

## **National Executive Council Elections 2023: Nomination request**

Kath Owen

University of Leeds Branch

Membership Number – 9967515

### **Standing in the Higher Education Female seat**



Dear Branch Secretary and committee members

I am writing to ask your branch to consider nominating me for the Higher Education Female seat for the 2023 NEC elections.

I want to thank those branches which have nominated and supported me in my previous terms of office in this role. It has been a privilege to represent our service group at a national level and I would be very humbled to have this opportunity once again.

All UNISON members face the threat of a spiralling cost-of-living crisis and now we face further austerity from a Tory Government which is determined to make us pay for the economic crisis. These elections are hugely important in determining the way that UNISON tackles these issues. I am standing in solidarity with the Time for Real Change majority on the current NEC. I fully support the democratisation of the union and making the union's strategy and organisation fit the needs of the current situation facing our members.

#### **Experience and background**

As a student union staff member, I see the impact of marketisation on the higher education sector, our students and all staff groups. UNISON members are struggling after 10+ years of pay cuts, which has been compounded by the cost of living crisis. Now is the time to build on the recent action taken by branches, alongside our sister unions. Our members need pay, pensions and working conditions which treat them with dignity: our union must fight for them.

I have been a union rep for 12 years, as a workplace rep and on the Branch Committee. I have represented our region on the Higher Education Service Group for 10 years and held the NEC Higher Education Women's Seat since 2017. In 2021 I was proud to serve as the union's national Vice President. For all of these roles, I have been asked by my peers to put myself forward and have done so to represent them, not for any personal gain. I would be immensely proud to secure your support to be a candidate for the NEC.

#### **What I stand for**

**UNISON must be a member-led union** – I believe this means that elected members should run our union, not selected full-time officials. I want to work with all our paid officials, but it is members and their elected representatives that should be the real leaders.

**We need to be an organising, not a servicing, union** – We cannot solve all our members' problems on a one-by-one basis. Members will always need individual support, but the focus should be on collective action. We need to increase UNISON's collective and organising activities and to empower our members.

**Every large city and county** should have a proud UNISON resource centre in the high street: we need to make it as easy as possible for members to find us. We must present UNISON as a vibrant, democratic, fighting and organising union.

**The pay crisis** – UNISON must end the scourge of low pay. For too long UNISON has failed to adequately fight poverty pay, pay freezes and below-inflation deals. We cannot simply approach pay negotiations the way that UNISON's leadership has done in the past. Hikes in the price of fuel, heating and food are seriously impacting our members. No UNISON member should have to rely on food banks. We need fully funded and staffed public services. Members should not pay the cost of Tory austerity. To achieve this, I want **more cooperative relationships with other unions**. We should work together whenever we can.

**We must support members needing to take industrial action**. Strike pay rates have increased substantially, but there is more to do. UNISON only has a national strike fund of £21 million. This must change if we are to show employers and government we mean business. Also, we need to ensure that every region supports branches who need to carry out effective strike action.

**UNISON's finances** – We need full disclosure and transparency as to how members' money is spent. We must make best use of the surpluses made nationally and locally during the pandemic. Also, we must review UNISON's large property estate and where appropriate, free up resources for organising. We must continue to bring the UNISON Staff Pension scheme deficit down to manageable levels. Members' subs should not be required to keep the scheme afloat. **We should insource all outsourced UNISON services wherever feasible**, based on our trade union values and our aspirations for our union. **We need a green agenda within UNISON**, including an audit of UNISON company cars and the proliferation of meetings requiring members and staff to travel long distances.

**I believe that UNISON should play a positive but challenging role in the Labour Party**. UNISON resources and influence should be used to promote the removal of anti-trade union laws, public delivery of public services and a green new deal that tackles the climate emergency through the creation of green, well-paid, union jobs.

**Equalities in UNISON** are central to my vision. There have been some major developments over the last two years. But there is much more to do to make equality a reality through our entire union, not just its NEC but at all tiers of our union, including within its staffing.

**Legal advice** – We must review UNISON's main legal services contract and particularly the difficulties branch secretaries have accessing timely employment law advice.

**We need a robust and effective review of staffing** to ensure that the great work our staff do is as efficient and meaningful to members as it can be. **I believe UNISON members should decide whether our most senior roles should be elected**.

**We must end once and for all the punitive culture of disciplinary action**. Disciplinary investigations into members take far too long, with no regard for welfare. We must continue to look at these processes from top to bottom and end their use to resolve political differences.

**If you are considering nominating me as a candidate, please consider supporting Jo Tapper for the Higher Education (General Seat). She is an excellent candidate and together we want to make a great difference to our union!**

We are confident that the ideas we support will build on the progress made over the last two years. We urge all UNISON members to vote for Time for Real Change candidates in these NEC elections and, if you are able, to help us campaign for real change in UNISON.

Yours sincerely, Kath

Kath Owen

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