



# University of Brighton UNISON branch

## Annual General Meetings 2025

1. Welcome	Page 1
2. Minutes of the four AGMs held March 2024	Pages 2, 3
3. Finance Report and 2025 Budget	Pages 4, 5
4. Branch Action Plan	Page 6
5. Branch Officers	Page 7
6. Branch Stewards and Health and Safety Reps	Page 8
7. Branch Secretary's Address	Pages 9 - 12

### 1. Welcome

Our AGM this year takes place across all three university sites:

City Campus	Monday 24 March	Grand Parade Boardroom (M2)
Falmer	Tuesday 25 March	Checkland A403
Moulsecoomb	Wednesday 26 March	Watts 509

Each meeting starts at 12.30pm, with a free buffet lunch from 12 noon.

The meeting will be hybrid, with members also able to join remotely via Teams through the usual UNISON Meeting Team. Members attending the meeting this way can join from 12.15pm.

Please remember that once the meeting starts, we need to have one person talking at any one time, otherwise, it's impossible for those on Teams to follow what's happening.

If you are on Teams, feel free to put comments in the chat, but it's not always easy for everyone in the room to follow this and respond. We won't tolerate any rude or abusive comments though, so please keep that to yourself.

Our aim is to make sure we maximise attendance across all University sites, so please come along to the one that works best for you, either in person or on-line.

## 2. Minutes of the AGMs held March 2024

The agenda and papers for last year's meeting can still be found our blog.

1. The chair welcomed everyone to the meetings.
2. The minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting were agreed as a correct record.
3. The financial return and branch budget was agreed.
4. The branch action plan was agreed.
5. Branch officers as proposed were agreed for the coming year.
6. Stewards and health and safety reps were agreed.
7. A change to the branch rules was agreed, which tidied up section 9, specifying that members of the branch speaking to the media or posting to social media on behalf of the branch, would only do so with the approval of the branch secretary, chair or communications officer.
8. The meeting received a report from the Health and Safety Officer, Alan Dilley, who outlined the work of the health and safety reps, and how the branch was planning inspections of parts of the University estate as well as following up on significant safety issues in relation to Elm House.
9. The Branch Secretary addressed the meeting.

Ivan talked about the future prospects of the University given the emergence of a funding crisis across the sector. With tuition fees for UK students not rising with inflation, more universities are relying on recruiting more international students, which is not an easy option for the University of Brighton.

The shrinkage of the University – the closure of Hastings and then Eastbourne campus, is a reaction to the reality that student recruitment is challenging, but also a strategic change in that consolidating teaching and research within Brighton will bring costs savings over time, particularly in relation to the older buildings at Eastbourne. The University is also trying to generate cash by selling parts of the estate and losing some of the halls of residence, which may backfire in the future.

Ivan stressed that it's the jobs, pay, pension rights and working conditions of our members that drives everything we do. Given that, the campaign to prevent further erosion of the sector and the wellbeing of our members has to be against the plans of the University's management, but also in favour of central government funding for the sector, funded from general taxation, not higher tuition fees.

Ivan also talked about the current strike mandate over pay that the branch has and the pressure that this could bring in extracting some concessions out of the

University. The branch was actively working to talk to the University about what they would be willing to offer, in exchange for an agreement to not use the live ballot mandate.

Ivan thanked all those who had played an active part in the union throughout 2023, especially those willing to take strike action, many for the first time ever. Ivan thanked the branch committee – officers, stewards and health and safety reps who had made it possible for us all to be members of an active and campaigning branch.

The meeting closed and the chair thanked all for attending.



*2025 National Higher Education Conference in Swansea.*



*Branch delegates and visitors to the conference with our current banner show why we need a new one.*

### 3. Financial Reports

#### Income and Expenditure at 31 December 2024

	<b>2024</b>	<b>2024</b>	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Variance</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Income</b>			
Subscription income	16,595.52	17,000.00	(404.48)
Owed from previous year	24.93	0.00	24.93
Retired member subscriptions	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bank interest	452.81	400.00	52.81
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>17,073.26</b>	<b>17,400.00</b>	<b>(326.74)</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Affiliations	141.60	600.00	(458.40)
Conferences and Group Meetings			
National Delegate Conference	145.16		
Higher Education Conference	1,028.63		
LGBT+ Conference	0.00		
Black Members' Conference	0.00		
Women's Conference	0.00		
Disabled Members' Conference	0.00		
Retired Members' Conference	438.75		
Higher Education Branch Seminar	958.39		
South East Regional Council	61.55		
South East Region SOGs	70.00		
	<u>2,702.48</u>	7,000.00	(4,297.52)
Donations	800.00	1,200.00	(400.00)
Education	0.00	500.00	(500.00)
Local activities	1,026.96	4,700.00	(3,673.04)
Other Administration	8,361.25	9,000.00	(638.75)
Other Meetings (including AGMs)	1,673.63	900.00	773.63
Publicity	330.30	500.00	(169.70)
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>15,036.22</b>	<b>24,400.00</b>	<b>(9,363.78)</b>
Surplus/(Deficit) to date	<b>2,037.04</b>	<b>(7,000.00)</b>	<b>9,037.04</b>

#### Bank Account Balances at 31 December 2024

Current Account	1,379.67
Deposit Account	19,267.90
<b>Net Current Assets</b>	<b>20,647.57</b>

The branch received £17,073.26 in income, roughly 20% of the total membership fees paid by our members. (The larger part goes to fund the union's national and regional activities.)

We spent £15,036.22, over half of which was the costs of employing the branch administrator. £2,702.48 was spent on funding travel and accommodation for branch activists attending conferences, mainly the Higher Education Conference in Milton Keynes and the Branch Seminar in Dundee. This year's National Delegate Conference was in Brighton.

Local Activity expenditure of £1,026.96 represents publicity materials for members to be given away as part of the members' survey launched at the end of 2024.

The branch set an ambitious spending budget which was not achieved, resulting in the branch cash reserves growing up £20,647.57 at the end of the year.

Included in this figure, a total of £611.82 is the remaining balance of the Industrial Action Hardship Fund which is designed to help members with significant hardship after taking strike action.

<b>Proposed 2025 Budget</b>		<b>2025</b>
		<b>Budget</b>
		<b>£</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Subscription income		17,500
Retired member subscriptions		0
Bank interest		400
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>17,900</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Affiliations		200
National Participation		
Black Members' Conference	<i>January</i>	0
Higher Education Conference	<i>January</i>	1,500
Women's Conference	<i>February</i>	0
South East Region Strategy Weekend	<i>May</i>	600
National Delegate Conference	<i>June</i>	3,000
Retired Members' Conference	<i>October</i>	400
Disabled Members' Conference	<i>October</i>	800
Higher Education Branch Seminar	<i>November</i>	1,200
LGBT+ Conference	<i>November</i>	800
Young Members' Conference	<i>November</i>	800
South East Regional Council		200
South East Region SOGs		200
		<u>9,500</u>
Donations		1,200
Education		500
Local activities		2,200
Other Administration		5,100
Other Meetings (including AGMs)		1,800
Publicity		2,400
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>22,900</b>
Surplus/(Deficit) to date		<b>(5,000)</b>
Bank Balance at 31/12/24		20,648
Projected Total Bank Balance at 31/12/25		<b>15,648</b>

The 2025 budget, agreed by the branch committee, plans to overspend by £5,000 during 2025, which would bring branch reserves down to around £15,000. This assumes that we can send delegates to most of the relevant conferences and events, especially the National Delegates Conference 2025, to be held in Liverpool in June.

We're also planning more expenditure on material as new members join and request quality drinking bottles, mugs etc. and to fulfill our longstanding plan to purchase a decent branch banner.

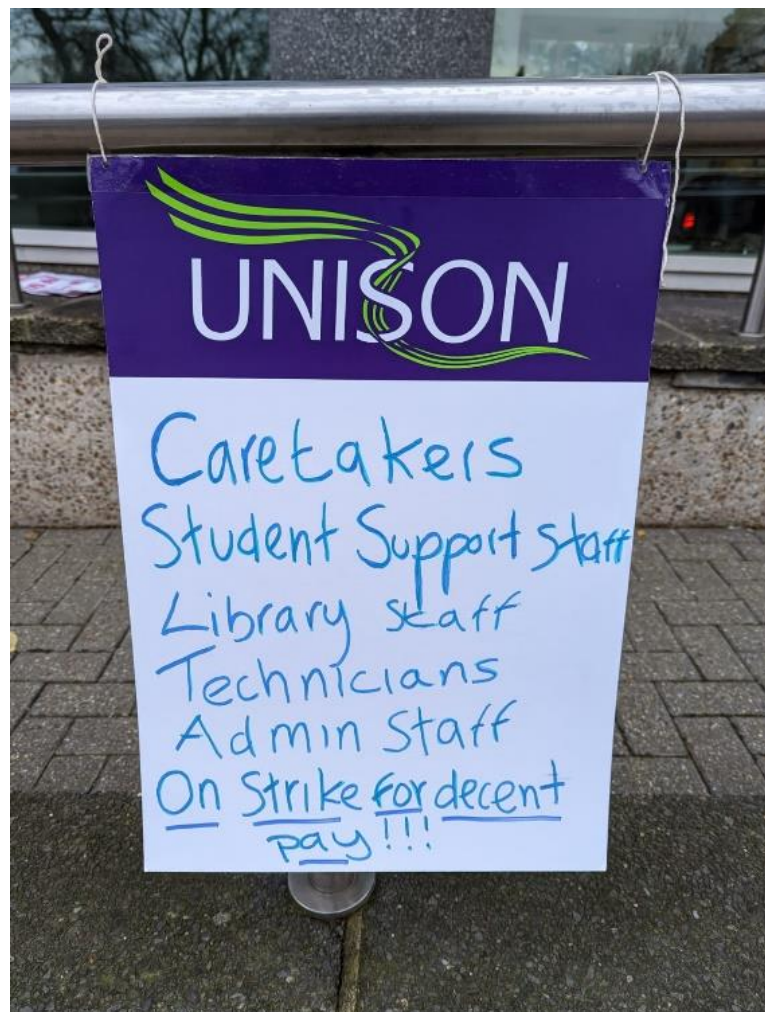


#### 4. Branch Action Plan 2025

The branch is required to agree an action plan for the coming year, developed from the Organising Framework Exercise, carried out in December 2024.

For 2025, our action plan is as follows:

1. Membership – keep all records up to date and survey members to increase data quality.
2. Activist Recruitment – increase visibility, especially around new-starters and encourage participation.
3. Activists Support and Development – all stewards and reps to be fully trained, including equalities and data protection.
4. Membership Growth – stewards to be conscious of their areas of responsibility and talk to all potential members.
5. Organising Opportunities - raise awareness of equality and inclusion, specifically UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter, Reasonable Adjustment Policy and Trans Ally Policy.
6. Branch Communication – regular emails and monthly payday meetings.
7. Local Bargaining Priorities – equality as per 5.
8. Workplace Inequality and Discrimination – neurodiversity training twice a year.



## 5. Branch Officers

Branch officers have specific areas of responsibility within the branch. Each officer tries to attend the monthly branch committee meetings as well as taking responsibility for their area of work.

	Equality Co-ordinator, Joint Black Members' Officer	Bill Acharjee
<i>new</i>	Communications Officer	Callum Gandy
	Retired Members' Secretary	Carole Chick
	Joint Women's Officer	Debbie Neale
	Joint Chair	Emily Brooks
<i>new</i>	Disabled Members' Officer	Eve Taylor-Mungai
	Secretary, Membership Officer	Ivan Bonsell
	Labour Link Officer	Ivan Landeira Pazos
	Joint Black Members' Officer	Jean Bosco Ndayizeye
	Welfare Officer, Joint Women's Officer	Lydia Freeman
	Treasurer	Martin Loftus
	Health and Safety Officer	Maurizio Valeri
	Joint Environmental Officer	Mel Hallett
	Young Members' Officer, LGBT+ Members' Officer	Rosie Dooner
	International Officer	Stephen Brooks
	Joint Environmental Officer	Suze Thompson
	Joint Chair, Education Coordinator	Will Dooley

New to our branch officer roles are Callum Gandy as Communications Officer and Eve Taylor-Mungai, as Disabled Members' Officer. Since our last AGM, we gained Suze Thompson and Mel Hallett as joint Environmental Officers and Rosie Dooner became LGBT+ Officer.

After the AGMs, Will Dooley will share the Chair role with Emily Brooks.

We also gained Cara Thompson and Disabled Members' Officer and Chrysanthi Kanari and Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator. Cara has since left the University and Chrysanthi has stepped down from the role. Also stepping down are Jodie Jones and one of our Women's Officers and Alan Dille as one of our Health and Safety Officers.

All our branch officers, both past and present play a massive role in running the branch, so a massive thank you to all of you for being involved.

If you're interested in being involved in a branch officer role, most of which can easily be shared, please let us know.

## 6. Stewards and Health and Safety Reps

Stewards are the backbone of the branch and the first point of contact for members. Health and safety reps report and follow up on safety issues and attend the University's Safety and Wellbeing Committee and/or other sub-committees.

All stewards and health and safety reps should be trained within the first year of appointment, to allow them to represent members and carry out safety inspections etc.

### Stewards (\*ERA accredited)

<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Bill Acharjee*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Callum Gandy
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Debbie Neale*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Emily Brooks*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Ivan Bonsell*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Ivan Landeira Pazos*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Katharine Rose
<i>City Campus</i>	Lee Christien*
<i>Students' Union</i>	Luke Frost*
<i>Falmer</i>	Lydia Freeman*
<i>Falmer</i>	Marco Troiani
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Martin Loftus*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Maurizio Valeri*
<i>Falmer</i>	Steve Brooks
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Thea Ridgley*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Will Dooley*

### Health & Safety Reps (\*Trained)

<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Alan Dilley*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Emily Brooks*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Ivan Bonsell
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Ivan Landeira Pazos*
<i>Falmer</i>	Lydia Freeman*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Martin Loftus*
<i>Moulsecoomb</i>	Maurizio Valeri*
<i>City Campus</i>	Richard Clayton*

We're pleased to welcome Steve Brooks, Katharine Rose, Thea Ridgley and Callum Gandy as new stewards.

All branch officers, stewards and health and safety reps meet monthly as the branch committee to agree the work of the branch and direct the branch secretary, who is seconded for a year. The branch committee after the AGMs is therefore made up of 24 people, which means that a quoracy of eight is required to make significant decisions.

After the AGM, the branch committee elects a smaller negotiating committee, which aims to meet weekly, and its role is to deal with day-to-day issues that can't wait for the next branch committee meeting.



## 7. Branch Secretary's Address

First of all, thanks to all of you for getting this far into the papers. I fully appreciate that many of our members don't want to be reading pages and pages of stuff, especially if it's bad news, but I do need to write something, if only to prove that I haven't been sitting around for a year and to give you some idea of what the branch have been doing.

2024 in many ways was a year of continuation and consolidation. Continuation in the sense that the problems the sector and the University are facing have continued, and consolidation in the sense that the University has just about finished its period of shrinkage to be wholly located at the three sites in Brighton.

When I started here, we had five campuses, at least three nurseries (down from an earlier four), we ran weekend arts drop-in classes at Grand Parade, had a functioning gallery and theatre etc. Over the years, financial pressures and a desire to re-focus has led to the closure of much of this, and the transformation of Brighton Polytechnic into the University of Brighton has in many ways been complete.

We still have a disproportionate number of students with disabilities and from non-traditional "university" i.e. working class backgrounds and still run many courses "with an industry focus" i.e. more skills-based than traditional academic subjects, but applicants today would be hard pushed to differentiate between what people of my generation would call ex-polys or pre-92 universities and post-92 i.e. traditional universities.

The legacy still remains though if you know where to look. We still have and want to defend our Local Government Pension Scheme and I'm sure academics feel the same why about the Teachers' Pension Scheme, both of which cost the University a fortune relative to the much less employee-valuable schemes run elsewhere. (The fact that the government still refuses to fund increases to the employers' contribution to the TPS contributes to this university's financial issues. The Minister for Skills is apparently "looking for a solution to this issue.")

The historic legacy also contributes to unwritten boundaries of UNISON/UCU membership. We're the formally recognized union for support staff i.e. those on grades 1 to 9 with a few beyond that, UCU are the "union for professional university staff" so some support staff are UCU members for reasons which make sense to them. It's not a big deal, but an anomaly that's never mattered enough to sort out. (At Sussex, those above a certain grade are guided towards UCU membership.)

Anyway, 2024 for us started just after the end of the industrial action we'd taken over pay and with the legacy of a live strike mandate. We're immensely proud of the fact that with one notable exception, we've managed to hit the 50% turnout required in every industrial action ballot since the change in the law. This doesn't happen without hard work and I know many members are tired of being asked to return ballot papers, but we've always approached a strike ballot with a serious plan to achieve that mandate, and the fact that the University management know that we can and will do it where necessary is a useful tool to have.

We debated how to use our mandate for a long time and came to the conclusion that trying to prise some concessions from the University would be a better strategy than calling our members to strike again when many other universities were no longer involved. After months of often protracted negotiations, we agreed a change to grade boundaries for grades 1, 2 and the bottom of grade 3. This did not affect most of our members, but for those in the lowest pay grades, it did provide meaningful change to their take home pay and would not

have come about without the willingness of our members to take strike action where necessary. There is more than enough evidence to show that if you're determined to win some concessions and it's backed up a willingness to take action, you can gain things, however unlikely that might seem at the time.

We are fully aware though that there needs to be much further movement for those at the top of grade 3 and above, and we want to press for the other issues we've talked about for a long time, such as a 35-hour week and equalisation of the annual leave allowance across all grades. We will continue to demand more for our members, especially now that we have a new Vice-Chancellor.

We also need to resolve disputes over job descriptions and grading, especially as the University evolves and jobs change. The change to the way security operates is having an effect on the caretaking teams and we want to see genuine pay and grading justice and for people to have jobs they're happy with. Many of our members are significantly overworked with unrealistic timescales and lack of clarity to their jobs. Reasonable adjustments for those with disabilities need to be taken seriously and managers need to be trained to accept that trade unions have won agreements over working practices that need to be respected.

As a result of the agreement struck with the University, we opted out of the 2024-25 pay ballot that UNISON ran across most universities in the early part of this year. The final offer made by UCEA (the body representing most universities) was over-complicated:

In August 2024, a £900 salary increase, followed by, in March 2025, a £300 or £250 increase, or the rest of an equivalent total increase of 2.5%. This meant an increase of something like 2.5%, rising to 5.7%, but with a proportion of it coming this month, rather than from August 2024.

All five unions rejected the offer as inadequate, given the years of high inflation. Whilst UCEA tried to prevent unions from balloting by threatening to withdraw talks on other related issues, both UCU and UNISON elected to ballot members. UCEA withdrew talks unilaterally and as it happens, UCU are still dithering over whether and when to ballot their members.

UNISON balloted about 75 branches (around 2/3 of the total), excluding ours. Four branches achieved the necessary 50% turnout, although many of those who would almost certainly have been able to, including ours, had opted out. The result was disappointing, realistically not enough to organise a major pay campaign with. UNISON's focus is now on campaigning for proper funding for the sector and looking towards the pay campaign for 2025-26.

The 2025-26 pay claim, presented to UCEA this week, calls for a rise of £2,500 or RPI+3.5%, whichever is higher. UNISON always wants the pay rise to be progressive and aimed at the lower paid, whereas a percentage rise pushes apart the pay spine. The joint pay claim is a compromise for all five unions across the sector. We recognise that many people will say that there's no point in claiming more than the sector can afford, and clearly unless there's something done to fix the funding crisis then there's no way this is affordable, but our claim has to be based on what our members need and we'll campaign as well for central government to find higher education properly.

Talks over pay start at the end of March and will continue until mid-May. After that, we'll know where we stand, and it may be that we ballot members again. We are clear though that any ballot over pay has to be linked to national funding of universities, over which we are planning events.

We know that UCU nationally have been agitating for a solution, and we've tried to press the government over this. We're planning a lobby of government sometime in May and would like to get members to this if possible.

The new Labour government has changed the focus of UNISON, now that an apparently friendly administration has power, but I'm not expecting any major shift in favour of working people without a fight. The Employment Rights Bill, if and when it's enacted, does give some concessions to workers' rights, but we need much more than this, including a repeal of all the anti-trade union laws passed by successive governments going back to the 80s.

The fact that we have to hold postal ballots, when the postal system is dysfunctional and colossally expensive, combined with the requirement to achieve a 50% turnout for any ballot to count, is blatantly anti-democratic and needs to be reformed.

There's also a major opportunity to shift the balance of power in favour of working people by taking some of the colossal wealth away from the super-rich and using it to fund public services properly. Unfortunately, the obsession with growth i.e. bribing the rich to invest in the UK rather than somewhere else, and the fallacy of wasting billions more on armaments, means that we have a government unwilling to improve the lives of working people until the rich are further enriched. Trade unionists will need to continue to fight in the industrial and political sphere, often in opposition to the political party to which UNISON is aligned.

For 2025, we launched our members' survey to try to make sure we have up to date communication information for our members. We've also continued to have monthly all-members' meetings, which we're now calling payday meetings i.e. on the last working day of each month – next one Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April.

We really want to build and maintain self-organised groups i.e. groups of Women, Black, disabled, LGBT+ and young members who organise themselves to campaign on issues affecting them.

Getting our communication methods up to date is something that we want to work on with a new Communications Team, particularly our social media.

We continue to be involved in UNISON nationally and regionally. We have two members of the Higher Education Service Group Executive in our branch, and we've been active participants in the national Higher Education Conference and the National Delegates Conference each year. Two of us have been on the Regional Committee and we're also involved in the regional higher education committee. We're also involved in Black members' and disabled members' groups and want to develop that.

Part of this is because we want to influence events so that higher education gets a look-in, but also because we want to change the union to be able to deal with the future appropriately. Members and activists don't always agree on the way forward, but where we need to, we discuss it and come to a democratic decision.

It is really great to see a new generation of activists getting involved in our branch. This happened in the early part of the decade when we started to strike over pay, but it has continued as more young people see the need to be active and stick up for their rights. The generations that lived through the student anti-fees campaigns, the excitement of Corbyn nearly winning (with significantly more votes than Starmer's "landslide") and the strike-wave of the last few years has decided to get more involved and that's great for the future of our branch and the union movement as a whole.

As always, it would be impossible to be branch secretary without all our members and the support of our activists. It's been a privilege to do it for another year and to carry on into 2025. Thanks to everyone who's played a part, however small, in campaigning, participating and publicising our branch. Please make sure others are aware of your

membership and ask them to join. We're much stronger when we're united, which is what it's all about.

*Ivan Bonsell, March 2025*

