

Thanks for nothing! Vote NO to 0% pay

HE members are being asked to take part in a consultative ballot over this year's 0% pay offer.

The online ballot will take place during November and the Service Group Executive Committee for HE is recommending members vote NO.

Emails have gone out to all members and the deadline for a response is 30th November.

We need to demonstrate the strength of feeling of members, so that we can move to a formal, postal ballot in the new year.

There's no need for us to tell you how hard members have worked and why we deserve more than a real terms pay cut.

Vice Chancellors will say there is no money for pay, but that exposes the weakness of the sector's funding model.

We've been campaigning for proper funding for universities and are happy to lead a joint campaign with management if that's what they want, but we can't accept pay cuts or job losses and we won't accept one of those to prevent the other.

Trade unions are there to fight for what our members deserve.

Winning a postal ballot across the sector with a turnout in excess of 50% will be a challenge, but first we need to show how determined our members are to resist this latest attack on our pay.

Please make sure you vote, and do everything you can to get other members to vote, and vote NO to reject their "offer" of a pay cut.

In the meantime, UNISON is calling on universities to think again, particularly once there is greater clarity about the number of students who have signed up and a clearer picture emerges about the impact of COVID on university finances.

Alongside the pay negotiations, we are also looking at the lowest pay points, and further meetings with the employers will be held before the end of the year.



This year's pay offer is widely seen as an insult to hardworking university staff (c)UNISON

Workers are also understandably angry at the 0% pay offer because many of them feel they have been left to manage the fallout, threats and abuse from frustrated students in isolation, with no extra support or recognition.

Security officers at one university report regularly risking their own safety to break up rowdy groups of students angry at lockdown restrictions, UNISON has found.

Similarly, staff have had to fight their way through hundreds of students – including Covid-positive cases – heading for fire exits as alarms were intentionally set off in accommodation blocks.

To keep students safe and fed, cleaners and catering staff are working extra hours to meet the huge increase in demand.

Against this backdrop, it's no wonder that our members feel totally unappreciated by their employer and angry that redundancies and other attacks on terms and conditions continue at a time when staff are working harder than ever.

That's why now is your chance to tell university employers – and the government – exactly what you think of this pay freeze and force them to think again about what you're owed by voting NO.

Come along to regular HE catch-up meetings

All HE branches and branches with HE members are encouraged to let their activists know that they can join the fortnightly informal HE catch-up meetings that take place online. The meeting is an excellent way to hear about what is going on in the sector across the region and to share information with colleagues from other universities. For details please contact n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk.

Fears over full-scale return to campus

IN the latest UNISON survey of members working in higher education, there are clear concerns about pay, working hours and the threat from COVID-19.

From over 4000 responses, 83% of HE workers expressed fears about social distancing on campus, and 45% said they were worried about a lack of personal protective equipment.

Worryingly, more than a third (36.4%) haven't yet received a personal COVID-19 risk assessment, according to the survey.

This is despite the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA) and Universities UK (UUK) recommending support staff be at the heart of safety planning ahead of any large return to campus.

Despite their heightened risk, 18% of university support staff said their employer hadn't provided them with any support, whilst two fifths (41%) said they'd like more support ahead of any return.

Commenting on the findings, UNISON head of education Jon Richards said: "Staff are understandably worried about returning to campuses in large numbers and they're tired of managers not listening to their concerns."

"Universities must make sure risk assessments are carried out and implemented before staff return and the government must ensure staff aren't forgotten in the headlong rush for universities to open up again as if it was business as usual."

The survey results come at a time of unprecedented upheaval for the HE sector.

Universities are managing outbreaks of Covid-19 among students and staff and in some places considering drastic cost cutting measures such as redundancies and pay freezes.

As well as fighting these measures, one of UNISON's key tasks is to ensure that members are not forced back onto campus.

Our advice is that all staff should have a personal risk assessment carried out before they go back to campus, which takes into account factors such as an individual's age, ethnicity and any underlying health factors, as well as issues such as caring responsibilities and anxiety about returning.

A useful tool to assess someone's vulnerability and risk is provided by the Association of Local Authority Medical Advisors (ALAMA) which can be viewed here: <https://alama.org.uk/covid-19-medical-risk-assessment/>

Depending on the outcome of this assessment, staff should either be able to return to campus safely, only return when reasonable adjustments have been put in place or remain working from home to avoid the risk.

Impact of online only teaching at Xmas

FOLLOWING the government's announcement to move to online teaching from the 9 December, universities are now having to consider how to encourage students to be tested before they travel home in time for Christmas or the winter break.

It is also anticipated that there are likely to be more students staying on campus over Christmas either because they are COVID positive or because of international travel restrictions.

All of this will impact on those UNISON members who are either supporting students who remain or are affected by the move to online teaching because their jobs cannot be done at home.

For students returning in January 2021, UNISON is requesting detailed guidance from the DfE about how this will be managed, and universities should be producing information as to how they will mitigate against the risks of having a large scale return.

The safety and jobs of our members therefore remains our number one priority during this challenging time.

You decide the next UNISON GS

WITH the recent announcement by Dave Prentis of his retirement as UNISON General Secretary, members are now being asked to choose his successor.

The names of the four candidates are listed below in the order they appear on the ballot paper and in the election address booklet:

Paul Holmes

Nominated by one service group executive, two regional councils and 99 branches.

Christina McAnea

Nominated by the national executive council (NEC), five service group executives, nine regional councils and 210 branches.

Roger McKenzie

Nominated by one service group executive, one regional council and 104 branches.

Hugo Pierre

Nominated by 31 branches.

Ballot papers will be sent to members' home or other notified address in writing.

Members will be provided with a pre-paid envelope for the return of the ballot paper to the independent scrutineer and all voting will be by post.

The deadline for receipt of ballot papers is 5pm on Friday 27 November 2020.

This is the most important election in the union's democratic structure so make sure you vote.

Keeping in touch

You will find UNISON on social media and the internet. It's an easy way to keep up to date and find out what is going on:

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