



Our newsletter is free to all members.

If you're not a member, what were you thinking?

Now is the time to join!

Fill in a paper form or join online. Just ask a steward or the link from Staff Central.

University of Brighton Branch Newsletter

March 2019

Welcome to this month's newsletter.

First of all, thanks to all of you who made it to our Annual General Meeting.

We maintained the tradition of having a sizable turnout each year, which is not easy if you have members spread out across five sites along the Sussex coast.

Our guest speakers from Wetherspoons told us how they organised themselves and campaigned for union recognition, an end to bullying managers and a decent pay rise.

We also agreed new branch rules and elected officers and stewards for the year ahead.

What is hanging over us all is the University's "Securing our Future" project and the lack of new students, leading to a lack of funding. This is now "the new normal" and as a university at the wrong end of the league tables, we need to brace ourselves for attempts to "increase efficiency", that is, to achieve more with fewer members of staff.

We're already seeing the early signs of this with the Students' Union. A freeze on the value of university funding to the SU from August is leading to SU managers proposing job cuts and a consequent scaling back of the services provided to students.

Two years into the Strategic Plan, "putting students at the heart of everything we do" appears to have been replaced by offering reduced services, delivered by recent graduates and apprentices on minimum wage.

The University's refusal to fund the Students' Union properly is an early sign of things to come. There's little point dressing up a review of school administration and academic processes, as well as a review of central departments, as a great opportunity to make the University more efficient. What we really mean by this is stripping back costs by making staff redundant.

It's coming soon and the only way to stop this is to campaign for more funding for higher education whilst resisting the destruction of our members' jobs.

Ivan Bonsell, Branch Secretary

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Tip of the Day

Announcements to your inbox

Our blog contains a load of information about who we are and what we do. There are newsletters covering the past year and articles on what we've been up to.

All members can subscribe to the blog, which means you get an email alert when new information appears.

You can subscribe here

University of Brighton UNISON Branch
NION FOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY

Annual General Meeting 2019

UNISON
University of Brighton

FACEBOOK
We are on Facebook. You can join our group here.

UNISON BRANCH
Friday 6th March 2019 from 12.30pm to 2pm

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Multiple roles are at risk of redundancy in the Students' Union

Staff were informed at a recent meeting that cuts were due to be made as a result of losses over successive years and a freeze in funding from the University. Our branch is disappointed that the University are comfortable with cuts to the Students' Union at a time when they claim to be prioritising the 'student experience'; every successful university in the country has a strong Students' Union and we urge our university to change course and properly fund our SU.



"Brighton Students' Union is dedicated to ensuring your time at University is the amazing, life-changing experience it should be. We are led by a team of student officers and work solely for our student members, so you can guarantee that we are on your side!"



University of Brighton

The University Strategy "Practical Wisdom" puts "Students at the heart of everything we do."



UNISON members at the University of Staffordshire campaigning against the university's attempt to transfer the lowest paid workers into a wholly-owned subsidiary, to prevent them from being members of the Local Government Pension Scheme. This was presumably posed as an efficiency saving, and it could be coming to us here.

“Securing Our Future” or how to manage a university when it can’t recruit enough students

It is clearly the case that the university has struggled to recruit students in recent years. The long-forgotten aspiration of not having to rely on clearing in the future, has been replaced by the hope that new student accommodation available in a few years will turn things around. The “disappointing” NSS score, terrible league table positions and a dip in the number of academically ambitious 18 year-olds have all come together to make life particularly difficult for those people who are paid well to fix this.

Increasing fees to £9,250 and making “the money follow the student” is leading to a disaster for higher education as a public service. Marketisation, pitching universities against each other to compete in the game of luring in as many students as possible, was never going to end well. We’re now in the mid-phase of this cack-handed experiment, where some smaller, more vulnerable universities are probably going to collapse in the near future.

Brighton is big, not in any real danger of falling over soon, but not unsinkable in the long term. Every 600 students that go elsewhere cost Brighton £5.55 million in lost income, or £16.65 million over the three years that they’re at a different university.

For a university with a £200 million turnover, this is not insignificant. Changes to the contribution that the University has to make annually to the teachers’ pension scheme will cost an additional £2.2 million from September. Costs are increasing and income is not keeping up.

So, faced with this, how should the University react?

What they could do is plan for the future by improving the institution and making the services provided to students better. This involves investment in training and making sure that all staff are working towards the same aim of providing a good service. The staff engagement survey told us that people are feeling under pressure, overworked and under-rewarded for their hard work. It’s necessary to recruit more people in those pressurised areas just to prevent people from becoming ill through stress-related illness. Investing in staff is precisely what the staff survey suggested as a solution to the problems people face.

Of course all this would cost money, but in our opinion it’s absolutely necessary for the University to carry out its legal obligation to monitor and prevent its workforce from suffering from stress. If the money is not there then the University has a choice. It can either let things get worse and try to manage the consequences or it can maintain its nerve and invest in the future of the institution.

The demographic dip of 18 year-olds will end in a few years and the number of potential students will go up to a level much higher than it is at the moment. It’s absolutely essential that future planning recognises this.

Unfortunately, the University’s Securing Our Future project has gone down the opposite road. In a panic over student recruitment and increasing costs, the plan is to carry out perpetual reviews of everything support staff are doing, benchmarking exercises and trying to introduce new systems in the name of efficiency. The first stage of this is to anticipate the future by refusing to offer any support jobs as permanent contracts, making it easier to get rid of recent recruits if and when this becomes necessary.

Now you could say that this is UEB's way of being responsible and not recruiting people so that they only have to "let them go" at a later stage. We think this flies in the face of any future confidence anyone has in the University. It will mean a reduction in the quality and commitment of a whole generation of support staff and it makes a nonsense of the redeployment policy and the discussions we've been having with HR about how they cope with managing secondments, acting up opportunities and staff development.

The ill-fated reorganisation of Registry (Academic Services), which was managed by a group of people so talented and committed that none of them are still here, dragged on for years and was the last excuse for a whole load of people to be held indefinitely on fixed-term contracts.

If the University want to learn anything from the staff survey and the general level of staff morale, then this is precisely the wrong thing to do.

Whilst we don't know the outcome of the reviews, we can guess that the likely recommendations will be a consolidation of school administrative staff into call-centre type offices which are campus based. This would effectively destroy the concept of schools other than collections of academics. The efficiencies gained by making sure that all staff have their days 100% filled with administrating for as many students and courses as possible, will be offset by increased illness, feelings of alienation and students having a completely soulless experience.

The benchmarking exercise of central departments, which was first talked about at least three years ago, will conclude that if Brighton spends more on activities than "our competitors" do then that must be part of the problem and needs to be scaled back. It appears that Brighton can't possibly make its own decisions, but has to follow the lowest common denominator, all in the name of increased efficiency.

So, whilst the UEB open meetings have praised staff for the "excellent work" we're all doing and promised that any changes will make the University a much better place for (some of us) to work, we all know that the sub-text to this is that redundancies, possibly mass redundancies are on the cards.

We understand the approach taken by the UEB, but that doesn't mean we can support it! Any trade union would defend the jobs and working conditions of its members and we cannot accept compulsory redundancies. If the University wants to dangle cash inducements to people to go then that's fair enough, but at the first sign of any jobs being threatened, we will ballot our members with a recommendation that strike action will be the only way to resist that attack.

Taking in the bigger picture, universities like Brighton are being threatened by government policies and it's necessary to make sure we do what we can to campaign for sufficient funding for our jobs and for the education which we collectively provide.

It's not good enough to campaign against the UEB making job cuts, we need to relate our resistance to specific threats, with strike action if necessary, to a national campaign for proper funding. If we can't secure a better system with the necessary funds flowing to the University then we will have to keep returning to these battles and this will become "the new normal".

Whilst the Vice Chancellor has indicated that there would be general support from UEB for a campaign for funding, what they have in mind is polite lobbying of the government. What we have in mind is more persuasive campaigning, including strikes, lobbies and demonstrations.

Obviously we would want the University to join us in campaigning for the future of a comprehensive higher education system, but that has to start by agreeing to not trying to force compulsory job losses on our members.

There are parallels here with cuts to local authority funding. For the best part of a decade, elected councillors have, with very few notable exceptions, passed on government cuts to public services on the basis that there's nothing else they can do. For many Labour councillors, hoping for a Labour government has been their strategy. What they could have done is passed perfectly legal no-cuts budgets, used their reserves to maintain public services and campaigned for more funding from central government. There is easily enough wealth in society to fund schools, hospitals and universities if the government is willing to extract it from the billionaires.

Equally, despite the fact that hardly any of them are elected, the Board of Governors and University Executive Board could campaign for sufficient funding and aim to make sure that no job "losses" are imposed. They could link up with the trade unions at all universities and thousands of students and young people to create a massive movement which the government would find hard to ignore.

It seems though that the UEB so far are going down the road of "being responsible", which is code for accepting whatever the government wants. It's "being responsible" that has already destroyed large parts of public services, social care and the National Health Service, where cuts have combined with outsourcing and privatisation, in schemes designed to transform public funding directly into the dividends of private shareholders.

If we're not careful, universities like Brighton will go the same way.

So, it's important that all our members are aware of what's going on and what the reaction of our union will be to it. Please make sure you discuss what's happening with others and as always, we're stronger the more members we have. Please ask people to join and we will democratically but forcefully resist any attempts to remove our members from their jobs.

