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University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

June 2018

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2018-19 Pay Latest

University staff

The national Service Group Executive has agreed that the final employers' offer of 2% or £425, whichever is greater, needs to be put to members, with the recommendation that members should reject it. We will therefore conduct a national consultative ballot of all members, strongly suggesting that members tell the employers politely but firmly that a real-terms pay cut is unacceptable.

This branch has always been clear, and our members have backed that up with successive local ballots, that we should never accept a pay offer which is below inflation. Our claim for 7.5% was designed to make up for years of below-inflation settlements and we can't continue to let our pay slide down in real terms.

It is true that 2% is higher than many previous years' settlements, but it always has to be seen in the context of what people buy with it, and rents, travel, food etc. have increased by at least 3% and are likely to continue to do so. Our argument is that the government needs to fund higher education properly and that includes paying higher education workers appropriately.

It has been suggested elsewhere in relation to health and local government workers, that current, multi-year settlements are good, but the annual increase should not be confused with increments, which are an agreed way of paying people two, three or four years into the job, less than the going rate, on the basis that they are still learning the role. This is an established principle and it is a dishonest representation to mix genuine cost-of-living increases with increments. (The proposed NHS pay settlement is for 6.5% over three years, so whilst some staff will also receive incremental increases, many will get 6.5% over three years, which almost certainly means a real terms pay cut.)

So, as soon as we're authorised to, we'll be issuing instructions for the ballot and we want every member to cast their vote. **We will recommend rejection of the offer.**

Students' Union

The claim submitted was for 3% for all. We'd also like to see student staff all paid at least the proper minimum wage of £7.83/hour, rather than allowing the legalised form of age discrimination and paying those under 25 less. Our claim will go to the Board of Trustees in July and we'll let all our members know the outcome as soon as possible after that.

UNISON's National Delegate Conference

For the third year running, UNISON's national decision making body will meet in Brighton. The National Delegate Conference (NDC) will take place at the **Brighton Centre from Tuesday 19th to Friday 22nd June** and all members can attend as visitors for some or all of the sessions provided you do so in your own time.



Every UNISON branch is encouraged to send a delegation and participate in the debates which shape policy and priorities for the year ahead, for the whole union. As a relatively small branch compared to some of the large local government and health branches, we only have one delegate, but this hasn't stopped us engaging with the discussions and making our point in the past. The conference is also a good chance to talk to other trade unionists, particularly across the south east region and higher education service group to see what's going on elsewhere and share ideas.

This year, we have one motion on the agenda, which stands some chance of being discussed (see below). Our motion is not controversial, but reasserts UNISON's current position of being in favour of free education, properly funded through general taxation, and argues that UNISON nationally needs to make more of an effort to tell people.

This branch will be represented by one (shared) delegation but we can have as many visitors as we like, so if you want to come and see what UNISON's highest decision-making body looks like, if only for half an hour, then just let us know.

There's a suggestion that **Jeremy Corbyn** may well make another appearance on the Friday morning, as he did last year.



Our motion to UNISON's National Delegate Conference

Motion 56. Higher Education as a Public Service

Conference notes since the introduction of tuition fees, the idea of higher education as a public service, available to all based on educational merit, has been ruthlessly attacked. Fees are now £9,250 at the vast majority of institutions and universities are forced to develop marketing strategies to compete for students, who are seen as customers buying degrees as a product.

Introducing competition into higher education has been and continues to be a disaster for students, education workers and all working people, irrespective of their involvement in university life. Whilst many public services delivered by local authorities and the NHS are being relentlessly starved of funds, the elaborate system of student loans for fees is a con trick designed to fiddle the accounts and ultimately extract profits from future generations of graduates, as if young people don't have enough to worry about.

The speed of change is forcing vice-chancellors to turn their institutions into businesses, with the inevitable impact on jobs, terms and conditions of our members. Unprofitable courses are cut and campuses are closed, whilst students are crammed into sub-standard classrooms and ripped off by private landlords, or unaffordable university halls.

The proposed review of higher education funding, in the hands of such a reactionary government, will inevitably mean an attack on our members' jobs in particular and education as a public service in general.

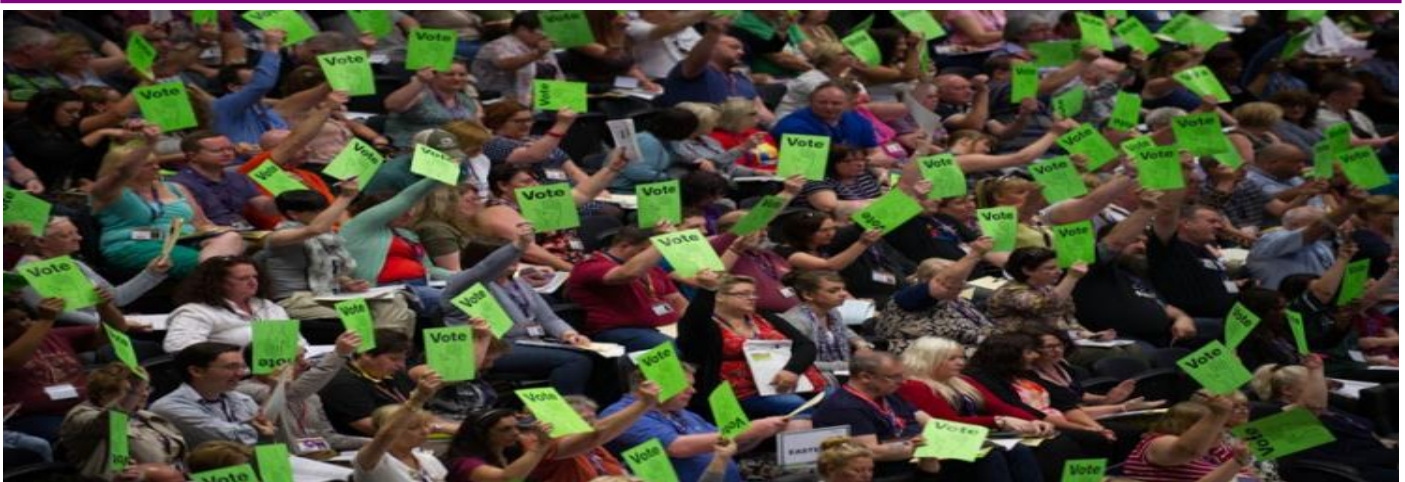
The trade union movement has a responsibility to defend higher education as a public service and the workers providing and supporting it.

To return higher education to a service free to all, fully funded from taxation, and to write off all loans would cost billions. However, this is entirely possible given the colossal wealth which exists in the hands of the rich and the billions wasted on armaments etc.

A clear call for free education, combined with an end to fees and effective taxation of the rich, will gain a major echo from millions of working people looking for an alternative to cuts and privatisation.

Conference calls on the National Executive Council to:

- 1) Be loud and clear in campaigning for free and properly funded education at all levels and for all ages;*
- 2) Identify and implement a strategy to make free education a major theme of UNISON's political campaigning, with particular reference to recruiting young workers and students into the trade union movement.*



How safe are our pensions?

The promise of a pension is one of the reasons why working at the university can be such an attractive proposition for many of us. For a long time, the theory was that public sector workers would put up with poor wages because they were compensated with a reasonable expectation that retirement would be ok.

Those of you around in 2011, will remember that we participated in what was a massive battle over the future of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), which ended in us not getting anything like what we should have done.

Since then, pensions at universities had been relatively stable until someone decided that the USS scheme at older universities should be amended, resulting in magnificent support for strikes in defence of pension rights at Sussex and across virtually all pre-92 institutions.

At **Southampton University**, recent attempts to replace an in-house scheme for non-academic staff have been fought off after a strong campaign by UNISON and members there will retain their final salary scheme. This is not, however, a full victory, since new starters after 1st August will be forced into an inferior scheme, creating a two-tier workforce. We congratulate our colleagues at Southampton for their partial victory and wish them success in campaigning for decent pensions for all.

Recent moves by **Staffordshire University's** management to "achieve financial sustainability" involve manoeuvres intended to pull large chunks of their workforce away from the LGPS. It's not possible to just decide that a university with the LGPS as its default pension can put out of being an eligible body, so their plan is to move their entire grade 1 to 6 workforce (i.e. the majority of support staff) to a new company, which will provide services (er, the same services) to the university, but a less cost because all the staff are on the least expensive (and least worth having) pension scheme.

If they get away with this, apart from making a total farce of the concept of organisations not being able to interfere with their employees' pension rights, then this will open the floodgates for universities like ours. It's not just trade unionists that are watching with interest at what happens at Southampton and Staffordshire. University leaders are, ironically, comparing notes to that they can plan new wheezes to reduce their staff costs and make their institutions more competitive.

What's driving all this is the large relative cost of funding pension schemes and the willingness of university managers to think "the unthinkable", now that they're beginning to see the cost-saving opportunities available for universities in desperate competition with each other.

The LGPS costs the university a substantial amount of money. From a management point of view, this makes us all more expensive than staff at many of our "competitors" and explains why some universities have gone down the road of finding imaginative ways of driving down their employees' pension rights.

Just as we'd argue that the top spinal point is the rate for the job (so increments are not pay rises), then our right to belong to the LGPS in its present state with our agreed pension rights, is part of our contract which we'll fight to defend, for existing and future employees.

We're not expecting any imminent changes, but in the eyes of many, the LGPS at universities, is a very expensive remnant of the fact that post-92 institutions were once run by local authorities. It's likely that the logic of doing away with LGPS, possibly for new starters only, and with the false promise of lower employee contributions (meaning higher take home pay), will form a smokescreen to an attack on our pension rights in the future, and we need to be clear that we will fight to retain our existing rights whilst supporting those elsewhere who are already battling to retain theirs.

We send our full support to University of Staffordshire UNISON members in their battle to retain their pension rights, because their fight today could well be our fight tomorrow.



2018 Service Group Elections

You may have noticed that some UNISON members have been electing candidates to their service group executives (SGE) over the last couple of months. If you did receive a ballot paper, then you probably shouldn't have done (please let us know!) because the three seats for our region are unopposed or vacant.

They are as follows:

Higher Education Women's Seat (reserved for a woman)

Sarah Pickett (our Labour Link Officer and a Students' Union rep)

Higher Education General Seat (for a woman or a man)

Ivan Bonsell (our Branch Secretary)

Higher Education Low Paid Seat (for a woman earning less than £9.94/hour)

vacant



Sarah and Ivan will take up their seats on the national SGE for higher education in a couple of weeks, representing all higher education workers and branches across the region's 17 HEIs from Brighton to Canterbury and Portsmouth to Oxford.

Sarah has been an SGE member for four years already, but Ivan is new, taking over from Adrian Dolby of Southampton, who is standing down. Ivan said, "I'm looking forward to getting involved in helping to shape some of the policies of the higher education group and making sure that we campaign effectively on pay, pensions and rights for the most vulnerable workers which we represent.

There's a real need for university workers to

stick together on a national basis despite this government's attempts to make us compete with each other."

The seats are reserved for different groups in an attempt to encourage participation for groups of members who have historically been less involved in UNISON's democracy, so it's a shame that the low-paid seat is currently vacant.

As it stands, any female member on grades 1 or 2 would be eligible to put themselves forward to fill this seat and are likely to be unopposed in doing so, so if that's you and you'd like to know more about it, then please let us know.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about the bigger issues that are dealt with on a national basis, then please feel free to contact Sarah or Ivan at any time.

Apprenticeships

We've been talking with the University on and off about apprenticeships, which they would like to introduce on the basis of work experience and college delivered training for a fixed period, with no guaranteed employment at the end of it.

We think that having apprentices can either be a massively positive step towards providing genuine training for people, whilst rewarding their work adequately and making sure that those providing the training are given the time to do so by backfilling part of their existing roles with additional resources.

Alternatively, it can be an attempt to make it look like the University is doing the right thing, with the apprentice either not receiving attention (because we're all too busy) or being exploited at below agreed national rates for pay, or both.

What we wanted was:

- *A rate of pay of at least £7.83/hour throughout (i.e. the basic rate of minimum wage) given that the trainee is receiving education and not carrying out existing work.*
- *Proper involvement of the supervisor, so that the apprentice could receive enough attention without the supervisor having to do their own job as well, which could only properly come through backfilling some of their time and amending their job description.*
- *An ability to sign an apprentices agreement with the University, guaranteeing mutual cooperation and support for the scheme.*

What we have been given is:

- *A rate of pay of £5.60/hour for the first year, followed by the (age dependent) minimum wage.*
- *No recognition that the supervisor will not be able to properly train the apprentice and complete their own job. (Presumably you're just expected to deal with it.)*
- *A frankly bizarre attempt to explain away the £2.23/hour difference on the basis of being able to "sell" the scheme to the head of department, as if £2.23/hour (about £4,000/year) is going to bankrupt the University.*

So, after being accused of being negative about apprenticeships, we're very happy for the university to have them, but we're not in favour of an apprentices-on-the-cheap scheme, which ticks lots of boxes, apart from providing good quality training and recognising that this costs money to deliver properly.

It feels like the University's management is negative about genuinely funded apprenticeship schemes.

