



***Our newsletter is free to all members.***

*If you're not a member, we need you to join and get involved. Fill in a form or join online. Follow our blog from Staff Central.*

## ***University of Brighton Branch Newsletter***

### ***November 2018***

*blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison*

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### **2018-19 Pay Campaigns**

Thanks to all our members who voted in the national strike ballot.

If you've not already seen the result, it was as follows:

<i>Yes to strike action</i>	<i>61.9%</i>
<i>No to strike action</i>	<i>38.1%</i>
<i>Turnout</i>	<i>31.0%</i>

Whilst this is a reasonably clear vote in favour of taking action, the turnout, at less than 50%, means that we can't legally take strike action to pursue a better offer.

For many of us, this is a disappointment, not because we wanted to lose pay through striking, but because we saw striking as the only way that the employers would improve the offer.

There will be further discussions about the lessons of this year's pay campaign and what it means for next year.

You can read our branch statement by going to our blog. [unison.brighton.ac.uk/](http://unison.brighton.ac.uk/)

We value your thoughts, so if you have any opinions which you'd like to express then please feel free to let us know.

Our members in the Students' Union also voted over what action to take after rejecting a 2.0% (below-inflation) offer.

Whilst there was an overwhelming mood to reject the offer, there was no clear mandate for strike action and so we've reluctantly accepted the 2.0%.

For workers at the University and the Students' Union, a further year of real-terms pay cuts will do nothing to improve motivation and overall happiness at work.

If we want the university to improve its services to students then there's a real need to recognise the value of the people who work here, both in terms of what we're paid and how our welfare is managed.

Staff surveys at both institutions revealed what we've known for a long time. Many people are over-worked, suffering from stress-related symptoms and generally feeling undervalued for the work they do.

Putting students at the heart of everything we do is only going to happen by valuing those who do the work.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

## More messages from the Vice Chancellor, UEB Open Meetings, a “Securing our Future” Project Board and three UK universities “on the brink of bankruptcy”

### *Is the University of Brighton in trouble?*

This year of student recruitment has added more pressure to those universities less able to recruit students, either because some of the “better” ones have expanded their number of places, or because the overall number of potential students has shrunk, or both.

As we all know, the competition between universities for students in a “market” where the funding follows the student, is clearly going to result in winners and losers over time. The unique features of higher education means that whilst it is a pretty idiotic way of providing a public service on a national scale, it has just about been possible to run this type of experiment without any major casualties in terms of universities declaring bankruptcy so far.

The remaining staff at Hastings (where the University has already thrown away nearly 800 undergraduate student places worth £7.4m per year), will tell you that some people have already suffered as a result of drastic changes, apparently designed to improve the University for the future.

The loss of 600 students against the target intake for this year is clearly an issue, although what really matters is the total student population and the volume of fees they’re all paying/borrowing/running up a lifetime’s worth of debt for. The problem of being 600 students short against the target depends what the target was, but I’m willing to accept that the University is short in terms of the likely income against what the expected income would have been. Equally, we need to understand what the expenditure plans were to be able to know how much of a problem this is. The University used to be notorious for what an ex-Dean referred to as “squirreling money away in contingencies”.

What is alarming is the suggestion that there’s a projected shortfall of approximately £20 million by 2020-21. This is clearly going to be based on a whole load of assumptions about future student numbers and costs. Without more details we just can’t tell how realistic this is.

So the Securing our Future Project Board, created to report to UEB, but including half of UEB, will meet to decide what to do about all this. Whilst we can’t say how knee-jerk or drastic their proposals may be, it’s likely that they will want to recommend closures of courses where recruitment has been difficult or students are consistently providing poor NSS results.

It’s not the job of the trade unions to say “ok then, that makes good sense.” Our role is to scrutinise what’s proposed and then campaign with our members if the proposed changes affect jobs or existing terms and conditions. We’re not resistant to change, but we will oppose changes which are detrimental to our members.

Fundamentally, a sensibly organised national higher education service would allow universities to thrive without the threat of financial disaster or the colossal waste of resources with universities trying to out-market each other.

Reports that three universities are close to the brink is worrying but not entirely unlikely. According to reports, one is in the North West whilst the other two are on the South Coast.

[inews.co.uk/news/education/university-bankruptcy-reliant-on-loans/](https://inews.co.uk/news/education/university-bankruptcy-reliant-on-loans/)

[www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/02/university-bankrupt-inevitable-market-forces](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/02/university-bankrupt-inevitable-market-forces)

It’s entirely understandable that the Vice Chancellor would want to do something about current problems, but we’d want to fully understand the situation. We still maintain that closing Hastings campus was a decision based on the future shape of the university rather than any financial justification.

If the University is in trouble, let’s see all the details so that we can judge for ourselves how much of a problem there is.

## ***Access to computers for all***

For many years, we've been asking that all members of staff have access to a PC which they can use to send and receive emails, look at Staff Central (if they want to), book leave and generally engage with what's happening at the University.

With the development of smartphones and the availability of Wi-Fi across campuses, this feels like it's less important and many people will probably use the computer in their pocket to do everything that they can use a PC for, but the principle of being able to use a PC during work time is something that we think is important.

For some members of staff, this isn't happening, either because they are not given the time to do so, or the facilities are not available when they're at work. We think this is unacceptable.

If this sounds like you then please let us know and we'll try to help. Also, if you need advice or training on how to use your work computer then the training provided by Information Services should be available for all members of staff, whatever your job. If your manager is not offering you help and support if you ask for it, please get in touch and we'll see what we can do to resolve it.



*UNISON members at Bradford University took four days of strike action this month to prevent 250 proposed redundancies.*

*Garbed in Halloween costumes, around 50 workers were on picket lines at both the main university campus and a satellite campus.*

*Anger is high among staff. One striker, Stephen, said: "I've only been working here ten months and already I've been through two restructures."*

*After a determined campaign, the University management reduced the number to 165 and then finally accepted that no compulsory redundancies would be made.*

## ***UNISON Higher Education Conference***

The annual conference of the higher education service group will take place on 10th January 2019 in Nottingham.

The agenda features crucial debates over pay, pensions and equalities. The full preliminary agenda is available on UNISON's website:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/events/2019-higher-education-conference/>

Our branch will be submitting amendments and looking to win support for a clear strategy to deliver a meaningful pay increase in August 2019.

All members are entitled to attend as visitors, although you'll need to book the day as leave.

Please let us know if you'd like to come with us.



# Why we're campaigning for £10/hour

Trade unions have always campaigned for a greater share of the value of our labour to come back to us as wages. It's more complicated in the public sector, where arguably, we're not producing commodities, but as working people, we're part of a global system of commodity production, and our wages are based on what's normal within a given society. This is then affected by pressures in both directions: we campaign to get more and the employers try to get more work out of us for less. However you dress it up, that's pretty much how it works.



For several years now, UNISON's policy has been to campaign for £10/hour as a minimum wage, as a step towards a real wage at which people can live a decent life. Applied to the University, this would mean that the pay rates of grades 1 and 2 would need to be abolished and everyone at grades 1-3 would be paid at the rate of grade 3. (Caretakers and security staff are already effectively paid more than their grade suggests through shift allowances.)

Obviously lumping everyone together like this would present some issues, but ones which we'd be happy to help overcome. We don't think that our members or anyone else should be denied a decent standard of living when they work hard. If University workers have to claim benefits, then the state, or the taxpayer, is effectively subsidising the University's low pay rates.

We're pleased that the University has agreed to pay equal to, or more than the Real Living Wage of £8.75/hour, (recently increased to £9.00/hour.) This means that new grade 1 staff starting at spinal point 5 will have their wages increased to spinal point 6 for a year, but when they come to receive an annual increment in April, their pay will stay as it is for another year. The cost to the University for each full-time person in this situation is approximately £400, taking account of national insurance and pension costs.

We estimate that there are around 170 grade 1 members of staff, but maybe only around 100 full-time equivalents, since most are part-time and of those, maybe 12 FTEs are at grade 5. On that basis, this commitment will cost the University no more than £5,000.

Obviously this is better than nothing, but a University genuinely wanting to abolish low pay could just have abolished spinal point 5 or even spinal point 6. Again, the calculation would reveal how little in cash terms this would actually cost. I'd guess as little as £10,000 per year, less than the cost of employing a principal lecturer for one day a week.

Anyway, we'd like to think that the commitment that the University will now pay at least Real Living Wage is down to years of pressure from trade unionists. We still think that £10/hour is necessary as a genuine and reasonable demand for all those who care about ending poverty pay and we'll continue to campaign for it.

