

Unity



Devon County Unison
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"Activism is my rent for living on this planet"

Alice Walker in 'The Colour Purple'

Alternative versions

If any member with special needs would like a copy of Unity in an alternative format e.g. large print, audio cassette or on floppy disc please feel free to contact the Branch office.

Welcome

Contributions are welcome in electronic form if possible (my typing is very slow and the spelling a little erratic). They should be sent to the Union Office at County Hall.

Andy Bowman

POTENTIAL CUTS TO NON TEACHING STAFF IN DEVON

Members in Schools are under threat as the education funding debacle continues. Devon LEA has indicated in figures given to the Education minister that it has spent 104% of its allocation for education.

Despite this, an NUT survey has indicated that Devon schools still need to make

savings in order to protect pupils. As we are all aware the first thing to go is the maintenance and the next is the non teaching staff

This is despite consultation on a package put forward by school standards minister David Miliband in the latest round of proposals intended to reduce teacher workloads in which Classroom assistants were to pay a key part in this process.

Miliband outlined plans to create up to 20,000 higher-level classroom assistants who will take on teaching activities under the direction of a qualified teacher.

Teachers have already handed over many administrative and clerical tasks to assistants.

Speaking at the launch of the teacher training agency corporate plan, Miliband said:

"Already there are some 350,000 people working in a wide range of support staff roles in schools. We are committed to increasing their numbers and expanding their roles.

"They will enrich the curriculum, provide more personalised help for children, and reduce the workload and raise the status of teachers. In a few years' time I anticipate people will wonder what all the fuss was about."

UNISON has signed up to the agreement on remodelling the school workforce and is in negotiations with local government employers and the DfES as to how it will be implemented.

Christina McAnea, senior national officer for UNISON, said:

"We're working to ensure these expanded roles happen in a **controlled way**. This is about raising the standard of education and this can only happen if the staff has been trained, there is a clearly defined system of supervision and issues of pay and grading have been addressed. This is not about teaching on the cheap."

Regional pay bargaining proposals cause concern

Suggestions in the last Budget of a move towards regional pay bargaining have caused great concern among public sector workers.

UNISON has warned the government against attempting to break up national pay bargaining in favour of regionally determined pay.

The union was reacting to chancellor Gordon Brown's speech, in which he called for a "stronger local and regional dimension" to public sector pay review bodies.

Dave Prentis, general secretary of UNISON, said of the proposals: "Extra pay in one part of the country cannot be at the expense of others. National pay bargaining is a transparent and fair system, which is efficient and aids movement around the country. Employers already have the flexibility to adjust to local conditions."

UNISON is concerned that a move to regional bargaining would lead to greater competition between councils – with staff congregating in regions offering better pay. Local authorities are already suffering as a result of competition with private sector companies.

Heather Wakefield, UNISON's national secretary for local government, said:

"Low pay is a problem in local government from the top to the bottom. Councils are also facing complex labour market factors, which cannot be solved by adopting regional bargaining.

UNISON is committed to national bargaining as the most effective and efficient way to set pay rates, which are based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

"UNISON's evidence to the Local Government Pay Commission will demonstrate that the way forward is more effective national bargaining, which

properly rewards all staff and doesn't make them pawns in a regional tug of war for staff," added Wakefield.

A recent study by IDS suggests that regional pay differentials are nowhere near as large or widespread as is commonly thought.

It is true that the tightening labour market and rising housing costs of recent years have led to some measures to increase pay in high cost areas. However the private sector (which is used as the prime example of regional pay) has been reluctant to devolve decision making on pay to local managers, and has generally retained national pay structures. IDS found that this was due to high administrative costs of local pay bargaining and problems in keeping control of the overall paybill.

Regional pay is also beset with difficulties, because of differences within regions and varying travel to work areas. It can lead to competition for staff between regions and depress wages in already poor areas. The evidence from opted out local authorities in Southeast England is that they still have recruitment and retention difficulties despite having the freedom to set pay rates locally.

WE HAVE A WINNER

Did you fill in the training survey, which came with the last Unity? Well, Ian Sosnowski did and he is now richer and happier for doing so. Next time fill in the form and you never know what may come your way. Your Branch has links with Go4. Go4 provides information and advice about learning and work to adults over 16years throughout Exeter and East Devon. Information about their help can be found via the Go4 website: www.go4lw.co.uk or Freephone: 0800 9755111.

Partnership Learning Agreement

Our Partnership Learning Agreement received a favourable response at the last Corporate Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) and is near the final stage. I would

like to welcome any member who has an interest in learning and development to contact me and become part of the Branch Learning and Development Team. Rose Gander. Branch Education Co-ordinator. 01392 468059 or via Branch office for advice and support with learning and development.

Attack on Union by Tory and Lib Dems. Be warned

Christina Huxtable, vice chair of the local government service group executive, UNISON branch secretary and trade union side secretary for Harlow council, has had her post slashed by the Tory-Lib Dem leadership.

Christina had also been suspended for telling the local press about the plans to axe her job, ordered to have no contact with staff or enter council premises and the trade union computer was seized. Christina is the only activist on full-time release in Harlow and her redundancy has implications for trade union organisation in the council - as well as personal ones.

UNISON is fighting hard at local, regional and national level to reverse the decision, but messages of support to Christina and complaint to the leaders of the council would be welcomed.

TRAINING ELITISM HITS PERFORMANCE

Organisations are losing out because they concentrate their resources and training on higher paid workers, according to a new survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

The report shows that low-income workers receive less training, feature less in the recruitment and reward strategies of organisations, and are much less likely to return to work when they become parents owing to prohibitive childcare costs.

Training and development was the most popular measure used by organisations to retain its "best" staff (66% compared with only 44% using increased pay incentives). However, part-time workers and people in lower grade jobs or with lower educational achievements were among those less likely to be trained.

According to John Philpott, from the CIPD's, "With more than three quarters of organisations encountering difficulty in finding suitable recruits for at least some of the vacancies in 2002, perhaps more could be done to up-skill existing staff." *"Who learns at work? 2002"* is available at www.cipd.org.uk/press/ResourceArea/SurveyMain.htm

Womens Lives Course

I first heard about the course on an information sheet circulated by Unison in late 1998.

Having been recently bereaved at the tender age of 35, I was unsure about enrolling, but thought it a good idea to focus on a subject that I found interesting & would hopefully lead to other things. I am office bound, working for DCC Social Services in Domiciliary Care.

I was apprehensive about attending the first evening, not having done an evening class before. However, there were 7 others in our group feeling the same. We all came from different parts of East Cornwall & Saltash, but soon jelled together as a group. Our trainer, Dee Cammack, made us feel at ease & there were hot & cold running tea & biscuits!

The course was to run over about 5 months and included a residential weekend at the Copthorne Hotel in Plymouth (all expenses paid by the union) with other 'Students' from Devon & Cornwall.

The subjects covered were aimed at looking at the way women are portrayed in the world & ranged from commenting on womens literature to the way the media relates/exploits female advertising. The discussion can get very in depth!!!

For one of the exercises, we were asked to write about our own experiences from a female perspective. Whilst daunting, it became a very positive way to express otherwise forgotten emotions.

The Residential Weekend was superb. I found I had a lot of common interests with other students. Our tasks that weekend included role playing. At the end of the course, an independent assessor marked our written work. We were lucky enough to have our work published by the Fawcett Library in London. A real surprise & honour. I gained 2 credits towards a degree.

A really good time was had by all participating & I can only recommend trying it !

can I go again ? !!!

Stephanie Montgomery

Saving for the future and a potential savings gap

There are 1000's of pounds to be saved by UNISON members through Britannia Building Society's special affinity savings range. But are you taking advantage of your membership and making the most of your savings?

Britannia offers the UNISON Special Regular Saver which is paying 4.15% on the minimum opening balance of £20. If there are no more than two withdrawals per year and UNISON members pay the same amount into the account each month via direct debit, UNISON members benefit from a whopping savings rate particular to UNISON.

In addition to the savings range is, UniSaver is designed to make your money work harder and is perfect if you have a lump sum to invest paying 2.50% on £1,000 or 3.00% on £10,000. In addition, it offers the following benefits:

- Attractive interest rates
- Minimum deposit of £1,000
- 30 days notice or penalty for withdrawals

- Choice of Branch only or Postal only operation

UNISON Save and Support offers a great opportunity to get an attractive rate of interest on your savings and support UNISON's Welfare Charity. Benefits for you include:

- Instant access to your savings through our branch network whilst receiving 1.75% on £100
- Choice of Branch only or Postal only operation
- Only £100 to open
- No penalty for withdrawal

UNISON's Welfare Charity benefits too, as they receive an annual bonus from Britannia of up to least 1% of the daily average balances held in all accounts.

UNISON members of Britannia are welcome to have a savings review to understand each customer's savings standpoint regardless of whether you are just opening an account for the first time or wishing to evaluate your current savings. Ring your local representative at any Britannia Building Society branch in the South West or contact Affinity Development Manager Nick Oldfield on 07976 342530

Events

Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival

19-20 July - For details contact southwest@tuc.org.uk
<<mailto:southwest@tuc.org.uk>>

YOUNG WORKERS CAN'T AFFORD A HOME

Workers in their 20's and 30's find it hard to set foot on the home ownership ladder, and it's worse in the south west than any other English region outside London, according to a new study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

A modest home in East Dorset or North Cornwall demands almost as big a share of the typical pay packet for young local workers as higher priced homes in the London boroughs of Westminster, Camden and Islington. Although house prices in the Southwest are cheaper than in the Southeast, wages are proportionately even lower.

The average house price to household income ratio in London was 4.8, and in the Southwest 4.2. According to the analysis, 76% of working households under 40 in London would be unable to purchase a home in the cheapest 25% of houses.

If as a member you have any experience in this please let us know so that we can use this in any challenge by the employers to introduce regional pay.

EQUALITY LAW ALLOWS DISCRIMINATION

In December 2003 new laws will come into force banning discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief. An employer found to discriminate when recruiting, promoting, or training staff would be in breach of the law. Positive action is allowed to encourage persons of a particular sexual orientation to apply for particular work or training.

However, in the draft regulations there are exemptions for employers "with an ethos based on religion or belief".

Discrimination is permitted if the employment 'is for purposes of an organised religion' and a particular sexual orientation is required to comply 'with the doctrines of the religion', or 'to avoid conflicting with the strongly held religious convictions of a significant number of the religion's followers'.

If the draft regulations become law, then an employer with an "ethos based on religion or belief", could sack or not employ someone even where sexuality is not relevant to their ability to do the job.

This directly affects members in faith-based charities, voluntary organisations, and schools. According to the National Secular Society around 200,000 people who work for an organisation with a 'religious ethos'. Your Branch now has a Lesbian & Gay Officer who can be contacted via the Branch office. There is some support to establish a Self Organised Group (SOG) for Lesbian and Gay members and we welcome enquiries, in confidence, to the Branch office.

Council chiefs condemning women to low-paid future

Local authorities have recommended a move towards local pay bargaining, in its submission to the local government pay commission.

UNISON has criticised the proposal as "dangerous and dated", warning that it "dooms" female council workers, in particular, to even lower pay.

The union represents more than 860,000 local government workers, 75% of which are female and form the biggest group of low paid workers.

They would be big losers out of any move to local bargaining, as recommended by the employers, the union says.

The commission was established under the terms of last year's local government pay deal. It is to investigate the key long-term problems of equal pay and low pay, which UNISON had highlighted.

The commission is to report to the National Joint Council in September, its recommendations providing the basis for future negotiations.

"It is astonishing how out of touch the employers are about the local government workforce," said Heather Wakefield, UNISON's national secretary for local government.

Referring to the employers' submission, Wakefield said: "We fear that the employers wish to use local bargaining to 'peg' women's jobs to market rates, which they know can be lower than those in

councils.

"We have already seen evidence of this with homecare workers, who are facing increased privatisation and erosion of their wages.

"We have no confidence that the employers would approach local bargaining with the needs of the majority of the workforce in mind, given the general lack of awareness of equality and pay issues demonstrated by their track record and approaches to job evaluation and pay."

The joint trade union submission to the commission includes an Income Data Services study of regional pay.

New 10 year fixed rate mortgage from Britannia

UNISON is celebrating its 10 years anniversary and Britannia Building Society is one of the union's long standing relationship service providers. To mark this special occasion, Britannia Building Society has launched a new 10 year fixed rate mortgage product which is designed specially for all UNISON members.

The 10 year mortgage is fixed at 4.79% up to 95% LTV which is highly competitive. In addition, the Society has waived its arrangement fee for all UNISON members, a substantial saving of £295.

The savings are considerable. When taking into account, the Society's average standard variable rate (SVR) over the 10 years was a rate of 7.49%. Therefore, the new UNISON 10 year fixed rate mortgage amounts to a saving of 2.70% on the rate.

Britannia will give the UNISON Welfare fund, £100 per 10 year fixed rate mortgage taken out, ensuring that UNISON's charity benefits too.

For further information contact your UNISON representative at your local BRITANNIA branch

End in sight for two-tier workforce

After 18 month of negotiations by UNISON, the government has finally agreed that people joining the staff of privatised public services in local authorities should legally be given the same rights as those transferred from the public sector.

Last year UNISON managed to get the government to agree that workers who joined private companies should 'in theory' have the same rights as those who had been transferred from the public employer.

After much wrangling with the CBI, who wanted new staff members to have merely 'broadly comparable' terms as their previously public counterparts, UNISON got an assurance that new joiners' pay and conditions would be "no less favourable".

This was not enforceable, however, and was merely a voluntary code of practice. Today's announcement means that there is now an independent dispute resolution process to sort out problems involving staff on private sector contracts.

Any dispute will now be resolved independently – supervised by ACAS – and the recommendations of ACAS will be legally binding.

"We have consistently argued that the code has to be enforceable and that disputes are able to be sorted out by an independent arbiter," said UNISON national secretary Malcolm Wing.

"This agreement on the dispute resolution mechanism is the final piece in the jigsaw.

"It has been a long process but this is a major step towards ending the two-tier workforce."
(6/6/03)