



*Our newsletter is free to all members.  
If you're reading this and you've not yet  
joined, why not strengthen our union and  
join today?*

## University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

**March 2017**

[blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison](http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison)

**Facebook: UNISON at University of Brighton**

**Welcome to our March newsletter, particularly if you're new to our union.** It's been a struggle to get this done before the end of March with everything that's been going on, but we're happy to say that we've just about managed it. By the end of the month, it seems likely that UCU will have taken their first strike. There's more on this over the next few pages.

As always, we welcome any points or questions that members want to make about anything to do with working life at the University.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

### Annual General Meeting

Thanks to all those who could make it to our AGM earlier this month.

The picture below doesn't really do the meeting justice, since we had more than one person there (we counted 68) and the placard in the picture behind us does not necessarily refer to what we were saying.

**Our guest speaker, Kath Owen** from Leeds University Student Union (and a member of the Higher Education Service Group Executive) spoke about democracy and the challenges facing trade unionists over the next few years



with the introduction of the Trades Union Act and the trend towards more casualisation. Cath stressed how we are campaigning to get every university to sign up with the Living Wage Foundation.

At the discussion and questions which followed, we addressed issues of the UCU dispute, the implications for our members and how we can better get our messages across to all at the University. We agreed to produce more material, including a video—coming soon!

We elected a team of nine branch officers and endorsed 13 local stewards and health and safety reps.

## Annual General Meeting (continued)

Since the AGM, more members have come forward to volunteer to play a part in building our branch, which we're very pleased about.

We also had a meeting at Grand Parade to try to address some of the issues which members have brought up, such as unrealistic expectations of maintaining student experience whilst student numbers increase and heads are cutting back on facilities. There are also numerous health and safety issues caused by accommodation changes.

We'll have another meeting for members at City Campus at the end of April.

We'll be looking at the AGM, what was good, what not so good, with a view to improving it for next year, at our Branch Committee in April, so if you have any suggestions on what we could do to make it better then please feel free to let us know.

We are seriously considering how we can make the AGM less Moulsecoomb-centric by having it across more sites with different meetings. Maybe lunchtime is a good time for most people but hopeless for other members. Is there a better time and place to have it?

What do you think?

## ***NEC Elections – Please make sure you use your vote!***

UNISON's National Executive Council (NEC) is the body which runs the national union in-between conferences. It is elected every two years and all UNISON members get to vote for who they want to be on it.

Elections will take place from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> April this year and we are all able to vote for two National Higher Education Seats, three South East Regional seats, and National seats reserved for Black members and Disabled members.

Ballot forms will go to home addresses at the start of April, so **if you don't get one then it's likely that your address details held by UNISON are incorrect.**

You can change this yourself online: <https://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison> or you can contact us and we'll update it for you, but you will need to contact UNISON nationally to request a ballot paper if you didn't get one in the post by the first week of April.

We'll send out more details to coincide with the start of the election, along with our branch nomination details.



## **Communications - to uni-info or not uni-info, or you uni-info if you want to...**

Everyone has a different view about uni-info. Many people are happy to delete stuff that doesn't interest or concern them, some people are sick of being bothered with calls for papers and flats to let. A lot of people set up email rules to dump all uni-info emails into a different folder and may not look at anything\*, whether it's a crucial email about something that we all need to be aware of or a request to do a survey on how much you like surveys.

Over recent years, we've normally taken the view that communicating to all 5,300-odd members of staff in one go is not necessarily the best way of doing it, so we've tended to use our own distribution list. That way, all our members get to read what we're saying (if they want to) and we don't bother the people who are in UCU or who have not joined a union, for their own reasons.

But relying on our own lists means that it may not be obvious to some people what we're doing or what view we're taking, so we think a carefully worded uni-info email is worth it now and then, just in case people forget we're here.

For most members, we're using your work email, but if you would prefer our emails to go to a different email account to your work one, then just let us know and we'll change it.

\*In case you missed it, here's our latest contribution to uni-info, about the UCU dispute:

***The UNISON branch fully supports UCU in taking whatever action it feels is necessary to defend the terms and conditions of its members.***

*What is at stake here is not just the three issues identified – jobs in Arts and Humanities, academic promotions and fundamental changes to contracts, but also the rights of all staff to work at an institution which maintains an effective working relationship between senior managers and the trade unions.*

*Working people do not take strike action lightly, but the overwhelming result of UCU's ballot for action demonstrates the depth of feeling of UCU members. As many UNISON members are telling us, the current leadership of the University are drifting to a position where confrontation and non-negotiable announcements are the norm rather than the spirit of constructive discussion, which had been the tradition at Brighton for many years.*

*Senior managers will say that this is necessary to deal with the challenges faced by the University as a result of government policies, student numbers and funding changes. We argue that turning this institution into an education factory with more casualisation and fewer employment rights is precisely what students are not in favour of. There is an opportunity to demonstrate that Brighton can be different and can show current and potential students that its workforce is less stressed, properly rewarded and highly motivated.*



*The anti-trade union laws, specifically designed to prevent trade-unionists from effective campaigning to support the rights of their members may have postponed the planned action, but we will do whatever we legally can to support UCU members later in the month.*

*If UNISON members have any questions, any of our officers, stewards and reps will be happy to answer them.*

*As always, we would encourage all members of staff who have not yet joined a union to seriously consider doing so. It is only by sticking together, and organising on a democratic basis that we can make sure that our rights at work are protected.*

## ***UCU Dispute Latest***

At the time of writing, UCU members have decided to take half a day of strike action on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March, followed up with two full days after the Easter holiday, if the management do not offer further changes to planned redundancies, hourly paid lecturers' contracts and academic promotions.

As we've stated elsewhere, we support UCU and hope that the dispute is resolved before anyone loses any pay, but defend their right to strike if they consider it necessary.

Since the industrial action was agreed democratically, all UCU members should be on strike and the UCU picket line is primarily designed to make sure that their members respect that decision. Pickets will also ask non-UCU academic staff to join them and join the union, as well as explaining the situation to students and asking them not to go onto the premises during the strike.

Support staff may be asked not to cross the picket lines, but we have to be clear that since we are not formally in dispute, UNISON members cannot legally strike at the same time. We can talk to pickets and give them our verbal support, but UCU members will respect the fact that most of us will be working on strike days.

What UNISON members should not be doing though, is undermining the strike by completing any work which a striker would normally be carrying out. If any members are asked to, they should refuse and contact their local steward.

UNISON members who wish to register their support more vocally can, of course, book annual leave to cover strike days, where possible, and give lots of encouragement to UCU members. For striking workers, to know they have the support of other workers is invaluable.

UNISON members can also sign the petition:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdjSJSzqZW8dbc3mFMiKi82dybLQ0u9dpeBFMp11bgCdCEC9A/viewform?c=0&w=1>

(...which is easier to access from UCU's website, which you can get to from StaffCentral.)

If you have any questions about the dispute, the strike or what we can and can't do, then please feel free to get in touch.

## ***Higher Education Conference 2017***

Our branch had a record four delegates and four visitors to this year's annual conference of UNISON's members across universities. We passed motions on mental health support, bullying, disability, the gender pay gap, leadership accountability and outsourced workers, amongst other subjects, and our



branch's motion committed the union to make the demand of a £10/hour minimum wage "central to future national pay negotiations."

Conference agreed that the initial pay claim for 2017-18 should be based on a payment

of £1,200 or 7.5%, whichever is higher, with £10/hour as an additional demand. This will be modified by the other unions to formulate a national pay claim to UCEA, the employers' organisation.

More news on this when we have it...