

# niposa Reports

Civil Service  
Group  
Conference  
2024

**9 pages of pictures & reports from the conference**



# Show of strength Unity of purpose

The following is a selection of the debate drawn from motions at the **2024 Civil Service Group Conference** held at the Clayton Hotel in Belfast on 7th November...

General Secretary **Carmel Gates**, moving **Motion 1**, on behalf of the Executive Committee, reflected on what she termed “the best bits” of a successful year’s campaigning and in particular the “fantastic” day of action on January 18th.

She told conference: “NIPSA was at the heart of pushing for that – not just across the Civil Service, but across Health and Education – and we helped make that [day] happen.”

Pointing out that the union should be proud of the role it played, Carmel continued: “I’m not suggesting for a second that we’ve got everything we wanted or everything we deserved, but for the first time civil servants were treated on a par with other public sector workers, and your pay award was as good as theirs.”

She told delegates that this success had boosted the confidence of members not to be treated as second-class citizens again. “From this moment on, as civil and public servants, we will work together to do what we can for all our members,” she added.

Carmel said another highlight had been the fact that every local political party had “vocalised their support for us” and that the union had put down an important “marker” and “a line in the sand” in terms of future campaigns.

“We turned the corner on the notion that civil servants didn’t have the support of the political parties and didn’t have the support of the public.”

Concluding, she reminded delegates that battles still lay ahead but that NIPSA is “starting from the right place” and expressed confidence in securing further “successes going forward”.

*Motion carried.*



**Motion 1 Carmel Gates**



**‘We demanded not to be left behind and were not’**

**In her opening remarks to conference, Civil Service Group chairperson Tina Creaney reminded delegates that they could “achieve great things” by standing shoulder to shoulder.**

**She said: “At last year’s conference delegates reaffirmed the demand that the NICS should not be left behind.**

**“We were being used as pawns in a political game between the British government and local politicians – but they underestimated us and we said ‘No more’ and ‘Enough is enough’.**

**NIPSA civil servants had, she continued, “flexed their might and stood up when it mattered”.**

**“That day (January 18th) was led from the front by NIPSA. It was a turning point for us and for civil service pay.**

**“The strike for industrial action or strategic selective action helped to achieve a pay offer that was for the first time on a par with all other public servants. We demanded that we would not be left behind and we were not.”**

We turned the corner on the notion that civil servants didn’t have the support of the political parties and we didn’t have the support of the public



**Motion 5 Brendan Mulholland**

**Marty McKee** (Branch 118), moving **Motion 5**, called for future pay offers to be put to the membership without Executive Committee recommendation “so members can make their own decisions”.

He said the Executive Committee had recommended acceptance of the 2023/24 pay offer as an above-inflation pay rise on February 26th despite inflation being nearly 7% at the start of the pay period.

Marty claimed this meant the offer was “in fact... a below-inflation pay offer”.

He continued: “The offer was also being recommended for acceptance without any remedies for lots of members who are in receipt of tax credits and benefits. So when they received their pay award, their benefits stopped, and in fact, their back pay was nullified.”

Opposing the motion, **Brian McGeegan** (Branch 96) pointed out that the Executive was a “democratically elected body of fellow trade unionists” and that it was an insult to NIPSA members “to suggest they do not think for themselves”.

Also speaking in opposition, **Brendan Mulholland** (Executive Committee) said this was about democracy and accountability.

He told delegates: “At a dozen meetings during the year the Executive Committee were able to follow the twists and turns of [pay] negotiations [with management side]. They are able to consider economic circumstances, the budgetary circumstances, what has happened in the home civil service across the water and consider what the

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industrial strength both of NIPSA and the trade union movement as a whole [are] at any point in time.”

Brendan warned that if the motion was carried, members would not be able to hear the Executive Committee’s recommendations, adding, “these are the very people we elect to represent [us] and take forward our policies – the very people who have had over a year to consider all the different circumstances and the context of the pay offer.”

*Motion lost.*

Senior management’s attempts to impose a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach on arbitrary attendance percentages was slammed by **Lucia Collins** (Executive Committee) as she moved **Motion 8** on hybrid working.

She told delegates that the centrally agreed NICS-wide policy on hybrid working resulted from “extensive” research and “comprehensive” equality and rural impact assessments.

But Lucia claimed that senior management were “stand[ing] outside policy” and that [some] local managers were “running amok” in their interpretation of it.

“We’re alarmed that the implementation has been forced through with total disregard to work-style agreements that were in place, [and that] reasonable adjustments were [being] ignored.”

She insisted that any review of hybrid working and how it is applied across departments “cannot deviate from agreed central policy” and that Trade Union Side would “continue to impress” this point.

Speaking in support, **Paul Doherty** (Branch 7) said most staff were “able and willing” to work “in a hybrid manner” and that this had “increased efficiency and productivity, less waste in many areas, and lower absence rates”.

He also slammed the putting in place of “artificial targets on office attendance” where there was no “proved business need for it”.

**Paddy McWilliams** (Branch 119), also in support, told conference that flexible working had benefited the vast majority of members.

He claimed individual agreements between members of staff and management locally “seems to have gone completely” and that “this part of the policy has been totally ignored”.

Paddy slammed the appeals part of the policy as “a total joke” and pointed out that the only “battles we have won for people” have been on the grounds of reasonable adjustment.

“It’s virtually unheard of that anybody can challenge management asking them to come in an extra day or two days in the office,” he continued. “Our members have a work-life balance established now through this policy, and we must fight [to protect it].”

*Motion carried.*

The putting in place of a four-day working week in the NICS and ALBs would be a “proactive step” in dealing with recruitment and retention issues, conference was told.

**NIPSA REPORTS**



**Motion 4** Damian McErlan



**Motion 11** Declan Sloan



**Motion 8** Lucia Collins



**Motion 8** Paul Doherty



**Motion 11** Gerard McLernon

**Gerard McLernon** (Branch 119) made the point as he moved **Motion 11**, claiming that research had “constantly demonstrated” that reducing the working week would create a “happier, more focused, more engaged” workforce and could help in tackling sickness absence.

He told conference: “Productivity studies tell us that employees working a four-day week are not only more

Our members have a work-life balance that is established through this policy and we must fight [to protect it]



productive, but often find more satisfaction in their work. When staff have the time to recharge, they return to work with a greater focus and energy.”

**Declan Sloan** (Branch 70), supporting the motion, said it was important that the four-day working week means “four standard days with no loss of pay and certainly no

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expansion of hours”.

**Colm Morgan** (Executive Committee), backing the motion, pointed out that this was current NIPSA policy agreed at the 2019 conference.

He said: “The motion details the benefits for workers of a reduced working week. The Executive Committee agrees and restates our promotion of this policy.”

*Motion carried.*

**Stephen Gowdy** (Executive Committee), moving **Motion 13** on NICS policy reviews, flagged up concerns he had found at local level among members about their pay, terms and conditions, and job security.

He told delegates: “One thing I noticed, everybody I spoke to was anxious and insecure about conditions, about pay. They had job security [concerns] – they didn’t know how secure that job is going to be for long term.”

While recognising the need to work with management on policy reviews, he cautioned: “In a time of scarce financial resources, reviews may be seen by NICS as an opportunity for efficiency and savings as it moves to undermine the terms and conditions of our members.”

What NIPSA had to do, he added, was to ensure “the line is drawn here” in protecting members’ interests.

Supporting the motion, **Declan Sloan** (Branch 70) quipped that if NICS management told him the sky was blue, he would “have to go outside and check!”

Warning of a “clear and present danger”, Declan told delegates: “We need to be on top of this – the Executive Committee need to make sure that any policy reviews certainly don’t impinge on our terms and conditions.”

*Motion carried.*

**Mark Gibson** (Branch 117), moving **Motion 14**, said NIPSA had been “delighted” by the recent success of large numbers of agency workers in gaining permanent employment in the NICS through the AO competition.

He explained that many of the successful applicants had been working for DWP Services for years and had as a result moved up the pay scale. This meant that some were already at the top of the AO scale. However, on securing a permanent position, they dropped to the bottom of the scale.

“They are in some cases finishing a shift on a Friday as an agency member of staff, taking up a new post on the Monday – sometimes in literally the same job – and doing so currently at a financial detriment of more than £1,500.”

Mark called on the incoming Executive Committee to approach NICS HR to ensure that workers in these circumstances have their time spent as agency staff factored in when calculating leave and pay entitlement.

Speaking in support, **Paddy McWilliams** (Branch 119) reminded delegates that agency workers had

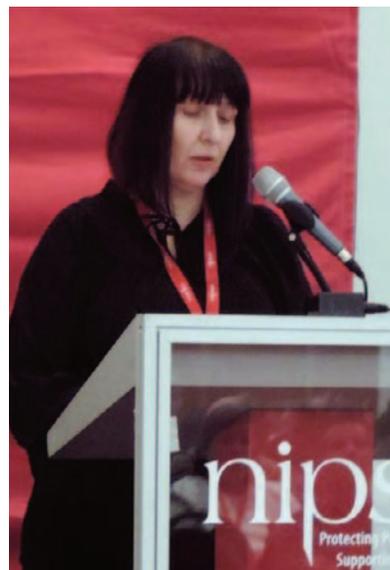
NIPSA worked very, very hard to get these young people full substantive jobs – only to find that when they did they were penalised with a cut in pay and a reduction in leave”



**Motion 13 Stephen Gowdy**



**Motion 19 Denise Crilly**



**Motion 10 Lorna Glass**



**Motion 25 Danny Lowry**



**Motion 14 Paul Soto Kelly**

supported NIPSA during times of industrial action: “They poured out of the building along with us. They stood with us.”

He said that agency workers taking a “£1,500 hit” after moving “from precarious employment into a career” was an absolute disgrace – and that NIPSA should argue for “day one rights” when such workers take up a position within the NICS.

Calling for remission, **Paul Soto Kelly** (Branch 171) informed conference that workers in NDPBs faced a similar situation to agency

workers in NICS.

He said: “Staff [in NDPBs] wishing to make a lateral move to the NICS [are] having to start at the bottom of the scale, having done maybe 10 to 15 years in the NDPB. They also lose the right for the extra five days leave built in over than five years.”

**Paul Cobain** (Executive Committee), in support, pointed out that agency workers contributed £150m a year to the Northern Ireland economy.

He said: “NIPSA worked very, very hard to get these young people full substantive jobs – only to find that



**Motion 14 Paul Cobain**

when they did [secure these positions] they were penalised with a cut in pay and a reduction in leave.”

*Remission fails, motion carried.*

“Work-life balance should be front and centre of any well-organised, well-run organisation,” **Denise Crilly** (Executive Committee) told conference as she moved **Motion 19**.

Workforce planning, which she defined as “ensuring the right people with the right skills are in the right places at the right time” was essential to the running of an organisation.



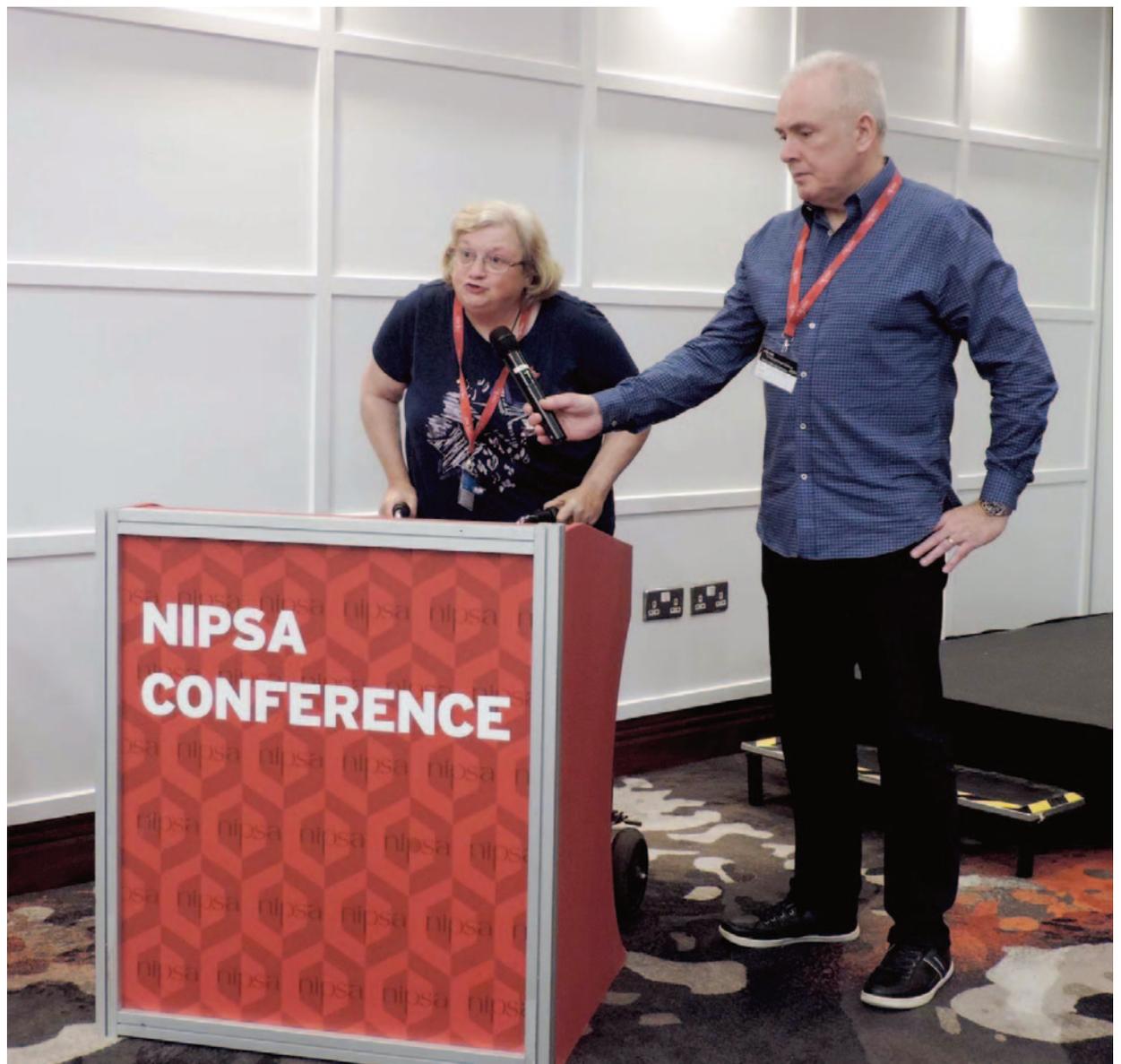
Motion 10 Oisín Cash



Motion 16 Brigidine O'Neill



Motion 28 Alan Law  
From page 4



Motion 9 Jacqui Agnew

NIPSA understood its importance and ensured that workforce planning was always on the agenda at Central Whitley level but cautioned that “none of this is possible without decent terms and conditions and decent pay”.

Denise also underlined the necessity of making NICS “an attractive place to work” to attract and retain staff “with the skillset we need” which would “provide a service that was fit for purpose”. *Motion carried.*

Concern was expressed to conference that NICS was continuing its “external recruitment by default” policy.

**Alan Law** (Executive Committee), moving **Motion 28**, said NIPSA was totally opposed to this approach and described the “whole exercise” as a “complete waste of time”.

He rubbished management claims that external recruitment “achieves equality in the workforce” and pointed out that NIPSA had gone through the 2021 census data and determined that this was already being secured through internal recruitment.

“We know that the objective – to

We know that the objective... is not being achieved through this process. We also know that it ignores the impact on existing staff, it completely demoralises people...



rebalance the workforce – is not being achieved through this recruitment process. We also know that it ignores the impact on existing staff, it completely demoralises people. There are hundreds of civil servants on temporary promotions – and external recruitment undermines those jobs.”

**Declan Sloan** (Branch 70) described it as “another field experiment by NICS” and called on the incoming Executive Committee “to roll it back”.

Speaking in support, **Andy Dunne** (Branch 119) said working for the NICS

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**Motion 28** Andy Dunne  
From page 5

was supposed to be a career but for a great majority of members, it doesn't feel like it.

He added that internal promotion was essential "for retention, innovation, to preserve institutional knowledge, and for its cost effectiveness".

**Mark Gibson** (Branch 117), moving **Motion 32**, told delegates that NIPSA was recruiting more and more agency workers as members.

He said: "We, as reps, do the best we can to represent these members but the truth is we don't often understand the difficulties faced by them. We need agency members of staff to be reps."

Explaining that it was impossible at the moment because agency workers were not given facility time to undertake union duties. He added that a Stage 1 reps course, for example, involved a 10-day commitment.

He continued: "It's a huge problem and a huge cohort of our members are not being represented. We therefore call upon the incoming Civil Service Group Executive to engage with NICS management with a view to enabling agency workers to be awarded facility time or similar arrangement so that time spent undertaking union duties or attending union training courses during work hours is regarded as time at work."

In support, **William Brooks** (Executive Committee) said the "concrete reality" was that agency workers were fast becoming the "backbone of the NICS".

He continued: "The precarious nature of how they work and the fears that can be put on them by line managers is something we have to be aware of. It's not just about us fighting for agency workers, we have to fight alongside agency workers. We have to have them as reps – that is the only way we can go through with this."

*Motion carried.*

**Paddy McWilliams** (Branch 119) moved **Motion 33** which asked for the Executive Committee to be given "detailed information" – including percentages and breakdowns – on previous industrial campaigns.

He told delegates: "If [as a member



**Motion 21** Ruaidhri O Sandair



**Motion 32** Mark Gibson



**Motion 2** Hilary Garland



**Motion 32** William Brooks

**Motion 12** Kerrin Joiner (below)





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of the Committee] you've been elected and entrusted to give a recommendation on a pay offer to our members, then you have to know enough about the circumstances around that offer.

"Those in the room negotiating with management need to know where our weaknesses are."

**Maria Morgan** (Executive committee), asked for remission, said: "The

Executive does not just look at previous efforts but at the current context. We look at the political climate, we look at the economic climate, we look at the social climate and we take the view of our members and of other unions.

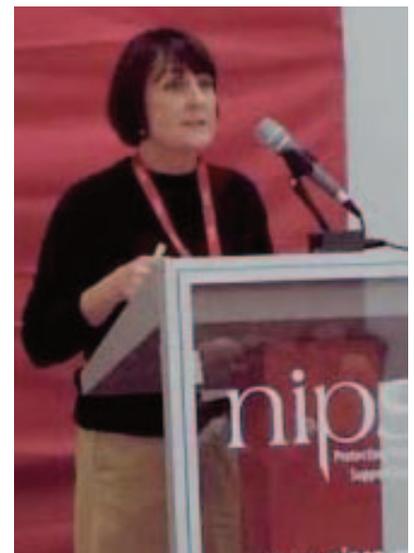
"Of course previous disputes will inform what we do, but we must live in the current context – that is the biggest informer of how we go forward."

*Remission falls, motion carried.*

We look at the political climate, we look at the economic climate, we look at the social climate...

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*More pictures on pages 8 & 9*



**Motion 33 Maria Morgan**



**Motion 33 Paddy McWilliams**



**Motion 34 Thomas McGarvey**



Motion 6 Heather Uprichard



Motion 12 Joanne Veighey



Motion 10 Ian Boersma



Motion 10 Val Russell



Union democracy in action: Mark Gibson (Branch 119) casts his vote



Motion 24 John Stewart (below)



Motion 2 Paul Dale



Motion 15 Enda McAtamney