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Scotland in UNISON

scottish council activists' bulletin..... Use these stories in your branch newsletter or circulate the pdf version to members

Scottish branch makes UNISON national policy

2021 to be Year of the Disabled Worker

By Kate Ramsden
SiU Editor

UNISON's National Delegate Conference overwhelmingly backed a call from South Lanarkshire UNISON to make 2021 the Year of the Disabled Worker.

In a shining and very tangible example of how branches can make UNISON national policy on issues about which they feel strongly, a motion penned by a Scottish branch is now informing the national agenda.

Renfrewshire also set policy on ensuring support for staff affected by the menopause, and **UNISON Scotland** on tackling the crisis in social care, the review of the devolution protocol, and celebrating 60 years of the Cuban revolution.

On the Year of the Disabled Worker, UNISON will now ask the TUC to support the initiative, so its influence could extend even further.

So how did that happen? How can other branches hope to do the same?

Well first of all you need to submit your motion to Conference.

It's also worth getting the support of the Scottish Council of Branches, so that it can become one of the Scotland priorities, as this motion was.

That helped it to make its way onto the conference agenda, on the "snake" or the remaining order of business. At 47th down though, it had no chance of being debated during normal business.

However, at the end of the week, when regions and self-organised groups have the chance to reprioritise the agenda, the

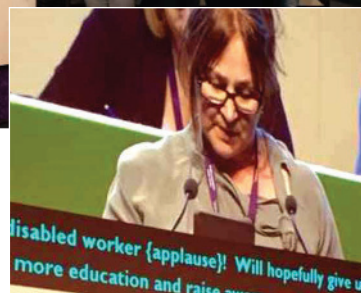


Conference gave a standing ovation to members who had organised, fought and won! *Inset:* South Lanarkshire's Karen Strain moves Year of the Disabled Worker motion.

branch lobbied hard and persuaded them to support their motion.

It was reprioritised and to the branch's great delight, was heard almost with the last throw of the dice on the Friday afternoon of conference.

First time speaker, Karen Strain, moved the motion and called for 2021 to be a celebration of the successes and contributions of disabled people in the workplace, with an aim to challenge societal and environmental barriers to



employing disabled people.

She joined the international condemnation of how the UK Government's policies affect disabled people and the lack of progress towards fulfilling the obligations set out in the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Article 27 of the Treaty places a duty on the UK government to create the conditions that promote equal opportunity for disabled people in relation to work and employment.

She said: "We've heard some grim stuff about how hard life is for the disabled in Tory Britain – the pay gap for disabled workers, those deliberately denied PIP and other supports.

"It's hard for us to get into work in the first place and many disabled people are trapped in jobs far below their aspirations, qualifications and capabilities."

She urged: "It must matter to all of us that the disabled are treated fairly at work."

She reminded delegates that 2018 was UNISON's year of young workers.

"That has been a great success so doing the same for disabled workers in 2021 is another golden opportunity for UNISON to educate, organise and change attitudes to improve the working lives of disabled workers across the UK."

The power of collective action sees significant wins

Overwhelming votes for strike action by UNISON members in Queen Margaret University, Dundee and West Dunbartonshire have led to action by the employers to resolve the disputes.

At Queen Margaret University the employer withdrew plans for compulsory redundancies after UNISON members voted to strike.

Regional organiser, Lorcan

Mullen said: "UNISON members will now be building on the successful campaign. They are now getting organised to fight a proposed privatisation of security officers, ground maintenance and other facilities staff."

Meanwhile, in Dundee, the council abandoned its controversial plans to reduce pay protection, to cap flexible retirement at two years and to end its commitment to no compulsory redundancies, after

UNISON along with colleagues in Unite and the GMB, returned a huge vote for strike action.

UNISON Branch Secretary, Jim McFarlane described the hard work of the branch, alongside the other unions, to encourage members that they could overturn the council's decision to impose changes to terms and conditions.

He said: "We believe that this unity of purpose forced the council to withdraw this attack

on members' long held terms and conditions."

In West Dunbartonshire social work members agreed to suspend strike action after the council made a firm offer to begin to address members' serious concerns, with a definite timescale set.

Jim Griffin, UNISON steward and social worker, said: "This is encouraging progress.

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Well done Gordon



Ayrshire and Arran Health's Gordon McKay chaired UNISON's National Conference as the national president – and he made a great job of it.

He chaired with humour and respect and the view of delegates was clearly demonstrated by standing ovations for his speech at the start of the week and after tributes from Willy Duffy and Tam Waterson on the last day.

Time to review Devolution Protocol

UNISON will review its Devolution Protocol to take account of significant developments since it was first established in 2004.

Moving the Scotland motion at Conference, Elaine Duffy reminded delegates that devolution has been with us for 20 years and the protocol for almost as long but much has changed in that time, both in the world and in the governmental structure of the UK.

"The Devolution Protocol however has not," said Elaine. "And it is time to look at it once again, to decide what works well, and where it might be strengthened or altered to improve its effectiveness."

She added that it isn't a marginal issue for us because in Scotland something like 95% of UNISON members work in services that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament.

Jim McFarlane, speaking on behalf of the NEC, backed Scotland's call, saying that our trade union values are universal but when things differ we need to have structures and systems to adjust for differences in the four countries.

Action wins

From Page 1

"The team remains committed to ensuring we meet the needs of our service users, and hopes the means to do so will be agreed through the coming consultation."

These wins have been reflected across the UK, with UNISON members building confidence for action, winning a strike ballot, then the employer withdrawing the threat. Only last month, domestics at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow forced the Health Trust to withdraw plans to outsource their service, after they voted overwhelmingly for action.

Congratulations to members in Queen Margaret University, Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, and the many other UK branches, who have shown the power of collective action to defend jobs and services.

Demand for 'fair work' in social care

Conference backed a campaign for social care to get the proper funding it deserves and for social care workers to get decent pay and working conditions, support and training.

UNISON will also seek to ensure social care's equivalence to the NHS in terms of access to services and its status within society.

Lilian Macer, Scottish regional rep, moved a Scottish amendment highlighting the Fair Work Charter Inquiry into Social Care in Scotland.

This inquiry, co-chaired by Lilian, found that there were over

'undervaluing of social care due to perceptions of care as "women's work"'

200,000 workers in social care in Scotland – a dedicated workforce in precarious contracts of employment, in which they have little power or influence.

It recommended that the Scottish Government should support a new sector-level body to ensure an effective voice in the social care sector, and that body should establish a minimum Fair Work contract for social care.

She said social care sector bargaining would see "changes that would put an end to

exploiting workers in social care through zero hours contracts and employers expecting staff to work excessively long hours

"We want improvement in how the real Living Wage is being rolled out but also changes that will see women's skills and labour better valued and rewarded through collectively agreed terms and conditions.

"This report calls on the Scottish Government to take urgent action to bring about a radical overhaul of social care

and to use fair work principles to drive high quality services for some of our more vulnerable people."

Lilian pointed out that the lack of status and chronic undervaluing of social care is not unconnected to perceptions of care as 'women's work' and that the failure to address the gendered dynamics of the care sector contributes significantly to the gender pay gap.

She emphasised the importance of driving forward improvements to ensure we make real progress on the Fair Work Agenda ensuring all public bodies adopt UNISON's Ethical Care Charter.

Conference backs call for menopause workplace charter

Conference backed Renfrewshire's call to develop a "Menopause - We got this covered" charter as part of a wide-ranging composite calling for UNISON to lead the way in campaigning for decent workplace practices to support women going through the menopause.

And the work done by South Lanarkshire branch in developing the first comprehensive menopause policy in Scotland was also highlighted.

The national union has already produced guidance on the menopause at work. As a trade union made up overwhelmingly of women members, UNISON will build on this work.

The union will work with branches regions and other groups to develop good practice in this area.

Speaking in support, Brenda Aitchison pointed to the numbers of high-profile women speaking on the menopause in



Renfrewshire's Brenda Aitchison moving the motion at National Conference

the media this past year.

However, she added that these women have far better paid employment than our UNISON women workers, access to hormone treatments, private health and well-being consultants.

Brenda said: "When we took this motion to our AGM in February we had a large number

of home care workers.

"The age profile in this group is weighted towards the over 40's, however some of the women couldn't believe we were discussing this type of subject at our National Conference.

"We said it is a health and safety issue and something that will affect all women at some

point in their working lives.

"They just hadn't thought about it in those terms before. They felt it was just another thing for women to get on with.

"If we can help to make those workers' working lives more tolerable during menopause, then that is what we should do," urged Brenda.

Stand in solidarity with Cuba

The focus on humanitarian work will go on in Cuba as they celebrate 60 years of the revolution, Scottish convener Lilian Macer, told UNISON Conference delegates, as she spoke about the UNISON Scotland delegation visit last December.

Nationalisation and redistribution of previously owned US land, homes and businesses, returned much of the wealth in the country to the Cuban people and state.

She praised the outstanding results despite limited resources on health prevention, the highest doctor to patient ratios in the

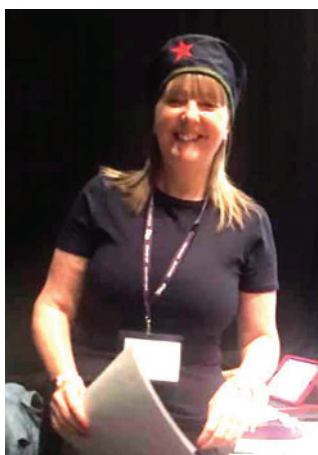
world and improved life expectancy rates.

"So how do they do it, and could other countries, rich and poor, learn from the Cuban example?

"I believe in Scotland and across the UK we have a lot to learn from the examples in the public health agenda with a focus on prevention", said Lilian.

She highlighted the literacy campaign that taught the people how to share, and give without expecting anything in return and how it liberated a generation of women giving them a completely different perspective on life.

Ryan McLaughlin of the Scottish Young Members



Lilian Macer and other speakers in the debate sported their Cuban hats

Committee who also visited Cuba, said: "We were able to experience first hand the

kindness and generosity of the Cuban people, to see the richness of their culture and join them for their May Day celebrations."

He also saw the daily struggles faced. He emphasised: "The Trump administration has continued its cruel and illegal blockade against Cuba, and indeed is heightening its sanctions.

"This imperialist blockade aims to deny the Cuban people their right to self determination and create another puppet of the United States Government"

He encouraged delegates to work collectively to support the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and stand in solidarity with the Cuban people.

Moray UNISON demands action on violence in schools

Moray UNISON is demanding that the council acts quickly to protect staff in schools from verbal and physical abuse.

This follows a survey of staff to give the council an insight to the levels of violence and abuse and how staff feel about it.

Early indications show that a number of staff, including pupil support assistants, janitors and

catering staff, report that “they simply did not have the time, given the nature of their roles, to deal with such conditions at work.”

Figures collected by the council itself revealed 980 violent incidents towards school staff in 2018, a huge increase of 48% over 2017.

Suzanne Wright, Moray UNISON branch secretary, said: “Some of our members

are falling victim to physical and verbal abuse sometimes multiple times a day. What is needed is an investment in proper facilities for children with behavioural needs.

“The indication we get from our members is that they need more help as we get so many reports of pupil support assistants (PSAs) being bitten, punched, threatened with scissors on a daily basis. The

issue needs to be addressed as currently it is a sticking plaster that is not sticky any more.”

Kelly Kinlin, a steward for Education and Social Care, who is also a PSA, said: “I fear for the safety of our already stretched support staff. Although PSAs have a very rewarding job they are also in a vulnerable position being subjected to both physical and verbal abuse sometimes multiple times a day.”

Pathways course reaps benefits for North East members

UNISON branches in the North East have reaped the benefits of running a Pathways residential course for 16 women from Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Grampian Health, with at least nine of the participants signing up for stewards’ training.

Other participants were interested in roles such as workplace contact, union learning rep, education officer, international officer, or health and safety rep, or in joining a Black members’ group.

Many of the participants came from campaigns that the branches have been running in the community and voluntary sector and the home care sector.

Susan Kennedy, Karen Davidson and Sarah Duncan were the course tutors.

Karen said: “Pathways is a great course for women. It’s fun and informative and our participants enjoyed it so much.

“Overall, we feel that the decision to run this course has reaped great reward for the members and branches in the North East.

“We will support and develop the participants into their chosen pathway into UNISON and look forward to offering more North East members the same opportunity to access this course again.”



West Lothian leads community campaign to save leisure services

UNISON West Lothian branch is leading a community campaign against West Lothian Leisure cuts proposals.

The body is currently in consultation with staff and unions on plans, including a cut in operating hours and axing a number of jobs at the Low Port Outdoor Education Centre in Linlithgow, a well established outdoor adventure centre offering activity courses and residential opportunities.

Research from YouthLink Scotland suggests that the social value of youth work in Scotland is estimated at a return of £7 for every £1 of public cash and the total value is at least £656 million. Investment



in local council youth work should be protected and enhanced not decimated.

Steven Dunn, West Lothian branch campaigns officer said: “We have been leading a proactive community based campaign, aimed at West Lothian Leisure’s chief executive, local councillors, MPs and MSPs and have been vocal in the local media, reaching out to various community organisations.”

“Staff in West Lothian Leisure, play a vital role in our local communities, helping people of various ages and circumstances providing them with routes to mental and physical wellbeing.”

“Low Port is a vital service which has an imaginative approach to education and a track record of helping children in difficult circumstances.”

“If we want public leisure facilities in West Lothian to thrive, decision makers in the council and Scottish Government need to provide adequate funding for West Lothian Leisure. This in turn protects and invests in the health of our local communities and children’s futures.”

Ambulance workers at breaking point

The Scottish ambulance service is in critical condition as a UNISON survey reveals that staff are at breaking point

The findings of ‘An Emergency But No Accident’ show ambulance staff are over-worked and stressed.

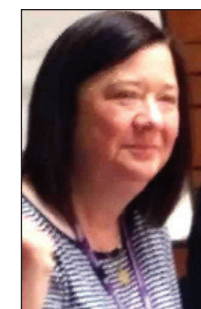
Almost nine in 10 ambulance staff (85%) reported their workloads being heavier (rising to 98% among paramedics). Shockingly, almost half of paramedics (47%) say they often think about leaving the service.

Many have experienced high levels of violence and abuse with six in ten saying they have suffered physical and/or verbal abuse at work.

Liam Boyling, UNISON Scottish Ambulance Service branch secretary, said: “Workers are exhausted from the physical and emotional demands of the jobs and it’s no wonder that the majority would not recommend it as a place to work. We’re already at crisis point and we need urgent action to protect this vital service.”

See the full report on our website under campaigns and damage reports.

Kim - a credit to our union



Glasgow City branch secretary Kim McLachlan has retired after “decades of incredible service, commitment and work on behalf of our members.”

That quote is from Dave Prentis, UNISON general secretary, who wrote to Kim saying: “Your work in various senior branch positions across Glasgow housing services - in Glasgow City Council, GHA and the Wheatley Group – including your time as branch secretary, has been a credit to our union.

“You have contested housing stock transfer and outsourcing in principle, while always ensuring the continued employment of our members, standards of service to tenants, and engagement with the employer.

“You are one of the people who make us all proud to be UNISON – thank you, and enjoy what I hope is a long, healthy and happy retirement.”

NHS Highland must implement Sturrock in full

UNISON Highland Healthcare has welcomed the findings of the Sturrock report into bullying and harassment in NHS Highland and is now looking for NHS Highland to implement the recommendations in full.

Janette McQuiston, Branch Secretary, said, “We welcome the fact that an action plan has been prepared by NHS Highland, and widely circulated. This situation gives us some significant opportunities to change things for the better.”

The branch has urged all its members to take part in the NHS Highland planned roadshows and focus groups to have their say.

Janette added, “The branch will also be

holding meetings to allow members to attend and contribute their views. We plan to offer training to our reps in supporting members who may feel they have been bullied, and training for members in recognising and raising issues about inappropriate behaviour.

“If there is to be a culture change in NHS Highland, this involves all of us,” warned Janette, pledging to hold NHS Highland to account in delivering the action plan.

Further discussions are planned at national and local level with the staff side and NHS Highland around historical concerns and compensation. The branch is also looking for more members to become active.

“UNISON is a member-led union and the branch always welcomes new input,” said Janette.

Violence at work? ‘Record It and Report It’

UNISON Scottish Borders Branch has been campaigning in Scottish Borders Council against stress and violence at work.

As part of their ‘Go for Growth’ campaign in May, the branch ran a series of visits to schools in the region to highlight the steps staff should take after a violent incident at work.

The ‘Record It and Report It’ campaign was launched after the branch received a high volume of queries on violence at work from members, particularly in education.

Branch secretary Kaymarie Hughes said: “We are campaigning to make sure that members are aware of how they can report violent incidents at work and stress in all its forms to their employer.

“We are also seeing an increased level of

violent incidents being reported to the branch. Incidents include staff being threatened, punched, pushed and kicked while carrying out their jobs.

“In addition to more extreme incidents, it is clear that lower level violence and verbal abuse is, worryingly, seen by some staff as a routine part of their working lives.”

Kaymarie added, “Work-related stress is a serious issue. Stress is difficult to identify, but it can be caused by excessive workloads or pressure placed on staff.”

“We want to make sure that staff know what to do in this situation. Record it and report it.

“We need to work to ensure that “a culture of zero tolerance towards violence and aggression” stops being a platitude on a poster and becomes a reality.”

Young footballers show racism the red card

For the third year running, North Ayrshire LG Branch, has sponsored the Show Racism the Red Card Medda Cup Competition.

Primary teams from across North Ayrshire battled it out on Saturday 1 June, in an exciting tournament to win the UNISON cup. St John Ogilvie Primary School took the trophy this year and all tournament players received a medal.

This year the branch also saw the first secondary school game with Irvine Royal Academy playing against Greenwood Academy.

UNISON organiser



Audrey Malloy said: “After a hard fought and exciting game, a penalty shoot-out had everyone on the edge of their seats. Congratulations to our cup winners, Irvine

Royal Academy.”

She added: “North Ayrshire branch works hard every year with support from Irvine Meadow FC to make this tournament happen,

highlighting Show Racism the Red Card.

“This was another fabulous event! We are already looking forward to our 2020 play-off.”

Take One Action Film Festival 2019

Take One Action, the global change film festival, returns to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness this autumn.

Once again it will bring some of the most acclaimed films tackling the big issues of our time, from the global housing crisis to workers' rights, via food production and climate disruption.

Supported by UNISON Scotland since its creation in 2008, the event welcomes thousands of audience members each year to experience cinema with a difference.

Take One Action will host over forty screenings across the four cities. Every screening is accompanied by participative discussions, enabling audiences to engage actively with campaigners, artists, film-makers, journalists, politicians and each other – and to take action themselves.

This year's highlights include three films supported



by UNISON Scotland: the Scottish premiere of Push, an incisive documentary that sheds light on our increasingly unaffordable cities and the erosion of the basic right to housing; the Scottish premiere of Soyalsim, a wide-reaching exposé of industrialised global food production; and Everything Must Fall, a powerful reflection on the 2015 student strikes in South Africa, which unpacks the

deeply intersectional movement that re-ignited solidarity between students and contracted workers.

TOA Executive Director, Tamara Van Strijthem, said: “Our focus as a Festival is strongly attuned to the campaigns UNISON supports and we look forward to welcoming many UNISON members to our events.”

• Edinburgh & Glasgow 18 - 29 September, various venues
• Aberdeen 15-17 November,

Belmont Filmhouse
• Inverness 22 -24 November, Eden Court

Full programme and booking details available from 14 August at takeoneaction.org.uk

UNISON members can book tickets for all cinema screening for just £5.50 by booking at the venue with their UNISON member card; a sliding ticket scale (£0 - £8) will apply for all screenings in non-cinema spaces.

Merged funds could beat ‘pensions rip-off’

By Simon Watson
Regional organiser

Money isn't everything, but if there was a spare £100 million in Scotland every year, where should it go?

An extra 2,700 nurses? Into local public services? Putting the brakes on austerity? Affordable housing for young workers? Or to financial managers in the City of London?

Country estates in Surrey don't come cheap, but the chances are that your pension contributions are helping keep investment managers in champagne and caviar.

£100 million is being lost from Scotland's Local Government Pensions Scheme (LGPS), every year.

The LGPS is your money, your deferred wages. A quarter of a million workers are paying in.

Council workers, utility workers, education workers, police workers, care workers.

Employers pay in too. One in five Scots have a financial interest in the scheme. But big investment companies also have a “financial interest” in the scheme, and that is the problem.

The great pensions rip-off is not complicated. Investment companies charge higher fees for smaller investments than bigger ones.

Unity is strength, but in Scotland the LGPS is split into 11 smaller funds which invest the money to get income to pay your pension.

There is no good reason why there are 11 funds - it's just an accident of history. In global pension terms Scotland isn't big, and split into 11 it starts to get very small, and the fees rise and rise.

It's not just that. Small pension funds can't afford to employ much in-house expertise so they rely on the tender mercy of external consultants, and the competition watchdog has just released a damning report on how they operate.

All-in-all, around £1 billion could be released over 10 years by having a single LGPS fund for Scotland.

What does this mean? Sharing the benefits evenly amongst councils in the North East it could mean £3.13m a

year for Aberdeen City, £4.3m for Aberdeenshire and £1.57m for Moray.

That's a lot of services not being cut. A lot of pupil support assistants, librarians, housing workers, support workers still in jobs.

UNISON's campaign to merge the funds is common sense. But we need to overcome vested interests from the pensions elite, and so we need a grassroots movement for change to overcome this.

Briefings are going out to branches linked to the LGPS soon and we want branches to invite someone to their branch committee meetings to help get the word out.

The campaign launch will be at UNISON Scotland's pension seminar in the summer.

FE: Stress at work at critical levels

UNISON Scotland has condemned a lack of progress in dealing with workforce stress among further education members.

The latest survey of support staff members in FE has shown that little has been done to improve the situation since UNISON published the last survey in 2016. A freedom of information request has found that over 50,000 days have been lost to stress by college staff over the last three years - an increase of 40%.

Chris Greenshields, chair of UNISON Scotland's further education committee said: “This report shows that workplace stress has reached critical levels in Scotland's colleges and is still on the rise. Our members are struggling with workloads while continued cuts to staff numbers are being sustained as a means of finding ‘savings’.

“We warned colleges in 2016 about staff stress levels and the colleges have singularly failed to address this. We are now calling on the Scottish Government to intervene to direct the employers to begin discussions on creating a national avoidance of stress policy and procedure.” Read more on the website at unison-scotland.org/new-staff-stress-survey/

Green UNISON Day 20 September

Is your branch keen to take action on the climate emergency?

UNISON Scotland's Green Network is encouraging branches to organise another day of local green workplace action, following on from the success of last year's activities.

Green UNISON Day 2019 will be on Friday 20 September

Since last time, we have seen a huge rise in protests such as Extinction Rebellion and the school students' strikes for action on climate change, with examples of governments and councils declaring climate emergencies.

This year again, we hope many branches will take part, holding stalls, getting members to pledge to take action to reduce their own carbon footprint etc. Materials and ideas for activities will be circulated.

Actions could include supporting UNISON's campaign for the local government pension funds to divest from fossil fuels and for stronger government policy action towards net zero by 2045. Branches could arrange to plant a tree – the best known system of carbon capture and storage technology! Or create an international focus, with a speaker/film highlighting the impact of climate change on the global south.

The 20 September is the start of a week of activities called by the school students strike movement. Branches could consider linking our Green UNISON Day activities to those planned by school students and others. This could include lunch time meetings with school student speakers or extended lunch breaks to join school student demonstrations.

Check the Green Network Facebook page for updates and more information. facebook.com/greennetworkunionscotland/

Sign up for UNISON training courses at
unison-scotland.org/learning

We want to hear your news

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