Your Unison at work – Looking back at 2016

As 2016 draws towards a close, we have seen many challenges this year for you the membership, the Branch Executive and Stewards group and it has been very satisfying to achieve some good outcomes for staff facing issues and difficulties at work.

The Stewards that support you at York are all part of a dedicated Unison team, who work on a voluntary basis to support colleagues through long term sickness, disciplinary, conduct, redundancy, redeployment, grievance, collective bargaining, restructures and retirement. Frances helps to assist with equality issues, Megan with young members, Jenny with H&S and welfare, Anne manages all of the branch finances and budgets, James with YCL members’ consultation, Jacqui with all the membership queries and Helen with education, strategy, planning and policies.

The team of qualified Stewards includes Jenny Underhill, who co-ordinates the casework, Helen Adcock, James Creaser, and Frances Daly, we will soon be welcoming Megan Ollerhead and Jacqui Chainey.

The restructures undertaken for reasons of efficiencies and technology have unfortunately not been able to accommodate all staff affected into new roles but we have been available and helped to support nearly 160 staff just this year. Our Unison support doesn’t just stop when a member of staff leaves, we are happy to amend your membership to lifelong membership through retirement, and unemployed member status for a period of time and There for You will always be available at the end of the phone for help, advice and guidance through difficult times.

I would like to thank the Unison trade union for the help & support provided by them & their rep. during a particularly difficult & fraught re-organisation of our department, I’m sure I speak for many of my colleagues in thanking you for looking out for the rights of each individual within the group. Regards....... A satisfied member.

Being a member of Unison brings you and your family protection, we broker negotiations and a relationship with HR and offer FREE professional advice and support in employment matters, Unison reassures you with access to FREE legal advice for more serious work-related issues. There is a wealth of other benefits and offers; FREE will writing services for you and your partner and discounted travel, car insurance, FREE accident insurance and the list goes on.

Lastly, thank you for your support for our surveys this year. It makes a huge difference to take back over 100 responses to questions around policy making – you have helped to design the new Making the Difference awards and veto the changes to the non-incremental Rewarding Excellence scheme and support calls for wider departmental participation in Flexitime for an equitable system for all staff. Well Done YOU. Come and celebrate with us!

The Christmas Social - 14th December, 12:30 to 1:45, HG/21 – RSVP by 12/12
The University of York Pension Fund – a valuable staff benefit

- Are you aged between 18 and 60?
- Are you employed in a role between grades 1 – 5?
- Have you been employed by the University for three continuous years or more?

If your answer to the questions above is “yes”, then you may be able to join the University of York Pension Fund.

What do you get?
The University of York Pension Fund provides a valuable package of benefits. These can include;

- A pension for you when you retire paid for the rest of your life
- A single tax-free lump sum paid to you when you retire or to your beneficiaries if you die before drawing the pension
- A pension payable to your spouse or registered civil partner for the rest of their life if you pre-decease them, plus a pension for eligible children whilst they are under 23 and in full time education or training
- An enhanced package of benefits if you have to retire early on ill health grounds

What does it cost?
The University makes a generous contribution to your pension – currently 16% of your pensionable pay. The cost to you is 7% of your pensionable pay, but you may receive tax relief on this or pay by salary sacrifice, which both help to reduce the cost to you. You can get an estimate of how your take home pay would be affected by joining by contacting the Payroll Team.

Want to join us?
It’s really easy to join, so if you think you want to, or have any questions, contact the University’s Pensions Team on x4782 or x4805 or via pensions@york.ac.uk

NEW! Unison Drop-In Sessions:

Your Union branch office, is W/022 and the branch will be running a drop-in clinic for all your work related questions and requests for information. Things such as working hours, pay, contract queries and requests for support in dealing with issues such as grievance, harassment and bullying, injuries at work.

The 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month from 21st January
12 – 1pm Drop-in Session
1 – 2pm Scheduled Appointments

Sultan Mahmood, S.Mahmood@unison.co.uk our Area Organiser will be available between 12-1pm for a drop-in session for information on work related issues, Unison benefits and a quick chat or between 1-2pm for a scheduled 1-2-1 appointment. To book just email Sultan directly.
National Women’s Conference 2017 & SOGs!

The branch Executive Committee will be holding a Planning Day on 10th December. We will be looking at initiatives for 2017 and we welcome your ideas.

One area that we think we would like to support members is in the foundation of Self-Organised Groups (SOGs). These are groups, run by the members and supported by the Branch – ideas include a Women’s group and they are all over the UK Unison branches.

Interested in being an organiser? Just email us on unison@york.ac.uk

Women come together each year at the annual Women’s conference to talk about policy, change and what's really happening ‘on the ground’. If you would like to register for conference it will be held in Brighton, 16th – 18th February 2017. Expenses are paid for by the branch, and we are eligible to send up to three delegates, get in touch with unison@york.ac.uk

Deadline for Conference registration is 5pm Friday 9 December.

We all know times are hard. Money is tight, the cuts are hurting, families are struggling. Now, more than ever we need our unions. We need to get together with our co-workers and organise.

UNISON's Organising Space is one way of keeping in touch and sharing ideas - and women members everywhere need more women activists using it! It’s a secure and safe online resource developed to support our activist and organising communities. The space allows us to share content, have discussions, ask experts and seek support from our peers. So check out UNISON’s secure social learning microsite exclusively for our activists and staff.
See York Learning website for more information!
http://yorklearning.org.uk/

New!  York Learning brochure coming on 20\textsuperscript{th} December 2016 – we still have lots of bursaries available up to £350 for courses.

**Maths Get On (Entry Level)** – Build on your existing maths skills to master the basics and gain confidence.
- 4134T2 – York Explore – H Beagley
  Wed/Thu 1:30pm-3:30pm 11/Jan/17, 12 weeks

**Level 2 Certificate in the Principles of Business Administration**
- Flexible \Online course
  Duration: 5 hours a week home study, between 16-20 weeks
  To be completed within 5 months of start date

**Keep Up with the Children in Maths (Short Course)** – Open to anyone – this is a short course for people who just want an update on how maths is taught at primary school or who are thinking of or are working already in school settings.
- 4143T2 – Fulford School – W Harris
  Thu 6:45pm-8:45pm 19/Jan/17, 5 weeks

**Practical Mindfulness – For Happiness**
- 2342T2 – York High School – D Levey
  Mon 7:00pm-8:30pm 23/Jan/17, 3 weeks

**ECDL Level 1**
Venue: Rougier House, Clifton and Acomb Explore Libraries
Duration: 30 hours over 12 weeks

New! @ Languages for All - University of York - Spring 2017

Registration now open for Languages for All, term two classes.

Fancy a lunchtime French course for beginners or learning Spanish through the use of drama techniques? LFA is now offering several new language courses, open to all, beginning on Monday 16 January 2017.

Register or email Ruth Ray at LFA@york.ac.uk for more information.
Feedback from members

For your education, well-being and training, the branch have opened 58 bursaries from £10-£350 in whatever you want to do and we are very pleased that some of you have taken advantage of courses; both work related and non-vocational to help boost your confidence, enjoyment with hobbies and skills to add to your CV. Please DO keep those applications coming as 2017 Spring courses will be available soon for enrolment.

The branch are looking for an Education Officer to help circulate information, monitor applications and liaise with education providers. Interested? Get in touch…

Autumn 2016 feedback from members:

- I enrolled on the Book Keeping course because it looked like a good entry level course to do. The course has been great and has given me an idea as to whether I want to pursue further courses similar to this in the future.

- ITALIAN LEVEL 2: I signed up for the course because I like to holiday in Italy and want to have a good grasp of the language to help me communicate. I am really enjoying the course and will be signing up for the next level when I can.

- As a keen cyclist I’ve always wanted to take a basic bike maintenance course. When Unison offered the opportunity to fund a course I signed up straight away. I gained a lot from the course as the tutor Phil was very knowledgeable. The small group size gave everyone ample time to work on their own bikes while Phil was on hand to check and advise. A very practical course.

- I signed up for the Level 1 manual bookkeeping course because I wanted to understand more about how to do the accounts for my wife’s work as a self-employed music teacher. Having Unison paying for the course has been a good motivation for me not to even consider giving up. The course covers the basics in bookkeeping, which means you need at least some confidence in maths. For me the biggest challenge is not the maths but the attention to detail that is essential. The teacher is very good at dealing with the very mixed maths abilities of the group, but has been putting us through our paces with an exam every few weeks leading to the Level 1 qualification. My next step will probably be Level 2.

- I decided I wanted to study an accredited counselling course to help with my role as a Steward in the Branch, to better support members who come to the Branch with issues and are upset. The course has helped to build on key skills to support members during helping sessions to enable a member to come to a positive outcome with feelings and actions. At Level 2 counselling skills will be invaluable in this role.
Unison at the University of York is now affiliated with the local York & District Trades Union Council (TUC). Helen Adcock has a position on the Executive Committee as Minute Secretary to support the Executive Officers.

The York TUC is a thriving branch with several affiliated trades union members and all sectors of industry are well represented. Each month the York TUC meet at the TSSA offices to discuss local and regional initiatives, drawing on the support of delegate members.

Most recently there has been support for Frack Free York – a group formed to help reduce the impact of fracking within the York boundary. Other campaigns include supporting workers at Tangerine – fighting for their contract terms and conditions which are under threat.

As a joint initiative the TUC wish to take forward an education initiative within schools, FE and HE in York to highlight the formation of Trade Unions and why they are so important in the workplace. There is a focus on publicising the importance of union membership to new apprentices entering the workplace, to ensure that they are familiar with minimum statutory terms and conditions, H&S and young workers’ rights.

The branch recently supported and attended with an information stand, a York Labour Party sponsored public event, hosted by Rachael Maskell, interviewing John McDonnell with questions from the floor on Labour’s economic policies going forwards following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader.

In October the TUC branch travelled to Birmingham to take part in the hugely successful event of protesting against the tory party austerity cuts and Unison were there in force.

If you, as a member of the branch, would like to take forward ideas for local campaigns within the York area, or are interested in becoming involved with Unison as a Labour Link Officer or York TUC - please contact Helen with further information. Helen.adcock@york.ac.uk
If you need to speak to one of the York team in confidence just email us on unison@york.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can come and speak to our Area Rep on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month in W/022 12-2pm.

**General advice**
There for You provides a confidential service for members over the phone or in person if you are experiencing personal difficulties.

**There for You Winter Fuel Grants** **NEW!**
Launches on Thursday 1st December 2016 and runs until the closing date of 17th February 2017. Please note that this year eligibility now includes those in receipt of housing benefit and the amount of the grant has risen from £40 to £50 per eligible household. Applications without a membership number and the relevant documentation attached will not be processed. Applicants must have paid a minimum of 4 week’s subscriptions before 1st December 2016 to apply. Application forms can be downloaded from the UNISON website. Members must complete the application form and survey. Priority will be given to those who have not previously received this grant and grants will not be paid out until after the closing date of 17 February 2017.

**Financial assistance**
If you are a member and you are experiencing financial difficulties, whatever the circumstances, There for You can offer you support. Worried about money? If you’re worried about money you can talk to an adviser at UNISON Debt line on 0800 389 3302. Lines are open from 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, and from 9am to 3pm on Saturday.

**Debt line support**
UNISON’s Debt line service is available to all UNISON members to help them manage money and deal with debt. We offer free confidential advice to help you clear your debts.

**Wellbeing breaks**
Wellbeing breaks can provide welcome relief from stress and respite from difficult circumstances. We can help you towards the costs of a break, depending on your financial situation.
**The branch AGM will be on Wednesday 29th March, 1 - 2pm, HG/21**

We are always looking for new Officers and Stewards to take up the reins for a very worthwhile and valuable Unison support team.

We currently have the following positions available, why don’t you come and give it a try!

- Retired Members Officer
- Communications Officer
- Education Officer
- Labour Link Officer
- Union Learning Rep
- SOGs Co-ordinator
- Minute Secretary
- Stewards
- Workplace Reps

All Officer and Rep positions have training available – the branch officer training is usually two days in May, at a residential weekend in Leeds. It’s a chance for Officers to meet other branch representatives, all training is paid for and time-off is given for Unison duties by HR. More about these roles is available here with training information - [http://www.unison-yorks.org.uk/education.html](http://www.unison-yorks.org.uk/education.html)

We would like to invite you to come along to our branch meetings and hear more about what the Officers and Reps do and how we support the branch membership.

**NEW! Dates for Your Diary:**

- Wednesday 11 January 2017 – H/G09
- Wednesday 15 February 2017 – H/G09
- Wednesday 8th March 2017 – HG/19
- Wednesday 29th March 2017 – HG/21 Annual General Meeting 1:00 – 2:00pm
- Wednesday 12 April 2017 – HG/19
- Wednesday 10th May 2017 – ATB/038
- Wednesday 14th June 2017 – HG/19
- Wednesday 21st June 2017 – HG/21 Strawberry Social 12:45pm – 2:00pm

*We hope you enjoy reading our Christmas newsletter, and wish you a very enjoyable Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.*

*The Branch Committee*