

July 2022

Unite submission to Labour National Policy Forum:

Securing first class public services for all

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.

We face the worst cost of living crisis in decades yet the government and others trumpet wage restraint and cuts. **Labour must be clear that workers should not pay for this crisis.** They must offer policies that speak to the majority of people, whose focus and experience will be on the threats to the security of their job and income. The Labour party was set up by the Trade Union movement to be the party for workers. It must focus on solutions that strengthen the resilience of the foundations of our economy, to improve the lives of working people now and in the future. Labour must be bold and work to transform our society, through an ongoing and significant stimulus package to strengthen our economy as a whole, to create and make all jobs good jobs, raise wages and incomes.

We need to meet the challenges of turning around the historic depression in living standards over the past decade, to finally build an economy that is socially just and wealth and power is more equally distributed and tackle climate breakdown. To do this we must address the insecurity that many face in their jobs and earnings, support and develop the industries and jobs of the future and deliver high quality publicly owned public services.

Public services are a necessary part of repairing our social fabric, improving people's everyday lives and crucial to creating a more equal and just society. They are also part of the story in achieving the jobs led recovery we need. Research from the TUC has shown that investing the resources our public services immediately need would create 600,000 jobs¹.

Labour must also work tooth and nail to prevent our public services being auctioned off as part of the post Brexit trade agenda.

1. What principles should underpin Labour's approach to the provision of public services?

Labour must commit to deliver public services that are sustainably funded, publicly owned, universal and comprehensive, democratically run and accountable.

Unite members working across the range of public service, from the health service, local government, social care and education sectors are all clear that our public services are under threat from a toxic combination of poor funding, fragmentation, underinvestment and privatisation.

Labour in power must commit to increase government spending to rebuild the public services we need and deserve. **Public services need to have sustainable levels of resources to meet current and future service need. Such funding must be long-term and stable, allowing our public services to plan for the future and never again leave us vulnerable and unprepared for public crisis like the Covid 19 pandemic.** After many years of short term and irresponsible decision making from the

¹ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/600000-jobs-risk-government-inaction-reaching-net-zero>

Conservatives in power, Labour will need to deliver urgent investment to rebuild our services. Such investment must include significant investment in staffing, training, skills and pay rises that reverse more than a decade of pay cuts for most public service workers and fix the recruitment and retention problems now blighting our public services.

The pandemic has illustrated just how damaging privatisation, fragmentation and poor employment standards are as structural challenges to maintaining high quality public services.

Unite is therefore clear that Labour must continue with its commitment to public ownership as central to its strategy for public services. There must be no return to Labour's experiments with the failed policy of privatisation and **Unite strongly welcomed the Shadow Chancellor's commitment to deliver "the biggest wave of insourcing in a generation"**. Labour must commit to introducing a statutory presumption for insourcing public service contracts, as well as to bring vital public services such as rail, buses, energy and utilities back into democratic public ownership.

Such commitments do not have to wait until Labour has a majority in Westminster. Labour in power must reject all forms of privatisation and outsourcing, including the use of so called social enterprise, false worker co-operative and volunteer based models. Local and devolved government provides Labour with the opportunity to demonstrate these commitments right now, by bringing services back in-house, as set out in the Labour Party document entitled "Democratising Public Services"², which was warmly welcomed by local authority workers at Unite's last policy conference.

Labour must continue to explore ways to make public services more democratic, and accountable. Unite firmly believes that services that involve their staff and service users within their decision-making and accountability processes will become more efficient, effective, accountable, caring, innovative and successful. Public ownership and the removal the web of bureaucracy related to privatisation and outsourcing will help, but a future Labour government must make sure that public services are democratic and accountable to the people who use them, and to a wider society, fostering a participatory culture where everyone is able to be involved.

2. How can Labour ensure the NHS and social care deliver a first class service for all?

The Labour Party is the party of the NHS. This proud legacy was founded on the Bevanite principle that healthcare should be available to all that need it, without the barrier of payment in order to serve all strata of society.

The NHS and its staff have acted heroically to deal with the pandemic. Yet this crisis has exposed the deep damage that has been done by years of underfunding and privatisation (in England in particular), and this Government's commitment to finding answers in the private sector even when this is not the most efficient and effective option, as 'We Own It' have repeatedly exposed.

Unite and other health trade unions have campaigned vociferously against the increasing privatisation of the NHS under the Tories³. Data shows a growing share of England's NHS budget going to private and non NHS organisations over the past 12 years. The Department of Health and Social Care's annual report⁴ shows a rise of almost 20% spend between 2014-15 and 2019/20 from

² <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Democratising-Local-Public-Services.pdf>

³ <https://www.nhsforsale.info/nhs-privatisation-overview-2/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/105242/1/dhsc-annual-report-and-accounts-2020-2021-web-accessible..pdf

£8.1bn to £9.7bn in 2019/20. An Oxford University study, published in the Lancet this week, has shown that the rise is strongly linked to a drop in patient care,⁵ as widely predicted by trade unions.

Labour must commit to undo this damage and **restore our NHS as a publicly owned, publicly funded, publicly provided and accountable, universal and integrated service with proper funding and resources to meet the public health challenges of the 21st Century**. There must also be recognition that underfunding the NHS is a false economy. Labour must hardwire the principle that prevention is more effective, and therefore cheaper, than cure.

The pandemic has demonstrated why a publicly owned and universal health system is so important. Good public health is a benefit to all in society and Labour commitments on this principle will continue to be crucial. Privatisation must end and that health services must be brought back in house. This includes the services that have in the past been almost dismissively referred to as ‘backroom’ or whose importance has not been recognised – such as pathology labs and cleaning services. The pandemic has focused attention on these crucial services and their role as central in the delivery of quality healthcare.

Nothing demonstrates the risks of the alternative more than our social care services, where privatised, fragmented and deregulated services, run by an unrecognised, highly exploited workforce struggled to cope with the pandemic. The failings of the service are not new but they were brutally exposed by the pandemic and the government’s failure to protect service users and staff alike.

Labour in government must commit to build a national care service run on the same basis as the NHS. Social care, including residential care, should be publicly run, funded out of general taxation and free at the point of need; there must be an end to the broken market in social care and government must ensure that properly-funded high-quality residential care is available for all who require it, shaped by the involvement of older people and their families and consistent with the principle of supporting independent living.

Labour must also commit to establish a National Independent Living Support Service (NILSS) that gives new universal right to independent living, enshrined in law, funded through general taxation and free at the point of need. This service must be co-created and delivered locally in co-production with disabled people.

These services must commit to vastly improve the work, pay and conditions of care workers, formally recognising their skills and introducing a national system of collective bargaining to drive standards nationwide.

3. What do mental health services need from a Labour government?

Labour must continue to commit to prioritising mental health services with parity of esteem, better funding and integrated support for patients through acute care, preventative support, social care and independent living services for those with long-term needs (see above.)

Mental health services require sustainably resources, as well as a well-trained and well treated dedicated workforce. Any plan should include criteria for decent working conditions, to include the requirement not to over burden staff to the point that they themselves become traumatised.

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/jun/29/nhs-privatisation-drive-linked-to-rise-in-avoidable-deaths-study-suggests>

It is vital to have the required number and skill level of staff to meet the service need. This principle underpins the whole system and will require urgent investment in pay and training opportunities to ensure a high quality and diverse workforce reflects the general population and meets their needs.

There must be a strategic and united system wide approach across government departments, with mental health, particularly children and young people's mental health, at the heart of all planning and decision making. For example, children find themselves faced with many immediate challenges around the pressures of government-based targets related to educational achievement. This culture is placing children and young people, and in turn, teaching staff, under huge and counter-productive pressures which appears to be linked to the increase in mental health distress in children and young people.

There is a need to invest in CAMHS support for children and families, and to address parental mental ill-health. There needs to be adequate funding for longer term therapies for people impacted by trauma and abuse, and rebuilding of many of the wider community support services that have closed following years of government austerity.

Families also face economic pressures which will inevitably impact on the wellbeing of young people. In addition, babies, children and young people also face the challenges presented by the climate crises and looming environmental disasters. There is a need to invest in CAMHS support for children and families, and to address parental mental ill-health. There needs to be adequate funding for longer term therapies for people impacted by trauma and abuse, and rebuilding of many of the wider community support services that have closed following years of government austerity.

There is already a wealth of evidence on measures that can help reduce mental ill health and societal distress and it is clear the key is to reduce health, social and financial inequalities. It is also vital to focus on the prevention of abuse, stopping gender-based violence, racial violence, violence and abuse of disabled people, and all forms of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia.

Targeted interventions at key points of need are vital to prevent long term mental health problems. Consequently, there is a need for specialist clinicians. For example, mental health problems are firmly entwined with the wider equalities agenda, and it is no surprise that discriminated against groups such as black and Asian ethnic minority communities and LGBT+ people are at far greater risk of having mental health problems. To tackle these problems Labour must simultaneously work to tackle discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion of these communities, while offering funding and resources for organisations that provide appropriate, specific responsive support and care.

More investment into local communities will increase community trust, social inclusion and cohesion, all vital ingredients for population wellbeing. Labour must view the growing problem of mental health as a symptom of modern society and economics. **Unite has done substantial work and campaigning against the growing use of precarious, insecure and exploitative work across the UK economy and the impact such contracts are having on mental health should not be understated.** The UK also works some of the longest hours in Europe with some of the highest levels of inequality, while UK incomes and living standards have declined in real terms significantly since 2008. In addition, the effects that job cuts and industry closures have on the population, for example the closures in the UK steel industry can have a devastating effect on a community's mental health. All this is undoubtedly contributing to increased mental health problems in the UK. Unite stresses that any solutions to that crisis must look at the problem holistically, setting out to tackle these huge drivers of insecurity in life as part of its broader strategy to prevent mental illness.

4. How can Labour ensure high-quality education for every child and young person that secures the skills they need for work and for life?

Labour must continue to put the case that there should be clear local democratic oversight and autonomy for schools with a set of universal standards and expectations co-developed with staff and their unions, that would prevent inequality of provision across the UK. Ending the competitive, market based approach to education that has been pursued by successive governments is a critical step in improving the standards in education, as is the need for far greater accountability.

This public health crisis demonstrated the need for local authority and community accountability and planning across schools in a local area to coordinate the best provision for all children, rather than the fragmented and privatised system the Conservatives have created.

Schools and further education colleges must be returned to local education authorities, and be accountable to elected councillors, recognised trade unions, parents and students. Bringing these services back under local authority control, with added resources and infrastructure, is the best way to achieve this. Importantly it would also make sure that all parts of our education system are fully integrated with other crucial services such as housing, social care, child and adolescent mental health services, social work and youth services.

Where our schools work with charities and not for profit providers that support education, children and their families there must be strong commitments to deliver sustainable long-term funding that covers the full cost of delivering important additional services. Government must support and promote the voluntary sector's social action role as a critical ally for the education service. 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.

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.

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.

5. How can Labour deliver high-quality vocational and academic training routes?

Educational opportunities should be available for people throughout their lives and Labour must put in place support for those who wish to re-enter education and to re-train. Labour has the policies to enable this through its commitment to removing the barriers to education at every stage in life through proper funding, free universal access and investment in the workforce that will make education a dynamic force that changes and improves all of our lives and society.

Unite believe all educational routes should be equally available to all young people so they can freely choose between the range of options presented to them by Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE), vocational training and apprenticeships. Unite welcomed the commitments to invest in FE and introduce free, lifelong education in FE colleges, enabling everyone to upskill or retrain at any point in life. Unite believe this requires significant investment in FE, which has suffered significant cuts since 2010. This must now urgently be maintained and built upon as a Labour commitment. The commitment to re-instate the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and concessionary public

transport fares for young people is a small, but necessary, part of ensuring educational opportunities are open to all.

More young people (16 to 25-year olds) will need college places due to high unemployment. There is a large cohort of young people, particularly new college starters, needing support to 'catch up' in learning after several months of lockdown. Fewer apprenticeship places are resulting in a large number of apprentice redundancies and a shortage of new places for aspiring apprentices. Additionally there will be a large numbers of adults requiring training to help them move from the sectors in most difficulties into those which might expand or recover more quickly, this may reach even greater numbers if furloughed workers then face redundancy.

Labour need to develop and retain their commitment to funding being available through grants and bursaries for older people to access further and higher education who may otherwise be prevented.