



University of Brighton UNISON branch

Annual General Meetings 2023

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1. Welcome

Our AGM this year takes place across all four university sites as follows:

City Campus	12 noon/12.30pm, Monday 6th March	Grand Parade 204
Falmer	12 noon/12.30pm, Tuesday 7th March	Checkland E423
Moulsecoomb	12 noon/12.30pm, Wednesday 8th March	Mithras House G4
Eastbourne	12 noon/12.30pm, Friday 10th March	Aldro Building 112

Each meetings starts at 12.30pm with a free buffet lunch from 12 noon.

Each meeting will be hybrid, with members also able to join remotely via Teams through the usual UNISON Meeting Team. Members attending the meeting this way can join from 12.25pm.

This is experimental, so please bear in mind that those on-line need one person talking at a time. Those on-line, please bear in mind that we won't be able to monitor the chat very easily and also that we won't tolerate any rude or abusive messages!

Our aim is to make sure we maximise attendance across all four sites, so please come along to the one that works best for you, either in person or on-line.

2. Minutes of the meeting held 9th March 2022

The agenda and papers for last year's meeting can still be found our blog.

1. The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, which was held via Teams due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. The minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting were agreed as a correct record.
3. The financial return and branch budget was agreed.
4. The branch action plan was agreed.
5. Branch officer as proposed were agreed for the coming year.
6. Stewards and health and safety reps were agreed.
7. Changes to branch rules were proposed and agreed via an on-line vote.*
8. The Branch Secretary addressed the meeting, discussing the on-going situation with Covid, the closure of One World nursery and the campaign to save it and the announced closure of Eastbourne campus. There was also some discussion on the pay campaigns. The meeting fell in the middle of important decisions about what the branch should do in relation to strike action.
9. The meeting closed and the chair thanked all for attending.

* Since the AGM, the regional Education, Training and Development Committee has identified some issues with the rules, and the branch has been asked to make further changes. Proposed changes are to be discussed under item 7.



3. Financial Reports

University of Brighton Unison - Current branch financial position

Date:	31 December 2022	<i>Budget in OLBA for 2022</i>
Income to date		
Subscriptions received from unison head office 2022	£16,741.73	£17,214.84
Other (including retired members, unemployed members, etc)	£30.00	
Savings account interest	£90.55	
Strike pay - reimbursements claimed to 31/12/22 from HQ	£49,095.65	
Strike reimbursements - outstanding from HQ	£4,755.86	
	TOTAL	£70,713.79
	Income to date minus strike pay claims	£16,862.28
		£17,214.84
Payments to date		
Administration (including staffing costs, stationery, etc)	£6,041.27	£9,710.00
Conferences and group meetings (including HE seminar, Unison conf. etc)	£2,605.25	£4,150.00
Branch Committee (travel, refreshments, etc)	£0.00	£3,440.00
Other meetings (including branch agm)	£113.20	
Publicity	£671.48	£2,100.00
Education	£875.00	
Donations	£300.00	£1,200.00
Affiliations	£494.45	
Local Activities	£2,436.83	£500.00
Other funding deductions (e.g. unison course fees, NDC creche, etc)	£0.00	
Strike payments made	£53,851.51	
	TOTAL	£67,388.99
	Payments made not including strike payments	£13,537.48
		£21,100.00
Overall financial position of branch based on this year's income to date	£3,324.80	-£3,885.16
(a red / negative number indicates we have spent more than we have received in income)		
Balance to date not including strike payments	£3,324.80	
Bank account balances on 31/12/22		
Current account (including industrial action and strike funds)	£8,727.06	
Deposit account	£14,401.75	
	TOTAL	£23,128.81

Expenditure (not already presented to BC) to date for branch to note:

HARDSHIP FUND

(All funds and payments made from current account - accounted for separately in OLBA)

Date:	31 December 2022	
Income to date		
Dec 2021	Transfer to set up hardship funds from branch funds	£ 888.89
Dec 2021	Member donation for 2021 strike	£ 50.00
March 2022	Donations for hardship fund	£ 2,350.00
June 2022	Donation for hardship fund	£ 200.00
July 2022	Donation for hardship fund	£ 100.00
	TOTAL	£ 3,588.89
Payments to date		
08/04/2022	Payments made to date for December 2021 strike day	£412.05
13/04/2022	Refund for donation to hardship fund from member	£50.00
25/05/2022	Balance of donations donated to unison there for you charity	£1,937.95
02/08/2022	Balance of donations donated to unison there for you charity	£300.00
		£2,700.00
Balance of Branch Hardship funds		£888.89

Income and expenditure 2022

	£	£
Subscriptions		
UNISON subscription income this year		£16,741.78
Funding adjustments (overpayment for 2022)		-£0.05
Retired member subscriptions		£30.00
Deposit Account Interest		£90.55
	Total Income	<u>£16,862.28</u>
Expenditure		
Administration:	£381.14	
<i>Administrator costs</i>	<u>£5,660.13</u>	
		£6,041.27
Group Conference & Meetings:		£2,605.25
Other meetings:		<u>£113.20</u>
Publicity		£671.48
Education		£875.00
Donations		£300.00
Affiliations		£494.45
Other Expenditure		£0.00
Local Activities		<u>£2,436.83</u>
	Total Expenditure	<u>£13,537.48</u>
	Excess of Income over Expenditure	£3,324.80

Industrial Action Fund

Balance at start		£888.89
Donations from account	-£2,700.00	
Donations into account	£2,650.00	
Strike payments made	-£53,851.51	
Repayments claimed from HQ so far	£49,095.65	
Balance at end		<u>-£3,916.97</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2022

	£	£
Fixed Assets:		
Equipment	0.00	
Less Depreciation	<u>0.00</u>	0.00
Investments:		
Bank Deposit Account		14,451.81
Current Assets:		
Bank Current Account		8,284.48
Less Current Liabilities		
Funding owed to HQ for 2022 overpayment		0.05
Creditors		184.18
Creche payment due to HQ for 2022		85.41
Net Current Assets		22,466.65
Total Net Assets		
Represented by:		
Accumulated fund balance at 31/12/21	23,058.82	
Excess of income for year	3,324.80	
Industrial Action Fund balance at 31/12/22	-3,916.97	
Balance at 31 December 2022		22,466.65

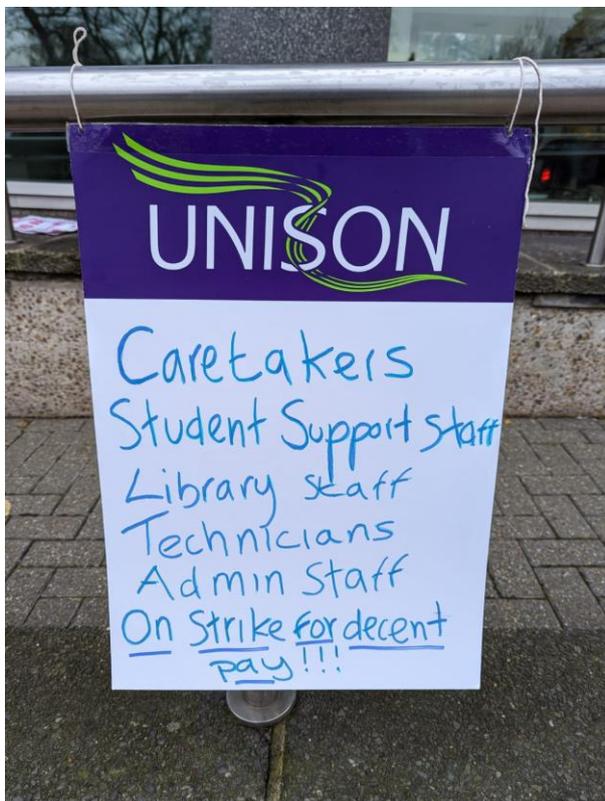
During the year, the branch received £16,862 income and spent £13,537, leaving a surplus of £3,325. This was much higher than the budget, which planned for an overspend.

The bank account balance at 31st December 2023, was £22,746.

Included in this, is the branch hardship fund of £889.

Proposed Budget for 2023

	Budget
Branch Funding	(18,000.00)
Administration	10,000.00
Participation_National	2,000.00
Participation_Region	1,000.00
Participation_Branch	1,000.00
Other Meetings	1,000.00
Publicity	2,500.00
Donations	1,200.00
Local Activities	500.00
Other	500.00
	<hr/> 19,700.00 <hr/>
	<hr/> 1,700.00 <hr/>



4. Branch Action Plan

The action plan is developed as part of the Organising Framework process for each branch. The branch agreed targets as follows:

Recruitment and retention

Targets, objectives and other information

Build network of trained stewards working with members to publicise the benefits of belonging to UNISON to recruit and retain members.

Health and Safety

Targets, objectives and other information

Health and Safety Officer and more health and safety reps to cover all divisional health and safety committees.

Trained and active plan

Targets, objectives and other information

Formal training and confidence building for existing stewards to take on casework. Develop training programme to mentor and develop activists.

Complete insurance renewal questionnaire in OLBA

Add agenda item on recruitment and retention at branch committee meetings

Targets, objectives and other information

Branch to add as standing item to agenda, to trigger conversations with Branch committee around recruitment initiatives

Activist Development

Targets, objectives and other information

RO to look at options for branch based, or joint branch based training across a number of HE branches - this is quite straightforward to organise online. Work with Branch Education Coordinator to arrange this

Targets, objectives and other information

Branch education to explore member learning opportunities in 2022, working with AO

Find out when the next course Equality in your Branch course is at

<https://learning.unison.org.uk/events/>

Targets, objectives and other information

branch to explore the next opportunity to access this training

5. Branch Officers

Branch officers have specific areas of responsibility within the branch. Each officer tries to attend the monthly branch committee meetings.

	Alan Dilley	Health and Safety Officer
<i>new</i>	Aras Ertan	Young Members' Officer, Joint Communications Officer, Joint LGBT+ Officer
	Bill Acharjee	Equality Co-ordinator, Joint Black Members' Officer
	Carole Chick	Retired Members' Secretary
	Dawn Whitaker	Treasurer
	Debbie Neale	Joint Women's Officer
	Ivan Bonsell	Secretary, Membership Officer
	Jean Bosco Ndayizeye	Joint Black Members' Officer
	Jodie Jones	Joint Women's Officer
<i>new</i>	Jody Edwards	Joint Communications Officer
<i>new</i>	Lydia Freeman	Welfare Officer, Joint Women's Officer
	Mark Harvey	Disabled Members' Officer
	Martin Loftus	Chair
<i>new</i>	Sam Oliver	Joint LGBT+ Members' Officer
	Sarah Pickett	Labour Link Officer

Vacant Officer Roles:

- Education Co-ordinator
- Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator
- International Officer
- Environmental Officer

If you're interested in filling any of the vacant roles, please let us know.



6. Stewards and Health and Safety Reps

Stewards are the backbone of the branch and the first point of contact for members. Health and safety reps report and follow up on safety issues and attend the University's Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

All stewards and health and safety reps should be trained within the first year of appointment, to allow them to represent members and carry out safety inspections etc.

Stewards (*ERA accredited)

<i>new</i>	Alec Crane	Falmer
	Bill Acharjee*	Moulsecoomb
<i>new</i>	Bruce Samuel	Moulsecoomb
	Debbie Neale*	Moulsecoomb
	Emily Brooks*	Moulsecoomb
	Ivan Bonsell*	Moulsecoomb
<i>new</i>	Ivan Pazos Landeira*	Moulsecoomb
<i>new</i>	Lee Christien	City Campus
	Lise Loftus	Moulsecoomb
<i>new</i>	Lydia Freeman	City Campus
	Marco Troiani	Eastbourne
	Martin Loftus*	Moulsecoomb
	Maurizio Valeri*	Moulsecoomb
	Richard Clayton*	City Campus
	Sarah Pickett	Students' Union
<i>new</i>	Will Dooley	Moulsecoomb

Health & Safety Reps (*Trained)

	Alan Dilley*	Moulsecoomb
	Dawn Whitaker*	Moulsecoomb
	Ivan Bonsell	Moulsecoomb
<i>new</i>	Lydia Freeman	City Campus
	Martin Loftus*	Moulsecoomb
	Maurizio Valeri*	Moulsecoomb
	Richard Clayton*	City Campus

All branch officers, stewards and health and safety reps meet monthly as the branch committee to agree the work of the branch and direct the branch secretary, who is seconded for a year.

The branch committee, after the AGM, elects a smaller negotiating committee, which aims to meet weekly, and its role is to deal with day to day issues that can't wait for the next branch committee meeting.

7. Proposed branch rule changes

The AGM agrees the rules which the branch must follow. Proposed changes to the existing rules are highlighted below:

University of Brighton UNISON Branch Rules

Version 6 as proposed to Annual General Meetings, 6/7/8/10 March 2023

1. Branch Name

The branch shall be called “The University of Brighton UNISON Branch”, and is referred throughout the rules as “the branch.”

2. Aims of the branch

- a) To support and pursue the aims and objectives contained in the UNISON Rule Book and the Objectives agreed by UNISON’s National Executive Committee annually.
- b) To aim to achieve the agreed targets set annually.
- c) To organise members and build confidence, to be able to collectively achieve the best possible rights at work, in terms of pay, pension rights, working conditions and wellbeing.

3. Membership

Eligibility for membership shall be in accordance with the rules of the union. (Rules C1.1, C5.1 and C5.5)

4. Branch Structure

- a) There will be an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the branch held between during March, to confirm the election by ballot of branch officers and members of the branch committee.
- b) The AGM will receive the branch accounts and report on branch development and relevant issues from the branch committee.
- c) The AGM may comprise one meeting or a series of aggregate meetings across the University’s campuses, in order to maximise the active participation of members.
- d) The AGM will determine the basis of representation in the branch and the number of stewards and other representatives to be elected in each campus or workplace.
- e) Other general meetings may be called by the branch committee or by 10% of the membership.

- f) The quorum for any general meeting, including the annual meeting is **10%** of the branch membership at a single meeting or through aggregate meetings.
- g) The branch committee will comprise all branch officers (see rule 5 below), stewards, health and safety reps and equalities reps.
- h) The branch committee will be responsible for the general organisation and development of the branch and for policy and decision making on matters affecting all members within the branch, between general meetings.
- i) The branch negotiating committee will be responsible for the day to day management of the branch in accordance with the decisions and authority delegated by the branch committee. (See rule 7 below.)

5. Branch Officers

- a) The branch shall elect the following officers annually:
 - 1) Chair
 - 2) Secretary
 - 3) Treasurer
 - 4) Education Co-ordinator
 - 5) Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator
 - 6) Equality Co-ordinator
 - 7) Health and Safety Officer
 - 8) Communications Officer
 - 9) International Officer
 - 10) Membership Officer
 - 11) Young Members Officer
 - 12) Welfare Officer
 - 13) Labour Link Officer (elected by members paying into the political levy only)
 - 14) Retired Members' Secretary (elected by retired members only)
 - 15) Women's Officer
 - 16) Environmental Officer
 - 17) Black Member's Officer
 - 18) LBGT+ Officer
 - 19) Disabled Member's Officer

Others to be deemed necessary by the branch committee
- b) Branch officers shall be elected as follows:
 - 1) Any member may be nominated and seconded by the branch committee or any two members, with the exception of nominations for the Labour Link Officer (which shall be nominated by members paying into the Labour Link fund only.)
 - 2) Nomination forms will be available through the usual communication methods and all members will be encouraged to think about volunteering for a role.
 - 3) Nominations will be open **twelve** weeks before the AGM date and will close three weeks before the AGM.

- 4) If there is more than one nomination for a role, nominees shall be encouraged to stand on the basis of sharing the role and responsibilities, but if agreement cannot be reached then a vote will be held, after candidates have been given the opportunity to withdraw.
 - 5) Any votes for contested officer seats will be held by ballot of all appropriate members, within the three week period ahead of the AGM, with the results announced at the AGM. Any ballot will be conducted by secret electronic ballot and postal vote for members with no valid email address.
 - 6) Where no valid nomination for a role has been received before the deadline, nominations to fill vacant officer posts may be submitted throughout the year. The branch committee will consider nominations at its next meeting.
 - 7) The AGM will approve all branch officers, who will serve for one year.
 - 8) The branch committee is empowered to fill vacant seats (including those which become vacant during the year due to resignation) by nominations and a show of hands at any quorate branch committee meeting.
- c) Branch officers are accountable to the branch for their conduct and should be expected to give reports to the branch committee on request.
 - d) The Branch Secretary shall give regular reports and updates and is responsible for all practical aspects of the branch operations, convening meetings and managing the administration for the branch.
 - e) Any serious allegations of misconduct of a branch officer should be investigated by the chair or branch secretary, with a report made to the branch committee with recommendations.
 - f) ~~If the branch committee consider that misconduct of an officer is proven and serious enough for the officer to be removed from their post, then a special general meeting should be called and the branch asked to vote on a specific course of action.~~ **To be removed**

6. Branch Committee

- a) Representation on the branch committee will be agreed by the AGM and will include branch officers, stewards, health and safety reps and equalities reps.
- b) The branch committee will conduct branch business in accordance with UNISON rules.
- c) The quorum for the branch committee shall be 33% of the members of the committee.
- d) The branch committee shall ensure that sections within the branch are appropriately and equitably resourced to ensure the effective participation of members, recruitment and organisation, representation, and collective bargaining and campaigning on behalf of members in each section.

- e) The branch committee will establish arrangements for the individual representation of members.
- f) The branch committee shall meet monthly at locations which reflect the spread of branch membership across University sites, or via video conference (e.g. Teams).
- g) All branch committee members will be notified of the meeting arrangements and provided with an agenda and other papers at least **ten** working days in advance.
- h) If urgent decisions need to be made which cannot wait for the next scheduled branch committee, any member of the branch committee can either:
 - a. Request an additional branch committee meeting to discuss and decide on the issue, providing the meeting is quorate.
 - b. Email all branch committee members asking for a virtual decision to be made, which would require a quorate response i.e. 33% of the branch committee indicating agreement to a proposal, within a one week timescale. The branch secretary will keep an audit trail of responses and the decision will be reported to the next branch committee meeting for ratification.

7. Negotiating Committee

- a) The negotiating committee shall be elected annually by the first quorate branch committee meeting after the AGM, to manage the day to day functions of the branch between branch committee meetings.
- b) Membership of the negotiating committee will constitute no more than eight branch committee members, and shall include the chair, branch secretary and other officers and stewards based on the composition of the branch committee. There is an expectation that negotiating committee members will be able to attend most meetings and commit themselves to building and strengthening the branch.
- c) The negotiating committee shall meet weekly at a suitable location, or via video conferencing, to ensure the effective day to day management of the branch within the parameters of the decisions and guidance issued by the branch.
- d) The negotiating committee will generally include the branch officers and stewards most able to be members of the relevant university committees – Support Staff Common Interest Group, Joint Negotiating Committee, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and Equality and Diversity Committee.
- e) The negotiating committee will be primarily responsible for the planning and execution of agreed branch committee policies with respect to negotiations at the above meetings.
- f) **The negotiating committee may commit to no expenditure, policy decision or affiliation that has not been previously agreed by the branch committee.**
- g) All negotiating committee meetings are open to all members of the branch committee who are able to attend.

8. Conduct of Meetings

- a) All meetings will be conducted in a fair and democratic manner and with reference to the UNISON South East Working Together Guidelines.
- b) All meetings will be advertised as far in advance as possible. For the AGM, all members will be notified in the most appropriate format at least six weeks before the meeting (or first aggregate meeting).
- c) The procedures to be used at the meeting will be explained clearly.
- d) The Branch Secretary will maintain records of all meetings and other appropriate records to enable the branch to function.

9. Media Communications

- a) Communications to the media on behalf of the branch shall be made only by the following branch officers authorised by the branch committee:
 - Branch Secretary
 - Chair
 - Communications Officer
- b) Publications on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) on behalf of the branch shall be made by the following officers:
 - Branch Secretary (or Branch Administrator, acting under instructions)
 - Chair
 - Communications Officer
- c) Any other members speaking to the media or publishing on social media platforms on behalf of the branch do so with the approval of the named officers in 11 a) and b).

10. Affiliations

- a) Affiliations to relevant constituency Labour Parties will be decided by members contributing to the Labour Link political fund.
- b) Affiliations to trade councils or any other campaigning groups will be within UNISON rules and shall be determined by the branch committee.

11. Finance

- a) The branch shall keep a Unity Trust bank account in the name of the branch and will maintain a financial record of all assets and transactions in accordance with UNISON guidelines.

- b) The branch will manage its finances in accordance with the UNISON Branch Finances Handbook and follow the branch internal control policy (page 29).
- c) The branch Committee will set a budget before the end of each year and this will be regularly reviewed at branch committee meetings.

12. Donations

- a) Donations shall be agreed by the AGM or branch committee in accordance with UNISON's policies and objectives and subject to the national rules.
- b) Any donations made should be to support the trade union movement or workers fighting injustice through strike action or other campaigns.
- c) Each branch committee meeting shall consider requests to make a donation of no more than £100 and decide on one recipient by a show of hands, with the chair having a casting vote in the event of a tie.
- d) If the branch committee meeting makes no donation, the opportunity will be carried over to the next meeting.

13. Expenses

Rates of expenses for members attending meetings or carrying out other activities on behalf of the branch shall be agreed by the AGM in accordance with the Scheme for Branch Expenses as per the UNISON Branch Finances Handbook.

14. Honoraria

No honoraria payments will be made to members of the branch.

15. Branch Staff

- a) The branch shall indirectly employ a part-time administrative assistant to assist the branch secretary and the branch committee in the day to day running of the branch.
- b) The University will employ the post-holder in accordance with its terms and conditions and will invoice the branch periodically for the full costs of employment.
- c) If the post-holder is a member of the branch by virtue of other employment at the University or related organisations, then normal membership rules will apply.
- d) If the post holder is not a member of a trade union, they shall be encouraged to join one, and they shall be eligible for membership of the branch as an employee of the lead employer, but may wish to join a different trade union.

- e) The branch secretary, as the line-manager, will be responsible for the employment, direction and supervision of the post-holder consistent with employment law, current good practice and the University's policies.
- f) In the event of staff disciplinary or grievance matters, the branch chair will liaise with the University to determine the procedures to be followed.
- g) The outcome of any disciplinary or grievance hearing will remain confidential and a summary of the outcome will be reported to the branch committee on its conclusion.

16. Approval/Alteration to Branch Rules

- a) Branch rules must be agreed by two thirds of members present and voting at a quorate **annual general meeting**.
- b) Branch rules must be approved in accordance with UNISON's procedures.
- c) Any changes to branch rules must be agreed and approved as above.



8. Branch Motion

Proposed by Alex Lee:

Fossil Free Careers Worker Union Motion

This branch notes:

1. Impartial, evidence-based advice offered by HEI careers services is valuable for students and wider society.
2. HEI careers services promoting roles in oil, gas and mining industries is likely contributing to the global climate crisis, and leading students into careers which will decline as we rapidly decarbonise our economies.

This branch resolves:

1. To actively work with People & Planet to publicly support the student-led Fossil Free Careers campaign, calling on university careers services to align their operations with sustainability considerations, particularly by declining to promote oil, gas and mining companies.
2. To produce a website statement about this motion and support for this campaign, and amplify the calls to action of it.



9. Branch Secretary's Address

These meetings will be the first Annual General Meetings we've managed to hold in actual, physical rooms since March 2020, a few weeks before the pandemic. For 2021 and 2022, we had to hold them on-line. Having hybrid meetings is still pretty experimental, so we hope it works, but we think that we need to reflect the way in which many of our members are now working.

Since last year, our branch has taken some major steps forwards and we're confident that we will continue to grow as we deal with all the inevitable challenges we face.

Marketisation of universities has made the sector unrecognisable from what it was a decade ago. Universities have been encouraged, and then forced, to chase the money from student tuition fees. Whilst Russell Group institutions have the possibility of winning lucrative research contracts or increasing international student numbers and income, this is not a realistic prospect for a university like Brighton. Growing student numbers to counter the inflationary effect of the £9,250 fee being frozen is not easy, and in our case, probably not going to happen. Inflation is so high that it's not possible to grow numbers to make up for this. Just like our pay, universities which have not increased their student intakes have seen a massive real terms decrease in income.

The reality is that the University of Brighton is struggling financially as a direct result of the government's failure to maintain funding for teaching at an appropriate level. The £9,250 fee piles tens of thousands of debt onto a generation of (mainly) young people, but it's no longer enough to fund a university in these times and Vice-Chancellors are responding by cutting services. As I write, the University of East Anglia's VC has resigned, following a vote of no confidence due to their financial situation, and planned response to cut jobs. The University of Brighton is almost certainly amongst the growing list of universities in a similar situation.

Of course Vice-Chancellors could do something about this. They could publicly campaign for funding to keep up with inflation. A campaign for universities to be properly funded (from general taxation rather than tuition fees) would gain a massive echo from students, school students and trade unions, as it did when proposed by Corbyn.

What has happened though is that those in charge have taken the easier option, planning cuts, particularly to our wages, to keep things going. The problem is that not only does this affect the students, it demoralises staff, creating more stress and makes the University a less attractive place to work. We're all expected to work harder for less.

Against this, we've been fighting back for decent pay. Our branch was the first to propose disaggregate ballots, so that those branches able to achieve 50%+ turnouts in strike ballots are able to take action, rather than waiting until such a point that the necessary turnout can be achieved across all branches. In that sense, UNISON is still several years behind UCU, who decisively won an aggregate ballot this year and are balloting again.

We took strike action at various points during 2021, 2022 and 2023, all over the same issue of falling real-terms pay. Our picket lines were really well attended, as were the marches and rallies we organised on strike days. It's difficult to put a number on it, but we know many dozens of members have participated in what we've done, one way or another.

We're very grateful to those who have made a real effort to make strike days a success, when staying in bed may have sounded more of an attractive option. You've collectively put

our branch on the list of those across UNISON and Brighton that will campaign visibly for its members.

The updating of UNISON's national strike pay to up to £50/day from day one of any action made a massive difference. Thanks to a lot of hard work by Dawn, our Treasurer, we've been able to make strike pay payments to every member applying for it, sometimes earlier than the pay that's been lost.

Strike action is always a real test for a trade union branch. Communicating the issues to members and then winning the argument that strike action is not just a voluntary individual decision is never going to be 100% successful. Most of our members recognise the issues and the way in which a trade union has to organise i.e. that we've democratically voted for something, then we do it. For some members, the legacy of a massive trade union that recruited for decades on the basis of individual problem solving or cheap deals, proved decisive. For these members, the strikes were seen as something for others to get involved in. This issue won't be solved easily, but the crucial point is that strike action has to be seen to be successful.

For August 2023, the offer is for pay increases of 5%, 6%, 7% and 8%, depending on spinal point, with an increase of £1,000 in most cases to be paid upfront in March, backdated to February. We should be clear that with RPI inflation currently at 13.4% and CPI inflation at 10.1%, this still represents a real-terms pay cut. But without the action we've already taken, there's absolutely no way that we'd have been offered anything more than a few percent, if that.

Strike action has shown we're serious and determined, even if we've not won what we set out to.

Talks with ACAS are continuing and UCU are striking on 15th March. Our latest round of strike action, on 16th, 17th, 20th and 21st, was cut short half way through when union negotiators agreed to suspend strike action from 20th February as a condition of further talks. This caused havoc with our branch and activists and we knew that some members would strike anyway, having not got the message.

More to the point, many of us were frustrated at strike action being called off when we could see very little gain having been achieved by negotiators. It remains to be seen what the talks produce, but we should be clear that we have rejected the proposed pay rise in a member consultation, and are still in dispute. Talks are to focus on zero-hour contracts, workload and that old favourite, the 35 hour week. This has long been an aspiration of our branch, along with realigning the annual leave allowance so that everyone gets the same, regardless of grade.

Zero-hour contracts as far as the employers are concerned is more to do with academics, but we have a small group of Academic Support Workers, many of whom are research students, who work on a casual basis. We'd like to get the University to agree to a proper system of guaranteed employment with the certainty of regular hours and decent pay. This, amongst others, will be an ongoing campaign into the next year.

Given the option of balloting over pay for 2023-24 early, which would enable our branch to strike in early June, we had to make a quick decision and opted to ballot later,

which would give us a mandate to strike at the start of the 2023-24 academic year, hopefully alongside other UNISON branches and UCU.

We will still need to win the ballot though, through a strong vote to reject and a 50%+ turnout. We're confident we can do it, but we'll still need members to make sure they've voted and convince members that striking can and will make a difference. Our branch is continuing to evolve with new, younger members joining a branch that's campaigning and doing something about the issues our members face, but we still need to convince those members less likely to read all this, that campaigning and collectively solving our problems at work is what a trade union should primarily be about.

As well as pay, we've campaigned on health and safety issues and equalities, supported members through reorganisations and in individual cases.

We now have seven health and safety reps with the potential for more. We play an important role in challenging the University over potential dangers, both visible and hidden, including the effects of work-related stress, which we know many of our members are suffering with.

Our stress survey indicated many worrying signs of how our members feel about working here:

147 responses received, mainly from UNISON members, but the survey was open to all UoB employees.
 "Negative" responses highlighted in orange.

		Yes		No	
1	Do you feel you have the right amount of work to do?	51	34.7%	96	65.3%
2	Have you had sufficient training to do your job?	97	66.0%	50	34.0%
3	Are there any problems with your work environment?	68	46.3%	79	53.7%
4	Are you able to have some say about how your job is done?	113	76.9%	34	23.1%
5	Do you feel included in decision making in your team?	99	67.3%	48	32.7%
6	Do you feel you are using the skills you have got to full effect?	60	40.8%	87	59.2%
7	Do you feel that you get enough support from your line manager?	94	63.9%	53	36.1%
8	Do you feel that you get enough support from your colleagues?	120	81.6%	27	18.4%
9	Do you take the breaks you are entitled to at work?	89	60.5%	58	39.5%
10	Do you feel you have a healthy work-life balance?	86	58.5%	61	41.5%
11	Are you affected by any conflict in your team?	41	27.9%	106	72.1%
12	Are you subjected to any bullying or harassment at work?	11	7.5%	136	92.5%
13	Do you feel that your team works well together?	115	78.2%	32	21.8%
14	Are you clear about your roles and responsibilities at work?	94	63.9%	53	36.1%
15	Do you feel that there is any conflict in your role?	54	36.7%	93	63.3%
16	Do you understand the role of others in your team?	120	81.6%	27	18.4%
17	Are you aware of any changes that are happening at work?	100	68.0%	47	32.0%
18	Do you understand why change is happening?	89	60.5%	58	39.5%
19	Do you understand the impact on your job of any change?	93	63.3%	54	36.7%
20	Do you feel well supported during change at work?	58	39.5%	89	60.5%

Whilst these results are skewed in that it's a self-selecting response, the reality is that most of those responding felt that they do not have the right amount of work to do, or have problems with their work environment etc.

We have consistently argued that the University has to take stress at work seriously, in terms of monitoring it, preventing it and dealing with the consequences. We don't accept that this is happening, and demand that a comprehensive survey is carried out. This would tell us what we already know – there are groups of staff where suffering from work related stress is normal. It's totally unacceptable for this to be happening.

We've taken steps forward toward to having a more diverse branch committee and wider group of activists and are now well on the way to having viable branch groups representing most of UNISON's self-organised groups (SOGs):

Women, Black members, LGBT+ members, Disabled members and Young members (those under 27)

Our activists and ordinary members have represented our branch at several SOG conferences and we want this to continue. You can find Bill's report of Black members' conference on our blog.

If you want to be involved in any of our SOGs, please get in touch.

UNISON organises national conferences every year, one for higher education members and one for all UNISON's service groups. We've maintained the tradition of sending delegates and usually moving motions and amendments.

In February, we had two delegates and one visitor at HE conference in Newcastle. Their report is on our blog.



2023 National Delegate Conference takes place in Liverpool in June and we've proposed two motions for debate, one supporting trans rights and one encouraging debate on election of senior officers, as opposed to appointment.

We also play a role in UNISON's regional structures, with delegates to Regional Council and activists elected to Regional Committees. We'll continue this into the rest of the year.

Our branch committee, as proposed, has 25 members, of which 15 are officers. As a branch with a 55% female membership, we want our branch committee to reflect this gender split. Our new branch committee is 36% female, so we have some way to go.

We've lost some activists since our last AGM, many of whom have played a major role in our branch. Mandy Williams personified our branch at Falmer for many years, but decided to retire in 2022 after a long career in the School of Education. Sian Williams, our ex-joint chair now works on the railways and is a proud member of the RMT. Cathy Peters, who had been a branch education officer longer than most of us can remember, retired around Christmas. We wish them all the best, alongside many other members who have been proud UNISON members, who no longer work here. (All retiring members are welcome to become retired members for a life membership fee of £15.)

We're improving our communications, and thanks to Aras and Jody, we now have a small but perfectly formed comms team to develop our on-line presence. We're on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and we have plans to create a members' WhatsApp group. Members receive regular emails from me, but we want to make this much more slick, with members being able to choose how they receive information tailored to them. Our monthly newsletter remains, for now, but we also want to look at a better website, subject to cost and our ability to update it.

We've also continued to deal with individual cases and people involved in reorganisations. One of the consequences of being an organised branch is that members are more likely to ask for support. This can sometimes be challenging, but we do what we can to provide advice and get the best possible outcome for all concerned. Our stewards play an invaluable role in maintaining this, but we need to be better at involving all our stewards in casework, and this has been identified as a priority for the rest of 2023 and beyond.

Trade union activists can only ever build on what's gone before and we all owe a debt to those in the past prepared to stick their necks out to stand up against injustice. Since I became branch secretary, several years ago now, I'd like to think that we've taken things forward, but in a rapidly changing world where working people are being forced to stand up for themselves more and more against the latest round of austerity, there's so much more that we need to do.

As always, we need more members, but more members who understand what a trade union is and what we're trying to achieve. We need activists who will promote our union and not be frightened of asking people to join us.

It's been an incredible privilege to be branch secretary for another year, and I'm immensely grateful to everyone else who's helped to deliver the team effort that organising a trade union branch requires.

It's not always easy. Messing up a link for the strike pay emailed to every member, or finding out that the strikes were off on that Friday evening being good examples of what can test you.

I've received more than a few message of support and encouragement, especially when things were difficult, so thanks for those, and thanks for putting your faith in me for another year.

Onwards and upwards, comrades.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary elect