

UPDATE

for UCU members in the

North West Region



University and College Union

MARCH 2021

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The 8 March “return”: key Covid-19 advice for members

Safety is UCU’s number one priority

The pandemic is not over. Whilst cases are declining nationally, the latest REACT1 study shows that [the rate of decline is slowing](#) and cases are higher today than when colleges and schools opened in September. [UCU has called on employers](#) to use common sense and to take a precautionary approach in relation to the 8 March “reopening” by keeping teaching online wherever possible to reduce the risk of further Covid-19 outbreaks.

Risk assessments and controls

UCU is clear that employers must meet with trade union health and safety representatives to agree new risk assessments. Testing cannot be used as a replacement for suitable control measures. We seek updated risk assessments to take account of a number of [factors](#) including the increased transmissibility of new variants.

- Increased airflow in ventilation systems
- Reduced numbers in classrooms
- Shorter lessons in classrooms
- Full compliance of face coverings (exemptions aside)
- Self-isolating if you’ve been working less than 2m with a student or colleague

UCU has also raised concerns over the potential use of [unreliable](#) lateral flow tests.

Before you return to campus, you should ensure that you read the appropriate risk assessment(s). If you have any safety concerns, then we would encourage you to flag these directly with your line manager in an email and copy in your UCU reps.

Contact your branch reps

Your branch reps will have met the employer for consultations over the updated risk assessments. If you have any **questions** about the risk assessments and control measures, and/or on any of the points in this update, or have **concerns regarding safety**, then please [get in touch with your branch reps](#). They can provide guidance regarding your individual rights to health and safety at work.

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

What should I do if I am asked to do something that I consider dangerous or if I see a break down in the control measures?

Step back and tell a manager. There is a general legal duty, set out within [Section 7 of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act](#), for your employer to listen to safety concerns and take action. If you believe that you or those in your care are in danger and/or there is a break down in the control measures, then you should *step back* and raise the issue with your immediate line manager and also immediately contact your local UCU branch reps.

Members have the right to remove themselves from the workplace under [Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act](#), ‘in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believed to be serious and imminent and which he could not reasonably have been expected to avert’. UCU will support members who have reasonable grounds to believe themselves to be in serious and imminent danger. However, as the legal bar for such action is high and heavily dependent on the particular circumstances, it is advisable that where possible, members seek advice from the union before they do this and that reps seek advice from the Regional Office. For more information on your individual rights, [please read this guidance](#).

I am clinically extremely vulnerable - what should I do?

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff are advised not to attend the workplace, until 31 March at the earliest.

Staff who are CEV will previously have received a letter from the NHS or their GP telling them this, and there is [guidance for everyone in this group](#). It provides advice on what additional measures individuals in this group can take. Your employer should have contacted CEV staff about how they will be supported, including to work from home where possible. Clinically extremely vulnerable staff will continue to be paid on their usual terms.

Keep up to date with the [latest UCU coronavirus updates here](#).

I have an underlying health condition and/or I am a carer - what should I do?

Any other staff who are vulnerable due to underlying health problems must not be exposed to unnecessary risks. If you are vulnerable or if you care for someone who is vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable, then you should request an individual risk assessment from your employer and seek advice and support from your UCU rep.

Keep up to date

See the [UCU national coronavirus update page](#) for the latest guidance.

UCU statement on the death of Donna Coleman

Sadly, Donna Coleman, a longstanding UCU member, who worked with vulnerable students at Burnley College died last month (Wednesday 6 January 2021) after contracting Covid. She was 42 years old and leaves behind friends and family.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: 'We are all angry and devastated about the loss of Donna. Her passing will be deeply felt by her family, her students and her wider community. Too many workers, including those in post-16 education, have lost their lives to Covid. These deaths are not inevitable. UCU will continue to fight to keep our members safe, and for employers and the government to protect their health and safety.'

UCU regional official Martyn Moss said: 'Donna's death is an appalling tragedy and we are supporting her family at this difficult time. UCU is investigating the circumstances that led to Donna's death, including whether she contracted Covid through her work at Burnley College. Unfortunately, the college is refusing to disclose whether it knows if it has had any Covid outbreaks. Prior to Donna's death we had rejected the college's risk assessments because of their poor Covid controls. We have also raised our health and safety concerns with the college and with the Health and Safety Executive, the government body that polices workplace safety.'

Mental Health Matters - Mental Health and Covid-19

Join the TUC on Wednesday 24 March 2021 for the latest session in the [Mental Health Matters series of online events](#). This session will look at the impact COVID-19 has had on mental health and wellbeing. Guest speakers for the event will be:

- Karen Kendrick, TUC North West Executive
- Janet Newsham, Greater Manchester Hazards
- Janet Farrar, Manchester College TU Education
- Peter Kelly, HSE, Senior Psychologist

[Register here.](#)

UCU North West members fighting redundancies



Members begin the fight back at UCLAN, University of Liverpool and Southport College.

UCU members at [the University of Central Lancashire](#) have this week voted to take strike action in a row over job losses. 79% of members who voted supported strike action, with 88% backing action short of a strike, which could involve refusals to do unpaid overtime. The university wants to sack six members of teaching staff in the Faculty of Culture and Creative Industries as part of a wider culling of jobs across the university. The university proposed axing 67 jobs altogether, despite 200 staff having already accepted voluntary redundancy over the past 18 months.

Meanwhile, [UCU members at the University of Liverpool](#) have begun a strike ballot in response to the employer's proposals to cut research-active staff in its Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. UCU labelled the plans disastrous for staff and the city region as the proposed cuts will impact a faculty that is part of [Liverpool STOP COVID](#), a city-wide group whose aim is to decrease the burden of Covid-19 locally, nationally and globally. UCU Liverpool branch president Anthony O'Hanlon said: 'The attempts by the university to claim this attack on jobs is part of its civic responsibility to address health outcomes in the city will not wash with the people of Liverpool. This is the latest in a long line of catastrophic errors of judgement from senior managers at the university and UCU will be fighting against these redundancies and the pernicious criteria they are attempting to justify them with.'

UCU members at Southport FE College have been served notice of a potential 27 redundancies in the last two weeks. The College merged with an existing local 6th form College in 2018 and was given funds of £3m to facilitate the merger. It is a great shock therefore to staff that the College now claims to need savings of £1.5m in order to balance the books. Furthermore they are citing a 'diagnostic assessment' carried out by the FEC as justification for the cuts. UCU and UNISON have demanded to see this assessment but so far the College are refusing to release it. Members meetings are now being organised across the College.

Build the union

With the coronavirus pandemic, 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