

## Branch Update October, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

We have held a number of extraordinary Branch meetings over the recent months in order to forge a collective and agreed way forward for the Branch to negotiate with management on our main concerns of:

- the provision of a safe working environment on return to campus
- mitigation of workloads arising from the move to online in parallel with the university's commitment to students of a minimum of 30% face to face teaching.

### **Branch Meeting Outcomes**

1. Our Branch led the way by formally tabling a [Motion](#) at Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committee (JNCC) to move teaching online wherever practicable – this was done in advance of UCU national, independent SAGE and official SAGE recommendations to switch to working online wherever possible.
2. Our Branch demanded that your UCU representatives had a seat at the various Task Group tables that are formulating policy and procedures around various aspects of university life in the pandemic (Digital, Estates, People, Teaching and Learning etc).
3. As a consequence of our ongoing Health and Safety concerns and management refusing to resile from their 30% face to face teaching proposition and refusal of UCU participation in the Task Groups, the Branch then voted unanimously in a **Vote of No Confidence** in the ability of management to provide safety in the physical conditions in which staff are working.

### **University Responses**

Our Branch is extremely concerned that there has not been a meeting of the university's Health and Safety Committee for the ENTIRE DURATION OF THE COVID PANDEMIC!

This is the [highly unsatisfactory response from the management](#) to our concerns about this:

*“At an early stage in the national lockdown, the decision to postpone the University Safety, Health and Security Committee was taken following consultation with the chair and reflected a highly dynamic situation”*

This is arrant, errant nonsense but is sadly indicative of the level of response your representatives have become used to receiving from management.

We have received the full management response to our Vote of No Confidence and our extensive document detailing our concerns with current practice and procedure. Our document also outlined changes we demanded in order to guarantee our safety whilst working on campus. Management say in their response that:

*"The formal processes and procedures envisaged by the legislation will inevitably need to be flexible during unprecedented times."*

The Branch Committee think that compliance with the legislation is needed more in these "unprecedented times", not less. What the university seems to be saying is that the Health and Safety situation was so serious that it was unable to follow Health and Safety regulations!

In the opinion of our hard-working Health and Safety representative the managerial response has been REACTIVE rather than PROACTIVE. So that when the university says:

*"if staff and students are infected, then we will..."*

the attitude should be:

"we will move all unnecessary face to face teaching to online teaching to minimize chances of contamination"

...if concern for staff and students is indeed at the core of our Health and Safety systems.

The wellbeing of staff is being neglected. Despite the recent Pulse staff survey no findings have been published. Any findings from the next Pulse survey will only come at the end of Term 1 with no time to address the concerns of those staff members with a heavier workload throughout TB1.

Health and Safety committee meetings were requested, but as noted above the April meeting was cancelled and there have been NONE since. Further requests from your union representatives resulted in "H&S debriefs", which were not minuted and do not form any formal part of our negotiating agreement with the university. Specific requests are redirected to JNCC where there is little time for the detailed negotiation and consultation that such important matters need.

Other unsatisfactory and contradictory answers to our concerns include:

*"Where an individual tests positive they are required to provide details of all close contacts to NHS Test & Trace. If they have been using the NHS Covid-19 app automatic alerts will be triggered".*

However, it was stated earlier in the reply that students and staff are not required to use the NHS Test & Trace (and indeed some cannot!). It is also known that the number of those alerts are low and tracing even lower. In fact, in some known cases of infected students attending a teaching session, colleagues have been instructed NOT to tell the other, potentially infected, students.

There has been mention of using SEAtS and other forms of internal monitoring for tracing linked to the alert system when a person informs the University about a COVID-19 infection. No specific details of how this system has been working have been provided up to now.

We lack transparency on monitoring of the alert system; if, how, when and how quickly contacts are traced and notified. There is no evidence that an effective system has been implemented, as there is little information available about what is currently being done.

Thus, we are extremely unhappy with the managerial response and feel that they continue not to be able to guarantee a safe campus for us to work in and are failing in their statutory Health and Safety responsibilities. We are currently in discussions with UCU National about our next steps.

### ***Other News***

We are happy to announce new members of the Branch Committee, Jelena Petrovic and Gavin Capps. Our colleagues will be representing members in the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences (FBSS). Colleagues in FBSS should contact Jelena (especially for Business School matters) and Gavin in the first instance for any UCU related queries in that Faculty.

#### **Staying in touch**

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