



***Our newsletter is free to all members.***

*If you're not a member, we need you to join and get involved. Fill in a form or join online. Follow our blog from Staff Central.*

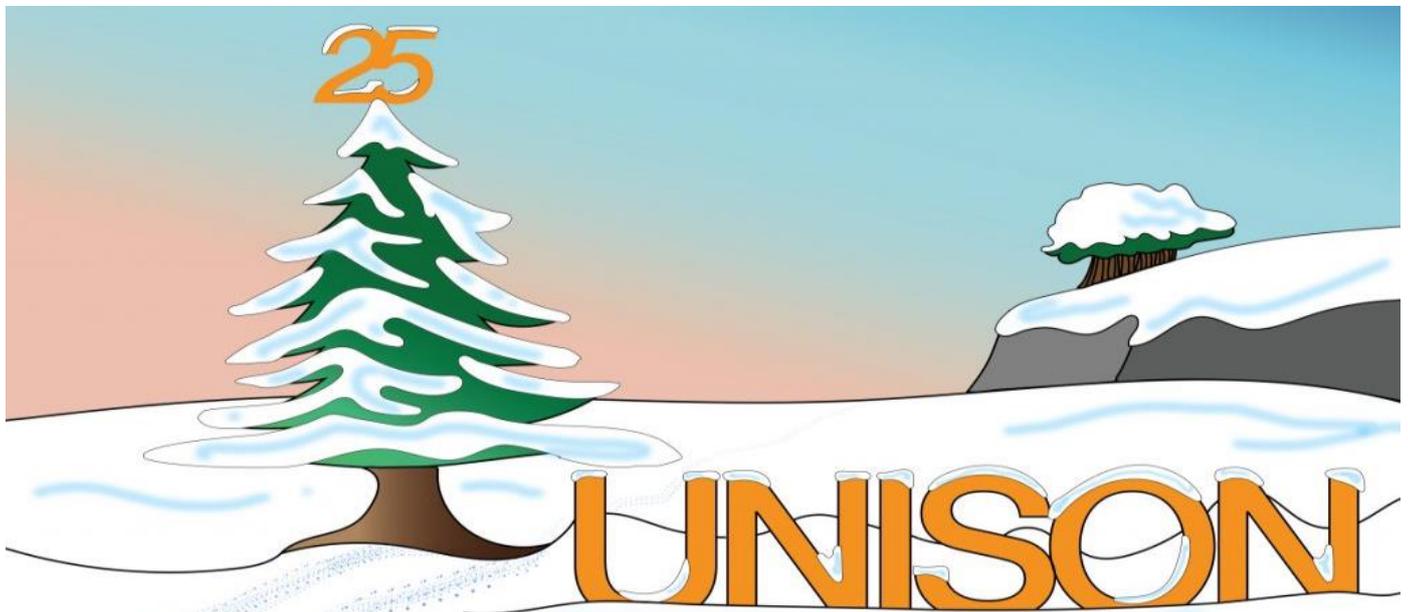
# **University of Brighton Branch Newsletter**

## **December 2018**

[blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison](https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/unison)

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As UNISON celebrated its 25th birthday in 2018, the end of the year is a good point to reflect on where we've come from.

Formed from a merger of NAGLO, NUPE and COSHE, UNISON has been one of the largest unions in the UK of workers providing public services.

For 25 years, and many years before that, many activists and members have given their time and dedication to trade unionism to build what we have today.

Unfortunately, the crumbling state of the public sector with cuts and privatisation has, with some exceptions, not been prevented, especially over the last decade.

Universities have, to some extent, been shielded from this process, but increased competition and the ideological obsession of treating students as customers, means that this is all around the corner.

For trade unionists, maintaining higher education as

a public service, imparting existing knowledge and generating new understanding is crucial, as well as defending jobs, pay, pension rights and working conditions for our members.

Our tasks for 2019 are to continue to do the best we can for our members, whilst encouraging non-members to recognise that belonging to a trade union makes the most sense for all of us.

We will build on what we've achieved this year, and try to learn lessons of what's not been so successful, so that we are prepared to adopt different tactics next time.

As always, we need more stewards, officers and workplace reps, so if you want to get involved, please feel free to get in touch.

Have a great Christmas and a very Happy New Year!

*Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary*

## *Voluntary Severance Scheme: Here we go again*

The second round of voluntary severance starts between now and the first day back in January with all “successful” applicants expected to leave the University by the end of July 2019.

As before, this represents a large-scale fishing exercise, with all members of staff “invited to apply” or told not to bother. What’s telling is that people at grade 9 / principal lecturer or above appear to be the target groups. For higher paid support staff, with no promotions procedure on a par with that’s available to academic staff, the numbers of higher paid staff at the university are entirely down to the University management. So, it appears that the University is effectively admitting that it has overstretched itself with appointing managers to manage more meetings, and now it has to rein some of that in.

How much trouble the University may be in is open to debate, but this scheme is designed to pre-empt a situation where student recruitment falls short of the target by around 600 undergraduate students three years running. This loss of students is not catastrophic, but it does mean a contraction of the University which implies that Schools and Departments have to shrink. If volunteers are found in the right places, i.e. academic staff with fewer students to teach, support staff carrying out functions that aren't strictly necessary, managers organising more meetings with other managers, then this could be a relatively painless exercise, but life is never that simple.

The government review of higher education, now due in February/March of 2019, and perhaps complicated by the resignation of the higher education minister, is likely to conclude that ex-polytechnics in the wrong part of the national league tables are not the type of universities to encourage. It’s likely that a reduction of tuition fees will be proposed, perhaps combined with differential fees for varying subject areas. If this happens, probably by September 2020, assuming that it does given all the other political considerations, this could be a disaster for the sector in general and Brighton in particular. The alternative scenario is that a Labour government comes to power with more progressive ideas about higher education as a public service, but there are some unanswered questions over how to abolish fees and simultaneously re-introduce some control over student numbers.

Either way, there is colossal uncertainty over what higher education will look like in five or ten year’s time even without throwing the issue of Brexit or Bremain into the mix.

Given all that, looking at it from a position of weakness where that’s nothing that can be done, it’s entirely reasonable for the University management to see if they can bring the costs down by tempting people to leave.

Our position is that we are opposed to the concept of trying to get people to leave their jobs, especially if the assumption is that someone else will pick up the work when they’re gone. We’re particularly opposed to the idea of “voluntary” severance with an implication that if you don’t take the bribe now then then next one won’t be as generous or as voluntary.

Our approach is to not accept destructive political interference with the public service we provide, especially if that means running down this particular university. We’ve seen the devastating consequences of the situation at Hastings, which was an ill-thought plan to throw away 800 student places for spurious financial reasons.

The trade union movement fights for decent jobs and good public services. We reject the marketisation of higher education and the colossal waste of resources in trying to persuade potential students to come here rather than go somewhere else. Brighton is unique and special for many reasons, but overall, we’re no better or worse than other institutions, just different.

We totally understand that some people will be tempted by the offer of some cash in return for agreeing to leave, and we will give practical support to any of our members who want to go down that road. However, we will still campaign for education funded through general taxation and a University which rewards all its employees properly with decent pay, pensions and working conditions.

### **Winter Fuel Grants**

If you have a household income of less than £18,000 and less than £800 in savings then you may be entitled to a winter fuel allowance of up to £60 from UNISON's There For You charity.

Please speak to a rep if you think you may be eligible.



A university this week warned unions that it plans to cut 100 posts as it seeks to make savings of around £5 million as part of its "Securing a Sustainable Future" plan.

The university has recently opened a new £16 million business school and a new sports centre is close to being completed. It made a surplus of £3.5 million before pension scheme adjustments in 2017-18.

A spokesperson said that the "operating environment for all universities is challenging" and that its "costs are rising

faster than our income". They are "acting now in good time to reduce our costs in order to ensure that the university can continue to flourish for the long term."

Sound familiar?

Apart from the redundancies bit, it's not that far away from the University of Brighton and potentially a sign of what's around the corner here.

### **Staff Development Reviews (SDRs)**

For what feels like decades, the SDR process has been "under-review". This had been one reason for them not happening, the others being that the manager can't be bothered or some other impending "review" means that it's not worth doing. Many members of staff, who see the SDR as a hassle or a pointless exercise or who genuinely feel that the process is to penalise them, were generally happy for SDRs to not take place, whatever the reason or excuse.

After months of on-off discussion and debate, we have agreed a revised process.

This isn't easy because we're trying to reconcile the University management view which sees SDRs as a way to manage performance, with our view that wants staff to be able to develop their full potential (if they want to).

As far as we're concerned, the SDR should be a regular discussion, which should include the following:

***Asking for all reasonable training and development which relates to the job, with paid time off to attend;***

***Asking for development opportunities (with fee waivers where appropriate) not necessarily related to the job;***

***Checking that the job description is still relevant and agreeing amendments where necessary, which could either mean a re-grade or an honorarium, or an agreement to stick to the tasks outlined in the job description.***

An important point is that staff development should not just be in relation to what the University offers. All staff should have an equal chance to develop their learning and their career if they want to, whether that's enrolling to do a PhD with a fee waiver or joining up for a basic English or Information Technology course to be studied in work time. We would expect that all requests are treated with respect and sensible reasons given if these are refused.

Equally, if people are just here to do a job then that should be respected. Not everyone wants to study or learn new skills, especially if life is a struggle anyway. SDR reviewers should be trained to respect the wishes of their staff if they are not interested and just want to get on with their job.

As the scheme is relaunched in the New Year, we'll provide more guidance for members wishing to get the most out of their SDR. Whilst the new scheme is not perfect, we think it goes some way to allowing all employees to further their careers, if they want to, but that will depend on how willing managers are to accept the concept of training people for the long term rather than using the lack of funding as an excuse to turn down genuine training requests.

# ***Leicester University security team wins battle against cut to hours and pay***

*The university drops its plan after magnificent branch campaign, including 100% backing for industrial action*

When the University of Leicester became a Living Wage Employer in 2016, the weekly hours were cut from 37 to 35. (Quite a smart move, which increases the hourly rate for all staff and makes the workforce feel more valued. Maybe an outcome of the Staff Survey at Brighton? We'll see....)

However, due to the way in which some staff are paid, this would have resulted in a cut in pay for members of the University's security team, who would each have lost £800 a year.



The UNISON branch fought this move, organising a consultative ballot of all affected members, which achieved a 100% vote to reject the changes on a 100% turnout. After a high profile campaign, the University backed down, agreeing to retain the 37 hour week for security staff.

There are many lessons here, but it's clear that by being organised and determined, a group of unionised workers are easily capable of making university managers decide to change their plans.

Hold the Date:

***Wednesday 6th March 2019***

For our **Annual General Meeting**,

which will take place at lunchtime at **Cockcroft Hall, Moulsecomb**.

All members are encouraged to attend and we'll aim to have meetings on other sites during that week for those who can't make it, but please put it in your diaries now and try to come along.

More details to follow in the New Year....

