

ASPECTS

Newsletter

Inside this issue

WHY UNISON?

NTW LOCAL NEWS

HEALTH REFORM

BLACK MEMBERS
CONFERENCE

NHS EMPLOYERS
PROPOSAL REJECTED

CUBA

PUBLIC SERVICE
ALLIANCE

WELFARE

WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE

Get in touch!

St Nicholas Hospital:
0844 811 5522 ext 28817

St George's Park:
01670 501 833

Northgate Hospital:
01670 394 161

Monkwearmouth Hospital:
0191 541 0546



e: unison@ntw.nhs.uk
w: <http://unison-ntw.co.uk>

Why UNISON?



What does being in UNISON mean to you?

For many members the union hasn't been a major part of their lives as we have worked and lived through a period of economic prosperity. But as we really begin to feel the impact of the government's austerity measures through cuts and changes to the way we deliver services then UNISON's relevance to all our lives is beginning to grow. It is through standing together and supporting each other that we are at our strongest.

UNISON members need to be united within their branch

to face the external threats we face to the NHS and our public services. It is crucial to have the best people representing our members, who can take on the role of feeding back in to the union structure what is happening in their locality. If you think you have what it takes to represent members in your workplace then we are always looking for new activists. Contact unison@ntw.nhs.uk for more information. The branch AGM is the central point in the democratic functioning of the branch. It is where branch officers, including the branch secretary and three assistant secretaries, will be officially appointed and is a real opportunity to hear updates on the union locally as well as nationally. Branch officers have been working hard to draw the branch together to manage the challenge we face through cuts in funding and ongoing reorganisations. A branch away day was held recently and all stewards are being invited to a meeting in the near future to discuss ways to take the branch forward.

We aim to represent our majority female membership in our branch structure.

There are women standing for all the key posts. Keep an eye out for more information on the AGM coming soon. The NTW UNISON branch AGM will take place at 6pm on Thursday 31st March at Trinity Church Centre, Gosforth. All members are welcome to attend and a buffet and drinks reception will be provided after the meeting.

On 26th March hundreds of thousands of people are marching in London as part of the TUC's 'March for the Alternative'.

Check out <http://marchforthealternative.org.uk/> which contains a map allowing people with spare seats on coaches to offer them to others.

Why not come and join us and make your voice heard?

UNISON membership can, and does, make a difference.

Not only in the workplace where we represent members in sickness reviews, disciplinarys and grievances but also through campaigning nationally to defend our public services, the NHS from privatisation, and in fighting for equal pay. Our membership in the community and voluntary sector is also growing rapidly and we have recently launched a new community and voluntary sector service group to recognise this. If you have friends and colleagues in the NHS and in the community and voluntary sector then encourage them to join UNISON. The main reason workers give for not being a member of a trade union is that they have never been asked.

A membership form is in this issue of 'Aspects'.

NTW LOCAL NEWS...

Next Steps

Consultation on management proposals to reduce the five existing directorates in NTW to three is continuing. UNISON has held meetings with members at all of the main NTW sites to canvas their views and make sure the voices of UNISON members are heard. Under the proposals, five directorates will be reduced to three, bringing senior clinicians, managers and support services together. UNISON NTW Branch is opposed to any compulsory redundancies. The branch is pursuing alternative options with management including voluntary redundancy and early retirement and is working to manage change with individuals where needed.

Susie Taylor, UNISON branch officer said "The fact is, there is no need for any compulsory redundancies. NTW is a large employer with many opportunities for redeployment. With hard work and good will from management, I am sure we can manage this change effectively and leave no-one feeling let down". If you need advice or support contact unison@ntw.nhs.uk

Choices Care

Choices Care, an independent provider of community homes, has successfully outbid NTW Trust to take over a contract from Sunderland City Council for running nine community homes. The staff who are currently employed by NTW will TUPE transfer to become employees of Choices in the next few weeks.

They will be following in the footsteps of their ex-colleagues, many of whom transferred to Choices Care following a successful bid to manage six care homes in December 2009. All staff will transfer, or have transferred under TUPE (Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) regulations) to Choices so their existing terms and conditions, including pensions, will be maintained unless there is a valid reason to change them. Although staff in the earlier homes are currently being consulted about changes to their terms and conditions – specifically a proposal to remove enhancements, this is currently under negotiation and may be open to legal challenge.

Care UK

Care UK, a private provider of health and social care has recently won the contract to provide mental health services at Acklington Prison and will be taking over the service previously provided by NTW. The trust had submitted a tender but was unsuccessful – despite being judged better on quality, delivery and risk and losing out only on price. Staff are expected to transfer to the new employer from 1st April 2011.

Congratulations to...

Dawn Liddle, winner of the pre-Christmas draw and who is now a proud owner of a Nintendo DS.

Disability Group Launch

The new NTW UNISON Disabled Members Group will be launching in the next few weeks and aims to identify particular issues affecting disabled workers in NTW and pursue these with management. Keep an eye on the branch website for more information and if you would like to attend contact unison@ntw.nhs.uk for details.

AGM

The branch AGM will be held on Thursday 31st March at 6pm in Trinity Church Centre, Gosforth. Come along and get involved in the running of your branch and join us afterwards for a buffet and a glass of wine.



Health Reform

In the face of furious opposition from a range of health organisations; including UNISON, health charities and GP's themselves, the coalition government is pushing ahead with the biggest upheaval of the NHS in its 63 year history.

“The biggest change management programme in the world... so large that you can actually see it from space”

was how NHS Chief Exec, Sir David Nicholson described the change. And all while trying to make 4% annual efficiency savings.

Before the election David Cameron promised **“no more top down reorganisations of the NHS”** and there was nothing in the election manifestos of either party.

Yet, eight weeks after the coalition agreement of 20th May 2010 came this proposal to be implemented almost immediately, with no proper piloting. The failure of either party to come clean about their plans led UNISON to challenge the government to a judicial review in the High Court over the right of the public to be consulted over such drastic change.

Under government plans Strategic Health Authorities (SHA's) and Primary Care Trusts (PCT's) will be abolished and replaced by several hundred GP consortiums. The consortiums will have responsibility for commissioning £80 billion of NHS care from “any willing provider” – NHS or private. This move will open up large parts of the NHS to European competition rules, with the result that private companies will take on large chunks of NHS services to be run at a profit.

GP's themselves rightly oppose the plans, arguing that they are trained to treat patients, not make commissioning decisions. They are worried that a few very expensive patients could blow a hole in GP consortia budgets and that GP consortia will be denied economies of scale, with those with commissioning experience spread thinly across the country. For some there may be the temptation to cut corners on management, endangering the survival of GP consortia and resulting in bankruptcy with no government bail-out and the very real danger that surgeries could close.

Patient satisfaction with the NHS is at an all time high and operation waiting times have been reduced to previously unimagined levels. Postcode lotteries may well be back however as the government has removed from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) – the organisation responsible nationally for evaluating whether drugs were effective and good value for money - the power to decide which drugs should be made available. Decisions about drugs will now be taken locally by GP consortia which, although good

news for some patients who will benefit from expensive treatment, may well mean that a few expensive patients blow the budget for others in the population leaving those with more basic needs to go without. So will the reforms benefit patients? Well, with hospitals allowed to undercut the NHS agreed tariff to increase their business resulting in a ‘race to the bottom’ on price threatening quality, the plans could lead to hospitals ‘cherry picking’ profitable operations with hospitals unable to compete being forced to close.

A better future for patients needing high quality, accessible care?

I don't think so.



Black Members Conference

NTW member, activist and conference delegate Matildah Cheza-Musendo shares her experience

My experience at the National Black Members Conference 2011 in Glasgow was as though it was my first in terms of the euphoria and expectations raised on my part. Each year holds something new and the spirit of solidarity at least gave us the strength to brave the freezing Scottish weather!

It was such an honour to have the General Secretary Dave Prentis, in our midst the very first day.

The schedule is always very tight with activities from start to finish. I chose to attend one of the fringe meetings which was 'Encouraging Black Activists to be Active', chaired by Simon Woolley, a commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission and who took the opportunity to remind us of Martin Luther King, saying it took one man to decide enough was enough and make a difference. Apparently in last year's fringe meeting Simon had challenged members to go back to their communities and make a difference. The result was that two

members were able to report this year that they are now school governors. What an inspiring outcome!

Dianne Abbott MP also gave an inspiring speech. I have always watched her on TV but have never had the opportunity to meet her in person. I just stared in admiration. In her speech Dianne explained that the presence of people of colour in the public sector would dwindle as the new Con-Dem government introduce their plans. She said that people of colour have the jobs they have, not necessarily because they are well educated but because the Labour government has invested heavily in the public sector over the last few years and also through the hard work of activists.

One passionate delegate gave a speech stating that for a person to get something they had never had, they have to do what they never thought they would have to do. She used the speech to stress to delegates the importance of

people coming out in their thousands to support the TUC March for the Alternative to defend public services in London on the 26th March.

Amongst the Northern region delegation we had a young member (under 26). There was also a noticeable increase in delegates from the private sector. Our region was on fire like never before and put in a motion that sparked life in to delegates for the whole of the conference. Speakers from our region like Simone Doyle and Rizwan Sheikh, to name a few, gave very powerful speeches.

My conclusions from the whole experience of black members conference is that we, as UNISON activists, have a lot of tools in our box and we need to make the best use of them. We need to network, encourage each other and put all our skills to use to make it work.

We will not win every battle we fight but we will surely win some.



NHS Employers Proposal Rejected

As the trust continued its consultation on 'Next Steps' and the way services are structured, UNISON elected activists rejected outright a recent half-hearted proposal by national NHS management to protect their jobs.

The employers had hoped that their proposal would be accepted by health unions and had proposed that in return for an agreement to freeze all (incremental) pay progression for two years they would: provide a no compulsory redundancy guarantee for all staff on Bands 1 -6, would take action to avoid redundancy for others, would make no changes to Agenda for Change and would consider potential deferment of the 1% rise in employee pension contributions.

The sting in the tail however was that implementation of the 'deal' would require agreement of the local NHS Trust and

local staff side.

Meeting on the 10th January 2011, UNISON's Health Service Group Executive (SGE) voted to reject the proposals for a wide ranging number of reasons. The executive argued that they could not support a further pay freeze on health staff – many of whom are low paid and are mainly women workers. In addition, the executive pointed out that the funding gap in the NHS is so great they were sceptical that Trusts would abide by a no compulsory redundancy agreement for two years.

Speaking about the proposals, Susie Taylor, UNISON NTW branch officer said "the

proposals are clearly divisive and only protect members in Bands 1 – 6. In NTW through the Next Steps programme and across the wider NHS it is members in Bands 7 – 9 who are bearing the brunt of the current swathe of redundancies. Are we supposed to just hang them out to dry? We need to stick together to face this challenge and be aware of threats to our existing terms and conditions both nationally, but also on a local level"



CUBA

UNISON NTW branch recently donated to a northern region young members delegation to Cuba. The visit took place in December of last year.

The delegates were there to see at first hand the Cuban health care system and promote international solidarity. They were also there to rejuvenate the twinning agreement between the Santiago Province of the Cuban Health Union (SNTS) and the Northern Region of UNISON.

Fundraising came from a number of different sources - a combination of donations from northern region branches and fundraising by the group themselves. All participants were involved in some degree of fundraising including bungee jumps, young members working at music festivals over the summer, sponsored car washing in a hospital car park and a coffee and cake stall with hospital staff.

Prior to the visit all young members attended up to 5 basic Spanish lessons and a number attended a meeting with the daughter of one of the 'Miami 5', five Cubans imprisoned in Miami for allegedly committing espionage against the USA.

Managing to escape the heavy snow and make the trip, in 'Aspects' one of the group has given an account of their visit:

"Throughout the visit we were really impressed to meet a number of high level health ministers. It was particularly interesting to meet particular Marcias Cobas, the vice-minister of health who has responsibility for coordinating a medical response in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake. Cuba has sent many doctors, nurses and resources to help and as we were there a medical brigade of 300 was preparing to leave to tackle the ongoing cholera epidemic.

Cuba's international health work has a long history and is truly impressive.

Originating in Algeria it now covers more than 70 countries, with thousands of Cuban doctors and medical staff voluntarily giving up more than two years of their life to work in some of the most difficult and poorest communities on the planet. We were particularly impressed to learn about "operation miracle" restoring sight for free to hundreds of thousands of people across Latin and Central America. Currently there are 24,000 students at the Central Unit for Medical International Co-operation where they learn the language, culture and medical systems of the places they are going to work in.

As part of our visit we were introduced to the provincial leader of the union in Santiago. It was truly impressive to see how they work – the union office has no roof thanks to the weather and there is a real difficulty in accessing transport due to the lack of parts.

We also visited the Ambrosio Grillo Hospital in the mountains, which has been twinned with the QE hospital in Gateshead for many years. It was incredibly moving to see their inventiveness and ability to make do with limited resources, repairing computer and technical equipment and building orthopaedic physiotherapy equipment.

Finally we visited the Latin American Medical School (ELAM) in Havana. There are 10,000 medical students from across the world (currently 74 countries) – from places as diverse as Africa, Colombia, Palestine and poor parts of the USA. Non-Spanish speaking students have to attend for an intensive six months Spanish course. Followed by 20 weeks of pre-med training to try and level standards and knowledge between different countries. The Cubans not only fund the cost of training, uniforms, study materials and identify

potential students from the poorest countries and poorest communities; they also fund their living costs. The students are in training for 6 years and are encouraged to specialise and do research. The basic arrangement is that each student should return to the poor community they came from, for at least 5 years and this happens in the majority of cases, with very few looking to personal financial gain. In each country there are Parent Associations that sometimes organise visits, and each student is responsible for trips home. The simple humanity and internationalism of this project was breathtaking and, the Cubans really are helping to create a better world.



Public Service Alliance



UNISON is at the centre of a bold new alliance which is uniting trade unionists across the northern region, in the battle against the government's austerity cutbacks.

The Northern Public Services Alliance is a regional campaign built on the collaboration between UNISON and more than a dozen other trade unions, along with the TUC.

Not only are the unions joining forces, but they are engaging with other strands of the community including local politicians, community, voluntary and user groups, to promote an alternative to the government's destructive economic agenda.

The Public Service Alliance was established last June, after a meeting between senior UNISON activists and civil service union, PCS.

"Public sector jobs are vital to the north east economy, comprising a third of all employment in the region." Says UNISON Northern regional convenor, Clare Williams. "The coalition's cuts will have a devastating impact here, potentially taking unemployment to unprecedented post-war levels and bringing back social deprivation not seen since Margaret Thatcher's government. "It was felt that we needed a campaigning initiative, a driving force against the cuts. It is critical to challenge these attacks and to promote a positive alternative agenda – one which introduces a Robin Hood tax and invests in public services to get us through and out of recession. The alliance is not politically based, it is about promoting the public sector, and the values, principles and

aspirations of trade unions in civil society. It's about a different vision of society than that of a government which is prepared to see the most vulnerable people hit the hardest.

The alliance has eight local coalitions – in Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Teeside and Northumberland: and an additional three in neighbouring Cumbria, which is in UNISON's north west region.

The coalitions are determined by their geographical areas: Newcastle Public Services Alliance includes the local government branch, health branches, university, voluntary groups and user groups within the city boundaries. Unions are particularly keen to ensure that women and young people are particularly well represented.

Groups meet monthly and are busily building the campaign at a local level, both in workplaces and through creating alliances with the community and voluntary sector organisations, local councillors and MPs.

Region-wide initiatives include an open "social forum" in the spring, on the future of public services, and the preparation of a manifesto for May's local elections, in liaison with Labour MPs and council leaders, and building on UNISON's Million Voices for Public Services campaign. The regional alliance has also produced a comprehensive "myth buster" leaflet, revealing the truth between the Tory-Lib Dem propaganda.

Local events include lobbies of council meetings and city rallies.

The alliance is raising awareness among our membership and the broader workforce in the region that have something relevant to say. And that leads to more people getting involved with their unions.

At the same time, success in the wider community reflects the fact that the alliance is not focussed on public sector jobs – although that's a critical part of its campaign – but the need to protect the public services themselves.

Other UNISON regions are interested in emulating the initiative. Once reason the northern region has led the way, Ms Williams believes, is the nature of the TUC in the region.

If you are interested in becoming active in the Public Services Alliance contact j.khoshooee@unison.co.uk



Welfare

The current economic crisis means UNISON members, like the rest of the country, are facing rising fuel and food bills, higher mortgages and the threat of unemployment.

Members who are experiencing financial hardship should seek help from UNISON Welfare.

UNISON Welfare offers a confidential advice and support service designed exclusively for UNISON members. The service includes debt advice, listening and support, financial assistance, breaks and holidays and general advice.

Care worker Susan contacted UNISON Welfare after experiencing poor health for some time. She and her husband were also caring for a severely disabled daughter. They desperately needed assistance to buy a wheel chair accessible vehicle. They also needed a new cooker, fridge freezer and washing machine, but their joint incomes were not enough. Susan's husband's health was already being

affected by the strain. The couple had already been in touch with the Family Fund charity, which supports families with disabled children, and UNISON Welfare agreed to share the cost of supporting Susan and her family. UNISON made a grant of £2,750.

“Words cannot express our sincere thanks for all your help,” said Susan.

“We found ourselves in difficult circumstances and don't know where we would have been without your help.”



UNISON Women's Conference, Harrogate February 2011

Pat Heron, UNISON NTW Women's Officer

Every year delegates from UNISON NTW branch attend the women's conference. Here, Pat Heron, UNISON NTW's women's officer gives an account of her experience.

"As a member of the national women's committee I was lucky enough to attend the women's conference in Harrogate this year. The northern region was well represented with delegates from a number of branches including Matildah Cheza-Musendo from our branch and Newcastle Hospitals Branch Secretary Linda Hobson, who has recently been selected to stand as a Labour Councillor in the outer west of Newcastle.

Angela Lynes, our President, opened conference with a really moving speech, speaking of her own experience in living through poverty and abuse. She moved many in the conference hall to tears as some empathised with her experiences and others themselves had lived through similar ordeals.

A number of motions were carried covering a range of areas and calling on UNISON to specifically target women in the community and voluntary sector, to campaign for an improvement in women's pensions and for research to be commissioned on the impact of cuts on flexible working requests and Sure Start. A delegate from the Northern region moved a motion on 'Our NHS – more than just a brand name'. She reminded conference that the Institute of Directors have asked the government to withdraw our ability to bargain nationally within

the NHS and that we say – "No!" Given the economic and political climate the government's ideological cuts to public services were high on the agenda. UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis addressed conference highlighting that the money paid out in bonuses to the top ten bankers would be enough to save all 400 libraries nationally that are threatened with closure. Given the disproportionate impact of the cuts on women, there were plenty who had something to say in the grouped debate that followed.

There was a real buzz to conference this year and I was really moved and motivated by the high level of political debate. As the cuts bite it is good to know that there are so many strong women willing to speak out and take action to protect our public services."



March for public services

26 March

Join thousands of people on the TUC march in London to tell the government that savage spending cuts are unnecessary and unfair.

UNISON believes that there is an alternative:

- fair taxation
- investment in local communities, health and education
- a more equal and just society.

Join us

Go to action.unison.org.uk/march to get more info and sign up for updates.

Join UNISON online today at unison.org.uk/join or call 0845 355 0845.



BRANCH CONTACT DETAILS

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Northgate	✓		✓		✓
St Nicholas		✓		✓	✓
Monkwearmouth	✓		✓		

Telephone Numbers

Northgate Hospital: 01670 394 161
 St Nicholas Hospital: 0844 811 5522 ext 28817
 Monkwearmouth Hospital: 0191 541 0546
unison@ntw.nhs.uk

