

University of Leeds Branch Bulletin



UNISON NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Two of our reps, Lucinda Walker and Katie Moore (pictured above), joined 800 delegates and visitors from all over the UK at the UNISON National Women's Conference at the Brighton Centre (11-13 February).

The conference included a sector-focused meeting about issues from primary and secondary education to FE and HE. Katie explained: "With the changes happening to schools becoming academies (sponsors of which include universities), the reduction in funding to FE / absorption into HE and the high-cost factors for students and pay for workers in HE, it's clear that we need to work together with our members across the whole education sector to unite and empower us at every level."

Guest speakers included Wendy Nichols, UNISON President, Dave Prentis, UNISON General Secretary, Naz Shah MP for Bradford (who provided an inspirational insight into her own journey to become a politician), and Kwaten-Klivitse Adowa from Forward, an organisation working to safeguard and support girls and women worldwide, who are victims of or at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Katie explained: "The conference was an excellent insight into how Tory government policies are affecting women all over the UK, from the impact of the reduction in funding for Rape Crisis centres (now to be funded by the Tampon Tax), to the impact of Tory cuts on the ability to access flexible working patterns for carers.

"One key issue raised was the need to get more young members (18 - 26), particularly young women, involved in the union as they are still facing age- and sex-related discrimination in the workplace. A motion was passed calling on the National Women's Committee to adopt measures to increase attendance at both Women's Conference and participation in UNISON. The measures include all branches making efforts to send a young member to the Women's Conference. So, we'd like to appeal to all of our members to encourage younger members of their team, women in particular, to become members and / or reps in their workplace. They are the future of our movement!"

UNISON HE CONFERENCE

On 25 February, Branch Stewards Mark Adcock, Rose Bavage, Andy Brown and Kath Owen attended the UNISON Higher Education Conference in Southport.

Of the 18 motions discussed, those with the greatest significance for the HE workforce were:

Motions 3 and 4 - the third motion passed was around defending trade union rights in HE, while the fourth was about recognising the impact of the Trade Union Bill. The Bill, which is going through parliament at the moment, remains an all-out attack on workers' rights despite the best efforts of the Labour Party to oppose it, although some of the worst aspects have now been removed thanks to trade union pressure.

Motion 6 - the most controversial motion, relating to the government's Prevent Duty, part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 which requires members of staff to report on students and colleagues if they feel they look or act suspiciously. The motion, put forward by the HE Service Group Executive, was to promote the Home Office training to staff and assist in implementing government policy. Although the motion was broadly critical of the policy there was a feeling among delegates that as a union we should be openly condemning the policy as actively racist and campaigning against it visibly across all campuses. Some amendments were tabled to register our opposition to the policy in a more robust fashion but some proposed amendments were ruled "out of order" by the HESG which resulted in the whole motion being rejected by a vast majority, despite amendments being carried should the motion be passed.

Motion 11 - regarding our HE pay claim. It was agreed our pay 'rises' in recent years have been insulting, that there is clearly money in university coffers to afford a decent pay rise, and that while workers have seen their income fall, VCs and senior staff pay has gone in the opposite direction with no satisfactory explanation as to why. The upshot of the motion and any amendments, which all passed, was to submit a pay claim for 5% or £1000 - whichever is greater for the member of staff in question, and with a commitment to carry out lawful industrial action if the claim is not met.

Other motions proposed on the day were:

Opposing the tuition fee model; the Race Equality Charter Mark for Black Staff; challenging government attempts to compromise health and safety; opposing the trend to outsource university services; protecting student welfare / opposing student exploitation; protecting staff at wholly-owned university subsidiaries; welfare of LGBT staff working overseas; age discrimination; commitment to free education; finding new ways of working / campaigning for disabled members; working more closely with student unions; and, agreeing the terms of the HE Service Group.

The full agenda, including motions and amendments, can be read in detail here: <https://www.unison.org.uk/events/higher-education-conference-2016/>

MEET THE REP: Lee Bryan

What's your role at the University?
I'm a Plumber within Estates.

Why did you become a UNISON rep?

To help members who haven't really got a voice and to stand up for them. Also to be able to carry out the necessary training involved to become a rep which was both a challenge but very rewarding.



How long have you been a rep?

I've been a rep since 2010, firstly carrying out my reps 1 and 2 training in the same year, then, in 2013, I decided to become a Health and Safety Rep and have since gone on to complete levels 1 and 2. I've also just completed my Health and Safety Diploma.

Most frequent member problem?

Generally bullying in the workplace.

The best thing about being a rep?

Helping members, also the training we get via trade union studies has been brilliant and I've made many good friends through the different courses I've studied on.

And the worst?

When you lose a case it can be frustrating.

Is it hard to balance your rep responsibilities and your role?

I'm fortunate to say it's quite easy, although I understand it isn't quite so easy for some of my colleagues within branch.

How hard was the training?

The training is as hard or easy as you want to make it. I was never bothered at school and wouldn't pretend to be very academic, but the little brain power I do have I put into good use. I work at home on my course which really helps me get the results I want.

Would you recommend being a rep?

Yes of course, it has given me confidence to sit on committees and be able to talk on level terms with management and higher management and get my point across.

Anything else?

Yes, join a union, because unity is strength.