

Higher Education Greenwich UNISON 2016 Annual General Meeting Minutes



Wed 16 Mar 2015, 1-2.30pm, Queen Anne 063, University of Greenwich, Greenwich Campus
Fri 18 Mar 2015, 1-2.30pm, Mary Seacole S311, University of Greenwich, Avery Hill Campus

Present: [redacted]

1. Introduction and welcome

Rob Beeston, Branch Treasurer, welcomed members and introduced himself. 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 2015 AGM: The minutes were agreed. [proposed Helen, seconded James H.]

4. Matters arising from the minutes: action re: materials to encourage members to register to vote in the general election was completed.

5. HE Greenwich Branch

a. UNISON at University of Greenwich

Stuart Inman (steward at UoG) made the following report, adding that he'd found the experience enjoyable so far!

"2015 was the year I officially became a steward, being voted in at the last AGM. I have been the only Unison steward in the University of Greenwich, which has meant that there have been limits to what I can do, initially also through lack of experience. I'm looking forward to us having two more stewards, and possibly more, in the coming year.

In the last year I have regularly attended Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) meetings, usually with Jo Galloway, most especially as part of an ongoing policy review group, involving HR and all the recognised unions at Greenwich, negotiating a series of new policies for disciplinary and grievance, and, currently, capability issues, with more to come. I have also been in consultation with members on restructuring, led here by Jo and by Lisa Newby. I have also had my first cases of representing individual members this year. I have attended conferences for the HE sector, both at regional and national level (see my report on the branch blog for the national conference), various events, either organised by us or in collaboration and the regular branch meetings.

On a personal note, I have found this work extremely fulfilling, sometimes frustrating that I couldn't do more. My concern though is that we need to recruit more stewards and branch officers. I will be retiring in just over four years and would very much like to be able to hand over my duties to a new generation of activists. They will be greatly needed."

b. UNISON at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Edith Speller (steward at Trinity Laban) made the following report, adding that having more stewards had enabled everyone to share the workload; the union was enabling members to work for change on issues they might not have wanted to raise on their own; that the union needs more members especially in the Faculty of Dance; and that she would recommend getting involved in the union as a positive experience and a chance to meet colleagues from across the institution and beyond!

"We have three stewards (Alex, Edith and James) plus several workplace contacts. Two of us (currently Alex and James) attend JNCC (Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee) with management and UCU reps. Charlotte also represents UNISON on TL committees (see her report below). In the last year we have raised several collective issues with management, most recently on office management and sustainability. We have given advice and representation to a number of individual members on issues such as role description and regrades, leave entitlements, and flexible working. We have held several lunchtime meetings, some open to all staff and others limited to members only. These included a staff room social jointly with UCU, and a meeting to discuss changes to the USS pension scheme. Anyone who'd like to know more or get active in UNISON at Trinity Laban is welcome to speak to Alex, Charlotte, Edith or James!"

6. Introduction of Branch officers

The following 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) especially with time-sensitive stories. It was also agreed to ensure the UHEG website is included on every email sent to members.

Action: get link to UHEG website on University of Greenwich intranet – Jamie and Stuart

Edith Speller: Membership Officer

I am responsible for maintaining our list of members on UNISON's membership database, and answering membership queries e.g. if someone's subscriptions aren't being paid, or if a steward needs a list of members in their workplace. I recently arranged an easier way to get new membership forms to the University of Greenwich payroll which should reduce problems in future. I have worked with UNISON contacts in the university to add members' departments to our system. I have started providing regular reports on membership changes to our branch committee meetings. Finally, I'm pleased to say our branch's membership has gone up since the last AGM!

James Hitchins & Alex Iossifidis: Communications Officer (job share)

Communications seems to be going well; it helps to share the work, Alex on Newsletters and emails, James on the website side of things. The new website is up; and we have had 118 visitors! We could always do with help and ideas, so please log on and have a look at www.uheg.org.uk.

Stuart Inman: Health & Safety Officer (University of Greenwich)

I am new to the role of Health and Safety rep and have not yet had training in this. I have so far attended one meeting, which for me was mostly useful for meeting the university Health and Safety people. I am on the distribution lists for all H&S events and information and will be attending meetings in the near future. I'm happy to discuss any H&S concerns and represent them to the university, unless someone else wants the job!

Charlotte Cooper: Health & Safety Officer (Trinity Laban)

I have acted as the UNISON representative on both the Trinity Laban Health and Safety Group, and the Operations Management Group. As well as raising members' specific concerns about health and safety matters and their general working environment, I have contributed to the updating of the institutional Health and Safety Policy and plans for health and safety training (online and in person).

7. Election of Branch Officers and Stewards 2016-17

Positions elected (all unanimously and unopposed):

Branch secretary: Edith Speller
Branch chair: Stuart Inman
Branch treasurer: Rob Beeston
Communications Officer (jobshare): James Hitchins and Alex Iossifidis
Equalities Officer: James Chick
Welfare Officer: James Hitchins

Workplace reps: in future these may be elected separately at workplace meetings.

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

Stewards (University of Greenwich): Stuart Inman and Rosie Blake (Stockwell Street Library), Chris Goodchild (Avery Hill).

Health and Safety rep (University of Greenwich): Stuart Inman

Health and Safety rep (Trinity Laban): Charlotte Cooper

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

Vice Chair

Assistant Branch Secretary

Membership Officer

Education Officer

Health & Safety Officer

International Officer

Retired Members Officer (nominated and elected by Retired members only)

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/.

If you'd like to know more or become a workplace contact or take on another role, contact Lisa Newby, l.newby@unison.co.uk.

Jamie commented he was proud of the work active members had put in to develop the branch had over the last few years, and that it is now in a much more sustainable position with more committee positions filled. UNISON is a member-led union so it is important that the branch leadership is made up of local activists, and he committed to UNISON staff supporting the new role-holders as they got to grips with their new responsibilities.

8. **Branch Accounts 2015**

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.

A question was asked about the deposit fund – in the past this was an industrial action fund but union rules mean this is no longer allowed as strike pay is paid from the central union as appropriate. We could choose to close this fund and move the money into the main account.

The accounts were agreed unanimously. [proposed Stuart, seconded James C.]

9. **Presentation of branch assessment**

Edith presented the branch assessment. The four areas covered are recruitment, stewards organisation and development, financial management and planning, and political campaigning. Members as a whole can help by inviting a colleague to join the union, telling reps about any issues that could be used as mini campaigns to recruit more members, and by looking out for updates on political issues such as the Trade Union Bill and the upcoming London mayoral and assembly elections.

Action: distribute postal and proxy voter registration forms to workplace contacts (for the upcoming London elections and the EU referendum).

A question was asked about the EU referendum – UNISON has asked branches to survey members to help UNISON decide whether or not to take a position, and what position to take.

Action: Jamie to hand over survey information to Edith. Jamie/Edith to provide background and consultation info for branch website

10. **Election of delegates 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 21-24 June in Brighton. James Chick and Rosie Blake were elected to share the delegate place for the branch. Donna Briant will attend some of the conference as a visitor.

11. **Question and Answer session**

12. **Any Other Business**

Greenwich meeting: Jamie Brown spoke about the current HE pay campaign and the Trade Union bill. HE pay: It was agreed at HE national conference in Feb (attended by Stuart and Rosie from our branch) that UNISON would ask for 5% or £1000 (whichever greater) to make up for years of real-term pay cuts or freezes. This will be UNISON's starting point for negotiations with the employers nationally, working with UCU. Many universities are investing a lot in buildings and facilities, and need to understand that their workforce needs to be invested in as well. See the UNISON website for more info: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2016/02/higher-ed-conference-pay/>

TU bill: being debated in the House of Lords. Some of the worst aspects have been removed or are being opposed but significant danger remains. The bill aims to stop ordinary working people organising themselves. Jamie highlighted three key areas:

- **DOCAS (paying union subs straight from salary) is under threat** in the public sector which is purely to attack unions and could lead to big drops in membership. Government claimed DOCAS cost the taxpayer money, but actually unions already pay an admin fee and some employers actually make money from this service!
- **Strike ballot thresholds** - requiring a 50% turnout for a legal ballot. This is very restrictive and doesn't apply in any political elections or the upcoming EU referendum! Public sector has a second stronger threshold: 40% of **all** members have to vote yes for industrial action to take place. An abstention therefore counts as a no vote.
- Unions are banned from holding **electronic ballots** to increase turnout, which makes the thresholds above particularly damaging and shows this bill is not a genuine attempt to increase democratic participation.

Avery Hill meeting: a discussion took place on ways to make the union more visible and members more active. Ideas included:

- Ask every member to speak to one colleague and encourage them to join. Workplace contacts could speak to another member and encourage them to come to a workplace meeting and become more active.
- Giving posters to workplace contacts to put on departmental noticeboards, e.g. a poster with the website address.
- Asking HR to include a UNISON who's who/leaflet/membership form in the induction pack for new starters.
- Order branded folders to give to members – increasing visibility around the workplace.
- Order business cards for branch officers/stewards to give members.
- Post about UNISON on the university's Yammer, e.g. the new group on Staff Engagement (set up by Lelah Williams).
- Hold meetings at different times for certain staff e.g. early morning ~8am for cleaners at Avery Hill.
- Identify a workplace contact in the Students' Union.

Lisa (with Chris) will establish a regular workplace meeting in Avery Hill for stewards, workplace contacts and interested members to get the union active there, as has been happening for some time in Greenwich.

Everyone present was encouraged to enter the UNISON prize draw with a top prize of £10000. All that's needed to enter is to confirm your contact details with the union at <https://www.unison.org.uk/win> .

Meeting closed at 2.19pm (Avery Hill), 2.28pm (Greenwich).