

Scotland *in* UNISON

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NO GOING BACK TO NORMAL

By **MIKE KIRBY**
Scottish secretary



As the largest trade union in Scotland we have a responsibility to help shape the national debate as the consequences of the pandemic become apparent.

We must rebuild public services, securing long term investment to ensure our services are there when we need them.

We must create fairer and safer workplaces. Everyone, especially disabled, black and women workers should be treated with dignity and respect.

We must give public sector workers a decent pay rise because the pandemic has shown how important they are.

And we must build a fairer and greener society, in which the inequalities so evident during the crisis are addressed as a matter of urgency.

Thousands of key workers died during the pandemic. Nurses, care workers, cleaners, and more made the ultimate sacrifice to help others. Despite the fact that public service workers had been undervalued, underpaid and too often invisible, they were there for all of us.

Throughout this pandemic UNISON has been organising, campaigning and bargaining for fairer, safer workplaces and communities. Whether it was PPE

We don't want to go back to the 'normal' that doesn't appreciate or value public service workers properly - that's why UNISON has launched this major campaign.



‘Coronavirus has changed everything. We cannot return to business as usual. We must seize this moment to rebuild a fairer greener more equal Scotland.’

shortages, our fragmented care services or campaigning for those in low paid, insecure employment.

The damage to our public services from a decade of austerity, including in our schools, policing and local government, has been plain to see. The same mistakes cannot be made again.

UNISON's campaign "No Going Back to Normal" aims to build on public support. Please do all you can to publicise this campaign.

UNISON service groups are already working to underpin this campaign:

• **Scotland's social care workers for change:** we are aiming to shape the debate for a new National Care Service. Care is in



crisis, it has been underfunded and ignored by governments for years.

• **NHS pay:** Scotland is joining NHS members across the UK to campaign for a decent pay rise this and coming years.

• **Local government funding gap:** UNISON is highlighting the chronic underfunding of local government and calling for action to plug £1bn funding gap in Scotland.

• **Safety at work:** we are recruiting hundreds of safety reps to carry out risk assessments and build safer workplaces.

• **We continue to support members in HE and FE** with difficult discussions to come on pay and finances.

And we do not rule out industrial action as a response to the disgraceful **British Gas** decision to dismiss its entire 16,500-strong workforce and re-engage them on reduced terms.

Coronavirus has changed everything. We cannot return to business as usual. We must seize this moment to rebuild a fairer greener more equal Scotland.

Speaking up for education members

UNISON Scotland has been speaking up for our members in education throughout the pandemic, highlighting the role of the whole of the education workforce in delivering care for essential workers supporting pupils at home and then planning and delivering recovery at national and at local level directly with employers.

Lorraine Thomson chair of the Education Issues Group (EIG) explains: "UNISON has a seat on both the Scottish Government and CoSLA recovery groups, reflecting the fact that we are a significant education trade union and are recognised as such by the government and employers."

"Many of our members worked throughout the crisis delivering childcare to essential workers and supporting home schooling for the rest. Our members are now back in schools and early learning centres ensuring the delivery of a vital public service for children."

UNISON Scotland has held weekly meetings of the EIG to hear from members about their concerns and to feedback on the work the union has been doing. UNISON has been consistently feeding our members views and concerns back to the government/CoSLA groups to improve guidance.

Workers' safety

Lorraine said: "The key concerns we have raised throughout the process both locally and at education recovery groups are workers' safety, infection control and the vital role of cleaning staff in preventing spread of disease."

"We have reiterated the impact of cuts to cleaning numbers, and the need to maintain safety in the workplace and have been pressing for appropriate PPE for staff both in hubs and on full time return; particularly our concerns about the ever changing advice on face coverings but also for intimate procedures."

"We continue to raise the impact on infection control on staff with more than one job, to pursue appropriate and robust training for staff on any new ways of working, specific training on infection control, immediate access to hand washing facilities and hand gels where appropriate for staff and children, social distancing between adults as well as appropriate and safe break facilities for staff. Testing remains a key problem with a range of challenges."

"School transport safety issues for staff have also been addressed and there is now guidance to support this."

"As scientific advice is updated, new guidance will continue to be issued to reflect this and we will continue to pursue input into the development of that advice."

"Key issues that remain will need to be resolved locally by branches with the employer due to the variations in premises and local plans round the delivery."

Organising during pandemic. Health members seize moment



Tracy Miller on the bell as members demonstrate at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

This issue of UNISON UK's *Activist* magazine (which should be included with this SiU) carries a feature by UNISON Scotland area organiser Greig Kelbie on how the successful health pay campaign managed to organise during a pandemic.

The campaign won talks with the Scottish Government and a commitment to re-open the 2020/21 pay deal.

Greig said the campaign: "has shown us that this is a moment to be seized, before it seizes us, even during a pandemic UNISON is a powerful union that is able to adapt, organise workplaces no matter what the situation."

Rising to the challenge of social-distancing, the campaign group set up a WhatsApp group and virtual meetings. to share ideas and support activists to

build for the socially distanced demonstrations across Scotland.

Clear and concise campaign messages that would chime with members were combined with letter writing, social media graphics, live Facebook events, lobbying, and a media strategy.

Engaging and involving members was a priority and the success of that was evident in the turnout for the demos.

Imaginative use of social

media saw isolating and shielding members being encouraged to send in selfie videos to support the campaign.

In the *Activist* piece, Greig describes events at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary demo: *It's 10.59am on Tuesday 18 August in a car park just outside Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary Hospital and Lothian Health branch secretary, Tracy Miller, is addressing more than 400 UNISON members.*

"With a large bell in hand Tracy belts out: 'Okay guys, I don't know if you can hear me?' They can. She's loud.

Tracy continues to shout out: 'When this bell rings at 11am, we are going to clap to show this government that what we have been through during this pandemic means we are worth a damn sight more, and they need to know that we mean business.'

"Clapping doesn't pay our bills – now we are going to clap to demand that NHS workers, regardless of role, get a pay rise!"

As 11am hits, Tracy rings the bell. The crowd goes wild.

The crowd doesn't just go wild in Edinburgh, but there are hundreds of members doing this all over Scotland.

Read the full story in this issue of *Activist* magazine.

Plug the funding gap to protect vital council services

Local government workers up and down the country have gone above and beyond in their response to the Covid pandemic, keeping essential services going in the most difficult of circumstances.

The willingness of workers in local authorities to adapt and shift priorities and roles to ensure vital functions for their communities have been maintained has been an exemplary response by an under resourced and undervalued workforce.

Local government has borne the brunt of austerity over the last 10 years – overall revenue funding fell 7% since 2013/14 resulting in over £2bn of 'efficiencies' in the last decade and the proportion of funding 'ring-fenced' for central government priorities rose to 61%, meaning cuts have fallen disproportionately on the remaining service areas.

In difficulty before Covid, local government is now in a crisis. The financial impact of the



pandemic has of course been huge. Local authorities have been faced with a perfect storm of increased demands and collapsing revenues.

The extent of this cannot be stated with any certainty yet as the crisis is not yet over and the pace and extent of any return to something resembling normal functioning is still uncertain.

But internal CoSLA estimates in June put the projected net cost, ie including additional Scottish government support to date, of Covid to councils as being £739m.

These figures don't include the difficulties faced by the leisure trust ALEOs which the Culture and Leisure Trust UK estimates to be in the region of £120m. As with other areas this is far from being a final cost.

Combined with a budget deficit of £149m at the start of the financial year these additional costs take the projected budget deficit to Scottish councils to circa £1bn.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON

Scotland head of local government, said: "This is a crisis of unprecedented scale. A deficit of £1bn would mean a cut to social work budgets across Scotland amounting to the wages of 13,400 care assistants or 6,300 occupational therapists."

"Education budgets would go down by a sum which would be the wage equivalent of 30,000 support for learning workers."

"Culture and leisure budgets would go down by a sum which would pay 3,500 library assistants."

"Both Westminster and Holyrood governments need to act now to prevent the collapse of local services and rising unemployment."

Mark Ferguson, Chair of Local Government Committee, added: "To protect these jobs we all need to get behind the campaign to persuade both Westminster and Holyrood governments to 'Plug The Gap'."

"Write to your MPs, MSPs and local councillors – contact your branch for advice on how to do this."

UNISON strike ballot halts Napier compulsory redundancies

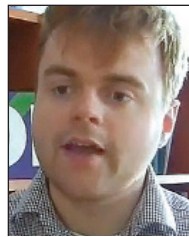
Edinburgh Napier University has halted compulsory redundancies in favour of a voluntary scheme, after UNISON members at the university voted overwhelmingly to take strike action.

UNISON's ballot for industrial action returned a resounding 84% 'yes' vote on a 68% turnout.

The ballot was called in response to planned compulsory redundancies at the university, announced before alternative measures had been exhausted and before a credible financial case had been made.

The pressure of the ballot and potential strike action in freshers' week and the first

‘This is testament to the strength of feeling among Napier members and their collective determination to protect jobs’ LORCAN MULLEN



week of teaching led to agreement on a voluntary severance scheme and a halt to planned compulsory redundancies.

If compulsory redundancies resurface in the coming months, UNISON members will be able to use their industrial action mandate to defend jobs.

There are currently no planned days of industrial action but UNISON will keep this under close review.

Lorcan Mullen, UNISON Scotland head of higher education said: "Given the fact that so many UNISON members were either working from home, furloughed or on annual leave during the ballot period, it is remarkable that the branch has comprehensively beaten the ballot thresholds mandated by anti-trade union legislation.

"This is testament to the strength of feeling among Napier members and their collective

determination to protect jobs.

"The branch committee have worked incredibly hard to achieve this result, and I am delighted they have received such backing from their members despite the limits and challenges of balloting during lockdown.

"The rest of the Scottish sector should be clear that UNISON will fight to defend members' jobs, and that compulsory redundancies will only happen at the far end of a painful industrial dispute.

"Members and activists elsewhere should also take heart that cuts can be challenged effectively on a collective basis, even in these strange new times."

UNISON victory for SEPA contact centre staff

By Zia Hussain

SEPA branch secretary

SEPA UNISON has successfully negotiated a shift allowance and double pay for working public holidays for SEPA contact centre staff members.

This payment will not only be paid going forward but also retrospectively.

This is a result of UNISON showing strength and solidarity in raising this issue with management.

These members were working alongside colleagues in receipt of a shift allowance and we felt this was unfair and as a result of working patterns being introduced without negotiation or consultation with UNISON.

Write to your MP to support Gas workers

Don't be bullied by British Gas is the message from UNISON as the company has served notice to 'fire and rehire' its entire workforce to force through worse terms and conditions of employment - as well as serving notice to end union recognition agreements.

As we went to press, the union was asking its members and the public to write to their MPs urging them to stand up for these workers. You can send an email at unison.org.uk, search for 'gas'.

UNISON national officer for energy Matthew Lay said: "It's important that we stand up to the attempts by British Gas to bully staff into accepting greatly reduced terms and conditions.

"We are negotiating hard to find a solution, one that recognises the business's challenges ahead but also reflects the needs of members.

"If we fail to reach an agreement, we stand ready to defend members. Work is under way to hold an industrial action ballot."

By Deborah Smith

Area organiser

After months of joint working, UNISON and Unite have secured a well-deserved pay increase for over 300 care at home staff in South Ayrshire.

South Ayrshire's Health and Social Care Partnership has signed off on a job evaluation review that will mean a full grade increase in pay for some of our most critical staff.

Preliminary discussions began over 12 months ago with working groups of staff, members, and reps from UNISON and Unite. It was clear even before the emergence of Covid-19 that staff were underpaid for the service they deliver.

One of the largest factors in the review was the increase in critical care patients. Years of under investment has left care at

home under-staffed and over-stretched causing real damage to staff morale.

Allison Andrew, a UNISON member who has worked in home care for the past three years, said: "All the staff in home care always try to do the best they can with the resources they have.

"It is a demanding job, both mentally and physically, and now with the Coronavirus outbreak they are under even more pressure."

Demand for the service has never been higher, leading to most patients classified as needing 'critical care' level support.



South Ayrshire's Sammy Maxwell gives the thumbs up to the pay rise.

This change in criteria means home carers must have additional training to help

support complex client needs.

Renee Gillan, South Ayrshire branch secretary, said: "The needs of the clients are constantly changing and our members are working hard to provide the best care they can.

"These staff provide an absolutely essential service and the current crisis has underlined the real dedication there to get the job done, even in the most difficult of situations.

"This victory on pay recognises home carers as the key workers they are, doing vital work with the most vulnerable before and during the Covid-19 pandemic."

Backdated pay will be issued from the submission of the evaluation and UNISON will continue to support these dedicated staff throughout the pandemic and into the future.

UNISON calls for regular testing for care at home staff

By Danny Phillips

Communications officer

Half of home care workers have not been tested for coronavirus, according to a recent UNISON Scotland survey.

The alarming statistic was revealed in a poll of 300 social care staff across the Scotland and the union is calling on the Scottish Government to ensure that all care at home staff are routinely tested for Covid-19.

According to UNISON's survey, eight per cent of care at home staff have tested positive, which is higher than workers in the NHS and residential care staff, and much higher than the Scottish population.

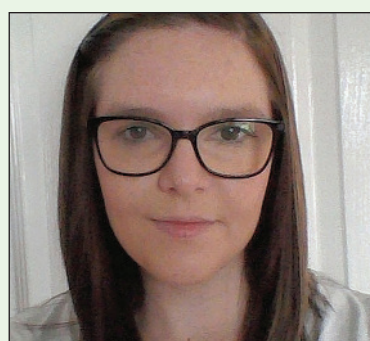
Unlike NHS staff and residential care staff - care at home staff are not being routinely tested for coronavirus.

‘The time to act on this is now’ FRANCES BURNS

UNISON is holding regular meetings with Derek Feeley, chair of the Scottish government review of adult social care. The review will consider UNISON's demand for a National Care Service and report by January 2021.

As the biggest trade union representing care workers, UNISON will ensure Derek Feeley hears directly from care workers to hear their issues first hand and raise the urgent need for care at home staff to be regularly tested so they can protect their patients and families.

UNISON has fought for and won: full sick pay, improved PPE, death in service benefits, and other benefits for staff



across care services.

Mike Kirby, UNISON Scottish secretary said: "This workforce were among the hardest working but lowest paid throughout this pandemic. Without regular testing care staff worry that they are putting their service users and their families at risk. Routine testing is how care staff protect their vulnerable clients and keep infection rates low in the community.

"For too long the care system

has been weighted towards price and profit. Underpaid, undervalued and undermined staff are at breaking point.

"That is why UNISON, the largest trade union for social care staff, is calling for a National Care Service, which will allow us to build a care service which values and protects workers and allows them to provide the person-centred care we all want.

"UNISON will ensure the inquiry hears directly from care staff and the urgent need to have routine testing for care at home staff. We are in a critical phase of the virus and we are all doing everything we can to stop a second wave of the virus and we cannot allow the death rate to rise again. It's why we must ensure staff are regularly tested."

Frances Burns, team facilitator

and care at home worker, said: "In my experience staff are not being routinely tested. If you are a care worker you worry all the time about the people we are caring for because of their vulnerability to this virus.

"The number of infections and deaths among service users over this pandemic has been heartbreaking for us, and the infection rate amongst staff still remains worryingly high. We cannot go back to when care was such a problem.

"We must improve availability of testing, we need to know the prevalence of the virus in care at home service so we can protect our patients.

"We need to quickly identify the people who are symptomatic to ensure we prevent further infections in the service. The time to act on this is now."

UNISON joins CoSLA to launch mental health awareness video

You're on mute! is a frequent cry during online meetings.

The #Don'tStayonMute video, launched by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and council trade unions, aims to reassure people who are suffering from anxiety or uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is to remind them they are not alone and that there is support available.



We hope the message: 'it's OK not to be OK and to speak to someone to get help' will resonate with the thousands of workers across Scotland still

working remotely or in isolation as the country remains in Phase 3 of the route map out of the pandemic.

Johanna Baxter, UNISON Scotland head of local government, said: "The Covid pandemic has changed everything about everything."

"These are difficult times and it's OK not to be OK about that. UNISON reps know how you feel as they are going through it too."

"Our key message is don't struggle alone. Contact your trade union or human resources team if you are having difficulties. We are here to help you."

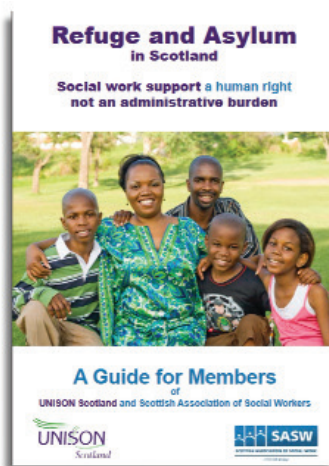
See the video on the UNISON Scotland and the CoSLA Facebook pages.

UNISON Scotland reissues guidance on supporting asylum seekers and refugees

Following the tragic death of asylum seeker **Mercy Baguma** in Glasgow, depute convener, **Stephen Smellie** has reminded all branches of what our members can do to support asylum seekers and refugees even where they have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and are unable to work.

He has called on social work members and others involved continue "to provide services they can be proud of and which they do so well" and highlighted the UNISON Scotland guidance, "Refuge and Asylum in Scotland."

Stephen said: "Mercy's death has once again thrown a spotlight on the UK's



inhuman asylum system. This was a concern pre Covid-19, and the pandemic has simply made things worse.

"Extreme poverty combined with the isolation created by the pandemic are a very real issue for many

people, including families caring for children and vulnerable individuals.

"It seems timely to reissue our broad and straightforward guidance for social workers and others asked to address issues arising from NRPF (including destitution) - and other matters relating to refugees and migrants."

Stephen added: "Solutions can be found and no one should be turned away because of uncertain messages from the Home Office and the agencies providing a service to them."

"We are particularly keen to remind our members that under Scots law, the child's welfare is paramount. We have long established that this

principle applies to every child in Scotland, including refugees and asylum seeker children.

"As always if there are issues in relation to this stemming from the attitude of your employer or management, advice should be sought from UNISON."

UNISON Scotland's asylum guidance is legally up to date and is designed for social workers and their management teams to action plan and deliver safe housing and protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. Please share this with those who can and will make a difference. See the guide at unison-scotland.org/social-work/

Scotland nominates Christina for gen sec

UNISON's Scottish Council has voted to nominate **Christina McAnea** for the forthcoming general secretary election.

She won about 80% of the vote at the online meeting on 23 September based on voting branches' membership numbers.

Other candidates receiving votes were Paul Holmes, Roger McKenzie and Hugo Pierre.

Glasgow-born Christina is a current assistant general secretary and, if elected, would be UNISON's first woman general secretary.

The new general secretary will be elected by UNISON members and will replace Dave Prentis who retires at the end of this year.

From 28 October, ballot papers will be issued to all eligible members with a prepaid envelope.

We are urging all members to use your vote in this election. The election period will close on 27 November.

See details of all the candidates at unison.org.uk.

Labour Link backs Leonard, slamming critics as 'self interested career politicians'

By Simon McFarlane
Regional organiser

UNISON Scotland's Labour Link committee on 4 September issued a robust statement of support for Scottish Labour leader **Richard Leonard**.

The statement decried Mr Leonard's critics as 'self interested career politicians' who were failing to represent 'core Labour values'. The statement also said the party needs 'fresh voices' representing Labour in next year's election.

Gordon McKay, chair of UNISON Labour Link Scotland said: "Our committee had a scheduled meeting with Richard and we assured him of our support and solidarity."

"The sense of anger and frustration at the situation was palpable amongst the committee."

"Richard assured us he was not going anywhere and was focussed on the real task in hand of continuing to hold the SNP to account whilst building the case for Labour values and public services at next year's elections."



"We are clear that should be the sole focus of every Labour politician between now and then."

Support for under-represented groups to get active in party

Labour Link has been working with the party and Scottish Labour Unions on twin track approaches to encourage and support more women, key workers and under-represented groups to come forward to get active in the Labour Party with a view to progressing as candidates.

At the meeting of the Scottish Executive Committee on 12 September Labour Link supported proposals to have women as top placed candidates on regional lists for the Scottish Parliament, to work to field candidates from under-represented groups and to

include key workers.

It is further planned by Scottish Labour Unions to run a series of political education sessions in the autumn aimed at women trade unionists thinking of getting more active in Labour.

These will be two hour sessions maximum hosted online (smart phone is all that will be required). There will be lots of support and encouragement and all efforts will be made to make it as accessible as possible.

We particularly want to encourage women to start thinking about putting themselves forward to represent your community at the local council elections in 2022. Full details have to be finalised but if you are interested please email h.scott@unison.co.uk so we can keep you posted.

Retired members set up online forum



Babs Fulton, retired members' secretary

The Scottish Retired Members Committee (SRMC) has set up a very successful Scottish retired members' forum which meets online.

Information on how to join in our RM forum meetings is available from your branch or alternatively you can contact Barbara Fulton, SRMC secretary by email babsunison@yahoo.co.uk or by mobile 07954380753 and she will give you information on how to join.

Babs said: "Well folks it's been a long seven month's since lockdown and by the looks of life its going to be a long winter."

"However the RM forum has met twice and has been a great asset to our retired members during this horrific time, especially as communication with UNISON Scotland retired members has been extremely limited or in some cases non-existent due to lockdown."

"Everyone is welcome and it's a great way to catch up on what's happening in our union, to meet other retired members from all over Scotland and most of all to let the Scottish retired members committee know what you, our retired members want out of our union."

Plus, it's informal and the chat is good and if you need any help or advice it's here. You are not alone."

Babs added that the national retired members conference this year has been put on hold and also activities like the annual bowling and day trip were cancelled this year.

"Hopefully by the beginning of 2021 we might be more active," said Babs. "As retired members though, it is always worth remembering that our union is working very hard during this unpredictable time and our benefits of being a retired member still stand. Help is always here for us," reminded Babs.

If you are due to retire please let your branch know and take advantage of the benefits of UNISON membership and the enjoyment of meeting new friends.

We want to hear your news

SiU is your paper, we want to hear your stories. Contact Kate Ramsden (editor) katearamsden@gmail.com, Danny Phillips d.phillips@unison.co.uk, Trisha Hamilton t.hamilton@unison.co.uk

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