaulted in their workplaces; the TUC reporting that two thirds of young women experience sexual harassment at work.

Conference, UNISON have been fighting the campaign against sexual harassment in the workplace for many years now and we were hopeful that the Workers Protection Bill 2023 would reinforce the employer's duty to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and protect against third-party harassment. Unfortunately, this bill has had amendments, which are likely to be accepted, which include scrapping the third-party harassment protection and diluting down the positive obligation on employers to prevent sexual harassment in their workplaces.

It is important that branches are equipped to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace with employers to bring about change.

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Work with LAOS to increase the understanding of sexual harassment for activists by providing tailored workshops on sexual harassment that covers topics on the law, behaviours; impact and barriers; and how to challenge sexual harassment in the workplace effectively.
- 2) Work with LAOS to develop a suite of materials available to branches on sexual harassment in the workplace, including updated model policies and guidance that can be tailored to service groups and training modules that can be delivered to employers by branches.
- 3) Work with the NEC and all appropriate sections of the union and our partners, including Labour Link to lobby for improvements to the law surrounding sexual harassment.
- 4) Report back on progress to National Women's Conference 2025.

***Northern Region***

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### **31. Housing Is A Women's Issue**

Conference notes:

Women are disadvantaged compared to men in terms of housing in many ways. On average, women have lower incomes and less capital than men. As a result, they tend to be disadvantaged in a housing system where access to housing is largely determined through the market. Women heads of household, lone-parent households, and households made up of lone women are overrepresented in many less advantageous housing circumstances.



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In 2020 the women's budget group produced the following statistics on housing and women:

- 1) No region in England is affordable to rent in the private market on women's median earnings. As for buying property, the median home in England costs over 12 times women's median wages (8 times for men).
- 2) 67% of adults in households accepted as statutorily homeless are women, reflecting their risk of loss of secure housing, and their responsibility for caring for children.
- 3) 60% of adults in households claiming housing benefit are women, reflecting women's lower incomes.
- 4) 57% of adults in social renting are women, reflecting women's lower incomes.
- 5) Since 2010 there has been:
  - a) A sharp reduction in overall government spending on housing.
  - b) Reductions in housing benefit rates and eligibility, and
  - c) Changes to the size and status of the social housing sector.

All of these have reduced the 'housing welfare safety net' and disadvantaged women in particular.

Conference notes that since 2020 the housing sector has become even more challenging for those seeking to rent properties on wages that many of our women members earn. This impacts on women and families in particular, meaning that many face long commutes to work as well as getting children to school.

Conference also notes that the Government has laid out legislation called the Renters Reform Bill which seeks to end no fault evictions and move to a simpler tenancy structure. Whilst the bill strengthens some renters' rights, it does not end all unfair evictions, nor does it end unfair affordability barriers that are put in place before someone can rent a property. However, the bill itself may not make it through parliament denying many women much needed protections.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- i) Work with Labour Link to highlight the needs of women and the clear need for rental reform.
- ii) Work with LAOS to produce a briefing sheet on housing and women.
- iii) Promote the work of UNISON's Housing Campaign and "Through the Roof" briefing document to all regions and branches.

***West Midlands Region***

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### **32. The Gender Pay Gap and Equal Pay**

This Conference notes:

The achievement of Claudia Goldin in winning the 2023 Nobel prize for economics for her work on gender pay inequality. Her work "provided the first comprehensive account of women's earnings and labour market participation through the centuries" and the main causes for the remaining gender pay gap. Her work also noted that progress in closing the gender pay is halting.

This Conference further notes:

That the last available data for the gender pay gap in the UK shows the median figure for the gender pay gap to be at 9.4% close to the level seen in 2017/18. The gender pay gap is wider in the public sector around 15%. Construction, finance and education have the widest gender pay gaps.

This lack of movement is despite the requirement of organisations with more than 250 employees to report their gender pay gap data. The United Kingdom sits behind France, Belgium and Sweden where employers are forced by legislation to address gender pay gaps directly.

This Conference recognises:

That despite the introduction of equality proofed pay systems, many of our largest employers are now subject to potential legal action around equal pay.

Therefore, this Conference calls upon National Women's Committee to work with Labour link, the NEC and the TUC Women's Committee to:

- 1) Campaign for employer action plans to force employers to reduce gender pay gaps.
- 2) Look to produce a tool-kit for branches on gender pay gaps and equal pay.

***West Midlands Region***

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### **33. Time to Smash the Gender Pay Gap**

Despite The Equal Pay Act coming into force over 50 years ago, there remains a persistent gender pay gap in workplaces across the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. According for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), median hourly pay for full-time employees was 8.3% less for women than for men in April 2022, while median hourly pay for part-time employees was 2.8% higher for women than for men (figures exclude overtime pay). However, because more women work part time the gender pay gap for all employees is considerably larger than the full-time and part-time gaps. The gender pay gap for all employees was 14.9% in April 2022.

The gender pay gap cannot be considered in isolation as it is influenced by other factors such as age, location and employment sector:

- 1) The gender pay gap for women in their 20s and 30s is relatively small, but a substantial gap emerges among full-time employees aged 40 and over.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

- 2) The gender pay gap steadily increases after a woman has her first child.
- 3) Women working in the financial and insurance industry face the biggest gap.
- 4) The public sector has a slightly smaller pay gap for full time workers and a larger gender pay gap for part time workers than the private sector.
- 5) The full-time gender pay gap is highest in the South East and East Midlands and negative in Northern Ireland.

It is also important that the gender pay gap is not considered in isolation and more must be done to fully understand the impact of multiple pay gaps. While work is at an early stage on ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting, research suggests that the gender pay gaps faced by Black or disabled women are higher. This means that work to close the gender pay gap must also pay attention to the intersectional profile of the workforce.

Conference believes that we need branches who are able and willing to work with their employer on a local level to tackle the gender pay gap and that they need the support from their service group executives to deliver real change for members.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- a) work with Service Group Executives through the service group liaison committee to support the inclusion of calls on employers to end the gender pay gap as part of annual pay claims.
- b) refresh and relaunch the "Bridge the Gap" campaign and consider providing the opportunity for service groups to tailor the campaign for their workplaces and members.
- c) develop and promote negotiating guidelines to support branches to negotiate local action plans to close the gender pay gap.
- d) work with the Learning & Organising Services team (LAOS) to develop bitesize training on understanding the gender pay gap and how to develop meaningful action plans to close the pay gap.
- e) consider submitting a bid to the Campaign Fund to commission research on the gender pay gap in key sectors and the impact that leadership and development programmes that specifically target women are having on closing the gap.
- f) consider offering national service groups and the other Self Organised Groups the option to include a session on tackling the gender pay gap in one of their future conferences.

***Scotland Region***

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

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### **34. Year of LGBT+ workers – Let's embed LGBT+ equality in our union**

Conference celebrates that we are at the beginning of UNISON's the Year of LGBT+ Workers and welcomes the opportunity that this provides to promote UNISON as the union for LGBT+ workers, raise awareness of LGBT+ rights, challenge discrimination, and recruit and activate LGBT+ members.

The year highlights the important contribution our LGBT+ members make to the union, to improving employment conditions for LGBT+ workers and to campaigning more broadly on equality for LGBT+ people. But there is still much more to do.

LGBT+ women still face mental and physical health challenges at a higher rate than other workers, as well as discrimination in the workplace. This is even more marked for Black and disabled LGBT+ women. Trans women have become a target of serious abuse by the right-wing media, certain Christian groups, and elements from within the Conservative Government. Bi+ women are less likely to be 'out' to their families or at work and are more likely to experience domestic abuse. For some LGBT+ women, work may be the only place they can be their authentic self because of the animosity they face at home, and in wider society.

Conference recognises the UNISON has been key to campaigns to improve the rights of LGBT+ women within the workplace and wider society and has played an active role in the repeal of section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, and the introduction of civil partnerships and marriage for LGBT+ people.

As a trade union, we need to continue to encourage active recruitment and promotion of LGBT+ women in UNISON and strive for LGBT+ representation at all levels of leadership. By fostering diversity in leadership, we not only provide role models for LGBT+ members but also bring diverse perspectives to decision-making, benefiting the entire union.

To achieve this, all branches should be encouraged to support local LGBT+ Pride events and run awareness campaigns within the workplace and make UNISON's LGBT+ materials visible.

Conference acknowledges that tackling systemic and ingrained discrimination against LGBT+ women will take more than one year. Conference further recognises the need to use the success of the year of LGBT+ workers to continue our work and embed the work on LGBT+ equality in all areas of our union.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the appropriate bodies within the union to:

- 1) Promote UNISON's year of LGBT+ workers, including national and regional events;
- 2) Encourage regions and branches to use days in the LGBT+ calendar to promote the work that UNISON does for LGBT+ equality;
- 3) Continue to raise awareness of LGBT+ women's rights and discrimination throughout the union;

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- 4) Promote and participate in equality training, and in particular the trans ally training;
- 5) Promote and encourage the use of UNISON LGBT+ guidance, fact sheets and model policies in workplaces.

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

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#### **35. Trans equality is UNISON business**

Conference recalls the “trans equality – louder and prouder” motion that was adopted by the 2022 women’s conference, which acknowledged the toxic debate ignited by the United Kingdom (UK) government’s consultation on reforming the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) and recognised the need for our union, including the national women’s committee, to become more visible and more vocal – louder and prouder - in supporting and promoting trans equality.

However, trans women have continued to be a target of serious abuse by the right-wing media, certain Christian groups, and elements from within UK politics. And it’s having a devastating impact as seen in the most recent hate crime statistics in England and Wales, which reported that transgender hate crime rose 56% in the period of 2021/22 compared with the previous year.

In response to this, the national LGBT+ committee has worked with UNISON College to create the successful trans ally training across our union. This helps members to better understand the issues our trans, non-binary and gender diverse members face and how to be allies to them. We are proud of how many members have taken part in this programme and how many trans, non-binary and gender diverse members have become activists because of this work. It also shows that by equipping members with knowledge and empathy, we can facilitate more welcoming and supportive workplaces.

Tackling systemic and ingrained discrimination against all women takes time. Therefore, it’s imperative that UNISON remains committed and vocal in support of reform to the GRA, including self-identification through the legal process of statutory declaration. Equally, we remain committed to continuing our support for our trans, non-binary and gender diverse members.

Conference is unequivocal in its solidarity with trans women and believes that:

- Trans women are women and present no risk or threat to single sex spaces.
- Feminism and allyship with trans women go hand in hand.

Conference calls upon the National Women’s Committee to work with the National LGBT+ Committee to:

Produce a statement of support and solidarity to our trans siblings and our non-binary and gender diverse comrades,

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

- 1) Continue working to increase the strength and visibility of UNISON's work to promote trans equality among women members,
- 2) Encourage women members to undertake the trans ally training,
- 3) Promote UNISON materials, such as the factsheet on reform of the Gender Reform Act, to help branches and members to counter the myths and disinformation being spread by those campaigning to roll back the existing rights of trans people.

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

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### **36. Defending Trans Rights and Self-Identification**

Conference notes that UNISON has a proud record of defending and promoting trans rights.

We re-iterate UNISON's stated positions and stand in solidarity with our trans comrades and will fight for a full ban on trans 'conversion therapy', to immediately scrap all barriers to legal self-identification of gender, for fully funded trans healthcare and our NHS and to stop the attacks on provision of puberty blockers.

Conference recognises that the rights of trans people do not conflict with the rights of other oppressed groups.

Conference therefore condemns the attempts by Sunak's Tory government to whip up 'culture wars' against an already demonised group, in a desperate attempt to get re-elected. demonising vulnerable LGBT+ people.

It is in this context that Conference expresses its disappointment that Labour has significantly weakened its stance on trans rights. As recently as 2021, Keir Starmer was promising he would introduce self-identification for trans people, removing the requirement for a medical diagnosis in order to obtain a gender recognition certificate. Yet Labour has now backtracked and moved away from the principle of self-identification.

Trans people and their allies know they will be better off under Starmer, Dodds and Cooper than Sunak, Badenoch and Braverman. But what they expect to see from Labour is the courage and integrity that led to the Equality Act reflected in the party's next manifesto

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to publicise that any member self-identifying as a woman will be able to participate in the Women's Self Organised Structures.

Conference also calls on the National Women's Committee to liaise with our LGBT+ Committee to seek raise these issues as a matter of urgency with Labour Link, with a view to UNISON urging the Labour Party leadership to speak out clearly and consistently in support of trans rights including adopting the principle of self-identification.

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Conference further calls on the National Women's Committee to work with the LGBT+ Committee and the NEC and General Secretary to promote UNISON'S position on trans right is promoted in the wider trade union and labour movement.

*Wirral*

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### **37. ERWC Motion: Year of the Black worker, the legacy and celebrating Black women past, present and future**

2023 was designated by Unison as the year of the Black worker. Conference, it was an incredible year to be part of both as members and as Black female activists. On a national level at the Delegates and other national conferences, many events and initiatives celebrated this, including fringe and the Black members events.

Having a voice and being seen as Black members and workers has made this a huge part of the success of the year's designation. However, in equal importance, we must all use our voices to support the legacy of the year of the Black worker and show continued solidarity with our Black female comrades going forward.

We know that Unison's membership is currently made up of around 80% women and as such, we should ensure that a legacy remains by continuing to collectively be the voice that raises our Black sisters. We know that Black women are underrepresented in Unison roles and at conferences, this must change to make it truly representative.

There are many prolific Black women who have shaped union activism and equality in the UK; one such example is Jayaben Desai, who between 1976 – 1978 led a strike (backed by Apex and a local postal union) when she protested against her treatment at her job in the Grunwick photo processing laboratory in North London; she was fed up of being humiliated by the management, receiving lower pay in comparison to similar factories (despite the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1970); shameful disregard for basic provisions such as going to the toilet; and being asked to do (though they really couldn't refuse) short notice overtime which required them to work into the late hours of the night.

This treatment, of course, was not just because they were women but also an intersectional issue of race as the employers were aware that the majority of the impacted employees were immigrants to the UK escaping persecution from South Asia and were treated as unskilled immigrants as the norm. When Desai walked out, 137 colleagues also walked out with her (there were 500 employees) and continued to strike for 2 years. It is also recorded that at one event there were 20,000 (male, female, Black and white) people supporting their strike. Whilst they did not get the outcome they wanted, it did leave a legacy of united activism, challenging inequality, and highlighted the issue of the stereotyping of Southern Asian women.

What this motion seeks to address is the continued recognition and support of Black workers past and to continue this representation and celebration of Black female workers in the present and the future. We only need to look at the statistics: TUC analysis reveals that 60% (2020) of self-employed Black women are low paid; London School of Economics (2021) also stated that Black women are the least

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likely to be among the UK's top earners compared to any other racial or gender group. Doreen Lawrence (Chair of the Labour Race Equality Act Taskforce) cited the systematic inequality which led to Black communities being disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (Guardian, 12th October 2022); and in 2017, the TUC analysis of 3.1million Black workers, showed that they were much more likely to be in insecure jobs such as zero hours contracts.

The Eastern Region Women's committee ask the National Women's committee to undertake the following:

- 1) Work with the NEC and its campaign committee to highlight historical and present Black female activists in its digital campaigns.
- 2) Work with the NEC and its campaign committee to specifically refer to historical Black female activists as inspirational figures and to include them and their activism as part of our inheritance and legacy in Unison through inclusion in educational materials (digital and otherwise).
- 3) Work with the NEC and its campaign committee together with SOG's and appropriate bodies to build stronger campaigns referring to past / present wins for Black women with Black women where it applies.
- 4) Create an award for an outstanding Black woman (or women) activist(s) of the year as part of the legacy of the year of the Black worker 2023; and
- 5) Work together with SOGs to ensure greater representation of Black women in positions within Unison at all levels, and as delegates to national conferences.

***Eastern Region***

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### **38. Equal Pay is for Life**

Equal pay is nothing new, in 1910 Mary Macarthur led the women chain makers of Cradley Heath to victory in their fight for a living wage by leading a strike to force the employers to implement the rise.

In 1968 a group of women workers followed suit at the Ford factory in Dagenham which led to the Equal Pay Act in 1970. From Agenda for Change to the green book Job Evaluation Scheme and much later Equal Pay Law being covered by the Equality Act of 2010, equal pay for women members continues to be an issue today.

Conference, it has been 54 years since the Equal Pay Act came into force but the fact we need to raise the issue again in the 21st Century is depressing and illegal for it to be happening.

Whilst we can celebrate the achievements for women on equal pay that have occurred since the 1970's, as a union with the largest number of women members this issue needs to remain a priority for UNISON.

We call upon the National Women's Committee to:



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- 1) Work with the NEC and other bodies of the union to continue to raise awareness and support women members facing inequality through pay in the workplace;
- 2) Work with the NEC and other bodies of the union to continue to keep equal pay at the top of UNISON's priorities; and,
- 3) Work with LAOS to identify and deliver appropriate training for activists.

### ***City of Wolverhampton Local Government***

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#### **39. Outsourcing Public Services: Impact on Women Workers**

Conference notes that within the public sector, almost 65% of workers are women and as more and more of the public sector is sold off, increasing numbers of working women are facing precarious and low paid work as a result. This is also an intersectionality issue with Black women and disabled women being disproportionality impacted.

Conference also notes that the Labour Party and trade unions, including UNISON, have co-produced the New Deal for Working People which will see a strengthening of worker and trade union rights within the first 100 days of a Labour Government, alongside "the biggest wave of insourcing of public services for a generation" which would reverse the race to the bottom that outsourcing has inflicted on hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers, disproportionately hitting women and Black workers.

Conference is aware that the privatisation and outsourcing of public sector contracts have been a failure for those dependent on them and for those employees delivering public services. Numerous reports have found that outsourcing contracts were poor value for money, carried huge social costs and often benefited overseas shareholders of multinational companies.

Conference is also aware that outsourcing usually moves employees from a job-evaluation-based, equality-proofed pay system in the public sector to a pay system where, managerial discretion over pay is higher, performance pay is more common and there is a complex array of groups of staff on different terms and conditions. Transparency around pay is also lower and these features make pay discrimination towards women more likely, and makes it much more difficult to identify and challenge.

Conference notes that most companies to which public services are outsourced state their intentions to provide pay and benefits that are in line with market rates which, for jobs predominantly performed by female, part-time workers are much lower than those in the public sector.

Conference understands that the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a duty on public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act and that private organisations don't have to comply with the duty. Therefore, where public services are threatened with privatisation or outsourcing, NHS Trusts, Local Authorities, Health Boards or integrated care systems, and others in England, Scotland or Wales should:

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- a) take ownership and accountability for PSED considerations when making decisions on commissioning and outsourcing decisions that affect the workforce
- b) undertake and publish evidence-based Equality Impact Assessments which assess the impact that commissioning and outsourcing decisions will have on groups with protected characteristics
- c) monitor contractors to ensure the required workforce data is provided
- d) develop a procurement strategy that is equality impact assessed
- e) consider ways in which the existing procurement process and duties can be used to improve compliance with the PSED's general duty; for example, how they can be incorporated into principles of the Social Impact policy/Social Value Model/Social Value Wales Model and tendering and contract management processes.

Conference, therefore, asks the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Provide and promote guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and the use of Equality Impact Assessments in relation to the procurement of public service contracts
- 2) Provide updated resources and training to women's officers, branches and activists
- 3) Work with the National Labour Link Committee and the wider union to promote Labour's New Deal for Working People within workplaces and communities

### ***Newcastle Hospitals Unison Branch***

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#### **40. Access to Apprenticeships for Part-time Women Workers**

Conference is concerned that women workers are being refused access to apprenticeships on the bases of working part-time.

Conference is aware that 5.87 million people work within the public sector with 1.96 million working within the NHS and 2 million working in Local Government.

Conference is also aware that around 65% of public sector workers are women and that around 38% of women work part-time.

Conference notes that women are less likely to progress within the workplace and are more likely to be overqualified for the role they are in. Working part-time is linked with:

- 1) Limited pay progression
- 2) Structural barriers during recruitment and appointment processes

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

3) Reduced access to training and development opportunities, reward, and promotion

These all contribute to the continued existence and widening of the Gender Pay Gap.

Conference further notes that supporting women to progress, to use and develop their skills can help in attracting and retaining talent whilst also increasing productivity and performance. There is clear evidence to show that actions can and do help to close the Gender Pay Gap. Such actions include:

- a) create an inclusive culture
- b) support women's career development
- c) progression for part-time workers
- d) improve recruitment and promotion processes
- e) measure and evaluate policies to support diversity and inclusion

Conference is aware that a shortage of flexible and part-time apprenticeship programmes mean that women are missing out on training and development opportunities as only one in 10 apprenticeships are contracted to work for less than 30 hours per week.

Conference is also aware that the current guidance from the Government is that "If, at the beginning of the programme, the apprentice works fewer than 30 hours a week you must extend the expected duration of the apprenticeship on the ILR (pro rata) to take account of this. You must also extend the dates on the apprenticeship agreement and training plan." However, some employers are using the 30 hours rule to discount part-time workers contracted to work less than 30 hours and for those working zero-hours contracts.

Therefore, conference asks the National Women's Committee to:

Provide tools to support women's officers, branches, regions, SOG's and service groups to identify how widespread the issue is

- i) Provide resources to branches and activists to aide local negotiating around access to apprenticeship for part-time workers
- ii) Work with the National Labour Link Committee to put pressure on the Government to issue stronger renewed guidance on part-time and flexible apprenticeships to clarify the position for employers

***Newcastle Hospitals Unison Branch***

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### 41. Fair representation for Disabled Members

UNISON is a union that strongly believes in equality, diversity and inclusion. We recruit and encourage activism from members of all backgrounds and our self-organisation structure is recognised as an example of good practice. We work hard to promote the rights of disabled people and are proud of everything we have achieved.

We estimate that between 350,000 and 400,000 (between 27% and 30%) of UNISON Members are disabled with around 80% of those being disabled women. This is based on the percentage of working age people who are disabled combined with evidence that more disabled people work in the sectors where UNISON represents and the ageing workforce in these sectors.

Despite this our Disabled Members, and disabled women in particular, are under represented on many of our national committees with few openly Disabled Members holding chairing positions. This includes self organised group (SOG) committees, service group executive (SGE) committees and NEC sub-committees which do not always reflect the diversity of our union.

Disabled Members have to overcome many barriers to be elected into positions of responsibility, including as chairs of national committees. As in any organisation, there can be 'gate keepers' who want to retain positions of power.

Some of the other barriers Disabled Members face include:

- 1) Not enough understanding of reasonable adjustments and how they work in practice.
- 2) Not enough Disabled Members on national committees to allow a strong enough voice for Disabled Members to get elected into leadership positions.
- 3) Not enough flexibility in elected positions. For example, if chair and vice-chair positions could be job-share roles in the way they are on National Disabled Members Committee (NDMC) this could be a reasonable adjustment for some Disabled Members.
- 4) No consistency in reserved seats on SOG committees. For example, NDMC has two reserved seats for representatives from LGBT+ Committee and two from Disabled LGBT+ caucus but National LGBT+ Committee don't have reserved seats for NDMC.
- 5) Some branches and regions not encouraging Disabled Members to stand for roles that aren't specifically roles for Disabled Members.
- 6) Some branches, regions and committees consistently sending non-disabled representatives and delegations to national committees and conferences.

Equality, diversity and inclusion is a core principle in UNISON and Disabled Members must be at the heart of this. It is time to break down the barriers that prevent Disabled Members, and disabled women in particular, from fully participating in all our union's structures.

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We have fair representation rules for Disabled Members and other diverse groups but they are not as strong as the proportionality rules for women and men.

Conference believes it is important that SOGs, SGE's and the NEC take a proactive approach and seek to ensure that all national committees and their chairs reflect the diversity of our union including Disabled Members.

As the largest self-organised group in UNISON, women can take a leading role in helping Disabled Members, and disabled women in particular, to overcome the barriers they face. Where National Women's Committee (NWC) lead the rest of our union will follow.

Conference instructs the National Women's Committee to work with NDMC to:

- a) Promote opportunities for disabled women members to advance in all our democratic structures.
- b) Create guidance for NWC to create a level playing field for disabled women members who wish to stand for election to positions of responsibility including chairing roles.
- c) Identify and seek to eliminate barriers that may prevent disabled women from standing for positions of responsibility, including chairing roles, on NWC. This should include considering more flexibility when filling positions to remove or reduce the barriers that stop disabled women from standing.
- d) Develop and deliver training, with support from the UNISON College, for NWC to pilot to increase understanding of reasonable adjustments, raise awareness of the unconscious bias and micro-aggressions disabled people face and the importance of making our union more inclusive for Disabled Members.
- e) Consider ways to support disabled women, including mentoring and peer support, to gain the confidence to become more active on NWC including in roles of responsibility such as chairing positions.
- f) Identify best practice and share the lessons learned with other SOGs, SGEs and the NEC.

### ***National Disabled Members Committee***

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#### **42. Neurodiversity and Women Members**

Building on the work of a previous conference in 2018, this motion aims to further address the issue of neurodiverse women in the workplace and how they can be appropriately supported in careers.

More women are being diagnosed as neurodiverse, yet many women are still waiting for tests and a diagnosis of Autism and ADHD. As a result women may lack the confidence and knowledge to ask for the support they need.

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It is important that neurodiverse women feel valued and appreciated at work, as they can bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their organisation.

This Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Develop a workplace policy template that is primarily focused on Neurodiversity and Women in the Workplace which includes training for staff, especially managers, to ensure staff are given the help they need to live and work confidently with their condition.
- 2) Develop and promote learning around Neurodiversity to activists and members
- 3) Highlight and share the work of Unison groups and how they can provide strength and assistance to neurodivergent women.

*Newcastle City*

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### **43. Inspiring Trade Union Women Make Herstory**

Conference notes with concern the continuing under-representation and muting of women's voices, particularly working-class women's voices, across many sections of society, from politics to the arts to the workplace. Conference believes that if we want the role of women in any campaign to be remembered, we need to be the ones that tell that story.

Women in the trade union movement have always played a significant role in social movements and social change. We can be proud of the role that Trade Union women played in achieving the Scottish Parliament and the 50/50 campaign amongst others. In the same way, the women of the Trade Union movement, played a major role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process and were directly involved in the Good Friday Agreement negotiations. Sadly, in the coverage of the recent anniversaries of both the Good Friday Agreement and the Scottish Parliament, there was little mention of the role of women in the creation of either of them let alone trade union women.

Conference notes and commends the work of the STUC Women's committee in creating the Inspiring Women book to raise awareness of the many women who have played a significant role in Scottish Political life. Recent work of the STUC Women's Committee focused on developing the 'Herstory' project which has given the skills and confidence to trade union women to convey rich stories of their activism, and which has begun the recording and sharing of these stories more widely.

Conference also applauds the campaign run in Northern Ireland to work with Women's groups to rename streets after inspiring women activists which raises awareness of these women to the wider public.

Conference calls on the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) work with regional women's committees to collate examples of inspiring women from across the UK

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- 2) consider submitting a bid to the campaign fund to create a repository of women trade union history which would be an online resource with the option of downloadable material.
- 3) identify new ways of sharing and promoting the stories collected, across the wider trade movement.

### *Scotland Region*

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#### **44. Long Covid**

According to the Gender and Public Health emergencies working group, by August 2022 long COVID had negatively impacted over 100 million people worldwide with residual symptoms that could persist many months or potentially a lifetime after having the acute infection.

Symptoms of long COVID include shortness of breath, chest pain, brain fog, fatigue, myalgias, and gastrointestinal issues. While research is limited regarding this condition, a systematic review revealed that more than half of those who had SARS-CoV-2 infection experienced long COVID for up to six months.

Gender differences have been evident since the pandemic's birth, as women are more likely to be infected with COVID, whereas men with acute infection exhibit higher mortality rates. However, the working group have highlighted that women are four times more susceptible to long COVID than men.

Women and girls may be more susceptible to long COVID due to their stronger immune responses. Women have been shown to have heightened IgG antibody production, which is protective in the early phase of COVID-19 but can prolong inflammation if persistently elevated. Studies have also found that inflammatory marker IL-6 is elevated months after COVID-19 infection, especially in women. Immune T cells are more active in women than in men. Women have two copies of the X chromosome, which contains many genes coding for the immune system, whereas men have only one. Also, women of reproductive age have stronger immune systems because they have adapted to support pregnancy. Ultimately, all of these factors contribute to a hyperactive and prolonged inflammatory reaction in women that leads to the persistent fatigue, myalgias, cognitive changes and other symptoms that characterize long COVID. Women may also face persistent complications in cardiovascular and pulmonary function due to long COVID. In addition to multiple physical symptoms, women also experience psychological manifestations of long COVID. Depression, anxiety, memory issues, and sleep disturbances are common psychological consequences of long COVID. A survey reported an increase in depression during the pandemic among 83 percent of working women compared to 36 percent of working men. Financial stressors during the pandemic significantly impact women and compound mental health concerns.

Doctors also think that long COVID worsens the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause. Lower levels of oestrogen and testosterone appear to be the reason. The symptoms of both the menopause and long COVID can be very hard to tell apart and it's important that women get the right diagnosis and treatment.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

The long-term symptoms of COVID-19 will impede women's ability to work. Women already face a high percentage of job loss in society, but now many women have reported difficulty entering the workforce due to brain fog, pain, and chronic exhaustion from long COVID. There is a fear of unemployment as more days are taken off to recover from symptoms. This further exacerbates COVID-19's disproportionate impact on women even beyond the health sphere. Unison need to be at the forefront in supporting and representing women members who are experiencing long COVID symptoms. Thanks to Unison many employers, have or are introducing policies, procedures and guidance relating to the Menopause and there should now be some dialogue about doing the same with regards long COVID.

With the above in mind, we are asking the National Women's Committee to:

- 1) Conduct a survey of women members to identify workplace issues that are affecting those with long COVID.
- 2) Look into existing research on the impact for women of long COVID which can inform the producing of Unison guidance and factsheets for members.
- 3) Work with regional committees, branches to support representatives in negotiating a long COVID policy in the workplace.

### ***South East Region***

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#### **45. PTSD Awareness**

This conference notes that PTSD can occur to any person regardless of ethnicity, nationality, gender, occupation, culture and at any age.

Trauma can be triggered by events such as road traffic incidents, experiencing life threatening illness; bereavement witnessing suicide or attempted suicide, natural disasters, or terrorist attacks.

The myth is that only those who serve in the military or emergency services will be affected. Evidence disproves this.

50% of people will experience trauma at some point in their life. The majority will only experience short term distress due to a traumatic event however 20% of people will go onto develop PTSD (equivalent to 1 in 10 people)

Women may experience PTSD differently from men and will experience symptoms for a longer period before diagnosis and treatment.

Women who experience abuse whether physical, emotional, verbal, sexual can suffer long term impact on their mental health, such as depression, anxiety, hypervigilance, disassociation, and avoidance. They are more likely to be given a diagnoses of Emotionally Unstable Personality disorder than men.

PTSD is associated with impairment in a person's ability to function in social or family life including occupational instability, marital problems, family discord, and



## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

difficulty parenting. This can lead to women not seeking help for fear of losing their children and their employment.

Many PTSD sufferers feel emotionally numb, have trouble communicating with others about what they are feeling. It can lead to problems with memory and cognition and increased risk of maladaptive coping strategies including drug or alcohol misuse and self harm

The treatment for PTSD is not a one size fits all and specialist treatment and support is difficult to access.

We call upon conference and the National Women's committee to:

Raise awareness of how PTSD affects women.

Campaign for accessible treatments that are person centred for women.

Work with officers to produce guidance for women on PTSD awareness.

Promote a campaign of PTSD awareness and how it impacts women within the wider union, regions and branches.

### ***South East Region***

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#### **46. Legal aid disadvantaging women**

Conference, access to justice through legal aid was already significantly restricted following the major changes to legal aid in 2012. However, shockingly a recent report by the Women's Budget group has found that women have been disproportionately affected by these changes, leaving them without essential support to fight discrimination, violence, and housing insecurity.

Conference, Dr Sara Reis, the head of policy and research and deputy director of the Women's Budget Group, said: "The report reveals a troubling reality: the legal aid changes introduced in 2012 have cut a critical lifeline for vulnerable women including survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and asylum-seeking women, leaving them without essential legal support in the face of discrimination, violence and housing insecurity."

Conference, the report, funded by the Community Justice Fund, identified the following significant barriers for women attempting to access legal aid:

- 1) Ineligibility, for example some employment discrimination not being included in legal aid.
- 2) Inaccessibility due to insufficient legal aid providers.
- 3) Lack of awareness and signposting of what qualifies for legal aid

Conference, UNISON provide exemplary legal services to our members on a range of areas, including employment issues, however, we need to lobby for improvements

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

to legal aid so that our members can access support in other areas that is not covered by union membership, when needed.

Conference, we ask the National Women's Committee to:

a) Work with the NEC and all appropriate sections of the unions and our partners, including Labour Link to lobby for improvement to the law to ensure women are not disproportionately affected by legal aid.

b) Report back on progress to National Women's Conference 2025.

### ***South Tyneside Local Government***

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#### **47. Artificial Intelligence a gift or a curse for women**

Conference, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way we live our lives and inevitably will have significant consequences within our working lives too.

Conference, we recognise the value of AI and as recently highlighted by PWC, AI alone could add an estimated £232 billion to the UK economy by 2030. The introduction of

new technology in the workplace can help to improve work for staff and make it fairer, safer, faster, less monotonous, more productive. However, it is essential to recognise that new technology in the workplace will also put jobs at risk.

Concerningly, due to the makeup of the workforce, it is likely that women will face a disproportionate AI job automation risk. A recent study by McKinsey found that women are one and half times more likely to be impacted by artificial intelligence job replacement. A United Nations study has also found women are more greatly exposed to potential job losses caused by generative AI, due to their over representation in clerical jobs.

Conference, we know that the introduction of new technology at work is often made without a clear and reasoned justification provided by the employer. Sometimes the justification given is disproportionate to any need. And too often new technology is introduced in the workplace by employers outside of any collective bargaining process.

As a trade union that is made up of 70% women, we must be prepared to respond to these risks appropriately and ensure that in areas where AI technology is adopted, this is not to the detriment of UNISON women members

We ask the National Women's Committee to:

i) Work with Regional Women's Groups and service groups to build a body of evidence showing how AI technology is being used in workplaces currently and use the results to create a campaign to highlight the impacts.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- ii) Work with the NEC and all appropriate sections of the union and our partners, to update resources and bargaining guides for branches to best equip them for the ever changing environment of AI technology in the workplace.

*South Tyneside Local Government*

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### **48. Women and Gambling: Making the Invisible Visible**

Conference at least one suicide a day in the UK is linked to gambling harm.

Durham PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) Joy Allen who is the joint national lead on Addiction and Substances Misuse, has spearhead the pioneering work nationally and regionally to look at better supporting the impact by gambling addiction. Durham is here in the Northeast of England and research shows those most susceptible to harm are often concentrated in disadvantaged and deprived areas sadly here in the Northern region we already face serious health inequalities. Research by Public Health England has stated the economic burden of problem gambling on women differ from that of men to amount to more than£1.2billion a year.

Northern Women's Network invited PCC Joy Allen to speak to us on the effects of gambling from the fact of being the wife, mother, granny, sister etc with a spouse or family member who gambled.

Women are more than often deemed the ones taking on the protector role within their families, they feel the shame and so struggle carrying the debt, despair and hopelessness alone safeguarding their loved ones as the social and cultural pressures differ between men and women., she will cover up the debt or take on extra work to pay towards often spiralling debt within the home On top of this she will balance fall out with partner or children's behaviour problems linked to addiction of gambling. Which can lead to domestic abuse, homelessness, breakdown family relationships and poverty.

Over 1 million women are at risk of gambling harm according to study by GambleAware this is because the traffic to online casino & bingo sites on smartphones etc made access easier than going to traditional bingo halls and betting shops to add to this is the buying scratch cards and lotteries available across the retail industry.

Conference the stigma of gambling is the main barrier for women seeking support for fear of being judged and the fear to confide in those close to them as gambling is seen as "Acceptable" activity for men but not for women.

Conference there is a lack of widespread awareness, support and help for these women as the services available are just not there or tailored for men (developed for men by men ), it doesn't matter if it's from social services-healthcare -banks justice system and even family courts. Many workplaces don't have polices or where they do they are vague and more often fall to sickness or performance related or disciplinary actions that miss the issue are addiction on gambling harm

Conference we call upon the National Women's Committee

**2024 National Women's Conference  
UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

- 1) Work with our services groups to embed good practise in policies and supporting mechanisms to promote health and wellbeing of our women members Gambling and gambling Harm
- 2) Work with National Labour Link around the toughening of the regulation of sector and tighten controls of the industry practices that directed at women like the pink ads and spa days.
- 3) Work with LAOS to develop a training awareness package around harm of gambling and support of women by women
- 4) To report back to National Women's Conference 2025

***North Cumbria Northumberland & Tyne & Wear Health***

# 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

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## Motions Ruled Out of Order

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### Beyond Remit of the Conference

#### **Shifting the balance of power in the union – more work to be done – rule change**

Conference, traditionally trade unions have been dominated by men, with little flexibility and few opportunities for new activists, particularly women, to participate. Women make up around three-quarters of UNISON members and are at the forefront of many of our most important campaigns.

Conference, we know that our women members are our greatest asset in UNISON.

National Women's Committee supports and is committed to proportionality in all the policy it creates and in previous years has supported motions brought by North West and Northern Women's Network to do specific work to increase the participation of Black, disabled and LGBT+ women and to work on proportionality in all areas of the union.

UNISON rules and guidance provides for the principles of proportionality and fair representation to be implemented in UNISON elections and delegations. Yet, despite the union's strong commitment to proportionality the unfortunate reality is that in many branches proportionality is not achieved and as such creates an imbalance.

Conference, we know many motions have been passed over the years to address this imbalance and work is being done to shift the balance of power across the union. However, this will take time to be embedded.

Conference, the UNISON Rule book 1.10.4 provides for self-organised groups (including National Women's Conference) to submit a total of two motions and/or amendments to rule at National Delegate Conference. Conference, as a union that is made up of 80% women, how can it be that women's motions and therefore priorities are limited in such a way?

Conference therefore calls upon the National Women's Committee to:

- To do a full review of all structures, rules and policies to see if proportional representation truly reflects the makeup of UNISONs membership.
- To report back the findings at national women's conference 2025.
- To work with the NEC to create an action plan to ensure proportional representation is implemented across all structures, rules and policies.

***Northern Region***

# 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

## Support At All Levels for Low Paid Women in UNISON

Addressing Barriers Faced by Low Paid Women in Unison Participation at National Level

The northwest regional women's committee acknowledges and recognizes the significant contributions of low paid women in various sectors, both in the workplace and at the national level. However, we are deeply concerned about the barriers still being faced by these women when attempting to participate in unison activities at the national level due to various financial obstacles, complicated forms, and delayed financial support.

Financial Barriers:

- Many low paid women are unable to participate due to the high costs associated with attending national-level events, such as registration fees, accommodation, travel expenses, and meals.
- The financial burden restricts opportunities for low paid women to engage, network, and collaborate with fellow participants, limiting their professional growth and hindering collective progress.

Complicated and Incomprehensible Forms:

- Low paid women often encounter forms and paperwork associated with national events that are excessively complicated and difficult to understand.
- These complexities result in frustration, misunderstandings, and ultimately deter participation, depriving low paid women of the chance to voice their concerns, share experiences, and learn from others.

Delayed Financial Support:

- The lengthy periods of time it takes for financial support to reach low paid women after an event severely impacts their financial stability.
- Many low paid women depend on prompt reimbursement to cover expenses already incurred, but the delays prevent them from taking part in subsequent activities, which perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, diminishing the representation and influence of low paid women.

We call upon the National Women's Committee to urge the relevant committees and authorities responsible for organizing national-level events to address the financial barriers that prevent low paid women from participating fully, by:

- Exploring and implementing measures to reduce overall costs associated with attending such events.
- Developing scholarship or subsidy programs specifically targeted at low paid women, ensuring equal access to educational and networking opportunities.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

- Collaborating with sponsors and partners to establish dedicated funding support to alleviate the financial burden faced by low paid women participants.

- We ask the National Women's Committee to liaise with the organizing committees to simplify and streamline the registration and paperwork process for low paid women, to ensure they can easily navigate and comprehend the necessary documents.

- We ask the National Women's Committee to liaise with the organizing committees that financial support for participation in national events is disbursed promptly, eliminating

long waiting periods that prevent low paid women from continuing their engagement in subsequent activities.

- That the National Women's Committee liaise with the LAOS team to urge all members to actively engage in promoting inclusivity within the organization, while also encouraging low paid women to participate in and shape national events, fostering a supportive and diverse environment.

This motion aims to address the barriers faced by low paid women in engaging at the national level and emphasizes the necessity of financial accessibility, simplified procedures, and timely support.

### *North West Region*

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#### **Supporting Young Mothers at Work**

Conference notes that the number of UK mothers in work reaches highest level for 20 years according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Conferences notes that the 2023 Working Families Index, found that significantly more parents are reporting it is 'financially harder to raise a family' and that 60% of respondents reported that making ends meet and raising a family has become more difficult 'over the last three years'.

Conference understands that a significant factor in this is childcare costs in the UK, with mothers twice as likely to report availability of childcare having an impact on their ability to work. This will not only impact the capacity to work, but also career progression, especially for mothers.

Conference believes that young UNISON members who are mothers are likely to be disproportionately affected by the burden of childcare costs and the cost of living crisis more widely, as they are more likely to be in entry level, lower paid jobs. Statistics from the ONS show that the average public sector pay is £629 a week, compared to £653 a week in the private sector.

Conference believes that these pressures on young mothers has an impact on their ability to participate fully in the workplace, including activism within UNISON.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

Conference believes that better pay and terms and conditions (especially around flexible working) and fully funded childcare provisions from government would go a long way in alleviating these pressures on young mother's and would give them more time, resources and opportunities within their workplace and careers. Conference believes that this would not only be beneficial to the individual but would also positively impact our public services.

Therefore, we ask National Women's Committee to:

- Work with the National Young Members Forum (NYMF) to actively support UNISON's pay campaigns, by encouraging young women to engage and participate in the pay structures & negotiations by responding to ballots and surveys producing the formats of communication majority of young members access like Tic Tok, Instagram
- Work with Regional Young Members groups work in conjunction with Regional Women's groups to promote the work of the said self-organised groups (SOGs) and encourage young women activist to participation within the groups they identify with .
- Work with NYMF who supports UNISON's campaigning on government funding of childcare for young working mothers and parents.
- Work with Regional Young Members groups to work with branches and activists to support young mother activists, to ensure that they can continue participation within UNISON and all its structures.

### ***North Cumbria Northumberland & Tyne & Wear Health***

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Could Place the Union in Legal Jeopardy

#### **Opposing International Men's Day**

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

***Wirral***

#### **Women Speaking up in our Union**

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

***Kirklees Local Government***

#### **Women and those identifying as women affected by bullying and the impact on their wellbeing within UNISON**

Not printed on the advice of the legal officer

***Cymru/Wales Region***



## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

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Not Competent

### **Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy**

Conference notes that in July 2022 the Government produced a Women's Health Strategy for England Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) that highlights that:

- ? Half the population is female
- ? Health & Social Care services were designed by men for men
- ? Women live longer than men, but have longer periods of ill health or life limiting conditions in later life
- ? Race, Disability and Sexual Orientation means women experiences of healthcare is further compromised

UNISON has more than a million women members who make up more than two thirds of our union and they can provide first-hand experience of how the many different health issues affecting women, and those who identify as women, can have a massive impact on their lives and daily functioning for years.

Without an all-encompassing policy on Whole Life women's health issues and the impact this has on all women in the workplace, women will continue to remain unsupported in many workplaces and face continued inequality.

Conference further notes that such a policy would also benefit trans men and other people with traditionally female reproductive systems. Even with hormone blockers and surgery, trans men can experience some biological issues that can, for example, impact severely on their mental health.

Conference acknowledges some progress has been made, for example, the introduction of Menopause Policies is a critical step forward in recognising the impact of menopause transition in the working lives of women members and is to be applauded. However, having broken through the brittle barrier of wilful ignorance on the menopause, we now need to go further.

Women experience unique health issues and conditions, from pregnancy and menopause to gynaecological conditions, such as uterine fibroids and pelvic floor disorders.

Some of these conditions are little understood within the NHS as well as within the workplace and members can face long waits for treatments, which compound the issues they face in the workplace.

Members in the North West have provided several examples of why they believe the development of a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy is vital. These examples include up to 75 per cent of urinary tract infections being missed because of outdated urine testing, leaving women susceptible to Chronic Embedded Urinary Tract Infections and a quality of life that can be equivalent to crippling rheumatoid arthritis, terminal cancer or end-stage renal failure; women undertaking demanding roles while experiencing excruciating period pain; women being severely impacted

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day to day with both Endometriosis and Pre Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder while dealing with ill-informed employers and a wait of up to 8 years for a diagnosis; inconsistencies in the way women are treated by employers.

A Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy would broaden the knowledge and understanding of both the Trade Union and employers and formally recognise:

? Gynaecological health and disorders affecting women include menstruation and menstrual irregularities; urinary tract health, including urinary incontinence and pelvic floor disorders; and such disorders as bacterial vaginosis, vaginitis, uterine fibroids, and vulvodynia.

? Disorders related to infertility include uterine fibroids, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, and primary ovarian insufficiency.

? Pregnancy issues include pre-pregnancy care and prenatal care, pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth), preterm labour and premature birth, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), breastfeeding, and birth defects.

? This list is an indication of the many and various aspects of women's health but is by no means conclusive.

Recognising the specific health issues that impact on a woman's ability to work is a key equality measure.

Employers who ask the right questions, provide the right support and engage with women workers appropriately are more likely to retain staff across the board as attitudes change to health concerns.

Conference believes that taking a Whole Life approach to the impact of specific health conditions will be a union builder by encouraging more women to join a union and more taking on lay and elected representative roles.

Conference calls on the National Executive Council to:

- Conduct research into the unique health conditions facing all women members
- Use this research to develop a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy
- Work with LAOS to develop training for union representatives on Whole Life Women's Health issues and the impact they have on a women's life at work so they are better equipped to ensure employers engage with women workers and provide the right support

***Knowsley***

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

### **Better support and better rights for Women (Mother) with children with Disabilities**

Conference I want to bring attention there is 68 million population in Great Britain, but 16 million population are class of disability and there is 351,000 children's up to 17 years old disabled.

As mother like me who raise a child with infantile spasms (Children Epilepsy) and I do understand that every mum going through pregnancy and raise child. During maternity you suppose to enjoy looking after child at home with family surrounding but spending time in hospital having treatments, medication needs, regular meeting with specialist and 24/7 all-round care. Once your maternity leaves over and return to work but I do worry like other mothers about child's wellbeing and would your employer understand and support you. For example, emergency phone call for sick child or extra time off or workplace adjustments.

Applying disability allowance for disabled child is not easy and straight forward process. You had to complete 39 pages including evidence to prove your child is disabled and the results always rejected in which led family further debts. This force mother like me go back to work. Many employers thinks that this will be an issue as child will be sick all the time which can be classified as direct discrimination. This government does not pay attention to parents' prayers to get better support for children with disabilities, compensate majority activities, clubs, and schools SENCO, which would help families and specially mums to go back to work without worry about childcare. I am asking conference to support this motion and force government to give better financing and compensation for mothers or carers to hire care workers. Also make better structure for parents to get places in special schools and nurseries. Better funding Senco and community services that it was easily accessible without waiting long queues. Force employers give more flexible working hours for mothers with children who has special needs.

***Central Bristol Health***

### **Cuts in Education and the Impact on Women & Children In Northern Ireland**

Conference believes the cuts in Northern Ireland to Education as well as those in the Department for Communities, Infrastructure and Health will have the most detrimental impact on children and young people. In particular, it will impact children and young people who have the least and who require increased social investment to ensure that they have a fair chance to achieve, particularly through the cost of living emergency.

A lot of these cuts are to programmes and initiatives borne out of the covid-19 pandemic which represented crucial recognition that investment was urgently required to ensure that disadvantaged pupils opportunities were protected.

Conference notes with concern the cuts to Education which include:

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- An end to Free School Meal Payments during holiday periods ('Holiday Hunger Scheme') which provided 96,300 children with £27 a fortnight.
- An end to Happy Healthy Minds
- An end to Engage
- An end to the Digital Devices scheme
- An end to the Baby Book scheme
- A pause on capital development
- 28 New school projects paused
- A 40% cut to Free Period Products budget
- A 50% cut to the Shared Education budget
- A reduction in Nurture funding from £70 million to £62 million
- An end to schools coaching programme run by Irish Football Association (IFA) and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
- An end to funding available to Young Enterprise NI
- A pause on a cashless scheme for schools
- A depletion of funding available to Extended Schools (ES)
- A significant shortfall in resource for pupils with SEN

Conference believes that the Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris and the Tory government's deficit reduction strategy is unfair and will disproportionately disadvantage women and families, particularly those on low incomes.

Conference also believes that the Cost of Living Crisis should be viewed in the same way as the Covid crisis and warrants an urgent response to ensure that no long term harm is caused, particularly to women, children and young people.

Conference instructs the National Women's Committee to campaign against these cuts and to protect services that provide support and opportunities to those most in need.

***UNISON Northern Ireland***

### **Supporting our Migrant Workers**

We recognise that UNISON recruits and supports migrant workers, the most vulnerable of these people are usually women. These members are at risk of being charged deductions for their accommodation and living costs. There have been numerous cases where there has been an issue with what members have been paid. When what is received is felt to be an incorrect amount for the hours that they have worked. Often, they are not given pay slips that show anything other than a net

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

amount, so when they try to deal with this, they are ignored. Usually, they do not want to raise an issue for fear that they might lose their job.

Conference, these employers are aware that these vulnerable workers usually have no right to appeal to a tribunal as they have less than two years employment but also that their visa depends on them being employed. They think they can treat them how they want and to be honest they are getting away with this! These workers are scared because they would not only lose their jobs but also their right to residence. As ever until employees gain rights from day one, this behaviour will continue. The more training, knowledge, and awareness that we can gain as women activists (to support these colleagues) the better!

We call upon the National Women's Committee to:

Work with the NEC and other bodies of UNISON to identify those women this affects and to support them where possible.

Work with LAOS to provide training for all UNISON stewards on migrant law.

### ***City of Wolverhampton Local Government***

#### **Payment of UNISON Expenses up front**

This Conference recognises the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the general decline in wages is having on our women members and prospective members and activists.

The Southwest Region has a clear commitment to engage and recruit activists for succession building of our union, and to facilitate members to engage, they need the tools to be able to participate without barriers. The Southwest Women's Committee took a similar motion to our Regional Council and passed it unanimously as we knew that women were struggling to take part in UNISON activities and proportionality was beginning to be affected.

We know that finance is one of the major barriers for women to become active.

At National Women's Conference 2023, Motion 24 from the National Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender plus Committee, amended and overwhelmingly supported by the National Women's Committee, stated that Branches should actively look to provide up front expenses for daily living, mileage and other associated expenses whilst undertaking duties on behalf of the union and that childcare provision is not an afterthought.

Whilst the NEC has made provision for expenses to be paid in advance this has to be a request rather than the norm. This conference asks that all members of UNISON are treated equally and that members do not have to go cap in hand to get this provision.

This Conference asks that all Branches, Regional and National Committees and conferences allow and encourage prepayment to members to have expenses paid upfront.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

***South West Region***

### **UNISONs Domestic Abuse Charter – still more to do**

Conference notes that the impact of domestic abuse is far ranging and will and does inevitably affect workers, colleagues, families, and friends.

It is important that domestic abuse is not ignored or misunderstood within the workplace. We welcome the fact that UNISON recognises that domestic abuse is a trade union issue; has developed information and guidance and has worked with women's committee to ensure domestic abuse is understood as a serious, recognisable, and preventable issue.

Conference also notes that women who identify within the LGBT+ group have been reporting increasing domestic abuse and, 25% of bi and lesbian women have experienced domestic abuse. The Scottish Transgender Alliance indicates domestic abuse sits at a shocking 80%.

Conference believes that it is important that we collaborate with women's organisations to break the taboo around abuse. Highlighting the importance of training about the impact of domestic abuse is key.

Workplaces have a role to play in supporting women experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Workplaces are seen to be a safe place that gives women respite if only for a few hours. Yet we still see some workplaces who are reluctant to implement workplace policies or guidance which would give women experiencing domestic abuse the courage to come forward and seek help and support.

Conference asks the National Women's committee to:

- 1) To work with regions to engage with local domestic abuse organisations to understand what training is available for branches and workplaces.
- 2) To survey all UNISON branches to see how many workplaces have been successful in signing up to the charter and what training has been rolled out.
- 3) To report the findings back to National Women's Conference 2025
- 4) To encourage workplaces where they have not signed UNISONs Domestic Abuse Charter to do so.

***UNISON Northern Energy***

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Not Sufficiently Clear

### **Gender equality and the human rights of women and LGBT+ persons**

Conference, gender equality is at the very heart of human rights and United Nations values. Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter, adopted by world leaders in 1945.

## **2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

Yet millions of women and LGBT+ persons around the world continue to experience discrimination in the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Moreover, many women, including transgender, gender diverse and intersex women, face compounded forms of discrimination—due to factors such as their age, race, ethnicity, disability, or socio-economic status—in addition to gender-based discrimination.

Effectively ensuring full enjoyment of human rights by women, girls, men, boys and people of diverse gender identities requires, first, a comprehensive understanding of the social structures, social norms and stereotyping, and power relations that frame not only laws and politics but also the economy, social dynamics, family life and community life.

Conference notes UN Human Rights is committed to working with national human rights institutions (NHRIs), civil society, and other stakeholders worldwide to:

- Reform discriminatory laws and policies which allow gender-based discrimination and bring them in line with the international human rights law;
- Transform discriminatory social norms and harmful gender stereotypes into more equal social structures and power relations for all genders;
- Eliminate gender-based violence;
- Guarantee the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights by all;
- Protect and expand the civic space of women human rights defenders and feminist movements;
- Facilitate equal participation of women, men and people of diverse gender identities in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life; and
- Ensure gender equality within the UN Human Rights Office and the United Nations.

## 2024 National Women's Conference UNISON PRELIMINARY AGENDA

Conference calls on the NWC to:

- Explore ways of working with the UN Human Rights to tackle discrimination faced by women and LGBT+ persons
- Report its findings to conference 2025

### *Yorkshire - Humberside Region*

#### **Carers – The forgotten members and motion**

Conference, back in 2017 UNISON Northern Energy formerly known as UNISON EDF Energy Doxford Branch brought a motion to conference to look at the possibility of setting up a carer's network both regionally and nationally or to allow carers to become active in the disabled members networks and to work with labour link to highlight the plight of women carers with MPs at national level to improve carers rights.

This was aimed to help support and provide a space to share experiences with other carers. However, seven years down the line, there has been no progress or further discussions. Since COVID the number of women carers has significantly increased, impacting on work, homelife and mental health.

According to Age UK there are 1.25 million sandwich carers in the UK, these are people caring for an older relative as well as family, of which 68% are Women.

Since Covid more women are becoming carers for family or friends and this can have a considerable effect on the lives of those who take on this role. While medical professionals and family members focus all their attention on the person who is ill, the carer can become the one in the shadows. Depending on the support needs of the cared for person, caring can be hard physical work, involving lifting, cleaning, personal care, and distrusted sleep.

We are aware of how far stretched Social Care and Services are and more women are carrying the burden of a broken care system by taking it upon themselves to care for vulnerable family members with no tangible support or signposting in place.

While there are some services out there to support women carers, Unison currently has no provision in place to help support our women members who are also caring for loved ones. Laws and legislation quite rightly protect the rights of citizens with disabilities and caring needs, but the laws in place do not go far enough to protect those women who are carers. Many women who both work and care for loved one's face issues regarding time off to attend hospital appointments or require emergency leave and if granted will usually be unpaid. This further impacts women on low pay as they struggle to make ends meet. Protecting the rights of carers is vital to both the carers themselves and the people they care for; they have a role to play in shaping legislation for carers and for people with disabilities as the carers are also impacted by the constraints.



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Conference calls on national women's committee

- 1) To revisit the asks from the original motion submitted in 2017 with a view to implementation.

### ***UNISON Northern Energy***

#### **Feeding choices for new mums**

Motion: Campaign to increase support and feeding choices for new mums

Every woman should have the right to choose how feed their babies – breast or formula - without judgement.

There should be no aggressive promotion of breast feeding or using infant formula. Only accurate information to enable mums / parents / carers to make informed decisions.

New mums should have access to support if or when they would like it. However, a reduction in the role of health visitors means funding is focused on post-natal support, leaving women with little support and advice to talk through feeding options.

Some women are being forced to breast feed because they can't afford the rising cost of formula, while others who aren't able to breast feed are having to rely on support services to feed their baby.

The cost of baby formula is so expensive in the current cost-of-living crisis that it is now being security tagged.

Support services say they are being forced to ration infant formula because demand is rocketing due to the cost of living.

And parents have been urged not to dilute formula after a baby was treated for life-threatening seizures after ingesting diluted formula.

Nobody should have to consider diluting baby formula in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

The current legislation preventing competitive pricing and offers on formula is out of date.

Formula companies should not be excessively profiting at the expense of innocent babies, and families should not have to pay excessive prices for formula.

Mums and families should not be penalised for not being able to breast feed or for choosing not to. Breast feeding is not possible for everyone.

Conference requests the National Women's Committee to:

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- Campaign for a comparison chart showing the nutritional value and scientific information on different baby formulas.
- Lobby to make this chart accessible to the public in one place.
- Lobby for a change in the law to allow formula to be available on offer, with restrictions on pricing and increases to be kept below inflation.

### ***North West Region***

#### **Women's Health Policy**

##### Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy

Conference notes that in July 2022 the Government produced a Women's Health Strategy for England Women's Health Strategy for England - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) that highlights that:

? Half the population of Britain is female

? Health & Social Care services were designed by men for men

? Women on average live longer than men, but have longer periods of ill health or life limiting conditions in later life

? Race, Disability and Sexual Orientation means women experiences of healthcare is further compromised

UNISON has more than a million women members who make up more than two thirds of our union and they can provide first-hand experience of how the many different health issues affecting women, and those who identify as women, can have a massive impact on their lives and daily functioning for years.

Without an all-encompassing policy on Whole Life women's health issues and the impact this has on all women in the workplace, women will continue to remain unsupported in many workplaces and face continued inequality.

A women's health policy would also benefit trans men and other people with female reproductive systems. Even with hormone blockers and surgery, trans men can experience some biological issues that can, for example, impact severely on their mental health.

We know some progress has been made, for example, the introduction of Menopause Policies is a critical step forward in recognising the impact of menopause transition in the working lives of women members and is to be applauded. However, having broken through the brittle barrier of wilful ignorance on the menopause, we now need to go further.

Women experience unique health issues and conditions, from pregnancy and menopause to gynaecological conditions, such as uterine fibroids and pelvic floor disorders.

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Some of these conditions are little understood within the NHS as well as within the workplace and members can face long waits for treatments, which compound the issues they face in the workplace.

Members in the North West have provided several examples of why they believe the development of a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy is vital. These examples include up to 75 per cent of urinary tract infections being missed because of outdated urine testing, leaving women susceptible to Chronic Embedded Urinary Tract Infections and a quality of life that can be equivalent to crippling rheumatoid arthritis, terminal cancer or end-stage renal failure; women undertaking demanding roles while experiencing excruciating period pain; women being severely impacted day to day with both Endometriosis and Pre Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder while dealing with ill-informed employers and a wait of up to 8 years for a diagnosis; inconsistencies in the way women are treated by employers.

A Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy would broaden the knowledge and understanding of both the Trade Union and employers and formally recognise:

? Gynaecological health and disorders affecting women include menstruation and menstrual irregularities; urinary tract health, including urinary incontinence and pelvic floor disorders; and such disorders as bacterial vaginosis, vaginitis, uterine fibroids, and vulvodynia. ? Disorders related to infertility include uterine fibroids, polycystic ovary syndrome, endometriosis, and primary ovarian insufficiency. ? Pregnancy issues include pre-pregnancy care and prenatal care, pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth), preterm labor and premature birth, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), breastfeeding, and birth defects.

? Women's Reproductive System and other cancers, while breast cancer can and does affect men, and men can inherit and pass on the brca gene, it overwhelmingly affects women

This list is an indication of the many and various aspects of women's health but is by no means conclusive.

Recognising the specific health issues that impact on a woman's ability to work is a key equality measure.

Employers who ask the right questions, provide the right support and engage with women workers appropriately are more likely to retain staff across the board as attitudes change to health concerns.

Northwest Regional Women's Committee believes that taking a Whole Life approach to the impact of specific health conditions will be a union builder by encouraging more women to join a union and more taking on lay and elected representative roles.

We call upon the national women's committee to:

- Commission research into the unique health conditions facing all women members

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- Use this research to develop a Whole Life Women's Health in the Workplace Policy
- Work with LAOS to develop training for union representatives on Whole Life Women's Health issues and the impact they have on a women's life at work so they are better equipped to ensure employers engage with women workers and provide the right support

### *North West Region*

#### **Right To Protest**

We note that many people, the majority of whom are women especially those working in low paid jobs, are facing an ever-increasing cost of living crisis due to this government.

Everyday costs, including childcare, are rising while employers (including the government) are refusing to increase pay.

A recent report by the Living Wage Foundation has found that.

- 60% of those surveyed have had to use a food bank
- 50% of those surveyed are worse off than a year ago
- 2 in 5 of those surveyed have regularly skipped meals or have fallen behind in paying household bills.

Already women are at a disadvantage because of the pay gap.

For many women are responsible for balancing household finances and arranging childcare

Overall, a fifth of women in work (20.4%) are paid below the real living wage, this is approximately 2.9 million people.

So as a result, jobs in which women work account for 59.7% of jobs paid below the living wage.

In Social Care, where women outnumber male workers 4 to 1, 71% of care workers in the independent care sector are paid less than the real living wage.

All this shows that Inflation is a Gender Issue

Nurses are being made to pay for parking at their places of work.

Care workers are being made to pay for protective uniforms and not paid for travel time or for training.

Both these professions are composed mainly of women workers and these figures show that women are disproportionately affected by low pay and the spiralling cost of living.

And yet employers backed by the government are still refusing to increase wages.

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Under such conditions is it any wonder that low paid women workers want to "fight back" for better pay and conditions, by striking as in almost all cases to withhold their services / labour is the only method women workers have.

Yet this government instead of encouraging good pay awards introducing barriers to strikes such as Service Level Agreements.

Legitimate protest is dead under this Tory government.

We instruct the National Women's Committee to

- 1) Work with the NEC and its Campaign committee to continue to highlight the plight of low paid women workers
2. work with appropriate bodies to continue to campaign to remind people that this crisis will not go away.
3. Work with other Self Organised Groups ( SOG ) and Young Members to campaign to raise awareness of the effects of their fiscal policies on low paid women workers.

***Eastern Region***