

8 April 2022

Raj Jethwa
Chief Executive
UCEA
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Dear Raj

As I am sure you will agree given the sharp recent rise in infection and death rates – on top of waning immunity and the emergence of yet more transmissible variants – it is clear that Covid remains a significant health and safety risk and hurdle to effective delivery in our universities.

In this context, I am writing on behalf of UCU to ask that UCEA ensure universities continue to prioritise Covid-19 in workplace risk assessments and to work with us to develop health surveillance measures in partnership with local health teams to prevent outbreaks and reduce the impact of the virus on the health and safety of staff and students.

In the higher education sector we have worked with you and joint education unions to agree a number of joint statements and approaches that improved health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. The 'Principles for working safely on campus during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic' was agreed by UCEA and the joint education unions and we welcome UCEA's confirmation that these principles will continue to be applied across the higher education sector.

Effective joint working has led to improvements in health and safety across the higher education sector during the pandemic and minimised disruption to education. We are committed to continuing this good joint work as the pandemic continues.

We would also, though, be pleased to see UCEA sign up to the [Independent SAGE Covid-19 safety pledge](#) to show ongoing commitment to protecting staff and students from the virus, and, critically, to minimising its disruptive impact on the delivery of education in our colleges.

We have recently called upon the UK government to continue to provide free universal access to Covid-19 testing which is essential in higher education. In the absence of government funding, we believe that employers should themselves provide free access

to lateral flow tests for their staff and students as part of their workplace health surveillance measures.

As you will appreciate, there are particular risks for Covid-19 transmission specific to higher education with the significant mixing of large groups of staff and students in teaching, social and residential spaces.

UCU would like to work with UCEA to develop an approach to workplace Covid-19 health surveillance which incorporates the effective use of free lateral flow tests for staff and students as well as additional occupational health surveillance approaches.

We believe a commitment to ongoing health surveillance and Covid-19 risk assessment will reduce the spread of Covid-19 infection, prevent outbreaks and reduce the disruption to education as the pandemic continues.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Grady". The letter "J" is large and stylized, followed by the name "Grady" in a cursive script.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary