

# UNISON Newsletter

University of Birmingham branch

Autumn 2018

**VOTE 'YES' IN THE  
INDICATIVE BALLOT.  
VOTE 'YES' FOR IMPROVED  
PAY AND WORKING  
CONDITIONS ON CAMPUS!**



*16th Oct - 6th Nov 2018*

**STAFF IN HAS - CHECK YOUR PIGEON HOLES!  
STAFF IN OTHER AREAS - CHECK YOUR EMAILS!**

**The joint unions' demands (available on  
[uobunison.org.uk](http://uobunison.org.uk)) cover matters such as:**

- subsidised childcare,
- improved flexible working policy,
- fairer treatment of Cleaning Staff in disciplinary cases,
- equal rights for everyone who works on campus,
- bank holiday & closed day pay,
- extension of sick pay in cases of serious illness,
- fairer workload,
- protecting staff and students' rights on the Dubai Campus
- employing more accredited counsellors,
- improved support for Welfare and Wellbeing staff,
- other demands on equality, job security and casualisation.

**HAVEN'T RECEIVED YOUR BALLOT PAPER OR EMAIL?  
CONTACT US AT [ATUNISONBHAM@CONTACTS.BHAM.AC.UK](mailto:ATUNISONBHAM@CONTACTS.BHAM.AC.UK)  
OR TEXT 07964 926 949**

## UNISON National Delegates Conference

Ioana, Michael and Alison attended this annual 4 day conference that establishes policy and debates the issues affecting members. The programme was extremely full and the debate was, at times, lively. The three decided to vote on how they thought our members at the university would wish, trying to be as democratic as possible. It made us realise that the more we know about our members' concerns and opinions the better.



### Conference view from UoB's UNISON Women's Officer, Alison Dingle

- The strength of the conference was that there were people represented from all over the UK. It certainly was not centered on England; the current president is Scottish and he has replaced a previous president from Northern Ireland.
- UNISON made a real effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment – though there were a lot of stairs for people who have a problem getting around.
- The nature of the debate meant that some people spoke frequently and others not at all. I would support a ruling that regular speakers should graciously allow first timers their chance if time is limited.
- In some of the debates there was a lot of repetition, different delegates reaffirmed the same point several times, which took up time and meant that important things did not get discussed.
- Members can attend conferences such as this (please let us know if you wish to attend!), so you can see how much we are part of a bigger and stronger organization (with 1.3 million members across the country).
- Fringe groups put a focus upon the peripheral (but still important) issues. Alison went to the one with an international focus, to see how the union works to support workers worldwide. Some branches will find this more relevant than others.
- A number of people spoke with awful stories about the Windrush fallout. We wondered how many of our members are affected by this, directly or indirectly and how we could support them. I'm sure the university would be happy to help with this as it would generate good publicity as well as be worthwhile.

If you are interested in attending future conferences or would like to get more involved with UNISON, then please contact Lee Crutchley [L.Crutchley@bham.ac.uk](mailto:L.Crutchley@bham.ac.uk) or Ioana Cerasella Chis [ioana.unison@gmail.com](mailto:ioana.unison@gmail.com)

Did you know that a staff fee concession is available for members of staff who wish to undertake a part-time research degree? The concession rate is a one-off payment of £500 for all doctoral programmes and £250 for all Research Masters Programmes (MRes). The eligibility criteria are as follows:

- Must hold a contract of employment with the University (full or part time). Honorary contracts are excluded.
- The contract of employment must be for at least 12 months duration, full or part time.
- Must undertake a minimum of 12 hours employment per week.
- Must be eligible to register under student and immigration regulations for part-time study for a research degree and evidence of the eligibility to study part time must be provided.
- Must hold an offer of a place for part time research degree study.
- Agreement of the Head of School/Head of Division in which the employee is based must be obtained via completion of the Staff Fee Eligibility form.
- A member of staff who leaves the University's employment while registered for a research degree at the staff concessionary rate will be liable for tuition fees at the relevant rate from the date they cease to be a member of staff.
- Reduced fees are not available for taught courses.
- Where a registered postgraduate research student takes up employment part way through their studies, the concessionary rate may be applied from the beginning of the employment providing the conditions above are met. The Staff Fee Eligibility form must be completed.
- Where the contract of employment is for 15 hour or more per week, two external examiners will be required to be appointed to examine the thesis.

Further details are available from the Research Student Administration on 0121 414 7904 and via [pgrstudentrecords@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:pgrstudentrecords@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

## Congratulations to our Prize Draw winners



Back in June 2018, we asked all members to update their contact details and by doing so, they could be entered into our Prize Draw to win up to £100. Our winners were: Tom Pass, Gary Hilton, Sushila Jones, Karen Staples, Helena Neville, Jacqueline Kennedy & Jason Waite. Congratulations and enjoy!

We asked Gary why he thought staff should join UNISON (other than the prize draws) - "If you have problems at work you need someone you can rely on to have your back – being in a union provides you with support when you need it. The local UNISON reps are really friendly and helpful, and they have access to expert backup from the national organisation. But more than that everything working people have fought for and benefit from – paid holidays, employment rights & decent wages – are all under attack. Without unions we would all be on zero hours contracts with no rights at all. We need unions today more than ever – and we all need to stand together to ensure that our voice is heard and we are not picked off one by one."

# Confessions of a... *Wellbeing Officer/ Welfare Tutor*

A fictional account of a day in the life of a university wellbeing/welfare tutor, based on real events

I arrive by mid-morning to find around 50 emails ranging from students who haven't had any Wi-Fi to submit their assignment, to those who have fled their home in fear of honour-based violence. For every 5 emails that can have a standard response there are 2 that will take an afternoon to respond and follow up with for further support due to risk. I have been working with a student who is actively suicidal and need to formulate a plan with the Student Support services to support them. I am fearful they will throw themselves in front of the train on the way home. I have spoken to management at Support Services at Aston Webb and they told me to get guidance from the Student Support Coordinator - not any of the professional mental health nurses or social workers that work in that office, as they don't have the capacity.

Our drop-in service runs for 2 hours a day and we can see around 20 students presenting with low mood, parents going through a messy divorce or a sexual assault that they don't want to report. The Manager doesn't want our appointments to last longer than 20 minutes and student services @ Aston Webb tell us that we shouldn't be probing in our meetings with students, but use the Goldilocks method. This is: to not ask too many questions, have tissues on the table, don't have the student in for just 5 minutes (around 10 minutes but no more than 20 minutes) and record statistics in case the student kills themselves and the coroners want to know if the university were aware that the student was suicidal. I don't have a lunch break, because this is when staff meetings are scheduled or a Personal Tutor brings in their tutee because there is a concern for their wellbeing. The office plays round robin with accessing the database as only one person can use it at a time and we all need to record meetings we have had with students as they so happen to have all been high risk.

I am trying to get an alternative assessment in place for a student with a disability. The academic is being aggressive, dismissive of all options and during our phone calls he talks over me constantly - in the end I tell him I am ending the call because he is causing me distress.

I go to the Head of School, but they tell me I have misunderstood what the academic was saying, refuses to do anything and "sweeps it under the carpet".

I see a student at the end of the day: they have informed me that they are feeling overwhelmed and want to die resulting in them picking up furniture in the office and hitting themselves with it, or throwing themselves on the sharp corners. I have no panic alarm in the room, there are no other staff members on the floor, and the student has pulled over the computer as they continue to self-harm. I am concerned for their safety as my own and manage to call security and without wishing to expose the student, I state what assistance is required and where to find us.

I am left physically, mentally, and emotionally drained. My own mental health is suffering as a result of what I deal with; there is no clinical supervision or professional staff that I can debrief with. Although Occupational Health has said that I should work from home when needed, my Manager has refused this request due to operational needs. I book to see my GP and she signs me off work. I worry about the work that is left for my colleagues, but I can't face going back to the office.

If you would like support in your role or someone to talk to UNISON has a charity called **There for You**, which offers free support in the following areas:

- Tax credits and Universal Credit
- Financial assistance
- Wellbeing breaks
- General advice
- Debtline support

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/>