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Low paid Staff Protest at 'University of the Year' as strike ballots opens

Over 100 low paid staff today (26/11/13) joined by many students and members of the lecturer's union, UCU protested at the University of Birmingham over the imposition of a 1% pay award called by UNISON, UNITE and GMB after failure to agree and to mark the opening of a ballot for strike action which closes on 20 December. This is also in conjunction with UNISON's campaign for a Living Wage.

The 1% pay rise follows 5 years of below inflation pay increases which has resulted in support staff having a 10% real terms pay cut, for a Band 500 support staff worker earning £22,594 this has meant a real term loss of £188.28 a month or £2259.40 a year.

"It's disappointing that the 'University of the Year' can't pay its lowest paid staff a national living wage when its Vice-Chancellor is paid over £400,000. It is time they paid the national living wage" said UNISON Branch Secretary, Matthew Raine, 'a typical member of staff at Band 100 on an annual wage of £13,946 has now lost £1255.14 a year or £104.59 a month over the last 5 years because of the effects of inflation which means they have to top up wages by relying on in work benefits"

A member of the cleaning staff commented 'Over half of my wages goes on my rent, what sort of life is that?'

A librarian went on to say, 'Many low paid women are now the main breadwinners for their family and trying to make ends meet is getting harder and harder.'

'Given that Birmingham City council and a less well off University's like Wolverhampton can pay the living wage, we are really upset that our University won't pay up. With Christmas coming and my husband with the uncertainty of a zero hour contract it is very difficult to think of the future". A Gardener added.

UNITE are expected to join UNISON in balloting their members in a co-ordinated joint campaign at the University 'Support staff contribute significantly to the life of the University and they deserve fair pay' said a representative from UNITE.

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Notes to editors

1. Staff wished to remain anonymous.
2. Over 300 members of staff are paid below the National Living Wage of £7.65 at just £7.45 per hour.
3. Birmingham City council and University Wolverhampton are amongst Midlands employers who do pay a Living Wage.
4. Support staff at University of Birmingham are not inside national bargaining because the University withdraw in 1995.

UCU members at the University are taking part in national industrial action for a pay rise along with UNISON and UNITE members at other universities.