

University of Greenwich UNISON Branch



2015 Annual General Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 10 March 2015, 12.30pm – 1.30pm
Queen Anne Room 063, Maritime Greenwich Campus

Present: [redacted]

1. **Welcome/Introductions**

Rob Beeston, Branch Treasurer, welcomed members and introduced himself and union organisers present. As the branch does not currently have a chair, Rob chaired the meeting. Edith Speller (Branch Membership Officer) took minutes.

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

3. **Minutes of 2014 AGM:** The minutes were agreed.

4. **UNISON at University of Greenwich [and the branch as a whole]**

Fran Allton works as an area organiser across London in the HE sector: she supports negotiation, representation, recruitment, campaigns, and the training of stewards and branch officers.

As there is no branch secretary at the University of Greenwich at the moment, Fran and Jamie are more directly involved in negotiations at the JNC (Joint Negotiating Committee) with other unions and management than they would normally be, and Fran also supports members with individual cases where she can. The aim longer-term is for activists from the University of Greenwich to be directly involved in negotiations again and ultimately run the branch with less assistance from organisers.

There has been good progress in the branch since the last AGM:

- A group of stewards and workplace contacts regularly meet at Maritime Greenwich, who aim to improve communications with members and recruit more members to get stronger. An aim for the year ahead is to replicate this at Avery Hill and Medway.
- The branch held a summer social.
- The branch sent reps to both regional and national events. This is important as it gives us a voice and influence in the union at a higher level.

Fran reported on some current University of Greenwich issues:

- Casework (individual members' issues) has largely been around disciplinaries, grievances and sickness.
- There have been several restructure consultations particularly last summer. These included the Faculty of Education and Health, and the Faculty for Architecture, Computing and the Humanities. In one case union involvement stopped posts being downgraded and led to the creation of an extra post where members felt it was needed.
- A case where two teams of admin staff in different schools (but the same faculty) were on different grades ended very positively with staff on the lower grade moved up to the higher one, rather than the reverse. This would have been unlikely without union representation.
- A recognition agreement has recently been signed between management and all the trade unions. This sets out the relationship between management and the unions, and is a positive step for us being actively consulted on changes.
- A new restructure policy has recently been agreed and will be available soon.
- A wider policy review is starting soon.

Jamie added some information about the **LGPS pension scheme**, applicable to University of Greenwich and some longstanding Trinity Laban members. New boards are being set up with staff representation, which is a good thing. The scheme is managing investments of billions of pounds.

UNISON are seeking people to become a rep in order to ensure ethical investment and that the scheme is managed efficiently e.g. not overspending on investment advice. Full training is provided so staff don't need to be experts in finance, and time commitment is TBC but approx. 2-3 meetings each year. Anyone interested was advised to contact Jamie (j.brown@unison.co.uk); information will be sent to all members soon.

5. **UNISON at Trinity Laban**

Edith Speller (steward at Trinity Laban) reported on specific issues at Trinity Laban:

- TL is a relatively small employer, but our UNISON membership is gradually growing and in particular member engagement is increasing with more members coming to meetings and taking on contact/steward roles, which is very positive. Edith expressed her thanks to all members for this.
- In particular we now have representation at Health and Safety meetings and also at a regular Operational Management Group meeting to raise issues related to facilities and other service departments which are important to staff.
- The Faculty of Music staff room opened last Autumn after a lot of work from several UNISON members, firstly to show the need for the room and secondly to support the institution in setting it up.
- Walkarounds of offices to tell staff about the union and a staff room lunchtime launch (jointly with UCU) have been successful recruitment events.
- A new flexible working policy has been agreed and a general policy review is underway, with a capability procedure next to be discussed.
- Relationship with management is generally good but things can move very slowly which is a frustration.
- Casework has been varied but one theme is supporting long-term sickness and stress. The union needs to consider how to raise this as a collective issue without holding up any individual member's case as an example as these can be sensitive situations.
- Upcoming changes to the USS pension scheme (which most admin staff at TL are in) are concerning and there may be interest in the union holding a meeting for staff on this.

6. **General Election 2015**

Jamie Brown started by thanking all the local contacts and stewards for building momentum in the branch, evidenced by the AGM turnout and the establishment of regular branch meetings which didn't happen 18 months ago.

Jamie gave a presentation on the upcoming general election which is available as a separate document. In particular he highlighted the devastating impact of tribunal charges (introduced by the current Tory/Lib Dem government) on the number of sex discrimination cases being taken to tribunal. It's also vital that members ensure they are registered to vote (and register for a postal vote if they might be too busy to vote on 7 May itself), and look at each party's policies and prospects in their area when deciding how to vote.

The key message is to vote on 7 May!

A question was asked about communicating these issues to other staff who aren't UNISON members. Jamie explained the coalition government's Lobbying Act seriously restricts what we can do re: communicating to non-members.

Action: Jamie will check whether local reps can perform walkarounds to encourage all staff to register to vote, and what (if any) materials UNISON can provide to facilitate this.

7. **Branch Treasurer's Report**

Rob Beeston provided a written report on the branch finances, which are very healthy. He is pleased that the branch becoming more active has meant we have started spending some of our reserves, and encouraged the branch to continue with this. The accounts were agreed unanimously.

8. **Election of Officers and Stewards**

Positions elected (all unanimously):

Stewards (Trinity Laban): Edith Speller (Jerwood Library), James Hitchins and Alex Iossifidis (Student Services).

Steward (University of Greenwich): Stuart Inman (Library)

Branch treasurer: Rob Beeston

Membership officer: Edith Speller

Communications Officer: Mary McCartney

Health and Safety Officer: job-share between Stuart Inman (University of Greenwich) and Charlotte Cooper (Trinity Laban)

Welfare Officer: James Hitchins

Positions vacant:

- JNC reps x 2 (University of Greenwich)
- More stewards for University of Greenwich
- Branch representative at National Conference
- Branch chair
- Branch secretary
- Education Officer
- Equality Officer

Anyone interested in a vacant position is welcome to contact Fran (f.allton@unison.co.uk, 020 7535 6681) to discuss this. Full support and training is available for all roles. While there is no branch chair or secretary, Fran is the first point of contact for branch information or to request assistance with a University of Greenwich workplace issue.

9. Any Other Business

Rob thanked everyone for attending and highlighted the Retired Members social taking place on 30 March at 12 noon in the Lost Hour pub in Greenwich. Non-retired members are also welcome!

Meeting closed at approx. 1.35pm.