



UCU's Disabled Members Standing Committee met on Monday 6 April and extend solidarity greetings with all UCU members affected by Covid1

We know that this virus can attack anyone and we are all in this together to defend our lives and our livelihoods. But we also know that Disabled people have been hard hit by this crisis. We are often more vulnerable to the virus itself but our lives are also impacted by the introduction of emergency legislation that threatens our hard earned rights. Some employers expect us to continue to work without allowing us to take home specialist equipment or without reasonable adjustments or access to the human support we need. Many supermarkets are failing to provide deliveries and the conditions of the lockdown are particularly difficult for some disabled people for whom getting out of the house more than once a day is a necessity. We want to ensure that the UCU is doing everything possible to resist the erosion of our rights, to defend our jobs and working conditions and to provide support to disabled members during this crisis.

Disabled lives matter

In regard to medical treatment for disabled people, members may have seen with alarm the initial NICE guidance on admittance to critical care which removed the age parameters of the clinical frailty scale and therefore potentially denied ICU treatment to many disabled people of all ages regardless of whether their disability was relevant to clinical assessment. A member of the committee initiated legal action and the guidance has been amended to make it clear that it should not be used in relation to people with autism, cerebral palsy or learning disabilities. However, we do not think this has gone far enough and on behalf of the committee, the NEC members representing disabled members have signed the statement from Disability Rights and others DPOs. It can be found [here](#) and we would urge you to support it and Disabled peoples' fundamental right to life.

Emergency Laws seek to erode our right to social care and inclusive education

The Tories' emergency legislation (The Coronavirus Act) is a serious threat to disabled people. While billions have been poured into support for businesses and in some cases for wages of laid off workers, the government has not made money available for social care on which many disabled people rely to survive. Instead they have suspended the duties owed by local authorities to disabled people and sought to erode our rights to care. This will leave many people, some of them our members, in great danger now and without the ability to participate in work and life in the longer term. Family members, again many of them our members, will be impacted and expected to fill the gap—increasing risks of coronavirus for many disabled people. There is also a serious threat to the rights of people living with mental distress, in the removal of safeguards around sectioning those considered to be a danger to themselves or others. This is a particular threat to autistic people, a number of whom are already detained indefinitely in Assessment and Treatment Units, and it is likely to disproportionately impact black people who are already more likely to be sectioned under mental health legislation.

These powers could last for two years and we fear that in the context of post covid19 austerity, the removal of the right to care could be extended. However it is important that you know that this legislation has not abolished the Human Rights or Equality Act and here are some [useful resources](#) for members who wish to defend their care packages, or indeed get one.

The Women and Equalities select committee is holding an inquiry into the impact of Covid on inequality and we will be responding to this. But please tell them how it has affected you in your work and life. Deadline for responses is 30 April and individuals can respond <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/227/coronavirus-and-the-impact-on-people-with-protected-characteristics/>

DMSC are also asking the general secretary to meet with the NEC disabled member reps and Vice Chair of DMSC to discuss representation directly to the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work.

Increased discrimination at work

We appreciate that all UCU members are struggling with health and safety issues when the home becomes a workplace. We have heard from disabled members that the following issues of discrimination have arisen:

- In FE: Members being told they will not be paid if they do not attend work even if a member of their family requires shielding (resolved via negotiation and pressure from the branch officers)
- Academics being asked to fulfil the role of additional learning support (ALS) without training or time to meet these needs
- Refusal to allow members to take home specialist equipment but expecting them to work without this
- Members paying for equipment to allow them to work from home – even when the employer is aware of their disability and agreed reasonable adjustments
- Data collection being undertaken on productivity levels impacting on disabled members with the concern that they will be targeted for redundancy or competency disciplinary later
- Move to online learning without meeting additional training needs of disabled staff
- Impact on mental health and relationships caused by working from home with limited space and with additional responsibilities of care i.e. for children or disabled relatives

We have put some advice out for disabled members already and more will follow. We strongly believe that branches need to take up the additional stresses on disabled members as part of their negotiating strategy and have asked that some guidance on this can be prepared for branches.

Finally the DMSC have resolved to hold a weekly listening circle for disabled members and these will begin as soon as possible after Easter.

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