



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member, we need you to join now!

Fill in a paper form or join online. Just ask a steward or follow the link from Staff Central.

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

February 2020

Welcome to our February newsletter!

This month's issue features stuff about the reviews of Academic Services, Size and Shape. There's also a report on the Higher Education Conference and what it means for us, and our objections to the proposed closure of Phoenix Nursery.

As we put this together, we're making preparations for our Annual General Meetings. This year we're having four.

We're holding identical meetings at each site during the first week of March and all members are invited to attend whichever one make the most practical sense to go to.

We're trying to sort out a speaker and/or a video from Birmingham University branch where UNISON members successfully took strike action

for a better pay deal. We'll also use the time to talk about current developments and make plans for the coming year.

We've always been very pleased at our AGM attendance, particularly given that many of our members find it difficult, if not impossible to get away from work, but you have the right to attend provided you give your manager enough notice.

Whether you've been a member for ten years or ten days, please try to come along to an AGM.

There are details in our special AGM supplement, where you can find links to our nomination forms (for people wishing to be officers or stewards) and the chance to ask a question or propose a motion.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Thanks for reading!

Ivan, Branch Secretary

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Would you close this down?

Phoenix Nursery

Phoenix Residency Halls, Flat 2, Block E, Southover Street, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 9WN



Inspection date 5 June 2019
Previous inspection date 26 March 2015

The quality and standards of the early years provision	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding	1
Personal development, behaviour and welfare		Outstanding	1
Outcomes for children		Outstanding	1

We've written elsewhere about how we object to the closure of Phoenix Nursery. Not just because it's going to mean a loss of jobs, but because it's going to mean the destruction of years of hard work by the staff to make it consistently rated outstanding. It provides a valuable service to staff, students and the wider community of Hanover and Brighton. It demonstrates at least in part that the University has more than a box-ticking interest in widening participation, allowing mature students with children a better chance of academic success.

Meanwhile, the need for greater standards in education has been used for a decade to attempt to justify the bottomless pit of essential university resources that have been thrown at Brighton Academies Trust.

Our University has colluded with the government programme of taking schools out of local authority control and handing them over to be managed by self-appointed, non-elected groups of local dignitaries. This may or may not have improved standards at individual schools, but most

experts agree that academy schools have done nothing to improve the UK education system overall.

Ultimately, it's a question of what the University chooses to spend money on. We think spending a relatively small amount to fund consistently outstanding childcare provision is perfectly reasonable, and getting into debates about what's sustainable and what's unsustainable is not very sensible, given that hardly any of the university's central services pay for themselves.



In 2010, closure of Phoenix Nursery was proposed by the equivalent of UEB because it was “unsustainable” and “not core business”. This coincided with a generalised movement against cuts across the country in the wake of the financial crash of 2007-08.

A demonstration against the cuts in March of that year attracted thousands and nursery workers and their supporters were part of that.

We also lobbied the Board of Governors’ meeting early one morning in the pouring rain. (Round the back of Mithras House where the steepness of the hill put us on a level with the second floor meeting.)



All this resulted in some people, somewhere within the University’s decision-making process, revisiting the initial decision and accepting our plan to open up the nursery provision to the local community.

What this demonstrated was, at that time, it was possible for those who make the decisions to change their mind.



Arguably, this was, to some extent, the membership of the Board of Governors thinking what a terrible idea closure would be. We thought at the time that maybe the full plan was not properly explained to them.

Anyway, the Nursery was saved

and ten years later we’re back to where we were, but in a different scenario.

As competition between universities for students gets more intense, we’re going to be seeing much more of this - attempts to save a small amount here and there to keep the banks happy that the University can still generate sufficient cash for them not to call in their loans.

The problem is that all these services make the University what it is, and cutting everything that’s not “core” will result in a bland institution with no character or attractive features, where everything is only ever provided if we think enough students demand it.

There’s still time to re-think this decision.



Academic Services, Size and Shape

What we expected at this stage was “a detailed plan”. Maybe we misunderstood, but what we have actually got is further proposals to consider and feedback on, so we’ll be doing that by the mid-February deadline.

Obviously our main concern with all this is our members’ jobs, terms and conditions and how happy they are in their working environment. As far as we can tell at the moment, the proposals will have a direct affect on school administration managers, their deputies and programme administrators who happen to be in a new school where there are deemed to be too many of them. There are also some quite firm suggestions over centralising some activities which will mean that school staff are drawn into Academic Services (or whatever it’s called) and Student Centre staff are expected to work unsocial hours on the off-chance that a student wants something at quarter past six rather than during more sensible working hours.

What we have to remember is that much of the drive for these changes is about saving money, so depending what happens with the current round of voluntary severance, there are potentially compulsory redundancies hidden as VS options around the corner. (It’s not really voluntarily if the only other option is redundancy.)

We’re also conscious of a few subtle hints about a flexible workforce. Yes, let’s make jobs more interesting and rewarding if people can voluntary work across different areas doing different things, but we’re not happy about generalised, poorly paid admin staff being sent all over the University where there are gaps. Part of the issue last time they tried to reorganise Academic Services (and by all accounts, made a total mess of it) was that people didn’t want to become “experts” in one thing, which in effect, downskills the workforce.

We’re hoping that we’ll have some firm proposals by the end of March, ahead of a full consultation of all those who’s situation will be affected by the final plan.

As we’ve emphasised before, if this results in major changes which threaten the jobs of our members then we’ll consider how to respond. If necessary we’ll need to consult members on what action we can take, up to and including strike action, to defend our members’ jobs.

2019-20 Pay Dispute Latest (1)

Thanks to the pressure of UCU’s strike action, the employers’ body, UCEA, have made some meaningful concessions over casualisation, workloads in relation to mental health and work to improve the gender and ethnic pay gaps. What they are refusing to do it budge on pay.

By the time this goes out, we should have some idea of what UCU’s next move is, which could mean further strikes called in late February.....

2019-20 Pay Dispute Latest (2)

UCU have asked us to ask our members for support for those members taking strike action who face particular hardship as a result of losing pay.

We are asking our supporters, fellow trade unionists and those of our own members who can, to chip in whatever they can afford to help us to support those in particular financial hardship.

Please spread the word amongst friends, family, colleagues and others who support higher education. And please donate what you can at:

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/brighton-ucu>



Voluntary Severance - UNISON Help

As promised last month, if you've applied for voluntary severance and are seriously thinking about accepting an offer if you get one, here's what to do if you want our help.

If you're told that your application has been accepted, you need to get some legal advice. This won't be help over whether you should accept it or not, but more a formality that's legally required, so that a legal expert can check the documentation and make sure you understand what you're about to agree.

If you want a UNISON legal rep (from Thompsons, who are the leading group of solicitors specialising in trade union and employment law) then you just need to email us at UNISONHelp@brighton.ac.uk with the pdf of the agreement that HR will have given you and a confirmation of your contact details (name, address, email and phone number). We'll then pass this on and a Thompsons legal person will call you to discuss.

If you'd sooner sort this all out yourself at a High Street solicitors, then they can also provide a service, for a price. The University will cover the cost either way, within a limit of £300.

Please don't forget, you've not agreed to anything until you sign and return the document and you can change your mind at any time before that. It goes without saying that unless you're effectively retiring or close to retirement age, you should seek some information about the effect this will have on your pension and think about what you do next, especially given that some welfare benefits might be difficult to access if you've voluntarily left your job.

If you want to talk further about any of this, please feel free to contact a rep.

UNISON SOGs!

What are they and why would I want to be in one?



Part of UNISON's equality work involves having Self Organised Groups (SOGs) within UNISON for members who experience particular types of prejudice and discrimination.

These groups meet locally, regionally and nationally to discuss, campaign and organise around the specific issues that affect them. They help UNISON understand equality and meet our equality aims.

Our four self-organised groups are for black members; disabled members; LGBT+ members and women members. We also have equality groups for young members (under 27) and retired members.

These groups have their own dedicated national conferences which debate and make decisions about what action UNISON should be taking for members in that particular group. This all then gets fed into UNISON nationally through UNISON National Delegate conference and from the SOG national committees.

If you are interested in any of these groups, just search on the UNISON national website for the group you are interested in and you can give your email address to be contacted directly by that group. We could potentially set up SOG groups within the branch if there was enough interest.

If you do join a SOG and are interested in attending the conference of that group please let us know and we may be able to pay your basic expenses, provided you are willing to write a short report for us after the event, which we may want to put on our blog or in our newsletter.

Any queries please contact our Equality Officer, Emily - E.L.Brooks@brighton.ac.uk



UNISON Higher Education Conference 2020

There's a full report of what happened on our blog: unison.brighton.ac.uk/, but the main issue debated was our branch's motion on the use of disaggregate ballots.

As you'll recall, our ability to take any meaningful action over pay was stifled by our aggregate ballot turnout of 29%, where at least 50% is required for a legal strike mandate. Whilst we managed that here, thanks to a lot of hard work and having many branch members on whom we could rely to remember to vote, this was not the case nationally.

Our motion was designed to make sure the ballot next year is done on a disaggregate basis, which we think gives us a fighting chance of making a difference.

The debate was quite polarised, but for those of us used to trade union conferences, where everyone agrees on the issue that something bad is actually really bad, this was a breath of fresh air. It was so good to have a proper debate over something that really makes a difference and for our branch to be leading that.

Disaggregate Ballots

Individual disputes are declared at different universities, but over the same issue. Each branch then ballots but on the basis that a 50% turnout locally will be enough for local strike action to legally take place, provided that's the result. Whilst this could be divisive, with some branch striking while others don't, it's still possible to maintain the national focus of the multiple disputes by organising hardship fund donations from branches not taking action and re-balloting to gain a mandate to keep the momentum going. UCU have to some extent gone down this road for the current dispute over their four claims and changes to the USS pension fund.

Our motion was passed by 8,108 to 6,350.

What this means is that the stronger branches will be able to take action next year provided they hit the 50% turnout threshold. Obviously we want them all to, but if any don't, it won't prevent the others by bringing down the national turnout.

It was great to see our branch delegates, Sian Williams and Martin Loftus, make a real difference to the conference and we'll be back next year to argue for a fighting democratic union which makes significant progress in winning better pay, pensions and working conditions for all of us.

Aggregate Ballots

All members nationally are balloted on a national dispute with the employers' organisation over the issue. This means that at least 50% of those issued with ballot papers have to return them for the result to count, whatever the result is. Last year we managed a 29% turnout and the year before it was 31%. Whilst this approach maintains the unity of branches across the country, it's a united approach of not be legally able to do anything.

Anyway, we had 19 speakers, including the Service Group Executive speaker, speaking on behalf of the leadership body and dutifully opposing our motion.

The show of hands was close, so the first card vote, (where the number of votes for each branch delegation relates to the number of members in each branch) for 17 years was called.



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Closing date for receipt of applications is **Friday 14 February 2020**.

NOTE: The £18,000 net income applies only to the There for You small grants programme. Any member who is struggling financially due to an unexpected crisis should either contact their branch welfare officer, call us on

020 7121 5620 or visit www.unison.co.uk/thereforyou for more information.

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the public service union

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