

RISING TOGETHER FOR BETTER PAY

HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023/24



SCAN to JOIN



University of Brighton

UNISON | Branch Newsletter

October 2023

Welcome to this month's newsletter!

Thanks to everyone who took strike action at the start of the month. The campuses were busy, with it being the start of the new academic year, but the number of services was visibly down and the University was failing to function in many ways.



Obviously we don't want to go on strike, but the pay "offer" that was imposed on us in February and August is still well below inflation and constitutes another real-terms pay cut.

The pay of all university workers has fallen every year for over a decade. Senior university managers have held down pay as inflation as shot up, partly because they want to get more work out of us for less, but mainly because the entire sector is facing a funding crisis. The £9,250 fee, which universities such as ours rely on for the vast majority of income, has not gone up for years, even though inflation has reached double figures.

We don't want more debt falling on students, but we do need universities to be funded properly, just like schools, hospitals, council services etc. Our battle for decent pay is tied up with our battle for all public services to be adequately resourced.



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The problem is that Vice-Chancellors all know this, but hide behind the need to be “politically impartial”, as if asking for universities to be properly funded is somehow a revolutionary demand.

Some university leaders have said that UCU tweets, suggesting that universities have vast reserves, actually prevents them from asking the government for adequate funding!

The reality is that marketisation and forced competition between institutions that were never in the same place financially anyway, has created winners and losers. This has generally followed the pattern of the older Russell Group universities being able to rely on research income and international students to buy time with their finances. Some top universities are sitting on money that could be spent on staff pay with no real worry about the future liabilities. At the other end, many institutions, generally the ex-polytechnics and smaller institutions, are struggling, with no real prospect of growing international numbers enough to make up the shortfall.



This is where Brighton is, and without significant change to the income per student, the likelihood is that managers will preside over more redundancies, course closures and the type of managed decline that we’ve already started to see.

Obviously, we call on all Vice-Chancellors to campaign and lobby for more funding, but who would they be lobbying? Sunak has already had a go at universities for delivering “Mickey Mouse courses” and being “too woke”. The aspiration of 50% of young people going into higher education is attacked as part of the Tory party’s latest attempt to drive division between different groups of workers, as a desperate attempt to win votes.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Starmer has failed to provide any kind of hope that a Labour government will actually change things. After ditching the promise to abolish fees (admittedly without any clarification over what would replace them), Starmer has come up with nothing. The need to be fiscally prudent, i.e. spend nothing, leave the billionaires safe to sit on their vast wealth, trumps the idea of spending appropriate amounts on higher education, leaving many universities to struggle along with cuts and a failing service for students.



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If nothing changes fairly quickly, “putting students at the heart of everything we do” will be laughable, if it isn’t already.

It’s already the case that we just don’t have the staff numbers to deal with the number of student requests and inquiries at this time of year. Some students may well be happy with limited contact time and not a great deal to do, but we’re failing generations of people who want to receive a decent education, which the University just can’t provide.

This isn’t just worrying about the future prospects, we can see it happening now, with some of the additional activity which made the University more appealing having already been closed and/or scaled back. Nursery provision for staff and students (we used to have four) closed, the theatre and gallery closed, additional language support for international students reorganised and reduced. As the University of Brighton shrinks to deal with the reduction of student numbers, the breadth of

additional facilities drops away, potentially leaving only those courses where income can be maximised or where a half-decent NSS score is judged to be likely. It’s a vicious cycle of reduction in quality and quantity of higher education.



Some would say that if all this is true, we shouldn't be striking for more pay, but that’s a recipe for a race to the bottom. We want decent pay, not just because our members are struggling to pay rent, bills and buy food, but because we genuinely care about the future of the University. There’s already evidence that recruitment into many roles is difficult because the University doesn’t pay enough to compete with other organisations, or because some schools or departments have reputations for being difficult to work in. Workloads which are unmanageable generate stress. Staff are forced into sick leave and some leave altogether. High staff turnover is a sign of people getting better offers elsewhere and not a sign of a healthy workplace with happy, contented workers.

In short, the sector is in a mess, with only those who work here able to solve the problem through collective campaigning and sticking together. If and when we strike again, we’re demanding decent pay, but also decent resources to fund what we all do.



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Get involved in our Self-Organised Groups!

A MESSAGE FROM THE WOMEN'S GROUP

If you haven't heard about the women's group, we recently formed to discuss and target problems that predominantly affect women in the workplace. Together, we can organise around those issues. As term starts again, students are heading back to campus and for many it's an increasingly busy and stressful time of year. I think most of us employed here at the Uni of Brighton are aware of an ever-growing pile of work. As work increases and the workforce diminishes, some of us are being expected to struggle through workloads that are double what should be expected. We want to encourage you to resist accepting more work than is reasonably manageable. For an employer to depend on its workforce to get things done out of goodwill is unsustainable and risks stress levels skyrocketing, which we really don't need with added life pressures at the moment already diminishing our mental health. In the event that you don't feel comfortable turning down workloads, we urge you to ask for a stress risk assessment. This can be found on staff central and it should create more of a safety net for those of us really feeling the pressure.

If you identify as a woman and you recognise the benefit of female workers banding together, join us! We currently hold monthly hybrid meetings, for flexibility and with the occasional luxury of a free coffee. Our next meeting is **Wednesday 1st November at 2pm**, we are hoping to have a speaker present to talk about menopause and the workplace. See you there!

If you want to get involved in the Women's Group, please get in touch with our Women's Officers:

Lydia Freeman, Debbie Neale, Jodie Jones

If you want to get involved in our LGBT+ Group:

Sam Oliver, Aras Ertan

If you want to get involved in setting up our Black members' Group:

Jean Bosco Ndayizeye, Bill Acharjee

Are you in our WhatsApp Community?

Our branch has a group for messages to members. Ideally, we want all members to join it so that we can send out urgent messages when we need to.

If you'd like to join, just email your name and phone number and we'll add you to it.



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