

**Unite submission**  
**NPF 2022 Consultation - A future where families come first**  
Delivering financial, social and housing security

This submission is made by Unite, the major UK trade union with over one million members across all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, financial services, transport, food and agriculture, construction, energy and utilities, information technology, service industries, health, local government and the not for profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our union.

**1. What change are needed to the social security system to help tackle the cost of living crisis and to ensure the system tackles poverty, makes work pay and provides genuine security?**

The opportunity must be seized to immediately correct some of the worst impacts of the distortions and cuts in our social security system and then to recreate it into **a system that promotes equality and ends poverty**. The goal should be a universal and comprehensive social security system that is complementary to well-funded comprehensive public services and housing provision and strong individual and collective employment and trade union rights that drive up pay and security.

As an immediate action, as well as **an increase to the level of Statutory Sick Pay, there should also be a further increase in the level of Universal Credit and legacy benefits, including restoring the £20 a week** and then building on this further and adjustments made to improve its coverage; including ending the five week wait by providing a grant or other means, ending the two child limit and the benefit cap. Sanctions should not have returned to the system and should end. Universal Credit, and the wider cuts to the social security system, has in particular harmed women and disabled people over the past decade.

Additional changes that should be made to Universal Credit include ending the payment to a single individual per household. Social security should provide a strong floor for all as part of ending poverty in this country; this does not prevent additional rights being accrued through National Insurance, but the principle of a universal social security system that protects everyone must be the foundation on which this is built – something Universal Credit in particular has not supported which is why Unite has called to replace it as set out here. At a time of economic pressure and crisis we must ensure there is no return to the scapegoating and derogatory language that has been associated with our social security system and those that have need to call upon it.

Alongside **creating the right to social security** we must ensure this is meaningful by improving its accessibility. This includes funding the local authority directly provided and the funded advocacy, support and justice organisations that support social security applications and appeals. We must invest in services and the

hardware to eliminate digital exclusion in society and ensure that people are not excluded from applying for social security because of the inaccessibility of applications and the process by 'digital only' means.

This must work in concert with wider economic policies aimed at protecting and creating jobs and decent employment and universal, comprehensive, well funded public services.

Unite believes there is a need to raise the state pension level – and not the age of entitlement. This is more acute now as **a number of reports have highlighted stagnating – and in areas reduced – life expectancy as first the decade of austerity and now the pandemic continues to take its toll.**

In achieving **pensions justice**, Unite also supports auto enrolment but believe the contribution levels are only half way to where they need to be in order to avoid pensioner poverty. Unite further believe that a minimum of 15% pension contributions is needed to avoid future pensioner poverty. This is the figure from the Independent Review of Retirement Income (IRRI) that says a national retirement savings target of 15% of lifetime earnings should be adopted “to avoid future pensioner poverty”. Two-thirds of pre-retirement income is seen as an acceptable level of pension’s provision by many pension commentators. It will take contributions greater than 15% to achieve this. Unite believe that employers should be taking up the greater strain, on a minimum 2 times employer contribution to 1 times employee contribution basis. The Government should also implementing as previously announced, the lowering of the age to access to auto enrolment from 22 currently to 18 in the mid 2020s. In addition they should make sure that contributions are paid from the first pound of earnings, with no Lower Earnings Limit deduction as it is currently from £6,240 pa onwards.

Linked to this – and crucially - **we need to enable people to save towards their retirement by securing them financial security, safe work and higher incomes now.** Higher levels of insecure work and falling real wages now will create greater pensioner poverty in the future, with this pensioner poverty reflecting the inequalities we see in our labour market highlighted above.

Unite continue to support pensions justice for the WASPI women who have been left struggling to enjoy the retirement they had been planning because of the **Government’s initial disregard for women and failure of taking women’s circumstances into account in its policy making**, and its continued failure to address this injustice.

## **2. What can be done to ensure secure and decent housing for all?**

Housing is an area where there has long been a need for urgent action to **ensure that everyone has access to quality, affordable housing**. Inaction in addressing our housing crisis has multiple social and economic costs that will continue to worsen; while measures taken to fix our broken housing market can create a huge, nationwide economic boost, deliver better lives and be a major contributor to us reducing our carbon emissions as a country. This includes Labour continuing to support a **mass investment and construction programme of council homes, with construction workers and apprentices directly employed and benefitting from industry collective agreements**.

This Government has acted shamefully in respect of private renters rights during the pandemic. Labour must continue to put forward its commitment to much greater tenant rights and security of tenancy and rent caps generally and supplement this by recognising that protections from evictions must remain in place and that during the pandemic private rent holidays were required. If protections from evictions end and are not extended and strengthened there threatens to be a sharp and avoidable rise in homelessness as the economic crisis grips. The actions in housing homeless people have shown that where there is a political will there can always be a way that is found to solve a problem. To this end Labour must campaign to **abolish section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act, end ‘No Fault’ evictions and return to indefinite tenancies**.

### **3. How can the next Labour government give children the best start in life and what changes are needed to ensure all children have access to high-quality, affordable childcare?**

Unite believes that to at least be at the same level as countries that are similar to us economically, we **need the provision of both affordable and free childcare that meet the needs of parents and carers, with a childcare strategy reflecting pre-school, primary and secondary school needs, with respect, decent work and sectoral collective bargaining to protect standards for those who work in the childcare sector**.

Unite also supports **further strengthening of rights and protections for working parents and carers as vital to giving children the best start in life**. The following far-reaching policy was agreed at Unite National Women’s Conference 2020/21 asking the government to:

- **Harmonise (upwards) paternity/maternity rights:** Bring paternity leave and pay into line with maternity pay and leave.
- **Additional leave for women who have premature babies.**
- **Non-regression clause relating to existing maternity rights:** The government should commit to a non-regression clause principle in relation to existing parental rights in order to ensure that the implementation of any new

parental leave policies does not lead to a weakening of existing forms of parental rights, particularly maternity rights and protections.

- **Increase statutory levels of pay:** Increase statutory maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental pay to at least Real Living Wage levels so that new parents aren't forced to go back to work before they or their baby are ready.
- **Parity between workers and employees:** All those engaged in work should have the right to paid maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave.
- **Scrap qualifying periods:** All parental rights should be a day one right.
- **Enhance maternity rights:** Compared with other EU countries, UK statutory maternity pay is poorly paid. Following alignment of paternity and maternity pay, both should be paid at 90% of earnings (without a cap) for 14 weeks. Following this period, statutory pay should be paid for 39 weeks, set at the Living Wage rate.
- **“Use it or lose it” leave – non-transferable leave:** Paternity and Maternity rights should be individual entitlements and non-transferable to the other partner. The evidence suggests a ‘use it or lose it’ element incentivises dads to take their leave.
- **Concurrent use of parental leave:** Parents should be able to use their leave concurrently for a maximum period of 6 months. This would enable families to spend time together and for parents to jointly care for their children.

#### **4 How can we ensure young people have choices and chances and are able to take the steps they want towards economic and social independence?**

Unite believes that young people's chances and choices require Labour action in all spheres - education, health, mental health, housing, jobs, skills, safety, security, equality, action on violence and harassment, transport, criminal justice, economic justice, legal rights and so much more – all are fundamental to the ability to move towards economic and social independence.

Unite strongly supports the provision of a Youth Service as integral to support, giving children and young people the best start in life. In addition **Unite welcomed the Labour commitment to ending the cuts to youth services and to place youth services on a statutory footing to ensure all young people have the opportunity to be involved in youth work.** This requires decent standards and treatment of those who work in the youth service, and not the piecemeal insecure work faced by so many people dedicated to this vital service.

Youth services are also crucial to supporting young people to become adult citizens, helping them to achieve better education and health outcomes and reducing levels of risky behaviour on the part of young people. These services are more vital and

needed than ever following the pandemic and its impact on so many children and young people's lives.

Unite members at Conference have called for recognition of the impact of growing up in care on young people's life chances and opportunities, and have called in particular for local authorities to enable apprenticeships and training support programmes and job opportunities to target those leaving care, with particular recognition of barriers faced by Black & Asian ethnic minority young people who have lived in care.

**Further Unite believes the National Minimum Wage age rates promote unfair age discrimination.** People of all ages should be paid the rate for the job. Unite calls for unfair age rates to be abolished, and has systematically negotiated throughout industries to remove them. Real apprenticeships and decent training opportunities are critical and a Labour in Government could ensure investment to transform young people's opportunities in life, unlike the way the current levy is operating.

The voluntary sector's social action role as a critical ally for the education service is vital to young people's chances. This could serve to promote innovation, accountability and advocacy, rather than treating not for profit organisations as vehicles for outsourcing and delivering services on the cheap.

Please also see Unite's response to the Public Services consultation document.

## **5. How can we ensure equalities are at the heart of all of our policies and that equality impact assessments are fully utilised?**

Unite, and predecessor unions which formed Unite, has long supported Equality Impact Assessments as a vital tool to ensure changes do not adversely impact equality. **Equality impact assessments reveal that there can be adverse as well as positive impacts from change.** The aim must be to advance equality and anti-discrimination measures, as well as to check and prevent worsening of existing inequalities. EQIAs are an important tool to support tackling underlying structural inequalities – so devastatingly revealed during COVID with disproportionate impact and deaths of Black & Asian people.

When David Cameron called Equality Impact Assessments “red tape and tick box stuff” and stopped them from being carried out, he set back equality, and Labour needs to expose the damage caused, as well as ensure we “right the wrong” that was done. If EQIAs are being used as a tick box exercise only, then there has been insufficient training, and those carrying them out are failing and should be called out and required to implement an active policy to advance equality. This should include the use of Equality Impact Assessments to prevent poor policies being introduced, monitor implementation, and regularly check the impact of policies in the light of changes that take place. EQIA has always been an invaluable tool as well as regular Equality Audits to prevent and tackle discrimination in the workplace. Without EQIA, untold damage to people's lives can be caused. One stark example is from a

chemical company, where the shift pattern was changed – there was no EQIA, no union equality representative, no equality training had taken place – and within 12 months, a workforce that had been 50:50 men and women became 90:10 men and women. The new shift pattern made it impossible for most of the women working there to continue to balance their work and family responsibilities. No one decided to dismiss most of the women working in the workplace, but the impact was just as devastating. While there are of course legal rights to challenge, the aim of EQIA is to prevent the discrimination from happening in the first place.

Unite has many examples where by using equality impact assessments, Equality Audits and surveys where we have been able to resolve cases, disputes or prevent discrimination as a result of proposed policies.

- When British Airways went ahead with its plans to fire and rehire its workforce, also making thousands of staff redundant, Unite called on the airline to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment before making job cuts but the airline refused to cooperate. Therefore, Unite conducted its own Equality Impact survey and the results were truly shocking. Our survey clearly revealed that compulsory redundancies had disproportionately impacted older women in particular overall. In one airport, the disproportionate impact on black and Asian ethnic minorities (BAEM), young and disabled staff was also exposed and challenged.
- Following an Equality Audit that revealed a glass ceiling within a bus company, Unite negotiated a training programme aiming to provide first level supervisory and management skills training. This jointly sponsored training programme was set up to increase promotion opportunities for under-represented workers, particularly BAEM and women employees. It developed them as future managers and supervisors and encouraged junior grade staff who worked as bus drivers, engineers, administrators and in other areas and wished to increase their skills to take part. This clearly improved the chances and opportunity of being promoted in the future.
- In an NHS Trust equality monitoring exposed that BAEM women were hardest hit by redundancies, completely undermining stated commitments to race equality. Unite successfully negotiated joint training and fairer processes to prevent this form of discrimination.
- A Unite rep at a London Borough Council monitored the impact of the restructuring of the Council. At the end of each phase of the job cuts a monitoring form was filled out and the branch representative analysed the data to see who was disproportionately affected by the reorganisation process.
  - The analysis looked at the impact of the job losses by gender, ethnicity, disability. It was mostly Black and Asian women who were disproportionately affected by redundancies.

- An equality workshop was organised in the council to look at how the reorganisation of workers was affecting certain groups with protected characteristics and to identify a way forward. Participants included, trade union representatives, independent members, workers and directors.
- Unite has worked to ensure that the Council adheres to Equality Duty good practice.
- Unite has experience of the impact of privatisation when equalities considerations were specifically excluded from the tendering process under compulsory competitive tendering. This showed that disproportionately it was low paid women, black women and disabled workers in particular that were affected, leading in our experience to the creation of the current equal pay cases and serious decline in the employment of disabled workers. This showed that serious problems occur when the impact of policies on equality is not taken into account.
- Transport for London's procurement practices have been a good example of how early engagement and communication with all stakeholders, clear presentation of the business case and reporting of successes and benefits provides positive outcomes for women, black and Asian ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups in its supply base.
- Pay negotiations through collective bargaining leads to more transparency and narrowing the pay gap. In our experience in workplaces where we have collective bargaining there is greater commitment by employers to prevent and tackle the gender pay gap. For example in the NHS, the Equality and Diversity forum which is a joint employer and staff side forum launched the Equal pay toolkit to monitor gender equal pay among NHS employers.
- The initiatives of the Scottish government around equalities, for example to highlight the needs of trans men and women in the provision of services, the Scottish government is working with the public sector and supports the Inclusion Project as part of its work to improve NHS Scotland.

Please use the link to access Unite guide to workplace equality impact assessments <https://www.unitetheunion.org/media/3382/action-on-covid-19-equalities-booklet.pdf>