AGM details

The UNISON Great Western Ambulance Branch AGM will be on Thursday 29th March 2012 at Stockwood Vale Golf Club, Stockwood Lane, Keynsham, Bristol BS31 2ER from 1400-1800 hours.

Light refreshments will be provided, licensed bar facilities available, large FREE car park and there will be a guest speaker at 1400:

**Guest speaker:**
*Andy Weal – HPC reporting: the facts!*

Reasonable travel claims (40p/mile) will also be paid to all attendees, in line with our UNISON branch rules.

Who should attend? YOU! Providing you’re a member of UNISON!

It’s an important meeting as all of the branch positions are up for re-election. Any member who is interested in standing for election as a steward or branch officer needs to complete the attached form confirming the position they wish to stand for, and the names and signatures of two fellow UNISON members who support them. Completed forms must be submitted or scanned and e-mailed to:

Ian Whittern  
*UNISON Branch Chairman*  
11 Alverstoke  
Whitchurch  
Bristol BS14 0AE

*ian.whittern@unison-greatwestern.co.uk*

All applications need to be completed in full and submitted by 24th March 2012 – to allow time for processing.

Members wishing to attend should email *ian.whittern@unison-greatwestern.co.uk* to allow us to order enough food!

Your union needs YOU

Each workplace is required to nominate a UNISON member to act as a “workplace contact”. Get thinking! Who could…

- Act as a point of contact with members (particularly if no steward is available in your workplace)?
- Help keep UNISON notice boards up to date; receive UNISON mail for your workplace?
- Keep a list of branch stewards to forward to any member needing advice or representation?
- Liaise with your local steward, and attend branch executive meetings when possible?

Workplace contacts DO NOT represent individuals in meetings with management, so it is a nice, supportive and non-confrontational role for anyone who wants to get more involved with the union. Contact us at *yourvoice@unison-greatwestern.co.uk* for more details.

Divine prize!

A member of our branch, who wishes to remain anonymous, has won a big box of Divine Fairtrade chocolate for participating in a recent UNISON survey advertised on our branch website. The photo looks lovely so we can see why they wish to keep it a secret!
Save our NHS!

The government is trying to push its controversial Health and Social Care Bill through the House of Lords on **Monday 19th March**. This could be the final Parliamentary chance to affect the outcome of this dangerous Bill, which threatens to break up and sell off parts of our health service.

It’s even more worrying that the Government is trying to get the ink on the paper before anyone finds out what’s in the Bill’s risk register – the internal government document that sets out the risks from any new set of reforms.

Campaigners have been trying to get this document made public for a long time. The Government, having been ordered to release it by the Information Commissioner in response to a freedom of information request, appealed against this decision and lost the appeal. But they still haven’t released the risk register.

Risk registers are not normally released to the public, but the tribunal took this unusual step as they felt the particular risks in the document were of a nature that made this case different from earlier instances. We need to know what’s in that document before parliamentarians take the final votes on whether the Bill is made law.

Crossbench Peer Lord Owen is concerned that this means Peers are being made to make a critical decision, without the information they need from the Government. He has submitted an amendment to the Bill, which will be one of the last debated before the final vote in the Lords.

The amendment asks for a delay in the process for Peers to scrutinise the information in the Risk Register before the Bill gets its final Lords vote – the last step before it could go on to receive Royal Assent and become law. You can read the text of the amendment itself on Lord Owen’s website.

Please email a peer today by visiting www.unison.org.uk/ournhs/adopt.asp

**MEMBER COUNT**

<table>
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<th>Month</th>
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<td>January</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>937</td>
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Come on, let’s make it one thousand!

**STUDENTS LEAD THANKS**

A group of students at the University of Bristol have launched a kind-hearted campaign to encourage people to thank ambulance staff for their invaluable life-saving work.

Over 1,000 messages have been left online praising the unsung heroes and the students are hopeful that their plight will continue to attract support.

The idea came about thanks to a competition called Rise To The Challenge which encourages teams to promote a good cause which they believe deserves recognition.

It’s a unique programme combining online training with offline activities, giving young people valuable business skills and experience to make them more employable, whilst encouraging them to engage in their community and be active citizens.

The University of Bristol team comprises Ben Bowman and Richard Whitmore, both 22, and Will Brown and Phil Lake, aged 20.

Ben said: “We came up with supporting the paramedics as we felt that those who often need them aren’t in a position to say thank you. So many people know a friend or family member who has needed a paramedic. I have a very close friend whose life was saved by a paramedic after he fell off a wall and needed to be placed in a coma, so we’re all indebted to their amazing work.”

To leave your own message of thanks, please visit: www.thanksto.com/campaign/thank-the-paramedics
The final results of the long drawn out resolution process are ready to be decided on by UNISON members. You will soon receive a separate communication about this. But here is a summary:

**The ECA role**

GWAS remains committed to maintaining the ECA role but as a result of the industrial dispute the trust has promised to work with UNISON to ensure that adequate training is provided for the role.

ECA progression to paramedic will continue to be available via the OU. At any one time 60 ECAs (1 in 5) will be on the course. GWAS have committed to improving the support provided and tell us that they have written to all current OU students to apologise for the lack of previous support and to confirm the details of their support.

Furthermore every ECA will be appointed a mentor to assist them with their portfolio and future development. The trust will provide UNISON with proof that this is happening.

This is as much improvement as UNISON is able to negotiate with the current trust, but in view of the impending acquisition by SWAST, who have abandoned the ECA programme, there is future scope for changes.

**Relief Policy**

UNISON members have made it very clear to the branch that one of their main concerns is the use of relief. Relief practices vary across the trust. We have now agreed the consistent application of a relief policy with the following benefits:

Relief shifts will be allocated with at least six weeks notice.

Members will not have to change their shifts within two weeks of the relief unless they choose to do so.

(During periods of escalation at REAP 4 or above changes may be made within two weeks. However the decision to enact this power will not be automatically granted with escalation to REAP 4. Instead, the chief executive or nominated deputy will have to discuss the potential decision, and the justification for it, with the UNISON branch secretary.)

This is a significant improvement in the relief policy for our members. However this can only be possible by a modification of the leave policy because relief should be primarily to cover leave.

To allow the allocation of relief shifts with six weeks notice, eight weeks notice will be required for annual leave. This gives a week for line managers to grant the request and a week for CRO/resource hub/line managers or whoever is in charge of relief to allocate the relief to the team.

This process will be reviewed on a regular basis by UNISON and the trust. If our members decide that the 8-week notice period for leave is too much, it is possible to decrease it to, say, six weeks but the relief notice would have to decrease accordingly.

For leave requests that come in inside of the eight weeks, a short notice leave process has been agreed as part of the policy. It is based on encouraging local managers to grant the leave if possible. This will be reviewed by UNISON and the trust to make sure it is adequate.

But what about permanent relief? Where pool relief exists, this will be utilised to fill long-term gaps in rota lines e.g. long-term sick, maternity, UWE paramedic course. This means that long-term absence from teams will now be filled with these staff, giving both the relief staff and the team some stability.
Proposed rest break policy

The trust’s original intention to introduce a single rest break in 12-hour shifts have been overturned. All staff who work 12-hour shifts will be able to have two breaks. Members will be able to opt to take their two rest breaks in a single period by notifying EOC accordingly at the beginning of shift. Therefore, if you like one break, you can have one break. If you like two breaks, you can have two breaks.

The total duration of break in a shift (either 30+15=45 minutes or 30+30=60 minutes) would be determined by a majority on each station, rather than on a sector basis, which really allows local choice. (Remember that whatever length of break you choose, you work the same number of hours each year.)

Our members understand that taking an ambulance resource out of service for RTB-ing can place pressure on performance and in recognition of this ONE of the rest breaks MAY be taken at a suitable alternative location.

The list of suitable locations would need to be agreed in advance at the JCNC and all would be subject to a scrutiny.

If the trust can demonstrate that it is safe, food may be carried on an ambulance vehicle, subject to the ratification of a joint risk assessment. There is a draft risk assessment that has been drawn up unilaterally by GWAS that is currently being assessed by UNISON. Members will not be expected to carry food on ambulances until this piece of work is approved.

Shift Patterns

As part of the industrial dispute process GWAS has already agreed the removal of many unpalatable shift start times including many 0900-2100 hours shifts.

The ‘stagger’ required for 24/7 teams created a number of unpopular start times. In addition therefore, we propose that start times outside the 0600 – 0800 window (and 1800 – 2000) will only be implemented or maintained with the agreement of the majority of a team and subject to regular review. This has brought about the end to 0530 & 0545 starts and 0830 & 0900 finishes.

Locality Based Reviews

Following the debacle of A&E Redesign implementation which was so shambolic that Process Evolution instructed us not to use their name in bulletins about it, locality based reviews have begun in all three sectors, although it took a year before Avon sector management started in earnest. This process can be regularly repeated (the trust suggests an annual basis but local dialogue can be more regular) if members want changes, and it will be led by the OSM and CTLs at locality level giving staff & UNISON further opportunity to find workable solutions that will then be recommended to General Managers for approval.

Quality & Welfare Review

There will be an academic study to examine the evidence that links staff welfare and patient safety to patterns of work. The proposal aims to use occupational health consultant expertise, full UNISON involvement including a nominated expert of our choice to jointly put forward recommendations of the provision of the optimum working environment for patient care.

Incident reporting

Additional methods for incident reporting have been put in place as the result of the industrial dispute.

Mileage rates

The trust has acknowledged that the payment of public transport rate for training is not an Agenda for Change specification but a GWAS contractual term. In the current financial climate we are unable to challenge this but have asked the trust to
review the location of training in order to reduce the mileage that members clock up.

**Technician banding**

The technician banding issue continues to be a problem as GWAS refuse to accept the results of the review panel. This issue may not be resolved internally so UNISON proposes to remove this from the industrial dispute and continue to fight it separately.

**Training**

The ambulance practitioner to paramedic training is a very significant commitment and will remain so until the end of 2012. In theory this opens up more opportunities for training across the trust. UNISON has recently had a productive meeting with education leads from both GWAS and SWAST and is prepared to investigate a number of innovative ideas for improving education.

More details and your opportunity to vote on the A&E industrial dispute will follow soon.

**PROTECTING ECA CREWS**

According to trust policy, in “absolutely extraordinary circumstances, when the situation cannot be avoided by any other means, ECAs can be paired to together on a front line ambulance.”

ECAs should make sure they read the operational instructions that explain the “ECA deployment plan” to make sure that our members are dispatched safely. Double ECA crews must not convey patients unless the patient has been assessed by a practitioner/paramedic or by the Clinical Desk.

ECA crews must not administer drugs other than oxygen and entonox.

As a result of consultation with branches, UNISON’s health leadership body – the Health Service Group Executive – has decided to consult members on the proposed 2015 section of the NHS Pension Scheme, asking if they want to accept the proposed pensions scheme or to reject and take further industrial action.

The timetable for the consultation is not yet fixed, but it is likely to run during March/April which has an impact on the Action Short of Strike (ASOS) mandate from the ballot of ambulance members in which you recently voted.

As a result of the arcane legislation which dictates how union members can take lawful industrial action, our ASOS ballot ‘mandate’ for all of our ambulance members will expire before we know whether members across the NHS want to accept the 2015 Pension Scheme or reject and take further action. This doesn’t mean that we are changing our commitment – in the event that the union calls for further national industrial action on pensions, we will run another ASOS ballot for ambulance members, to ensure that our branch has the flexibility to both increase participation in the action and provide safe levels of cover during the dispute.

UNISON will be sending you more information about the proposed new 2015 pension scheme once the final details are available. In the meantime, stay in touch with what’s happening by asking your branch, or by visiting www.unison.org.uk/pensions/healthcare.asp

Thanks for all your support during the pensions dispute.

For urgent help and advice at work contact the UNISON Branch Helpline on yourvoice@unison-greatwestern.co.uk or 07590 229439 or as soon as possible