



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

# UNISON members climate change the green economy and just transition

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Priestley International  
Centre for Climate

# Foreword by **UNISON**

**Interest has been growing inside UNISON to take more action collectively to tackle carbon emissions, promote green alternatives and to pursue a just transition to net zero. The views in the member survey reflect this growing movement and rising awareness that workplaces and public services have a key role to play if the UK Government is to hit their targets. Many public bodies have declared climate emergencies and have published their contribution to reaching net zero.**

Though a small green network of activists has existed on and off for many years inside UNISON, momentum started to build after the successful annual conference decision in 2017 for UNISON to campaign inside pension schemes, such as the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), for the disinvestment from fossil fuels. A guide was produced for activists and pension scheme trustees about how this could be done within the fiduciary responsibilities of the various schemes and there have been local successes to report on disinvestment. In 2020, but for the COVID pandemic, the UNISON National Executive Council (NEC) had planned a significant green statement and motion for debate at the annual National Delegate Conference.

The international United Nations COP Climate Change Conference hosted in Glasgow was delayed from 2020 to 2021 and interest built inside UNISON month by month, with a UK wide green week in October 2021, when the member survey was launched. UNISON Scotland has been leading the way with their green activist network and green week for several years.

November 2021 saw UNISON in Glasgow at the COP launch a major publication from the University of Greenwich on greening UK public services<sup>1</sup> and UNISON was also included on the NHS (England) taskforce on net zero.

In 2022 the UNISON green network has grown in size and the NEC also finally got to propose to conference a green motion that was passed. Perhaps more significantly, the Conference backed a rule book change that now makes a green rep or environment officer a permanent feature of every local UNISON branch committee going forward.

UNISON is an active union at all levels (local, national and international) and the challenge from the survey is how the union can help members with interest and enthusiasm build collective strength for environmental change in the workplace and wider public services.

**Sampson Low**  
**UNISON Head of Policy**

# SUMMARY

## of findings

**UNISON members** are much more **worried about climate change** than the average UK worker. **85.1 per cent of UNISON's members** think the UK is already experiencing major effects of climate change, **compared to 54.4 per cent of UK workers** on average.

While **UNISON members** are **generally positive** that the green transition will bring positive **benefits for local communities**, they are less confident that they personally will be able to access these opportunities.

Less than **20% of UNISON members** have been consulted by management on climate plans and even less have received relevant training around this topic.

**Many would consider switching into 'green' jobs** although access to training and **concern about 'green' job quality** are barriers that need to be addressed. There is **strong support** for the principles of a just transition.

**UNISON members support** a range of climate policies including **carbon taxes** and **investment in green technologies**, alongside this, members are also likely to support policy options that favour new forms of public ownership to **help drive net zero**.

Many anticipate they will need to **learn new 'green' skills** in their current role so that they can **work effectively in a more sustainable way**. Climate education and more **specific training** to help workers address climate goals are **seen as critical**.

The survey highlights that very **many UNISON members** have a **clear idea** of the ways in which their **workplaces could decarbonise**.

# INTRODUCTION

**The UK public sector (excluding transport) is estimated to be the source of around 2 per cent of direct greenhouse gas emissions or 8 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e annually, predominantly from the heating of buildings. Yet with £4 in every £10 of expenditure in the UK being in the public sector, there is considerable scope for action to reduce carbon emissions across public sector buildings, modes of transport, land used and more widely through its purchasing power.**

UNISON is the largest trade union in the UK. It represents workers mainly in the public sector across local government, health care and education services, police and justice and also across community organisations and private sector workers in water, environment and transport and energy and is well placed to be part of the progressive change needed to ensure climate targets are met.

Frameworks for action in the public sector are beginning to develop. For example, the NHS has embedded net zero into legislation through the Health and Care Act of 2022, placing a duty on the sector to contribute towards statutory emissions and environmental targets. Many local authorities have declared climate emergencies and are developing net zero action plans.

This helps create a positive context for change, but frameworks are not enough. Delivering on the decarbonisation of public services will require both significant investment and changes at the workplace and in working practices.

This report has been prepared for UNISON on members' perceptions of the transition to a low carbon economy. 372 members of UNISON responded to the survey which was launched in

UNISON green week in October 2021 and further promoted alongside the activities of COP26 in November 2021 and closed on January 27th 2022.

The survey was designed by researchers at the University of Leeds, Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) and distributed by UNISON. This report focuses on the responses from UNISON members and where relevant compares them to the findings of a similar survey which was undertaken with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 workers across the UK in 2021<sup>2</sup>.

## **The key themes explored in these surveys are:**

- How the threat of climate change is perceived by UNISON members.
- What workers see as essential in ensuring that a green transition is fair and effective.
- Workers' hopes and fears for the transition to a greener economy.
- Workers' readiness for the green transition including skills and training needs.

<sup>2</sup>[Worker Perceptions of Climate Change and the Green Transition \(2021\)](#)

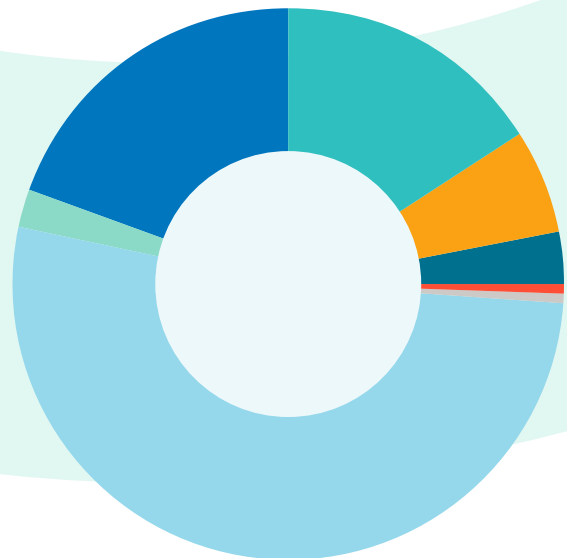
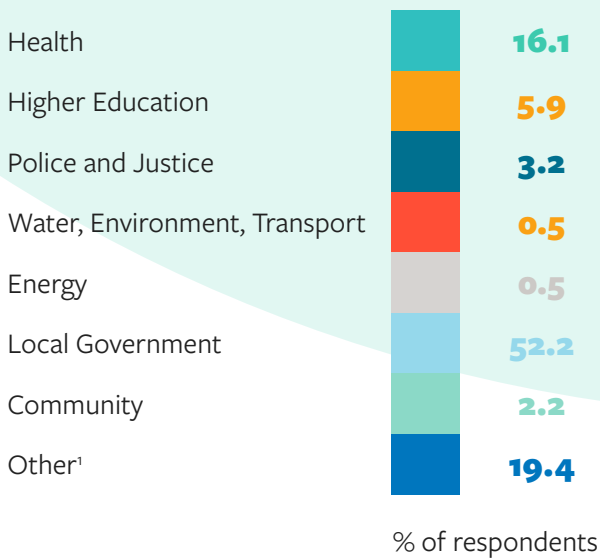
# PROFILE of survey respondents

## The majority of respondents to this survey work in the Local Government service group or the Health service group (See Table 1).

Across the survey 37.1 per cent are a union rep and 15 per cent classify themselves as an active member. The remaining 47.9 per cent say they are a member but not very active in the union or its campaigns. 90.1 per cent of respondents identify as White British, with a larger female workforce: 61.3 per cent identify as women, 37.3 per cent as men. Most of the respondents have a relatively stable working life: 89.9 per cent are in permanent employment; 71.3 per cent work full-time, 28.7 per cent work half time. 74 per cent work in large workplaces with more than 500 employees.

Only 18.3 per cent of respondents consider that they work in a workplace with high carbon emissions. 47.3 per cent said they work in public administration, 23.9 per cent in health and social care. The level of education is high, with 63.7 per cent having a higher education level degree (NVQ Level 4 or higher), this compares to 48.5 per cent across the UK workers survey.

**Table 1:**  
**Survey respondents by UNISON Service Group**



<sup>1</sup>Working for charity, school or private company or unsure of their service group

# PERSPECTIVES on Climate Change

## UNISON members are very worried about climate change (See Table 2).

They are on average much more worried than the UK worker average. Across the UK as a whole 77.3 per cent of workers state they are very or fairly concerned about climate change but over 95 per cent of UNISON members state this. The response rises to 99 per cent of union reps and officers, although active and not-so-active members also have very high levels of concern (93 per cent and 92 per cent respectively). 85.1 per cent of UNISON's members think the UK is already experiencing major effects of climate change, compared to 54.4 per cent of UK workers on average.

**Table 2:**

**Views on climate change**

**% of respondents**

<b>Statements:</b>	<b>UNISON members</b>	<b>UK worker study average</b>
I am very or fairly concerned about climate change	<b>95.1</b>	77.3
We are seeing the affects already now in the UK	<b>85.1</b>	54.4
Climate change should be addressed with extreme urgency	<b>61.6</b>	29.8
Climate change should be addressed with a high-level urgency	<b>28.5</b>	65.7

**Overall, 90.1 per cent of UNISON members think that climate change should be addressed urgently:** this includes 61.6 per cent of UNISON members who think that climate change should be addressed with extreme urgency, compared to 29.8 per cent of UK workers on average. It is also notable that when looking at respondent type 64.3 per cent of reps and officers agree we are in a climate crisis that needs to be acted on with extreme urgency, this rises to 71.1 per cent of those that define themselves as engaged union activists (but not reps). 52.5 per cent by those who self-defined as not active as a union member state that climate action needs to be addressed with extreme urgency. This is still a high proportion, but it is worth noting the subtle differences in the sense of urgency in addressing climate change across these respondent groups.

**We know from a growing body of research that our emotions about the climate crisis influence how we process information about climate change, the likelihood we will take individual or collective action on climate, and the type of policies we support (Stanley et al 2021).**

Thus, perceptions and emotions relating to climate change are an important factor in understanding workers’ perspectives on the green transition. We asked how strongly respondents feel about climate change and their emotional response to the issue asking about hope, fear, anger, guilt and outrage<sup>3</sup>.

**Table 3 shows some interesting results.** Levels of anxiety, fear and outrage are much more dominant/prominent among UNISON members than with the average UK worker, in contrast levels of hope are little lower amongst UNISON members. Again, looking at this set of questions in more detail with respect to the type of respondent, there are some small but potentially important differences, for example 31.8 per cent of reps/officers feel hopeful about the challenges of climate change, this declines to only 25.0 per cent of active members, yet non-active members are much more hopeful, with 33.4 per cent giving this response. These patterns of difference are repeated across the different categories of emotional response. The survey also checked the extent to which respondents felt knowledgeable about the topic of climate change. A large majority feel well informed about climate change. 65.1 per cent state that they have a good knowledge about the causes and effects of climate change, compared to 49.1 per cent in the UK national worker average.

**Table 3: Climate emotions**  
Very or quite strong feelings of...



Hope

31.1%

36.5%



Guilt

37.8%

36.5%



Anxiety

53.9%

37.8%



Fear

51.7%

37.1%



Outrage

63.2%

41.6%

UNISON members

UK worker study average

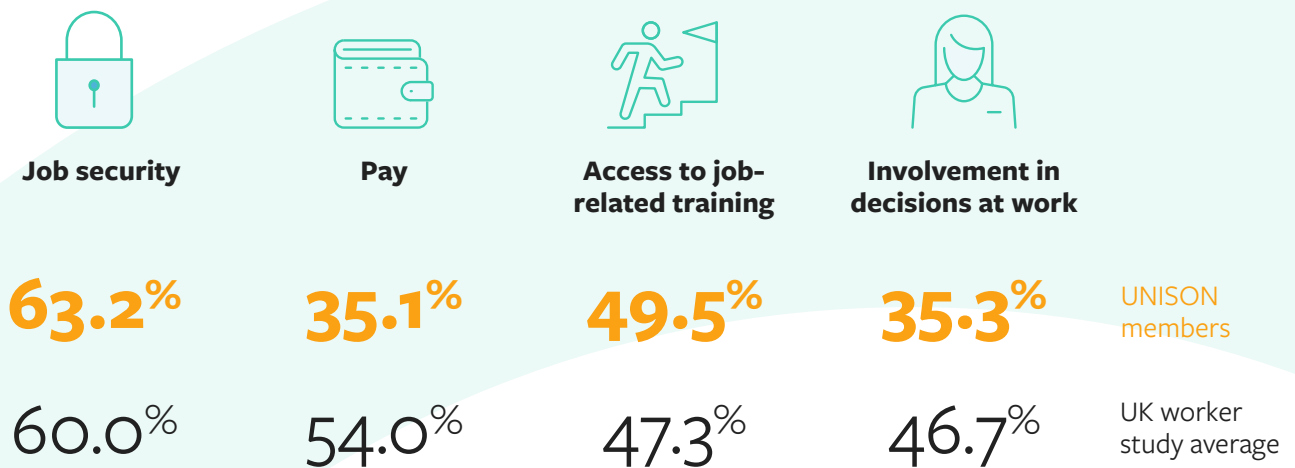
<sup>3</sup> Stanley et al 2021. From anger to action: Differential impacts of eco-anxiety, eco-depression, and eco-anger on climate action and wellbeing. The Journal of Climate Change and Health, 1, p.100003.

# DECARBONISING AT THE WORKPLACE: Members are disappointed by management

**The survey explores general questions around job satisfaction and the degree of dialogue with employers in members’ day-to-day experience at work.**

This helps set the context for questions about the extent to which they are involved in dialogue over workplace changes related to the climate crisis and plans to move towards net zero. Members of UNISON seem relatively satisfied with their working conditions in terms of job security and training: Table 4 shows that 63.2 per cent are extremely or rather satisfied with job security compared to 60.0 per cent nationally. UNISON members are also relatively satisfied with access to job-related training (49.5 per cent). There is less than average satisfaction with pay (35.1 per cent), 17.7 per cent state they are extremely dissatisfied with pay, and 28.9 somewhat dissatisfied with pay, while nationally 54 per cent are extremely or rather satisfied with pay.

**Table 4: Measures of Job Satisfaction**  
Members extremely or somewhat satisfied with...



**Questions in the survey asked about the state of workplace employment relations and the nature of dialogue between workers and management.** The results indicate that employment relations are evaluated as being slightly worse by UNISON members than by other workers across the UK. For example, only 35.3 per cent of UNISON members rate the degree of involvement in decisions at work positively, compared to 46.6 per cent of workers nationally. 42 per cent of UNISON members say that managers are good or very good in seeking the views of employees or employee reps, again this is slightly lower than the national response of 48.4 per cent.

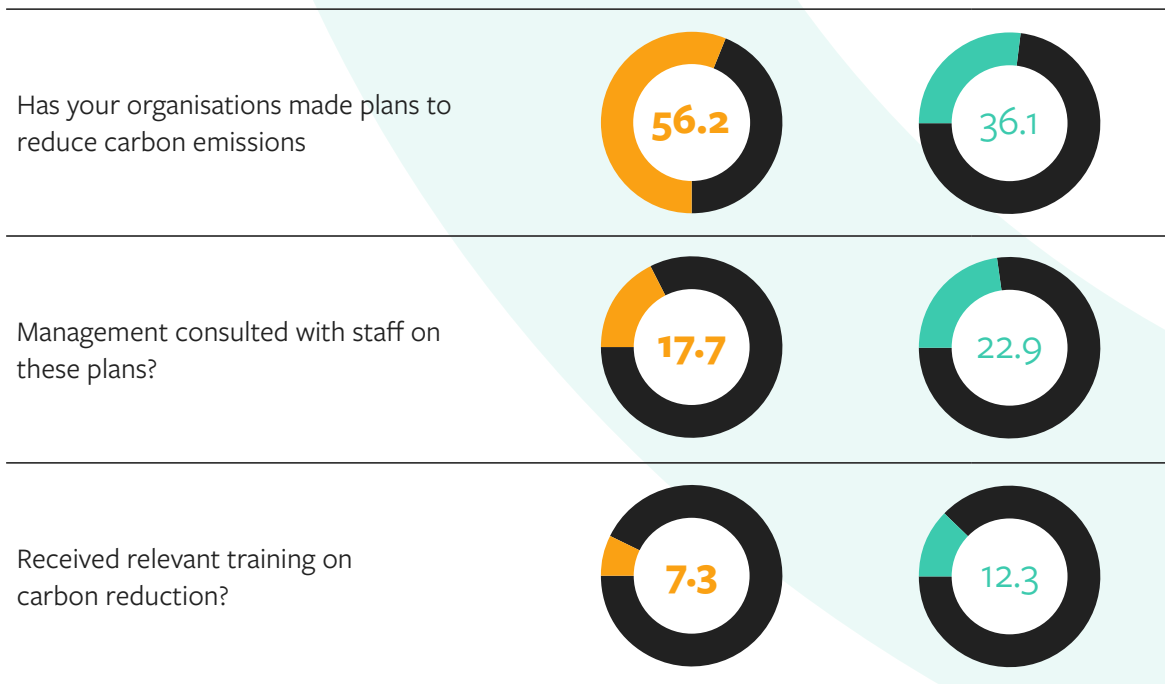


28.8 per cent think managers are good at responding to suggestions from employees or employee reps and this is much lower than the national average across the UK workforce where 46.4 per cent state this. A further 14.3 per cent even state that their managers are very poor at seeking the views of employees or employee reps.

This rather negative judgement by UNISON members at management’s ability to take on board worker views gets even more critical when asking UNISON members about satisfaction with their employers and their engagement towards net zero and green issues, shown in Table 5. While over half of UNISON respondents state that action is underway in their workplace to reduce carbon emissions (compared to a third of UK workers overall), UNISON members are less likely to have been involved in consultation over relevant changes and received any relevant training on net zero plans. Thus, only 5.9 per cent feel that the organization is able to decarbonise, while 63.3 do not feel confident their organisation will be able to decarbonise successfully.

**Table 5: Carbon reduction plans at work**

% of survey respondents



**UNISON members make a wide range of suggestions as to ways that their organisation could invest and make changes to help reduce carbon emissions and highlight a wide range of benefits for their organisation of making these changes.**

In asking an open question ‘What key changes or investment is needed to ensure that your organisation decarbonises?’ Over a third (123 respondents) gave an answer and called for green travel (21 respondents), climate education (18 respondents), increased budgets (14 respondents), improved energy efficiency of buildings (13 respondents), better leadership (12 respondents) and improved engagement and dialogue with staff (8 respondents). Examples of comments made by members are shown in [Annex A](#).

**Another notable observation, is that when respondents were asked a further question** ‘What opportunities or challenges do you think that moving to lower-carbon products or services will bring to the company and or the workforce?’ Only a low number of people gave an answer (59 or 16% of respondents). Interestingly, workers stated economic advantages as the main opportunity: reducing costs (13 respondents), alongside opportunities for public service or operational benefits (12 respondents) and health and well-being benefits (9 respondents).

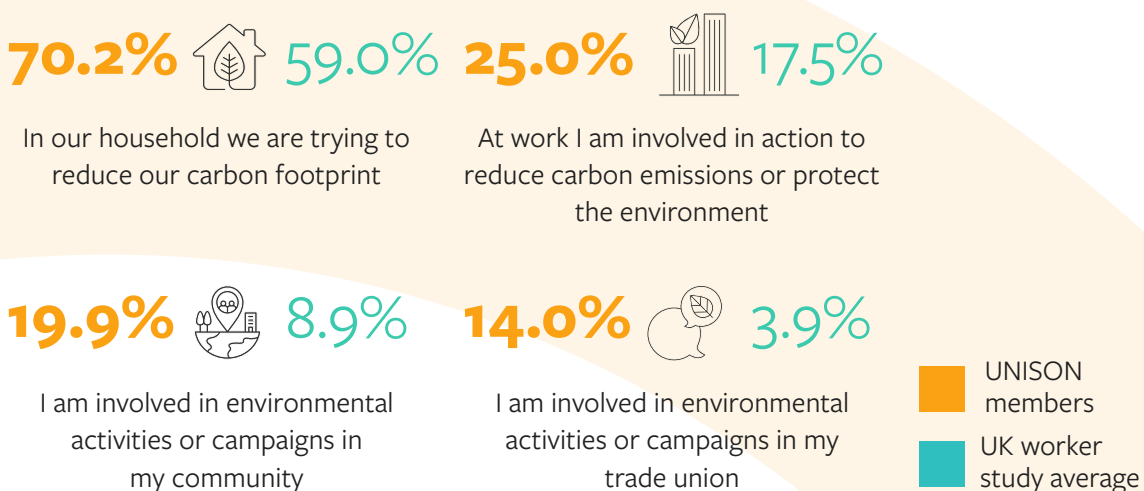
# MANY MEMBERS ARE ACTIVE on climate change

**Table 6 shows that UNISON members are already active in many ways on climate change, in their households, at work, in their community and via their trade unions.**

On all these measures, UNISON members score more highly than the national average for UK workers. All types of UNISON members (reps, activists and not so active members) are taking action on climate in their households at equally high levels (86.8, 86.9 and 79.6 per cent respectively). Climate action in other settings at work or in the community is more varied across these groups, with 42.1 per cent of reps and officers engaged in green action at work, and 29.9 per cent of this group also report that they are active in environmental activities or campaigns through UNISON.

27.7 per cent of union activist members report that they are involved in some way at work in action to reduce carbon emissions, although on 8.5 per cent of this group and only 2 per cent of the not too active members group report that they engage on green issues through UNISON. Yet, when asking about climate action or campaigns at the community level 30 per cent of reps, 23.1 per cent of active member and 19 per cent of not so active members indicate that they are active in environmental action or campaigns locally. These findings suggest that there is considerable scope to connect the concern that members have for environmental issues with the potential for action and engagement via the workplace and through the work of the union.

**Table 6: Taking action on climate change. Members extremely or somewhat satisfied with...**



# GOVERNMENT AND UNION ROLES IN CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

**When it comes to who has the greatest responsibility to address climate change UNISON members think it is the government, then business, then individuals and then community groups and organisations.**

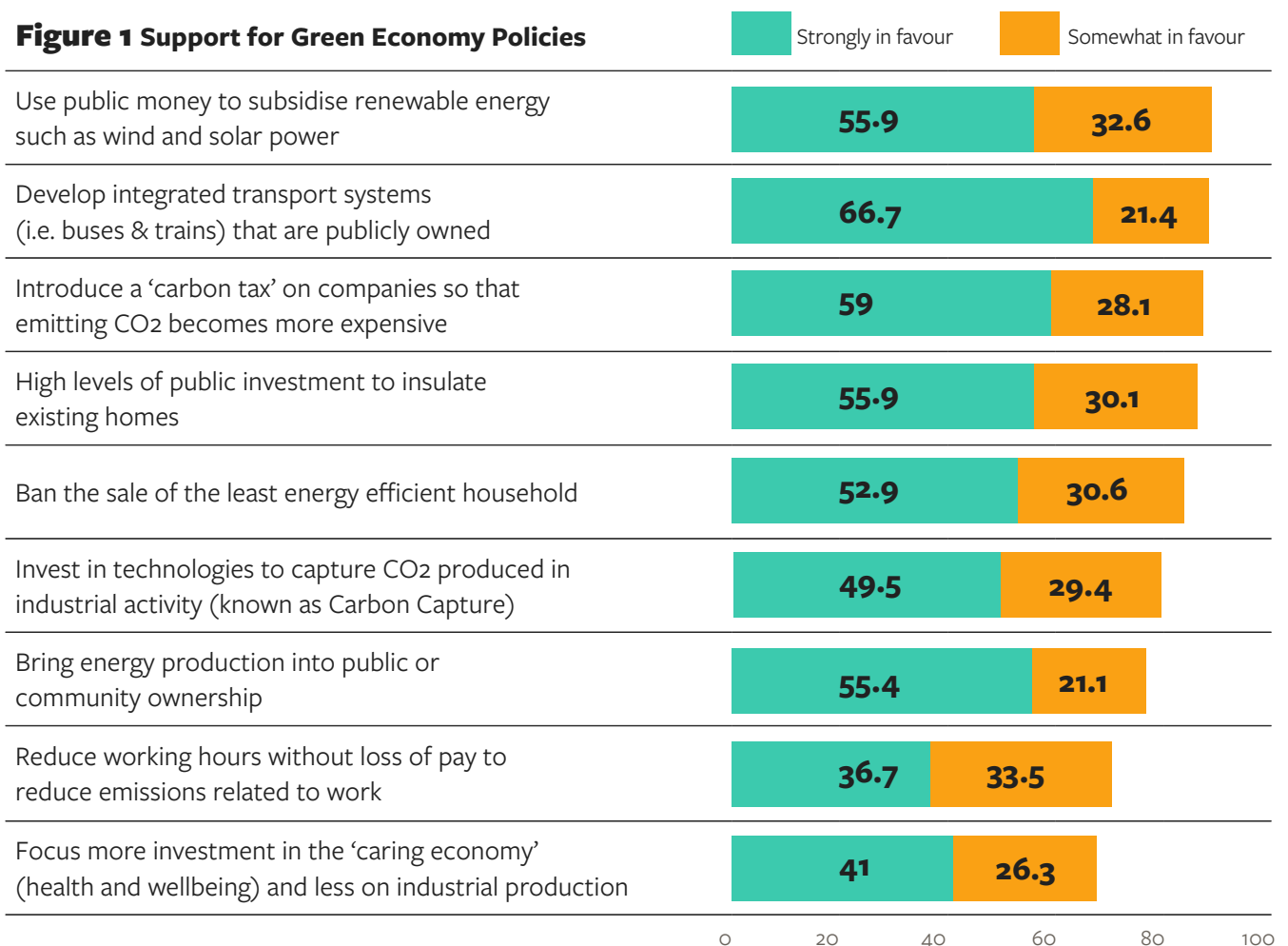
Interestingly though, UNISON members also think that the union could play a huge role in addressing climate change. When presented with the hypothetical case of a worker who is concerned about high emissions at his workplace and about huge amounts of waste, UNISON members think that he should try to push change through his workplace union (32.7 per cent) while instead only 16 per cent think he should raise it with management.

**44.1 per cent think it is local council/government who should make sure that companies meet high environmental standards through regulation and legislation, another manifestation of the strong belief climate change needs to be (foremost) addressed by government.**

# SUPPORT FOR net zero policies

**While the UK has a legally binding target to achieve net zero by 2050, there are a number of potential pathways and policy options open to government to help achieve decarbonisation.**

We presented the survey respondents with a number of the policy ideas that are currently debated among trade unions and government and asked respondents to rate them, the results are shown in Figure 1. Policies that got the most support (strongly or somewhat in favour) are public investment in renewable energy, retrofitting as well as public transport. UNISON members were most strongly in favour of developing publicly funded integrated transport systems. It is notable that more “socialist” ideas that challenge the current economic orthodoxy, like bringing energy into public ownership, also get high levels of support alongside the more familiar market-focused solutions such as carbon taxes and those focused on investment into technological solutions like Carbon Capture and Storage.



**The options that presented to those taking part in the survey are clearly only a sample of the possible actions that can be taken to help mitigate the effects of climate change.**

Survey respondents were invited to make written comments on possible solutions to addressing climate change and examples of the comments are shown in **Annex A** illustrating a wealth of knowledge and ideas for addressing climate change.

The survey also asked a set of questions about how respondents view the more general question about possible trade-offs between the need for economic growth for prosperity and the protection of jobs vis a vis action to address the climate crisis. Generally, UNISON members are undecided if economic growth harms the environment, 23.8 per cent think it always does, 36.7 per cent disagree and 35 per cent are undecided. Regarding their own union, members think that unions should prioritise the fight against climate change at the expense of certain jobs as long as there is adequate investment and support for new, decent quality jobs with 83.8 per cent agreeing with this statement. There is less support for the idea that unions prioritise the fight against climate change at the expense of certain jobs (48.2 agree with this), but even less support the idea that jobs are more important than climate mitigation, only 23.8 consider that unions should prioritise the fight to protect jobs over action to address climate change.

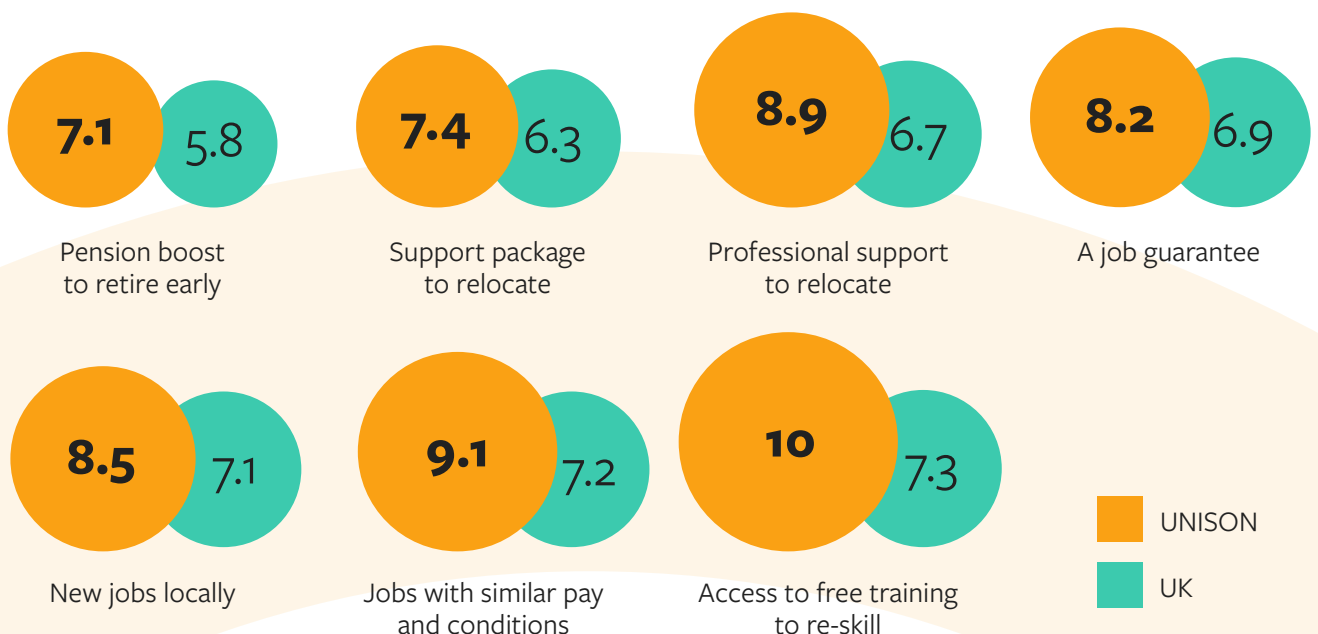
# SUPPORT FOR Just Transition Policy

**One aspect of the discussion on climate policy is how to support workers and communities to ensure that any green transition is fair. Climate adaptation and mitigation and the turn towards a greener economy might have deep implications on jobs and employment.**

Policies supporting workers if jobs are at risk because of efforts to reduce climate change are called policies for a Just Transition (JT): they try to ensure green transitions are fair and effective. We asked respondents to rate the importance of JT policies, drawing on the most prominent the good practice suggested by the ILO guidance on Just Transition (2015) and more recent demands from UK unions (Prospect UNISON Unite GMB, 2019).

**Respondents were asked to rate each policy on a ten-point scale ‘from not at all important’ (0) to ‘extremely important’ (10).** Figure 2 shows the results for key areas of direct policy support for workers. Figure 3 shows preferences for the core principles upon which dialogue over just transition should be based, both figures compare the data from UNISON members to that of the national UK worker survey. Figure 2 shows that the balance of priorities was broadly the same for UNISON and UK workers, with access to training and good quality jobs locally being seen as key elements of the just transition, it is striking to see how much importance UNISON workers place on access to free training for re-skilling.

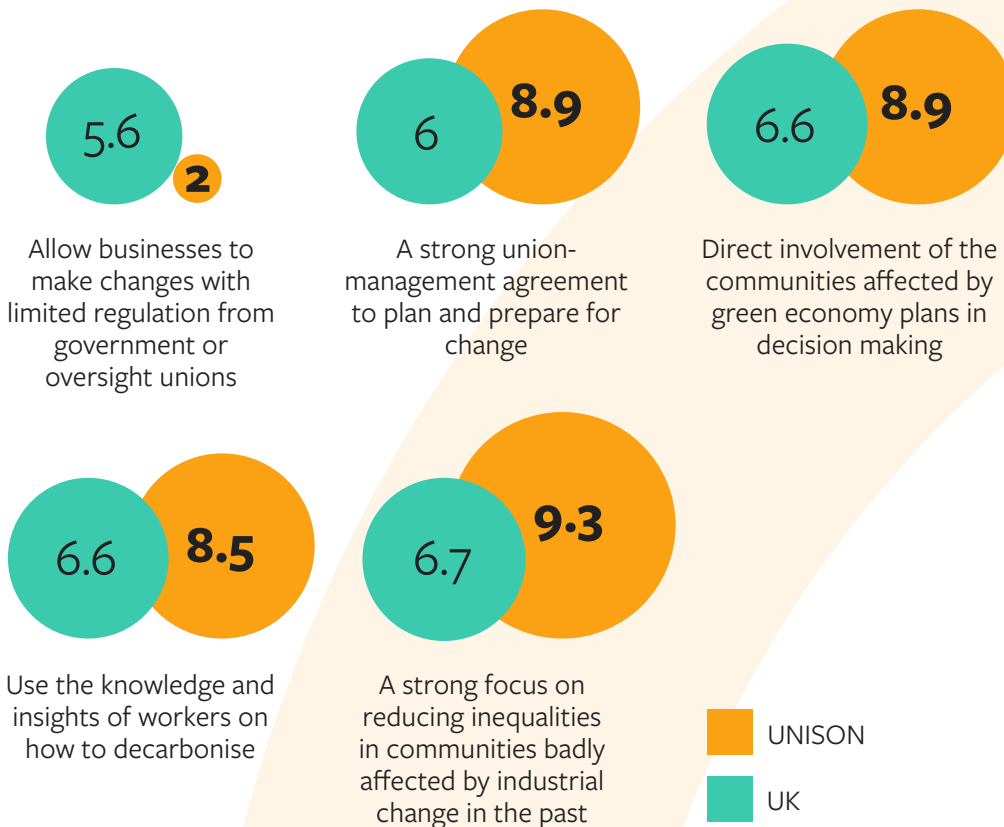
**Figure 2**  
**Rating of Just Transition Policies.**  
**Average score (10 point scale) UNISON members & UK workers compared.**



**Figure 3 highlights how strongly UNISON members reject a ‘laissez faire’ approach of an unregulated, business-led green transition, with high importance placed on union-management plans, worker and community engagement.**

UNISON members as with the national workers survey also place a high premium on policy being sensitive to the needs of particular regions already negatively affected by industrial change.

**Figure 3:  
Rating of Just Transition Policies.  
Average score (10 point scale) UNISON members & UK workers compared.**





# POSITIVE ABOUT A SHIFT towards the green economy

**Most members are positive about the changes of the green economy. 49.4 per cent think it will bring new jobs to their community and 43.5 per cent think it will bring better jobs to their community.**

While these results are more positive than the UK worker average, it is still notable that less than half of UNISON members anticipate these potentially positive outcomes, the so-called ‘co-benefits’ of climate policy<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 4: How will moving towards a ‘greener’ economy affect your local community?**

## UK

47%

It will bring new  
‘green’ jobs to my  
community

27%

It will lead to  
job losses in my  
community

40%

It will bring better  
quality jobs to my  
community

## UNISON

49.4%

It will bring new  
‘green’ jobs to my  
community

16.9%

It will lead to  
job losses in my  
community

43.5%

It will bring better  
quality jobs to my  
community

<sup>4</sup> Stern, N. 2006. The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Following on from questions about anticipated community level impacts, the survey explores how respondents see the potential impact on their own employment prospects, shown in Figure 5.**

As might be expected (and in line with projected changes in public sector employment), only a small minority of UNISON members think that the green transition will mean that they will need to change job and therefore very few anticipate the disruption of need to move away to find work. But it is notable that UNISON members and UK workers are in agreement in terms of the proportion anticipating that they will need to learn new skills in their existing job to ensure that they are prepared for work in the low-carbon economy. Only 4% believe that if they had to change jobs to work in the green economy that this job would be of better quality than their current one.

**Figure 5: How will moving towards a 'greener' economy affect you?**

**UK**

14.3%

I will need to change jobs

26.2%

I will need to learn new skills

12.4%

I will need to move to find work

16.1%

I will get a better quality job

**UNISON**

4.8%

It will bring new 'green' jobs to my community

26.4%

It will lead to job losses in my community

2.7%

It will bring better quality jobs to my community

4%

I will get a better quality job





# THE POTENTIAL TO SWITCHING into 'green' jobs







**The survey asked respondents to reflect on whether they would be interested to work in specific 'green' occupations: those that are forecast to grow in the transition to a low-carbon economy.**

What is notable is that although only 5 per cent of UNISON members think that they will have to change jobs in the green transition, a larger proportion are interested in the prospect of switching into work that is connected to environmental protection or other aspects of ensuring effective functioning of a low carbon economy. Table 7 also shows the proportion of those indicating their potential interest to switch into environmental work and of those, the proportion who state that they would need to learn new skills in order to make this shift.

**Table 7: Switching to green jobs**

% of survey respondents

Occupation	% interested to work in this job UNISON	% would need to learn new skills (UNISON)
 Environmental conservation professional	<b>20</b>	<b>27</b>
 Forestry worker	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>
 Environmental assessment auditor	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>
 Further education teaching professional	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>
 Care worker	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
 Logistics and warehousing manager	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>
 Logistics and warehousing operative	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>

	Electrical engineer	<b>2</b>	16
	Bus or train driver	<b>3</b>	14
	Construction trades supervisor	<b>2</b>	14
	Pipe and cable installation	<b>1</b>	15
	Heat pump installation technician	<b>2</b>	15
	Bricklayer	<b>1</b>	14

**When asked about what attracts them to green jobs, 29.3 per cent state they think the work would be interesting, 28.5 per cent say they would like to have a job that helps to reduce or halt climate change. Only 5.2 per cent would expect good pay in those jobs though, and only 28.8 per cent think that their skills would be extremely or very useful in the green economy, and 10.6 per cent think that they could easily retrain.**

While these responses are only indications given the hypothetical nature of the question, they do illustrate some important tendencies: members are interested in working in meaningful work that addresses the climate crisis but a considerable proportion would need support and training to help them achieve any switch that this would imply. There is also considerable concern that jobs in the green economy are not viewed as opportunities that offer decent working conditions or pay. This could be a significant barrier to the green transition.

# TRAINING NEEDED FOR THE ‘GREENING’ OF EXISTING JOBS

**The majority of workers are not anticipating that they need to switch roles and we asked a more general question about whether members feel equipped to work in a more sustainable way within their current job. Many feel that their existing skills and training needs to be upgraded in order that they feel ready for working in a low-carbon world.**

Over a quarter feel that they would need to learn new skills to be effective in their work that will require them to be more knowledgeable and have improved levels of ‘green’ knowledge.

While UNISON members in our sample have regularly updated their knowledge and skills, **83.9 per cent** agree and strongly agree that they have done so.

Even more, **96.2 per cent** are willing to learn new skills, and **84.5 per cent** feel confident about learning new skills. However, only 7.3 have received training related to climate change or the skills and knowledge needed to effectively decarbonise their operations and business.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Overall, the case is clear that from the perspective of workers in the public sectors, there is an urgent need to ensure that the ambition to decarbonise public services is met with appropriate measures to engage and empower the workforce to deliver this change. There is a clear opportunity for UNISON to engage more with members and employers around climate change. Members are very concerned and very emotional about climate change, which sets a good ground for climate action:**

## **Recommendation 1:**

Provide communication materials for reps and officers to engage with members on UNISON's climate policy and proposals for decarbonisation.

## **Recommendation 2:**

Build upon the 2022 motion at conference to support the growth of green reps in every branch as a route to engage with members.

**The survey has highlighted a broad range of knowledge and ideas for action amongst the UNISON membership about what needs to be done in their workplace and beyond to address the climate emergency. Harnessing this wealth of knowledge is key. On the other hand, it is notable that relatively few respondents identify concrete potential benefits of decarbonising.**

**Recommendation 3:**

Draw upon the existing body of knowledge held by workers across the public sector about how work systems, jobs and skills will need to change to meet the climate challenge.

**Recommendation 4:**

Work with reps and members to build consensus on specific priorities and opportunities that can form the focus of climate action plans locally, including action at the workplace to organise relevant climate education and green skills training for workers.

**Recommendation 5:**

The central role of public sector for procurement puts them centre stage for driving decarbonisation through tendering and monitoring. Training on green procurement should be a key priority.

It is notable that UNISON members feel that their management's overall approach to engagement and dialogue on climate change is weaker when compared to other workers across the UK. This matters, as good practice highlights that collaboration and consultation with workers and communities is essential for successful decarbonisation and a just transition. This sets out a clear role for the union to fill this gap to claim more involvement from employers around decarbonisation and to offer a platform for broad-based climate action.

**Recommendation 6:**

Officers and reps should be encouraged to hold employers more to account on decarbonisation plans, to actively engage with workers on those plans and ensure that the principles of a Just Transition are embedded within them.

# COMMENTARY

**The conclusions of this report based on the survey of UNISON members in 2021 tally with the motion<sup>1</sup> passed at UNISON conference in 2022. It recognised the urgency of this issue and set out a programme to engage at all levels, from local workplaces to public services design and delivery as a whole. UNISON already successfully took this plan to the TUC Congress in September 2022 to get other unions on board.**

Our growing number of green reps (or environment officers) will add weight to this effort but will also need support and training too. Our industrial sectors, known as service groups, are separately engaged in collective bargaining and consultation with employers, large and small, at all levels and will need to set their own agenda and priorities within the national framework. It will be for the members in these groups to set the pace. And of course, devolution offers an opportunity to engage with governments across the UK and metro-mayors in England too.

There has never been a better time to recognise the need, and appetite, for increased engagement. Our members in the Environment Agency, for example, see first-hand the direct impacts of climate change here in the UK. With increased flooding, sewage overflow, grassland fires and air pollution causing new, quantifiable, risks to health in all areas. Climate denial is no longer the issue – the issue is the urgent need for climate action.

The survey was conducted before the current cost of living crisis, which has amplified the fuel and food poverty issues for households across the UK and climate change exacerbates both. Our members working in the energy sector, housing, children and adult social services, schools, the NHS and voluntary sector all see the devastating effects of cold homes.

This challenge unites us as union and gives an emotional drive to engage on the green agenda as a workplace and public service union as set out in this report.

**Sampson Low**  
**UNISON Head of Policy**



# ANNEX A

## Annex A: The following give examples of the range of comments written in by survey respondents to the following questions:

### Q23 - If you have other 'greener' economy policy ideas, please state them here:

- 'Additional days provided for annual leave if employees use alternative lower carbon transport rather than flying for their holiday(s) and tax or pay benefits for using green transport and minimising mileage.'
- '(The) public sector (local and national government) should have a requirement for the majority of their travel to be green in nature, and all new vehicles should be hybrid or electric, unless good reason can be given for an exception'.
- 'Invest in decarbonisation of public buildings and insulate them to reduce energy demand'.
- 'Making building regulations tougher to promote zero carbon homes and local energy generation.'
- 'More taxation on higher-polluting activities such as fossil fuel extraction, frequent flying, to subsidise green investment in hydrogen tech production, network and storage.'
- 'Not just a case of subsidising, but of removing hidden subsidies to polluters. Motorists/airlines do not pay full costs imposed'.
- 'Reform or get rid of the monetary system and the idea of 'shareholder value' which it promotes at the cost to the people and the planet'.
- 'A basic income to enable freedom, to think and organise with each other for a safe world to live in'.

### Q34 'What key changes or investment is needed to ensure that your organisation decarbonises?'

- 'Reduction in overseas travel, divestment from fossils and greening the properties.'
- 'Green energy, green vehicles and ensuring suppliers are carbon efficient.'
- 'Sustainability is included in our organisational strategy, but due to the pandemic many areas of work are overstretched, so there is a need for re-prioritisation. To help in this our union needs increased capacity to enable support for a 'green' rep'.
- 'Training throughout the organisation; higher priority given to decarbonisation by senior management'.
- 'A clear strategy, improved consultation with employees, better training, ways to record and assess performance, increased resource.'
- 'More focus on the issue, more staff involvement in arriving at viable solutions, more awareness raising among staff.'

### Q35: What opportunities or challenges do you think that moving to lower-carbon products or services will bring to the company and or the workforce?

- 'It is an opportunity to lower costs, and setting a good example to others'
- '(it offers an) Ability to save money in the long run, although but don't look at things long term. They are inexperienced and often have to be 'fire-fighting.'
- Home insulation schemes could be vastly expanded, and switching all council buildings and new builds to electric heating systems would be an opportunity for the council to invest in this area?'
- 'Huge opportunity to become a sustainable service. Challenge will be getting everyone on board (staff, residents & businesses) - that is why carbon literacy training is so important. Once people understand, it will be far easier to switch to a more sustainable way of living & working.'
- Better health and better outcomes for those we work with.' happier workforce using flexible working and accessing digitally enabled working environment, better skilled workforce through learning and training, saving.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Prof. Vera Trappmann** is professor of comparative employment relations and leads a **programme of work** on the green transition, climate change and the worker voice at the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change at the University of Leeds. Vera is an expert in industrial restructuring, and led on projects for the European Commission, the European Trade Union Institute, the German Research Foundation, IG Metall, and most recently for Hans Böckler Foundation (HBF) on Just Transition in 12 countries. A second strand of research deals with precarity and protest [www.leeds-index.co.uk](http://www.leeds-index.co.uk)

## Dr. Jo Cutter

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