



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member then you're inadvertently weakening our ability to defend each other, so please join!

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

November 2017

blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison

Facebook: UNISON at University of Brighton

As I write, UCU are continuing their campaign to defend two workers who are threatened with compulsory redundancy. If the University management don't negotiate to an acceptable conclusion then further strikes will take place in December.

Many of our members have been supportive of UCU members, offering food and drinks to pickets and joining the lunchtime protests last Thursday. Many UNISON members are asking if and when we can strike.

Taking strike action not something to run into without careful thought and preparation.

It's necessary to make sure all members are aware of the situation, appreciate what's at stake and willing to lose a day's pay to defend the situation or fight for something better. For many of our members, a day's pay is not something that can be sacrificed easily.

In this case, UCU have shown that on the issue of redundancies, they are united behind an overwhelming ballot in favour of strike action—an impressive 85% ballot result, given the limits imposed on (non-official) University communication with regular “information” giving one side of the story.

Faced with a similar situation, which affects members' jobs, pay and conditions, we would need to make some serious decisions about how we respond. These decisions would be democratic and involve the widest group of members as possible. A consultative ballot would be the first stage in gearing up our members, by patiently explaining the issues, so that enough members take the decision that being prepared to strike is the only way to win concessions and/or major improvements for all of us.

Irrespective of this dispute, the lack of a willingness of this government to fund higher education properly means that it is entirely possible that we will be faced with having to take action in 2018 to win a half-decent pay settlement. We will aim to do this alongside UCU where we can.

Workers taking collective action is not something that only happened in the 1970s. As working people are more pushed into a corner, while the money is there to pay us properly, we will seek to act. For us, the collective answer to our problems is the only way to defend what we have and improve the working lives of all.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary



Staff Open Meetings

Many of our members will have attended the open meetings as “a chance to talk about the issues that matter to you and ask questions”.

If the one I went to was typical, there was a good 40 minutes of speeches from Debra and other UEB members. (Is it just me, or my age, but does UEB sound like a group of people who would want to sell you electricity?)

We were told the good news stories— they have planning permission at Moulsecocomb, they got a silver status for the TEF and they brought in more students this year than they planned. (Not all in the right places, but a university like Brighton can't have everything.)

There is to be heavy investment in buildings (funded from reserves—let's hope they don't borrow more) and a continued investment in trying to build research.

A few questions followed, but the general theme of the meeting was that some things are great, but most things are mediocre and need to be improved. Improved by us all working harder that is.

What was missing was any recognition of the efforts made by staff, the morale levels and the fact that a major dispute with UCU was round the corner.

In the words of one of our members, [I] pointed out that nothing of these could have been achieved without our hard working staff. I mentioned specifically that focus should be given on staff; there are not any bonuses given or any significant salary increase, the staff morale is very low at the moment; many people are leaving, positions are not filled on time, this puts more pressure on teams, there are not many career progression opportunities for staff that have been working in the university for years and they want to remain working for the university.

Someone else told me:

I have not worked anywhere before where so many people have stress related illnesses and are either on medication for it or in some kind of CBT or counselling. Myself included.

Its about time that UEB actually have a look at how their staff are feeling and act upon it. I think that the general consensus is that UEB don't care. Not only that, it might be worth them taking a look at the amount of people leaving the university to work elsewhere because they have had enough?. I think that Sussex are doing quite well out of this. It seems that many are jumping ship.

Staff morale is not entirely down to the University, since many people are dealing with the problems faced by workers elsewhere. Since the crash of 2007-8, living standards of most people have fallen and there is little prospect of things improving in the near future without working people fighting for it.

What appears to have happened at the University, is that staff are increasingly unhappy, expected to do more work for real terms pay cuts, while senior managers fail to recognise that any problems exist at all.

We'll be taking up some of these issues, but fundamentally, they come down to a management which is severely out of touch with its workforce.



The University is once again in the top ten of UK universities “ranked by environmental and ethical performance.” This represents a massive achievement for all those who have worked towards this in all parts of the University and we congratulate them.

But closer inspection of the details reveals an abysmal 10% score on workers' rights - the same as last year. This is due to a failure to become a living wage employer, embrace Fairtrade or make any commitment to buying from ethical supply chains. We'll have more on this in the next issue...

Vice Chancellors' pay

There's been more in the news lately with the VC for the University of Bath attempting to suggest that a further pay rise of £17,589 on top of her £451,000 salary is entirely reasonable.

Here at Brighton, our VC struggles on a mere £237,585, although the controversy over the values of VC pay has prompted a lengthy "justification" over why this is appropriate and reasonable.

Apparently, "she takes the same salary increase awarded to all staff at the university and waived her contractual right to a performance bonus" We're all in it together then.

Except that 1.1% awarded this year was worth £2,585, admittedly less than Dame Glynis Marie Breakwell awarded herself, but enough to make a difference to people increasingly struggling to live in the South East. We've been waiving our bonuses for years it seems.

We're not opposed to professional people being well paid, but we're not convinced the quarter of a million pounds of public money/student fees is value for money given that it could fund half a dozen people, and is more than double what it would cost to retain the people which UCU are striking over!

Given that the University has consistently opposed our suggestion of becoming a Living Wage employer, (currently committing it to pay a minimum £8.75/hour), we think that other VCs raking it in elsewhere does not excuse the vast gulf between University employees struggling financially and those at the top. (£237,585 is £123/hour.)

The website says "the university's Remuneration Committee, made up of members of its Board of

Governors, sets the Vice-Chancellor's salary in line with the ACEVO Good Pay Guide, ensuring that remuneration levels are linked to a regular and objective system of performance appraisal and benchmarked against comparable roles."

In other words, mostly unelected people from the Board form a secret group amongst themselves, who then decide how much the VC is paid, as long as the answer is similar to that of other Vice-Chancellors.

A solution to this problem would be to introduce a maximum wage and stick to it. Imposing a limit of say £75,000 would give all senior managers enough to live on and the money saved (probably several million) could be spent on other things. UEB would be more in touch with the problems faced by the rest of us and could legitimately say that student fees are invested in their education rather than contributing to a publicly funded gravy train.

In terms of University democracy, some of us would be happy with a Board of governors elected directly by students, staff and the wider community, but for now, we'd settle for an appreciation that the pay of senior members of staff being so distant from ordinary workers needs to be dealt with, rather than excused.

Standing together for fair pay.

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UNISON South East

A graphic with a pink background. On the left, the text "Standing together for fair pay." is written in white. To the right is a white handprint. Inside the palm of the handprint, the text "£10 now" is written in pink. Below the handprint is the UNISON South East logo.

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A green heart icon is on the left. A green car is on the right. The background is a blue sky and green grass.

LGBT Members' Conference 2017

Members of our branch went to UNISON's national conference to discuss and debate issues relevant to LGBT people. If you're interested in UNISON's LGBT section, contact Emily Brooks, our LGBT Officer.



PAY UP NOW!

You don't need reminding that working people have seen their pay fall behind inflation for many successive years now. UNISON is campaigning on a national level to argue that caps on public sector pay, both official and unofficial, are lifted and all public sector workers should expect to see an inflationary uplift that rises at least with the official increase in prices.



With inflation currently around 3% and likely to stay or increase, it is more important than ever that we improve the confidence of our members to struggle for better pay. It's not going to happen otherwise.

So, as part of UNISON's national pay up now campaign, we'll be holding stalls wherever we can over the next few months. This is to explain the issues and encourage members to get involved and non-members to join us. Please let us know if you're free at lunchtimes to help and we'll work around wherever you're based and what times you can offer.

We don't normally have adverts in our newsletter, but why not? If there's anything that you want us to publicise then we're happy to as long as readers appreciate that this isn't an official endorsement.

Whether you want to improve your posture, reduce joint pain, add some strength and flexibility to your exercise routine, or strength your core and back, Pilates can help achieve these aims and many more. Rebecca Haroutunian, former Communications Manager at the university, is now a qualified STOTT Pilates instructor and back care specialist. She is also a pre and postnatal exercise instructor and offers classes, courses and 121s across Brighton and Hove. Go to www.bn1pilates.com for more information or contact her at rebecca@bn1pilates.com