



*Our newsletter is free to all members.
If you're not a member, you need to join
now to get a vote in the pay ballot.*

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

September 2018

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NATIONAL STRIKE BALLOT— VOTE TO REJECT THE OFFER

Following the consultative vote on whether to accept or reject the “final” 2% or £425 offer, UNISON is organising a national pay ballot. This is our opportunity to decisively reject a pay offer which is below inflation and represents a real-terms pay cut for all higher education workers.

Ballots papers will be posted to members’ home addresses on 14th September and members have until 25th October to return them. We would, of course, give members the option of an electronic vote, but anti-trade union laws dating back to the 1980s prevent that.

More recent legislation dictates that we have to achieve a turnout of at least 50% to be able to take any action, so it’s important that all our members do their best to make sure their vote is returned by post by the deadline.

We think that 2% is not enough. Inflation is around 3.2% and we’ve all seen the price of things that real people have to buy—food, travel and rent increasing, so we want you to vote to reject the offer and we can start to campaign more effectively, to receive a pay increase that our members deserve.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

**VOTE YES
for strike
action**

**Have
your
say**

**on
HE
pay**

Hitting the 50% threshold

Under the Trade Union Act 2016, at least 50% of those entitled to vote must do so for an industrial action ballot to mean anything. Many would say that's entirely reasonable, but you need to appreciate this in the context of what the legislation is trying to do and what is generally understood to be democratic.

Before March 2017, UK strike laws were already the most restrictive in what we'll call the developed world. Legislation brought in by Tory governments of the 80s and 90s, which was never repealed during the Labour government years which followed, outlawed voting by a show of hands. So workplace meetings, where trade unionists could discuss the issues and make an informed choice in the workplace were abolished in favour of postal ballots sent to home addresses.

Apart from the obvious costs involved in managing this, a trade union has to deal with ballot papers which go missing or never reach their intended recipient. More to the point, the postal ballot rules mean that members votes are made as individuals, isolated and away from the workplace, the antithesis of trade unionism.

Obviously we're generally in favour of secret ballots if we or members are concerned about management singling out "trouble-causers" as was the case in the early years of trade unionism, but for ballots to have to rely on thousands of pieces of paper posted around the country in the 21st century, the technique is antiquated on purpose, entirely designed to make it difficult for us.

The 50% turnout requirement, given the context, is a perversion of the democratic process. It effectively means that for every 1,000 members balloted, at least 500 have to vote and if they do, at least 251 have to vote for action, but if only 251 vote for action and no-one votes against, the 100% result in favour of action on a 25% turnout will render the ballot irrelevant in legal terms.

Part of the theory behind this is based on a consistent pattern of, stable, real-terms pay cuts, so that active trade unionists can only stick up for themselves if enough of them can be motivated enough to take the difficult step of withdrawing their labour.



If you have no opinion, then you're assumed to have voted against doing anything, when of course the reality is that you've not expressed an opinion either way.

The entire system, when combined with postal only ballots and the options of legal challenges, if the data we need to supply to employers is not perfect, is rigged in favour of nothing happening, which is of course the point.

So the challenge we face is not so much getting people to vote to reject the final offer as they have already done through consultation, but getting members to vote, particularly those who may never have voted in a trade union ballot before, or those in other university branches where the organisation and infrastructure of the union is not so well developed as it is here.

We aim to do everything we can to make our turnout as close to 100% as we can make it, and encourage other activists in other branches to aim for 100% themselves.

It's not going to be easy, but we have a historic opportunity of being the first trade union to show this group of millionaires what we think of their undemocratic laws and deliver a majority turnout in a national pay ballot.

Our plan is to contact members individually during the latter part of September and early October to check that they have voted. We'll also be visiting members during the week beginning 10th September and making sure that all our members know how important their participation is. Please let us know if you're willing to help.

What you can do to boost our turnout:

1. Vote yourself!

It might seem obvious but it's easy to fill in your ballot form and then forget to post it. **Please make sure you stick it in the post!** (If you manage to do this by the end of September, if you want to email unisonhelp@brighton.ac.uk to let us know that you've voted, we won't waste time phoning you up to check that you have!)

2. Ask all your colleagues

All it takes is a gentle reminder that they need to vote. If you end up asking non-members then you can remind them that they can get a vote if they join now and ask for a ballot paper.

3. Check across your School or Department

If you're feeling braver, you can always contact people within your school or department to check that the members have voted. You can explain that there's little point having a vote if you don't use it!

4. Volunteer to help out

From 10th September, we'll be doing activity to recruit new members, and making sure that all our members have



voted. If you want to get involved then please feel free to give us a shout.

5. Make sure your friends and family know what's going on.

If you know of anyone else who works at a university, if they're in a union, the chances are they'll be balloted as well, so make sure they've voted.

The more we raise the general awareness of a ballot, the more chance we have of reaching 50%.

UCEA: the people who can't afford to pay us a decent wage

The vast majority of universities in the UK are members of UCEA, which means they rely on this national body to negotiate pay with national trade unions (UNISON, UCU, Unite, GMB and EIS).

So who are the people who run UCEA and who's elected them?

Well, in keeping with the usual democratic process across higher education, nobody's elected any of them. They're all appointed, effectively by the great and the good, and are invariably Vice Chancellors, a few Chairs of Council and one Chief Executive Officer (The list includes a certain Professor Julian Crampton CBE DL by the way.) The current or past financial circumstances of these people makes them utterly incapable of being able to judge what we all need to live on.



Professor Smith

The Chair of the Board is Professor Mark E Smith (not that one) of Lancaster University, who was paid £268,000 by Lancaster in 2016-17. His predecessor in 2006-07 was paid a mere £199,000, so the VC post at Lancaster had had a steady annual pay rise of about 3% a year, presumably to attract and retain the right people.



Mark Edward Smith

By contrast, grades 1 to 9 staff pay has increased by about 1% a year on average over the last decade from a starting point considerably less than that of Professor Smith and almost certainly all his friends on the Board of UCEA.

Now it's not true to say that because these people are all raking it in, it follows that we can all get a reasonable increase if they stopped. If we were to get our VC at Brighton to work for nothing for a year to fund our pay-rise, that would only account for about a 0.25% rise for us. Higher education funding from tuition fees and diminishing government grants goes to fund it all, so whilst it might be a legitimate debate about how that's shared out, to fund our pay properly, we need government funding coming the way of universities.

The point is that if these people genuinely think that higher education workers should "exercise restraint" and accept a below-inflation increase (i.e. a wage cut) then we'd be more inclined to accept their argument were it not for their blatant hypocrisy.

Hastings

As members will know, Hastings Campus is due to close after the final year have finished, so probably in the summer of 2019. We campaigned over the decision to close it, which was a political decision based on Hastings not fitting into where the University wanted to go, rather than an economic decision. The number of students there was not as many as any of us would have wanted, but that didn't mean that it should close.

Anyway, given where we are, we have asked, repeatedly, for a closure plan to give Hastings members some ability to plan for the future. As we write, this has still not materialised, despite us being told in April that it was a few weeks away.

We will continue to press for this, and will continue to campaign for the best possible outcome for Hastings members of staff, whether they want to be redeployed to Brighton or Eastbourne or claim the redundancy payments they are entitled to.