Despite widespread criticism in the media and across the health care sector, secretary of state for health Andrew Lansley is ploughing ahead with damaging reform of the NHS in England contained in the Health and Social Care Bill.

“There is very little support for this bill from anywhere. Many GPs are opposed to it, as are patients, NHS staff, clinicians, charities, think tanks, MPs and unions. Lansley’s vanity project is undemocratic, unaffordable and unnecessary,” UNISON’s general secretary Dave Prentis said.

The reforms, if delivered, will allow private companies to manage commissioning and service provision on behalf of GPs, and ultimately turn the NHS into little more than a brand name attached to a range of competing services within a fragmented health system. Already the big health companies are circling the NHS waiting to exploit the changes.

The Bill will also remove the cap that restricts the amount of money hospitals can make from private patients that pay for their care, potentially pushing NHS patients to the back of the queue.

UNISON members have been lobbying their MPs and held a protest outside the Houses of Parliament. UNISON is continuing to build opposition against the plans and attempting to make changes to the bill in its passage through Parliament. Already, Mr Lansley has performed a u-turn on his threat to introduce price competition into the NHS, although as things stand the operating framework being proposed still allows for price competition.

For detailed information on the bill read UNISON’s Rebutting the Rebuttals briefing, available at unison.org.uk/ournhs

Join UNISON’s Our NHS, Our Future campaign to stop these damaging reforms. Model letters to MPs and GPs, posters, leaflets and other resources are available on the Our NHS, Our Future website unison.org.uk/ournhs

UNISON slams Lansley’s damaging reforms
Health members to join demo in support of public services

Health conference delegates and visitors will raise their voices against the onslaught of cuts and damage to public services by this government.

UNISON members attending this year’s health conference will build on the success of the national demonstration held in London on 26 March, where UNISON members, friends and families marched alongside community groups, services users and other trade unions in support of public services.

A demo will be held outside the conference centre in Liverpool on Tuesday 5 April from 12.45pm until 1.45pm for everyone attending health conference. A wide range of speakers will address the challenges we face and provide a rallying call to all of us who care about public services.

Handbook puts spotlight on duty of care

A new version of UNISON’s popular duty of care handbook will be launched at health conference this year. The handbook aims to help all health and social care staff to maintain the duty of care, particularly when there is pressure on services. It is intended to assist good practice by giving guidance on how to tackle concerns about unsafe practice effectively and positively.

“At a time of change, patients depend more than ever on the integrity of care professionals, this handbook provides valuable guidance when it may be hard to know the right thing to do and even harder to do it.” Harry Cayton, chief executive of the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence said about the handbook. The handbook will be launched at the duty of care focus group event at health conference on Tuesday 5 April from 3.20pm to 5pm.

Protect Our Pensions campaign steps up a gear

UNISON is stepping up its campaign to protect our public sector pensions as we face new threats from the government’s budget cuts. The government has already made changes including moving the inflation rate measure from the retail price index to the consumer price index, which will mean smaller annual pension rises. And they also plan to increase employee contributions starting in 2012. To achieve the level of savings the government is aiming for requires a contribution increase of around 3.2% of pensionable pay. This means that for a member currently paying 6.5% of their salary into a pension scheme, the level of their contribution would increase by almost 50%.

Alongside these changes, the Public Service Pensions Commission, led by John Hutton MP, has undertaken a fundamental structural review of public service pension provision. Hutton’s recommendations could lead to major changes in the future structure of our public sector pension schemes and the benefits they deliver.

The big challenge for us over the next few months is to build a network of workplace pension contacts to help strengthen
our campaign and to keep members informed. For more information on the Protect Our Pensions campaign, and to sign up to be a contact, please visit the UNISON health care stand at the conference exhibition or email protectourpensions@unison.co.uk. Keep up-to-date on the government proposals and how they will affect you at unison.org.uk/pensions.

Major overhaul of safeguarding schemes

After ongoing pressure and campaigning by UNISON, the government has announced that the vetting and barring scheme (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) regime (England and Wales) will be thoroughly overhauled.

The requirement for individuals to register with the vetting and barring scheme will be scrapped. Now, only those who are barred and therefore not able to work with children and vulnerable adults will be put on a named list. Criminal record checks will be limited to those working closely with vulnerable groups and the checks will be made portable and more streamlined. UNISON will be pushing for further improvements and seeking to clarify the details of these proposed changes.

Living wage commitment in Scotland

Following pressure from the UNISON Scottish health committee and the living wage campaign, employers and the Scottish Government have agreed to implement a living wage in 2011/12 across NHS Scotland. Assuming the promised £250 increase for the lower paid goes ahead, the plans would boost the minimum hourly rate for NHS staff in Scotland to £7.29, benefiting an estimated 4,500 workers at an annual cost of £2m on the NHS Scotland paybill.

“This is far more than a fringe benefit, it goes to the heart of the household budgets of working people struggling to make ends meet”, chair of the UNISON Scottish health committee Tom Waterson, said.

Northern Ireland cuts create health care crisis

Following repeated warnings by UNISON, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department of Finance and Personnel has finally acknowledged that there is funding crisis facing health services.

Following a reduction in the funding that Northern Ireland receives from Westminster, there is an estimated £2.3bn black hole in the health care budget over the next four years.

Across Northern Ireland, UNISON is stepping up the fight against cuts. Members have expressed their outrage at the situation, demanding that a clear strategy is put in place to address this fundamental gap in the budget which is putting the health of people at risk.

Welsh members put outspoken Assembly candidate in his place

Ian Gunning, Conservative Welsh Assembly candidate for the Vale of Clwyd outraged UNISON members when he said the NHS had “had its day”.

“These comments are a betrayal of the NHS. UNISON members in Wales will work to defend the NHS. Privatisation is clearly on the Conservatives agenda and we will reject it,” healthcare support worker Jan Tomlinson said.

“No now we know the truth about the Tories’ plans for the NHS,” said Margaret Wilkinson, chair of Cymru / Wales Labour Link. “The NHS has not had its day and we will work hard to ensure that the Tories in Wales don’t have the chance to destroy it.” For more information on UNISON Labour Link go to unison.org.uk/labourlink.

Forthcoming seminars for 2011

**Nursing and midwifery professional seminar**
11 – 12 May
An update for nursing, midwifery and healthcare assistant representatives on key national nursing issues.

**Ambulance branch seminar**
13 – 15 May
Workshops on terms, conditions and workforce topics, along with specialist sessions that should be interesting no matter which part of the ambulance service you work in.

**BAOT/UNISON national OT stewards’ seminar**
2 – 3 November
An opportunity for BAOT/UNISON stewards to discuss key industrial relations and professional issues affecting occupational therapy staff.

Further details of these seminars are available from UNISON branches.
Branch campaign beats outsourcing

Like many branch activists coping with reform of primary care services in England, Claire Campbell and Karen Guy know that the strength of a campaign lies with members.

When Nottinghamshire County PCT announced plans to put all its services out to tender, including 3,000 staff and a budget of over £100m, it signalled the biggest sell-off in the history of the NHS.

Under the leadership of branch secretary, Claire, and branch chair, Karen, the local branch seized the opportunity to engage with members, keeping them informed at every stage of the negotiations and tendering process via email, workplace visits and meetings. UNISON members knew what was happening and the staff side had real strength.

“We learnt a lot from past experience, we gave regular updates to members and they got on board and fed information back to us. It all filtered out to non-members who wanted to join the team”, Karen Guy said.

Our NHS Our Future - publicity material available

UNISON has produced a range of Our NHS Our Future material that can be ordered via the website or by emailing stockorders@unison.co.uk and quoting the stock number, quantities and delivery address.

You can view some of the latest items on the ‘Resources’ section of the Our NHS Our Future website: unison.org.uk/ournhs

Above left: A5 two colour leaflet spelling out the dangers of the government’s plans for the NHS (stock number 2938).
Above right: A4 two colour Our NHS Our Future poster, ideal for noticeboards in the workplace. (Stock number 2945)

UNISON’s on line print service lets you add your own text, logo and pictures to our design and have your leaflet/poster printed and delivered direct to you. It’s the easy way to produce professional leaflets and posters to help with local campaigning.

If you want to find out more go to unison.org.uk/web2print/branch.htm (also available on a separate site for UNISON regions).