

# RISING TOGETHER FOR BETTER PAY

HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023/24



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to JOIN



**University of Brighton**

UNISON | Branch Newsletter

March 2023

## Welcome to our new-look March newsletter!

Thanks to everyone who came along to our Annual General Meetings. We had another great turnout and four very different but successful meetings. If you couldn't make it, you can still find all the documentation on our blog.

It's been a very busy few months, with strike action over pay, which was then called off at the last minute, followed by organising for the AGMs.

With pay, a meeting held shortly afterwards agreed that I should write to the Chair of the Higher Education Service Group to say how exasperated our branch was with the way in which the strike action was cancelled and how we don't feel that it was a good tactic. The situation now is that we have no mandate for any further action over 2022-23's pay and we're in the process of receiving the brought-forward element of the 2023-24 offer, which for most will be a salary uplift of £1,000, or £83/month. In August, we'll receive the remaining increase, meaning that we'll all have received a pay rise of 5%, 6% or 7% compared to wages from January 2023.

This has been firmly rejected by our members in an on-line consultation and has not been accepted by any of the five trade unions, but will be imposed this month. It's much better than we would have got if we'd not been striking, but still below inflation, and therefore a real-terms pay cut.

We will ballot all directly-employed members, probably in late April, over this pay offer, and our recommendation is that members should firmly reject it. Whilst it is true that our university is not cash rich, there's plenty of money around - just in the hands of the wrong people. There's money for arms to Ukraine and money given away as tax breaks to the richest in society, but not, apparently enough to fund higher education properly or to prevent students from dropping out because they can't afford to eat.

Union members are sick of this. We need decent funding for universities and proper funding for the wages of people working here. We'll have more on our pay ballot in the next issue.

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*



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As promised, here's my letter to the Chair of UNISON's Higher Education Service Group...

Dear Mobina,

I am writing to express our branch's frustration and disappointment after the cancellation of our two days of strike action, scheduled for 20th and 21st February.

On Wednesday 22nd February, our branch held an all-members' meeting and many of our members were confused about the tactics and the need to call off the strikes. Obviously, with the strikes falling across the talks with ACAS, we were in a very difficult position, with agreement reached with ACAS and the other unions to suspend strike action on the Friday evening, halfway through our planned four days. Some members didn't get the message early enough and where that happened, we will honour claims for strike pay.

The frustration felt at our meeting though, was less about the confusion of conflicting messages about the strikes being paused, when we'd spent weeks telling members the dates, but more about the wisdom of the pause. It still doesn't feel as if we've achieved enough to stop our action and the promised from ACAS to talk about pay-related and non-pay issues does not alter the fact that we've not seen any improvement on the pay offer, above what we've already achieved.

We appreciate that it's very difficult to make quick decisions alongside the other four unions and when pressured by ACAS and UCEA. We also understand the difficulty of having to maintain confidentiality about the talks, but we can see no material benefits of pulling back on strike action. This is more the case for us than for UCU, since as I write, they are taking strike action, but we can't since our mandate has run out.

As a result of all this, we've elected to hold back from balloting straight away and we'll be balloting members in the second wave. This is in part because we don't see striking in June as being viable, but mainly because we need to allow many of our members to calm down, so that we can re-explain the importance of making sure we win the ballot with the necessary turnout in April/May.

I should add that the strike action here and elsewhere has been an inspiration. We've had many new members, and many of these have been on the picket lines or willing to take action straight away. In general, those not striking were the older layer of members who've never been engaged with the work of the branch.

We're hoping that with a new ballot mandate, we can take a renewed battle to the employers with the demand that they increase the 5-8% and offer us something that comes closer to inflation, fully funded by the government so that universities can't claim they don't have the funds.

We appreciate that you're really busy at the moment, but once things have calmed down (!) we'd very much like to invite you to one of our on-line all-member meetings to explain where we're up to and what we can do. In spite of our misgivings about recent tactics, you'll be very welcome to attend.

In solidarity,

*Ivan, on behalf of our branch committee*



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**Our Annual General Meeting agreed the following motion:**

## *Fossil Free Careers*

**This branch notes:**

1. Impartial, evidence-based advice offered by HEI careers services is valuable for students and wider society.
2. HEI careers services promoting roles in oil, gas and mining industries is likely contributing to the global climate crisis, and leading students into careers which will decline as we rapidly decarbonise our economies.

**This branch resolves:**

1. To actively work with People & Planet to publicly support the student-led Fossil Free Careers campaign, calling on university careers services to align their operations with sustainability considerations, particularly by declining to promote oil, gas and mining companies.
2. To produce a website statement about this motion and support for this campaign, and amplify the calls to action of it.

As a result of this, we'll be meeting with the University to discuss what they currently do, and what we'd like to see them doing.



...are a body which campaigns to reduce fossil fuel usage across universities.

They are currently campaigning alongside the Students' Union at UWE to end fossil fuels careers.

[You can sign their petition here.](#)



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## Lessons of the Pay Campaign so far

With the pause in strike action, it's worth thinking about where we're up to.

The first thing is that there shouldn't have been a pause, or at least not a gap without a mandate to strike. We could have been ok with the two weeks' stoppage, negotiated with ACAS, if like UCU, we'd have been able to resume strike action afterwards. As it is, we can't, because our mandate ran out on 25th February, and it's the failure to secure another ballot to keep this going that's the tactical error.

It wasn't for want of asking. We tried to make sure this was on the agenda, at every opportunity, but we had to settle for a delay due to all the other ballots taking place across UNISON.

So, we're now in a situation where we need to re-ballot to be able to take action at the start of the 2023-24 academic year - September or October 2023.

I know that many members will feel like we've been striking on and off for months with little to show for it, but I think it's very clear that when UCEA (the employers' organisation) decided to agree a payment of between 5% and 8%, some of which is brought forward, they did so on the basis that our members are not happy and are prepared to strike.

Don't forget that this is in the middle of a major financial crisis for many universities, with the UK tuition fee value frozen at £9,250 when it's now worth a fraction of its original value. If nothing is done to bring this up to a more reasonable level, or better still, secure government funding for universities, then some institutions will struggle to survive.

If we'd sat back and accepted pay rises of 1-2% or even a pay freeze last year, then that's what we'd have been presented with for 2023-24.

So, the lesson of the last few years has to be that we've tried to secure a better pay rise, and we've partially succeeded, but there's still a long way to go, and for those of us working at this particular university, the answer to proper wage increases goes further than the VC's salary or spending on buildings. It's true that senior salaries are still excessive and that there are clearly a lot more managers to go to meetings and then manage more managers than there were a decade ago, but proper, sustainable funding is required.

We can't rely on senior managers to campaign for this. OK, they might be complaining at industry events and bending ears at conferences, but any clear message about funding universities properly has not been forthcoming.

Working people provide all the services at a university. We're the ones with the most to lose if the University of Brighton is not a going concern, but that doesn't mean we trade off poor and falling wages so that we can keep our jobs. We have to fight for decent wages and decent funding for all universities and part of a national education system that we can all be proud of.

Ballot papers to maintain the pressure will, we anticipate, be issued in late April.



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