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University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

July 2017

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Welcome to our July newsletter. This month, we have an update on 2017-18 University pay, reaction to the demise of uni-info, information on training opportunities and some more on voluntary severance.

As you know, we don't often produce a printed version of the newsletter for obvious reasons, but you can find all the ones this year that you might have missed on our blog, which you can find by following the link on the right –hand side of StaffCentral.

You can also subscribe to receive updates on the blog if you're really keen.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

2017-18 National Pay Consultation for University staff

Thanks to everyone who made the effort to vote in our consultative ballot over whether to accept or reject the 1.7% (with slightly more for grades 1 to 3) offer for 2017-18.

The result was:

	Result	Turnout
City Campus	85.4% Reject	40.6%
Moulsecoomb & Hollingbury	59.6% Reject	39.9%
Falmer	75.7% Reject	44.0%
Eastbourne	60.0% Reject	36.6%
Hastings	66.7% Reject	42.9%
TOTAL	67.8% Reject	40.6%

So our members voted two to one in favour of rejecting the offer and moving to a formal postal ballot.

However, as we expected, the results on a national scale were suggesting that there wasn't such a mood for taking action. The results were mixed, but the overwhelming majority of higher education branches returned an accept vote with around 71% of members nationally voting to accept. Almost the exact opposite of our branch!

Maybe the fact that this Branch Committee recommended a reject vote made a big difference to our result, but in any case, we need to understand the feelings behind the national result, as well as accepting the logic of a democratic decision, however many qualifications we have to put against the accuracy of a consultative ballot.

Consequently, the Service Group Executive (SGE) have decided that there will be no further steps to increase the offer made. If it turns out that UCU and other unions do move to a formal ballot later in the year, then we will aim to overturn the SGE decision, so that we can ballot alongside them. A consultative ballot is only supposed to be about testing the mood, and as we know, things can change very quickly.

We think it's worth trying to see what a proper postal ballot would show.

So, as a Branch Committee urging a reject vote, we're disappointed in the national situation, but can't further our claim on our own as long as we retain the national pay bargaining system. It would be a brave move to pull away from this, but if the government gets away with further fragmentation of higher education and more competition for students, then this might be something we'd have to talk about and we'd want to know what our members think.

Next year, we will be arguing that the SGE should show more of a lead by developing an effective strategy and actively campaigning for a national effort to use our members' collective strength to win a meaningful outcome.

What was enormously encouraging was that fact that we achieved the largest number of reject votes of any higher education branch.

A massive thank you to all our members who voted, however you did.



UNI - INFO: the end of the era of free speech?

Many of us saw this coming sooner or later, but it's finally happened. The University powers that be have decided that they can no longer accept the long-held tradition at the University, of members of staff being able to communicate freely.

No amount of postings to "Announcements", "Discussion boards" or "Event listings" will make up for the fact that any of us, if we had the nerve or spontaneous impulse could email upwards of 4,000 people in one go, safe in the knowledge that most of those would delete it anyway without reading it.

It is true that many people did not like the constant interruptions of people selling things or items of lost property, but we think that's a small price to pay for a culture where everyone was able to say what they thought, however off the point or problematic it might have been.

The demise of uni-info was justified as part of a strategy to improve information and communication, with a survey of staff apparently suggesting that unsolicited emails to all was irritating. We're sure that some people said that, but we think that most would support the right of all of us, to say what we think, where it became necessary or just to let off some steam.

It's no coincidence that this decision has landed just at the point where some staff are threatened with redundancy and the University is trying to encourage some people to leave. In the last year, we've had comments on the ending of Modern Languages, the closure of Hastings campus and the withdrawal of Christmas meals, which have ranged from deadly serious to trivial. Many comments have been critical of the University's direction and the significant change in culture which is driven by the government's drive to turn us into a business, supported by some senior managers with a "what can we do but go along with it?" attitude.

What's also disappointing is that part of the justification goes back to the usual excuse of conforming to what other Universities are doing, as if being like all the others is the strategy and we will succeed as an institution if only we can be like Sussex or Surrey or Portsmouth.

Many people liked working here because it was different, and Brighton, like the town, has (had?) a strong element of independence, with a feeling that we did things slightly differently here. This culture is being slowly chipped away, with the end of uni-info being the latest in a line of very unpopular decisions, that will do nothing for staff morale or making people feel trusted and valued.

If anyone has a burning desire to let us know what they think then please don't keep it to yourself. Let us know and we'll print the best comments in August's newsletter, anonymously if necessary.

More on Voluntary Severance

The deadline for applications has now passed and all expressions of interest will now be assessed, before meetings between those who've applied and heads/directors start in August. At these, applicants will be told that either the University does not want to lose them or that the University has agreed in principle that they can go for the agreed amount.

If you are taking the process a stage further, our advice would be to seek professional information about pensions, mortgages and benefits. If you're a member then we can arrange for a UNISON solicitor if you want us to, or you can sort it out yourself.

Ultimately, you have until the point where you sign the document to change your mind, so please don't feel rushed into a decision at this stage.

What's more of an issue for UNISON, is the small but significant group of people who are currently at risk of redundancy and we are doing our best to make sure that nobody leaves the University without a chance of redeployment or a settlement that they are comfortable with.

Please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions.

Learning Grants and Open University Grants

If you're interested in applying for a course, see if UNISON can do anything to support you first...

Learning grants

These grants of up to £100 are intended to help members studying at their own expense on the following types of courses:

- Trade Union and Labour Studies where an applicant has not received a bursary
- Non-vocational education up to and including under-graduate level
- Vocational education relevant to public service work up to and including under-graduate level.

Grant Criteria

Grants are offered on a first-come, first-served basis until funding is spent. Funding becomes available at two points in the year: 1st January and 1st September.

They can be used for study on any general development course or any career-related course relevant to working in public services, including public services delivered by private contractors. Support is not available however for qualifications linked to licence to practice or more generally intended to meet an employer's statutory and/or legal responsibilities (e.g. health and safety).

A copy of your course registration and proof that you are meeting the full cost of fees yourself will be required before a grant can be paid.

You must be a member of UNISON for at least 4 weeks prior to applying for a grant, have no arrears of subscriptions, and continue to pay membership subscriptions during the time you are supported by a grant.

Each member can receive one UNISON learning grant only in each calendar year, up to a maximum of four grants.

Grants are made at the discretion of the NEC Development & Organising Committee.

The course you wish to study must start in 2017.

If you want to find out more, please speak to Cathy Peters, C.F.Peters@brighton.ac.uk.

FREE trade union courses at Sussex Downs

Sussex Downs College are trialling a new project starting in September 2017 where they will be providing FREE courses either online or using workbooks to be completed at home (the students can choose). The September pilot will be Equality and Diversity, but we intend to roll out other subjects such as Understanding Mental Health, Counselling Skills, Understanding Nutrition and Health plus many others.

Accreditation is via NCFE and will result in Level 2 Certificates being issued. The courses take an average of 8 – 10 weeks to complete and no classroom attendance is required.

You don't need to be a union activist, just a union member, but please get in touch with Cathy (C.F.Peters@brighton.ac.uk) as soon as possible if you want to find out more.

RETIRED? STAY IN UNISON

As a UNISON member you benefited from the essential cover that membership of the union gave you. Now that you've retired you can still have access to our range of benefits and deals and play an active part in your union by becoming a retired member.

It costs just £15 to become a retired member. This one off payment means you can:

- participate in UNISON's democracy
- have a voice on issues that matter to you
- benefit from a wide range of exclusive member discounts that can save you and your family money when you are shopping, buying insurance or looking for a holiday.

You qualify to become a retired member if you were a UNISON member continuously for at least two years on the day you retired.



Our Retired Members' Secretaries are organising meetings and social activities, so if you're due to retire or know a member who is then please contact us for further details.

October School Holidays

For those of you caring for children at schools which now allow two weeks for the October half term, we are aware of issues with booking leave. We have flagged this up as a potential issue, but if you have any problems with managers being awkward about booking reasonable time off for childcare, then please let us know.