

RISING TOGETHER FOR **BETTER PAY**

HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023/24



University of Brighton
UNISON | Branch Newsletter

February 2024

Welcome to this month's newsletter!

On 19 February, our pay re-ballot closes and we'll let all members know the outcome as soon as we can. The national executive (SGE) will meet on 20 February and decide on what branches are able to do, and what they will be encouraged to do. The pay campaign for 2023-24 is not over, but many members will now be looking to the next expected pay increase in August 2024.

If we do achieve a result that hits the required 50% turnout, then we'll need to discuss the implications of having a live strike mandate relating to the pay rise of 5-8% imposed on us in August. This was much more than we would have got had we not been in dispute and striking, but still a real-terms pay cut given where inflation was at the time.

With inflation still relatively high compared to what we were used to (RPI at 4.9% and CPI at 4.0%), our wages are worth significantly less than they were a decade ago and we're all being expected to do more for less.

Meanwhile we've been talking to the University over what they might be able to grant us in terms of workplace rights and benefits. We've asked for an equalisation of annual leave allowances, so that all support staff grades would receive 30 days' leave from day one, rather than most having to wait for five years' service.

We're also keen to renegotiate the grade boundaries, especially since the real living wage of £12/hour is due to be paid to all directly-employed members of staff in August, with the national minimum wage of £11.44/hour legally enforceable from April. These make many of the lower spinal points redundant and effectively mean that grade 1 and 2 members of staff will be bumped up to the bottom of grade 3.

We think it's essential that this is all resolved, with grades 1 to 9 urgently re-aligned to cope with this, so that people doing differently graded jobs are not being paid the same. Doing this properly is a big project, and allowing members of staff to receive additional increments as a result of it would cost the University some money, but the RLW changes will cost money anyway.

We will continue to make the case for pay and grade justice and we'll update you on the progress.



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**VOTE YES
IN THE
RE-BALLOT**

RISING TOGETHER FOR **BETTER PAY** HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023-24

Ballot papers were posted to home addresses on 29 November.

As always, it's really important that we hit our 50% turnout threshold, so every vote will count.

Please make sure you return your ballot paper in the post as soon as you can.

If you've recently joined, you should still get a ballot paper, so please look out for it.

Ballot papers must be returned by the **deadline of 19 February**, so please post yours in good time to reach Civica (the people who manage ballots for UNISON.)

Are you in our WhatsApp Community?

Our branch has a group for messages to members. Ideally, we want all members to join it so that we can send out urgent messages when we need to.

If you'd like to join, just email your name and phone number and we'll add you to it.



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A year of change ahead...

It's clear that 2024 will be a turbulent year. Already we're seeing changes to job titles and job descriptions of hundreds of technicians, the merger of two schools and the closure of Eastbourne campus, after many decades of a University of Brighton involvement in the town.

Many people will be affected by some of this, and some will no doubt accept redundancy.

This is all the latest stage of the managed decline of the University as UEB react to the ongoing and perhaps anticipated drop in the number of students and the income which each students brings.

The failure of the £9,250 fee for UK undergraduates to rise in line with inflation, as the cost of everything increased spectacularly during the last year, is continuing to have a major impact on the finances of all universities.

At Brighton, we've seen four years running of financial account deficits, which is a problem, and redundancies, course closures and campus closures are the reaction to this. Closing Eastbourne will mean the end of heavy maintenance costs of some of the least suitable education buildings, but it will also mean a lack of suitable provision in the area and the destruction of livelihoods for many people.



The planned "celebration" of Eastbourne campus, before its forced closure, is spectacularly misjudged. Those inclined to celebrate Eastbourne's historic contribution to higher education provision would presumably want the campus to remain open, rather than celebrate the end of its existence.



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A year of change ahead...

For the University after Eastbourne has gone, there's little sign of any stability without significant political change which properly resolves the problem of higher education funding.

The current government and its likely replacement in October or November show no signs of having a plan to allow universities to maintain levels of funding. If the £9,250 fee remains at its current level, more real-terms cuts to university funding will happen, unless a given university can offset this with massive recruitment increases and/or international students prepared to pay astronomical fees.

An increase in students will bring in more money, but more students to teach and unless managed very carefully, it's unlikely to make up the shortfall.

The reality of the situation is not helped by claims that the sector has got billions sitting in the bank, coming from some trade unionists. It's true that some Russell Group universities are doing ok, especially relative to our employer. Cambridge had about £400 million in cash at July 2023, but with a wage bill of just over £1 billion a year, the cash alone would not last long. Many so-called experts have concluded that "reserves" are equivalent to cash that could be spent on pay.

Universities could, if necessary, sell off land and buildings, but that would not prevent financial accounts deficits if the income does not match expenditure. Without any expectation that income will rise, even to keep up with inflation, finance directors are determined to "manage" costs, i.e. keep wages as low as possible.

At Brighton and many ex-polytechnics, mass recruitment and international student surges are not going to happen, hence the major problems that Brighton, Sheffield Hallam, Northumbria, Portsmouth etc are facing. If anything, recruitment staying flat is an achievement in Brighton, given the cost of living relative to other parts of the UK.

Managed decline is now the norm at many universities and will continue without a fix.

The current **Brighton 2030** exercise is all about what goes and what stays - the kind of university we want to be, being code for what will we be left with in 2030 if higher education (or all education provision for that matter) is not funded properly by future governments.

That's not to say we should accept all this, but campaigning for proper funding for higher education and decent pay for those who work in it, is now more crucial than it ever has been.



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UNISON Higher Education Conference 2024

I attended this conference as a visitor which was held at the Leonardo Hotel in Milton Keynes on 1st February 2024.

I arrived the previous evening and met up with Sarah, Ivan B, Ivan LP and Stephen (delegate). Our other delegate Julia was unfortunately stuck on the M25, so along with Martin L we didn't actually see her until the next day.

After a pre-meet with other branch activists, we enjoyed a chat over a Thai curry and discussed amongst other important things the behavioural habits of Waxwings (a rare migratory bird)!

On the day of the conference, we reconvened in the hotel hall where a total of 22 motions were submitted. The order of motions was somewhat themed where the first batch were essentially about Pay including the outrageous Gender Pay gap that still exists in these institutions. During one of these proposals Ivan B made a rousing 'call to arms' speech to continue our fight and campaign for 'Fair Pay for Higher Education Staff'. This was one Ivan's finest and please do remember that without our Branches original 'disaggregate ballot' motion that was passed a couple of years ago we



would not be in such a strong position that we now find ourselves!



I have to say that I was somewhat disappointed that all the motions were passed without any opposition. I was really hoping for some heated debates, but I

suppose it just goes to show that we are still united and singing from the same hymn sheet, which I believe can only be a good thing!

In solidarity.

Alan Dilley

H & S Officer



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2024 Annual General Meetings

As usual we're holding four AGM meetings in March to which all UNISON members are invited.



All meetings will begin at 12.30pm and if you want to join us for a free buffet lunch from 12 noon then feel free.

You don't need to attend the one at your campus if it's easier to come to a different one, but please try to attend if you can, either in person, or via Teams.

Monday 11th March – Falmer, Checkland B502

Tuesday 12th March – City Campus, Edward Street 304

Wednesday 13th March – Moulsecomb, Watts Building 504

Thursday 14th March – Eastbourne, Hillbrow 117

If you intend to come, please let us know by filling on our attendance form, which you can find here:

<https://forms.office.com/e/FgK1Nw5DXA> or by going to our dedicated AGM site on our blog.

At each meeting, we'll confirm the branch committee for the year ahead, made up of officers, stewards and H&S reps. We'll also agree the accounts, future plans and you can ask any questions you like of the branch committee.

Please come along if you can. All members are entitled to attend in work time, but please let your manager know in advance so that they can arrange cover if necessary.



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