

Advice to UCU branches: Omicron variant, 10 January 2022

All UCU branches should seek to engage with members and employers to ensure a safe return to work. This involves engaging with a bargaining cycle:

Step one: engage with members to frame demands

Call a (remote) branch meeting. Find out people's concerns. Discuss **UCU guidance**. Discuss **DfE guidance**. Discuss any employer guidance. Use the **UCU Five Principles**

Agree demands to take to the employer. These should include the employer carrying out new risk assessments and agreeing these with UCU. Employers should institute mitigations as described in UCU guidance including:

- reducing the number of people required on site to the minimum
- ensure a safe working environment for those working in-person and at home which considers the potential risks to their physical and mental health
- ensure adequate ventilation
- ensure members have access to masks
- ensure effective cleaning and hygiene measures are in place
- ensure access in work time to regular testing
- ensure all staff have access to vaccinations and boosters in work time without loss of pay.

Local demands – it's really important to listen to members and frame their concerns into demands. Members will have a whole range of competing worries, concerns, and questions – it's really important to provide space for honest discussions of these. Local agreements may need to be sought over:

- ensuring adequate staffing levels when many staff are isolating
- managing workload when short staffed
- workload issues arising from remote learning
- supporting staff with managing student compliance re mask wearing etc.

Where branches are engaged in ASOS this will need to be factored into local demands.

Step two: engage with employers

Branches should take members demands to employers through whatever local bargaining fora exist – JNC, health and safety committee etc.

UCU have written to employer bodies (AoC and UKEA) with expectations. Branches should refer to these communications in their local bargaining – but should not be constrained by them

Remember that employers have obligations under H&S legislation to engage with trade unions on, for example, risk assessments and enabling H&S inspections

Hopefully, employers will engage with UCU reps and put in place the demands of members.

Step three: report back to members

If employers have engaged positively this needs to be reported back to members.

If employers have not engaged positively this also needs to be reported back to members

Members need to engage in a discussion about escalation if employers have not engaged positively. This may involve potential industrial action or advice to individual members regarding their rights under S44 to remove themselves from the workplace due to serious and imminent danger. Branch officers should engage with regional/national offices as a matter of urgency