

Higher Education Greenwich UNISON 2017 Annual General Meeting Minutes



Tue 7 Mar 2017, 12.30-2pm, Queen Anne 063, University of Greenwich, Greenwich Campus
Thu 9 Mar 2017, 12.30-2pm, Mary Seacole S311, University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus

Members present: [redacted]

1. Introduction and welcome

Stuart welcomed everyone to the meeting, and mentioned there have been a lot of changes in the branch in the last year and we have made a lot of progress. However there is still a lot more to do and he encouraged everyone to get more active in their union.

2. Apologies for absence: none

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

4. Matters arising from the minutes: none

5. HE Greenwich Branch

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

b. UNISON at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

The circulated written reports were noted and supplemented with verbal reports. Stuart and Edith both emphasised restructures and cuts at the university and Trinity Laban and how it's more important now than ever to encourage colleagues to join the union so people get the support they need and can work together to improve proposals. Chris added that work being done behind the scenes was not always visible and we need to work on this. There are 30-40 policies to negotiate or be consulted on in total – recently have included disciplinary, and transitioning at work. Recruitment was discussed – Boyana recommended doing recruitment activities e.g. stalls regularly rather than as a one-off so people gain familiarity and know where to go to see the union. A member asked if any data was gathered on why people join the union. Charlotte represents the branch at the union's HE regional committee and can suggest this is done there. In future the branch could also put a motion to the national delegate conference to add this question to the online joining form.

6. Introduction of Branch officers

The circulated 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). In addition James gave a brief Welfare Officer report: he has dealt with several enquiries. UNISON offers grants for hardship, winter fuel and school uniforms. Contact James for more information.

7. Election of Branch Officers and Stewards 2017-18 Positions elected (all unanimously and unopposed):

Chair: Stuart Inman

Vice-chair: Chris Goodchild

Secretary: Edith Speller

Assistant Branch Secretary: Donna Briant

Treasurer: Charlotte Cooper

Equalities Coordinator: James Chick

Membership Officer: Ben Singer

Communications Officer (job-share): James Hitchins and Alex Iossifidis

Welfare Officer: James Hitchins

International Officer: Joe Wengraf

Retired Members' Officer (job-share): Janet Gillman and Rob Beeston

On **health and safety**, it was proposed that a group of reps come together to share H&S information in the absence of an elected H&S officer. Rosie Blake volunteered from Greenwich and Ritch Chering from Medway. **Volunteers are needed for Avery Hill and Trinity Laban.**

A vote of thanks was given to Rob Beeston who has served as our treasurer for a number of years, keeping the branch going almost single-handedly through the period where we lacked other key officers. He will still be active in the branch as joint Retired Members' Officer.

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):

Education Officer

Health & Safety Officer

LGBT Officer

Women's Officer

Black Members' Officer

Young Members' Officer

Disabled Members' Officer

Labour Link Officer (nominated and elected by APF members only)

+ more stewards 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 2016**

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.

Questions:

Liabilities – we are awaiting a £10k invoice from UNISON as payment towards Lisa, the Fighting Fund Local Organiser who worked with us and another branch last year.

Income – this is stable and is linked to membership numbers so if we grow our membership we will get more income.

A vote was taken and the accounts were agreed.

9. **Presentation of branch plan and budget**

Edith presented the branch plan. This has been emailed round and maps out activities for the year and builds on the branch assessment carried out between branch leadership and regional union staff looking at the areas of recruitment, stewards organisation and development, financial management and planning, and political campaigning. The theme for spring is to get the branch running smoothly (electing more officers, establishing branch rules etc) and then in summer we can run campaigns e.g. on the pay offer. Members as a whole can help by attending workplace meetings, inviting a colleague to join the union, telling reps about any issues that could be used as campaigns to support members and recruit more members. The budget (also circulated) enables us to carry out the activities we've planned. It includes delegated budgets to some officers/convenors to allow local spending without having to go back to branch committee every time, e.g. at Avery Hill to buy flowers for retiring members. The plan and budget were approved.

10. **Branch rules**

Edith presented the rules. The current branch committee inherited a situation where we did not have branch rules, so these were written in consultation with regional staff using a template but tweaking things like quorums and AGM timetables to suit the branch. Edith highlighted the convenor structure where the stewards in each campus/employer elect a lead steward (convenor) to represent the area at branch committee.

A vote was taken on adopting the rules: 32 votes for with no votes against or abstentions, so the branch rules were adopted.

11. **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 20-23 June in Brighton. Stuart Inman was elected as the delegate for the branch. All were encouraged to consider attendance in the future – it is easier if two people share the delegation. All expenses are paid and all of us who've attended have found it an interesting and enjoyable experience.

12. **Guest Speaker: Martin Groombridge from London Capital Credit Union (Greenwich) / Alan Stevens from Greenwich & Bexley Credit Union (Avery Hill)**

Both speakers spoke persuasively about the benefits of credit unions and their alignment with trade unions and the co-operative movement.

- Non-profit, the membership hold all the 'shares'.
- Democratic – officers elected at AGM and dividend (equivalent of interest in banks) is agreed there too.
- Anti-poverty – lend at fair rates, will lend to people banks won't help (e.g. those with erratic income or the young), and require anyone with a loan to pay into a savings account at the same time as paying off their loan. This stabilises their finances so hopefully next time they need money quickly they can draw on savings instead of borrowing more money.
- Ethical – e.g. they pay the living wage and don't have big differences in wages between the highest and lowest-paid staff.
- Diverse – members come from all over the world (many set up credit unions when banks wouldn't deal with 'foreigners') and they serve people on low, middle and higher incomes, all are welcome!

The branch was encouraged to ask our main employers to enable payroll deductions for savings. This benefits employers as well as staff – helps stabilise finances so people are less likely to seek work elsewhere.

London Capital Credit Union is open to all UNISON members or anyone with a Co-op membership card in London. <http://credit-union.coop/>

Greenwich and Bexley Credit Union is open to all who live, work or study in the boroughs of Greenwich or Bexley. www.gbcreditunion.com

13. **Any Other Business**

None.

Meeting closed at 1.52pm (Avery Hill), 2.01pm (Greenwich).