

UNISON, York St John University Branch
Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 9th March 2011, 10:45am.
Fountains Lecture Theatre.



Minutes

Apologies

Apologies were received from a number of members unable to attend due to other commitments:
Kevin Colbert, Neil Rogers, Gelayol Holme, Deborah Moody

Minutes

The minutes were confirmed as correct by the members present.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that weren't identified as being addressed in the Chair's report.

Chair's Report

Dave Thompson (chair) opened by drawing attention to the hard times we have faced over the past year but also that we were not alone in the sector and that, at York St John, we were in a stronger position than many other institutions to weather the current economic climate.

Dave highlighted the ongoing work between UNISON and YJS's management to ensure that the University's responses to the changes facing Higher Education were and remain to be proportionate and fair – addressing the fears of staff regarding job security. Whilst we recognise the need, at times, to change to meet new challenges we also felt that protecting the wellbeing of staff should be at the fore of University thinking. It was noted that the University's new Job Security Framework is development we enthusiastically welcome as a significant step towards this aim and we continue to work alongside management to strengthen this commitment.

Treasurer's Report

Simon Coulson (treasurer) formally presented and questions invited from the floor. With no questions presented the secretary (Gareth Jenkins) drew attention to the fact that due to changes in how honoraria were paid, two year's of honoraria were represented in a single year of accounts, giving the (incorrect) appearance of a massive increase in honoraria. It was noted that honoraria hadn't been increased at all at the previous AGM.

Simon stepped down as treasurer at this AGM due to pressures outside of his union work. It is to be noted that we greatly value the work that Simon has done for the branch during his time as treasure and that we very much appreciate his offer to assist with the transition to our new treasurer.

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Health and Safety Report

Monty Feather (one of our Health and Safety officers) spoke, noting that UNISON continue to work alongside management through the Health & Safety Committee and numerous other channels to ensure that York St John remains a safe and healthy environment to work. It was noted that we have a good relationship with management at the University regarding Health and Safety issues and that the University (and particular our University Health and Safety Officer – Neil Rogers) has a strong commitment to addressing Health and Safety issues.

It was noted that we have been in on-going discussions with management regarding issues with the heat levels in the Fountains building and have finally secured a commitment from management to find a long-term solution to the problem.

Other Items:

Branch Constitution

Gareth Jenkins (Branch Secretary) presented the new branch constitution for consideration by the members. It was noted that, until now, the branch ran along largely informal guidelines that, whilst well known, were not sufficient to meet our commitments to transparency and democratic process. As a result the draft branch constitution had been drawn up from a national template and had been altered, where necessary, to meet the specific needs of the York St John Branch. These alterations (mainly around sections and specific financial details) were brought to the attention of the members who were invited to accept the constitution. They unanimously did so.

Staff Survey: HR Response

It was noted that the response the survey had been delayed and that we would be receiving further information in the coming weeks.

Pensions / Pay Issues

Dave Thompson (Chair) drew attention to the national pay and pensions situation, reiterating the branch stance that we would support the national pay negotiations and that whilst the pay offer for 2010 was far from ideal, it was a preferable situation to greater job losses.

It was highlighted that the branch has an absolute commitment to defending our pensions and that we recognised that, for most members, pensions were a more important issue than pay.

Changes in Retirement Age

Dave Thompson (Chair) spoke to highlight the upcoming changes to the legislation on retirement age and that there would cease to be a default age of retirement this year. We continue to work with the University management to inform local policy on retirement which is yet to be fully agreed. However, the management have signalled their desire to remain as close to ACAS guidelines as possible and we expect the outcome to be very positive for members – allowing much freer choice of when and how to retire.

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Smoking Policy

It was noted that the University was advancing a policy banning smoking on campus and that there were a number of identified, and unaddressed, issues with such a stance. It was also noted that there had been communications from University management that implied that the branch had agreed with such a policy. It was made clear at the meeting that there had been no such endorsement from the branch and that we were opposed to a campus-wide ban. Attention was brought to the survey conducted of staff in 2009 where the issue had been raised and where staff had decisively rejected the idea of a campus-wide ban. It was noted that the branch would continue to work with management to find a solution to the issues around smoking on campus but that we felt that the management and the branch would be unable to find common ground.

YSJ Mediation Service

The Branch Committee drew attention to the upcoming mediation service being offered by Human Resources. Branch Committee endorsed the idea of such a service that aims to provide mediation in the hope that, in many cases, matters can be resolved amicably and without recourse to grievance/disciplinary procedures. It was noted that HR had made available electronic copies of their Mediation Service leaflets and that printed copies were available for members who wished to know more.

Election of Branch Officers

It was noted that our Treasurer, Simon would be stepping down from his post and that we also welcomed nominations for any of the other posts available on Branch Committee. All other officers were re-elected although there was no one willing to stand as Treasurer at the AGM.

[Note: subsequently, Ken Scott has offered to be our Treasurer and has been co-opted by Branch Committee]

Any other Business & Points of Interest from the Floor

No other issues were raised.