



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member, we want you to join us.

You can still join UNISON easily on-line.

Just follow the link from our blog on Staff Central.

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

September 2020

The return of students to the University is going to be a challenging time for everybody.

We've been in endless meetings and discussions with the University and health and safety experts on what we should expect in terms of measures intended to protect staff and students from infection and what we're comfortable with.

How you feel about working on-site, including how you're going to get there and back, obviously depends on who you are and what your situation is. For every person who is really looking forward to working back on site after months of working at home, there's someone who is literally having panic attacks at the thought of it. The last six months have had a profound effect on us all in different ways.

What we've been doing is looking at proposed control measures to limit the number of people on site at any one time and to keep people apart from each other as much as possible. These are one-

way systems around buildings where possible, sanitiser provided in classrooms and elsewhere, multiple signs on lifts, toilets, doors etc. and a small number of student "Covid champions" to try to control student movement.

We've supported all these measures and have argued where necessary that the University goes further in managing the situation. (We were arguing in favour of face-coverings before they were fashionable.)

There has been a colossal amount of work done to make buildings "Covid-secure" and whilst we have some scepticism that things might go a bit wrong, we recognise the work done by everybody at the University in unprecedented times.

This month's newsletter looks at the proposed changes to Information Services and what we can do about them. Please keep an eye on our blog for the latest.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

Follow us...

Online: blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison

Facebook: [UNISON at University of Brighton](#)

Twitter: [@UniBtonUnison](#)

Compulsory Redundancies Across Information Services



Securing our Future?

For any trade union branch, securing our members' jobs is the most important issue. We've always been opposed to redundancies and in the cases where this has been threatened and happened, we've had to weigh up what we can do about it, from arguing with management about the need to "let people go" right through to balloting members over strike action to try to stop it.

On 17th September, a total of 49 people, mainly those involved in IT support and reprographics, were told that their jobs were at risk as a result of the first major Securing Our Future report, recommending that the number of people employed in these areas should be reduced.

Different interpretations are available, but the general idea is that there will be fewer IT Support Technicians and managers, and roughly half the number of people working for Reprographics as much of the work is to be contracted out. Many people are now to face the undignified process of applying for new jobs, not exactly their existing jobs but as good as, alongside people they've worked alongside for years, as a competitive process, because there aren't enough roles available for everyone. Some are facing no obvious role and will have to try their luck in the redeployment pool.

Depending on how this plays out, we're looking at more redundancies in one go than we've ever had to deal with - enough to make us strongly object to both the process and the outcome. There are effectively two issues here:

Change in Process

Normally, if there is such a thing anymore, the University would conduct a consultation and then, at the end of a month's worth of questions and comments, produce a written outcome and then get on with making the changes.

What's happening here is that years of convention have been unilaterally dumped and the process of filling the new roles in a new structure, the existence and nature of which has "not yet been decided", are taking place during the consultation period. We think, as do UNISON's lawyers, that this makes the consultation significantly less meaningful, if at all, and that the end result appears to be a done deal.

The University way will help to "mitigate redundancies", which is true if by redundancies we mean the number of redundancy notices issued at the end of the consultation period. We think redundancies to most people means not having a job, not the technicalities of notice letters.

Compulsory Redundancies

Depending on what happens, bearing in mind you don't know in advance how many people will be happy with enhanced redundancy payments or who will fill the vacant "redeployment opportunities", this process as it stands will probably result in somewhere between half a dozen and around 15 redundancies. (Perhaps the worst situation is that of the three print workers faced with redundancy or, if they are lucky, one of the two term time only roles, meaning that if they avoid redundancy, they're facing a 25% pay cut.)

Many might say, between 6 and 15 redundancies is not many people, but that's not the point. Trade unions cannot sit back and allow this to happen without a fight. We know that Securing Our Future is about reducing the staffing cost base and getting those left to work harder.

Around the corner, is the phased transfer of School and Academic Services people into the new reduced school structures and it would be naïve to think that this won't result in a similar situation with a regrettable finite amount of redundancies, which the University would like to be able to "mitigate" as long as that doesn't mean changing their mind about job losses in the first place.

Where 30 IT Technicians are currently expected to compete with each other for the 23 posts, we'll be seeing something like 80 Programme Administrators forced to compete for the 65 School Programme Technicians, or something. This made up scenario is entirely on the cards.

So, we're faced with an important situation where



we have to fight the redundancies and we'll be calling on all our members to do what they can.

At this stage, we're making sure everyone knows about this, and asking people for their support, in objecting to the job losses and providing examples of the work that these people have done.

We'll be discussing with the University about how they could save the jobs of people threatened, by tweaking their plans or seeing if people are willing to leave through more generous packages. We'll also be suggesting that the plans could be paused, again, given the national health crisis and the fact that none of us, current and future staff and students want to see Brighton as the University which makes people redundant at Christmas, in the middle of a national pandemic with mass unemployment.

Ultimately, we'll need to use the power of our members and we'll be asking you to be willing to take industrial action if necessary. We don't want to go down that road, but when the University directly threatens the jobs of our members in such a blatant way, we have to do whatever we can to defend those jobs and the people filling them.

Victory!

SOAS backs down and commits to no compulsory redundancies

- Celebrate the SOAS UNISON victory against compulsory redundancies
- Say no to premature return to face-to-face teaching and unsafe campuses

Join our lunchtime rally

Tuesday 22 September 12:30–2:00



#NoSOASWithoutUs
#WeAreSOAS

If anyone wanted any examples of what can be achieved by a trade union, the experience of SOAS branch is a good place to start. The School of Oriental and African Studies is a part of the University of London and was expected to be hard hit by the anticipated drop in the number of international students this year.

In a similar situation to what's happening at Brighton, but on a larger scale, SOAS's management placed 159 staff at risk of redundancy with an "expected" 88 compulsory redundancies. This involved closure of the on-site catering services, a 40% cut in cleaning services and widespread cuts and outsourcing across all central departments.

UNISON's response was an industrial action ballot in which 74.8% of members voted yes to strike action on a 71.9% turnout. A staggering result.

Days before the first strike was due to take place, SOAS's management made a binding commitment that there would be no compulsory redundancies as part of the Transformation and Change restructuring project.

A decisive result of this kind is not easy and this result comes after many years and decades of building the branch and showing in practical terms what working people sticking together looks like.

Our branch agreed to send a message of support and a donation to their strike fund, which will not now be required, but we will send the following message:

"University of Brighton UNISON Branch sends our warmest wishes to SOAS UNISON members for defeating the attempt to cut jobs. Without a union branch determined to defend the interests of its members, SOAS workers would now be facing unemployment at the worst possible time."

"Our members at Brighton are also facing a similar situation on a smaller scale. It is inspirational to hear of success stories such as yours, when workers need to fight back against injustice, in part caused by the global pandemic but mainly as a result of the marketisation of higher education."

UNISON General Secretary Election



Dave Prentis (pictured), the general secretary of UNISON since 2001, is to retire at the end of December. The election of a replacement will be held during late October and November and all of UNISON's members (as at 28th July) will get a vote. Ballot papers will be sent to the home addresses of members as per UNISON's membership system, so if you've recently moved or just want to check your details, please register at [MyUNISON](#), or contact us to check.

Our branch committee met in September and nominated Paul Holmes. We'll produce further details nearer the time, but it's important that as many members as possible vote to determine who the future general secretary will be and strengthen the democracy of our union.

Pay Latest

Many will have seen and read the Vice Chancellor's message about national pay negotiations earlier this month.

The message was consistent with other VC messages at other universities, which pretty much said that "negotiations" have resulted in a zero percent pay "offer" for this year as universities were worried about the effect of the pandemic on recruitment and therefore income, as we all were.



As far as we're concerned, a zero percent pay rise, in reality a real terms pay cut, is unacceptable. We'll be determining what we can do about this, but we'd much prefer a UCEA statement which said what they were thinking - thanks for all your efforts over the past year, but you'll now have to work harder with less money because students might not come here. Now that students have arrived in record numbers, we'd expect the situation to change.

Some university managements have withheld increments from their employees. Apparently UEB and the VC have "decided that the majority of staff will this year continue to benefit from incremental increases". Given that this is a contractual right, it's a bit like saying our members have decided that we'll do some work this week, so UEB will benefit from us fulfilling our contractual obligations.

Increments are not about whether UEB is nice enough to let us have them or not. They are written into terms and conditions and effectively mean that new starters do not receive the full pay for their job until after three or more years' service. In return, they receive an incremental uplift, worth 3%, every April or September in recognition of progress towards the top spinal point of the grade - the rate for the job.

Some would argue that this costs the University more than the annual pay increase, and it would do, temporarily, if people never left, but it is offset by the savings made when people leave their jobs or retire, only to be replaced by someone at the bottom spinal point of their grade.

It's very nice for UEB to agree we can still have the increments we're entitled to.

In return, we'll do some work. Thanks.

STOP UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES PLAN FOR SECOND-CLASS EMPLOYEES!

Our branch is supporting UNISON members at the University of South Wales.

[Please sign their petition if you can.](#)



The University of South Wales (USW) has announced plans to employ all new support staff in a new company owned by the University which will allow them to employ staff on lower wages, inferior pensions, and reduced terms and conditions. This is being done in the name of cutting costs despite the University sitting on cash reserves of £100 million pounds. In most cases, new starters will earn thousands of pounds less than existing colleagues doing exactly the same job. The proposed terms are the worst of any University in the UK. New starters will effectively be second-class employees.

New support staff will get:

- + Lower Wages
- + Far Inferior Pension
- + Less Maternity/Paternity pay
- + Less Annual Leave
- + Less Sick leave
- + No Flexitime
- + Performance Related Pay
- + No Cost of Living Increase (unless directors say otherwise)

These changes will affect staff working in IT, examinations, academic registry, libraries, estates, accommodation and student support. Academic staff will not be affected, which sends a clear signal that support staff are not important to the University Executive.

There are 100 million reasons not to do this! The University is sitting on cash reserves of £100 million pounds. The University takes its staff from communities with high levels of deprivation. By doing this the University will be taking money away from a poorer area and failing in its civic duty. Female employees will also be disproportionately affected as they comprise the majority of support staff. Existing staff could eventually be transferred to the new company and its inferior employment contracts.

Staff unions, GMB and UNISON, are appalled by this divisive strategy and supported by the university lecturers' union, UCU, we are determined to challenge and oppose these plans. We will be enlisting the support of students, the local community and politicians to resist these proposals.

Show your support, please sign and share our petition today!

#100millionUSW