

UPDATE

for UCU members in the

North West Region



University and College Union

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Campaigns are growing

Strong support for local initiatives in the North West as branches develop campaigns

UCU branches across the North West have begun to develop campaigns to defend against any proposed cuts to jobs and to build the UCU [Fund the Future](#) campaign across the region.

- **Blackburn College UCU** branch's campaign against proposed redundancies has received huge support from the public with a [very successful petition](#) as well as support from the local [MP and local councillors](#). The branch are now inviting you to write directly to [the principal and chief executive of Blackburn College, Dr Fazal Dad](#) to ask that he halts plans for job cuts.
- **University of Liverpool UCU** branch's Defend All Jobs campaign has received support from [local MPs](#) as they call upon the employer to scrap non-essential capital development projects and to introduce a maximum wage of 100K in order to save precarious staff from redundancy. [Please watch and share their video](#) and [send messages of support here](#).
- **University of Manchester UCU** branch are calling on University of Manchester management to rethink plans to pre-empt a projected shortfall in income with proposals to cut staff pay, potential job losses and an attack on the institution's sector-leading suite of security of employment agreements. The new [flyer](#) for the branch's [Crisis Justice Campaign](#) is [now available](#). [Please send messages of support here](#).
- **Manchester Met UCU** have released a [new video](#) as part of their campaign to move precariously employed academic staff onto secure, permanent contracts. [Please watch and share their video](#). Don't let a whole generation of lecturers become another victim of the Covid-19 crisis! [Send your messages of support here](#).

Huge UCU membership growth in the North West

Over 2000 new joiners in the North West during the past 12 months with an unprecedented growth during the lockdown UCU membership in the North West has grown with 2,200 new joiners in the past 12 months and annual recruit rate of over 20%. This is testimony to hard work of branch reps who have worked particularly hard during the lockdown.

If you know a colleague who is not yet a UCU member, then get them to sign-up today—share this newsletter and tell them to [join UCU here](#).

Covid-19 and technology — share your views

Have you noticed an increase in the use of technology to make decisions about people at work and to monitor their activities, especially since the coronavirus crisis?

Do you think this technology is sometimes unfair, discriminatory and unsafe, or is it of benefit to you? And do you have any say in the development and use of technology at work? The TUC needs your help to put worker voice and experience at the heart of the debate on technology and artificial intelligence at work, and to make sure that technology is used for the benefit of all, not just employers and big tech companies.

[Please complete this TUC survey of union members to inform the campaign.](#)

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Covid-19 and the new academic year 2020/21: key information for UCU NW members

Challenges

The impact of the pandemic on the way UCU members work has been profound.

During March and April, the overwhelming majority of student facing activity in FE, Adult Ed and HE moved online. Members have worked tirelessly to ensure that students were able to continue to receive education and support. This has been a tremendous achievement and it is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of the workers that UCU represents. We know that you have had to work in challenging new ways and that this has added to an already full workload. It's now important as we reach the end of the academic year that UCU members and reps have a proper break and holiday during the summer period.

As we go forward it is vital that the intensification of workload and stress that members have experienced is not assumed to be the norm rather it is necessary to negotiate how work looks going forward. We need to make sure that proposals for how teaching and research take place in the new academic year are safe not just from the perspective of ensuring that any campus delivery take place in a Covid-secure environment but that workloads are fair and manageable.

We need to make sure that any new proposals from employers do not breach current contracts of employment particularly as the undertaking of new ways of working can in law indicate acceptance. We need to ensure that the employers fully accept what is involved in any new way of delivering and that this is reflected in workload models. We also need to ensure that those with particular vulnerabilities during this crisis are supported as well as those who have caring responsibilities, and that they are not just told to do it or take a cut in hours.

All of these issues pose huge challenges for UCU branches. Like you UCU reps and staff would normally take leave during this period and branches generally only have to keep a watchful eye on matters over the summer. With the pandemic, however, we face a series of unprecedented challenges. As this academic year ends, we have to try to negotiate over a wide range of issues many of which are entirely new to us and the timeframe to undertake these negotiations is short. In the North West employers have responded in two key ways: some have been prepared to talk to UCU and some have been less willing to engage in a constructive fashion.

Given the gravity of the situation and the limited time available before members begin to return after the summer leave, your UCU branches will continue to try to develop agreements and members will receive local updates due course.

At the same time, we want to outline some key actions (see below & overleaf) that you should do to support your branch and to ensure that in August, when we come back off our leave, we are in a position to defend your best interests.

Return to campus

The employer has a legal responsibility to consult with recognised Trade Unions over Risk Assessments (RA). These have to be completed for all workplaces and tasks and due to Covid-19 they have to be updated as the virus poses a serious and imminent threat to life. RAs have to be 'suitable and sufficient'. We have been consulted over RAs in a number of institutions. However, in a lot of branches we are still not yet able to recommend that it is safe to return to campus. (*Continued overleaf*)



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Covid-19 and the new academic year 2020/21: key information for UCU NW members (cont.)

(Continued from previous page).

UCU branches remain available to continue consultation.

To be clear: UCU wishes to see a return to campus learning when it is safe to do so.

Our concerns about a return to campus are for a number of reasons including research highlighting that the [age cohort of tertiary education students are the most likely to carry the virus \(often asymptotically\) and that they are the most likely to ignore advice on social distancing.](#)

Despite the intentions of the [Prime Minister to accelerate plans for a 'return to normality', the UK's chief scientific advisor, Professor Vallance has diverged from the Prime Minister's approach](#) by stating that working from home is still the best option whilst warning of the coronavirus risks.

It is clear that in most instances, and with the appropriate equipment and support, many members can work from home and, contrary to the claim of some employers, there is no need to ensure on campus teaching. Onsite working is desirable but only when it is safe. If you are asked to attend the campus you should ask to see the risk assessment in the first instance,

If you are asked to confirm your return to campus to carry out face to face teaching, you should contact your UCU branch immediately.

Extra work during summer

Unfortunately some managers believe that the provision of online materials is both easy to produce and, in some circumstances, a duty regardless of your workload agreements. The first thing that is important is that you take your leave. You need to recuperate.

If you are asked by your manager to complete work and to a deadline then the first thing you should do is make clear when you are taking leave and that you are not able to carry out any work during that period. What you should then do is to calculate the time you believe will be necessary to complete the task and advise the manager in writing (keeping a record of all written/email correspondences). If the manager insists, explain again in writing that it is not possible. If the manager threatens you, then contact your UCU branch immediately.

Recorded material

This is an area where there are certain legal rights held by members and you should ensure that these are not lost or abused.

Firstly the materials which you use to deliver lectures and classes such as power point slides are the property of the employer and they hold copyright; you should not withhold these from the employer. However, you do hold the performance rights for videoed and recorded lectures; these are for you to decide how and when they are used.

UCU branches are seeking agreements with all employers which will cover recordings including time limits their use.

If you are asked to provide a recorded version of the lecture you should contact your UCU branch to ask for advice on a reply which makes it clear you will not agree to share the performance until and unless an agreement is reached with UCU on their use and storage.

Weekend and evening teaching and lecturing from September

Some employers have proposed new or extended times of work and have expected that staff will just fall into line. UCU are clear that any such extension is a change to the terms and conditions of its members. As such it is a matter for collective bargaining.

There are also real questions as to whether this will produce any pedagogical benefit but it also clearly has a major impact on peoples lives and workload.

If you are asked to confirm that you will work to a new patterns, then we would ask that you contact your UCU branch for advice on reply which makes it clear that you will only agree to changes to your contract, terms and conditions in line with agreements made with UCU.

People with Covid-19 vulnerabilities & those with caring responsibilities

Most employers acted reasonably during the initial phase of lockdown by supporting those who were at heightened risk or who suddenly found the caring responsibilities of life clashing with work. We believe this approach should continue.

However, we are now concerned that some employers are saying to people, "if you can't manage this workload, then please take a cut in hours/days". This is unacceptable.

If you are approached over this, contact your UCU branch immediately.

UCU's priority is the safety and well-being of our members.

Protect health & well-being.

Protect jobs.

Protect pay.

Protect terms and conditions.

Protect education.

Stay safe.

#FundTheFuture