

UPDATE

for UCU members in the

North West Region

UCU

University and College Union

JANUARY 2021

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New Year, new variant, new lockdown

The government's [National Lockdown Guidance](#) asks all [FE](#) and [HE](#) courses to move online unless a relevant vulnerable student or critical worker course is identified. A review is scheduled for the February half-term period.

After months of campaigning for this, UCU believe this is an important step in the right direction to protect staff. However, with the pandemic currently worse than ever and hospitals on the brink of being overwhelmed, this period should be extended to cover the remainder of the academic year, and we will continue to lobby and campaign as hard for this as we have since we first called for the move online in August.



BTECs and industrial ballots

Despite the lockdown, member in [FE](#) and [ACE](#) have faced extra pressure due to the government's decision not to postpone BTEC/Vocational exams scheduled for January. [UCU and many others have opposing this approach to exams](#) as it is inconsistent with the rationale for the national lockdown and risks unnecessary community transmission. The [AoC](#) also expressed its opposition to the Department for Education's decision to devolve decision making on these exams to college leaders. In the North West, most employers have cancelled exams following interventions from UCU branch reps.

[HE institutions](#) are still seeking to implement a testing returns policy for the critical worker courses. In the meanwhile **industrial disputes and ballots** over health and safety, workload and proposed redundancies continue at a number of UCU branches in the region, including Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Central Lancashire, Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Lancaster.

Your local branch activities

Given the [heightened transmission of the new COVID-19 B117 variant](#) and the [escalating number of cases and deaths](#), your local UCU branch reps have contacted the employer to initiate consultations on the **existing Risk Assessments**.

Whilst the majority of staff are now working remotely, for those working on-site it is more important than ever that the employer updates their risk assessment with enhanced control measures such as adequate ventilation, stricter adherence to 2 metres social distancing as well as enhanced cleaning regimes.

(cont.) Reps are also raising the implications of **online delivery** particularly in relation to **workload**, adequate **IT provision for staff and students** and the adjustments that the employer should put in place for **staff with caring responsibilities**.

Get in touch with your branch

If you have any **questions** about the guidance and or on any of the points above, or have **concerns regarding safety**, particularly if you are working onsite to deliver teaching material to vulnerable students or on critical worker courses, then please [get in touch with your branch reps](#). They can provide guidance regarding your individual rights to health and safety at work, in particular your right not to receive any detriment if you refuse to attend your workplace under [Sections 44](#) and 100 of the Employment Rights Act 1996. Look out for details of forthcoming branch meetings.

Look out for details of forthcoming branch meetings. UCU is your union: have your say in your branch.

Updated UCU national guidance

UCU has [updated its health and safety advice for members](#) to address the new surge in cases and variant. In normal times the most effective way to protect the rights of individual union members to work in a healthy and safe environment is through the collective strength of union engagement with employers. However, we are not living through normal times. Members do have individual rights in law as well as collective ones, and trade unions can lawfully give their members information about these.

[Please read this guidance](#) for assistance in doing this.

Teacher covid rates up 333%

Covid rates among teachers are three times the corresponding local authority average. [As reported in Tes](#), these figures pose serious problems for all workers in education and highlight the importance of maintaining learning online until it is safe.

Unions can keep us safe

With the pandemic worse than ever, it's more important than ever to make sure you and your colleagues are in a union. Unions help to keep us all safe!

Share this newsletter with your colleagues and get them to join UCU today: www.ucu.org.uk/join

NOT YET A MEMBER? THEN JOIN UCU TODAY: www.ucu.org.uk/join