

**2024 Energy Service Group Conference  
Decisions**

## **2024 Energy Service Group Conference Decisions**

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## 2024 Energy Service Group Conference Decisions

### Motions

#### 1. Don't manage us out!

**Carried**

Conference notes that there is increasing anecdotal evidence from branches and stewards in the Energy service group of disabled and older workers being “managed out” of organisations. This can include Energy employers using capability procedures to push disabled workers out of their jobs without fully exploring reasonable adjustments that could be made in order to allow a level playing field.

Disabled and neurodiverse workers in the Energy service group can find themselves micromanaged with every detail of what they do picked up on by management. They can also be subject to sickness absence procedures that can lead to job loss when reasonable adjustments and disability leave should have been considered.

UNISON's model capability procedure recommends that formal capability procedures should only be used as a last resort after other forms of performance management and sickness absence management have been exhausted. The emphasis should be on encouraging the employee to improve, giving them a chance to recover or manage their impairment, and to stop any further problems arising. For example, Acas suggests that the employer could provide their employee with support, such as making changes to their work or arranging counselling sessions, and training to help them do their job better.

UNISON's model capability procedure guidance makes clear that it would be unfair and potentially discriminatory if an employer instigated a formal capability procedure because a disabled worker could not do their job, even though they could do their job if reasonable adjustments were agreed. As Acas states: “If the employee has a disability that's related to the capability issue, the employer must take reasonable steps to support them.”

Conference believes that disabled workers are talented and capable and can thrive in the Energy service group if they get the reasonable adjustments and disability leave they should be entitled to by law, and if the capability procedure is not used as a tool to exclude them from the workforce.

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

- 1) Encourage branches to use UNISON's two bargaining guides on Disability Leave and on Reasonable Adjustments Policies and Passports to bargain for

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policies that allow better access to reasonable adjustments for disabled workers in the Energy sector

- 2) Circulate UNISON's model capability procedure to branches and encourage them to audit existing capability procedures against this, and negotiate for any gaps in support for our disabled members.

### **2. Support for disabled workers dealing with mental distress**

**Carried**

Conference notes that many of our members in the Energy service group are seeing the result of the cost of living crisis in an increase in customers who are experiencing financial issues.

Our members are often the first to speak to customers with financial concerns, many displaying signs of significant mental distress, with some expressing suicidal thoughts. For disabled Energy workers who may themselves have a mental health impairment, this can trigger their own mental health problems and can lead to avoidable time off sick which can impact their career progression.

Conference believes that Energy employers should provide better training in dealing with customers in mental distress and with suicidal thoughts and should also provide support and time off for Energy workers who may themselves find their mental health is impacted through dealing with these customers.

Conference therefore call on the Energy service group executive to:

- 1) Use the bargaining levers at its disposal to seek to negotiate better training for staff in dealing with customers in mental distress or expressing suicidal thoughts
- 2) Seek to negotiate for better support for staff with mental health problems who may need additional support and time off to protect their own mental health after speaking to customers in mental distress.

### **3. Continuing to increase participation of Black members in Energy.**

**Carried**

In 2016 Energy conference agreed to look at increasing Black member participation in the service group. When looking at measurements of engagement such as representation on branch and national committees and attendance at service group

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and Black members' conferences the activism levels of Black members in Energy remains an area of concern.

At its conference in 2015 conference resolved to undertake a mapping exercise to better identify the representation and engagement levels of Black members in the Energy service group and further to identify how many branches have Black members self-organised groups.

Conference notes that UNISON is committed to achieving equality for all and one of the ways the union promotes equality is through self-organisation. Self-organisation brings together members from certain groups that face discrimination and helps the union identify and challenge discrimination and build equality.

Conference commends the work in other service groups and regions in the union that have seen branches come together to organise regional or geographical cluster groups for Black members where union membership has been persistently low, and it has been more challenging to organise.

Conference therefore asks the Energy Service Group Executive Committee to look at utilising this good practice to support Energy branch Black member self-organisation by:

1. Undertaking a further mapping exercise to identify the representation and engagement levels of Black members in the Energy service group.
2. Compare this data with that collected in previous surveys to identify areas where Black members from various branches with low levels of Black membership can come together in cluster meetings where geographically possible.
3. Working with regions to facilitate these meetings and ensure that they are properly resourced.
4. Reporting on this progress at the next Energy conference in 2025

#### 4. Neurodiversity and Women Members

**Carried as Amended: 4.1**

This motion aims to further address the issue of neurodiverse women in the workplace, especially women working in the Energy sector workplaces 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

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confidence and knowledge to ask for the support they need at work to enable them carry out their role appropriately.

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 Energy Service Group Executive 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 in the Energy sector workplaces with their condition.

2. Develop and promote learning around Neurodiversity to activists and members in the Energy sector workplaces.

3. Highlight and share the work of UNISON groups and how they can provide strength and assistance to neurodivergent women in the Energy sector workplaces.

4.. Develop a toolkit to assist branches and activists with understanding this issue and support their work in this area.

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

**Carried as Amended: 5.1**

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, including in Energy sector employers.

Greater flexibility should be welcomed where this works for staff. Some disabled women and women with caring responsibilities may find more home working 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 Energy staff, by blurring the line between work time and personal time. Being expected to be

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permanently available can have a particular impact on Energy 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 for Energy staff 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 Energy Service Group Executive to:

- 1) Work with the National Women's Committee through the Equalities Unit to promote the inclusion of properly supported work/life balance, including the right to disconnect, in flexible working policies.
  
- 2) Develop a comprehensive digital organising campaign to raise awareness among remote workers about the benefits of union membership, including protection of rights, collective bargaining power, and access to a supportive community.

### **6. Long term Impact of Working from Home and Hybrid Working on Energy Workers**

**Carried as Amended: 6.1**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work and hybrid work models, challenging traditional notions of the workplace. As we transition into a post-pandemic world, it is crucial to examine the benefits and challenges associated with these new ways of working.

Since 2020 the role of working from home and hybrid working has transformed the way Energy Sector members work. This has shown a growing importance of understanding and researching the impact of working from home and hybrid working models on individuals working in the sector. Comprehensive research in this area is

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essential for shaping the future of work and ensuring the health and safety and well-being of members working across the UK's energy companies. It is important to understand any benefits of changes in working practices as well as consider any long-term impacts and what roles are benefitting and which roles are 'losing out' on a more flexible approach to where people work.

Now is the time to ensure that we have research covering several topic areas where employers seek to impose ways of working that do not benefit for all. Research in this area should consider the following areas:

- 1) **Productivity and Performance:** The impact of working from home and hybrid working on individual and team productivity, as well as the factors that contribute to optimal performance in these settings. Understanding the conditions that foster productivity can help organisations design effective remote work policies.
  
2. **Work-Life Balance and Well-being:** It is essential to explore the effects of remote work and hybrid working on work-life balance, mental health, and overall well-being. Research needs to identify strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences and promote a healthy work-life integration.
  
3. **Collaboration and Communication:** Investigating the effectiveness of virtual collaboration tools, communication platforms, and team dynamics in remote and hybrid work environments is crucial. Understanding the challenges and opportunities in these areas and any best practice to support all Energy Sector workers can lead to the development of innovative digital solutions.
  
4. **Organisational Culture and Leadership:** Research should examine the impact of remote work and hybrid working on organisational culture, leadership styles, and employee engagement. This will enable organisations to adapt their practices and create inclusive and supportive environments for remote and hybrid teams – and not lead to alienation.
  
5. **Socioeconomic Implications:** The research should identify the broader implications of working from home and hybrid working on the terms and conditions for workers in the energy sector, including the potential for reducing commuting and the potential consequences for regional weighting, loss of travel time enhancement for workers.

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There needs to be a comprehensive exploration of the benefits and challenges of working from home and hybrid working models covering these areas to enable negotiations take place with energy employers to introduce policies and practices that maximise the advantages and minimise the potential drawbacks, ensuring a more productive, inclusive, and sustainable future of work.

This Conference calls on the SGE to

Work with the UNISON Energy Branches and relevant structures in our union to

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing policies and practices related to working from home and hybrid working.
2. Allocating necessary resources to support this work and reviewing and reporting annually to ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

This should also include research into the impact of remote and hybrid working on disabled workers in the Energy sector where in some cases these options may represent a reasonable adjustment but it is also important to ensure disabled workers aren't isolated at home, that reasonable adjustments are provided and that remote working does not become an excuse for inaccessible workplaces.

### **7. Organising to Win in the Energy Sector - Empowering Workers and Strengthening Collective Voice**

**Carried**

This conference recognises the critical importance of UNISON's "Organising to Win" national strategy that provides a vision of a stronger UNISON with a plan to increase member participation, build a bigger and more representative activist base, and achieve sustainable membership growth.

In the Energy Sector we need to strengthen the collective voice to protect the rights and interests of workers. Unionised workplaces strengthen workers' rights and create fair and equitable working conditions, promote job security, and ensure a sustainable and just energy industry.

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The current UK energy sector plays a vital role in powering our societies and economies. The drive to Net Zero needs to be underpinned by a strategy that ensures we organise across all areas of the sector including renewables.

Workers in this sector often face challenges such as precarious employment in smaller off shoot business not covered by the same pay, terms and conditions as the parent company, inadequate safety measures, and limited bargaining power. Union organising is a powerful tool to address these issues and empower workers to advocate for their rights.

Conference calls on the SGE to undertake the following:

To work with Branches, Regions, LAOS, and other appropriate parts of the union.

1. To deliver an 'Organising to win' recruitment and retention strategy that will grow the union across the energy service group, including the recruitment of new activists, health and safety reps, environmental reps and ULR's.
2. Produce a service group annual organising plan to ensure sustainable growth in membership, participation, and activism in the service group.
3. Develop new techniques including digital organising to improve member retention.
4. Promote of the UNISON College and the role of Union Learner Representatives.
5. Engage with the national industrial action project to ensure best practice organising techniques are embedded in future strategies for winning national ballots and disputes.
6. Develop Branch guidance and training to align organising and bargaining at a local level to increase member terms and conditions and secure improved union facilities.
7. Promote Organising to Win best practice by encouraging all activists to access the new organising guides, webinar recordings, templates, and tools contained on the UNISON Organising Space.
8. Map the sector to identify all employers where we have members, capturing where we have recognition agreements for the purpose of Collective Bargaining and where we have no engagement with companies.
9. Explore the use of sector wide and / or employer specific BSOF bids to deliver increased recruitment and retention in the sector.

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### 8. Delivering a Just Transition for the Energy workforce

**Carried**

This conference recognises the urgent need to commence negotiations across the energy sector for a just transition for the energy workforce supporting the crucial role that unions play in ensuring workers are protected and empowered throughout this transition. We believe that by promoting union-led just transition initiatives, we can create a sustainable and equitable future for both workers and the environment.

The energy sector is undergoing a significant transformation as we strive to address climate change. Delivering Net Zero targets requires the UK transition to cleaner and more sustainable energy sources to continue at pace. However, this transition must be clear on the delivery to achieve an outcome that delivers a supportive approach to those already working in the sector – that does not lead to a cliff edge where we see thousands of workers displaced and communities shattered as local employers downsize or withdraw from existing sites. A Just transition must ensure that workers are not left behind and that their rights, livelihoods, and well-being are safeguarded.

Conference calls on the SGE to work with LAOS, Regions and Branches and Labour Link to create a Toolkit for activists to bargain with employers in the energy sector for a Just Transition that includes:

- Protecting the rights and interests of workers in the energy sector using learnings from other EU countries.
- Focus on providing retraining and upskilling opportunities for workers whose jobs may be impacted by the transition and prioritise the creation of quality green jobs in the energy sector. By investing in training programs, we can equip workers with the skills needed for new roles in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and other emerging sectors.
- Unions can advocate for the development of renewable energy projects, energy-efficient infrastructure, and other sustainable initiatives that provide secure and well-paid employment opportunities for workers.
- How to lobby parliaments across the UK to ensure that each energy company has a workforce plan that identifies key actions and milestones as part of a just transition for its workforce.

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### 9. Year of LGBT+ Workers – Embedding LGBT+ Equality in Energy

**Carried**

Conference notes that 2024 is UNISON's Year of LGBT+ Workers and welcomes the opportunity that this provides to promote UNISON as the union for LGBT+ workers in the energy sector, raise awareness of LGBT+ rights, challenge discrimination, negotiate LGBT+ inclusive policies and recruit and activate LGBT+ members in the energy industry.

The year highlights the important contributions our LGBT+ members make to the energy service group, to improving employment conditions for LGBT+ workers and to campaigning more broadly on equality for LGBT+ people.

The LGBT+ self-organised group has been key to campaigns to improve the rights of LGBT+ people within the workplace and wider society while playing an active role in the repeal of section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, and the introduction of civil partnerships and equal marriage for LGBT+ people, however there is still much to do.

Most recently, the national LGBT+ committee has helped to create the successful trans ally training across our union. This aids 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.

We need to continue to encourage active recruitment and promotion of LGBT+ energy members and strive for LGBT+ representation at a branch, regional and service group level. 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 energy service group. To achieve this, energy branches need to support local LGBT+ Pride events, run awareness campaigns within the workplace and make UNISON's LGBT+ resources visible.

Conference believes that the Year of LGBT+ Workers can be used as a tool to negotiate with employers to improve inclusion in workplaces for LGBT+ members within all aspects of the energy industry, for example, adopting trans inclusion policies.

Conference acknowledges that tackling systemic and ingrained discrimination against LGBT+ members within the wider energy industry will take more than one

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year. Conference further recognises the need to capitalise on the success of the year to continue our work and embed the work on LGBT+ equality in all areas of the industry, especially when negotiating with employers.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Promote UNISON's year of LGBT+ workers including at national and regional events
2. Encourage branches with to use days in the LGBT+ calendar to promote the work that UNISON does for LGBT+ equality
3. Promote and encourage the use of UNISON LGBT+ guidance, fact sheets and model policies within workplaces
4. Follow up on the motions which have been passed by previous energy service group conferences to deliver the bargaining agendas on LGBT+ rights and equality in the workplace
5. Work with the national LGBT+ committee to run a webinar on the Year of the LGBT+ workers for members in the energy sector
6. Promote and encourage participation in equality training, and in particular the trans ally training.

### **10. The importance of self-organisation in energy**

**Carried**

Conference acknowledges the importance of self-organisation within UNISON as it allows marginalised groups within the union to challenge discrimination in the workplace and to campaign in wider society. Conference also notes that members of self-organised groups are a valuable resource to the energy service group as they have knowledge and experience of how our workplaces can be more inclusive. Their work puts equalities at the heart of our union – which is key to our success.

All UNISON regions have a LGBT+ self-organised group that works within the region by supporting local LGBT+ events and awareness campaigns that align with our union's values. However, while there are many self-organised group members working in the energy sector, self-organisation within energy branches is, at best, patchy and, at worst, non-existent.

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On top of this, since COVID 19, there has been a lull in engagement across the self-organisation structure. There have been many contributing factors such as remote working, leading to fewer face-to-face engagements with our branches.

Self-organisation is fundamental to our union: it fosters better understanding, provides support, and creates a safe space to network. Conference believes that strong self-organisation at branch level is key to ensuring the issues faced by our members are considered by employers.

Conference calls on the Energy Service Group Executive to:

1. Circulate information to energy branches on self-organisation and its role within the union
2. Encourage branches to support the setting up of branch self-organised groups and circulate examples of good practice
3. Encourage smaller branches to look at cooperation with other branches to establish multi-branch self-organised group where possible

### **11. Review of the Energy Service Group Executive Constitution**

**Carried**

Conference notes the significant changes that have taken place across the Energy Sector in the last decade.

Conference instructs the Energy Service Group Executive to undertake a review of the Service Group Executive constitution and bring any proposals changes to the current terms of reference to Energy Conference 2025.

### **12. Energy policy fit for net zero.**

**Carried**

Conference notes that to reach net zero we need a clear energy policy that is fit for purpose. We have seen too many times Governments moving the goalposts when it comes to a clear vision of what we need to achieve net zero.

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We have seen the roll back on the current Tory Governments' timelines on the abolition of petrol and Diesel cars and the constant changing in funding to renewable pilot schemes and energy efficiency.

Our industry was hopeful for the pledge by Labour in their flagship climate change policy – The New Green Deal, a plan that would turn a lukewarm Treasury, addicted to stop-start measures on climate change into a driving force of economic transformation with a pledge to spend £28bn annually until 2030 to cut emissions and build up green industries, which was cut not once but twice to around £4.7bn per year. Labour have also cut their goals on energy efficiency and retrofitting of residential properties by half while retaining the initial timeline.

Conference, this does not help our industry to plan ahead. We all know to support the transition to net zero we need to increase the number of employees in the industry. Unison's Grid Locked Report clearly outlines the benefits of decarbonisation with economic growth, creation of tens of thousand jobs in installation, maintenance, manufacturing, and research as well as promoting skills development and training programmes to equip workers with expertise.

Our industry requires stability to ensure we are able to meet demand in energy production, grid upgrades, EV charge installations, etc and these constant changes makes it impossible to ensure we have a workforce that is ready to implement low/zero carbon technology.

Therefore, conference calls upon the energy executive to:

1. Work with labour link to lobby Government and the Labour Party to set a clear plan for a net zero timeline and milestones.
2. Work with the NEC and other appropriate structures within the union to champion the energy sectors policies.