

STEPHANIE WISE

# on: lifelong learning

Lifelong learning gives members a way back into education and helps them learn new skills, whether as part of a career change or just because they never had the opportunity or confidence when younger.

Lifelong learning advisers and union learning reps – who now have statutory rights under new legislation – play a vital part in supporting members undertaking such education. And UNISON now has money from the government's Union Learning Fund to run a two- to three-year project in the nine English regions with fieldworkers helping to establish a culture of learning in the union.

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## Plus:

### Globalise struggle ... and hope

Newcastle branch secretary Kenny Bell sets out the case for involvement in the European Social Forum, plus readers' letters.

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### London weighting

Unions will meet employers again next month to discuss the joint union claim for £4,000 London weighting, with a warning that a failure to give a positive response could see further industrial action, plus news from around the union and the world.

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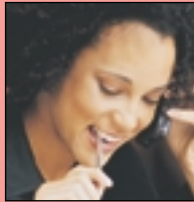
### A chance for new skills

Eastern region has set up a new scheme for NHS staff keen to develop their learning.

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### Learning for all our benefit

What new rights for union learning reps and access to the government's Union Learning Fund means for UNISON members.



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Halting private finance sell-offs in Harrow and Leicestershire, plus queries and answers on health and safety and the membership system.

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# Globalise struggle ... and hope

On 7 November, at least 25 UNISON members and other activists in Newcastle will be getting trains and planes to Florence to meet activists from across Europe at the European Social Forum.

All over the country, UNISON branches are seeing this weekend of international discussion, debate and sharing of lessons as a not-to-be-missed opportunity. It will boost our campaigns against privatisation, racism and attacks on asylum seekers and the threat of war, and for public services provided on the basis of need not profit.

in my opinion

Workers and communities in these struggles are facing the decisions of global institutions over which they have little if any influence: the IMF, the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank.

These organisations promote the free market and liberalisation policies which serve the interests of transnational corporations. The Labour government is following their agenda.

The only way to achieve a better world, based on social justice and equality, is for us to think and act globally. This means becoming an active part of the growing global movement of protest and positive alternatives.

The World Social Forum provides an umbrella for this movement: 60,000 activists and academics from around the world, representing more than 4,000 organisations took part in five days of discussion, debate, and demonstrations in Brazil in January.

Representatives from organisations of the landless in Brazil, small farmers from Mexico, community organisations in South Africa and trade unionists from South Korea came together, exchanging experiences and ideas, learning from each other.

A protest movement of enormous potential is growing which brings together all those opposed to privatisation, racism and the threat of war.

The European forum will bring together activists from across Europe committed to learning from each other and building the movement, which can create a better world. UNISON conference agreed to support the forum and it is hoped branches will mobilise and send representatives to contribute and learn.

Branches are urged to publicise the forum among members and other organisations. In the words of a banner from the World Social Forum in Brazil, now strung across the offices of Newcastle city UNISON: Globalise the struggle, globalise hope.

For information on the European Social Forum and the English mobilisation visit » [www.mobilise.org.uk](http://www.mobilise.org.uk) or contact Newcastle city UNISON branch on 0191 211 6980.



**KENNY BELL**  
branch secretary, Newcastle upon Tyne UNISON

# Far from the average

Reading the article in the last edition of *Focus* about last year's survey of UNISON stewards, I discovered I am not an average steward because I am younger than 47 and have only been in the union for two and a half years – becoming a steward after only 18 months.

champagne letter

Another factor that adds to my being "different from average" is that I am a UNISON (BAOT) steward.

The British Association of Occupational Therapists is a small union which has a partnership agreement with UNISON so that members have stronger and better workplace representation.

Most people join BAOT for the professional liability insurance and have no interest in "union" matters whatsoever.

I took up the stewards' role almost by default, not knowing the implications and responsibilities of holding such a position.

BAOT had its own seat on our NHS trust's joint negotiating council and the head of occupational therapy services wanted to ensure that this right to representation was not lost.

She asked me to fill the vacancy because "You would be good at it" and, suitably flattered, I said "Yes", thinking all I would need to do is contribute to discussion at joint council meetings. How wrong could I have been?

want to know more?  
see focus 176

I have since learnt that being a steward involves so much more than joint council meetings.

The TUC stage 1 stewards course opened my eyes to a whole new world of "all things union" and I have developed a new "branch" to my work as a senior occupational therapist, by acting as a representative and source of advice on union members.

To all intents and purposes I am now a fully-fledged UNISON steward, albeit not quite an "average" one!

**ROSIE PEARSON**  
Wakefield and Pontefract Hospitals branch

## Conference defended

As a first-time delegate to national conference, and living only 25 miles from Mark Wareham at Salisbury health branch, I feel I have to express a different view to his letter in *Focus* 176.

Whilst he expresses discontent over the format and direction of conference, I found the whole experience generally rewarding.

I accept that some branches do play a more proactive role in proposing and speaking to motions, but there is an extensive annual consultation process which invites all branches to submit items for debate.

I listened to many first-time delegates and speakers who braved the rostrum, so his view of dominance by the experienced minority is not widely shared.

His comments about conference being "divorced" from reality are offensive to the huge number of delegates who remain in front-line posts while performing union duties, often in their own time, in detriment to any career aspirations they may have once had.

He calls conference "confrontational" and accuses it of debating motions that go nowhere. Looking through my agenda I see items relating to privatisation, pensions, training opportunities, inclusive member participation and policy issues over matters of global significance such as the war in Afghanistan.

I believe these are the very subjects our members wish us to address. The lively debate that sometimes accompanies them is the democratic way of making that decision. I would much sooner listen to

these opposing views rather than be part of a boring stage-managed affair where even fewer members would want to take part!

No system is perfect, but I consider national delegate conference the best and most realistic method for UNISON to make its policy decisions.

**NEIL GARVEY**  
convenor, housing and community safety  
Southampton district branch.

## Congratulations – but we struggle on

On behalf of the North West regional black members' committee, I am writing to congratulate Bayo Omiyola on the successful outcome of his anti deportation campaign.

The committee would also like to thank the many individuals, branches, other organisations and UNISON nationally for all the support given to the campaign.

We should remember however, notwithstanding this success, there are many other campaigns who are still fighting for justice. Our committee will continue to offer support to those campaigns who should take heart that UNISON can and will support them. Collectively, we can succeed.

**RENA WOOD**  
publicity officer  
North West regional black members' committee

## Request for phone mast information

Do any other hospital trusts around the country have mobile phone masts on site?

My trust believes that the phone masts sited on our women and children building are safe, but the staff side has complained, with all the uncertainty re mobile emissions, especially in relation to children.

I would be most grateful for readers' comments and thoughts. Please e-mail me at [sheila.warwick@rws-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:sheila.warwick@rws-tr.nhs.uk).

**SHEILA WARWICK**  
Chichester health – St Richards branch

how to get in focus

Win a bottle of champagne  
Got something to say?  
Share it with fellow activists ...

Focus welcomes readers' letters. Please write to the editor at Focus, UNISON communications unit, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ, or email [unison-focus@unison.org.uk](mailto:unison-focus@unison.org.uk).  
The top letter each fortnight will win a bottle of champagne!  
Remember to include your name and address, plus the name of your branch. Letters of under 200 words would be preferred, but Focus reserves the right to edit, cut or omit letters.

focus

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## Plans ‘attack democracy and ignore real issue’

John Prescott’s proposals for tackling so-called underperforming problem councils aren’t good for local democracy and have nothing to say about the underlying problem of underfunding, says UNISON.

“The proposals are punitive rather than supportive, and represent greater centralisation of local government functions and duties and the erosion of local democracy,” said UNISON national officer Sandra Howell.

The deputy prime minister is threatening direct intervention and taking over so called failing councils with “special interim management teams”.

The proposals say “nothing about the real issue – chronic structural underfunding over a considerable period, which is the real story behind so called poorly performing councils,” added Ms Howell.

The government has invited comments on the plans by the end of September. These are outlined in a consultation paper which can be found on the web at [www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/conindex.htm](http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/conindex.htm).

## Hospital staff in Swansea ballot on pay

Hundreds of employees in Swansea hospitals are to be balloted on strike action over a fair wage claim against a private contractor.

The move follows talks between the contractor Mediclean and UNISON.

The ballot will involve all Mediclean staff employed in the Swansea NHS Trust area and will include porters, cleaners and telephonists.

An NHS cleaner earns £4.62 an hour but more than half of the Mediclean staff employed on the Swansea trust contract earn no more than £4.10, the current legal minimum wage.

# Date set for talks on London weighting



Living wage: general secretary Dave Prentis joined UNISON’s 55,000 Greater London local government members on the picket line during the four one-day strikes held this year already.

Greater London employers will meet the three local government unions next month in the latest stage of the union’s campaign for a living London weighting allowance.

A meeting of the Greater London provincial council executive has been fixed for 12 September to discuss the union claim for an allowance of £4,000 to meet the extra cost of living in London.

But a joint union meeting on 21 August warned: “If the unions don’t get a positive response from the employers on 12 September, then they will be looking at another one day all-out strike across London, on a date to be fixed.

“That would include selective action designed to cause maximum disruption to council services but

minimum disruption to the public.

“This would include disrupting internal council services such as revenue collection, IT, traffic control, parking and other income-generating activities.”

UNISON’s Julia Coleman, the chief trade union side negotiator, wrote to employers two weeks ago seeking a positive response on the London weighting claim after national talks saw employers produce a new offer on pay, which members are being consulted on.

UNISON’s 55,000 London local government members have already taken part in four days of strike action over the claim. At the moment these workers receive just £1,407 weighting in outer London and £2,674 in inner London.

Key workers such as dinner ladies, street cleaners and classroom assistants, many of whom barely make £9,000 a year, are being forced out of the capital due to the cost of accommodation and transport.

UNISON also believes that the extra cash will not only help these hard-pressed workers get more of a chance to find homes but will also ease recruitment pressures in key roles.

“Our public services in London are hovering on the brink of collapse,” general secretary Dave Prentis has warned.

“They are kept together only be dedicated low-paid workers. But it cannot last – our members are being priced out of the capital.”

► **Tony Braisby**  
t.braisby@unison.co.uk

### newscheck

## Back to work?

Accidents and other work problems see 27,000 people leave work permanently each year, according to new research from the Labour Research Department.

Up to 15% of injured workers who spend six weeks off sick never return to work, while only 10% off for six months ever get back into full-time employment, says a new RLD guide, *Rehabilitation*.

In the wake of figures, national health and safety officer Hugh Robertson said: “UNISON members need to feel that if, for whatever unfortunate reason, they need to take time away from work they’ll be helped get back into productive employment as soon as they’re well again.

“Unions, employers, and politicians need to be spending more time making sure our members and all citizens of this society can be assured of that promise.” More at [www.unison.org.uk/news](http://www.unison.org.uk/news)

## Have your say on devolution

UNISON is seeking your views on plans for regional assemblies in England as it prepares its response to a government white paper on the issue.

Regional assemblies are “a way of ensuring that the millions of pounds being spent by unelected, unaccountable quangos go where the people want it to go,” points out policy officer Ross Hendry.

They would have responsibility for economic development, skills and employment, housing, sport, culture, tourism, transport, planning, and environmental protection – but a potential drawback is that they would have just one layer of local government below them.

The union has prepared a background paper on the issue (on the web at [www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B480.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B480.pdf)) but the government deadline for responses is 30 August and member’s responses should be emailed to [r.hendry@unison.co.uk](mailto:r.hendry@unison.co.uk) as soon as possible.

More at [www.unison.org.uk/news](http://www.unison.org.uk/news)

## Tenants say No

Tenants in Merton, south London, have voted against the mass transfer of council housing stock to a housing association.

The move was rejected by 52% of tenants on a turnout of 65.5%. More at [www.unison.org.uk/news](http://www.unison.org.uk/news)

## Full grants called for

National young members’ officer Chris Fabby called for the “muddle” of student loans and “inadequate grants” to be replaced “by a system of grants, paid for out a progressive income tax system, to which graduates earning higher salaries would contribute proportionally.

His comment followed speculation that students could receive a maintenance allowance similar to the weekly £30 payment offered to keep teenagers in school. More at [www.unison.org.uk/news](http://www.unison.org.uk/news)

## Going beyond Johannesburg for the union perspective...

With the Earth Summit due to start any day now, all eyes are on Johannesburg to see whether world leaders are ready to take sustainable development seriously.

But during the 10-day duration of the summit, more than 50,000 workers will die from work-related illness and injuries across the globe, more than will be killed by war or AIDS.

These workers will lose their lives through accidents and disease in

### around the world

factories, fields, mines and other workplaces, mostly in developing countries. And their deaths are largely avoidable.

The Rio declaration of 1992 stated that: “Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development.”

So, to coincide with the Earth Summit, the International Confederation of Free

Trade Unions has released *Making Sustainability Work*, a briefing that explains why workplaces are central to sustainable development.

You can download it from their website at: [www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991216425&Language=EN](http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991216425&Language=EN).

The ICFTU site also contains *Fashioning a New Deal*, a detailed summary of the work of trade unions internationally since the last summit in Rio – and recommendations for the next

10 years. It is available online at [www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991216331&Language=EN](http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991216331&Language=EN).

Trade union members across the world are being invited to respond to the proposals in the document, which will go on to inform the trade union contribution to future international debates on sustainable development.

► **Helen Taylor**  
h.taylor@unison.co.uk



what's happening

in your area

# New skills for the under confident

Every month, *Focus* will travel around the regions on your behalf, finding out what your colleagues are doing.

We may take one particular issue such as the local government pay dispute and see how it has been played out in different areas. Or we may take one region at a time, as with Eastern's project aiming to help staff in the NHS overcome barriers to learning and training opportunities.

The Eastern region covers six counties – Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire – and is responsible for 81,000

regional roundup

of UNISON's 1.3 million members. The members are grouped into 120 branches with local government and health the largest sectors.

The region has recently set up a partnership with the Essex NHS Workforce Confederation and the Workers' Education Association to work with staff reluctant to take part in education and training opportunities, whether due to lack of skills or lack of confidence.

The project is due to run from next month until March 2004 and will initially involve at least four trusts and contractors.

"This is an excellent opportunity for people who may have left school with no qualifications and took a job which they feel has no prospects," says Johanna Weiss of the Eastern region, who is responsible for setting up learning partnerships in Essex.

"Most people who work in hospitals as cleaners, laundry staff, or catering assistants, for example, think they are not important enough for the employer to invest in. This project says everyone is important. And all training is free."

Project workers from UNISON and the WEA will help set up briefings for managers and supervisors to raise awareness of their staff's needs for writing and communication skills, and to explain what managers' roles can be and how the project will tackle these.

A 'learning needs analysis' and confidential discussion with a tutor will be offered to all interested staff to gather information. It will also offer advice on available courses, whether through the project, other education providers or the employer.

If staff want to pursue the training they will be offered a 10-week course to help them assess the areas they might like to improve – such as reading, spelling, maths, punctuation and confidence in speaking.

The partners to this project have many years' experience working within the NHS, with trusts and contractors, to offer a range of courses for this group of staff.

Past experience has shown that staff respond to the right approach if they have the support of key managers and supervisors.

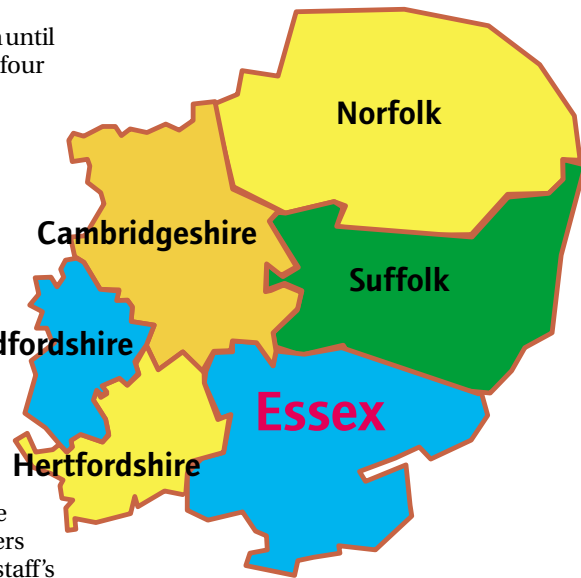
The training also benefits the employers, as staff become enthusiastic about training opportunities in health and safety and hygiene, for example, as well as more personal development. Staff are also more likely to apply for promotion and contribute to meetings and new initiatives after training.

"There is a sense of involvement in work, which comes from feeling the employer has taken an interest in their progress as an individual and has valued them as an employee," says Ms Weiss.

This has enormous benefits for the service in the short term, and, in the longer term, more staff will take up qualifications and responsibility within the NHS.

"Once people know what they want to do and what they are capable of, they can take up further opportunities with the help of NHS individual learning accounts that help pay for further training in their chosen area.

"We have found that once people overcome their initial wariness and realise that it's nothing like school, they get the learning bug and start on



a lifelong 'learning escalator'. We have had healthcare assistants train to become nurses and cleaners working their way up the ladder to a management position after attending these courses and undertaking further training."

The Eastern region also organised a membership services seminar last month to introduce branches to the region's organising and recruitment team and update them on the membership benefits and assistance on offer to help with organising and recruitment.

The event was aimed at representatives who had not attended such an event before and who were involved in recruitment and organising.

For lessons learned from the seminar see the next issue of *Focus* (179).

► Helen Barron  
h.barron@unison.co.uk



# Learning for all our benefit

Lifelong learning has been a key union priority for many years. It offers a way back into education for members who didn't have the opportunity when they were young, or who now want to learn new skills or change the direction of their career.

And lifelong learning advisers and union learning reps can help union members find a course that's right for them.

It is a crucial role that not only benefits individual members, but the whole union. And important new legislation now gives these key activists the right to take time off to carry out their work for the union.

UNISON's commitment to lifelong learning helps to create a culture in the workplace in which union membership is seen to have a positive benefit – which is especially useful in areas where it has been difficult to recruit members.

And UNISON has recently secured a £1million Union Learning Fund grant for a two- to three-year project in England, to establish a culture of learning in the union.

Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Union Learning Funds will also be accessed to extend the project to all regions.

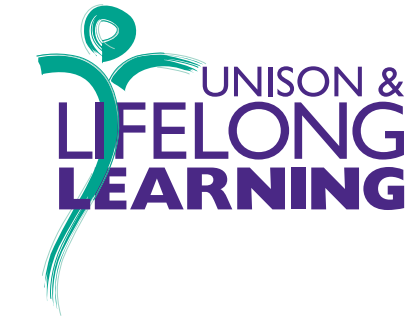
Full-time project workers have now been appointed in each of the nine English regions to recruit and develop a network of well-trained and supported lifelong learning advisers and learning reps.

## Who are lifelong learning advisers?

Advisers have usually completed a work-based learning programme themselves.

They have a commitment to their own and their colleagues' education, as well as a desire to raise awareness of the benefits of learning and training.

Union learning reps are existing workplace reps who share a commitment to learning



## union learning fund

The government set up the Union Learning Fund in February 1998 in recognition of the key role that unions can play in promoting learning opportunities for working people.

It aims to explore innovative and effective ways of delivering learning and development opportunities to working people.

UNISON has received funding for more than 25 projects to deliver personal development and vocational training opportunities for our members and to develop our capacity to organise and recruit around the learning agenda.

and want to develop learning in their own workplaces.

They are currently trained to negotiate and represent around learning issues.

## What do they do?

The precise role of advisers and learning reps will vary, but may include:

- raising awareness of lifelong learning issues in the workplace and the branch;
- raising awareness of lifelong learning opportunities amongst members and potential members;
- helping to identify and articulate the learning needs of particular groups of members or potential members;
- raising awareness of the UNISON partnership approach to learning;
- liaising with employers on learning opportunities in the workplace;
- working with branch officers and education co-ordinators to promote workplace learning;
- creating a positive experience of what UNISON can do for members in the workplace around learning issues.

## The new rights

The Employment Act 2002 gives lifelong learning advisers and union learning reps a number of statutory rights to time off for training and duties.

These rights – which come into force from next month, with a new ACAS code of practice expected in January 2003 – include:

- the right to be recognised as a union

representative in workplaces where UNISON is a recognised union;

- the right to reasonable time off with pay to train as an adviser or learning rep;
- the right to reasonable time off to perform duties in the workplace;
- the right to protection against unfair dismissal on grounds of their activity;
- the right to go to tribunal if the employer unreasonably denies access to time off to perform their duties or time off for training.

## Benefits for branches

By integrating the work of lifelong learning advisers into the day-to-day organising of the branch, branches may gain major benefits in terms of recruiting members and activists and building branch structure.

Branches that are active in developing advisers may even find that they are able to recruit members in areas where traditionally they have struggled.

The development of lifelong learning advisers will increase the number of branch activists advocating workplace learning and will build branch education teams.

This will encourage the participation of a new group of activists who may not otherwise have got involved in union activity and who may later decide to take on other responsibilities, such as negotiations around learning issues, recruitment and becoming a workplace representative.

"This is a great opportunity for developing a new level of activism," says Kay Mackenzie, who is managing the project.

"Many members coming off a course want to put something back into the union but don't feel ready to be a branch officer or steward. However, it's less formidable to become a lifelong learning adviser and therefore enables a much wider part of our membership to become involved."

► Helen Taylor  
h.taylor@unison.co.uk

**Interested in becoming a lifelong learning adviser or union learning rep? Or know somebody who would be an ideal candidate?**  
**Get in touch with your regional education officer or the lifelong learning fieldworker at your regional office.**

## more information

- [www.unison.org.uk/laos/index.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/laos/index.asp) for information from the union's learning and organising services unit
- [www.dfes.gov.uk/ulf/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ulf/) for information on the government's Union Learning Fund
- [www.tuc.org.uk/learning/tuc-5324-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/learning/tuc-5324-f0.cfm) for information on a TUC/DFES conferences and
- [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk)

# Take it up another degree

Keele University offers part-time distance-learning courses in industrial relations and human resource management, mainly through home study packs, with short residential periods at Keele University, ideal for people who are in full-time employment.

## opportunities

"Trade unionists take our courses for all sorts of reasons," says the university's Mike Ironside.

"For some it is part of a career move. Others want to deepen their knowledge of industrial relations and human resource management so that they can be more effective as union representatives.

"And others do it just because of their deep interest in the subject. At Keele we give total commitment to all of our students and to the values of trade unionism."

The university offers two courses: a one-year part-time Certificate in Industrial Relations, aimed at people with no formal academic qualifications, and a two-year MA degree course open to students who have gained the Certificate, have degrees or equivalent professional qualifications, or have a wide background of appropriate experience in industrial relations.

For more information about the courses see the website at [www.keele.ac.uk/depts/id/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/id/), or contact Margaret Yates on 01782 583396.

Bursaries are available from the UNISON open college for union members undertaking these courses. For details contact Alison Cluett, on 020 7551 1714, email: [a.cluett@unison.co.uk](mailto:a.cluett@unison.co.uk).

For two members' experience of this course, combined with full-time work and trade union activism, see the next edition of *Focus* (179) for interviews with former Keele students.



# Have your say on key pay issues



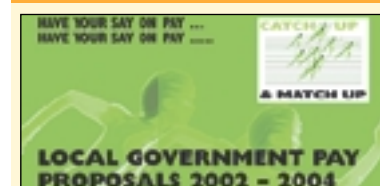
**Making the point:** The Hughes family (grandfather Alun, son Rhys, granddaughter Carys and grandmother Chris) all work for Cardiff County Council – apart for Carys of course – and played their part in getting employers back to the negotiating table.

## The pay offer

- Workers on scale point 4 will receive £5 an hour from 1 April 2002 – a 4.1% increase
- Others will receive 3% from 1 April 2002
- Workers on scale points 4 and 5 will receive a further 2% increase from 1 October 2002
- Those on scale points 6 and above will receive a further 1% increase
- All employees will receive a 3.5% increase from 1 April 2003
- Those on scale points 4 and 5 will receive an additional 1%, making 4.5%

Economic forecasts suggest that the proposals will comfortably outstrip inflation, but UNISON has reserved its right to reopen negotiations if inflation rises unexpectedly.

## useful material



### Have your say on pay

A4 leaflet on the current consultation  
» stock no 2099

want to order now? phone  
08701 555568  
if your branch is registered for phone ordering or use our online catalogue at  
» [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

The ACAS proposals, and in particular the staged pay increases, have confused many members.

With all the stepped percentages and staggering over two years, it is easy for the offer to be misquoted, misrepresented and misunderstood.

When the negotiations began this spring, the employers' first offer was 2.5%. We laughed that off the table. Then they offered 3% – which was also rejected.

For a long time they refused to negotiate. You got them back to the negotiating table through 17 July's successful strike. As a result, ACAS intervened and we now have a new proposal worth 7.7% over two years, with more for the lowest paid.

If inflation rises further UNISON has reserved the right to reopen the negotiations.

The employers wanted this deal to be spread over a three-year period but UNISON refused.

If the proposals are accepted, new negotiations would take place in 2004 – the year before the next general election is expected.

But one of the most powerful aspects of this new 'deal' is the proposal for a Commission on Local Government Pay.

This is an opportunity we must not let slip through our fingers.

It is an opportunity to be directly involved in finally fixing the recruitment and retention issues plaguing our local services.

This commission will investigate all the long-term pay issues affecting local government staff.

The commission will establish a firm basis from which to really tackle

The offer from local government employers involves more than pay – a key element of it is the opportunity for members to shape the policies of a new commission on pay

## what you can do

long-term pay problems.

It will report back in September 2003 after examining several key issues:

**Low pay** across the whole structure – including the areas that feel particularly neglected such as social workers, planners, librarians, home carers and teaching assistants.

**Recruitment and retention** difficulties and their causes – key to this, obviously, is pay and the issue affects the groups mentioned above, as well as workers such as IT staff and environmental health officers.

UNISON will produce its own investigation into recruitment and retention issues to feed into the commission.

This will work to counter any assumption by employers that recruitment and retention is only a southern issue. We know of significant difficulties in parts of the north.

**Equal pay** – it is hard to believe, but women earn only 66% of the wages of their male counterparts in local government. How does this happen in the 21st century in public service employment? UNISON will again be

able to feed information into the commission and help determine why this is the case and what action will be taken to rectify it.

**Single status implementation** – we need to see why authorities have taken so long to implement single status and why some have not yet started.

This is not a moratorium on single status – local authorities will still be required to work on implementing single status while the commission carries out its research.

**Sources of information on pay** – there used to be official government statistics on pay with details on gender, age, occupation, bonus and so on, but this is no longer the case.

The commission would, therefore, work to agree a comprehensive data source with employers which would form the basis of future negotiations.

The commission would be chaired independently and UNISON will push for a heavyweight, high-profile, authoritative person to steer through fair and independent decisions.

And, if the proposals of the commission were accepted they would need adequate funding. It would also be in the commission's remit to advise on this.

The commission would not be

engaged in a theoretical discussion, nor would it all be paper research.

It would spearhead a live and interactive process, with its research coming from people like you.

UNISON will need branches and regions to feed their experience of recruitment, retention, pay and working life into head office so it can be fed into the commission

UNISON would also ensure all information from the commission is fed back to branches and regions.

This is a crucial opportunity to have a say in the decision-making process concerning local government pay and to continue the momentum begun on 17 July.

Local government issues have been put on the political map and we must raise their profile yet higher.

We must also ensure our members' concerns are dictating the process as only they know what it is really like to work in local authorities.

We must take the opportunity to wield the voice of experience. It couldn't be clearer – only local government workers really understand the strains and pressures of local government work.

You must get your voices heard through this commission.

Encourage members to vote for the proposals so their voice, and yours, can be heard.

The alternative would mean escalating the strike action suspended following the ACAS proposal, which would not necessarily lead to an improved offer.

► Helen Barron

[h.barron@unison.co.uk](mailto:h.barron@unison.co.uk)



# All you need to know ...

## » Useful web links

**The internet can be a mine of useful information for union activists. Just some of the useful links out there include:**

» [www.drc-gb.org./drc](http://www.drc-gb.org./drc)

**Disability rights commission** – educating public opinion, promoting good practice and enforcement of disability law. The commission aims to work in partnership with employers and service providers, adopting a non-confrontational approach.

» [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)

**National Council of Voluntary Organisations** – umbrella body for the voluntary sector in England and includes a wide range of links to member organisations.

» [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service** – the employment relations experts. ACAS helps people work together effectively, including setting up the right structures and systems for settling disputes when things go wrong.

» [www.ukonline.gov.uk](http://www.ukonline.gov.uk)

The easy way to government information and services online.

## Help us keep our information current

Help us to help our members. We need to know about any changes to a member's name, address, or employer details.

## records

Otherwise we can't keep in touch with them effectively. Members should provide us with this information, but stewards can help.

Information can be provided to UNISON *direct* or to your regional office by telephone, email or in writing.

Alternatively, members can send the information to head office by returning the form that goes out with the new membership card.

*Where possible, members should quote their membership number when contacting UNISON.*

## how to get in focus

### Got information to share with fellow activists?

Contact the editorial team at *Focus*, UNISON communications unit, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ, or email [unison-focus@unison.org.uk](mailto:unison-focus@unison.org.uk).

It's time to order supplies of UNISON's 10th anniversary 2003 diaries. There are three to choose from:

- » two pocket-sized diaries in slimline and compact styles, costing £1.60 each;
- » an A5 size week-to-view diary (for desk, briefcase etc) at £2.75.

A donation of 10p per diary will be made to UNISON Welfare, and the union hopes to raise more than £20,000.

A wallchart year planner is also being produced, and costs £5 for five.

All these items should be ordered from Communications, UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ, fax 020 7551 1461 Please send a cheque with each completed order form.

Order forms can be obtained from the same address or downloaded from the web

## diaries



at » [unison.org.uk/acrobat/B462.pdf](http://unison.org.uk/acrobat/B462.pdf) for compact diaries, » [B463.pdf](http://unison.org.uk/acrobat/B463.pdf) for slimlines, » [B465.pdf](http://unison.org.uk/acrobat/B465.pdf) for A5 diaries and » [B464.pdf](http://unison.org.uk/acrobat/B464.pdf) for wallcharts.

## positively public

UNISON's East Midlands region is highlighting the Positively Public campaign at the annual Nottingham Robin Hood Marathon on Sunday 15 September. Around 12,000 competitors will take part in the full marathon, half marathon and family fun races.

The region hopes to get public support from many spectators along the route, which takes in local government buildings and the Queens Medical Centre. The East Midlands marquee will be at the event, and the union will be passing water bottles to grateful runners at one of the water stations en route.

Special running vests are being designed for any UNISON competitors and T-shirts will be available for other supporters, Contact: Brian Crosby, organising assistant, East Midlands, ☎ 0115 847 5460, email [b.crosby@unison.co.uk](mailto:b.crosby@unison.co.uk).

If you want to register to run the race, go to: » [www.robinhoodmarathon.co.uk](http://www.robinhoodmarathon.co.uk).

## Notices

### NATIONAL HOUSING SEMINAR

**16 September, Thistle Hotel, Cardiff: aimed at all UNISON members working in the housing sector, including "responsible social landlords", tenants groups and housing departments.**

**There will be a workshop for each region, which will present an opportunity for activists to network.**

**Other suggested workshop topics include:**

- » **housing finance and capital investment, the issues;**
- » **the case for affordable social housing;**
- » **life after transfer;**
- » **organising in the RSL sector;**
- » **Birmingham, Dudley – the implications of a No vote;**
- » **arms-length companies;**
- » **developments in Wales – the community mutual model;**
- » **research project – the impact of transfer on pay and conditions**

**The cost is £50 per delegate. If you are interested in attending contact your branch secretary or Denise Bertuchi on [d.bertuchi@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.bertuchi@unison.co.uk) or ☎ 020 7551 1789 or Heather Graham on [h.graham@unison.co.uk](mailto:h.graham@unison.co.uk) or ☎ 020 7551 1410 for further details.**

### PFI: FAILING OUR FUTURE?

**A UNISON policy conference on PFI, Thursday 19 September, 11.00-3.30, TUC Congress Centre, Great Russell Street, London.**

**The conference will bring together leading academics, architects, economists, practitioners, politicians, trade unionists and others with an interest in PFI.**

**There is a cost of £58.75 per person (including VAT and lunch) payable to CONNECT conferences. Discounts are available for multiple bookings.**

**Contact: Fiona Ross, CONNECT Conferences, ☎ 020 7222 2176, fax 020 7222 2677, e-mail [conferences@connectpa.co.uk](mailto:conferences@connectpa.co.uk).**

### COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY SECTOR SEMINAR

**All community and voluntary sector members are invited to the sixth national seminar, 11-12 October, The Holiday Inn, Nottingham.**

**Accommodation, meals and crèche facilities will be provided. The registration fee and travelling costs will be met by your branch.**

**Registration ends Monday 2 September. Contact your branch for details.**

### RIGHT TO CARE

**North-west: Public meeting, Manchester Town Hall, 12noon – 1.30pm. Three prominent speakers.**

**North-west: Public meeting, Floral Hall, Southport, 8 November, 12 noon to 1.30pm. Speakers: Claire Raynor, Rodney Bickerstaffe, Tony Booth (invited).**

### SOUTHERN REGION RETIRED MEMBERS

**The annual conference will be held on Saturday 12 October at the Guildhall in Winchester.**

## what's on

### » EASTERN

#### EDUCATION

25, 26, 27 Sep: Negotiating skills, Norwich.  
25, 26, 27 Sep: Stewards stage 1, Cambridge.  
1, 2, 3 Oct: Lay tutors stage 1 (pt1), London, Holiday Inn.  
1, 2, 3 Oct: Stewards stage 1, Chelmsford.  
2, 3, 4 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Ipswich.  
2, 3, 4 Oct: Negotiating skills, Cambridge.  
2, 3, 4 Oct: Web page design, WEA London.  
7, 8, 9 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Cambridge.  
8, 9 Oct: Branch health & safety officers, London Britannia St Centre  
8, 9 Oct: Branch secretaries / admin, London Britannia St Centre  
9, 10, 11 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Chelmsford.  
9, 10, 11 Oct: Intro to employment law, Norwich.  
9, 10, 11 Oct: Risk assessment, Ipswich.  
9, 10, 11 Oct: Stewards stage 1, Hertford.  
14, 15, 16 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Luton.  
15, 16, 17 Oct: Sickness absences, London, Britannia St Centre  
16, 17 Oct: Disciplinary hearings, Chelmsford.  
16, 17, 18 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Norwich.  
28, 29, 30 Oct: Health & safety stage 1, Hertford.  
28, 29, 30 Oct: Intro to employment law, Cambridge.  
29 Oct: Unfair dismissals intro, London, Britannia St Centre  
29, 30 Oct: Disciplinary hearings, London, Britannia St Centre  
29, 30 Oct: Lay tutors stage 1 (pt2), London, Holiday Inn.  
*Details: Sue Carrington, education assistant, ☎ 0870 889 0373 ext 200.*

### » EAST MIDLANDS

#### EDUCATION

1, 8, 15 Oct: The organising steward, Matlock, Lincolnshire, Northampton.  
23, 24, 25 Oct: The organising steward, Leicester, Nottingham  
9 Oct: Introduction to organising.  
17, 18 Oct: Identifying legal cases in the workplace.  
19, 20 Oct: Women in UNISON weekend - getting started.  
29, 30 Oct: Work Related Upper Limb Disorders.  
24 Oct: Implementing the Stephen Lawrence Report – tackling racism.  
31 Oct: Negotiating a domestic violence policy.  
*Details: UNISON regional centre, Vivian Avenue, Nottingham NG5 1AF ☎ 0115 8475415*

### » GREATER LONDON

#### EDUCATION

1, 2, Oct: Disciplinary hearings, Tottenham, CoNEL.  
2, 3, 4 Oct: Web page design, City, WEA.  
7, 8 Oct: Introduction to team negotiating, Tottenham, CoNEL.  
8, 9 Oct: Branch admin./secretaries, Kings Cross, Britannia St Centre. £30 branch fee.  
8, 9 Oct: Branch health & safety, Kings Cross, Britannia St Centre. £30 branch fee.  
9, 10 Oct: Strategies for tackling racism and discrimination in the workplace, Central London, Congress House  
14, 15, 16 Oct: The organising steward, Barking, Westbury Centre.  
16, 17, 18 Oct: The organising steward, Harrow, Teachers Centre Wealdstone.  
15, 16, 17 Oct: Sickness absence policies, Kings Cross, Britannia St Centre  
16, 17, 18 Oct: Intro safety reps, Deptford, Lewisham College.  
21, 22 Oct: Disciplinary hearings, Deptford, Lewisham College.  
24, 25 Oct: Disciplinary hearings, Harrow, Teachers Centre, Wealdstone.  
25 Oct: Going to national SOG conference, joint L&G/black members' course, Central London, Congress House.  
28, 29, 30 Oct: Intro safety reps, Barking, Westbury Centre.  
29 Oct: Unfair dismissal, Kings Cross, Britannia St Centre  
*Details: Greater London UNISON education, ☎ 020 7535 2100*

### » NORTHERN IRELAND

#### EDUCATION

1-3 Oct: Stewards stage 1 induction, UNISON Belfast.  
4 Oct: Building confidence for women, UNISON Belfast.  
7 Oct: Tackling homophobia, UNISON Belfast.  
8-9 Oct: Dealing with grievances & disciplinarys, UNISON Derry.  
10 Oct: Dealing with domestic abuse, UNISON

Derry,  
11 Oct: Devolution and relationships with our democratic structure, UNISON Centre, Belfast  
14, 21, 28 Oct: Stewards stage 1 induction (women), UNISON Derry.  
15-16 Oct: Lay tutors part 2, Venue tbc.  
17-18 Oct: Health and safety reps (women only), UNISON Centre, Belfast.  
19 Oct: Women seen and heard, Belfast.  
22 Oct: Bullying at work, UNISON Derry.  
23 Oct: Stress, UNISON Belfast.  
29-30 Oct: Health & safety stage 2, UNISON Belfast.

*Details: Cath Friel, regional education officer ☎ 028 9077 0813.*

### » NORTHERN

#### EDUCATION

5, 6 Oct: Women in civic society, Durham Marriott Hotel, Royal County.  
7 Oct: Human Rights Act day school, Pilgrim Street Office, Newcastle.  
12, 13 Oct: Handling grievances & disciplinarys stage 1, Durham Marriott Hotel, Royal County.  
*Details: Keith Hodgson, regional education officer: ☎ 0191 2450800*

### » NORTH WEST

#### EDUCATION

10 Oct: How to organise – steward development strategies, Blackburn, Penrith, Salford.  
10 Oct: Life long learning, Wirral.  
16 Oct: How to organise – steward development strategies, Liverpool.  
16 Oct: Life long learning, Bolton.  
22 Oct: Diversity awareness, Burnley, St Helens.  
22 Oct: Health and safety starter, Penrith.  
22 Oct: Rights at work, Bury.

22 Oct: The organising steward, Bury, St Helens.  
*Details: Stephen Jones, North West regional office ☎ 0161 211 1000 ext 459*

#### MEETING

7 Sep: Regional lesbian and gay group meeting.  
*Details: Stephen Jones, North West regional office ☎ 0161 211 1000 ext 459*

### » SOUTH EAST

#### EDUCATION

8-10 Oct: Ashford area new H&S seps (nr), CEAS, Imperial College at Wye (6 Sept).  
8-10 Oct: Maidstone area new stewards (nr), Oakwood House, Maidstone (6 Sept).  
29-31 Oct: Worthing area grievance & disciplinary handling (nr), Crown Agents Management Training Centre, Worthing (27 Sept).  
5-7 Nov: Crawley area new stewards (nr), The Hawth Theatre, Crawley (4 Oct).  
12-14 Nov: Brighton area new H&S reps (nr), UNISON regional office, Brighton (11 Oct).  
19-21 Nov: Eastbourne area new stewards (nr), T&GWU Centre, Eastbourne (18 Oct).  
19-21 Nov: Guildford area grievance & disciplinary handling (nr), Guildford 'Y' Centre (18 Oct).  
27-29 Nov: Reigate area new stewards (nr), Wray Park Conference Centre, Reigate (25 Oct).  
*For further details please contact your branch secretary, branch education co-ordinator or the regional education officer on ☎ 0870 770 1112.*

### » SOUTH WEST

#### EDUCATION

110, 17 Oct: Grievances, Plymouth, Cornwall, Exeter, Bristol.  
11-13 Oct: Black History Month, residential weekend, Somerset.  
17-18 Oct: Grievances, Taunton, Gloucester.  
18-20 Oct: Assertion training for women, residential weekend, Somerset.  
25 Oct, 1 Nov: Grievances, DARC.  
*Details: Marilyn Crawley ☎ 01823 288031 email: [m.crawley@unison.co.uk](mailto:m.crawley@unison.co.uk)*

### » SOUTHERN

#### EDUCATION

8-10 Oct: Health & safety induction, Southampton.  
11-13 Oct: Build your confidence (r), Oxford.  
18-20 Oct: Stewards induction (r), Newbury.  
19 Oct: Globalisation, Reading.  
23 Oct: The MacPherson Report, Southampton.  
*Details: Kathleen McCann, regional education officer, ☎ 0870 770 1112*

### » WEST MIDLANDS

#### EDUCATION

4, 5, 6 Oct: Branch organisation weekend, (r), City Inn, Birmingham, £120 branch fee.  
7, 14, 21 Oct: Health & Safety reps intro, UNISON regional centre, Birmingham.  
28, 29 Oct: Representing members – dealing with a disciplinary case, UNISON regional centre, Birmingham, £20 branch fee.  
*Details: Fred Cattle, ☎ 0121 685 4200. Fax: 0121 685 4400.*

# How to get your new address recognised



**Q: I know that regional offices can be contacted to change membership details but is there anything else I can tell my members, that they can do?**

**A:** Yes, if you visit the UNISON website at **queries & answers**

» [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk) you will see a 'contact us' button on the top bar. Clicking this will take you to a page with a link for membership queries and help at work.

If you follow that link you will find a selection of forms for members who wish to change their membership details.

Once completed, the form will be forward to Unisondirect, who depending on the query, will either make the changes immediately or pass the information on to the appropriate region.

**Q: What if my member does not have access to the Internet?**

**A:** You can also update your details by calling UNISONdirect on 0800 5 97 97 50. The lines are open

Monday to Friday between 6am and midnight and on Saturdays between 9am and 4pm. They will be able to update most of your members' details while they are on the phone.

**Q: But if my member has lost their membership card, will they need to go to they region?**

**A:** You can go to the region but you can also phone Unisondirect call centre or go via the UNISON website and they will arrange it for your member to receive a new one.

**Q: If I call UNISONdirect with my changes, how will the region know?**

**A:** Since the RMS is a nationally based system, all changes made to it are instantaneous.

They can be viewed by any user depending on their access rights. So if UNISONdirect updates a member's details the regional office or any branches that have access to the RMS will see the change immediately.

From September, all regions will start rolling out a programme RMS branch training, which will continue into next year.



# Health and safety – administering medicine

**Q. Some of the children attending our play scheme need medication during the day. Members are being asked to administer this but they are worried that something could go wrong, especially as they have not been trained. Can they refuse?**

**A.** There is no legal duty on non-medical staff to administer medicines or supervise a child taking it.

This is purely a voluntary role, and many members do it to ensure that children with special medical needs are not excluded from schemes such as yours.

Where staff do volunteer to administer medicines they should only agree to do so if they receive appropriate information and training specific to the child's medical needs.

A clear written policy on supporting individual children with medical needs should be developed, with specialist help from the local health authority, GP, or

community nurse. The policy should set out the procedures for the safe administration of medicines to individual children, include details of tasks that staff should not carry out, and the employer's responsibilities and insurance cover for staff in the event of an accident or mistake.

The policy should also cover issues such as recording arrangements, procedures for disposing of unwanted, unused or outdated drugs and arrangements for disposing of needles or other sharp instruments where used.

These safeguards are necessary both for the staff involved and to ensure the well being of the child as administering medicines can sometimes be dangerous if children are suffering from unrelated illnesses or conditions.

queries & answers

# Bringing a halt to the services-for-sale drive

The drive to sell off public facilities and run them for private profit is strong in Leicestershire council. *Focus* 176 reported on the authority's questionable consultation over meals on wheels.

According to an official survey, older people apparently said they would prefer seven frozen meals in their freezer dropped off weekly instead of a friendly face delivering a hot dish daily.

branch experience

UNISON, in collaboration with service users and relatives, soon put the council right on that one.

Now the union is challenging plans to sell off seven of the county's residential homes for the elderly, one of which is for those with mental health problems.

The council claimed that new, government imposed care standards for residential homes meant an expensive £2.5 million refit that could only be done through the private sector.

But UNISON together with relatives' action groups has pointed out that that these are not legal requirements, but they simply represent good practice which the council should aspire to.

Council leader Harry Barber claims, in a letter to regional officer Cheryl Godber, that "our strategy is far more than a response to financial considerations alone" and "it would be wrong not to aspire to good practice".

Ms Godber has hit back, pointing out that the original consultation document refers, directly or indirectly to the financial aspects of the national care standards legislation.

She adds in her letter: "Social



services was recently awarded three stars by the Audit Commission and all staff (including residential home staff) received a congratulations letter for all their hard work contributing to that award.

"That achievement would be a hard act to follow by the private sector."

She told *Focus*: "We have just slotted in a well taken penalty kick and Cllr Barber has had his workmen out to shift the goal posts, double quick."

The privatisation decision is due to be taken in the council cabinet on 3 September, but UNISON and other campaigners are hoping that public pressure will force it to be considered at the next full council meeting where all councillors can have their say.

It has worked to set up a public meeting due to occur this week.

The county council will not

respond over whether it will send someone to represent its views and has stopped the meeting being held in the council chamber.

"They told us they did not have insurance cover for members of the public in the chamber but now the city council have allowed us to use their chamber," said Ms Godber.

► Laurence Pollock  
l.pollock@unison.co.uk

## how to get in focus

**Does your branch have experience to share?**

Contact the editorial team at *Focus*, UNISON communications unit, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ, or email [unison-focus@unison.org.uk](mailto:unison-focus@unison.org.uk).

# Bidding better than PFI

Staff at Harrow council's learning disabilities services in north London are celebrating the success of an in-house bid which beat off the Private Finance initiative.

And the UNISON branch is keen to stress that the success came despite "some within the council" seeing it as a hostile bid which they tried to "strangle at birth".

The in-house staff were excluded from the consultation process, despite efforts by the Labour leadership to include them. Consequently, the service found itself being tested in the market twice.

The first market-testing exercise resulted in a victory for the staff but was rejected – the authority stated that because the in-house team were the only ones interested in bidding the their own work, the "market had not been tested".

branch experience



So the learning disabilities service – and the staff who provide it – had to go through the whole process again.

The second market testing resulted in the bid being won by the public service workers already providing the service, both on cost and quality grounds

Harrow UNISON supported staff and the future of the in-house service at every stage, campaigning for a

more in-depth consultation involving staff as well as user and carers groups.

Indeed, branch chair Bryan Shewry challenged the authority's management team to apply the process fairly and consistently, particularly in relation to the invitation to tender stage, where he raised UNISON members' concerns.

The branch is particularly keen to celebrate as it believes Harrow UNISON's success and the success of the staff is a PFI first for the sector.

"This is a clear demonstration that, given the opportunity, council staff can compete in the social care market and win," says Mr Shewry.

"The message here is that UNISON branches should use the Positively Public campaign to promote the opportunity for in-house bids in PFI contracts."