

# The Update

21 Jun 2021

The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

## UNISON Conference

Conference hears of the experiences of NHS workers in the pandemic - and debates what is needed to restore and improve the health service and social care



## The COVID experience: difficult to talk about, but vital that we do

**Post-traumatic stress disorder, exhaustion, the demands of a backlog of non-COVID care during a staff exodus - these are just some of the issues currently facing the workforce.**

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Linda Hobson from Newcastle Hospitals branch opened Wednesday afternoon's business by moving a motion from the Northern region on The NHS after the pandemic.

"It's difficult to talk about what we've experienced, but it's important that we do talk about it," she told delegates.

And as an NHS worker and branch secretary of a busy and acute hospital that saw some of

the UK's first COVID patients, Ms Hobson was in a good position to do talk about the impact of the crisis, "even as we tentatively emerge from lockdown."

She noted that "mental-health interventions alone will not deal with the crisis in the NHS." A proper pay rise was now a priority.

And she highlighted yet another issue facing the health service: privatisation. There was a stark

contrast between the effectiveness of the privately-run track and trace system in England and that of the NHS-run vaccination roll-out, “a real example of one-team working.”

Janet Maiden, of University College London Hospitals branch, echoed Ms Hobson’s call for an end to privatisation in health and social care.

Ms Maiden also mused: “Who could have imagined the last 15 months?” before reminding delegates of the comments by Boris Johnson’s former advisor Dominic Cummings, reportedly showing a prime minister who ranted that they should simply “let the bodies pile high”.

Conference called on the NEC to:

- campaign for substantial extra funding for the NHS and public health to help the service recover after COVID and to make up for a decade of underfunding;
- continue campaigning for an end to privatisation and for healthcare services to be brought back in-house;
- support moves to end the competition regime of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, but resist any parts of the government’s proposals that would give the private sector new opportunities;
- continue to support the principles of health and social care integration, but on the basis that social care needs a massive funding boost and major reform.

### **Social care, young workers, long COVID**

A busy conference session saw delegates vote to shorten debates in order to get through more motions.

On health and social care for older people after the pandemic, Rosie Macgregor, speaking for the national retired members’ committee, highlighted the lack of interest in tackling the issue from some in government.

Ms Macgregor said that a national care service was essential. “Never again must some of the

most vulnerable [be subject to] poor planning, ignorance or the relentless pursuit of profits.”

On burnout and young workers, Luca Di Mambro-Moor of the national young members’ forum told delegates: “The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the issues that young members have been raising for years”.

It was essential to make sure this doesn’t turn into a national mental health crisis.

Mr Di Mambro-Moor said that the forum supports UNISON’s Be on the safe side campaign to recruit and train more health and safety reps.

Ian Doig from South Lanarkshire local government branch spoke to conference about the need to class those with long COVID (also known as post COVID-19 syndrome) as having a disability, in order that workers suffering this can then receive protection under law, rather than leave them vulnerable to disciplinary procedures.

### **LGBT+ equality, outsourced workers**

Jackie Lewis, for the LGBT+ group, introduced a motion to affirm that there must be No going backwards on equality.

“This is about taking forward our work on LGBT+ equality,” she said, revising the union’s strategy to take account of many things that have arisen during the pandemic, such as the increased use of monitoring equipment by employers for those working from home, and online bullying.

UNISON was at its most effective by being a strong and organised union, with activists equipped to recognise and challenge issues around equalities, she said.

Ms Lewis highlighted the importance of UNISON’s work to defend trans people, given the ongoing anti-trans campaigns.

For the NEC, Davina Rankin took up that theme, stressing the need for all parts of the union to help defend trans members. She noted that training is being developed to help people become trans allies, urging branches to seek such training when it becomes available.

The final motion of the session raised the issue of trade union recognition for outsourced workers delivering public services.

Tony Phillips of the London Fire Brigade cited the case of the private company, Babcock, which employs staff to provide training to the London Fire Brigade. The company decided to derecognise UNISON.

The union went to London mayor (and UNISON member) Sadiq Khan, who contacted Babcock, pointing out that the company gets a lot of public money and needed to be aware of that. Recognition was regained.

Conference called on the NEC to:

- issue guidance to branches on how to secure trade union recognition for outsourced workers delivering public services;
- promote the need for ethical procurement, ensuring trade union recognition is incorporated into any tendering process.