



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member, you can join and vote in the pay ballot, but you need to get a move on!

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

October 2018

blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison

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NATIONAL STRIKE BALLOT— VOTE YES FOR STRIKE ACTION!

If you haven't voted yet, we really need you to do so now!

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, all members working directly for the University should have received a ballot paper at their home address.

If you've got it and you've posted your response back, thanks very much for helping to achieve the 50% turnout that we need to be able to act on the results.

If you haven't then please do everything you can to make sure you play a part in the democracy of our union.

We want to know what you think, not just because we're interested, but because we think that the pay increase we've been offered is not good enough. It is well below inflation and a real terms pay cut, as we've tried to explain on page three of this issue.

That said, even if you're happy with it, we still want you to vote so that your voice is heard.

It's absolutely crucial that all members return their ballot papers by the 25th October deadline. Page two shows you how.

With UCU also balloting and Unite balloting their members at some universities, there's a real chance this year of a united campaign over pay, with action threatened across the whole sector.

Ideally, we won't need to strike if the employers recognise that we're serious about going through with it, but if we don't have a mandate to strike then we're accepting another reduction in our living standards.

Please don't just be a passive member. You've joined union for a reason and you now have a chance to play your part in it.

Make sure you vote and we can make a real difference for all of us.

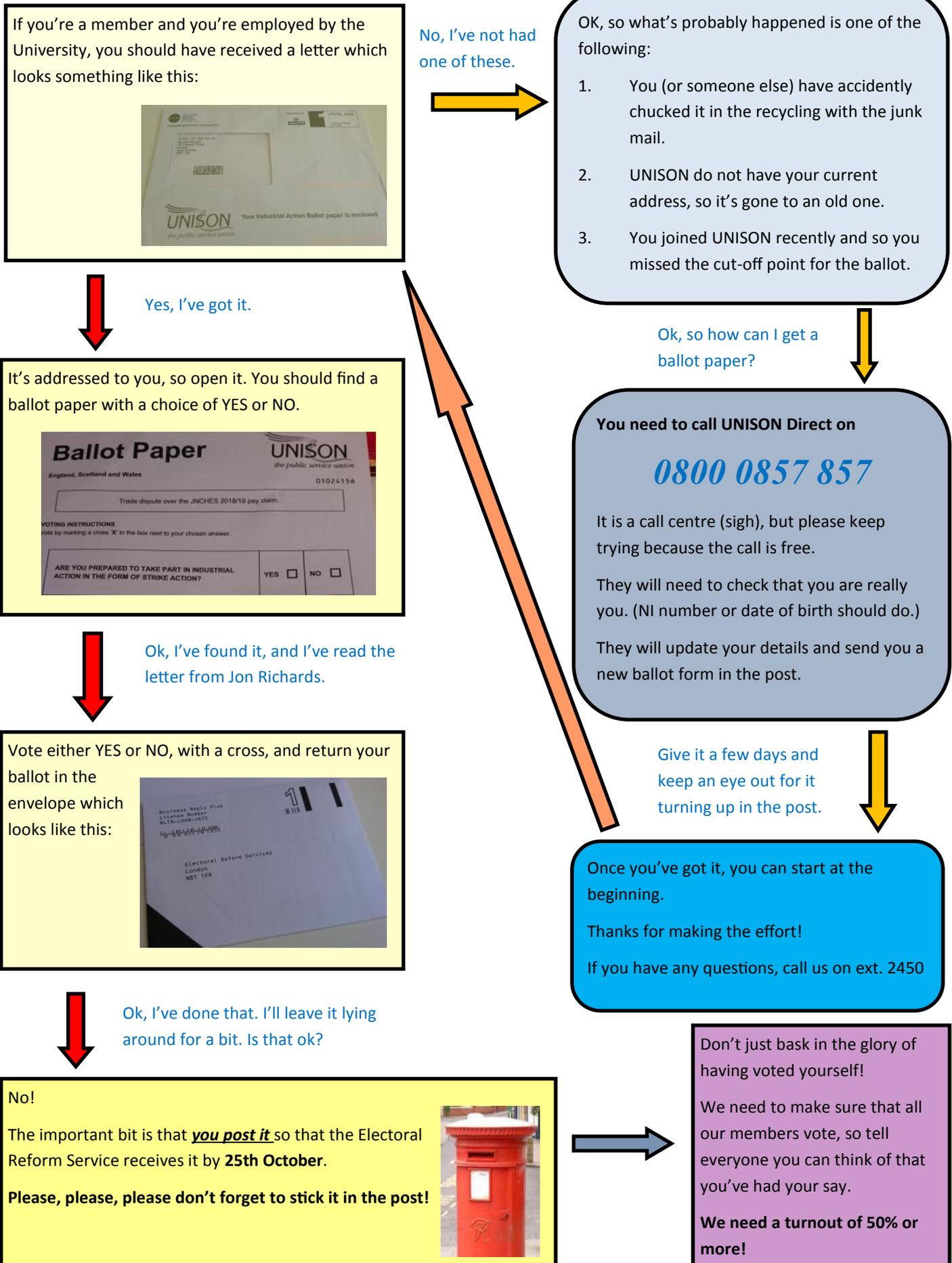
Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

VOTE YES for strike action



Here's our fool-proof guide to voting in the Pay Ballot:

We know this sounds really patronising (sorry), but we need to make sure that everyone votes and understands how to.



Inflation: why 2.0% (or even 2.7%) is not enough

(with apologies if you know all this already)

Inflation is the rate at which the general level of prices is rising.

At the time of writing, the retail price index (RPI) is increasing by 3.5% and the consumer price index (CPI) is going up by 2.7%. (The difference is largely due to RPI including housing costs.)

These measures give a rough indication of what things cost compared to a year ago, so something which cost £10.00 a year ago, will probably cost about £10.35 or £10.27 now.



This matters to those of us who rely on our wages to live, because if we don't increase our income to cover the increase in costs, then we're facing a pay cut in "real terms" i.e. real terms of how much our money can buy.

So, if the rate of inflation is really 3.5%, for the stuff we bought a year ago which cost £10.00, we need £10.35 to buy the same stuff now, but our 2.0% "increase" will only give us £10.20. So if we accept 2.0%, we have to buy fewer things. The 2.0% "increase" is only an increase in cash terms. **In real terms, it's a 1.5% pay cut.**

If you're paid say £24,983 a year (top of grade 4), you need to have your pay increased to £25,857 to cover a 3.5% increase in prices. The 2.0% increase you've just got might sound much better, at £25,483 (£500 more), but it's still £374 less than you need in real terms.

2.0% is better than nothing, but it's still a pay cut! (Without unions we'd get nothing of course, but that's not the point.)

We don't think we should accept this. We've tried to negotiate for more, but the only way we can get more is by threatening to take strike action.

Please make sure you vote and encourage others to do so. We can't afford to see our wages fall for another year.

VOTE YES for strike action



Stress at Work

For the past few years or so, we've been concerned about the levels of stress that many of our members have been under.

We appreciate that we all do different jobs under different circumstances, but the message we often receive is that far too many people are suffering from work-stress, caused by the pressures of work.

The University has a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its staff "as far as reasonably practicable". This includes the mental as well as physical health and safety.

The staff survey was far too limited in terms of properly assessing stress levels of the University workforce (as we've documented elsewhere) but still revealed many of the results which we expected. Many people don't feel like they have the resources to do their jobs properly, in terms of time, equipment or people and many said that they don't feel at all involved in decision-making.

The most obvious causes of stress are too much work with impossible deadlines or feeling under pressure to cover for absent colleagues.

With a new intake of students, many front facing staff are expected to cope with varying student numbers and students with varying abilities. We are all for widening participation and a diverse student population, so if we're to do justice to the potential of a wide range of students, it's necessary to allow time for them.

Staff under pressure cannot do this, and there's a vicious circle of students not feeling valued, staff under pressure and poor NSS results. These things are all related.

The focus groups and school/department attempts to address the issues thrown up by the staff survey will not solve the problem. That's not to suggest they're worthless, but they are failing to address the central issues, which are:

- Sufficient staff to provide a good service (to students and other members of staff)
- Effective cover for absent staff members
- Effective communication and involvement of staff in decisions made

Much of this is financial and under the control of UEB, and we accept that the current official level of funding is limited, and largely dependent on student numbers.

To address the problems properly, we need a higher education system which is properly funded through progressive taxation, which allows for universities taking students with varying levels of ability.

Our current pay dispute emphasises that universities should be resourced properly to allow for sufficient staff which are paid appropriately.

We'd urge the University Executive Board to support our campaign.

In the meantime, there's an urgent need to address the stress levels of all members of staff by dealing with staff shortages properly and looking at where there's a need to target resources.

Members suffering from stress should ask their manager to do a stress risk assessment and/or contact us for support and advice.



Black History Month

There is so much in history that gets left behind, erased or marginalised, particularly when it comes to Black history. Black History Month (October) is a time to counter that by celebrating achievements of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people throughout history. This year there are many events at the university running throughout October to celebrate Black History Month...

17th Oct, 1pm-2pm, Huxley 401 - 'Black is the New Black' film screening

22nd Oct, 6:30pm-8pm, Sallis Benny Theatre - An evening with Akala

24th Oct, 11am-2pm, Watson Building - 'Since You Call Me Coloured' by Timothy Sessanga art display

25th Oct, 6pm-8pm, BMECP Centre - Staff & Student quiz night

If you would like to know more about these events then have a look on staffcentral or contact

RaceAndFaith@brighton.ac.uk

Race Equality Survey

This year the university will be running a Race Equality Survey to try and address some of the challenges we face as an institution relating to race inequality. We would encourage all of our members to take the time to complete the survey, regardless of your own race identity. It is so important that the university hears from as many people as possible to get an idea of the varied experiences we all have.



UNISON Black* Members

Did you know... UNISON has a self organised group for Black* members, working to improve equality in the workplace and challenge racism and discrimination. If you would like to find out more or get involved then please get in touch with Emily Brooks, our equalities officer, at e.l.brooks@brighton.ac.uk

**In UNISON, Black is used to indicate people with a shared history. Black with a capital 'B' is used in its broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in Britain that have suffered colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.*

VOTE YES for strike action



Staff Survey Focus Groups

Anybody got any ideas which aren't already obvious?

For anyone who hasn't been to a focus group yet it feels like it's worth a report on one I went to recently.

First, a bit of background:

About two years ago, we recognised that many people were feeling overworked and undervalued, with multiple cases of people suffering from stress-related illnesses. We wanted the University to conduct a stress survey to assess the scale of the problem and address it. They didn't. This debate dragged on for long time.

Eventually, a new Director of People was appointed and the idea of doing a Staff Survey was floated. We said, ok, as members of the joint Safety and Wellbeing Committee, we're happy to accept a Staff Engagement Survey as a proxy for a survey on stress, provided that the survey actually includes sufficient stress-related questions, something along the lines of the model surveys recommended by the Health and Safety Executive.

So, we discussed the Staff Survey and agreed various bits, but by the time it came to a last minute agreement on questions, we had a few hours to argue about what went in and what was excluded. In the end, a staff engagement survey with a very limited number of questions relating to stress was what happened.

The survey itself threw up responses that none of us were surprised about, hence the current attempt to address the discontent amongst the staff. We've had school/department-wide meetings and now the focus groups are collating bullet pointed issues, which we all know anyway. People are generally fed up for the same reasons.

So, I went along to a "Employee Wellbeing" session with around 12 others, mainly support staff and from a variety of workplaces. Whilst it's important to recognise that these people were all volunteering their time, and so probably had something to say, the striking thing was that the vast majority were unhappy about the current university leadership and wanted improvement on staff-levels, communication, joined-up systems, consultation and working accommodation, and they're just the issues I can remember. The point is that several years ago, most of the people in groups like this would have been reasonably happy with a few suggestions for improvements. Now, if this group was typical, they are generally tired of endless discussions and meetings to address the obvious problems, problems which the staff survey threw up, when we could have listed them several years ago.

The feedback from the focus groups will now go to UEB and somewhere along this process there's an "Oversight Group" involved.

At the end of all these meetings, if the outcome is not adequate resources to fund sufficient staff to cope with the workload and cover the number of students we have properly, then people will see the whole process as a talking shop with ideas that can't be done because there's no money.

Some experts would say that organisations need to put their employees first if they want them to work hard and effectively as a whole unit. The working-better-together comes once people are already happy at work and feel valued.

"Putting students at the heart of the everything we do" is fair enough up to a point, but for many, this is increasingly code for giving students whatever they want, because they're paying, whilst staff are overworked and undervalued, but ultimately expendable. I don't think this is a sustainable strategy and whilst we have to recognise that UEB are at least making efforts to act on what was a pretty terrible staff survey outcome, we're still waiting for things to change, which hasn't yet happened as we're all busy talking.

Support the Wetherspoons Strikers

Our branch is pleased to support members of the Bakers Union taking strike action for the first time ever at the Bright Helm and Post and Telegraph in Brighton. On 4th October, they will join workers from McDonalds, TGI Fridays, Deliveroo and Uber Eats, campaigning for a £10/hour wage, union recognition, better working conditions and adequate notice of rotas.

The Wetherspoons strikers have already received massive support from the Labour and trade union movement in Brighton and we're pleased to support their struggle.

Come and join us at Brighton Clock Tower, Thursday 4th October, 6.30pm.

