

NEWSLETTER UCU

University and College Union

AN INFORMATION BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS IN PRISON EDUCATION

MAY 2020



UCU: we are stronger together

National update

Your branches

Since prisons have moved to restricted regimes, your UCU branch officers have been working really hard to support members with queries and concerns relating to home-working, micro-management, equipment and addressing queries relating to on-line learning.

UCU representation with employers

At a national level we have been trying to secure weekly meetings with each of the Prison Education Framework (PEF) providers in order to ensure that UCU is fully consulted over plans in relation to the recommencement of face to face delivery (when it happens). I'm pleased to report that 3 out of 4 providers are engaging with us on this basis. Unfortunately, Weston College have

failed to give us a date for a meeting and continue to be lagging significantly behind the other providers on a number of counts. Their engagement with the union being just one shortcoming. We will be putting Weston College on notice that a continuation of their current approach to industrial relations is likely to lead to a dispute.

UCU representation with HMPPS

We continue to be in close contact with our colleagues in the POA and alongside 8 other trade unions who work within the prison estate (Justice Unions in Prisons Alliance), we have written to the Secretary of State for Justice, Sir Robert Buckland a comprehensive set of demands in a 'Recovery strategy from COVID-19 restricted regime' which focuses on the health and safety framework we expect to be in place as part of a transition to a normal routine.

National update (continued)

Successful intervention to prevent breach of restricted regime

Following moves by one of the private providers in the YOI estate who notified staff that they would be expected to return to face to face delivery this week, we have received assurance from the chair of the POA, that under no circumstances would that be taking place. We have therefore been able to intervene and the employer has since reversed those proposals for the time being. It is really important that members escalate any moves to breach the current restricted regime by notifying your branch officers immediately.

UCU professional advice

Please see here the advice we drafted in relation to on-line and mixed media delivery: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10850/UCU-guidance-on-prison-education-onlinemixed-media-delivery/pdf/ucu_prisons_online-mixed-media.pdf

Representing members in parliament

We have also 'virtually' met with Lyn Brown, MP, the new shadow prisons minister. We delivered a brief presentation to the shadow minister which outlined some of the amazing work that our members carry out in prisons, how dedicated you all are and also highlighted that unfortunately this work and dedication is not valued in the way that it should. We set out that your skills, dedication and working conditions, were not reflected in your pay, terms and conditions and moved on to outline the lack of joined up strategy when it comes to offender learning given the nature of the PEF contract. We are really pleased that the shadow minister, committed to working with UCU on asking questions of the government not just in respect of the current crisis but also supporting our work on a fairer future for prison education and our members who work there.

UCU training

We are really pleased to announce that the prison rep health & safety training has been so popular it became over-subscribed within just a few days. We are in the process of setting up a second course as soon as we have found a tutor. Any reps who are on the waiting list will automatically be enrolled on to the new course. In the meantime, reps may be interested in this on-line webinar on 20 May - registrations here: <https://ucu.wufoo.com/forms/further-education-h-s-webinar/> which will cover:

- introduce the new guidance document
- discuss how to approach risk assessments
- take questions and feedback to improve UCU guidance.

Update provided by Marianne Quick, UCU bargaining and negotiations official

Branch updates

To contact one of the branch chairs or a UCU rep please email rkershaw@ucu.org.uk

Novus

Hope you and yours are all well.

We are now entering the phase of the pandemic where we are moving towards the possible return to work. As of yet there has been no official announcement from HMPPS as to what their plans are. What we do know is that they are meeting with providers to look at how to do this. We on the committee are committed to making sure that this return to work is as safe as possible for all our members. This will involve our involvement of keeping us informed of any worries you have or problems you foresee about the return. It is important that we have information at prison level as I am sure you don't have to be told that national directives are interpreted differently at local level and you are the key to solving this.

We have a long way to go to make sure we are all safe and all of UCU is committed to this goal. Please support us in our efforts to keep you safe.

Brian Hamilton – Novus UCU branch chair

PeoplePlus

My heart goes out to all of those that have lost somebody to this horrible virus or have had to battle with it themselves. Most of us seem to know somebody who has suffered and it hits home how serious the situation is. Nationally the talk is about how we come out of lockdown and when this may be. Our focus must be on the continued health and well-being of our members as inevitably we are asked to return to the prison sites.

In the PeoplePlus branch the committee now has a weekly call with senior management during this crisis. We will emphasise the importance of rigorous risk assessments agreed with the union. The availability of PPE and ongoing social distancing are key to any discussions between the prison and management. I have also raised questions around the information on cases at each prison and whether testing will be undertaken before we return. We must also consider new ways of working with our students, smaller classes, some remote teaching and other alternatives. I am also keen to ensure that those in vulnerable groups and those who have needed shielding continue to be protected.

If you have any further questions or need to contact me please email me.

Liz Smith – PeoplePlus UCU branch chair

Weston College

Georgia Finch has just been appointed as the new Weston College UCU prison education branch chair. She will be in touch with UCU members soon.

Milton Keynes UCU prison education branch

I hope that everyone is keeping healthy and safe and that you are coping with these extraordinary times working from home. For teachers everywhere it is difficult but for those in Prison Education it is even more of a challenge. I certainly have missed my class and found dealing with technology an interesting challenge. I know that many are also anxious about friends and family who are still working in the prison under very tense and difficult circumstances and it is a time to think about everyone who keeps us safe. Our thoughts go out to those who have lost their lives whilst doing their job.

The national officials at UCU and your branch will be working continually and are in discussion with MKC, HMPPS, MOJ and prison unions to give thought and consideration as to how the return to work will be managed in order to minimise risks and to keep everyone as safe as possible.

Thank you to everyone who has kept in touch so far, your input is incredibly useful. It is unsurprising that membership of UCU has increased substantially and we now have reps or contacts in nearly all MKC establishments. However, the branch committee now has only three officers and this may make it difficult for the branch to function in the future. There are three more posts to fill and I would urge any member who is interested in getting more involved in UCU to think about joining the committee. It is more important than ever that we have a strong committee to support the members as we move forward.

Please keep healthy and safe, and keep in touch.

Gina Hillsdon – MKC UCU prison branch chair

UCU needs you

If you would like to help your branch there are various ways to get involved.

- Encouraging colleagues to join UCU is a key way you can help – ask your local rep or contact Ronnie Kershaw rkershaw@ucu.org.uk for leaflets.
- If your prison doesn't have union reps, consider becoming a UCU rep or health and safety rep. Training and support is provided: www.ucu.org.uk/training
- Forward this newsletter to your colleagues

Membership benefits

1. Every day our trained local representatives, backed by full-time UCU officials, help to resolve hundreds of problems
2. UCU's legal scheme covers **employment rights**, **personal injury** (free and covers workplace stress), and **immigration employment advice**.
3. 24/7 confidential support including counselling and financial assistance through Education Support

For membership benefits: www.ucu.org.uk/ucuplus To join: www.ucu.org.uk/join