

RIISING TOGETHER FOR BETTER PAY

HIGHER EDUCATION PAY 2023/24



SCAN to JOIN



University of Brighton

UNISON | Branch Newsletter

June 2024

Welcome to this month's newsletter!

Talks over the pay rise for August 2024 still drag on, but there's hope that we'll be able to consult members over a final offer within the next few weeks. It's been a difficult negotiation, since all five unions are keen to make sure pay keeps up with inflation, which is falling and arguably going to fall later in the year, but also because we want to see some form of "pay restoration" to make up for some very significant falls in pay in relation to the cost of living over the last decade.

UCEA are also dealing with the fact that many universities are struggling financially, mainly due to the fall in the real value of the £9,250 fee and the government's disastrous attitude to international students, which threatens some significant drops in applications at some institutions.

We've been warning about this for many years, and it now seems to be happening quickly, with many universities announcing severance schemes and a redundancies, to desperately reduce costs.



Delegates from across the UK attended UNISON's National Delegate Conference this month, and our branch was there. You can read a full report in this month's newsletter. With a general election imminent, many delegates recognised that if we want to see a future government funding higher education properly, then we're going to have to fight for it.



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National Delegate Conference 2024

Ivan Bonsell, in a personal capacity

Over 2,000 delegates and visitors met in Brighton last week for UNISON's Annual Delegate Conference. The mood was upbeat, as one of Britain's largest trade union looks towards finally getting rid of a Tory government after 14 long years, but there was very little evidence of enthusiasm for what little is promised by New Labour's Starmer, Raynor and Streeting.



As usual, conference started with delegates "moving reference back", that is asking conference to agree to the union's Standing Orders Committee, which controls the running of conference, to have another look at motions that have been ruled out of order. This is a perpetual problem. Any motion which pushes the boundaries of safe campaigning is often not discussed, usually because it's "not competent", or "could place the union in legal jeopardy", or because an emergency motion is not deemed to be an emergency.

Delegates have often been frustrated by this, particularly when conference is supposed to be the highest decision making body, but is prevented from discussing important issues because the precise wording of motions written and submitted months ago, which can't be amended, is problematic in the eyes of risk-averse lawyers or those who want UNISON to stick to easy campaigns.

UNISON's out-going President, Libby Nolan, gave an inspiring address, celebrating UNISON's involvement in strike action across the UK and the consistent presence of UNISON banners and activists at the hundreds of local and national protests against the war in Gaza. This was, unsurprisingly, a focus of the conference, when the Palestinian ambassador, Dr Husam Zomlot, addressed conference on Thursday morning.



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Conference heard how members had taken strike action in multiple service groups and locations, often winning significant gains. A highlight of the conference was a dedicated celebration of members involved in strike action, which set the tone for a more combative and strike-ready union. Debates on the last day agreed the Organising to Win Strategy and heard delegates explain how ballots had been won – raising the confidence of members and showing that where members have a say in disputes, this can invigorate all those involved, throwing up new activists and the future generation on which the union movement has to be built.

There was some controversy. A motion trying to prevent activists “speaking in a personal capacity” was easily defeated. For all elected activists, from stewards to President, indicating that you’re speaking or writing personally has long been an accepted practice, allowing people to speak their mind rather than having to be slavishly following every precise policy direction, even if they exist. This has long been a basic democratic right. Conference spent a good hour going over the arguments, but many delegates explained how dangerous for democracy this would be, and the vast majority of delegates recognised that.

The phrase “from the river to the sea” in relation to Palestinian liberation was obviously controversial. A handful of delegates made reference to this, despite being asked not to. Whilst we recognise that causing offence for the sake of it is not an effective tactic in bringing workers together, the meaning of this slogan is hotly debated. Arguing over this does not provide a solution.



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National Delegate Conference 2024

Conference voted to continue to campaign for an end to the war in Gaza and for humanitarian aid to be provided to all those in desperate need of it. By campaigning on issues wider than pay, pensions and workplace rights, UNISON has the ability to assert itself as a union with interest in justice and peace across the world – in direct opposition to the New Labour attitude of managing capitalist stability.

Later, delegates from the Police and Justice service group raised concerns over some delegates last year making comments about their experience of racism and misogyny in the police force. Obviously, a distinction has to be made between the actual police and the support staff working for them, but some



delegates disagreed about how this should be reflected. Conference overwhelmingly voted to support a motion expressing solidarity with police service UNISON members, but some, predominantly younger and Black delegates were understandably suspicious of a motion which did not raise criticism of the institutionalised discrimination that police forces are riddled with, and the way in which this is reflected in the lived experience for many.

The election of a new Presidential Team - Steve North as President, Julia Mwaluke and Lyn Marie O'Hara as Vice-Presidents, indicates the continuation of the current trend, with UNISON's leadership firmly in favour of campaigning and winning for members.

Our branch's motion, "Universities in Crisis", was on the agenda, but not prioritised sufficiently to be discussed. (There's never enough time for all the submitted motions, so regions and then conference delegates determine what motions are a priority for discussion. Higher education issues are often squeezed out in favour of health, local government, or other general issues.)

However, our shared delegation contributed to the conference by speaking on motions about UNISON's need to demand proper funding for public services and the importance of branches being able to win ballots and take strike action where necessary.

Overall, it was a very positive conference and with membership growing across the UK, the union is asserting itself and prepared for the inevitable battles to come.

