



***University of Brighton branch
Annual General Meeting
12 noon, 3rd March 2021
via Teams (Group UNISON-meeting)
Agenda and Papers***

- 1) Welcome**
- 2) Minutes of last year's meetings (pages 2,3, 4)**
- 3) Guest speaker - Kate Knight, independent councillor for Moulsecoomb and Community Market organiser**
- 4) Financial return for the year 2020 (pages 5,6)**
- 5) Ratification of Branch Officers (page 7)**
- 6) Branch Secretary's Address and Questions (pages 8,9,10,11)**
- 7) Motions or Branch Rule Changes (non received)**

Meeting ends 1.30pm

1. Welcome

Thanks for attending our AGM, especially if you're new to the branch or haven't been to an AGM before.

Please bear in mind, given that we're using teams:

Any comments you make or posts you put into the chat could be seen by everyone at the meeting or everyone who is or has been a member of the Team.

Please mute your microphone if you have any background noise.

2. Minutes of last year's Annual General Meetings

University of Brighton branch - Annual General Meetings 2020

The AGM consisted of four separate meetings held at City Campus, Falmer, Eastbourne and Moulsecoomb respectively, on 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th March 2020.

To some extent this was experimental, and the turnout at each meeting reflected the size of each campus, with Moulsecoomb being the largest. For the Moulsecoomb meeting, there was a live Skype link from representatives from Birmingham University branch, who had successfully taken strike action to achieve a significant pay increase for their members.

All those who came to the first three meetings agreed that having localised meetings made practical sense for a branch split across four or five locations, even if it meant we lost some of the collective spirit of the one single meeting.

Each meeting heard from guest speakers from UCU who explained their "four fights" (pay, insecurity, workload and equality) dispute and asked for our support. The meeting agreed a £500 donation to their strike hardship fund.

Branch officers were agreed as follows:

Branch Chair	Martin Loftus, Sian Williams
Branch Secretary	Ivan Bonsell
Branch Treasurer	Dawn Whitaker
Black Members' Officer	Jean Bosco Ndayizeye
Equalities Coordinator	Emily Brooks
Health and Safety Officer	Alan Dilley
Labour Link Officer	Antonia Berelson, Sarah Pickett
LGBT+ Officer	Sarah Pickett
Education Co-ordinator	Cathy Peters
Retired Members' Officer	Mike Adams
Women's Officer	Charlene Tanton, Debbie Neale, Jodie Jones
Young Members' Officer	Shannon Fay

The branch secretary addressed the meeting, and talked about the challenges facing the branch over the coming year. There were discussions on pay, communications and how the branch can support members. There was general agreement that the branch should support UCU in their dispute over pay and some frustration that we have not been able to join them, which would have been much more effective.

The meetings discussed the following motions:

Motion 1

Proposed by Jean Bosco Ndayizeye

*Can UNISON and the University make mandatory **anti-racism** training to change the soft narrative with goes with the current "unconscious bias" Training.*

Racism is on rise, to quote Angela Davis: "In a racist society, it's not enough to be non-racist, we must be ANTI-RACIST".

Motion 2

Proposed by Ivan Bonsell

Support the UCU Four Fights! Decent Pay for all University workers!

This Branch notes:

All five unions involved in the 2019-20 pay round, including UNISON, are still in dispute with the employers' organisation (UCEA) after the University imposed the final offer in September, backdated to 1st August 2019.

This increased pay by 1.8% for most staff members, with slightly higher increases for grades 1 to 3, but in the vast majority of cases, this represents a further real-terms pay cut. This is after over a decade of higher education workers' pay being eroded by below-inflation "settlements".

A series of coordinated pay ballots, involving both UNISON and UCU, took place in September/October 2019, with both union leaderships advocating a vote in favour of strike action.

The University of Brighton UCU branch achieved a 76.3% vote in favour of action with a 59.2% turnout, which gave a clear mandate for legal strike action, since the ballot was conducted on a disaggregate basis.

This UNISON branch achieved a 78.1% vote in favour of action with a 51.4% turnout, but the ballot being organised on an aggregate basis meant that the clear national vote for strike action was legally undermined by the disappointing national turnout, which was well short of 50%.

Both unions worked hard to achieve these results in circumstances which have been deliberately designed to make it difficult. Members were emailed, called and visited to make sure that as many voted as possible. All activists should be proud of these results, which demonstrate the strength of feeling and the strength of union organisation at the University.

This Branch further notes:

UCU members at Brighton took strike action for eight days in late 2019 and are currently in the middle of a further 14 days of action, as well as working to rule.

Talks between UCU and UCEA have taken place, and whilst UCEA have made some concessions on pay equality and workload issues, no further offer on pay has been made.

The majority of UCU members have shown discipline in accepting the democratic ballot result to strike and a determination to deliver sustained and escalating strike action, to win the dispute as soon as possible.

It is the duty of trade unionists to always support others in their struggles. The fact that this is action in pursuit of a pay claim, which, if successful, will benefit members of both unions, makes it more pressing that the UCU strikers receive our branch's support.

This Branch calls on the Branch Committee to:

- 1. Continue to give the UCU branch and its members our full support in their fight for pay justice.*
- 2. Continue to oppose the feeble attempts at justifications for pay cuts by the University's senior management, putting a case for a properly and appropriately rewarded workforce at all levels.*
- 3. Organise a branch donation of £500 towards UCU's strike hardship fund.*
- 4. Encourage all UNISON members to support the strike by:*
 - * Visiting picket lines, bringing encouragement and refreshments,*
 - * Not carrying out work which undermines the strike action,*
 - * Making donations of whatever they can afford to the UCU hardship fund.*

Both motions were agreed and members on each site stayed for photos in support of UCU.



4. Financial Return

Branch Treasurer – Dawn Whitaker (2020)

Despite our continuing plans to reduce the branch reserves, covid-19 stepped in to make this impossible for 2020.

In standard years the main expenditure for the branch is on expenses related to sending our branch committee members on training courses and to attend seminars and conferences around the country. Covid-19 meant that all training, conferences and seminars, where they took place at all, were run on-line after March 2020 at little or no cost to the branch. We plan to continue reducing the branch reserves during 2021 if this is possible during Covid lockdowns.

During 2020 the branch made donations to the following organisations:

- Bromley Council Workers strike (Unite union)
- UCU strike/hardship fund (University of Brighton branch)
- Brighton & Hove Trades Union Council (to allow them to pursue campaigning that supports workers)
- UNISON There for you fund (support for Unison members who need financial help)
- ACORN (the renters union for campaigning work)
- Early Childhood project (Brighton based educational charity working to combat bias and discrimination in education)

Otherwise the branch should note that if membership levels continue to reduce as they have over 2020 this will affect our funding levels for future years and our ability to successfully train our branch committee members and engage with UNISON locally, regionally and nationally.

The AGM is asked to approve the 2020 accounts (next page)

The branch budget for 2021 is summarised as follows:

Group	Budget
Branch Funding	(18,000.00)
Administration	8,600.00
Participation_National	1,200.00
Participation_Branch	2,000.00
Education	500.00
Donations	1,200.00
Affiliations	500.00
	14,000.00
	(4,000.00)
Current Account	10,360.62
Deposit Account	8,663.35
Projected balance Dec 2021	23,023.97

The AGM is asked to approve the budget for 2021.

Income and expenditure 2020

	£	£
Subscriptions		
UNISON subscription income this year		£17,948.12
Retired member subscriptions		£45.00
Deposit Account Interest		£31.04
	Total Income	<u>£18,024.16</u>
Expenditure		
Administration:	£286.93	
<i>Administrator costs</i>	<u>£8,101.48</u>	
		£8,388.41
Group Conference & Meetings:		
<i>UNISON Annual Conference</i>	£0.00	
<i>Retired Members conference</i>	£0.00	
<i>HE Conference</i>	£259.35	
<i>LGBT conference</i>	£31.94	
<i>Black Members conference</i>	£107.75	
<i>Women's Conference</i>	£0.00	
<i>Other conferences (HE seminar)</i>	<u>£390.00</u>	
		£789.04
Branch Committee		£179.06
Other meetings:		
<i>Branch AGM</i>	£1,341.35	
<i>Others:</i>		
<i>Regional council</i>	£0.00	
<i>Health & Safety</i>	£8.50	
<i>University meetings (including grievance & disciplinary)</i>	£0.00	
<i>Other meetings (including forums and networking events)</i>	£58.70	
<i>Regional Committee meeting members</i>	<u>£114.14</u>	
		£1,522.69
Publicity		£0.00
Education		£115.00
Donations		£1,200.00
Affiliations		£466.75
Other Expenditure		£17.25
Local Activities		£0.00
	Total Expenditure	<u>£12,678.20</u>
	Excess of Income over Expenditure	<u>£5,345.96</u>

Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2020

	£	£
Fixed Assets:		
Equipment	0.00	
Less Depreciation	<u>0.00</u>	0.00
Investments:		
Bank Deposit Account		10,360.62
Current Assets:		
Bank Current Account		8,663.35
Less Current Liabilities		
Creditors		
Branch Funding owed for 2020 overpayment		0.04
Net Current Assets		19,023.93
Total Net Assets		
Represented by:		
Accumulated fund balance at 31/12/19	13,677.97	
Excess of income for year	5,345.96	
Balance at 31 December 2020		19,023.93

5. Ratification of Branch Officers

The following have been nominated and seconded to fill branch officer roles for the coming year:

Chair	Sian Williams, Martin Loftus
Secretary, Membership Officer, Communications Officer	Ivan Bonsell
Treasurer	Dawn Whitaker
Labour Link Officer, LGBT+ Officer	Sarah Pickett
Equality Co-ordinator	Emily Brooks, Hannah Kinsey
Health and Safety Officer	Alan Dilley
Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator, Education Co-ordinator	Cathy Peters, Rob Borland
Black Members' Officer	Jean Bosco Ndayizeye
Women's Officer	Debbie Neale, Jodie Jones
Retired Members' Secretary	Mike Adams

There are also roles which are currently unfilled:

Young Members' Officer (young members are under 27), Welfare Officer, International Officer

Please get in touch if you are interesting in filling any of these.

Current List of Branch Stewards and Health & Safety Reps (to note)

The following are also members of the branch committee:

Richard Clayton	City Campus	Steward and Health & Safety rep
Nixon Dube	Moulsecoomb	Health & Safety rep
Lise Loftus	Moulsecoomb	Steward
Kevin Pullinger	Moulsecoomb	Steward
Marco Troiani	Eastbourne	Steward
Maurizio Valeri	Moulsecoomb	Steward and Health & Safety rep
Mandy Williams	Falmer	Health & Safety rep

6. Branch Secretary's Report

So, normally I'd write a bit about what's happened over the course of the last year and where I think we're going as a union branch, but clearly there's been one issue which has dominated everything.

When we had the four site-specific Annual General Meetings in the first week of March last year, I think we were all aware of a deadly disease that was affecting people elsewhere, but we'd no idea that within a few weeks, many of us would be asked to go home and effectively stay there for months on end. Equally, many of our members were asked (or expected) to remain working on site for the last year, in spite of all the obvious issues, keeping things functioning and looking after the remaining students. It's an obvious point, but we should remind ourselves that nothing happens at the University (or elsewhere) without the huge efforts of working people. We're the ones who make the university what it is through our collective labour and we're the ones who gain collective power based on that crucial fact. The point is to organise, and use that power when we need to.

Even though it's been a very strange, unsettling, depressing and tragic experience for many of us, in many ways, things have still happened. We've seen many members leave the University through voluntary severance and been through our first ever major dispute with the University over a local issue (more about that later.)

Right from the beginning of the crisis, we recognised that we'd need to organise using Teams, and we've retained monthly branch committee meetings, often having larger turnouts as people got used to the idea of meeting that way. We've taken advantage of the situation to some extent and organised all-members' Team meetings, which have been well attended, although we recognised that the obstacles preventing many of our members being engaged in what we do, usually as a result of shift and part-time working and having little or no flexibility over hours, or needing to be providing a front-facing service, still remain. We're hoping that many will be able attend our mop-up meetings after the AGM.

The Information Services dispute was a massive test for our branch. I've written elsewhere about this and won't go into details here, but the experience was both inspirational and incredibly frustrating in equal measures. Inspiring, because so many members were happy to follow the lead of the branch committee's unanimous decision to recommend a vote in favour of strike action to defend the jobs of fellow members, irrespective of whether they were known or not. Frustrating because in spite of an overwhelming vote, which suggested we stood a decent chance of winning a formal postal strike ballot with a legally required 50%+ turnout, we were prevented from having a ballot by regional and national union officials, who would rather we delayed and "negotiated". Meanwhile our members could see UCU doing what they're good at, and just getting on with it.

Our response to this, after the event, has been to try to make changes regionally, so that ordinary, elected members and activists can have more say in the process, and this is an ongoing challenge for us. We recognise that many of our members were unhappy to say the least of this inaction, when we had chance to do what we're happy to advocate - use our collective strength to make a difference.

I don't want to widen a rift between our branch and the regional structures of UNISON, but I think it's worth pointing out that this branch's current leadership wants to make sure we do everything we can to strengthen our local organisation and prepare for the battles ahead. I understand that many are frustrated by what we can't do, but leaving the union doesn't help. Staying and trying to win that battle is the best response. Equally, many of us would like to see fundamental change in the way UNISON operates. The best way to do this, whatever vision you have, is to get involved and make sure you vote in the upcoming NEC elections. There's no point complaining about things unless you have a plan to change them and a way of winning over others to your position.

It goes without saying that the pandemic has created many new experts in health and safety. Our branch's safety reps have been to hundreds of meetings over the last year to examine risk assessments, debate and argue where necessary about what measures need to be in place to reduce the risk for everyone at work, at home and in between. It's been a gruelling process for many of us and I think we should all be grateful to those who have given a colossal amount of their time to this task, which is far from over.

With arts students set to return next week, the campuses will get busier, and we'll be seeing more of our members expected to be back on site. In every case, individual circumstances need to be taken into account, but our central message remains that members should not do anything which they are unhappy with on health grounds. Our safety reps will do what they can to provide advice but it's still the collective will to carry out tasks or not, which is decisive.

Library staff expected to facilitate study spaces earlier in the year were almost a perfect example of this. A general objection to the principle of supervising students inside led to a few members' meetings, emails and confused conversations about "your members refusing to work". Within days, the University decided that study spaces could no longer be booked within libraries. We've not made a massive thing about this, but it's clear that union organisation contributed to a reversal of a decision, despite this being communicated to students a week earlier.

Our stewards are the backbone of our branch and despite this crisis, we've carried on to support members in all kinds of personal situations – ill health, disciplinaries, grievances, bullying and harassment cases etc. We always make the point that this union branch deals with individual cases on the basis that each steward provides help and support backed up by the collective support of hundreds of union members. We're not a self-help group or an insurance against anything. For us, dealing with members' work-related problems, whether they're the victims of an injustice or are accused of doing something they shouldn't have, is an extension of our collective battle to make sure all of us have a better working life.

All our branch officers, stewards and safety reps are volunteers. It's true that many will claim "facility time" to carry out their work, attend meetings, support members etc. but this is often based on what can be negotiated and in many cases, our activists still give up a lot of their time to make sure our members receive justice or as close to it as we can manage. Our reps carry a lot of responsibility and in many cases make massive sacrifices in time and effort to do their work. I would like the whole branch to recognise this and thank them collectively for their efforts. I know that I could not have done what I have for the last year without the massive support, friendship and encouragement that our activists have provided.

We went into lockdown with the on-going dispute over pay. You've probably forgotten by now that we received a pay rise worth 1.8% in August 2019, and although we campaigned for a better offer, which actually matched real-terms increases in the cost of living, we were unable to achieve sufficient strike ballot results elsewhere to pursue this. (We did here though – the best result in the country, thanks to a concerted effort on the part of the branch activists to get the vote out!) UCU meanwhile did take action, and the coronavirus crisis cut across their "four fights" dispute over pay, workload and equality, which we were happy to support verbally and financially. Technically, both unions are still in dispute.

For August 2020, we were "offered" 0%, that's a zero percent pay rise or a significant pay cut in real terms. Figures vary, but we've lost something between 10 and 15% in real terms pay since the three year deal came to an end in about 2008, from memory. (It's that long ago that we had a pay rise worth remembering.) Since we knew the 0% would be imposed, with a heavy dose of "we're skint, what can we do?" as a justification, we've been trying to gear ourselves up for a battle. Our consultation produced mixed results nationally, but as usual, we're proud to have achieved a very credible 88% yes vote on a 46% turnout under very difficult circumstances. We've argued nationally for a full disaggregate ballot across all universities in national pay negotiations, but UNISON's decision-making process which deals with these things, has dithered and delayed and so three months on, we're still not sure whether or not we can begin to ballot our members over an imposed pay cut made six months ago.

In many ways, the imposed reduction in pay was an expression of the worry many vice-chancellors had over the situation, with an expectation that recruitment would collapse for the 2020/21 academic year. For unique reasons at Brighton, recruitment issues have added to pre-existing problems, but nationally, the worry has been largely unrealised. We too thought that we faced a major threat and were pleased to help organise a meeting of members and activists from across the sector, including John McDonnell MP, a long-standing member of UNISON and supporter of many trade union campaigns, including UCU's strike in defence of their members' jobs.

Despite the predicted fall in student numbers not happening nationally, the steady decline in numbers at Brighton has continued and over the last few years we've seen multiple voluntary severance schemes,

If Brighton's league table position and overall relative attractiveness to potential students does not improve, there's no guarantee that new student accommodation at Moulsecoomb will come to our aid and we should expect further reactions to a fall in income levels.

As we've explained many times before, this is the inevitable consequence of the marketisation of higher education. Southampton Solent University is several years ahead of us. An ex-polytechnic at the wrong end of the league table, struggling to recruit and cutting back on everything that does not generate sufficient cash. UNISON and UCU members there have witnessed mass course and building closures to try to deal with the crisis.

Recruiting a decent amount of students in the autumn would help, but the ideologically driven obsession with competition being a good thing as applied to a public service is a world away from our vision of free education provided at all levels for the common good of society. Whilst we recognise that a lack of students and funds puts UEB in a difficult position, this does not mean that we support their efforts to get out of the mess by cutting back on jobs or expecting our members to work harder, covering the work of those no longer here.

Far better for UEB to explain the truth, that marketisation will destroy valuable parts of the higher education system and lead to a situation where only the rich can access university, to be trained up to manage their profit-based system and tell us all what to do. If the Vice-Chancellor wants to campaign for more funding for higher education, an end to fees and proper student grants, then we're happy to campaign alongside her, but we won't allow more attacks on our members' jobs and livelihoods in the name of competition. What happens at the University is obviously reflected in the Students' Union and our members there also deserve the support of the whole branch in resisting job losses and cutbacks.

Finally, I want to thank again the outgoing branch committee and welcome the new one. Some activists are stepping down from their roles this year and I want to branch to thank them in particular,

The list of officers and stewards that we ask you all to agree at the AGM is a starting point, and if any members want to offer their time to get involved, in any capacity, then please feel free to let us know. In addition to the branch committee members, we also want to develop the next layer of activists who will promote the branch and encourage people to join. We'll be looking at more ways of doing this as we begin to return to "normality".

We also want to focus on some of our equalities work. Sarah is in the process of setting up a UNISON LGBT+ group and I think there's a lot of scope for encouraging people to be active in our union by promoting equality and what needs to change at the University.

The biggest challenge is going to be the transition to the new school structure and the reorganisation of academic services between now and August. We're anticipating hundreds of changes to roles, some minor, some more significant and we'll aim to support every member affected. We're hopeful that redundancies are not part of this, but we're all very much aware of the unrealistic workloads some people have been left with in the aftermath of voluntary severances, so where members have issues we will do everything we can to take them up.

We're all hoping that the latter half of 2021 will allow us to meet under different circumstances, but we all know that where it makes practical sense to use virtual meeting technology, we'll continue to do so.

If you've got this far, thanks for taking the time to read this, and we hope you enjoy the AGM. Please feel free to ask questions, either at the meeting itself or drop me an email afterwards. We're always interested to know what our members are thinking and to look for ways of strengthening our branch to allow us to be better placed to fight the battles of the future.

I've been branch secretary for three years now, and it's a massive privilege to be able to do this knowing that I have the support of the branch. I do appreciate we don't all agree on every aspect of what we do, but we try to be as open and democratic as we can, and we've always tried to be a member-led branch. I very much hope this will continue into the future.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary 01/03/21

6. Branch Action Plan

Every year, the branch has a review, known as the Organising Framework, which produces an Action Plan.

The Action Plan for 2021 is as follows:

University Of Brighton (9225)

Requirements

Recruitment and retention

Targets, objectives and other information

Build network of trained stewards working with members to publicise the benefits of belonging to UNISON to recruit and retain members.

Assigned to

Branch Secretary

To be completed by

31 Dec 2021

Status

Open

Health and Safety

Targets, objectives and other information

Health and Safety Officer and more health and safety reps to cover all divisional health and safety committees.

Plan workplace inspections

Assigned to

Branch Secretary

To be completed by

31 Dec 2019

Status

Completed

Trained and active plan

Targets, objectives and other information

Formal training and confidence building for existing stewards to take on casework. Develop training programme to mentor and develop activists.

Assigned to

Branch Secretary

To be completed by

31 Dec 2021

Status

Open

The AGM is asked to approve the Action Plan.