

“The shame of a country with more food banks than McDonalds’ restaurants”

UNISON members in HE were experiencing huge pressures at work, but collective action could bring about positive change, Assistant General Secretary, Christina McAnea told delegates at this year’s HE conference in Milton Keynes.

Ms McAnea outlined the challenges the sector faced including low pay, rising workloads and job insecurity as a result of constant reorganisations.

In such difficult times, the union continued she said to be “the first line of defence” against such attacks.

Ms McAnea also highlighted the growing inequality and poverty in Britain, evidenced by the scandal that the country now had “more food banks than McDonalds’ outlets”.

As the first of UNISON’s service group conferences to meet after the general election, the mood was one of disappointment at the result, but determination to fight back and strengthen the union.

In response, delegates backed an emergency motion calling for free higher education for all, maintenance of grants for HE, the end of marketisation, an end to casual contracts, a proper Living Wage and protection for all EU employees.

Delegates from across the UK also agreed to submit a pay claim for 5% plus RPI (Retail Price Index), a minimum £10 an hour for all staff and the introduction of a 35 hour week to the joint union group to begin negotiations with the employers’ organisation (UCEA).

Conference also debated the potential for the Augar Review on higher education being implemented, and a series of motions about fighting racism, dealing with disability discrimination, mental health issues and trans recognition on campuses.



Democracy in action at the 2020 HE Conference

The biggest debate at the conference took place over a motion from the University of Brighton, which called for the 2020-21 ballot over pay to be organised on a disaggregated basis.

This would mean that each university would hold its own ballot, and if the turnout exceeded 50% with a majority voting Yes, then that branch would be able to take industrial action.

After 19 different contributions, the chair called for a card vote; the first for seventeen years at a higher education conference, which resulted in the motion passing by 8108 votes to 6350.

The South East region was well represented at the conference by 15 delegates and a Standing Orders Committee member, covering 9 of the 16 universities.

“We must focus on our shared values to meet the challenges we face”, said Ms McAnea as part of a union that faces outwards and continues to grow.

Details of the motions debated and passed can be found on UNISON’s national website under “Events” and searching for Past Events.

Come along to the South East Regional HE AGM

All HE branches and branches with HE members are entitled to send delegates to the Regional HE AGM, 11am-2.30pm, 25 February 2020, UNISON HQ, London. Ruth Levin, Senior National Officer for HE will be the guest speaker, followed by a workshop on winning the campaign for a 35-hour week.

For information about how to attend, details of the agenda and standing for any positions contact n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk.

Defending the LGPS in HE

BETWEEN May and July last year, the Government carried out a consultation on changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) which would allow HE institutions, further education colleges and sixth form colleges the flexibility to no longer offer the scheme to new staff.

Campaigners are concerned that the proposed changes could affect the future viability and security of the scheme, would create a two-tier workforce in terms of pensions and discriminate against support staff, particularly women and low paid workers.

UNISON's HE Executive has agreed to build a campaign across all sectors affected by the LGPS to oppose any such changes, alongside branches, other unions and MPs.

The NEC will also consider industrial action where necessary to defend the scheme and branches are encouraged to monitor the situation and let the regional office know if there are any local developments.

Birkbeck cleaners win in-house battle

CLEANING staff at Birkbeck University of London have won their long-running struggle to have their jobs transferred back in-house, after they were originally outsourced in the late 1990s.

The workers will benefit from improved conditions, plus access to the SAUL pension scheme.

Birkbeck UNISON campaigns officer Edwin Clifford-Coupe said: "The cleaning staff and their UNISON representatives have campaigned courageously for an end to the injustice of outsourcing."

University branches in the region are asked to consider the extent of outsourcing on their campuses and the possibility of mounting similar campaigns to bring services back in-house.



UNISON campaign on pay continues

MEMBERS working in HE will be aware that despite 66% of members voting to take action over pay in our recent ballot, there was less than 50% turnout required to make the action lawful.

University employers have refused to pay up and their latest offer falls well short of our claim for a rise of RPI plus 3%, or a minimum increase of £3,349.

This means the majority of HE staff have been offered a rise of 1.8%, and lower paid staff offered between 1.82% and 3.65% - with many institutions paying the increase before the ballot had even concluded.

Visit our pay calculator at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/education-services/about/higher-education/pay-now-higher-education/> to see how much pay you've lost over the last ten years.

Make sure you encourage your work colleagues to join at joinunison.org.

View from the Chair



LIKE many large organisations, UNISON is split into service groups and each one has its own annual conference and national executive committee.

The HESGE (Higher Education Service Group Committee) is made up of delegates from each region and is elected biennially by individual secret ballot of the members in the group, voting in regional constituencies.

The HESGE's role is to take action on the motions passed at UNISON Higher Education Conference as voted for by branch delegates and to be part of the group that negotiates nationally on pay and terms and conditions.

In the South East there is a general seat open to anyone, a women's seat and a low paid women's seat available on the committee.

Elections are about to start again and the nomination period opens on 27 January 2020 and closes at 5pm on 6 March 2020.

Anyone wishing to get involved or find out more information should contact n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk.

Sarah Pickett
Chair SE Region HE Committee

Keeping in touch

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It's an easy way to keep up to date and find out what is going on:

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