

Higher Education Greenwich UNISON 2018 Annual General Meeting Minutes



Tue 27 Mar 2018, 12.15-2pm, David Fussey D011, University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus
Thu 29 Mar 2018, 12.15-2pm, Queen Anne 063, University of Greenwich, Greenwich Campus

Members present: [redacted]

1. Introduction and welcome

Stuart welcomed members to the meeting and explained the split AGM over two sites. The AGM is an exercise in democracy within the union - the branch reports on our activities and we welcome your participation as voting members, contacts or reps. Over the last year there have been a number of successes but also significant challenges, especially the recent restructure. New members are joining as a result of these challenges. Do encourage your colleagues to join as we are stronger together.

2. **Apologies for absence:** [redacted]

3. **Minutes of last AGM:** The minutes were agreed.

4. **Matters arising from the minutes:** none

5. HE Greenwich Branch

The tabled written reports were noted and supplemented with verbal reports and discussion.

a. UNISON at University of Greenwich (Greenwich, Avery Hill and Medway)

Discussion focused on the current restructure which is the biggest challenge this branch has faced for some years and is on a massive scale, trying to save £4.5 million.

Concerns raised about speed and efficiency of restructure process. Voluntary Severance was barely consulted on (tabled at the last JNC with a very short response time), was confidential to JNC membership so couldn't be discussed with members, and management said it was not something they had to negotiate over. The unions did suggest a minor improvement to an element of the policy seen to be ageist. Members raised concerns about the final version of the policy and questioned whether LGPS or the university paid for the full pension paid to over 55s taking VS.

No-one would say the restructure was well-run, for example the consultation before it went live was minimal. Consultation starting now is the first real consultation. Repeated HR restructures and staffing changes mean staff don't know the university and have contributed to concerns about the university's ability to handle a major restructure.

Vicky Lucioni our London Regional Officer gave an update: she advises no-one signs the 'preference form', or if you do then score out and initial the section about compulsory redundancy so you are not signing rights away. She has been unable to speak with the director or deputy director of HR to get the form reworded. **[secretary's note: UoG has since agreed to remove the offending section]** UNISON has now received statutory HR1188 notice but hadn't before so had been challenging the notice of restructuring issued to staff. Working with UCU. Meeting Stuart to discuss next steps. Justification for job losses is cost savings. UCU and UNISON both challenging whether correct procedures were followed. UNISON will robustly challenge proposals. It won't be possible to save everyone's jobs but there are things that can be done. Vicky will be here at least one day a week to support Chris and Stuart so members can raise things with them. Consultations have to be done department by department. Members are encouraged to recruit colleagues so they can get some support. We need lead officers for each department to collate information from **all members** and feed through to Chris, Stuart and Vicky to make a collective response.

A member asked about JNC - what is the makeup and what is procedure for reporting back and gathering questions for the JNC? All four recognised unions attend - UCU, UNISON, GMB, Prospect. They meet with Pro Vice Chancellor level staff, HR. Agenda items are added from unions as well as management. Questions raised by UNISON at JNC come from our membership - have discussed Mansion Site and outsourcing for example. Minutes are tucked away on the university website.

b. UNISON at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

TL is the second largest employer in the branch. The USS pension proposals have been the major issue in recent months and we are expecting to ballot for strike action soon. UCU is putting the latest offer to its

members but are carrying on with strike action until agreed. Their next strike dates – start on 16 April (12 universities, none local). At TL UNISON and UCU have had an ongoing email conversation with the Principal on USS. There has not been much of substance to report, however after we requested it he did support the latest offer in the UUK consultation, though with reservations around affordability if employer contributions are increased. A member asked about informing non-members about USS - when the offer situation is clearer, perhaps we could hold another open meeting?

6. Introduction of Branch officers and reports

The tabled written reports were noted. James and Alex added that they would welcome contributions of news stories for the website and newsletter, or ideas of topics to cover, and to contact them directly (contact details on www.uheg.org.uk). Alex can also help source or create leaflets/posters for local needs if you have a particular issue to communicate to your department or workplace about.

Joe attended the 2017 international seminar. Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world for Tus so the branch affiliated to Justice for Colombia to support their work. Joe with Juliet J (new Black Members' Officer) launched a successful campaign to highlight black artists through history at Trinity Laban. Joe is just back from the 2018 latest international seminar where he heard about the current national priorities including Colombia, Turkey and modern slavery.

7. Election of Branch Officers and Stewards 2018-19 Positions elected (all on a show of hands and unopposed):

Chair	Stuart Inman. Stuart announced his intention to step down as chair next year.
Vice Chair	Chris Goodchild
Branch Secretary	Edith Speller
Assistant Branch Secretary	Donna Briant
Treasurer	Charlotte Cooper
Membership Officer	Ben Singer
Education Officer	Carol Howells
Health & Safety Officer	Stuart Inman
Communications Officer (job-share)	Alex Iossifidis James Hitchins
Equalities Coordinator	James Chick
Retired Members Officer (nominated and elected by Retired members)	TBC [in 2017/18 was Janet Gillman in a job-share with Rob Beeston]
Welfare Officer	James Hitchins
International Relations Officer	Joseph Wengraf
LGBT Officer (job-share)	Ali Finch Smith Pippa Hogg
Black Members' Officer	Juliet Jackman
Labour Link Officer (nominated and elected by APF members only)	Donna Briant

At Greenwich James Chick was elected as a new steward.

On **health and safety**, it was proposed that a group of contacts feed information through to Stuart as H&S officer. Rosie (Stockwell St), Isaac and Katarina (Queen Anne) volunteered from Greenwich; Donna

volunteered from Avery Hill (with information to be passed to her from Estates & Facilities Management staff). **Volunteers are needed for Trinity Laban.**

Vacancies (information on each role can be found at www.unison.org.uk/about/our-organisation/activists/branch-roles - contact a branch officer to volunteer):

Women's Officer

Disabled Members' Officer

Young Members' Officer

+ more stewards, Health & Safety contacts and workplace contacts. The latter act as a point of contact for the union for members in the contact's department/workplace, and distribute information from the union to those members. It is an easy way to help the union, and a really valuable role which supports stewards and other reps. More information on each role can be found at www.unison.org.uk/about/our-organisation/activists/workplace-roles/ .

8. Branch Accounts 2017

Charlotte presented her report. The balance is still healthy and we ran a surplus despite planning to run a deficit. Charlotte feels positive that we are sending members to more conferences. Thanked Rob Paynter our branch auditor, a former member of the branch. Existing affiliations are Justice for Colombia and the National Pensions Convention.

A vote was taken and the accounts were agreed.

a) Motion to affiliate to Greenwich and Bexley Trades Union Council

The circulated motion was discussed. For information about GBTUC see Lynne's talk (point 11). A vote was taken and the motion was carried. The branch is seeking a delegate to attend the council's monthly meetings in Woolwich

9. Presentation of branch plan and budget

Edith presented the branch plan. This has been emailed round and maps out activities for the year.

Organised first with ongoing activities and then by term, with the autumn term kept blank for now so we can reprioritise in the summer. Aim of all activities is to recruit more members and have an active branch working together for things the membership wants.

- Agreed to add Estates and Facilities at Avery Hill to the plan for the summer term.
- Alex encouraged all members to tell new starters about the union – you can always put them in touch with a rep for more information if they ask anything you're unsure of.
- Stuart will ask at JNC about leaver and starter lists.

Charlotte presented the budget (also circulated) which enables us to carry out the activities we've planned. It includes plenty of money for socials, branch events, conferences and recruitment. We are planning to run a deficit budget but did same last year and still had a surplus. Reminded members that funds are there for activities we want to do. The budget is not set in stone so if anyone has ideas for socials, recruitment etc get in touch as we can probably find funds to support such activities.

A vote was taken and the plan and budget were approved.

10. Election of delegate(s) for National Delegate Conference

The National Delegate Conference takes place annually and is where ordinary members representing every branch agree the union's policy and priorities for the year ahead. This year's conference is 19-22 June in Brighton. All expenses are paid and all of us who've attended have found it an interesting and worthwhile experience. James Chick and Sukhdeep Badhan were elected to share the branch delegation.

11. Guest Speakers at Greenwich AGM: Rob Beeston (Retired Members' Officer and former Chair and Treasurer); Lynne Chamberlain (Greenwich & Bexley Trades Union Council – GBTUC)

Lynne spoke before the affiliation vote (item 8a) at Greenwich. She is a semi-retired UCU FE member. GBTUC reformed in 2010 and meets monthly. It is a conduit to organise solidarity for union disputes in the area, e.g. sending letter to affiliated unions about a current dispute explaining the situation and asking for donations; visiting picket lines, organising collections and spreading the word. They run stalls at local events, fairs etc to inform the general public about unions.

GBTUC also campaigns and support national demos and campaigns too for example on the NHS. They are affiliated to other campaigns e.g. Stand Up to Racism. They recently supported the UCU USS strike and the New Year strike of Prospect at the Maritime Greenwich Museums. UCU strikes have been very effective and gained a lot of support including students on picket lines and marches, despite the snow! UCU has

reportedly gained 4000 members during the dispute. UCU in FE has been striking over 1% pay rise. Lynne ended with a request to the branch to please affiliate to GBTUC as we are stronger together.

Sadly Rob was unable to attend the Avery Hill meeting due to travel problems so gave a brief speech at Greenwich instead: It is great to see the branch thriving again – Rob thanked Edith, Stuart and whole committee for doing an admirable job. At one point it was just Rob and his dog! Rob left school at 1952 aged 15 and joined a print union. He worked for a Teacher Training College as a print technician under the ILEA – sadly it was so good the Tories broke it up. Thames Polytechnic took over Garnett College in 1987 and Rob moved to the Woolwich campus. He became a NUPE member which later formed part of UNISON. Thames Polytechnic became the University of Greenwich. Rob had mixed feelings about this as he felt polys had a real role in the education system covering practical teaching as well as theory. Rob became branch chair 6 months after moving to Woolwich and continued until retirement. Peter Kavanagh was the secretary then and was brilliant, with over 300 members in branch at that time. After retirement, Rob came back and helped out in the union office. A few years ago there was a crisis when the branch couldn't get any officers at all so Rob became treasurer as a stop gap. Some other members helped out and he got a lot of support from the region to help the branch through the difficult period. Rob is very hopeful for the future as the branch is working very hard and he is sure we'll go from strength to strength. He felt pleased that people are volunteering to become delegates and officers and wished all of us the best.

At the end of Rob's speech, Stuart thanked Rob on behalf of the branch for all his hard work for the union and Charlotte (his successor as Treasurer) presented him with an engraved bowl as a small token of our thanks. Isaac also shared his thanks for Rob's support in the office in lean times.

12. Any Other Business

- Concerns about outsourcing – need to keep an active watch on this. UNISON opposes outsourcing as it is not cost-effective.
- A member asked about HERA role grading – if you have a query about the grade your job is at or the regrade process, contact your local steward.
- A member thinks we can and should get a plan of FTEs across the university so we can monitor starters and leavers through that and see early warning signs of restructures e.g. vacancies that never get filled. Need to check if this is in our recognition agreement. We should get reports on vacancies at each JNC and watch out for underspent budget getting reallocated to contract workers, capital funds etc.
- Is there training on negotiation skills? Yes. Email secretary or education officer to get brochure of training opportunities. Vicky can run steward refresher courses on-site if there are sufficient numbers.
- A member encouraged others to spread the word with colleagues that unions are getting things done! We would not have any annual pay rise without national negotiations. We need to shout about what we're doing nationally and locally
- Vicky reported that she has 9 branches on her patch. She agrees it is great to talk to other people about all the little successes and loves that the branch is building and building. Thanked all the branch officers and new officers. This is how a good branch should work!
- A vote of thanks was made to both Stuart and Edith for their hard work, particularly at the university and on USS.

13. Opportunity for members to meet their reps and officers

14. Next Branch Committee meeting: Thu 26 April, Greenwich

Meeting closed at 1.55pm (Avery Hill), 1.52pm (Greenwich).