

Spring 2009 issue

Activist

The newsletter of the Blackburn with Darwen UNISON branch

Your Vote Counts in the European Elections

Make a difference on 4 June 2009... Use Your Vote!

The European Parliamentary elections are different than a local or General election, because of the proportional voting system used for electing MEPs:

Your Vote Counts

- Every vote is important
- You have a much higher likelihood of affecting the result, no matter where you live
- The candidates are the same across the region, so there are no differences across wards – even if your ward traditionally favours one particular party, your vote can still make a difference across the region

Vote Your Values

- You can vote for the party you really believe in, for the agenda you want advanced in/by Europe
- You have a higher chance of ending up being represented (in your region) by a party you voted for
- Your vote effectively counts twice – once for the party you support, and once to minimise the chances of other parties gaining seats

Voting = Easy

The ballot paper is very straightforward. You have one vote, which is used to elect a list of MEPs who will represent the whole region. Simply vote for the party you prefer – put an X in the column next to that party's name. That's it, job done! To check if you're registered to vote, go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk or contact the council. The deadline to register for this election is 19 May 2009.

How MEPs are elected

Each region has a certain number of MEPs dependent on its population size – the North West has 8 seats. Parties win seats roughly in proportion to their share of the vote. It works like this: the party with the highest vote gets one seat allotted in the first round. Its vote is then divided by two. The party with the highest vote in the second round then wins a seat and its vote is divided by two. If a party which has already won a seat wins another round, then its percentage vote is divided by the number of seats it has won plus one. This continues until all 8 seats are allocated.

Campaigning

MEPs are elected by a form of proportional representation based on region-wide vote totals. This means it is worth campaigning in every ward, every borough and every county – those where there is lots of political activity already, but also in areas which aren't normally targeted at election time and amongst people who don't usually feel part of the national political conversation. No matter whom you support or what issues you want to promote, you can organise, campaign and get out the vote in our own areas, and make a difference to the result.





STRESS.....AGGRAVATION.....PRESSURE

Constant pressure to deliver ever better services at ever lower costs?

Boss constantly on your case?

Cuts in your service area?

Job Evaluation and Remodelling?

Recession?



We are all facing increasing stress both in the workplace and in our home lives.

Stress in large doses is not good for you. It arises from the most basic of our survival instincts. We are pre-programmed from birth that when faced with a difficult or dangerous situation, we will either stand our ground and confront it or will make our escape as quickly as possible.

In order to achieve either of these responses our bodies flood with adrenaline, our heart rate increases as does our respiration. Our senses sharpen, fat and glucose in our bodies is metabolised to provide energy, our blood vessels dilate and endorphins (natural painkillers) are released. The natural judgment system is also turned down and more primitive responses take over as this is a time for action rather than deep thought.

All of the above is useful if you are out in the open facing a hungry lion or on the battlefield but is less than ideal if your manager is asking the whereabouts of the Report he asked you for a week ago, or a motorist is complaining about a parking ticket you have just issued.

Bad management can exacerbate an already stressful workplace. Although most managers who work for the Council are good conscientious people who do their best to look after their staff, some do not.

The Health and Safety Executive's Website says: -

In 2007/08 an estimated 442 000 individuals in Britain, who worked in the last year, believed that they were experiencing work-related stress at a level that was making them ill, according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

The 2007 Psychosocial Working Conditions survey indicated that around 13.6% of all working individuals thought their job was very or extremely stressful.

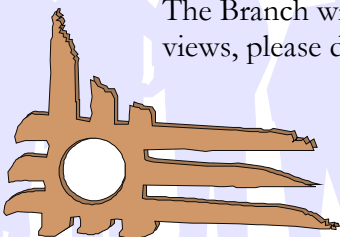
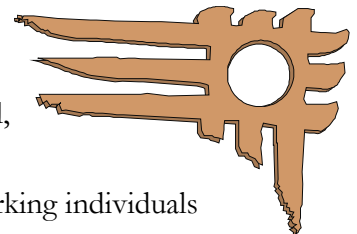
The annual incidence of work-related mental health problems in Britain in 2007, as estimated from the Health and Occupation Reporting Network surveillance schemes, was approximately 5,750 new cases per year. However, the HSE feels that this almost certainly underestimates the true incidence of these conditions in the British workforce.

According to self-reports from the Labour Force Survey, an estimated 237 000 people, who worked in the last 12 months, first became aware of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2007/08, giving an annual incidence rate of 780 cases per 100 000 workers. Estimates from the Labour Force Survey indicate that self-reported work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for an estimated 13.5 million lost working days in Britain in 2007/08..

As a Branch, we have been working with the Council via the Health and Safety Consultative Committee towards a new Stress Management Policy.

The new draft policy (which has not yet been agreed) is currently out to consultation and can be viewed on the Council's intranet on this link: - <http://cms.intra.blackburn.gov.uk/server.php?show=nav.2622>

The Branch will be making comments and suggestions as to possible amendments, but if you have any views, please do not hesitate to make them known to Gareth at the Branch Office.



IF YOU HAVE ANY HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES OR IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE PLEASE CONTACT ME AT THE BRANCH OFFICE ON 01254 585428

Some simple Stress Busting Tips

- Try to set aside a short time each day to do what YOU want
- Avoid making yourself into a door mat - respect your own worth (and make sure others do too)
- Ask for help when you know that you really need it
- Prioritise and limit in realistic terms each day's work - if you are being given too much tell your manager – if they won't help tell us
- Be prepared to talk to someone about your difficulties – we are here to help if you get no help from your manager or colleagues
- Avoid living out difficult situations over and over in your mind
- Recognise when your fatigue level is reached and take a break
- Try to introduce more physical activity into your life and make it fun
- Go for a short walk in the fresh air – few people get enough of either
- Do anything that will introduce some laughter or pleasure into your life
- 'Be gentle with yourself!'
- If you are feeling stressed at work let your manager know – if they won't help tell us.

Complete the Stress Self Indicator Tool (on the Intranet) and if it reveals you have a problem raise it.

Comparator Appeals Update

Comparator Appeals are now up and running and the policy is available on the intranet.

We have sat on about 15 appeals panels thus far, and assisted about 20 members in presenting their appeals.

The vast majority of the appeals have been successful, with the members securing a higher band. For the few that have not been successful, all our feedback from reps on the panel are that the outcome has been fair based on the facts presented.

This is fantastic and encouraging news for all of you who may be considering putting in a comparator appeal – to ensure the best chance of success, please make sure to contact the branch for support in preparing your appeal and for representation at the appeal hearing.

Pay Claim Update

As many of you may already be aware, the 2008 Pay Claim was finally agreed in March. The employer originally offered 2.45%, which was added to staff wages in November as an interim measure whilst an ACAS arbitration panel considered the unions' claim.

The ACAS panel eventually ruled that staff would receive a total of 2.75%, and the additional 0.3% will be backdated to April 2008.

This fantastic news, however because it has taken so long to agree we are now into negotiations over the 2009 Pay Claim! Talks on the 2009 Claim have now started and we will keep members updated via our website, and the national UNISON site as to progress.

Unionlearn Project Update

We are pleased to report that we have been successful in our bid for funding for the Unionlearn project for the next 12 months. This project involves partnership working between the Joint Trade Unions, the Council and providers such as Blackburn College and Edge Hill University. Although we had done some background work, the project officially started on 1st April 2009.

"Learning in the workplace" has started at the Town Hall. A number of staff have been attending Maths and English classes on a weekly basis, and the majority have just completed level 1 and are now working towards their level 2 qualifications. We are very pleased with the results from the "Did It In A Day" event for Maths held at Blackburn College in the new conference facility. The staff were able to study in an informal relaxed setting, the college provided lunch. All the staff who entered the level 2 exam were successful. We are now arranging another "Did It In A Day" event for English on the 21st May.

A number of school staff have shown an interest in accessing Maths and English classes and we are currently visiting them with a view to arranging provision in their particular schools. Although we have been concentrating on Literacy and Numeracy, the project can also give advice to staff about opportunities and courses in IT, NVQ's, further and higher education. The project is proving popular with staff and we intend to keep sending out a positive message about the benefits of learning.

We already have a number of Unionlearn reps who have been through training. We are in the process of recruiting and arranging training for more reps in the near future. Recruitment of Unionlearn rep's is essential in order to make a success of the project. We are always on the look out for motivated people to get involved.

Learning at Work Day

UNISON, UNITE, Strategic HR, Neighbourhood and Learning, Capita and Local colleges are working in collaboration to stage an event at King George's Hall on Learning at Work Day – Thursday 14th May from 11.00 am – 2.00 pm

The event will provide a wide range of information about a variety of learning opportunities. Come along and take part and discover how to continue or start your learning journey. Learning at Work day is part of National Adult Learners Week. There will be a number of events run during the week across the borough for citizens and staff.

Details of the events will be published in Team Talk or contact Denise Wilkins on 01254 585220.



Special insurance rates for members

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Lines are open Mon-Fri 8.30am - 8.00pm and Sat 9.00am - 1.00pm

*For quality and protection your call will be recorded. UIA exchange information with other insurance companies and the police to prevent fraud. **Compared to the standard price you would be quoted if you called us. This only applies to home (buildings and contents) and travel insurance. UNISON is an Introducing Appointed Representative of UIA (Insurance Services) Ltd and UIA (Insurance) Ltd, which are both authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Travel insurance is underwritten by Fortis Insurance Ltd. All these companies are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority. 1004612/04



Getting a Head Start

If you are still some years off retirement but want to start planning early then you may be interested in the one day **'Head Start'** course on **Wednesday 9th September** for people **between 10 and 3 years off retirement.**



UNISON has teamed up with the Manchester Phoenix ice Hockey Club to bring you a new and exciting sporting experience. UNISON visits the

Altrincham Ice Dome every weekend in support of the Manchester Phoenix Ice Hockey Club and we want you to enjoy an exhilarating night out on our behalf!

We are offering every member of UNISON, the opportunity to witness a fantastic night of Ice Hockey for FREE! In addition to individual members requesting tickets, we have also secured agreement for branches to block book up to 20 tickets for "special events".

Sign up for your Free Family Ticket courtesy of UNISON and bring the whole family to experience the fun filled atmosphere. It's Easy! All you have to do is visit www.phoenixpartners.co.uk/guest/unison.html to sign up and claim your Free Family Ticket. Manchester Phoenix Ice Hockey Club play every weekend, predominately a Sunday evening with the game starting at 5.30 pm.

UNISON hope to see you all at the Ice Hockey over the forthcoming weekends, taking part in this fantastic offer from the Manchester Phoenix Ice Hockey Club.

Pre-retirement Courses



If you are retiring sometime in the next 18 months, you might find a pre-retirement course helpful. Lancashire County Council's Adult Learning Service runs one, two and three day pre-retirement courses which cover issues such as making the most of your money, pensions,

welfare rights, health and other challenges of retirement.

The one day courses cost £65 and the three day non residential or two day residential courses cost £150. In the majority of cases the courses are funded through your departmental training budget, subject to your manager's authorisation.

The courses are held at Alston Hall, a Victorian country house, six miles from Preston, close to junction 31A of the M6 and are running on the following dates:

- Monday to Wednesday June 1 to 3 – three day, non residential course
- Tuesday, June 23 – one day course
- Wednesday June 24 – one day course
- Monday to Wednesday, September 21 to 23 - three day, non residential course
- Tuesday & Wednesday November 25 & 26 – 2 day residential

For a booking form or more information about the courses, please contact Bob Tidman or Anne Russell at Alston Hall College tel. (01772) 784661.

E-mail: robert.tidman@lancashire.gov.uk or anne.russell@lancashire.gov.uk

Do you have what it takes to help others Learn?

UNISON, the UK's leading public service union, takes learning seriously and offers a range of trade union education and lifelong learning opportunities for members. This includes training and development for union reps as well as personal and career development courses ranging from Skills for Life through to professional qualifications.

Becoming a **Union Learning Rep** can open doors for you and for your colleagues...

With paid time off to attend a five day training course, this fulfilling role can change lives and bring about positive change through Lifelong Learning. You'll need to be enthusiastic about learning and prepared to act as an advocate for learning in the workplace.

The role involves:

- Giving advice to colleagues about how education and training can help them
- Providing information about courses and learning opportunities
- Supporting colleagues who are nervous about returning to learning and identifying training needs
- Liaising with employers about lifelong learning opportunities

For more information, please contact Gervaise Sandham or Denise Wilkins on 01254 585220.

UNISON keeping in touch with you in between newsletters

Our members have commented on how much they appreciate the fact that we have for some time now had our branch newsletter that keeps them up to speed with issues within the various groups and workplaces of our members. During the times between newsletters we are planning to create an email list where we make sure our members are kept up to speed on a range number of issues. If you would like to be added to the list can you please contact our branch with your e-mail address at unisonbranch@blackburn.gov.uk. Also don't forget about our website www.unison-blackburn.gov.uk

Unison Welfare...help and support during the credit crunch

Times are hard for everyone, and we are well aware that our members are as vulnerable to financial difficulties as everyone else in the country.

UNISON Welfare is a unique confidential advice and support service that can help members in a variety of ways, whether you're after just a chat and sympathetic ear, or more concrete assistance:

We can provide:

- Listening and support
- Breaks and Holidays
- General advice
- Financial assistance
- Debt advice

This is a confidential service for our members. For further information, please contact Branch Welfare Officer - Vivienne Graham, through the branch office or directly on 01254 585527.

Living wage not minimum wage

UNISON led the successful campaign for the introduction of the national minimum wage. In 2004 we were successful in getting 16 and 17 year olds covered by the legislation, albeit on a lower rate. We are continuing to campaign for abolition of the age differentials and to increase the minimum wage rate to a living wage.

There's been some good news on our campaigning in this area - the Government has announced it will increase apprentices allowance from £80 to £95 in 2009, and the Labour Party has agreed to support a change in the adult rate so that it starts at age 21 rather than 22.

The current rates are:

22 years and over - £5.73 per hour

18-21 years of age - £4.77

16-17 years of age - £3.53

Change of Details Form

1. Name _____
3. Membership Number _____
4. Occupation _____
5. Workplace (and address) _____
6. Home Address _____
7. E-mail _____
8. Daytime Number _____
9. Mobile Number _____

Please send changes to the UNISON Branch Office via post or email at unisonbranch@blackburn.gov.uk as we do not want you to lose the opportunity of winning our Monthly Prize Draw.

Congratulations to our newly elected officers for 2009 - 2010

Office	Name	Contact No.
President	Angela McIntyre	585460
Vice-President	Heather White	222504
Chairperson	Paul Crewe	585702
Vice-Chair	Ron Whittle	269035
Branch Secretary	Katherine Johnson	585416
Assistant Secretary	Gervaise Sandham	585790
Treasurer	Paul Crewe	585702
Assistant Treasurer	Hazel Owen	666593
Convenor	Gareth Roscoe	585428
Welfare Secretary	Vivienne Graham	585745
Equal Opportunities	Julie Redhead	666433
Health and Safety Officer	Gareth Roscoe	585428
Sports Secretary	Sean Gambles	273035
Recruitment Officer	Pat Burdus	666675
Lifelong Learning/Education Co-ordinator	Denise Wilkins	585220
Communications Officer	Russell Critchley	585786
Labour Link Officer	Ron Whittle	269035
Young Members Officer	VACANT	If you are interested, contact branch office on 01254 585220
LGTB Officer	Peter Grunshaw	580038
Retired Members Secretary	Val Lovell	698716

WANTED

INTERESTED?

The branch has the following vacancies:
Stewards in all workplaces
Health and Safety Stewards
Union Learning Reps
Young Members Officer

For more information
and contact details for
departmental reps, check
our website or ring our
branch office on
Ph: 01254 585220

UNISON MEMBERS

To take part in decision making,
Be informed and inform others,
Advise and support colleagues,
Receive first class training and support.

**A strong union is made stronger by
the involvement of its members so
why not think about getting involved?**
For an informal chat please contact
Branch Office 01254 585220 or
unisonbranch@blackburn.gov.uk

Election Day 4th June

Don't forget to
vote on 4th June.
Please stand up and
be counted
for your vote.

**Your vote is
your voice.
Speak up...**



Would you pass the Citizenship Test?

Name: _____ Contact Details: _____

All foreign nationals applying to become British citizens are now required to take a test to show that they have an appropriate level of knowledge of the life and language of the UK before they can acquire citizenship. In order to pass the test, you need to answer 18 correctly to score 75%. Complete the Citizenship Test and return your answers to the UNISON office. You can also complete this sample test on our website at www.unison-blackburn.gov.uk.

All members who pass the test will be entered into a raffle - 3 boxes of chocolate up for grabs! Get your completed tests submitted by June 19. Wish you all a very good luck !

1. Women were given the right to vote at the same age as men in 1982.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Where did the first immigrants come from after the Second World War?
 - a. Europe
 - b. Africa
 - c. United States
 - d. Asia
3. When did a woman's earnings and property stop automatically becoming her husband's on marriage?
 - a. 1880
 - b. 1882
 - c. 1881
 - d. 1884
4. When was the Council of Europe created?
 - a. 1948
 - b. 1950
 - c. 1949
 - d. 1951
5. What is the speed limit on motorways and dual carriageways?
 - a. 40 mph
 - b. 60 mph
 - c. 70 mph
 - d. 80 mph
6. The Prime Minister can be dismissed by
 - a. His or her party
 - b. The Leader of the Opposition
 - c. The Public
 - d. The Queen
7. 50% overall proportion of today's African Caribbean, Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities in Britain were born in Britain
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. Britain has a constitutional Monarchy in which the King or the Queen have unlimited powers
 - a. True
 - b. False
9. You should contact _____ to register yourself as self-employed
 - a. Jobcentre Plus
 - b. City Council
 - c. HM Revenue and Customs
 - d. Trade Union
10. _____ overrides national legislation and must be followed by the courts in each member state
 - a. Regulations
 - b. Directives
 - c. European Law
 - d. UK Law
11. What is the state retirement age?
 - a. Men and women both retire at 65
 - b. Women 55, Men 60
 - c. Men 70, women 65
 - d. Men 65, Women 60

