

Severance Payments Cap

The Great Pensions Robbery – Where is the Outrage?

New rules limiting severance payments to a total value of £95,000 in the public service have been pushed through by the Tory government.

Severance packages must not exceed a maximum of £95,000 in value. Most Local Government Pension Scheme employers will be included but not those in Higher Education, Further Education and private contractors. The changes will mostly affect those in the LGPS who are made redundant and who are over the age of 55.

The old rules meant that a member made redundant over 55 had to take the pension they had earned in their current LGPS service at the point of redundancy (including any previous service). Unlike with voluntarily redundancy this pension is not reduced by an early retirement factor for early payment, as the employer picks up the additional costs of early pension payment – what is termed the “strain cost”. This can be expensive

Heard about the
fresh attack on local
government pensions?

as the cost is based on the member drawing their pension from their normal pension age. If they draw their pension before they are receiving their pension for longer – and paying less in. That is why the employer is asked to pay the fund for this cost. This is called the strain cost. Many employers offer enhancements such as Voluntary Early Retirement as an alternative to compulsory redundancy but such VER packages are also affected by the cap.

The strain cost paid by the employer to the pension fund will be included in the calculation of the £95,000 exit cap. So money the employee never sees in reality is counted towards this cap. The cap will also include statutory

redundancy pay and any other severance payments. This means that even some low and medium paid staff will hit the cap if they have more than 30 years’ service and are made redundant in their mid to late 50s. Even those on moderate earnings with long service can be affected.

In a separate process the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCLG) is currently consulting on reforming exit pay. This consultation runs to 9 November 2020 so any changes arising from this will come in some time after the £95,000 cap comes into force. That will cause serious difficulties for local authorities and legal uncertainty.

Continued overleaf

inside

**Striking in the
Age of Covid**

Pages 4-5

**General
Secretary
Election**

Page 6

**OneTeam 2k:
Time for
a pay rise**

Page 7

**Losing our
friends and
colleagues**

Pages 8-9

**Be On The
Safe Side
Campaign**

Page 11

**Education
Reports from
all sectors**

Pages 14-15



Continued from front page

For those over 55 being made redundant the consultation proposes that the regulations allow for only part of the early retirement reductions being removed if the cap is exceeded. It proposes to give members the option to defer their pensions and take a severance payment or take the pension and if the cap is exceeded, the member to pay any excess out of their own pocket or take the reduced pension.

The consultation also proposes to limit severance payment for all members made redundant to:

- A maximum of 3 weeks' per year of service
- Up to a maximum of 15 months' pay
- Setting a maximum salary on which an exit payment can be based (the NHS scheme salary limit is £80,000 for example.)

It also proposes that where a strain payment is made so the pension is unreduced for early payment, the member can only get the minimum statutory redundancy payment not any additional severance payment, even if the strain payment and additional severance payment would be under the £95,000 cap.

Although this is (deliberately?) complicated make no mistake that this is a direct attack on public sector workers. The proposed cap was initially announced in 2015 and then rushed through a month ago. It will dramatically affect a wide range of members, especially those with long service, and will have severe detriment to staff earning as little as £28,000. Inevitably because of the gender make up in local government it will disproportionately affect women. It affects all local authorities, maintained and academy schools, fire authorities, the civil service, NHS and the police.

Regional Council unanimously carried an emergency motion at its meeting on 10 October. Speakers were staggered by the lack of publicity UNISON and other unions had given to the issue and called on UNISON nationally to:

- Launch an immediate high-profile campaign, condemning the content and timing of these moves and make this a national priority for the union in the lead up to the ending of the national consultation on 9 November 2020.

- Take immediate legal steps to challenge the cap and the severance pay limits via an injunction or any viable legal option to delay and or prevent any implementation
- Develop a high-profile campaign of public and political opposition including demonstrations both real and virtual.
- Ask employers to support the campaign and use Labour Link structures to demand vocal support from Labour authorities, Mayors and the front bench of the Parliamentary Labour Party.
- Ensure that members can obtain legal advice at the lowest possible cost.

Regional Council also called on branches to raise this with their employers and request the employer sends out the details of the implications to all affected staff. Specifically the employer should be asked if they support our campaign and engage with national UNISON's search for examples of members who will be detrimentally affected by these measures.

FE Pay Claim Lodged

UNISON has submitted a pay claim for further education colleges in England, which seeks a "full restoration" of the cuts to pay in the sector over the past decade. The claim calls for:

- full restoration of college pay levels to where they would be had

college pay kept pace with inflation since 2009;

- the Living Wage to be the minimum wage in the sector
- all contracted-out services to be brought back in-house with improvements in terms and conditions equal to those already directly employed by the college.

UNISON Head of Education Jon Richards said: "After more than a decade of cuts to the sector, and a decade of cuts to staff and pay, the

FE sector needs investment – not just in buildings and equipment, but in staff to fulfil this ambitious agenda.

"Austerity was a mistake and now is the time for the government to rectify that mistake. Further education is vital to the recovery of our country and finally the government sees this. Further education employers in England must act now to address low pay in colleges."

Care Workers v Covid Campaign

Stand Up For Social Care – End the Crisis Now!

Over the past six months, care workers have been at the forefront in the struggle against COVID-19. Despite inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE), broken promises around testing and poverty wages, care workers have put themselves at risk to care for our loved ones.

Within the North West, however, care workers have also been on the frontline in the fight for better working conditions through our Care Workers vs COVID-19 Campaign.

From signing our petition, meeting politicians, organising online meetings, to speaking to the media. From social media posts, making viral videos, recruiting their colleagues to lobbying local councillors. Thousands of care workers have taken action to demand access to testing, appropriate PPE and, crucially, full normal pay for all coronavirus-related absence. Nearly 3,000 new social care members have joined UNISON in the North West during the campaign.

Because of the commitment and dedication of care workers, 17 out of 23 local authorities that commission social care in the North West have signed up to the Care Workers vs COVID-19 Campaign or made commitments in line with the campaign demands

– but it's now important that we develop our demands beyond the pandemic.

Our privatised and outsourced model of social care has systematically driven down pay and conditions in order to generate private profit for multi-national care companies. Secure and well-paid jobs within local authorities have been replaced with precarious, zero hour jobs in the private sector with workers employed on bargain basement terms and conditions.

Even before coronavirus, care workers were regularly and routinely forced to come to work whilst they were ill due to the lack of occupational sick pay. This toxic mix has been brought into sharp focus during the current pandemic – but it also shows that the inherent weaknesses within our social care system cannot be resolved until we realise that the conditions of employment within social care are intrinsically linked to the quality of care and until we remove the profit-motive from the sector.

Following a survey of nearly 800 care workers across the North West, our members have identified their key priorities as an increase to their basic pay, the introduction of occupational sick pay and a voice at work through recognised trade unions.

In order to progress these demands, we are launching the next phase of our campaign:



Stand Up for Social Care – End the Crisis Now! This campaign will mobilise our 20,000 social care members in the North West to reinforce commitment to the Ethical Care Charter and demand that local authorities strengthen social value commissioning to include specific measures for payment of the Real Living Wage, occupational sick pay, hourly rates for sleep-ins and travel time, and trade union recognition and access. No longer must private companies profit from public funds by attacking the terms and conditions of our members.

We will also be launching a *Stand Up for Social Care Councillors' Network* that will organise sympathetic councillors to advance these demands and develop proposals for in-sourcing social care services.

We are currently in the process of finalising campaign materials ahead of the launch, but if any branches or activists would like to get involved with the campaign – or believe there is an opportunity to bring social care in-house within their authority contact Dan Smith, Regional Organiser, d.smith3@unison.co.uk to discuss further.

We Are With You Dispute

Striking in the Age of Covid

UNISON members in the drug and alcohol rehabilitation service in Wigan and Leigh are involved in a long-running dispute over broken pay promises.



Photo: Marcus Rose/UNISON



Lisa Nandy MP

The 29 members were transferred from the NHS to their current employer, the London-based charity *We Are With You*. They were promised that their rates of pay would continue to match those of NHS workers, but the charity reneged on that commitment. The employer cited the European Court of Justice ruling on *Alemo Herron* to legally support its non-payment of the promised pay rise.

We Are With You has a five year contract with Wigan Council to supply the service from 2018-23. Over the course of the contract, former NHS staff stand to lose an estimated average of £7,870 each.

The members have now taken **26 days of action** over the course

of 12 months. The dispute was interrupted by the Covid outbreak and the planned action in the spring was suspended. Members are determined that *We Are With You* should keep their pay promise and ensure that they receive a consolidated pay rise.

Staff recruited directly by *We Are With You* are on far inferior pay and conditions to those who transferred from the NHS. The overall cost to keyworkers in Wigan and Leigh of this service being commissioned from *We Are With You* rather than being provided in the public sector is estimated at £1.8million. UNISON represents members in both tiers of the two-tier workforce and has a density in excess of 50%. In September, the union won statutory recognition to collectively bargain

on behalf of the workforce in Wigan & Leigh. This was achieved after a protracted covid-delayed process and despite strenuous employer opposition. It will now be possible to formulate and submit a pay claim on behalf of all staff and to seek facilities time for the hardworking local reps.

We Are With You is a charity but it receives most of its income from taking on outsourced public service contracts. It pays its chief executive £140,000 a year, and it spent the same amount on a re-brand earlier this year – ditching its previous moniker 'Addaction'.

The recent strike action in September and October necessarily involved socially-distanced picket lines, striking from home, and a



virtual rally. Despite the challenges of taking strike action during a pandemic, effective ways were found to give voice to the dispute.

The strike has been supported widely across the labour movement. Local and front-bench Labour MPs have supported picket lines and rallies, and members have received messages of solidarity from as far away as Dorset and Cuba. Members are very grateful for all

the messages of support and for the generous donations to the strike fund.

What You Can Do

We Are With You prizes its reputation very highly and is sensitive to criticism on social media. Please follow and retweet the regional account @NorthWestUNISON and look out for the hashtags #WeAreNOTWithYou and #KeepYourPayPromise



Sign the petition:

<https://tinyurl.com/wawy-2020>

Get your branch (or personally) donate to the strike fund, the details are here:

<https://tinyurl.com/UNISON-solidarity>

My67 Mandela Day

18 July is Mandela Day, which celebrates Nelson Mandela's values, dedication to the service of humanity and struggle for peace throughout the world. UNISON North West will once again honour Mandela Day by taking part in the Mandela8 My67 campaign.

Nelson Mandela's fight for justice began in 1942 and for 67 tireless years he continued to fight for social justice and human rights. The My67 programme encourages people to give 67 minutes of their day to help someone else, ideally on Mandela Day or in that week.

It is a day where Nelson Mandela's life's work is celebrated annually through acts of kindness and a growing number of UNISON branches now take part in the event.

In 2019, several UNISON branches took part in Mandela My67. Liverpool Branch worked with Liverpool City Council and the Inclusive Cities project to pay for refugees, migrants and asylum

seekers to undertake a free 67 minute taster session at local leisure services. The branch also distributed 67 free passes to Liverpool's leisure facilities which allowed 2 months' free entry. In addition, UNISON Merseytravel organised a 67 minute concert by a local choir and dedicated 67 minutes to securing donations for local food banks.

This year's My67 was always going to feel a little different but our branches got creative and still managed to have a positive impact on their communities. Liverpool Hospitals' Health branch secretary Su Edwards raised £700 for the L6 hub by holding a sponsored silence! Whilst 67 food parcels were donated to the local food bank and books were donated to the community resource centre.

Meanwhile, Salford City UNISON held an equalities discussion relating to Mandela Week featuring speakers including Sonia Bassey MBE (Mandela8 Campaign), Cllr



Sharmina August (Salford City Council), Nahella Ashraf (Stand up to Racism) and Shay Brown (TransActual).

Finally, a regional webinar took place which discussed Mandela's legacy, UNISON's role in the anti-apartheid movement and anti-racist campaigns since then, the Black Lives Matter movement, the challenges facing us today and the next steps for trade unions in tackling racism.

It featured speakers including Kim Johnson MP, Ameen Hadi (UNISON NW Black Members Committee Chair) and Izzy McVicar (Community Heart).

If you are interested in taking part in commemorating Mandela Day in 2021, then please contact Lynne Morris: l.morris@unison.co.uk

General Secretary Election

Maximise the Vote!

This autumn, members will pick a new leader for UNISON in our General Secretary election. The General Secretary is the most senior role in the union. It's important that as many members as possible take part and vote for the person who will best represent them.

It's no secret that fewer people are voting in elections – and that applies to UNISON too. But deciding who leads UNISON is a big decision and one we only take every five years. Branches have an important role in increasing participation; helping to spread the word about this election and encouraging members to have their say.

This is not about promoting any one candidate – there are strict rules to ensure that UNISON branches don't use any branch funds, property or resources to campaign for any one candidate in the election – with the one exception that, if your branch

has nominated a candidate, you can advise members of this nomination using up to 100 words and your usual channel of communications.

Ten things to do to get the vote out:

1. Use branch communications to let members know about the election and why it is important to vote
2. Remind members about the election in branch and workplace meetings – virtual or real
3. Download the poster from UNISON's website and display on noticeboards
4. Keep checking the website for new materials
5. Follow UNISON's Facebook and Twitter feeds for the latest
6. Encourage members to vote
7. Share national UNISON's social media posts about the election
8. Remind members that the ballot pack contains everything they need
9. No ballot paper by 10 November? Call the ballot hotline: 0800 0 857 857
10. Remind members to vote and return ballot papers by November 27



General Secretary Election – North West Region nominates Paul Holmes



Nominated: Paul Holmes

At a Special Regional Council on 19 September, delegates voted overwhelmingly to nominate Paul Holmes (Branch Secretary of Kirklees Local Government Branch in Yorkshire & Humberside Region and member of the National Executive Council).

The first ever virtual meeting of Regional Council was well attended

and all 5 candidates were present. Following opening statements, each candidate answered a range of questions put forward by regional committee and then made closing remarks. Voting was as follows:

Paul Holmes 79
Christina McAnea 17
Roger McKenzie 17
Hugo Pierre 2
Peter Sharma 0

One Team 2k Why everyone in the NHS deserves a pay rise

A campaign for an early pay rise for all NHS Staff has been launched by UNISON. COVID has shone a light on the work that NHS staff undertake and how often they go over and above the call of duty to care for others.



Although the government announced that some public service workers would receive a pay rise not all NHS staff were included. UNISON has members in all parts of the NHS. The full healthcare team includes porters, domestics, healthcare assistants, nurses, occupational therapists, many other health professionals, administrative and other support staff. All NHS Staff have contributed to the fight against COVID and so all NHS Staff should receive an early pay rise.

Several events to back up the campaign took place recently. There was an NHS Pay webinar with Paula Barker, MP and Sara Gorton, the UNISON National Officer who is the lead negotiator for all trade unions on NHS Pay. Attendees also heard from George Barron, who sits on our National Health Service Group Executive and Paul Almond, UNISON Rep from We Are With You. Michelle England, Chair of our North West Regional Healthcare Committee chaired the webinar.

Michelle said “NHS workers had no choice but to continue to work to ensure patients were cared for. Some members have told us about how they held the hands of the dying - when their own families couldn’t be with them, whilst other members moved out of their family

homes to protect their families who were shielding. UNISON members continue to go over and above to get the nation through this pandemic. Politicians stood on their doorsteps to clap every Thursday and now we ask them to really show us they value us by giving all NHS staff an early pay rise.”

Meanwhile members in East Lancashire made the front page of the Lancashire Telegraph when staff from three different hospitals took to the streets and demanded an early pay rise. Karen Narramore from East Lancashire Health branch who led the rallies said “UNISON members have kept the NHS going through years of austerity, going year on year without a pay rise. A meaningful pay rise this year would be well deserved recognition of the amazing job the full NHS team has done during the COVID pandemic”

UNISON now takes its call to the government as any pay rise needs to be fully funded. Paula Barker, MP for Liverpool Wavertree tabled Early Day Motion 742 and we are asking activists and members to write to their MP to gain support for the motion. Paula Barker, who was UNISON NW Regional Convenor

before she became an MP said “UNISON members are at the forefront of the response to this crisis. What our members and NHS staff deserve is material recognition for their work not just warm words and empty gestures. I promise to stand with our members in this fight for an early pay rise. Such a gesture should be just the start after a long decade of pay restraint.”

Members are asked to support the One Team 2k Campaign by writing to their own MP and asking them to support Early Day Motion 742. They can also add the campaign photo frame to their Facebook profile photo – links below.

For the latest information visit the UNISON North West website: www.unisonnw.org/value_us_pay_us

Facebook Photo Frame

www.facebook.com/profilepicframes/?selected_overlay_id=784923732257132

Early Day Motion #742: For an updated list of signatories follow this link <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57283/early-pay-rise-for-nhs-staff> and check to see if your MP has signed it.

Glen Williams, Regional Convenor writes...

Sending strength, solidarity and thanks to our UNISON North West activists



Since I last wrote we have lost a true friend and comrade to our region – **Jean Blevin**.

Jean was our Regional Treasurer and longstanding health activist known throughout our region and union.

After a short battle, Jean fell victim to cancer in August and we have met regularly with her family, friends and colleagues. When the pandemic allows, we will properly remember the immense work Jean did for our region and union.

I really do hope you are all safe and well at work, at home and in your community. Whilst these are unprecedented times, they are also times in which massive numbers of workers are joining our union. Whilst this can cause significant workload increases in casework and contacts to already overworked branch and regional officers, it

should also be seen as recognition that UNISON is the go-to union in this region.

Since taking up the role of Regional Convenor in May, I have been 'going' to as many 'meetings' with different regional service groups, self-organised groups and committees as possible to listen to the issues and discover how they fit into the bigger picture of our union.

Solidarity messages have been sent all over the UK and the globe to people in struggle on behalf of the UNISON North West region, as well as financial support to workers suffering hardship. It is a real pleasure to send these but at the same time a source of anger they are needed at all.

Whilst there can be no going back to 'normal', your region is beginning to get used to the new virtual world. We have held various regional meetings now and accompanying

training is being provided for a wide range of activists.

The pandemic has not stopped some rogue employers attacking our members and We Are With You (formerly Addaction) are leading the way in terms of trying to exploit our members. I doubt they expected the steadfast opposition from this brilliant group of workers, who are again on strike with the full backing of our union against their employer's refusal to honour their promise to pay Agenda For Change rates.

We will hopefully all get through this terrible pandemic and I promise to do briefer updates on a more regular basis. My real purpose for writing was to say an enormous thank-you to all involved in raising the profile of our union in this region, it may often go unnoticed but it is never without thanks.

Stay safe and well.

Raph Parkinson "A warm and funny gentle man"

We are so sorry to have to record the death of Raph Parkinson, Regional Organiser. Raph had been receiving treatment at Royal Liverpool Hospital for pneumonia complications arising from Covid-19 but sadly his situation worsened. Regional Council paid tribute to Raph with the chair describing him as "a warm and funny gentle man".

Raph had been involved in the union throughout his working life. For many years he was a NALGO then UNISON senior activist in Merseytravel and Liverpool City Council. He served

on the NEC, was a leading member of the Regional Black Members' Group, a committed anti-racist and socialist campaigner. He joined the union's staff over ten years ago as an Area Organiser and progressed to Regional Organiser in the Merseyside and Cheshire Team and latterly the CASE Unit. Raph was a much liked and respected colleague, a committed staff union representative, a loyal fan of Liverpool FC, who loved his family and was dedicated to the cause of trade unionism and socialism. He will be missed by all of us who knew



him in UNISON and the wider labour movement.

Raph is survived by his partner Laura and his two sons. UNISON North West Region sends them our deepest sympathy and solidarity. Messages of condolences to Raph's family may be sent via Val Rothwell (V.Rothwell@unison.co.uk) at Regional Office.

Dying to Work Jean's Campaign

Jean had been supportive of the Dying to Work campaign since its creation and had advocated for it within her roles as chair of UNISON North West's health committee and a member of the North West TUC Executive committee.

Jean had been in discussions with Walton NHS Trust since the summer of 2019 about signing up to the Dying to Work Charter.

So in the summer of 2020, when Jean discovered she had terminal cancer, she wanted it to be her legacy that no-one who has received a terminal diagnosis would suffer additional strife at work or financial concerns. Jean was incredibly proud of her achievement, which means that everyone working within the trust will benefit from the Charter for years to come.

Jean's Story

I was feeling particularly awful for weeks, I just couldn't shake it. I'm rarely off sick from work or my union duties as a UNISON steward and officer but this felt like something distinctly different.

With some 'encouragement' from my family, I got an urgent appointment where I was very quickly sent for some tests and within days I was given the news that I had cancer that was quite advanced. I was given months.

A terminal diagnosis is devastating for anyone as you can imagine and it impacts far wider than just the individual being given this life shattering news. Your wider family are affected, your friends, colleagues

and most challenging – your nearest and dearest, loved ones, partners, children and grandchildren.

It's an emotional roller-coaster, it's terrifying, overwhelming, crushing and sobering. There are so many questions, obviously, often, the first one being 'is there any treatment?' closely followed by 'how long have I got?'

My family, my union and my employer were so supportive, immediately putting things in place to ensure that we had thought of everything like prioritising my health, safety and wellbeing, removing stresses, not worrying about work, or my employment status or pay or my union duties. Instead, I could plan to overcome practical and financial worries and allow myself to focus on who and what was important.

Knowing that you have limited time means that you need to focus on what is important, thinking about who, and what you will leave behind. You will need to have some challenging conversations and consider a future that is uncertain. I wanted my legacy to be making sure that nobody working in the Walton NHS Trust ever has to worry about the effects of getting a terminal diagnosis ever again and working with my employer whilst I still can, we've signed up to the TUC's 'Dying to Work Charter', I'm so proud of achieving this!

Life is so precious, as is our wonderful NHS and I thank every single NHS worker for the role they play in helping people like me every day. I'd like to thank the Walton NHS trust for signing up to this Dying to Work Charter and working with me on the list of requirements needed to successfully meet the pledge.

I'd like to thank my union, UNISON for always having my back and supporting my family. And to my family, I'm the luckiest mum in the world to have had you all, you've made me so happy.



Jean Blevin

The TUC Dying to Work Charter

Is your employer signed up to the TUC's Dying to Work Charter? If the answer is no, then ask them to be a signatory and join the growing list of TUC partners and employers that ensure choice, dignity and respect to staff facing the end of their lives. The Charter allows members to have some control over their working and personal lives, despite their illness. It gives the choice and ability to continue working or spend the precious time left with loved ones. The charter ensures bespoke treatment and support for those facing the kind of challenges that we hope we ourselves and our families never have to.

Sign the TUC Charter: www.unisonnw.org/dying_to_work



Inside Liverpool Labour History

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Marx

The problem is that not enough of that history has been written by trade unionists. Many of us will have been interviewed by academics or PhD students writing their thesis or drafting a book. How many of you have gone beyond writing that article for a branch magazine about a dispute you have been involved in? Where is the personal record of your struggle?



A new website written by four former UNISON activists who were involved at branch, regional and national level looks at a variety of disputes and struggles going back to the 1970s.

There are many myths about the history of the Labour and trade union movement in Liverpool and the North West. This website aims to better inform debates about that history by publishing documents, recollections and opinions about events from trade unionists who

actually took part in those struggles.

It will cover the 1970s to the present day and contributors will give testimony based on their personal involvement.

This is our history written by our activists. We hope it will give younger members and those who were not actually involved in particular disputes a window into the past, into our history. The website already includes articles on

Our City Our Fight – NALGO and the Liverpool City Council 1985 budget crisis; the 1978/79 social workers strike; the Liverpool typists strike 1981; the year-long miners’ strike; UNISON – NALGO, NUPE and COHSE the merger ...and lots to come.

The website is about more than Liverpool and more than Labour and you can find it at insideliverpoollabourhistory.com

Take a look.

Don't lose your say – vote safely – vote from home

There will be elections across the North West in May 2021. This is the first chance for members to give a verdict on the Covid crisis, growing economic uncertainty and the direction of our region since the General Election.

These are important elections that affect the public services we provide and those that we rely upon. They give members

an opportunity to have a say on important issues and to send messages to government.

Because of the pandemic, it remains unclear how elections will be conducted.

There has been talk of fully postal voting or of extending voting over several days, as well as the possibility things will be done as normal on one day.

Whatever happens the best chance of ensuring our members can have their say safely and at their convenience is to sign up for a postal vote.

Members should be advised that they can get the form to sign up for a postal vote by contacting the elections office of their local council.

Sign up for a postal vote!

Health and Safety

Be on The Safe Side: build Health & Safety Capacity at Pace!

The new reality is a global health and safety crisis we have never experienced before. And amidst this more than 500 health and safety reps have been keeping over 200,000 members in the North West safe in 35,000 workplaces – many of them hostile environments. That's an average of 400 members in 70 workplaces for each branch H&S rep to keep safe!

It continues to be a hugely committed and courageous effort in the face of extraordinary circumstances – when branches are already overwhelmed with the day to day issues members face. And with the end of furlough coming, the reality of redundancies is real and inevitable. But branches are meeting the challenge of organising remotely to support members on the 'old' and the 'new' with little or no physical access – and have learned quickly to adapt.

Omnishambles is surely too kind a word to describe the Tory government's mismanagement of the situation. Workers in health, local government, police and justice, public transport, schools, and social care have put their lives – and those of their families on the line – to continue doing the jobs they love. All without the support of the government and their employers to keep them safe. They all need to be members to protect each other.

Broken promises on PPE; little or no access to testing for key workers; so called 'world beating' track and trace system failure; absence of or



insufficient risk assessments; rogue employers bullying members to return to unsafe workplaces; and the avoidable deaths of key workers supporting the vulnerable are all part of the problem.

The NW *Be on The Safe Side* project team is working hard to build a picture of branches current capacity and capability to keep members safe. Campaign meetings with 15 branches have already taken place – it is a campaign moving at pace. If your branch has not yet had the opportunity to discuss the campaign please contact d.isherwood@unison.co.uk to organise a virtual briefing session.

An important aim of the campaign is to build greater diversity in our H&S activist base. We are meeting with regional self-organised groups, and the young members' forum to hear about lived experiences, and to listen for ideas on how to encourage more members to become active in H&S.

This will inform the campaign strategy further to build greater

diversity of member participation, and enhance proportionality and fair representation.

Members who come forward to become H&S reps will need to be trained and supported to become active. Training is already in place for new and existing H&S reps with an online H&S starter course every Thursday for six weeks starting on 5 November. If you are new to online learning and are worried about using technology contact Regional Education Organiser Bob Kelly at k.scott@unison.co.uk for a chat and an application form.

Health and safety law is currently on our side. H&S reps have the most power in the trade union movement because of the legal protections employers cannot ignore.

Nobody knows what the future will bring but we do know that the better organised we are, the more activists and reps we have the easier it will be to meet the challenges ahead. Get your branch engaged in the campaign to keep members safe and healthy at work: [#BeOnTheSafeSide](https://twitter.com/BeOnTheSafeSide)

General Secretary Dave Prentis

No Going Back to Normal

What comes next? How do we campaign for a recovery that recognises the huge sacrifices made by working people and addresses the glaring inequalities we all see in our communities?

UNISON Our new campaign, *No Going Back to Normal* is part of the answer.

Thousands of key workers died during the pandemic looking after us. Nurses, care workers, cleaners and more made the ultimate sacrifice to help others. And this was all the more heart-breaking because for years before COVID-19, these public service workers and the jobs they do have been undervalued, underpaid and too often invisible.

Years of neglect made the effect of the pandemic so much worse for them – from shortages of PPE to the crisis in care homes. From a lack of nurses to a shortage of Covid tests. This was a failure of planning, but it was also the result of more than 10 years of brutal spending cuts and vicious austerity.

And yet despite all this, key workers in our public services pulled through for all of us. I'm proud of every single UNISON member's reaction to this unprecedented crisis. And proud too that our union has continued to support, represent and fight for those incredible public service workers every single day despite the

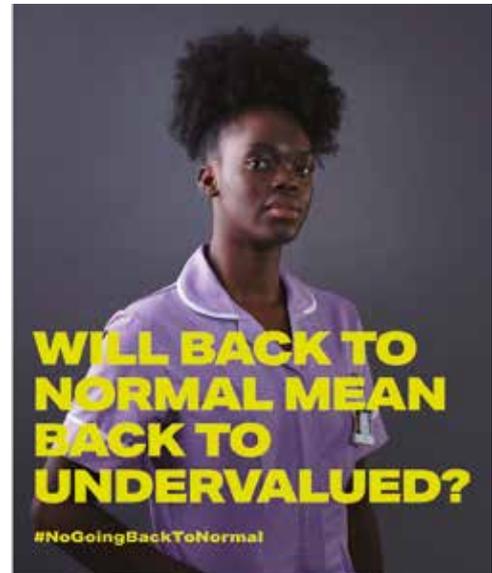
challenges we've all faced.

It's understandable that after so much sacrifice, there's a desire to return to normal. Yet in UNISON we know that normal was never good enough. The old "normal" would only mean making the same mistakes again, and a return to under-valuing our public services and the people who provide them.

This autumn, politicians Westminster, Holyrood, Cardiff and Stormont will be making important decisions about the future funding of our public services.

The early signals are that the lessons have not been learned. The Westminster government is intent on pitching public sector against private sector and ignoring the decisions they have taken that got us to where we are now. They want things back to normal, because they think the old normal was ok.

That's why our campaign calls for measures now to: rebuild all our public services, by securing sustained long-term investment; create fairer and safer workplaces; give public service workers a decent pay rise, lift the lowest paid out of in-work poverty and build a more equal post COVID-19 society, in which the inequalities that have



The clapping might have stopped but the support shouldn't. Join us in the fight to rebuild public services and support the people who provide them at unison.org.uk/nobacktonormal



become so evident during the crisis are addressed as a matter of urgency.

Over coming weeks we will be taking this fight to the government.

The more people who visit our new campaign website and sign the open letter to the prime minister and chancellor the better. Please look out for the ads in the press and on social media over the coming weeks and share with your family and friends.

Together, we can make sure that our future is better than the old normal.

Further details here: www.nogoinbacktonormal.org/

Young LGBT+ Mental Health and Suicide Awareness

Hub of Hope

Did you know that LGBT+ people have an increased risk of mental health issues compared with heterosexual people? Figures from the LGBT in Britain Health Report 2018 show that LGB are six times, and Trans people nine times more likely to have thoughts of suicide when compared with the 5% rate of the general public. One in eight LGBT people aged 18-24 said they have attempted to take their own lives.

Most services available to LGBT people often focus on the practicalities, physical and sexual health – but missing mental health support completely. The effect of Covid-19 on the LGBT community has also been massive. The LGBT Foundation, in a document called *Hidden Figures: The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on LGBT Communities in the UK* noted a 50% increase in calls about mental health to the Foundation's helpline where isolation was a key area of concern.

The lack of face to face events which would normally be the only safe space for some people increases isolation particularly when looking at intersectionality, for example gay males in Muslim families.

In late September **Laura Heaton** chaired a North West Trade Union Congress meeting on Young LGBT+ Mental Health and Suicide Awareness. This followed a



successful motion to UNISON's 2019 LGBT+ Conference.

Laura told us "It is a subject I am passionate about due my personal experiences with mental health, growing up as a lesbian, coming to terms with my sexuality, and coming out in the late 90s. Being part of the UNISON NW Regional LGBT+ Committee, I see people with varying mental health needs who are in desperate need of advice. So we have to ask the question "What can we do?"

"I have created a wallet sized, folded signposting card with the backing of NW region TUC and UNISON NW LGBT+ Group. This has links to PAPYRUS, Young Minds, Zero Suicide Alliance and a QR code link to the **Hub of Hope** website. This is something we are looking to print and get out at events when we can once again meet face to face.

In the future we are looking to launch this card in the North West, and then hopefully move to making it a national initiative. I am also meeting with the founder of **Hub of Hope**, Jake Mills, and Sarah

Skelton from PAPYRUS to discuss developing and promoting the resource further. We are meeting soon to discuss possible resources online.



One specific area of progress is with The Hub of Hope. This is a first of its kind; a national mental health database which brings together in one place organisations and charities, large and small, from across the country who offer mental health advice and support. We are looking at how the Hub may be promoted more widely and how we may increase the amount of LGBT+ services available.

It is important that people can access the support they need in this pandemic and this is something that will really make an impact for LGBT+ people. I'm really looking forward to the difference we can make to people's lives."

Laura Heaton, UNISON North West LGBT+ Committee

EDUCATION – Schools Report

The Government could do better

Most of our schools never closed of course – they remained open during the COVID lockdown for key worker and vulnerable children. But full re-opening recently is causing much anxiety. Even in the short time since full reopening many have had to close year-group bubbles. In Greater Manchester alone there have been 110 schools with reported cases and this continues to rise.

Support Staff are anxious about the return with many saying they do not feel safe in their workplace. We have been supporting our members by issuing regularly updated guidance, amid extremely tight deadlines. Advice notes, FAQ sheets, and an in-depth health and safety checklist have all been issued.

Whole school risk assessments as well as individual risk assessments and where necessary occupational health risk assessments have all formed part of the support offered. And then there have been our popular webinars, covering various aspects from health and safety, mental wellbeing, and pupil

behaviour to name but a few. All have been very well attended and, in many cases, oversubscribed.

But Gavin Williams, Secretary of State for Education continues to show his and the government's complete lack of understanding of how schools run and the work support staff carry out. Many head teachers are clear that schools can't run without them. Support staff are integral to the smooth running of a school from reception to back office staff, teaching assistants, pastoral support, technicians, cleaners, catering staff, caretakers and facility staff to name but a few.

The lack of breakfast and after-school clubs in their own children's schools is affecting working hours especially in areas of local lockdown, where grandparents or other childcare provision is not an option. In some areas our members are being asked to accept a temporary change of contract.

Cath Baggaley, Chair of our Regional School's Forum said, "We have other instances where members have to stay at home because their child's school has been

subject to bubble closures, again it is the impact of this for anxious members – will they be paid, will they have exhausted their special leave policy so early into the school year?"

The government advice is not decisive and many find it completely confusing, they ask employers to be understanding but offer no additional funding to support our schools so they in turn can support their staff.

School bubbles have to be rigidly adhered to, yet children from all bubbles can go on the same school bus. Schools have staggered start and finish times, yet many parents congregate on pavements outside of school, with no social distancing in place. This is extremely frustrating for our members who are doing everything to ensure that they, their colleagues and pupils remain safe. It all adds to members' levels of anxiety.

Pam Howard, Chair of the National School Sector Committee said, "There is no end in sight to the challenges schools are facing, we just have to hope we can all keep safe".

EDUCATION – Higher Education

Organise and Sanitise!

A recently published UNISON survey shows how university staff including cleaners, security guards and administrative workers are feeling increasingly anxious about work, now that universities have reopened. More than 4,000 UNISON members

completed the annual higher education survey, which exposed concerns about pay, working hours and the threat from COVID-19. 83% expressed fears about social distancing, and 45% said they were worried about a lack of personal

protective equipment. Worryingly, more than a third are still to receive a COVID-19 risk assessment.

This is despite the employers recommending support staff be at the heart of safety planning ahead of any return.



Despite their heightened risk, nearly one in five of university support staff said their employer hadn't provided them with any support and two out of five said they'd like more support ahead of the return. Encouragingly though, two out of five reported excellent support from their managers, highlighting what can be achieved when responsible universities work with staff and unions.

More generally, the picture of the financial impact on HE from Covid is mixed across the region. There are projected losses of £270m at one institution to £30m at the lower end, a picture being replicated across England. It is clear that our members will be the ones bearing the brunt of any measures to change the financial position.

Meanwhile the government failed to come up with any financial bailout for HE other than to offer loans, advance 2021 student fees money and suggesting mergers where institutions are at significant risk.

UNISON continues to call on the government to provide an urgent financial injection and sustainable funding to protect higher education. A significant number of our members who provide vital support service functions in HE institutions have been placed on furlough, which is due to end this month. With the push to provide more online learning there are real concerns about what will happen to these jobs. Some institutions are already coming out to say redundancies will be inevitable while others are looking at ways to cut pay, annual

leave and general terms and conditions.

UNISON has consistently called for universities to work with their campus trade unions on a risk-assessment based approach. Universities need to properly resource a safe return to work and continued working on campus with full and appropriate sanitisation facilities, social distancing measures and enhanced cleaning regimes.

Given the increase in COVID cases in the University sector in our region, trained and active health and safety reps are more important than ever. If you are interested in finding out more about becoming a health and safety rep, please contact d.isherwood@unison.co.uk.

Andy Rutherford

EDUCATION – Support Staff

Plea from all education staff: Test us all!

UNISON has launched an emergency petition calling for all education workers to be included as one of the groups named for priority COVID-19 testing.

It takes a whole team to keep schools, nurseries, colleges and universities running, but when Matt Hancock, the health secretary announced the list of workers eligible for priority testing in England, in education, only 'teaching staff' were mentioned. This completely ignores the fact that over half of the staff in education aren't teachers.

The union is demanding that when the government announces the full details of priority testing, it includes

all education staff – not just teachers.

UNISON Head of Education Jon Richards said: "Once more, the government has shown they don't understand that nurseries, schools, colleges and universities can't function without support staff.

"In the spring, we persuaded the government to add education support staff to the list of key workers, following their initial proposal that only teachers would be included.

"It seems we have to remind them again that schools won't open, classrooms and halls won't get cleaned and staff, children and



young people will be put at risk if support staff are sitting at home wondering where and when they can get a test."

And Mr Richards concluded: "If only the government realised, once and for all, that there is more to education than teachers."

You can sign and share the petition here: <http://action.unison.org.uk/page/68165/petition/1>

UNISON NORTH WEST LABOUR LINK

Gearing Up for Elections in May 2021

The first test of public opinion since the General Election will be in May 2021 when elections will take place across our region.

Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham are defending their Mayoral positions in Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Regions. City Mayors are up in Liverpool and Salford. Police and Crime Commissioners are being contested in Lancashire, Cheshire, Merseyside and Cumbria. There are local elections in all areas that have annual elections. In Lancashire and Cumbria, the 84 County Council divisions in each area will be contested.

Crucial Chance To Have Our Say

UNISON Labour Link is urging activists everywhere to get involved where they live. This Government has presided over chaotic confusion through the pandemic. Ill-prepared after ten years of cuts, slow to act with the fifth highest number of deaths worldwide and our social care homes suffering particularly badly.

They have us staring down the barrel of a 1980s-style recession and a catastrophe in the making with local government funding. People across the region need to hear the alternative and we can take no area for granted in this

campaign. Angela Rayner, Deputy Leader of Labour, one of our own, has challenged the prime minister in Parliament and she opened the Labour on-line Conference with a call to pay our key workers a decent wage.

One Lancashire Campaign

UNISON is aiming to specifically target extra resources to Lancashire. In 2019, Labour were reduced to just 4 MPs in

the county; we need to be winning there. It is important to retain Clive Grunshaw as the Police and Crime Commissioner since Tory plans fall far short of restoring services in Lancashire to their 2010 level. It is vitally important to win back control of the County Council too. It's not just about opposing savage cuts, it is also about who shapes devolution in Lancashire with a Combined Authority likely.

This will see local government reorganisation affecting members' jobs. We need people in power that will listen. It is also important we use district council elections to provide a civic leadership to challenge the new Tory MPs in Lancashire. Our activists in all these areas will welcome assistance as the campaign unfolds.

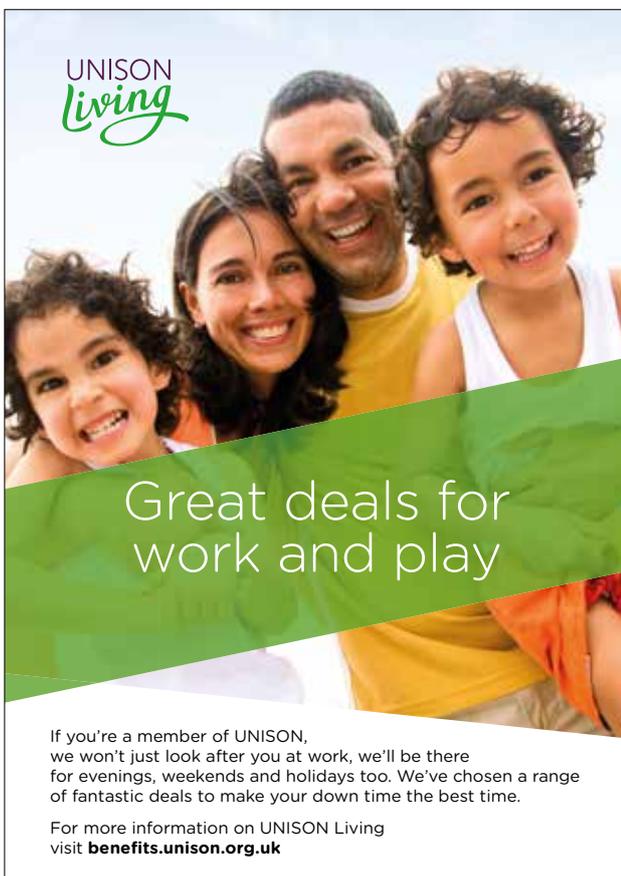
No Complacency

Other important areas include the defence of David Keane as Police and Crime Commissioner and Cumbria County Council. Local elections in areas that Labour fell back in 2019 also need attention.

What You Can Do

We will be developing member to member messages, urging members to sign up for a postal vote and offering support as citizens to local Labour campaigns. Further details will follow. Any questions may be directed to j.hunter@unison.co.uk

WATCH THIS SPACE.



UNISON
Living

Great deals for
work and play

If you're a member of UNISON, we won't just look after you at work, we'll be there for evenings, weekends and holidays too. We've chosen a range of fantastic deals to make your down time the best time.

For more information on UNISON Living visit benefits.unison.org.uk