



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member, we want you to join us. Scan this QR code, or ask a steward for a paper form.



Get organised, join a union!

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

December 2022



A massive thank you to everyone who played a part in our strikes at the end of November.

Whilst it's not possible to have a precise picture of what happened on those days, we know that the University's ability to pretend that the strikes had no effect was severely dented. Libraries were self-service only, student advice was close to non-existent, buildings were opened



and closed by a tiny handful of Estates staff, and in hundreds of cases, essential support work that the University relies on wasn't done. Striking alongside members of UCU also meant that the University buildings were quieter than ever, and our picket lines were very well attended, by staff and students.

We also had rallies, a march around Brighton and a trip to London.

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We should make it clear that we don't want to disrupt the University or the education of our students, but the whole point of a strike is to do just that, as a last resort. We've done all the negotiating that we can do and the employers have imposed this year's pay "rise" on us all.



Prices of virtually everything have gone up. Inflation is currently 14.2% (RPI) and our members are struggling with the price of food, housing, travel and heating. The 3%, or even 8% that has been awarded to some University workers is just not enough to prevent a massive real-terms pay cut, and this means that many of our members are sliding into severe poverty.

Strike action, on that basis is entirely justified and backed up by a democratic vote of our members. It's not just university workers who are fed up and fighting back - postal workers, NHS workers, rail workers, dockers, teachers, civil servant etc. are all either involved in strike action for better pay or balloting so that they can be.

It's not even a case of better pay. If we'd had an award that matched the cost of living, then we could have then argued about going further and demanding more to make up for the years of real terms pay cuts over the last decade. This is a defensive battle to try to prevent our pay falling further behind.



As a direct result of the action that we've taken so far, the employers have brought forward the negotiations for 2023-24 pay, and suggested that they would be prepared to make an interim paying in February. This doesn't sound much, and clearly it's miles away from what we want to get out of this campaign, but it does show how we can make things change with decisive action.



We're clear that as far as we're concerned, the 2022-23 pay round is not resolved and we still want significant movement on pay, bearing in mind that inflation is in double figures.

Further meetings with the employers are due to take place during December and the New Year, to conclude at the end of January.

If we have an offer, as always, we'll put it to our members, but we still have the option of taking further strike action, alongside UCU in February. Meanwhile UCU will continue their working to contract.



Some have put forward the tactic of calling for all-out strike action in February, as a way of ending this dispute. If we were to go down that road, we would have to think carefully about the implications, strike pay, hardship funds etc. but if it is necessary to end the dispute, then it makes sense to consider it. The employers need to know that we're serious.

We know it's hard to keep taking strike action, even with the benefit of strike pay. As we keep saying, none of us want to have to do this, but ultimately we have no choice when the employers impose a massive pay cut on us all.

Many will say that the University of Brighton has no choice, because it's in a precarious financial situation, as a result of the government's refusal to fund universities properly.

Our university is uniquely placed to suffer the worst aspects of government policy and general disinterest in ex-polytechnics. We're the second highest education institution in a not particularly large city, in the wrong half of the league tables, with a relatively low entry requirement. For many of the most pig-headed reactionary MPs, we're providing poor quality education to young working class people who would be better off getting a job. They don't want taxpayers' money

that would be better spent giving it to the super rich, going to tuition fee loans that may not be paid back. If they get their way, they would be happy for Brighton to fail financially and for the OfS to asset-strip the University, perhaps for a forced merger with Sussex.



So our campaign for better pay has direct parallels with other public sector pay disputes. We want decent pay, but we need this to be properly funded, not by raising tuition fees and increasing the debt for students, but by funding universities properly through taxation.

The money is there: share dividends, profits and wages paid over £100,000, totals £393 billion!

A 5% cut in the income of the super rich would easily fill the so-called £55 billion funding gap. Britain is a rich country, but the rich are getting richer and perpetually protected from losing any of it, whilst we're all being told we have to be realistic. We can see we're not all in it together and we know that paying workers properly does not mean higher inflation. We've had years of pay cuts and inflation is through the roof, as a result of the inability of the system to plan itself and the drive for short term profits for the few.

2022 is the year that working people start to fight back in a serious way.

As I write this, potentially millions of working people are in the process of gaining confidence that we can stick up for ourselves and overturn the mantra that the poorest in society have to suffer, so that the rich can continue to rake it all in.



We know that there is no guarantee of an absolute victory and most industrial disputes end in a compromise. We're demanding a revised, serious pay offer, that means we can pay our bills, feed our children and heat our homes. We'll continue to campaign until we get one.

Thank you to everyone who's been a part of this campaign so far.

Our Annual General Meeting 2023



It's not yet Christmas, but we need to start planning our AGM for 2023, which will take place in early March.

Every year, we're really pleased that so many members make the effort to attend and we want to make the next one the best ever. Our branch has taken massive steps forward during 2022. Partly, but not only as a result of the pay campaign, we have increased our membership and we now have more young members (under 27 by UNISON's definition) than ever before.

For the last two years, for obvious reasons, we've held our AGM on-line.

In 2020, just before the pandemic closed the University, we had specific site meetings, and for 2023, we'll probably do the same, with the option to join on-line.

We'll issue more specific invites to all members in January, but before then, we'll begin to invite nominations for branch officer roles.

If you want to get more involved in the branch, we're always happy to have volunteers.

Branch officers take responsibility for different areas of our work, and roles can be shared if you don't fancy doing it all yourself.

If you want to get involved, please respond to our request for nominations, or give us a shout if you want to know more.



Why we think you need to join a trade union



If you're reading this, the chances are you're already a member of UNISON, but whether you are or not, it's in all our interests that we strengthen our branch and our union by recruiting more members.

Trade unions are not groups of people who moan about everything, or clubs for lazy workers. We're organised workers who see the need for workplace organisation that's based around mass membership and collective interest.

We support all members with their individual problems at work, but the main reason we're all members is that we can do so much more when we have the weight of hundreds of members with us.

Many people working at the University will be concerned about what's round the corner. Universities like ours are facing all kinds of uncertainty. Public services in general are being cut, sold off and privatised. Workers' terms and conditions are being attacked, as those in charge are forced to run things as "efficiently" as possible. In short, we're all expected to work harder for longer and less money.

The entire system means we have to fight back. Trade unions are about working people seeing that we're much stronger together. You can fight and win on your own, but you're much more likely to win if you're fighting alongside hundreds and thousands of other people like you.



Please make sure you join a trade union and stick up for your rights at work.

If you're already a member, please ask those working alongside you to join as well.

You can join UNISON on-line, here:
or ask a steward for a paper membership form.

