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University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

December 2017

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As you'll understand, this is a shorter newsletter than normal, cobbled together before we're all off for the Christmas closure, but in a manner that shows our determination to get a newsletter done for every month of the year throughout 2017. Many thanks to all who have helped us with that task.

The fact that the University is closed between Christmas and New Year is a welcome rest for most, and a good example of how trade unionists in the past have campaigned and won concessions, which probably would not have been granted had people not stuck together and demanded them.

More often than not these days, trade unions are fighting defensive campaigns—opposing the compulsory redundancies of academics or the closure of Hastings, rather than campaigning for improvements. However, we always make the point that if we did not exist then the University would be a very different place.

"In the current climate" is a phrase most used by people who want to try to justify cutbacks and attacks on workers' rights, and I'm sure we'll be hearing it more into 2018.

"Trade unions are always resistant to change" is another one, but it depends who's proposing the change. It's true that we will always resist change if it is going to affect our members' rights to a decent working life, but if by change we mean improvements in pay, holidays and taking away some of the causes of workplace stress, then we're always in favour of change.

Those who make national decisions about higher education policy and funding are determined to make institutions such as ours carry out cuts to its workforce and make savings wherever it can, applying efficiency with no regard to the welfare of those who work here. Maintaining the tuition fee at current levels means that Brighton is probably unable to fulfil the demands of the 2018-19 pay claim (likely to be a 7.5% rise (or £1,500) and a guaranteed £10/hour minimum wage), without making cuts elsewhere.

That doesn't mean though, that we should accept further cuts. Vice Chancellors could stand up to the government and demand proper funding for higher education through progressive taxation, which would reward its workers properly. Any VC which campaigns for proper funding will receive the full support of organised working people across the sector.

Making excuses for attacking working conditions is what successive Vice Chancellors and senior managers have done "in the current climate". It's time they demonstrated that they accept change and joined us in fighting back against cuts and austerity.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary



Workplace Stress—what it is and what we’re doing about it

Much has been written about stress at work, the official Health and Safety Executive definition being “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them at work”.

Some people would claim that workers just need to be more resilient, as if we can all be better protected against suffering stress-related symptoms by fending them off. Employers have the same legal requirement to manage work-related stress as they have with any other hazard, so the resilience argument is like saying that dangerous chemicals and radioactive material are not a problem if you toughen up a bit.

Our strategy for combatting the symptoms of stress is to get the University to be better at recognising the problem, so we have raised the idea of the Safety and Wellbeing Committee organising a stress survey for all staff as soon as possible. We’re keen that this includes enough breadth and depth of questioning, so that the relevant questions are asked, and that it happens very early in the New Year, for the University to then deal with the results quickly.

If this doesn’t materialise soon, we’ve said we’ll conduct our own survey and make it clear that we are not happy about a lack of cooperation. We’ll let you know what happens.



Emily Brooks, our LGBT Officer at Stonewall’s Young Leaders Programme last week, funded by our branch. “Everything I learned on the programme has contributed to a big confidence boost that I hope will empower me to challenge inequality whenever and wherever I see it.”

UNISON aims to provide training opportunities for all members, not just activists. We can’t promise to fund everything, but if there’s something you’d like to do, just let us know and we’ll think about it.

Get help staying warm this winter



With rising fuel costs and another cold winter many members are worried about how they’re going to pay this year’s winter fuel bills.

Help is on hand

“There for You” has set up a limited fund to help UNISON members

on low income by way of a one-off payment of up to £50.

To apply and download the application form visit unison.org.uk/thereforyou or simply contact your UNISON branch office.



There for you is the working name of UNISON Welfare, a registered charity supported by UNISON the trade union. Registered charity no. 1023552/SC038305