



Questions to Unison General Secretary election candidates

November 2020

Grassroots Black Left Health Workers Group (GBL-HWG) wrote to all the candidates standing for the position of Unison general secretary, which will be decided this month. GBL-HWG, which has some leading Unison African Caribbean and Asian activists in it, asked 13 questions we felt were important to Black health and social care workers in determining the best candidate to represent them. Unison is the trade union with the most NHS members and, like GBL, uses the political Black term to describe African Caribbean, Asian and other people of colour. We informed the candidates we would be publishing their answers, which are given below.

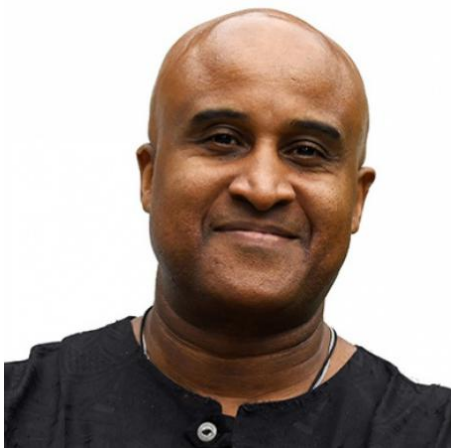
The candidates are:



Hugo Pierre (HP)



Christina McAnea (CM)



Roger McKenzie (RM)



Paul Holmes (PH)

1. What have you had to say about the way Covid-19 has disproportionately affected people in the Black communities, by which we mean Africans, Caribbeans and Asians?
 - **HP:** I condemn the Government for backing the last 10 years of austerity which have disabled our NHS from being able to deal with the pandemic. I condemn their hostile attitude to black workers and front line workers in general because of their attack on their rights at work including the Anti-trade union laws which have limited the effectiveness of trade unions in the workplace. I condemn their record of cuts and privatization of public services which has led to more front-line workers, many of whom are Black, to zero-hours contracts and low pay. I condemn the government for not acting, given there have been many recent reports on this, on the health inequalities faced by Black workers. Unfortunately, the disproportionate effect of this pandemic was wholly predictable once the nature of the disease became known.
 - **CM:** See question 2
 - **RM:** I have been very vocal at a large number of online meetings about the impact of the virus on Black workers and the Black community as a whole. I ran my own live streamed online meeting on 1 November where I discussed the impact of the virus on Black workers and the wider community with Black members and Bell Rebeiro-Addy. I have also given a commitment to establish a Covid Task Force within the union to tackle the issues that we currently face and to deal with the issues that are likely to be a fall out from the pandemic going forward which is likely to include a large scale cut in public service spending. Black workers have had difficulty getting jobs in the public services and if history is a good guide Black workers will bear a heavy burden in future jobs cuts. I will put in place a campaign against these job cuts and will make sure that there is a particular emphasis on the impact on Black workers. If that does not take place then Black workers will likely face a triple whammy from the pandemic by being heavily impacted during the two waves and then by any subsequent job cuts.

2. What would you do as general secretary to get the union to more effectively combat the way Covid-19 has disproportionately affected members of the Black communities?
 - **HP:** Black workers need additional protection in the workplace. All employers should be forced to have individual risk assessments for Black Workers which should include the right to not work in hazardous areas, whether or not they are front line workers. They should have backing from their trade union to access whatever PPE they need and the right to refuse to work if their employer fails to provide this with no loss of

pay. The trade unions must fight for this and I would make this a priority if I was elected UNISON General Secretary.

CM: (Q1&2) I have been leading the union's response to covid and have ensured this is a major priority for the union, producing guidance and advice for branches and members on the impact of covid on black workers. I have raised it in every meeting with government ministers and officials . I have coordinated our work in raising this with public health bodies, submitting our response to the inadequate report produced by the government, pursuing a legal strategy and model letters and templates for branches and members to use. As AGS for Bargaining and Equalities for the union I have ensured this has been raised with employers and that we are keeping it high on the agenda and insisting on risk assessments for all black workers. Going forward I will work with our Black Members committees and bargaining groups to fight for a full public enquiry and that black workers and their families are supported in their claims for justice. I was the only trade union representative on the governments Social Care Taskforce and ensured the issue raised by UNISON Black care workers were taken into account. I have been the unions spokesperson on many Covid issues and have raised the impact on Black staff in numerous media interviews on Tv and radio over the past 6 months.

- **RM:** Many of the Black workers affected by the virus work in private sector care homes. These are often very poor employers and where we have very low union density. I would therefore prioritise building strong union organisation in the private care sector as well as mounting a campaign to bring these services back in-house. The number one priority would be to ensure that our members were Safe in the workplace. I would ensure that all employers put in place comprehensive risk assessments. If these risk assessments were not forthcoming I would support our members exercising their rights under health and safety legislation not to attend a workplace where their safety was compromised.

3. How have you fought the creeping privatisation of the NHS?

- **HP:** The privatization stopped being 'creeping' some time ago. I have supported many local campaigns against privatization in Health.
- **CM:** See question 4
- **RM:** I have spent my whole working life campaigning against the privatisation of the NHS. I don't agree with the characterisation of privatisation as creeping. I believe that privatisation including the introduction of the internal market in the NHS and the Private Finance Initiative as a clear public policy decision by successive Governments - both Labour and Conservative. I have also fought to ensure that workers in the private sector who are delivering services in the NHS get the full benefits of any nationally agreed pay rises. They were left out of the last pay agreement - many of these workers are Black women. I worked hands on with other

Organisers in my team to deliver a 17% pay increase to members working for a large private sector body operating in the NHS.

4. What would you do as general secretary to get the union to more effectively combat NHS privatisation?
 - **HP:** The Tories have used the pandemic to use the NHS as a brand rather than a service as they have turned to the private sector to deal with the pandemic; testing, track and trace, safety equipment, ventilator production etc. It has all provided to be a shambles and ineffective. I would start by demanding the Government use their emergency powers to bring all the suppliers, testing labs, track and trace and other Health Services under the direction of the HS in conjunction with Local Authorities where necessary. I would demand democratic oversight of this plan of production by the trade unions and elected representatives acting on behalf of service users.
 - **CM: (Q3&4)** As Head of Health for the union fighting privatisation was a key priority and I led many campaigns to stop services being outsourced or transferred to wholly owned subsidiaries. And to get services brought back in house – this involved coordinating targeted and specialist support for these campaigns, and raising the issue with government. I have been to many rallies and demos across the union to support local campaigns. Going forward I would ensure there are sufficient resources in regions and branches to mount successful campaigns. I would build on the work I did in the health group to provide specific specialist support which can analyse proposals and provide robust rebuttals and alternative strategies. This has proved successful in a number of high profile campaigns to date.
 - **RM:** I have given a commitment to establish an Anti Privatisation Unit within Unison to provide the policy background to bring services back in house. The second element needs to be the political campaign that needs to be waged to not just stop privatisation but to bring services back in house. A large part of what the NHS is involved in relates to social care. I support a National Care Service. This should though be on the basis of ending a role for the private sector in the delivery of social care. I think that its essential that the union needs to be strong enough on the ground to enable us to end privatisation in the NHS. That's why identifying and developing more activists in the union is critical. I have set a target of 100 thousand activists within the union.

5. What would you do as general secretary to get the union to more effectively support and get more influence for its Black members in the work place and the union's structures?
 - **HP:** I would do two things: inspire black members to become active with a positive programme for change that relates to Black workers and ensure the organizational structures take up those demands on behalf of all workers.

- **CM:** I would work with our black members networks in UNISON to review the participation of Black members. UNISON is running leadership courses for Black activists and staff and this could be extended. I have a long history of supporting self organisation in the union and would ensure this was fully supported at all levels in the union.
- **RM:** I have spent my whole working life supporting and building Black self organised groups around the trade union movement. I think we should strengthen the Black self organised structures within Unison so that they are not, as they often currently are, an after thought. I want to see all of the self-organised structures within the union involved from the beginning in all of our strategy development and work. I am keen to see that we end the process of defining certain issues as so called Black issues when all issues impact Black workers. All too often Black members are excluded from discussions unless the terms race, racism or Black are involved. Whilst we always have a specific view about the rise of racism in the UK. This sort of approach can minimise the voice of Black workers. I have given a commitment to put in place regular direct meetings between myself and the national Chairs of the self organised groups and to which I would invite the national president to attend. I would also ask each region and nation to put in place similar arrangements.

6. What would you do as general secretary to get the union to more effectively support Black workers who are disproportionately on zero hours contracts, in the lowest pay grades and the last to be hired and first to be fired?

- **HP:** I would launch a campaign against the use of zero hours contracts throughout the union and demand that public sector employers stipulate to contractors that this is not allowed in their contracts. I would also launch a campaign to bring all-public sector contracts back in-house.
- **CM:** I would lead a national high profile campaign to end zero hours contracts. I have been campaigning against them for many years and have made this a focus of our social care campaign where 40% of homecare workers are on ZH contracts.
- **RM:** I think my answers to previous questions relate to this. I think that we are only able to tackle low pay and precarious work is by building strong union organisation. Our strength as a union comes from the number of members who are active in their places of work. I would also increase the political campaign to tackle low pay as well as zero hours contracts. I support Labour Party policy to eliminate zero hours contracts and I will prioritise keeping that as policy within the Party so that a future Labour Government will legislate against them. I think we should also consider litigation against employers to show racial bias in pay arrangements. I would ask our legal team within Unison to investigate the scope for doing this.

7. How have you campaigned against the NHS surcharge levied on migrants?
- **HP:** I have opposed it and campaigned locally.
 - **CM:** I have been the main spokesperson for our union in the campaign to support migrant workers and coordinating our work across our bargaining groups. I have frequently spoken out on this issue in the media, I have spoken at various conferences and events on this. I was the co-chair of the Cavendish Coalition – a group set up to look specifically at the impact of post Brexit employment issues on the health and care workforce and which has taken the lead in arguing for open access and support for migrant workers in this area.
 - **RM:** I have raised this issue in online meetings, social media and in articles in national media outlets such as The Morning Star.
8. Do you support Black self-organisation and Black self-determination?
- **HP:** I do support both. However I strongly believe this is to ensure that the whole trade union movement fights to defeat racism in the workplace and wider society.
 - **CM:** yes as Assistant General Secretary I have responsibility for the work the union does on self organisation including with Black members.
 - **RM:** Yes of course! I have spent my whole working life setting up and/or establishing Black self organised groups across the trade union and Labour movement. I am a former Chair of the Labour Party Black Sections movement and I am one of the founders of the Global African Workers organisation that came out of an international conference that I organised through Unison nearly two years ago.
9. What would you do as general secretary to get the union to more effectively support its Black members who are disproportionately disciplined by managers and would you support industrial action as a means of backing them?
- **HP:** UNISON should demand Equalities information from employers on this at a local level on this and call them out publicly. UNISON should be launching employment tribunals but more importantly ensure there is support for industrial action in the workplace to combat this.
 - **CM:** This is major issue for our Black members and I have been involved in ensuring this is raised with employers across the union's bargaining groups. There is a specific workstream on this in our health negotiations. When I was head of health I spoke at many events on this issue and have led workshops with managers on it. I have been involved in surveying Black members on this and keeping it on the agenda at NHS England. If UNISON members voted for industrial action to resolve this I would support it.
 - **RM:** I would make sure that the Race Protocol that already exists within the union is actually implemented by regions. I would ensure that all activists and officers undergo regular training so that they can recognise and act on race discrimination cases that occur within workplaces. Yes I would most certainly support industrial action if thats what our members wanted to do and as

long as it was real industrial action rather than any kind of superficial action that has little impact on employers.

10. What do think should be done to get more Black people on health trusts, including as chairs?
 - **HP:** I would call for all Health Boards to be democratically elected positions voted on by the local populations.
 - **CM:** See question 12
 - **RM:** I support the view that positive action measures need to be taken to ensure more Black people on to Health Trust boards including as Chairs. To do that there should be specific training programme put in place to support more Black people to become ready for these roles. This could be along the lines of the work carried out by Operation Black Vote.

11. What do think should be done to make health trusts work more effectively for the Black people they serve?
 - **HP:** I would call for the abolition of the current trust system as it is undemocratic, unaccountable, not transparent and remote to service users. I believe the NHS should be democratically run at all levels. That way Black workers have a chance of challenging the widespread Health inequalities they face. I would also end the use of PFI and cancel any debts associated with it to free up resources that are currently crippling many trusts. I would also end all internal market measures and completion measures that have seen Trust – takeovers on a large scale.
 - **CM:** See question 12
 - **RM:** I think part of the answer to this can be seen in my response to question 10. I also think think that Health Trusts should do much more to prioritise Black community engagement. That will not necessarily be the same in every Health Trust but there should be a clear and measurable duty for them to do so.

12. What do think should be done to get more Black-run GP practices?
 - **HP:** We need to ensure that Black young people have access to a proper education so that they can aspire to becoming GPs. We have to set up practices that are accountable to local people and owned by the local population not individual GPs. The management should then be democratically accountable to the needs of the local population.
 - **CM:** (Q10,11 & 12) I would be very happy to support UNISON working with black health groups to support initiatives and raise theses issues.
 - **RM:** In common with what I said for an earlier response I think we need to put in place programmes to prepare Black GPs to run their own practices. We also need to be clear what the obstacles are to Black run GP practices. Action plans with measurable outcomes need then to be put in place.

13. How do you think social care can best be taken away from the private sector and reintegrated into the NHS?

- **HP:** I believe social care must be taken back into the public sector – both care homes and home care. It should be organized on a national basis and be jointly operated by Local Authorities and the NHS. It requires substantial investment to ensure the work is paid a professional salary, organized on a professional basis and there is substantial career development to end the criminal shortage of workers.
- **CM:** I believe we need a National Care Service which is publicly funded and publicly provided. This would need to be able to coordinate across the NHS and Local authorities. There needs to be a clear workforce strategy ensuring a standard contract, decent pay and conditions and a training and grading framework. This could be part of the AfC but it may be a stand alone pay structure.
- **RM:** The short answer is with political will! There needs to be the political will to end the role of the private sector in social care. When I first became an activist in local government in the early 1980s I represented members in care homes in Walsall. It was entirely run by the Council. Now more than 90% of social care provision is carried out by the private sector. This needs to be reversed. The creation of a National Care Service would offer an opportunity to bring about removing the private sector and reintegrate the service into the public sector where it belongs.

PH: Did not answer the questions put to him. Instead he replied to Grassroots Black Left Health Workers Group member Jocelyn Cruywagen, who is convenor of Lambeth Unison's Black Members Committee, to say: I would point you towards the recording of our Black Members Rally held recently on 29th October: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEhSchEKA1U> This should help explain my own and our grassroots campaign's policy positions and my record on fighting racism, including through industrial action within my own branch. One of the speakers at our rally was Tommo, a black member from my branch (Kirklees), who took successful industrial action against racist bullying of bin workers in Kirklees, 25% of whom were Afro-Caribbean. I hope you will want to review this recording and that it will help you judge my record of action and our campaign's policy positions. This meeting was a public rally and so available for you to attend subsequent to receiving your list of detailed questions. Any of these questions could have been raised within the public rally, but I believe a number are addressed within it. I would also invite you to review the content on my campaign page: <https://www.facebook.com/Paul4GenSec/> There are a number of statements, policy positions, and videos relating to race, racism, Covid-19 and the health service. Our campaign is genuinely a grassroots one with widespread support, and this distinguishes it from the other campaigns. I hope this helps.