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# University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

**May 2017**

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This month's newsletter comes out as parties are campaigning for your vote in the upcoming general election. The Lobbying Act means that there are tight rules on what this branch can say or do, but we'd urge all our members to vote for whichever party they think best supports public services.

If you want to know UNISON's national position on the election, or to find information about UNISON's **Public Champions** campaign, then it's all at [www.unison.org.uk/](http://www.unison.org.uk/).

This month's newsletter features information on pay, stress and technical demonstrators. As always, please let us know if you have any comments.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

## 2017-18 Pay Latest

### *Students' Union*

Pay at the SU is negotiated locally. After asking our members what they thought, we have submitted a pay claim for **2.0%** plus **1.0%**.

To quote the claim,

*"BSU staff have seen the value of their earnings fall in recent years as pay fails to keep pace with the cost of living. The national rise to the cost of living is felt deeply in the South East, perhaps most prominently so through the rise in the cost of renting property. This is a focal aspect of inflation which sees the lowest paid employees suffer most.*

*BSU must endeavour to mitigate these costs by paying staff at a competitive rate in what is a growing sector. Whilst hard to show, there is strong consensus among members that pay is behind university staff for most equivalent roles. This is in spite of BSU staff consistently delivering a standard of service which goes above and beyond expectation.*

*This pay claim constitutes a reasoned response to these factors, acknowledging employer limitations but also highlighting the need to motivate staff by fairly compensating them for their efforts at work."*

We will meet with the Students' Union management in the first week of June to discuss their views and report back to members as soon as we can.

### *University*

At the last meeting between the employers' organisation (UCEA) and the five trade unions across higher education, UCEA made their "full and final offer". This is **1.7%** for all spinal points except for those at grades 1, 2 and 3 where the offer is equal to roughly **£365**, making the percentage increase at this university range from 2.3% at the start of grade 1 to 1.7% at the top of grade 3.

## 2017-18 Pay Latest

This is the best offer which UCEA will make without members taking action, or at least threatening to.

Higher education branches are therefore consulting all their members on whether they would like to accept the offer or reject it, which would mean organising a formal ballot for industrial action.

This branch sees the offer as wholly inadequate given where inflation is, where it's expected to go and the number of years that higher education workers have been forced to manage with less. **We'd urge all our members to reject the offer on the basis that we can campaign for more.**

Throughout June, we want all our members to give us their response—either accept or reject, so please watch out for your chance to have your say. More details to follow...



## FEELING STRESSED!?

Work related Stress is becoming an ever increasing problem in the workplace. It can affect employees at any level of the organisation and recent research shows that work related stress is widespread and is not confined to particular sectors, jobs or industries.

Work is generally good for people when it is well designed, properly organised, managed with clearly achievable tasks being set. The problems start to arise when insufficient attention has been given to job design and work organisation or where clear communication by managers as to organisational change is lacking. It is worth remembering as the HSE point out that work related pressure is not the same as stress.

Work related stress develops because a person is unable to cope with the demands being placed on them. If not dealt with properly and at an early stage work related stress, can be a significant cause of illness and is known to be linked with high levels of sickness absence, staff turnover and the quality of an employees work often begins to suffer.

Recent statistics prepared by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show the following:

- The total number of cases of work related stress, depression or anxiety in 2015/16 was 488,000, a prevalence rate of 1,510 per 100,000 workers.
- The number of new cases was 224,000, an incidence rate of 690 per 100,000 workers.
- The total number of working days lost due to this condition in 2015/16 was 11.7 million days. This equated to an average of 23.9 days lost per case.
- In 2015/16 stress accounted for 37% of all work related ill health cases and 45% of all working days lost due to ill health.
- Stress is more prevalent in public service industries, such as education; health and social care; and public administration and defence.
- By occupation, jobs that are common across public service industries (such as healthcare workers; teaching professionals; business, media and public service professionals) show higher levels of stress as compared to all jobs.
- The main work factors cited by respondents as causing work related stress, depression or anxiety (LFS) were workload pressures, including tight deadlines and too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support

These figures don't tell the full story since stress is probably underreported as many people feel admitting to stress is interpreted as a personal weakness.

As an organisation within the Higher Education sector the University of Brighton is not immune to workplace stress and UNISON has seen a clear increase in the amount of casework where stress plays a part.

A lot of members have already been contacting us concerned that existing vacancies aren't being replaced, but they are expected to cover the extra work. If the numbers of staff in a department are being cut, then we expect management to talk to remaining staff about how to reorganise the workload, taking their welfare into consideration.

**We are expecting more cuts to come, and staff can't keep doing more and more without it affecting their health.**

If you feel that stress is an issue within your job you should not suffer in silence. An employer has a duty of care towards its staff and under the Health and Safety at Work Act an employer has to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their staff. In addition, employers have duties under common law (non-statute) to take reasonable steps to ensure health and safety at work. Employees should not put under undue pressure or set unachievable goals with increased workloads and insufficient resources.

## What Can Be Done?

As a union we will help every single one of our members to hold management to account and make sure they fulfil their duty of care toward its staff. If you feel you need help to cope with work related stress contact your line managers and/or HR and let them know. Also contact your local UNISON rep and inform them of the situation, they will be happy to help support and advise you through this process. If stress is becoming a problem in your job, ask for a Stress risk assessment to be carried out and make sure management/HR follows the agreed timescale to do this. This will be the first step to getting help and hopefully finding solutions. Ignoring the signs of stress will only make things worse in the long run.

When you are experiencing work-related stress it can seem like there is no solution but often simple steps can be taken to improve matters and our branch will provide expert support and advice.

- Request possible flexible working arrangement.
- Seeking clarification of your exact roles and responsibilities.
- Asking your managers for extra training or support to help with workloads.
- Ensure that channels of communication or reporting are adequate. Regular work meetings may help.
- Know the grievance process and be willing to use it to ensure that your issues are properly addressed. Management will want to resolve matters prior to your lodging a formal grievance.

The important thing to realise is that you are not alone and that your Union will support you to realise your rights.

We as a branch don't feel that the University has done enough to recognise or address the problem of work related stress and we believe it is time for the University management to engage more with this serious issue. A first step towards doing this is to arrange an organisational stress survey to ascertain the level of the problem within our workplace and then using this as a basis to find solutions.

Safety and Welfare Committee (which is a joint body representing management and unions) has agreed to conduct a university-wide stress survey in October. In the meantime, we will continue to bring attention to areas of concern and demand that the University takes all cases seriously.

*UNISON's National Delegates Conference is due to take place from Tuesday 20th to Friday 23rd June at the Brighton Centre. All members can attend as visitors for some or all of it (in your own time if you're not an activist).*

*If you'd like to see UNISON's democracy, then please get in touch and we'll sort out your visitor badge.*



## UCU Dispute— lessons for UNISON and what we have agreed, and what we haven't

This branch is very pleased that UCU members have reached a settlement with the University after only having lost half a day's pay. The fact that UCU could convince a clear majority of their members that it was necessary to threaten strike action in order to be taken seriously, shows the loyalty of UCU members to their leadership, but also that sometimes it is necessary to remind the University that the trade unions are not just here to be consulted.

Over the last few years, we have seen the drip, drip effect of the "staff costs are too high" mantra taking hold, with heads of schools and departments forced to see what else they can cut. Many of our members are stressed as a result of changes proposed without explanation and no clarity of any decision making processes. We have increasingly seen a lack of any willingness to negotiate anything. UCU have shown that if you want to negotiate on a point, then you need to turn to your members and threaten to stop work.

If the University wants to cut back on the number of staff, with all that it would involve for the systems and processes that keep the University functioning, then UNISON will also be forced to consider the best strategy to defend the collective interests of our members.

We recognise that many of our members will have been perturbed by some of Deputy Vice Chancellor's choice of words to explain the summary of the UCU/management agreement.

UNISON has agreed to be involved in the process to review the duties carried out by the hourly-paid workers at the centre of the dispute. Out of that independent review, will hopefully come an agreed job description **for those people** into the future.

**We have not agreed to a change in job descriptions for existing staff who are wholly or partially demonstrators, since we recognise that many of these roles are unique with specific skills.**

Our position is that all support staff have the right to question their own job descriptions and query points with their line manager if they feel that an update or changes are necessary.

As one of our stewards has already pointed out, many demonstrators are already under increased pressure because of rising student numbers and the extra efforts they need to make, to manage new intakes who increasingly require additional support.

If, as a result of the review of the hourly-paid workers, there are implications for demonstrator roles, we would look to consult with members and determine a way forward, but we are not in the business of changing roles or responsibilities just to make the number of job descriptions easier for HR to manage or perhaps more to the point, to make the demonstrator role more generic, against the wishes of our members.

After Chris Pole's email, we asked for the wording to be amended, to correct any misunderstandings.

The request for the Deputy Vice Chancellor to use uni-info and send a follow up email to clarify the point has not, at least up to now, been granted, which perhaps highlights some of the issues facing us.

We have held some very productive meetings with technical demonstrators and will continue to do so as long as the issue is live, but please feel free to get in touch if you want to discuss more details.



*Thanks to all of you who voted in the elections to UNISON's National Executive Council. Most of the candidates this branch nominated have won or retained their seats, with **Kath Owen** (who spoke at our AGM) and **Sandy Nicoll** now representing Higher Education.*

*The full results can be found on UNISON's national website.*