



Meeting of: Disabled Members Equality Conference

Location: INNSiDE Manchester, 1 First St, Manchester M15 4RP and online

Date: Thursday 16 November 2023, 9.30 am – 1.00 pm

Unconfirmed minutes

Present: In person

Naseem Anwar	Scottish RMB
Vicky Blake	University of Leeds
Cecily Blyther	Petroc
Donna Brown	Royal Holloway, University of London
Amanda Brunton	University of Cambridge
Lucy Burke	Manchester Met University
Katie Cave Reynolds	Anglia Ruskin University
Ioana Cerasella Chis	University of Birmingham
Holly Cooper	University of Oxford
Lorraine David	University of Bedfordshire
Kevin Daws	City of Bristol College
Jennifer Dods	Leeds Beckett University
Jo Edge	The University of Edinburgh
Peter Evans	Ealing Hammersmith and West London College
Carla Finesilver	King's College London
Alison Gaughan	Kirklees College
Martin Giddey	Southern Region RMB
Joe Gluza	Eastern & Home Counties Retired Members' Branch
Claire Graf	The University of Edinburgh
Dan Green	Heriot-Watt University
Jon Griffith	University of East London
Claudia Jefferies	City College Plymouth
Berrisford Lewis	York St John University
Jacqui Lovell	Liverpool John Moores University
Gertjan Lucas	University of Nottingham
Sophia Lycouris	The University of Edinburgh
Moona Ma	University of Southampton
Rubi Mahmood	University of Derby
Marian Mayer	Bournemouth University
Justine Mercer	University of Warwick
Themesa Neckles	University of Sheffield
Katherine O'Brien	The University of Manchester
Ellen Owens	University of Reading
Christina Paine	London Metropolitan University
Ben Pope	The University of Manchester

Jessica Redway	University of Winchester
Patricia Roche	Blackpool and the Fylde College
Lisa Rull	University of Nottingham
Shirley Searchwell	Walsall College
Chris Sheehy	North West RMB
Roddy Slorach	Imperial College London
Martyn Smith	University of Leicester
Abdul Sobratee	Sheffield College
Maddalena Tacchetti	University of the West of Scotland
Saira Weiner	LJMU
Joshua Woodcock	The University of Manchester
Yashi Yuan	University College London

Present: Online

Hariett Axbey	University of Swansea
Linnie Blake	Manchester Metropolitan University
George Burrows	University of Glasgow
Ndidi Chidomere	University of Derby
Aysha Chodhury	SOAS
Anastasia Christou	Middlesex University
Stephen Cole	Suffolk New College
Jo Corke	South West RMB
Fay Cosgrove	University of Cardiff
Justine Dashwood	University of Stirling
Katherine Deane	UEA
Bethan Evans	University of Liverpool
Caroline Haig	University of Glasgow
Mike Higgins	Central Groups - HE London
Cynthia Iglesias	University of York
Laura Kelly	Manchester Metropolitan University
Nikolaos Mavroudis	University of Reading
Naomh McKee	NOVUS
Theresa McKinven	Manchester Metropolitan University
Linda Moore	Ulster University
Iman Naja	Open University
Rachel Nutt	University of St Andrews
Bijan Parsia	University of Manchester
Martin Pitchers	City College Norwich
Sara Scott	Southern RMB
Emma Sheppard	Coventry University
Lori Snyder	Kingston University
Roger Taylor	Manchester College
Cecilia Wee	Royal College of Art
Hannah Wright	QMUL

In attendance

Charlotte Nielsen
Swati Patel
Jenny Sherrard,
Sharon Russell

Equality Support Official
Equality Administrator (Minutes via online)
Head of Equality and Policy
Equality Support Official

Introduction, welcome and role and function of the conference by Pat Roche, Chair of the Disabled Members' Standing Committee (DMSC)

- 1.1 Pat Roche welcomed all delegates to the conference. This is the first time the conferences have been held in a hybrid format.
- 1.2 The conference theme was Disability and Autonomy: Nothing about us without us.
- 1.3 Pat Roche introduced herself as the Chair of DMSC and the FE NEC rep for Disabled Members.
- 1.4 Kevin Daws introduced himself as the Vice-Chair of DMSC.
- 1.5 Sharon Russell, Equality Support Official for DMSC, was thanked for all her work.
- 1.6 Pat Roche outlined some housekeeping rules, a code of conduct during the conference, as well as the conference's role and function.

Conference Business

2.1 Adoption of standing orders

- 2.2 The standing orders were agreed upon.
- 2.3 Marian Mayer raised an issue about ableist conduct at Congress in 2023. DMSC had written to all 3 Congress chairs for respect and inclusion, but this did not happen. Marian Mayer wanted the conference to send a message to UCU to treat disabled members with respect and dignity and operate in an inclusive manner.
- 2.4 There were comments in favour and against the contribution by Marian Mayer.

2.5 Minutes of Disabled Members' Annual Conference 2022

- 2.6 Minute 2.23 should read Marian Mayer explained that the term declaring and not disclosing a disability should be used, not Marian Mayer apologising for using the term disclosure.
- 2.7 The minutes from the above amendment were approved as an accurate record.

Report from the Disabled Members Standing Committee

- 3.1 Pat Roche has been delighted to be elected to the NEC. Disabled people are facing enormous challenges at present, including the cost of living crisis, disability pay gap, and the government's focus on punishing people with disabilities.
- 3.2 Sharon Russell and DMSC members were thanked for their work producing the accessibility checklist. Sharon Russell and Marian Mayer (previous chair of DMSC) were thanked for their work producing the reasonable adjustment passport.
- 3.3 Bijan Parsia (HE rep on NEC) and the rest of DMSC were thanked for their work

in promoting disability equality.

- 3.4 Kevin Daws pointed out that he has pushed forward for disability equality. Still, disabled people need to “shout a lot louder” to have their voices heard and for disabled people to use their disability history to progress in terms of attaining disability equality.
- 3.5 Ben Pope from Manchester University was co-opted onto the DMSC and highly recommended that members join the committee. Ben Pope initially came into contact with the DMSC when he was on the Anti-Casualisation Committee when both committees worked on a set of guides on the intersection of casualisation and disability.
- 3.6 This year, DMSC put forward a motion to the HE sector conference around bureaucratic processes in HE, which looked at developing guidance on employers' inaccessible policies and procedures. The guidance can be produced by harnessing the huge knowledge amongst UCU members, which can be shared by branches and used to engage with members in their workplaces and ultimately negotiate for more accessible policies and procedures, not just for guidance but also as a campaigning tool.
- 3.7 There is ongoing work to make the UCU website more accessible.
- 3.8 For Bijan Parsia this is his first conference as an HE NEC rep. It is daunting as well as exciting. Some things are positive, but there are also challenges within UCU around disability and accessibility.
- 3.9 For the first NEC meeting, Bijan Parsia wrote a paper about a principled-based approach to access for everyone within UCU. He will write a paper on the 4-day work week following the discussion during the motions debate, which he is hoping to circulate to the NEC. Bijan Parsia's aim is to provide papers that are accessible to decision-makers so that they can implement the requests made by disabled members.
- 3.10 A question was raised about the progress of making the website accessible, which DMSC raised about two years ago, and an update would be appreciated. What is the present status of making the website accessible? Various reasons have been given as to why the website has not been updated, but at last year's Disabled Members conference, assurance was given that work is ongoing and will soon be completed. Inaccessible website is in breach of the Equality Act 2010. Making the website accessible would benefit all members.

Motions to Disabled Members Conference

Motion 1 Proposer

**UNCRDP
City of Bristol College/Disabled Members' Standing
Committee**

This Conference congratulates the Deaf & Disabled Persons Organisations (DDPOs) who produced and presented a detailed and damning critique of the government's inaction seven years after the UN's finding that austerity and welfare reform

measures were responsible for grave and systematic violations of disabled people's rights through:

- the closure of the Independent Living Fund, which supported disabled people with high needs to live in the community.
- the introduction of the bedroom tax, which mainly hit disabled tenants.
- the role of benefit sanctions in the deaths and suicides of disabled claimants.
- the introduction of the Work Capability Assessment
- the impact of Covid 19
- the impact of the cost-of-living crisis
- the withdrawal from the European Union

This Conference calls on the UCU to work with DDPOs to:

- Campaign actively for the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People into UK law

Kevin Daws moved the motion. Marian Mayer seconded the motion.

Votes for the motion:

57 in favour, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions

The motion was carried.

Motion 2	4 Day Week/Disabled Members' Standing Committee
Proposer	City of Bristol College

Conference notes that the weekend and the five-day week was won by trade unions, securing greater freedom for working people from the domination of employers.

Conference notes there has been little progress in further freeing working people, that working hours in the UK are now amongst the highest in Europe.

This conference calls on the UCU to:

- explore the feasibility of introducing a 4 Day Week in Further and Higher Education; Adult and Community Education as well as Prison Education
- identify the particular benefits of the 4 Day Week for its disabled members.

Kevin Daws moved the motion. Christina Paine seconded the motion.

Amendments were not being taken so the comment about the impact of 4 day a week on casualised workers needs to be researched is being recorded.

Votes for the motion:

55 in favour, 1 Against and 4 Abstentions

The motion was carried.

Motion 3 Inclusive conferences and meetings
Proposer City of Bristol College

This Congress believes that all UCU meetings and conferences should be as inclusive as possible.

This Conference notes and welcomes the decision of the UCU to run all of the Equalities conferences on a hybrid basis.

This Conference calls on the UCU and the NEC to uphold the UCU's commitment to inclusion by ensuring that all future conferences, congresses, and other meetings are hybrid.

Kevin Daws moved the motion. Vicky Blake seconded the motion.

Votes for the motion:

53 in favour, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions

The motion was carried.

Motion 4 Rail Ticket Office Closures
Proposer Southern Retired Members' Branch

UK rail companies plan to close most rail ticket offices, spuriously claiming that staff can be more effectively deployed on platforms and in station concourses where they All sell tickets and provide information.

This change would disadvantage many people, particularly disabled travellers, some of whom are unable to use vending machines or to make online purchases. Induction loops at ticket offices for those with hearing impairments would be lost.

Dedicated ticket staff provide expert information and advice disabled travellers who have special needs. This expertise will be diminished or lost. Rail unions fear that the closures are a pretext for redundancies. Rail companies and their shareholders would benefit while travellers suffer, and railway staff are at risk of unemployment.

This motion is redundant as it was enacted, so no vote was required.
Martin Giddy, the proposer, read out a statement about the motion.

Motion 5 Accessible and Inclusive Conferences and Workplaces
Proposer Disabled Members Standing Committee

This Conference welcomes the publication and distribution of the 'Accessibility as Standard' Checklist by the UCU Disabled Members Standing Committee as a possible way to further improve accessibility.

This Conference believes that:

- meetings and workplaces should be inclusive and accessible for all.
- all trade union meetings, conferences, workplaces, vehicles and events should be as accessible and inclusive as possible.
- UCU Committees including Branch Committees, Regional Committees, Advisory Committees as well as the NEC and its sub-committees should examine the accessibility of the venues that they use for their meetings and conferences, and seek to improve access as much as possible.

This Conference calls on the UCU to encourage UCU negotiating teams at all levels to include the accessibility of workplaces on the negotiating agenda and to persuade the employer to undertake Accessibility Audits with UCU reps and to act promptly on the findings of those audits.

Kevin Daws moved the motion, and Pat Roche seconded it.

Votes for the motion:

55 in favour, 0 Against and 0 Abstentions

The motion was carried.

Motion 6 Understanding the needs of Neurodivergent members at UCU events

Proposer Kirklees College

Many members who attended UCU Congress 2023 in Glasgow will have been aware that there were sections of the event that were experienced as distressing by neurodivergent members, particularly those with sensory processing issues. Conference believes that the problems were partly due to a lack of understanding of neurodivergent issues and needs in the context of a large event. We believe that UCU should endeavor to improve our performance in supporting the participation of neurodivergent members in UCU events.

Conference calls for all UCU members and staff involved in Congress to attend training to support needs of neurodivergent members and that this training should be delivered with the involvement of neurodivergent people with first-hand experience of the relevant issues.

The wording was changed to Conference calls for everyone involved in Congress as opposed to UCU members and staff.

Alison Gaughan moved the motion. Marian Mayer seconded the motion.

Votes for the motion:

38 in favour, 1 Against and 3 Abstentions

The motion was carried.

4 Nominations to Disabled Members' Standing Committee

- 4.1 There were five vacancies for a two-year term and three for a one-year term.
- 4.2 Nominations were received from Cecily Blyther, Claire Graff, Christina Paine and Cecilia Wee, elected unopposed to the 2-year seats.
- 4.3 Members present were encouraged to be co-opted onto DMSC as there were still four one-year vacancies.
- 4.4 A retired member pointed out that he would like to join and contribute to DMSC but cannot do so because the cut-off date for joining any standing committees is having been in employment for at least 12 months before being nominated. This should be addressed.

Ellen Clifford, Disabled People Against the Cuts (DPAC)

- 5.1 Pat Roche introduced Ellen Clifford from DPAC. Ellen Clifford is a disabled activist and author who has worked within the disability sector for the past 25 years, predominantly within organisations run and controlled by Deaf and Disabled people. She sits on the national steering group of DPAC and is co-chair of the Experts by Experience Commission on Social Security.
- 5.2 Ellen Clifford had produced a presentation on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD), but the slides would be circulated and not presented due to lack of time.
- 5.3 The presentation was on how UNCRPD can be used for campaigning so that it is relevant to the everyday lives of disabled people and to resist the government's targeted attack on deliberately lowering the living standards of the working class.
- 5.4 The common term now is disability justice rather than disability rights, as a rights-based approach can too often focus on achieving rights by providing resources whilst leaving the system unchanged. To end the oppression of disabled people, there needs to be a fundamentally different type of society.
- 5.5 The UNCRPD sets a high bar of access and inclusion, but the reality is that the current system would have to be fundamentally changed in order to fully implement the convention. The mental health system would have to be radically different.
- 5.6 In 2016 the UK government was found guilty of grave and systematic violations of disabled people's rights due to austerity and welfare reform. This came about due to an investigation that DPAC triggered.
- 5.7 The UK government ratified the UNCRPD in 2009. New Labour had to be lobbied to sign up to the protocol. They did sign up for the optional protocol, which enabled disabled people to make complaints to the UN to investigate under UNCRPD.

- 5.8 The special investigation in 2016 was triggered using the optional protocol. The UN was and continues to be concerned that the UK government was deliberately taking systematic measures to regress disability rights.
- 5.9 Within the monitoring process, which includes the reporting mechanism, the Deaf and Disabled people take the lead on the civil society element of the reporting. The reporting process includes the state party, i.e., the government of the country. In the UK, it includes the equality and human rights commissions based in different nations, as well as civil society.
- 5.10 The monitoring process of the convention makes it very clear that it has to be led by Deaf and Disabled people's organisations. Domestically, charities speak on behalf of Deaf and Disabled people and are used by the government to pass measures that adversely impact them.
- 5.11 Thus, the more radical Deaf and Disabled People's organisations have been able to push other organisations to take a more radical line in challenging the government.
- 5.12 The UN committee continues to be highly concerned about the whole UK. The routine examination in 2017 by the committee found damning findings of the UK government. The next one was due in 2022 but has been delayed.
- 5.13 In 2023, the UN committee decided to hold a particular enquiry, which includes sending a written report to them covering employment, social security and independent living. In August 2023, the committee scheduled for oral evidence in Geneva, but the UK government, at the last minute, said they were not ready and could not go.
- 5.14 The committee decided that the Deaf and Disabled people's organisations could go and have their say in Geneva anyway. The session was streamed live, and it aimed to raise awareness of the key issues identified by these organisations. One of the key issues was the new attack on social security.
- 5.15 In March, the UK government received extensive media coverage around changes to the work capability assessment, which they considered a progressive move. Deaf and Disabled people's organisations have been campaigning for changes to the work capability assessment, but the proposals put forward by the government were much worse.
- 5.16 Under the new system, no one will be exempt from sanctions. It will be up to the individual work coach's discretion as to what level of work-related activity every disabled claimant has to undertake. PCS union is appalled by this idea, as work coaches are already far too stretched and don't have the training or professional qualifications to make such decisions about disabled claimants.
- 5.17 The impact of rolling out in work conditionality is disproportionately going to affect disabled people. This is whereby claimants who are low paid or receive universal credit will have to do work search activity for higher paid or more hours work not to be sanctioned.

- 5.18 The government has launched a consultation that says the personal independence payment (PIP) assessment is being changed. The White paper suggests that they will look at PIP, as many disabled people receive out-of-work benefits but not PIP. The government seems to aim to ensure that as few people as possible claim PIP and out-of-work benefits.
- 5.19 Ellen Clifford, in conjunction with the Public Law Project, challenged the consultation on a technical basis, in that it was not accessible enough, did not have enough information, and was too short. Ellen Clifford has received a letter from DWP. The letter has been provided to a barrister specialising in social security to see if it is possible to pursue this as a case.
- 5.20 There is concern that the response to the consultation and the government's final proposals will be released on the same day as the budget, obscuring the responses.
- 5.21 It is essential that many Deaf and Disabled people's organisations and people respond to the consultation.
- 5.22 DPAC is planning an online event before the election about the different social security plans of each party and how they will impact people, a Parliamentary event to launch a campaign, and a look at protest and direct action. Members present at the conference were urged to join in campaigns and show solidarity where it is possible.
- 5.23 This is not about disabled people and disability benefits but about market intervention to ensure that workers are disciplined to continue receiving decreasing pay, deteriorating working conditions, and industrial action.
- 5.24 Ellen Clifford was thanked for her presentation.

Autonomy and accessibility

- 6.1 Cecily Blyther from PETROC introduced herself as being on DMSC and explained that Sharon Russell and Kevin Daws produced the accessibility checklist.
- 6.2 The accessibility checklist includes several sections. Branches can choose to complete all of them or a selection of them.
- 6.3 If any branches have ideas to improve the accessibility checklist, they can contact Sharon Russell.
- 6.4 Bijan Parsia, NEC HE rep on DMSC, explained that the accessibility checklist started a year ago when DMSC considered marking the UCU Day of Action for Disability Equality in Education. The idea came to Bijan Parsia from a Twitter bot, whereby universities say how gender equal they are, and there is a Twitter feed of their actual gender pay gap which posts a reply to say in this institution, they are celebrating that their female staff are being paid X% less than their male staff.
- 6.5 The accessibility checklist could be a powerful tool for highlighting specific issues, including barriers to accessibility. It can also share the burden so that

individuals do not have to advocate for themselves. At the institutional level, branches can develop an approach to holding the employer accountable.

- 6.6 Many things on the accessibility checklist are straightforward measures the employer can implement.
- 6.7 The accessibility checklist is a tool for organising better around access issues. It is important to be judicious when using the checklist.
- 6.8 Kevin Daws outlined that the accessibility checklist can be used as a campaigning tool. The checklist can be adapted to the needs of a branch to find out how accessible the workplace is, and accessibility implementation will benefit staff as well as learners. The checklist can also be used as a negotiating tool and added to the pay negotiations agenda.
- 6.9 There were comments from the floor:
- Accessibility impact on casualised workers should be included as a category.
 - It is important for the branch to hold onto the checklist as if the ownership is given to employers, they will do the bare minimum and use the checklist to say they have fulfilled their obligation, and it will be just a tick-box exercise.
 - The aim is for branches to give feedback to DMSC so that the checklist can be updated. The idea is for the checklist to be a living document.
 - The idea is for equality and health and safety reps to work together so that there is a connection in particular barriers which disabled members may face. The checklist aims to improve the rights of disabled members in the workplace.
 - It would be helpful for branches to send in their recommendations and results so that DMSC can look at them yearly.
 - The reasonable passport, which is a great tool, should be linked to the accessibility checklist.

Closing remarks by Pat Roche and close of the conference

- 7.1 Pat Roche pointed out that the advisory motions will be put forward to NEC.
- 7.2 Pat Roche thanked Sharon Russell, Sue Bajwa, Swati Patel, the captioners, the venue's audiovisual staff, members of DMSC, and all the delegates in attendance, both in person and online.
- 7.3 Pat Roche thanked Ellen Clifford, the speaker and Justine Mercer (President).
- 7.4 Bijan Parsia thanked Pat Roche for her exemplary chairing.
- 7.5 Justine Mercer thanked everyone for the successful conference. The successful Disabled Members hybrid conference last year led to all conferences being in a hybrid format this year.

The conference closed at 1.00 pm.