

POLICY PROPOSAL

SUPPORT TRADE UNIONS

PROPOSED BY: BRAD BAINES (BTB24)

SECONDED BY: NATHAN PHILLIPS (NP469)

REASON FOR CHANGE

Considering that...

1. Trade union membership has fallen to an all-time low, for reasons including the growth in precarious employment and the erosion of the public sector¹. Unionisation is particularly poor in the private sector, at just 13%.²
2. This decline isn't inevitable or beneficial, with national surveys showing that 59 percent of private sector workers believe that trade unions are necessary to protect working conditions³.
3. The University of Bath has eroded pay and conditions for both teaching and non-teaching staff whilst boosting the pay of senior management⁴⁵⁶, enabled by low unionisation rates amongst key staff groups.
4. On average, union members get higher rates of pay than non-union members, work in safer workplaces, have more control over terms and conditions, and better sickness and pension benefits.
5. Students' Unions and the trade union movement share common values, both recognising the value of collective organisation and direct action by members.
6. 77% of students are now entering into some form of employment to ease the growing financial pressures of going to university⁷
7. Staff working conditions are students' learning conditions. Students' learning is directly affected by low pay and casual labour⁸.
8. Unionisation rates, pay and conditions are particularly poor amongst postgraduates who teach or perform research⁹.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/01/union-membership-has-plunged-to-an-all-time-low-says-ons>

² https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/nov/15/uk-unions-membership-fabian-society-community-hospitality?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

³ <http://www.fabians.org.uk/publications/future-unions/>

⁴ <http://www.bathchronicle.co.uk/news/another-pay-rise-countrys-highest-799402>

⁵ <http://bath.web.ucu.org.uk/2017/07/21/pay-and-pensions-fights-ahead/>

⁶ <http://www.bathchronicle.co.uk/news/bath-news/house-lords-in-shock-lord-197873>

⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11794199/Rise-in-number-of-university-students-in-paid-work.html>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/25/lecturers-striking-low-pay-casual-work-students-university>

⁹ https://www.nus.org.uk/Global/1654-NUS_PostgradTeachingSurvey_v3.pdf

9. Three major unions have branches on campus and are recognised by the University of Bath: the University and Colleges Union, Unite the Union and UNISON.
10. Union membership is not beyond the means of many students – many unions have progressive contributions policies based on income¹⁰¹¹¹².
11. Students’ Unions, especially elected sabbatical officers, are expected to provide leadership to students.

PROPOSAL

1. The SU University of Bath will provide all those working within the Students Union with information about the trade unions on campus and encourage them to join and become active in their branches on campus.
2. The SU will collect and publish the unionisation rates amongst those working within the SU and publish and implement strategies to increase this.
3. The SU should call on the University of Bath to recognise all trade unions its employees are members of, if it does not already.
4. Elected sabbatical officers are required to hold regular meetings with trade union officers representing staff on campus, as well as actively engage with Bath Trade Union Council which represents employees across the city.
5. The SU will provide information to its membership from and advertise dedicated training events run by trade unions about how to join and become active in a trade union and the benefits they would get from doing so. The SU will call on the Careers Service and Departmental Placements Offices to provide similar information and advertisement of events. Too many don’t join a union as they simply don’t know it is an option. Information provision should be targeted at final year students who are going into graduate employment as well as students on sandwich year programmes going on placement.

RATIONALE

1. The SU aims to support students interests and welfare – these are the same as the objective of trade unions on behalf of their members. Students as members directly benefit from better pay and conditions. They also benefit from better teaching as staff pay and working conditions are students’ learning conditions.
2. Trade Union membership gives students power in their workplace, in keeping with the SU’s values of “empowering students to achieve their full potential”.
3. The SU’s vision is “for every student to get the most they can out of their time at the University of Bath”. Students’ long-term career prospects are advanced by union membership, meaning it is a big advantage.

IMPLICATIONS

¹⁰ <https://join.unison.org.uk/membership-rates/>

¹¹ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/subscriptions>

¹² <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/Join-Us/Membership-Rates>

1. The costs of running awareness and information campaigns will be equivalent to existing activities. Specific research is not really required, necessary information can be found easily online and will readily be supplied by trade unions. Union representatives will be unlikely to require reimbursement for events as most will have local regional headquarters and branches and will directly benefit from such activities.