

RIISING TOGETHER FOR **BETTER PAY**

HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023/24



University of Brighton
UNISON | Branch Newsletter

March 2024

Welcome to this month's newsletter!

Thanks to everyone who made it to one of our Annual General Meetings. Having four meetings on different days and making them available to attend via Teams meant that our combined attendance was really good. As always, it's great to see so many people interested and engaged with what we're trying to do for all our members, so thanks for being involved.

What came out of the meetings was a sense of significant concern over the direction of the University and the higher education sector. As we all know, the failure of the government to raise the £9,250 tuition fee value means a reliance on income from international students, which this particular university has trouble recruiting in numbers. As a result, income levels are falling as costs are going up, resulting in a perpetual need to "find savings" when we all know that many services are struggling to get the work done as it is.

Meanwhile, university workers have faced a reduction in real-terms earnings as pay has not kept up with inflation for over a decade. Our re-ballot over 2023-24 pay resulted in a 75.2% vote in favour of strike action on a 53.5% turnout. This indicates our members' collective determination to not accept real-terms pay cuts as the sector moves into a significant financial crisis.

What we've been doing is talking to the University about how we can resolve this. We have longstanding demands relating to pay - equalisation of annual leave (so all grades receive 30 days from day one of employment), a 35 hour week (without loss of pay), but what is urgent, is a proper look at where the grade boundaries sit, in relation to the pay spine.

The pay spine figures are "agreed" nationally as the basis of the annual pay negotiations, but each university decides on their own grades and where they sit. Grades 1 to 9 straddle spinal points 5 to 50, from £20,880 to £66,857. The increase in the national minimum wage and the real living wage are going to make spinal points 5 to 11 irrelevant, and push those at grades 1 and 2 effectively into grade 3, meaning that cleaning supervisors may well be paid the same as the cleaners they're supervising etc. It's a nonsense that clearly needs fixing....



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What we'd like to see is a proper re-negotiation of where the grade boundaries sit at every grade. This would address some of the historic anomalies where grade 7 for example has seven spinal points, two more than all other grades 3 to 6 and contributing to the overall gender pay gap.

The University are less than keen for any of this to happen of course, since they think it will cost them money, but the increase in the national minimum wage, thanks to a Tory government (!) is going to cost them around £64,000/year as a rough estimate. The real living wage to be paid in August, will cost a further £125,000/year.

As a rough estimate, fixing grades 1, 2 and 3 to maintain a difference would cost about £70,000/year, but there's a need to sort more of just the lowest grades and some universities have recognised that this is overdue. Just talking to the University about the numbers involved and what could be done would be a vast improvement from what we have now, but it feels as if the best paid people at the University have no desire to enter into conversations to sort this out.

The problem is that only looking at these things financially fails to recognise the unquantifiable change in staff morale and retention. People are leaving the University for better paid jobs elsewhere and as these roles are not replaced, either to save money or because nobody wants the job, experience is lost and remaining staff are pressurised to maintain the service. It's leading to a crisis in morale and work-related stress which is getting worse.



Since we have a live strike mandate until mid-August, we're looking to use that to be able to win some gains for our members. Our members are prepared to strike over pay, but if the University are able to give us concessions on pay-related elements then we will put this to members for a decision - either we strike or we accept changes to the way we're rewarded and valued.

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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