



## **Members' Newsletter - February 2025**

### **Higher Education Funding Crisis Continues**

As 2025 develops, there's no sign of any significant shift in the funding prospects of UK universities. The tuition fee increase from £9,250 to £9,535 will be wiped out by the increase to employers' national insurance contributions and the additional costs of the teachers pension scheme are already due to affect post-92 institutions significantly.



Our university has been through a period of significant contraction with something like 15% fewer staff members now that a decade ago. The closure of Hastings and Eastbourne campuses and the consolidation of everything back to Brighton is part of the reaction to a collapse of funding which became much more pressured during the recent period of high inflation. The redundancies of mainly academic staff, closure of both remaining nurseries, major

reductions to non-pay expenditure, have all contributed to the economic shrinkage of the university from what it once was.

With a new Vice-Chancellor starting this month, many people will be wondering what further changes are round the corner. "Doing things differently with less" is Donna's introductory message and signals more potential restructuring and change, potentially dropping some activities to concentrate on what works, or what is perceived to work to recruit and retain students, which is what drives our funding.

The reality is that universities have been significantly underfunded for a number of years and the chaos of marketisation has contributed to the picture being uneven and to some extent, unpredictable. The University of Sussex is making significant cuts after a period of perceived success, because of its reliance on international students.

Here, targeted voluntary severance is in place across two schools for academic staff and I'm sure UCU are thinking that "doing things differently" means less research and more teaching with cheaper graduate teaching assistants.

For support staff members, we're running out of things to cut. Many are already covering for absent colleagues and work-related stress is not just something that we're constantly moaning about but a significant cause of sickness absence and something that the University could act on by considering reasonable workloads on many areas.

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Fundamentally, unless the funding system for universities in England is fixed properly for the future, this instability and uncertainty will continue to be the new normal. UNISON is putting pressure on government to sort it, by providing adequate funds from general taxation, rather than putting more pressure on generations of students by increasing tuition fee debt.

UNISON's policy is for higher education to be funded properly, as a public service, just like education, health and social services should be. Unfortunately, since the 2008-09 crisis, a decade and a half of austerity has been loaded onto working people - services have been cut and there's no suggestion that a new Labour government is going to shift the balance in our favour.

The ideological position is that growth of the economy has to come before investment in, or even basic funding for the services on which we all rely. Anyone who thought that this government was going to solve the problems of working people is recognising that's more neoliberalism with a different group of leaders, potentially less unhinged than the last lot, but still unable to stand up to the billionaires.



UNISON will do everything we can to defend our members' jobs and defend higher education as a public service. We don't accept that the money isn't there to fix things - it's just in the hands of the rich and powerful and we need political determination to do something about that.

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## UNISON Members' Survey

Our members' survey was launched just before Christmas, but we're keeping it open into 2025, so if you've not yet filled it in, please do.

All the questions are optional, so it will only take a couple of minutes, or even less depending on what you want to tell us.

You can find our survey on our blog.

## 2025 Annual General Meetings

Our three meetings for 2025 will take place as follows:

**Monday 24 March - City Campus, Grand Parade Boardroom, M2**

**Tuesday 25 March - Falmer, Checkland A403**

**Wednesday 26 March - Moulsecomb, Watts 509**



All three meetings will start at 12.30pm with the option to join us for a free buffet lunch at 12 noon beforehand. We'll also make all the meetings hybrid so that members can join via Teams.

An invite has now gone out and obviously, we'd like everyone to attend one of the meetings (it doesn't matter which one).

Our AGMs vote on important stuff and confirm the election of the branch committee. All members can stand for any roles, which are all up for election, and any member can propose a motion for the meetings to consider and vote on.

More importantly, we can discuss the direction of our branch and what we want to be concentrating on during 2025 and beyond, so please make every effort to attend if you can.

If you give them sufficient notice, your manager should allow you to attend the meeting in work time. If you have any issues with that, please get in touch.



## 2025 Higher Education Conference

UNISON's annual conference of higher education members and branches took place in Swansea at the end of January.

Our branch had seven people there - two delegates, three visitors and two members of the Service Group Executive - potentially a record turnout from our branch.

Motions passed criticised the wave of redundancies and cuts across the sector, in particular, those announced at Cardiff University, which is particularly significant given Cardiff's status as a Russell Group institution.

Our motion, "Promoting Higher Education as a Public Service", demanded that UNISON look to publicise our position on the sector and what needs to be done, including our demand for an end to tuition fees and for free education for all.



Delegates paused for a photo opportunity to demand the ending of all compulsory redundancies and giving solidarity to all those branches that are fighting for their members' jobs, in Cardiff, Wales and across the UK.



Next year's conference will be in Brighton on Thursday 29th January 2026. We'd like to have as many branch visitors as possible, so if you're interested, please save the date and let us know if you'd like to come along.