

2021 Virtual Special Water, Environment & Transport Conference UNISON FINAL AGENDA

12 Jun 2021

1. WET Climate Crisis – Doing our bit

The world is facing a terrible threat, not only affecting our way of life and those of the billions across the globe, but also animal and plant life – as witnessed by the destruction of coral reefs due to ocean warming and drought and bush fires destroying hundreds of hectares of woodland.

The water industry, transport and environment branches all have a vested interest in reducing our reliance on carbon-based energy. This conference recognises that the WET service group needs to do its bit in reducing our carbon footprint. Therefore, this conference asks that the Service Group Executive:

- a. Explore ways in which WET branches can encourage their employers to work together to share facilities – such as Electric Vehicle charging points – to minimise their carbon footprint.
- b. Explore ways in which WET branches, both regionally and nationally, can work together to minimise their carbon footprints.
- c. Produce a guide to branches of possible ideas, case studies, methods on best practice in minimising branches' and their employers' carbon footprint.

Yorkshire - Humberside Region

2. Employers – Do the right thing for our members

Since March 2020 there have been 3 lockdowns. During these many of our members have been working from home. Sitting at kitchen and dining room tables, if they are lucky in converted boxrooms, doing their jobs. In some households two, three or more people were and are working from home.

The computers have to be powered. Lights have to be on and, in the long, cold winter, heating on. At the same time the employers' offices were shut down. Utility bills dropped considerably. The Canal & River Trust (CRT) has even declared it will be closing virtually all its offices and working from home will become the norm. This is likely to be the case in the future for many of our members. The CRT, like many employers, is refusing to contribute towards its employees' steeply rising utility bills and instead advises staff to change their tax codes, which amounts to a tax break of around a miserly £6 per week.

Many of our members working from home are poorly paid call centre or admin staff, yet they are being forced to subsidise large public and private companies.

This conference asks the Service Group Executive to develop a package to encourage branches to fight for contributions from employers to help staff pay for utility bills, insurance and equipment by:

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1. Researching the extent of this problem across all branches.
2. Developing a negotiating manual for branches.
3. Starting a national campaign to shame the worst employers in this respect to do the right thing for our hardworking members.

Yorkshire - Humberside Region

3. Shift working health issues

This Conference is concerned about the health risks of UNISON members employed as shift workers in the Water industry and possibly other sectors covered by the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group.

Regular shift working causes disturbed sleep patterns which in turn can affect concentration levels which can then cause potential Health and Safety issues whilst undertaking tasks.

This issue has become even more prevalent as a result of the extended working hours UNISON members as key workers in the Water Industry have been expected to work particularly during the pandemic.

The Service Group Executive in conjunction with UNISON's Health and Safety unit are asked to undertake a survey of branches in the Service Group to evaluate the scale of the problem and develop a guide for branches to use to evaluate the potential of recompense for members affected as well as reducing the necessity of shift working.

United Utilities

4. Dealing with noise on operational sites

2021 Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Conference notes that UNISON members employed in some sectors of our Service Group experience hearing difficulties during and post-employment caused through noise on operational sites particularly in Water.

Pumping stations are particularly noisy but all areas of plant where noise exceeds permissible limits should (but often don't) have warning signs instructing of the necessary mandatory use of ear protection.

Often, ear defenders don't constitute part of PPE and where this occurs, disposable ear plug dispensers should be routinely provided and used.

As the pandemic has demonstrated, PPE is not always as readily available as it should be and has been in the past so this issue post COVID is particularly pertinent.

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Regular reviews of such sites are necessary to ensure noise levels haven't changed and that appropriate signage is maintained as well as registers created and updated.

This Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to work with UNISON's National Health and Safety unit to develop a "best practice" toolkit in this regard to benefit the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of UNISON members both whilst working and in later life.

United Utilities

5. Fatigue in the Water Industry

The Special Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Conference 2021 is increasingly concerned about the extent to which a decade of austerity and regulatory constraints has impacted on the safety of WET members when carrying out activities in the workplace as well as the impact on the response to the pandemic as key workers. The levels of fatigue experienced by UNISON members employed in the Water Industry and potentially in other sectors covered by the Service Group appears to be reaching unprecedented levels.

Staffing levels being butchered to the bone by employers in the Water Industry is the major cause of fatigue with members covering more than their contractual work and hours.

With renationalisation of the Water Industry unlikely to occur now for at least 4 years this issue is likely to only get worse as Water Companies remain profit driven in preference to delivering a fully staffed quality service to the public.

This Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to work with UNISON's National Health and Safety unit to explore developing a best practice guide to assist members in dealing with fatigue which will undoubtedly continue for the foreseeable future.

United Utilities

6. A sustainable future for Water, Environment and Transport workers – we need more women engineers

Conference is concerned that although some employers in the Water, Environment and Transport sector have worked hard to reduce their gender pay gap - notably Thames Water - reports for 2019 (reporting was suspended in 2020 due to the pandemic) revealed others have mean average gaps which are significantly higher than the industry's average of 11.7% and higher even than the UK average – Affinity Water at 22.5%, Bristol Water at 20.2% and South East Water at 23%.

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Conference notes that the gender pay gap has increased during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Much of this is due to the fact that in the UK, women still do the majority of caring, whether paid or unpaid. Women who work and have children and/or other caring responsibilities have been hit hardest having to balance doing their job with childcare. A report from the TUC in January 2021 highlighted how working mothers have picked up the lion's share of caring responsibilities and that one in six working mothers – mainly those on the lowest pay – have had to reduce their hours at work as a direct result of school and childcare closures. Some have been forced out of work altogether.

Given that pre-Covid many WET employers reported larger than average gender pay gaps, pay inequity in these employers is now likely to be substantial. Women tend to work in customer facing and support roles rather than engineering, which is heavily dominated by men and higher paid.

Conference believes that gender barriers need to be addressed and that as a predominantly female trade union UNISON should lead the way in calling for action from the industry. We believe we need more visible female role models and we need louder, clearer leadership and targets. We also need a range of internal policies and programmes – for example, on flexible working and changes to recruitment practice. We need to see the industry taking positive steps to encourage women to apply for traditionally male roles and to support their career development.

Conference congratulates the National Women's Committee on the #bridgethegap campaign, trailblazer project and gender pay gap bargaining tools launched in April 2019. Conference notes that post-pandemic, closing the gender pay gap will be even more important to halt the reverse in gender equality brought about during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Conference calls on the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive to:

1. Ensure that closing the gender pay gap is included as a priority in bargaining with WET employers;
2. Work with the WET service group executive to develop visible female role models, encourage flexible working, change recruitment practices to attract women to work in traditionally male roles such as engineering;
3. Work with the National Women's Committee to encourage WET branches to participate in UNISON's national gender pay gap trailblazer project.

National Women's Committee

7. The impact of Covid-19 on Black workers in transport

"We're all in this together" has become a rallying cry during the coronavirus pandemic. While it is true that COVID-19 has affected everyone in some way, the magnitude and nature of the impact has been anything but universal. Evidence to

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date suggests that Black workers face much more economic and health insecurity from COVID-19 than white workers.

Although the current strain of the coronavirus is one that humans have never experienced before, the disparate racial impact of the virus is deeply rooted in historic and ongoing social and economic injustices.

We are pleased that UNISON has provided guidance and encouraged Black members about the vaccination programme and signposting them to the information on the UNISON Covid-19 website pages.

There are three main groups of workers in the COVID-19 economy: those who have lost their jobs and face economic insecurity, those who are classified as essential workers and face health insecurity as a result, and those who are able to continue working from the safety of their homes. Black workers are disproportionately found among the essential workers in the economy today continuing to go to their workplaces, risking their health and that of their families because they are unable to sustain adequate social distance from their co-workers and customers.

Transport worker safety has been a huge concern all through the coronavirus crisis. Bus drivers in London have reported they have been spat at while working. Spitting at transport staff is not only disrespectful but also dangerous when it can spread a deadly virus.

There is clear evidence that more people from Black communities are dying because of coronavirus. Black people working as security guards, taxi drivers and chauffeurs, bus and coach drivers are also among those with the highest increase in all-cause mortality.

The awful death of Belly Mujinga, who was spat at and tragically died of coronavirus, has shocked the country. Although British Transport Police said her assailant did not have coronavirus, she was targeted and assaulted while simply being at work. This is completely unacceptable, and her death is a tragedy for her family, her friends, her colleagues, and for the transport industry.

This conference calls upon the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive to work with all appropriate employers/bodies to get better protection for transport workers and especially Black members who are more vulnerable in this current crisis, and who were, and still are, already exposed to racist behaviour and attacks.

National Black Members' Committee

8. Homeworking as a reasonable adjustment in post-COVID WET workplaces

Conference notes that many disabled staff in WET workplaces have previously requested to work from home as a reasonable adjustment and been refused. However, COVID-19 has sparked a revolution in home working and as a union we

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need to build on the positives for disabled workers whilst also guarding against any detrimental impact.

UNISON's National Disabled Members Committee carried out a survey of disabled members at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in June 2020. 5,000 disabled members responded, including members working in the WET service group. The survey found:

- a) 50% of disabled members were working from home, compared to just 5% before the pandemic
- b) 73% said they were more productive or as productive compared to being in the workplace
- c) Many reported having to take less time off sick
- d) The reasons for increased productivity and reduced sickness absence included being better able to manage their pain at home, able to take short breaks or work a more flexible day with later start and finish times, and not having to make a long commute that impacted on their impairments
- e) 54% of disabled workers said they wanted to continue to work from home after COVID-19
- f) However 37% said their employer was likely to refuse to allow them to continue to work from home

Conference notes that there have been some examples of best practice in the WET service group, with some disabled staff given the tools and resources they need to work from home during the pandemic and a growing realisation from some employers that they need to allow more staff to work from home in a post-pandemic world.

Some WET employers have also ensured that staff have the same adjustments at home as they have at work – or have provided additional adjustments required for home working.

Nonetheless, there remain WET employers who are reluctant to allow home working in the future for disabled workers who need it as a reasonable adjustment. There are also employers who failed to transfer existing adjustments from the workplace or provide additional reasonable adjustments for staff working from home.

UNISON has a number of tools WET branches and stewards can use in arguing for homeworking as a reasonable adjustment including:

- i. Our Homeworking guide
- ii. Our two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled workers and representing Deaf workers

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However conference believes that in the post-pandemic world we need to negotiate with WET employers for a much stronger right to working from home for disabled workers who want it, and for the adjustments these staff require to make this a success.

Nonetheless, we must also protect disabled workers who want to return to the workplace from being forced to work from home in order to save the employer money or allow the employer to avoid ensuring accessible workplaces. Home working should be a choice for disabled workers, not a requirement.

The impact of home working on isolation and mental health also needs to be tackled and WET employers need to put additional safeguards in place to address virtual bullying and harassment.

Conference therefore calls on the WET service group executive to work with the national disabled members committee to seek to:

1. Negotiate with employers to produce stronger guidance on agreeing homeworking as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers who want it, and on ensuring reasonable adjustments are provided for disabled home workers
2. Agree safeguards against disabled workers being forced to work from home against their will if this is not their preference
3. Achieve strengthened advice on supporting staff mental health whilst working from home and measures to tackle virtual bullying and harassment
4. Publicise UNISON's Homeworking Guide to regions and branches
5. Circulate the two new 'Stewards Guides' to representing disabled and Deaf workers to regions and branches

National Disabled Members Committee

9. Accessing reasonable adjustments during COVID-19

Conference notes that a UNISON survey of disabled members working from home during COVID-19, including WET workers, found that 53% did not receive any reasonable adjustments from their employer to help them to overcome the barriers they faced as a disabled person working from home.

Only 5% had help from Access to Work, the flagship government scheme which helps identify and fund adjustments. 41% did not know about Access to Work and 23% did not think Access to Work could help with working from home.

As a result of these findings, UNISON wrote to the Chancellor in July 2020 asking for increased investment in Access to Work and for its extension to cover equipment required for homeworking. UNISON followed this up with meetings with civil servants. Conference welcomes the subsequent announcement by government in

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August 2020 that Access to Work would receive further investment and be extended to include home working.

However, there is still far too little awareness of Access to Work by both staff and employers covered by the WET service group, as was highlighted by the experience of our members during COVID-19.

Many WET workers struggled to get the adjustments they needed at home. Some had to use makeshift adjustable desks, had to buy their own monitors and head sets, were unable to access virtual meetings and thus isolated from the rest of their colleagues, or had to manage the pain caused by unsuitable dining room chairs.

'Long COVID' has also affected disabled workers who are being chased through punitive sickness absence procedures by their employers. Some previously non-disabled workers may now be covered by the Equality Act 2010 which gives a right to reasonable adjustments to people whose symptoms have a significant impact on normal daily activities and have lasted or are likely to last 12 months or more. However, conference does not have confidence that all WET managers will accept this duty.

Conference believes that one way to ensure employers take seriously their responsibility to provide reasonable adjustments is to agree an 'Accessibility Passport' system. This allows adjustments to be agreed once without the need for stewards to argue the case every time the worker gets a new manager or changes teams.

Some WET employers have implemented a passport system for reasonable adjustments. However, others do not have a passport system and some staff struggled during COVID 19 to get the adjustments they needed for home working.

UNISON has produced a Reasonable Adjustments Bargaining Guide which includes a template passport that can be adopted by WET employers. Key to UNISON's bargaining guide is that the employer should respond to requests for adjustments within a specified timescale and should also agree a timetable for implementing adjustments, overcoming the twin issues of our members receiving no response to their request or waiting years for agreed adjustments to be put in place. The guide also includes frequently asked questions that can help WET employers understand the benefits of a passport system.

Conference further notes that UNISON has also published a Quick Guide to Access to Work which can be shared with WET members.

Conference therefore calls on the WET Service Group Executive to:

- a) Raise the inconsistency of access to reasonable adjustments during COVID-19 with the employers, seeking ways to ensure there is a more joined up approach in future
- b) Publicise the government's Access to Work scheme to members and branches in WET, using the UNISON guide

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- c) Seek to negotiate with employers both nationally and locally to discount sickness absence “triggers” for workers with ‘Long COVID’ and to work towards clear acknowledgement by the employers of the right to reasonable adjustments where the Equality Act applies.
- d) Circulate UNISON’s Reasonable Adjustment and Accessibility Passport Bargaining Guide to branches and encourage them to include achieving an accessibility passport agreement with the employer as part of their local bargaining agenda.
- e) Encourage branches to share successfully negotiated passport agreements and best practise on reasonable adjustments agreed during COVID-19 with UNISON’s bargaining support unit so that other branches can learn from them.

National Disabled Members Committee

10. NET Zero

This conference notes that the UK Government has previously announced an acceleration on the progress to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Previously, the Committee on Climate Change had looked at the possibility of reaching net zero earlier but concluded that this was not credible. They acknowledged it could be possible in the production of electricity by 2045, however this would require a massive investment in renewable and low carbon generation including new nuclear.

This shift by the UK Government has provoked a massive national debate and conference believes that UNISON WET workers must be ready to respond immediately to this fast-changing situation.

While welcoming the acknowledgment that we need to achieve net zero emissions, WET workers in UNISON will be concerned about the impacts necessary changes will have on them, their families, and communities. They will rightly want to have a significant say in how the UK Water, Environment and Transport industries achieve these difficult but possible outcomes and will determine that any transition which is ‘just’ will secure workers jobs and livelihoods through the process of change.

To illustrate the scale of the challenge, in spring 2020, the Environment Agency established their carbon footprint to be c273,000 tonnes per year over half of which (147,000 tonnes) comes from construction. The Environment Agency also produces 31,000t from their fleet, 16,000t from pumping activity to alleviate flooding and drought, 15,000t from IT, and 13,000t from commuting to and from work (pre-COVID). All these emissions need to be reduced or offset to reach net zero.

The UK water sector baselined total gross Green House Gas (GHG) emissions in 2018-19 at just over 3 MtCO₂e (million tonnes CO₂ equivalent) - offset by the purchase of green electricity to total net emissions of around 2.4 MtCO₂e. This was mostly from the use of grid electricity but included nearly 0.7 MtCO₂e of gases

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(methane and nitrous oxide) emitted from treatment processes. The total excludes emissions from civil engineering construction.

The Committee on Climate Change recommended that HM Treasury should undertake a review of how any transition to net zero be funded and how we ensure a 'Just Transition' for workers and businesses in high carbon sectors. Our members in the Water, Environment and Transport Sectors are key stakeholders and need to be involved in this process within UNISON as well as with the UK Government.

Conference therefore calls on the WET SGE to:

1. Support fully the commitments to achieve net zero in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 including the aspiration published by Water UK for the water sector to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
2. Recognise the huge challenge the UK faces in getting to net zero by 2050 and that this is a specific challenge to WET Service Group workers and members. The water sector ranks as the fourth most energy intensive industry in the UK.
3. Support the view that while achieving net zero is a wider citizenship issue for all to consider, how we achieve net zero and the impacts on WET Service Group members is very much an industrial issue best determined by those who work in it.
4. Work with all appropriate stakeholders in UNISON to push policies that support a net zero strategy including a significant increase in employment growth in WET alongside new skills and training packages for new WET workers, all of whom will be required to achieve net zero.
5. Agree that financial support for decarbonisation is achieved through direct government taxation as opposed to levies on bills that often protect the wealthiest consumers.
6. Recognise that public ownership in all parts of the WET sectors presents the most efficient way to deliver decarbonisation while protecting workers and consumers alike.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

11. Health, Safety and Wellbeing in a post-pandemic working environment

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many health, safety, and wellbeing issues for WET Service Group members. We ask that this Service Group Conference aims to secure a post-pandemic working environment that supports the needs of all our members, on a COVID secure basis, with employers meeting their full range of health and safety responsibilities towards their workforces.

We know from research commissioned by the TUC that at the start of the pandemic outbreak, most employers risk assessments were inadequate, especially in dealing with a health pandemic.

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We know from members in our branches across the Service Group that working in isolation, whether that is in the home environment or out on site, has caused anxiety, uncertainty and stress including mental health issues in some cases.

Many of our members have been working from home since March 2020 and have borne the additional costs of their regular working activity in terms of heating, lighting, and powering up the essential work equipment.

In 2021, workplace lateral flow testing is being rolled out across many workplaces in our Service Group. Members have concerns about the confidentiality of this test data, plus about the potential for this to be a regular, compulsory workplace activity into the foreseeable future. However, the reliability of these tests is still unclear, and although they may have some, but unproven, benefit in reducing rates of transmission, they are no substitute for robust risk assessments, and implementation of necessary precautionary measures.

Looking ahead to the future, we know that the vaccination programme is being rolled out across the UK, with the aim of moving us into a post-pandemic social and economic environment. WET members have concerns about the potential for COVID-19 vaccination being compulsory to be able to continue to undertake their jobs. For example, water sampling technicians who visit customers' homes.

We call upon the Service Group Executive to support our members and our branches by undertaking the following actions:

1. Ensuring that guidance and best practice in homeworking, working in isolation, working in the field, and returning to indoor workplaces is shared across the Service Group.
2. Supporting bargaining across our Sectors to be sure that our members are not individually expected to meet the full costs of flexible working (including homeworking) into the future.
3. Ensuring sector specific best practice is collated about the handling of lateral flow testing, both in the home and/or work environments and shared across the WET Service Group.
4. Ensuring that guidance and support about the importance of workplace risk assessments is shared across the Service Group, including the new UNISON H&S review tool and to improve the recruitment and retention of H&S reps in the WET sectors.
5. Ensure that the SGE continues to support and promote the Be on the Safe Side campaign ensuring that guidance and support about the issue of COVID-19 vaccinations is shared across the Service Group. The aim of these actions is to support our members as we enter a post-pandemic world of work.
6. Re-emphasise the importance of regular and focussed joint-union meetings with the HSE that include representatives from the UNISON WET SG. This will help ensure that all important Health & Safety issues are discussed directly with those who have the power to enforce remedial action by employers in WET.

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Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

12. Deficiencies in the protection of operational staff in the water sector from exposure to COVID-19

This conference notes that the health, safety and wellbeing of workers providing services in the Water, Environment and Transport Sectors – as well as in the other more prominent sectors such as Health - has been paramount to UNISON during the COVID-19 pandemic, and will continue to be into the future.

The Water Industry Sector has had particular concerns relating to:

1. Effective and timely supply of PPE (in particular face masks) and hygiene supplies
2. Activities of a small minority of workers placing other workers at risk

Conference observes that a search for “PPE” on the website of the water sector regulator Ofwat yields only six results, none more recent than 2018. A similar search of the website of Water UK (the trade association which represents the major water companies of the UK) lists four results from 2017 or earlier. The report by Frontier Economics commissioned jointly by Ofwat and Water UK (published in December 2020) “Economic impacts of COVID-19 on the water sector” fails to investigate either the direct or indirect impacts on water company employees.

Conference also recognises that the limited supply of PPE in the initial stages of the pandemic had to be channelled to people working on the front line in the NHS. This was of course necessary, but it was to the detriment of key workers in other sectors including Water, Environment and Transport.

At some water companies, rollout of PPE in certain areas of wastewater and water operations was poor – though at others it was good. Some teams had to wait weeks, others got a good supply very quickly. This was caused by a combination of various factors at each water company. In addition to low quantities of items such as the required grade of face mask being available in the supply chain - these may have included (despite the best endeavours of the water companies):

- a. Lack of nationally-coordinated PPE procurement for the water industry, because of its fragmentation into private companies
- b. Just-in-time procurement practices, leading to minimum stock levels of PPE at the outset
- c. Out-of-date items being held in stock that could not be used
- d. Emergency procurement (to protect workers quickly), through new channels leading to the unintended purchase of items that were not of sufficient quality
- e. Centralised holding of available stock, leading to distribution problems
- f. Poor pandemic-related provisions in business continuity plans

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g. Risk assessments focussing on office-based workers and appearing to ignore the risks to field-based staff

Furthermore it is noted by this conference that despite the best efforts of the water companies, and the managers of subcontractor organisations, the activities of some workers have at times put other workers at risk. In particular:

- i. Contrary to directives about only doing essential activities, doing non-essential work
- ii. Not following the water companies' or subcontractors' protocols with regard to COVID-19
- iii. Not wearing the correct PPE, including facemasks
- iv. Not social distancing

Conference therefore calls on the WET SGE to:

A. Lobby Ofwat to require that all water companies must have adequate pandemic-related provisions in their five-year plans, with particular relation to a safe working environment for all employees.

B. Work with Labour Link to emphasise the Labour party's policy to bring the water industry back into public ownership. In particular the benefits of nationally-coordinated procurement and the reversal of outsourcing should now include the improved health and safety of workers (through better PPE provision, and the direct overseeing of all workers) in addition to the economic benefits.

C. Work with Water UK so that constructive discussion can lead to greater worker involvement in the scrutiny of risk assessments across all companies in the water sector. In particular this should focus on improving the elimination, reduction and mitigation provisions that these documents contain which relate to pandemic-associated risks.

D. Work with the HSE to provide the union with greater input in shaping the guidance that the HSE publishes, and its direct relevance to workers in the water sector. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that such guidance covers water companies' responsibility for the health and safety training for subcontractor workers, and the management of subcontractors to ensure protection of all workers from COVID-19.

Southern Counties Water

12.1

2nd para 3rd line after 'which represents' DELETE 'major water companies of the UK)' and INSERT "the UK water industry")

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4th Para DELETE “At some water companies” INSERT “In some parts of the UK water industry”; at the end of the 4th para DELETE ‘companies.’ and INSERT ‘industry.’

Point ii) DELETE ‘companies’ and INSERT ‘industry’

Point A DELETE ‘all water companies’ and replace with ‘the water industry’

Point C, second-line after ‘involvement,’ insert ‘and improve training’, and DELETE ‘all companies in the water sector and ’ and replace with ‘the water industry’

Point D delete the whole sentence and replace with:

To work with the Health and Safety Unit in lobbying the HSE and the UK government for more effective regulation in the water industry. This includes regular inspections, ensuring that employers understand their duty to all staff working on their premises (including subcontractor workers), and providing workers and unions with greater input in shaping the guidance that the HSE publishes, and its direct relevance to workers in the water industry.

Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive

13. LGBT+ workers health and wellbeing

Conference welcomes the increased recognition that mental health is a serious workplace issue for staff working in the Water, Environment and Transport sectors. It also has a strong equalities dimension.

Even without the impact of the pandemic, people vulnerable to discrimination face worse levels of mental ill health. In the wider community, around 1 in 4 people are affected by mental ill health. But in the LGBT+ community these figures can be as high as 70%, with trans people – and in particular young trans people – significantly over-represented (41% having attempted to end their lives). Many LGBT+ people will avoid healthcare settings they do not feel safe in, and are far more likely to access LGBT+ specific services for support with their mental health.

During the pandemic, calls to specialised LGBT+ help lines have increased dramatically.

The pandemic has physically removed LGBT+ workers from LGBT+ support groups in and outside of the workplace, limiting their ability to seek help. For some, their own homes have been unsafe with LGBT+ workers, particularly young workers, having been forced to stay in hostile environments with unsupportive family.

Galop, the LGBT anti-violence charity, found an escalation in the number of reports they received about hate crime and hate speech. Some of this violence and abuse was perpetrated by people who blamed the LGBT+ community for the pandemic,

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and often included references to the AIDS epidemic and Covid-19 as a 'punishment from God'.

Conference recognises the importance of ensuring that WET employers have policies and procedures that help to protect the mental health of staff in general and provide support to workers experiencing mental health problems, and welcomes the UNISON "Bargaining on mental health policies" guide for branches.

It also recognises the importance of occupational health services, employee health and wellbeing programmes and employee assistance programmes being fully LGBT+ inclusive.

Conference therefore calls on the WET service group executive, in liaison with the national LGBT+ committee and other parts of the union as appropriate, to:

- a. Seek to ensure that workforce health and wellbeing is on the bargaining agenda with all WET employers;
- b. Urge employers to acknowledge the impact of discrimination on mental health and include a strong equality dimension in mental health initiatives and strategies;
- c. Promote the UNISON 'Bargaining on mental health policies' guide to branches;
- d. Gather and publicise examples from branches organising in the service group of good practice in occupational health services, employee health and wellbeing programmes and employee assistance programmes;
- e. Call on employers to acknowledge the importance of specialist support services, such as LGBT+ support services, and publicise them to staff, where these exist;
- f. Signpost information and support on LGBT+ mental health to WET branches, stewards, equality co-ordinators and LGBT+ officers.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee

14. No going backwards on LGBT+ equality in Water, Environment and Transport

Conference acknowledges that even before Covid, equality was increasingly being seen as a luxury in many Water, Environment and Transport workplaces, with some employers barely abiding by the law. There is now a risk of going backwards.

Conference recognises that equality is at the heart of UNISON, and that self organisation is an essential tool to achieving UNISON's equality objectives.

Conference welcomes that many Water, Environment and Transport branches recognise the importance of self organisation.

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Conference further welcomes that many Water, Environment and Transport branches have Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) officers, allowing LGBT+ equality to be raised at branch committee meetings and assisting branches to bargain with employers to make their workplaces more inclusive.

Conference recognises that Water, Environment and Transport service group rules, language and practices that are inclusive to our LGBT+ members are vital for us to achieve our equality objectives. Likewise, it is vital that all Water, Environment and Transport branches demand that employers consider the impact of policies and practices on LGBT+ staff.

Conference further recognises that discrimination faced by LGBT+ people at work remains persistent and widespread and notes there is still a significant lack of knowledge, particularly about trans equality, among many employer HR departments and leads.

Additionally, Conference notes with concern that the TUC reported in 2019, that nearly seven in ten LGBT+ people reported being sexually harassed at work, yet two thirds didn't report it to their employer. One in four of those who didn't report it said it was because they were afraid of being 'outed' at work.

Conference further notes that 2018 National Delegate Conference called on the National Executive Council to work with the self organised groups, regions and branches to continue to work towards making UNISON recruitment and organising, advice, negotiations, campaigns, services, communications and language inclusive of non-binary members. Non-binary people are people whose gender identity is not solely male or female. The ability to be yourself at work impacts on your work performance, your relationships with colleagues and your health, both mental and physical. This is clearly a trade union issue, and there is still much to do, including within the Water, Environment and Transport.

Conference recognises that the many barriers to challenging discriminatory behaviour often stem from a lack of information, education, support and firm policies in the workplace. It is essential that there are allies in workplaces for all LGBT+ identities. It welcomes the development of the new UNISON trans ally and LGBT+ ally training programmes, aimed at giving all non-LGBT+ members the opportunity to explore what it means to be an ally and to identify ways of creating an inclusive working environment for everyone.

Conference therefore calls on the Water, Environment and Transport Service Group Executive, working in liaison with the national LGBT+ committee, to keep LGBT+ equality centre stage in bargaining and:

1. Encourage the negotiation of inclusive language in agreements and policies, and of inclusive practices and procedures, across the service group;
2. Urge branches to use UNISON's trans equality guide and model policy, along with the LGBT+ bargaining factsheets and guide to non-binary inclusion to review policies and agreements with employers with a view to achieving best practice;

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3. Urge branches where employers have no trans equality policy to seek to negotiate the adoption of UNISON's model policy;
4. Circulate guidance for branches on key areas of work on all aspects of equality including inclusive language;
5. Promote UNISON's LGBT+ and Trans Ally training courses across the service group;
6. Promote the use of UNISON's Trans Ally and Bi+ Ally leaflets to members across the service group;
7. Encourage branches to promote UNISON's Bi+, Trans, Black LGBT+ and Disabled LGBT+ network meetings;
8. Encourage Water, Environment and Transport branches to send delegates to UNISON's LGBT+ annual conference.

National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus Committee