



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

July 2021

thanks for **n%thing**

UNISON
the public service union

University staff have been offered 0% for the toughest year of our working lives

Vote X

to strike for the pay we deserve

unison.org.uk/thanksfornothing

Another month, another ballot. We know we've been bombarding members over why it's important that we all vote in these things, but without our members sending back their ballot papers in significant numbers, we're not following the democratic decisions of our members and we're potentially not able to act on those

decisions.

The nursery ballot was close, but we need that crucial 50% turnout, so don't just vote yourself, please make sure others do so and we can start to do something about our falling pay.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

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Getting the Vote Out

The law says that for a strike ballot, a trade union has to make sure that over 50% of those balloted return their ballot paper, for the result to count. Nowhere else in any democratic process does this apply. Many councillors and some MPs (both recent by-election winners) would not be in their seats if a 50% turnout were required.

The law also says that strike ballots have to be done by post, as if fifty years of advancing technology don't make this method of communication redundant. The point of this is to make members vote alone, outside of any influence of their fellow workers, in the expectation that members would be more likely to not want to cause trouble this way.

Taken together, everything practical to prevent trade unions from being able to use their power to take strike action is enshrined in laws, invented and refined over thirty years of reactionary governments.

So, whilst we would of course like to sweep much of this anti-democratic, anti-trade union legislation away, for the time being, the challenge is to rise to it and show that we can navigate the difficulties of a postal ballot and hit that 50% turnout.

Our ballot over the One World closure, managed 48.5%, which was agonisingly close, but still achieved on the back of a lot of hard work from activists and members.

Our pay ballot has to go further than that, and so it's essential that every member receives, completes and returns their ballot paper in the post.

Part of that challenge is to convince members to think about why they're a member in the first place. Unions like ours exist to fix work-related problems where we can, and this is often, but not exclusively, an individual situation. But we totally object to the idea of union membership being an individual relationship. Every problem we solve, or make easier to solve, is backed by hundreds of union members who want to see justice at work.

In that sense, defending a member who has done something they shouldn't have or providing advice to a victim of bullying, is no different to all of us demanding better pay for all of us, but particularly those lower graded members, many of whom are really struggling.

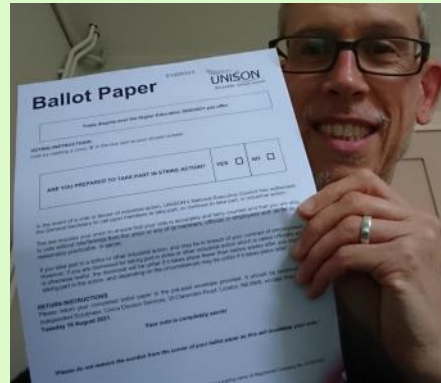
The only way we're going to get some pay justice is for all members to engage with this process and vote in this ballot. Whether you're willing to strike or not, members can't opt out any more than the branch can opt out when members need help.

So, if you've not yet voted, please make sure you do so. If you need a new ballot paper or need to sort out your address details, read on....

Please make sure you return your paper ballot paper!

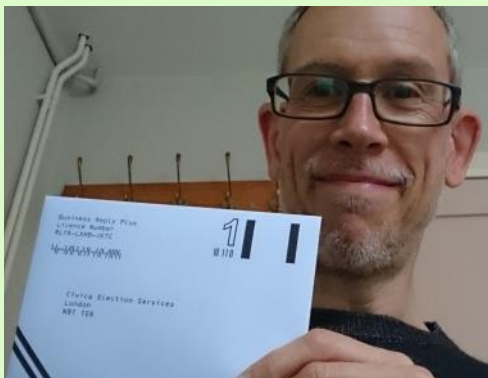
You've seen this before, but here is it again...

Your ballot comes from CES, who manage postal ballots on behalf of UNISON and will look like this:



Please make sure this doesn't end up with all the other junk mail. It's important!

Please open your ballot, read it, fill in your vote and post it back, like this:



Please don't leave it in the kitchen, or by the door, or carry it around for weeks.

You can't vote on-line or at work, or by posting the ballot to the branch!

Only posting the paper ballot back in the freepost envelope will do and it needs to be posted in a post box!

Finally, please let us know you've voted. Email unisonhelp@brighton.a.c.uk or iadb@brighton.ac.uk.

If you've not received your ballot paper, it's probably because UNISON has an out of date home address. Please let us know, and we can check this.

You will need to call UNISON Direct free on 0800 0 857 857 to get a replacement ballot paper. It will take a minute at most and you need option 1.

Please spread the word. There's no point voting if others don't, so let's show the University the real strength of feeling over this pay freeze and allow us to take action if we need to.

Please make sure you vote, and vote YES to Strike Action!

National Pay Ballot FAQs

Why are we balloting?

In August 2020, in what we thought would be the middle of the pandemic, UCEA, the body which represents all universities in national pay bargaining (most of them) decided that they couldn't afford to increase our pay. Pay has to go up each year to cover inflation, otherwise it's a real terms pay cut, i.e. your pay falls in relation to the cost of the things we all need to buy (food, housing, transport, bills etc.)

It's taken a massive amount of time to get this far, but we're not going to accept a pay freeze without at least asking members if they are prepared to take action, hopefully to force a rethink, now that we know most universities are not in danger of financial disaster (as seemed possible last summer.)

We have been offered, 1.5% in August 2021 and no doubt we'll be told that this is very generous and we should be grateful, but that's less than 0.75% a year for two years' running. It's not acceptable and we think we should forcibly tell the employers that.

This is a disaggregate ballot, so different university branches were asked if they want to participate or not, since the dispute is with the local employer i.e. the University of Brighton, rather than UCEA. Around 48 branches nationally, including ours, decided to be included in the ballot,

What do we need to get a mandate for strike action?

We need a majority of members who vote, to vote in favour of striking, plus a turnout of over 50% of the ballot papers issued. If we get both of these, we can legally strike if we decide to.

What happens then?

It will depend on the situation nationally. Realistically, we need other branches to also achieve a strike mandate and enough of them to make action meaningful. We'd also like other unions, such as UCU, to be in the same situation.

If we get that, we will name some dates and see if the employers want to change their minds. We'd settle for a decent offer paid in August 2021.

What if I don't want to strike?

Nobody wants to lose money and disrupt the University, but we are a democratic union, so if members vote in favour of strike action, then we expect all members to respect that result and take action. We will encourage members in financial hardship to apply to our hardship fund.

What would a strike involve?

On strike days, we will refuse to work if we're scheduled to. Those not scheduled to can always contribute by making donations to our hardship fund.

Are you sure this is going to work?

There's risk in every action, with no guarantees of success, but threatening to strike is often the only argument that those in charge understand. If they're sensible, they will see how serious we are and come back with a better offer, but for that to happen, we need to show that we can take action, and for that we need all our members to vote.

Please make sure you vote, and vote YES to Strike Action!

Return to work?

The announcement that 19th July could mean a return to “normality” will no doubt be a concern to many people who have been working off-site throughout the pandemic.

It remains to be seen what the University thinks about people returning to campus-based workplaces, but we’d say that people should only return where necessary and for a large number of people, there’s no need to be back on site with no students around and office work to be done, which can easily be done at home.

The University is planning to introduce a system of “agile working”, which rather suggests that we were all working sluggishly beforehand, but this new term refers to the concept of working at home for some of the time, hardly that agile.

What we would like to see is, for those working in jobs where working from home is possible, a real attempt to allow people to determine when they need to come in and when they don’t. What we’re likely to see is an over-bureaucratic exercise of over-management, where managers spend most of their time managing rotas and working out who’s where they’re supposed to be.

We think people are more than capable of sorting out who’s doing what and where, and what matters is that the work gets done by people working the hours they are paid for.

The timing of all this will no doubt be affected by the Covid situation with the number of infections rising and people having significant concerns over travel to and from work and what the ventilation situation is like when we get there.

Planning anything at a university when the new health secretary seems to think ignoring guidance put in place for health reasons is perfectly reasonable, is pretty much impossible, and a new generation of students are bound to get something different to what they’re hoping for or think they're paying for.

We will continue to make the point that the ability to work from home for those who request it is both welcome and necessary under the circumstances, but we’re hoping that the University will give people the power to determine what works for them, allowing good safety practices as well as a decent work/life balance, provided the work is done, since that’s why we’re all here, or not here.

Annual Leave

If you, like many people, have a massive amount of leave to take before the end of August, please don’t forget that you can’t carry forward more than 10 days (74 hours), which is pro rata if you’re part time. Make sure you take the holidays you’re entitled to!

One World Nursery

Statement from the Nursery Workers, 6th July 2021:

It is with heavy hearts that we are announcing the end of the campaign to Save One World Nursery.

We continue to believe that the Nursery, the values it holds and work it does, are worth saving but the intransigence of the University of Brighton's Executive Board and the unwillingness of the Board of Governors to overturn this decision means that we have nowhere else to go.

The Governors noted in their response to our rally, the petition and the numerous letters of support "that the decision to close the Nursery was a matter for the University Executive and not a Governance issue for the Board" meaning the decision to close the Nursery has been pushed through by 8 unelected people who refused to even consider an alternative model which would have halved the subsidy.

The disregard the University Executive Board has shown for the children and families of the Nursery, its workers and the wider community is in contrast to the high regard, the respect, the love and appreciation that has been expressed over the campaign to save the nursery and the value of the early year's work it did.

We would like to thank all the families, individuals, local councillors, MP's, organisations and others who have supported us throughout the campaign. We would like to especially highlight the ongoing support given to us by UNISON and particularly the Branch secretary who amplified our voices when others in the University tried to silence us.



We are proud of what we have achieved both over the last 3 months of the campaign and historically over the last 4 decades of One World Nursery.

The One World ethos will undoubtedly live on through everybody who has been touched by it.

We ❤️ Our Nursery



Securing a strike ballot mandate, could, of course, have made a significant difference to this outcome, but we'll never know. What we do know is that it's always better to have fought and lost then to have given in straight away, and the One World Workers have shown us what can be achieved in campaigning terms, in a short space of time if you're willing to put in the effort.

We're still arguing, it seems, with the University over redundancy terms, as they appear to be renegeing on an agreement that redundancy would be calculated properly, if industrial action didn't take place. For now, though, we pay tribute to the bravery of the One World team who campaigned to defend what took decades to establish and months for the University Executive Board to destroy.