



***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**

## **October 2020**

### ***Securing Our Future? Consultative Ballot Launched***

The situation we've been expecting for many years is now starting to play out, with Information Services staff facing redundancies, as well as a small group of school administrative staff. We're expecting the number of people that the University plans to be made redundant over the next year or so to increase, so after years of talking about this, we need to do something about it.

Our consultative ballot over compulsory redundancies is now live, until 5pm on 16th October, so if you work directly for the University then please make sure you vote.

This is important, because we need to test the willingness of our members to take strike action, if it comes to that.

We're hoping this won't be necessary, and that the University will find a way to avoid redundancies of

those who want to remain working here.

**Please make sure you use your vote!**

### ***Return to Teaching on Campus***

As I write this, we don't really know what a limited return to classes on campus looks like. We'll be doing inspections this week to find out, but for many people, and many of our members, there is real concern over working on site and what it means for their health and safety.

Please do not return to work without having completed the questionnaire and discussed it with your line manager. Whilst every individual case is different, if your concerns are making you ill or just anxious, we'd argue that you shouldn't be working on site and would expect your manager to respect your feelings.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

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# Health and Safety Issues

The next few weeks and months are going to be crucial in terms of how the pandemic effects the life of higher education. It's possible that students will return, in limited numbers as far as campus population goes, and everything is relatively fine. Or, students will return in larger numbers than we can manage, staff will fall ill and the measures put in place will be seen to be ineffective given the national, worsening situation. It's probably going to be somewhere in between these two scenarios.

Students are going to get this, and many will do so without symptoms. We've been debating for months the maximum number of people in each room on campus, but nobody has seriously suggested that halls of residence should be deliberately half full. As students tend to live in close proximity to each other, in halls or shared housing, we shouldn't be surprised if "outbreaks" occur or if the level of infection amongst the student population is higher than the national average.

What matters most is that everything possible is done to prevent those most at risk of serious harm from the effects of infection, contracting the disease.

For many people, working on site after months of working safely at home is a big issue. As the national picture appears to deteriorate, anxiety over health concerns is going to be an issue, as is the apparent contradiction of the government advice "stay working at home if you can", whilst educational establishments should try to function as normal. Universities are apparently "open for business" as if business is a catch all term for what universities do.

If you have concerns about working on site:

- Complete the questionnaire and discuss the results with your line manager
- Make sure you have seen, read and understood all the relevant risk assessments
- Ask to speak with Occupational Health about your concerns
- If necessary, talk to your GP

If there are significant medical or psychological reasons why being at work on campus is going to cause you distress or significant risk, then we think you should remain working at home for the foreseeable future.



## ***Consultative Ballot over Information Services changes***

**PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU VOTE BY**

**5pm, 16th OCTOBER**

***If you work directly for the University, you should have received an email link to our on-line ballot. Please make sure you have your say by the deadline.***

***We need as many members as possible to show the strength of feeling over compulsory redundancies, which are hanging over some members and could be hanging over any one of us soon.***

### ***Fee Waiver Policy***

Many members will have been shocked and upset over the changes made to the policy which allowed staff to study at the University with a fee waiver. This has long been seen as the only perk which working here provides and it made sense for years for the University to provide this to its workforce.

The introduction of tuition fees changed the financial arrangements, and where the University was able to claim funding for every student, it now has to get the funding from the student.

However, denying the chance for people to study whatever they want, for the sake of education and everything this brings is apparently the way this is going to go, causing confusion and disappointment across a load of staff members.

The cost of this is marginal and the benefits it brings in terms of staff satisfaction is massive. By changing this policy, the University are clearing the way for a much more combative attitude to its own workforce, which started with the closure of Hastings campus and we're now seeing with redundancies becoming the norm.

It's worth pointing out that "consultation with our trade unions" consisted of the existing policy being re-written and presented to us, at which point we rejected all the proposals. The policy as published therefore, includes some modifications to what people will have to contribute, but in reality, it has been imposed by the University.



October is Black History Month. The webinars below are organised by the South East region and open to any members who are interested and able to attend.

Please let us know if you need your membership number to register and you don't have it.

## Black Members Tackling Racism

**Tuesday 13 October | 11:00 - 12:00**

This webinar is aimed at Black members and will cover the ways in which racism can be experienced. We will then look to why victims and onlookers do not always report racism when it happens before looking at the legal protections - both inside and outside the workplace which are available to those experiencing or witnessing racism.

This webinar is free to attend. To apply, please email your membership number to [educationse@unison.co.uk](mailto:educationse@unison.co.uk).



## Eradicating Racism in the Workplace

**Wednesday 28 October | 11:00 - 12:00**

A one hour webinar aimed at supporting UNISON activists who want to learn more about how to move towards eradicating racism in the workplace.

This course will cover;

- Examining issues that might be affecting Black UNISON members right now
- Learning how to support Black members facing racism and discrimination in the workplace
- Identifying signs of systematic racism and consider how to tackle it
- Exploring ways of increasing UNISON activism amongst Black members

Receiving guidance on the importance and use of UNISON Race Protocol in branch casework

This webinar is free to attend. To apply, please email your membership number to

[educationse@unison.co.uk](mailto:educationse@unison.co.uk).