



***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**

# **February 2022**

As I write this, energy bills are to rise by 54% or around £700 a year in two months. Rents are going up. The cost of food, travel and basic living costs are rising by around 6% and there's no sign of any of this ending soon. Without a significant rise in our income, many University workers are seriously going to struggle. Many are already struggling,

With that as the backdrop, we're pleased that 51% of our University-employed members voted in our 2021-22 pay ballot, with 78% of those voting in favour of strike action.

We're pleased because members have followed our suggestion that the only way we're going to be able to prevent a massive drop in standards of living is by threatening, and being prepared to take strike action. We never want to disrupt students' education, but we have no choice. It's in the interests of the students and everyone connected with the University that staff are paid properly and able to eat, stay warm and comfortable and prevent themselves from being evicted.

Our branch committee met on Wednesday 2nd February and agreed to give notice to the University that we will be taking two days of strike action on **Tuesday 1st and Wednesday 2nd March**. This overlaps with the last two of the five days planned by UCU at the end of February/beginning of March.

Obviously, the hope is that UCEA, the employers' body, which instructed universities to impose the August 2021 1.5% pay rise (real-terms cut), will recognise that circumstances have since changed and our members need a pay rise which matches the cost of living rise. Universities like ours also need sufficient funding to pay employees properly and maintain investment in the future. We're not just campaigning for our wages, but for a decent education system that values its employees.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

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## ***1st and 2nd March Strike Days***

We all know how the cost of living is rising and how this is putting a massive strain on the finances of working people. It's arguably the most urgent it's been for a generation that the trade union movement does what it can, to take up the campaign for higher wages.

Unfortunately, the anti-trade union law is doing its job, and making union ballots which overwhelmingly support working people campaigning for more, ruled out of order. If we didn't have the anti-trade union laws, the whole of the NHS, local government and universities would be on the verge of striking for better pay and the government would be under enormous pressure to find more.



As it is, we're facing a situation where some university staff, in UCU and UNISON, are able to take action having managed sufficient turnouts in ballots, and given the situation, we're determined to mount an effective campaign.

This means the nine UNISON branches with a mandate will join UCU in their Four Fights campaign, to put pressure on UCEA (the employers' body) to think again about what a 1.5% pay rise means when inflation is approaching 7%, gas/electricity prices are about to rocket and national insurance will increase

in April.

Since this is a national campaign, the University of Brighton is not affected differentially, except that is it, but only because other university branches do not have a mandate for strike action from both UNISON and UCU. We would have preferred all university branches to be involved in this national dispute, but we are where we are as a result of the anti-trade union laws.

The fact that we have both UCU and UNISON striking here, is down to the hard work of all activists across both unions, but also illustrates the strength of feeling that our members can't take any more reductions to their pay.

For the strike action to be effective, it's important that all members of both unions understand the reasons for striking and the way we expect members to follow the discipline of a trade union once a decision to strike has been made democratically.

**UNISON members working for the University of Brighton are expected to take strike action on 1st and 2nd March, unless they have an exemption.**

We do totally understand that this is a big expectation. Many of our members will struggle to lose two days' pay, but that's why we have a Strike Hardship Fund, which members can make claims against.

If we don't campaign for better pay now, when will we ever? It's necessary to put as much pressure on UCEA as we can and our only way of doing that is by making our strike as effective as possible.

Obviously, we don't want to disrupt students' education but we all want a university that's funded properly with well-rewarded members of staff.



So our strike on 1st and 2nd March is part of our on-going campaign for pay justice for higher education workers. We're not working on those days and we'll be picketing buildings across the campuses.

Our picket lines are designed to persuade other workers to join us, both join the union and join the strike. Non-union members can strike, just as we can, but they should join us so that they have the protection of being in a trade union.

If people cross the picket line and go into work, or if they choose to work from home, they're breaking the strike and make it much harder for us to win anything. If they're union members then they need to understand how a democratic strike works and consider why they want to be in a union!

A trade union works because it's based on unity of working people. This means sticking together and recognising that if we fight, then we stand a chance of winning.



## 2022 Annual General Meeting

We're firming up our agenda for our AGM on 9th March at 12 noon, which will be on-line.

We're hoping to have a speaker from a university which has campaigned to win a 35 week for all staff, as well as someone from ACORN, which is campaigning for justice for renters in Brighton and nationally.

Please make a note of the date and time, and try to attend if you can.

Further details and papers will be 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 have deducted 1/365th of annual salary from your pay on Monday 31st January.

If you want to make a claim, please use the form we've done - this in the email we sent at the end of January, or please get in touch with a steward.

The claims deadline is Friday 11th February.



## UNISON All-members' meetings

As more people come back to work on-site, you could argue that we should stop having on-line meetings and start doing physical ones. What we want to do is try to do both, so please watch out for invites to our meetings over the next few weeks.

We'll be trying our best to get the message out to members, non-members and students about our strike days and making sure everyone understands where we're coming from, what we're doing and why.

If we continue to get people to both physical and on-line gatherings then we'll try to keep having them as much as we can.