



***Our newsletter is free to all members.***

*If you're not a member, we want you to join us. Either follow the links on-line from our blog on Staff Central, or ask us for a paper membership form.*

## **University of Brighton Branch Newsletter**

# **January 2022**

**Happy New Year and welcome to the first newsletter of 2022!**

With inflation going higher and higher, it's more important than ever that we do what we can to make sure the pay of university workers does not fall further behind. Our strike on 2nd December was part of that, but we also need to make sure we have a mandate for action over the 2021-22 real terms pay cut by making sure we maximise the turnout.

We're becoming veterans of running postal ballots now, but we still have many members who don't vote, either because they don't see the need, or lose the ballot paper or never got one because they've moved recently.

Either way, making sure every member is encouraged to return their ballot paper by the deadline is our strategy to keep up the pressure on those who still feel happy to cut our wages.

For our existing dispute, over the pay freeze imposed in 2020-21, we're open to meet with UEB to discuss a resolution, but we're willing and able to strike again, if necessary. Nobody wants to lose wages through strike action, but we can't sit back and let our pay fall further and further behind when it means our members can no longer afford rent, bills or a decent standard of living.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*



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# ***2021-22 Pay Ballot***

## ***Why we need you to vote!***

We probably don't need to spell it out, but our pay has fallen dramatically over the last decade. More to the point, with inflation currently at 5.5% (RPI) then the 1.5% we've received (after the pay freeze the year before) is hopelessly inadequate.

But complaining about this is not going to make a difference. We need to campaign more forcefully and the only language that means much in these situations, is to threaten to take strike action.

Obviously, there's no guarantee that threatening action and then going through with it if necessary is going to be successful, but we can guarantee that if we don't get ourselves into a position of being able to do that, then the world will move on, we'll all get poorer and we miss a vital opportunity to do something about it.

The reality is that we have to fight for what we want and this means first of all achieving a strike mandate by getting a strong YES vote with a turnout of over 50% of our members.

**This means that every member balloted has the responsibility of making sure that their vote is posted back in time.**

It doesn't matter if you want to vote NO. It's a secret ballot anyway, so we won't know, but to beat the anti-democratic anti-trade union laws, we need that turnout!

So, if you've already voted, thanks very much, but if you haven't....

Please dig out that ballot paper and get it returned.

If you don't have it, either because you've lost it or it's gone to the wrong address or just not turned up, please call the hotline:

**0800 0 857 857**

They can issue you a replacement ballot paper to the correct address. Please just make sure you post it back by Wednesday 26th, since the ballot closes at 10am on the 28th.



## Covid-19

The saga continues.

As the government is determined to see higher education continue “as normal”, university workers continue to bear the brunt of the risk of infection and the anxiety that comes with it.

The main issue is that students are, in general, just like us, sick of it all and therefore not very good at remembering the need to wear face-coverings.

We’ve been pressing for a return of student Covid ambassadors to maintain the message that face-coverings are mandatory in university premises, and in particular, university libraries, where students sitting down are treating the place like a café.

As the weather remains cold, it’s also necessary for windows to remain open where this helps to increase airflow and CO2 monitoring is vital in checking that air replacement is at a sufficient rate.

For members of staff worried about the situation, the message remains that a discussion with your line manager is essential, but we will try to take up individual cases as much as we can.

## 2020 Pay Dispute

After our strike action on 2nd December, we’re hoping to meet with UEB to talk about what’s necessary to settle the dispute.

We’re in an odd situation, given that we’re currently balloting over the 2021-22 pay cut, but our strike mandate for 2020-21 remains live for the next month or so.

Our branch committee has been clear that we can and will strike again, where necessary, because we can’t accept the injustice of our members suffering years and years of real-terms pay cuts.

Whether strike action over pay is part of the 2020 mandate or the 2021 mandate, which we hope to achieve this month, is an important tactical question.

The branch committee will meet on Wednesday 12th January to determine the next steps. This will be discussed in more detail at our all-members’ meeting later in the month, date to be confirmed....



## 2022 Annual General Meeting

Our AGM this year will take place on Wednesday 9th March at 12noon.

**Please save the date.**

Given the Covid situation, we're planning one on-line event, with mop-up meetings a few days afterwards for those who can't make it. If the situation improves, we will look at having physical meetings at different sites, but we'd only want to do that if we can do so safely.

As usual, our AGM will be your chance to hold the branch committee to account and for us to democratically agree on new branch officers and stewards. We're always looking for more members to get involved in what we do - please let us know if you're interested.

We'll also discuss the way forward into 2022 and what our members would like us to focus on.

It's been a significant year for our branch. We've campaigned over the Nursery closure and are currently in dispute over pay, whilst balloting for further action.

It's crucial that members attend so that we can have the widest possible discussion about where we go from here. Please make sure you attend (virtually) if you can.

Managers are aware that all our members are entitled to attend the AGM in work time, provided you give your manager sufficient notice, especially if they need to arrange cover.

We'll have more information on our blog nearer the time.

### 2nd December Strike Hardship Fund

We recognise the sacrifice our members have made by forfeiting a day's pay to strike so that we can all have a better pay deal. Going on strike is never easy, but if you're a member of a union which has democratically decided to take action, then there's an expectation on all of us that we will accept the decision of the majority.

Our Hardship Fund is designed to make sure that members do not face significant hardship i.e. do not find themselves in a desperate situation as a result of missing out on a day's pay. Most members should be able to ride this out, but for those in difficulty, we want you to make a claim.



For those who have made a declaration (and everyone on strike should have done), the University will deduct 1/365th of annual salary from your pay on Monday 31st January.

A few days before then, we'll let all members have details of how to make a claim. You will need to show us details of your January wage slip and we will determine how much we can afford to pay out, depending on our funds and the generosity of other trade union branches.