

From: ucu
Sent: 13 March 2020 16:14
To: Middleton R.H.; Vice-Chancellor
Subject: Re: COVID-19 - UCU concerns

Importance: High

Dear Richard and Vice Chancellor

We acknowledge the email from the COO received at 15.52 today.

We do, of course, recognise that the threats posed by COVID-19 take us all into uncharted territories, and that there are many and varied aspects to be considered. While you have taken the very sensible step of halting classes for students a week early, many of our members have expressed serious concerns that you have thus far failed to fully take into consideration aspects of their health and wellbeing, as well as financial security. Your email this morning did not address the various points Southampton UCU had raised with you yesterday concerning staff wellbeing and related issues.

To reiterate, our key concerns are:

Staff, including PGRs on casual and hourly paid contracts

Please provide urgent guidance to these staff as they face considerable financial hardship if classes (and field trips, for example) are cancelled and such staff are not eligible for sick pay. This risks both their personal finances and, crucially the health of others in the event that staff feel pressured to work when they perhaps ought not. We suggest that any money the University has saved from not paying striking staff could be channelled into supporting these casualised workers. We are, in the meantime, seeking legal advice on the situation in which a reasonable expectation of paid employment is unilaterally withdrawn.

Vulnerable staff, including those with existing health conditions, compromised immune systems, pregnancy, with mental health conditions, together with the close families of such staff

Please provide urgent reassurance that these staff can work remotely without penalty, and outline what other support mechanisms are (or will be put) in place.

Students (and staff) on work/study-related visas

Please outline how the visa status of our students and colleagues will be protected during the disrupted period—this includes some plan for how people will be treated if they are out of the UK in a way that would not ordinarily be permitted by their visa terms, as well as the implications for staff directly affected by student uncertainties and disruptions.

Impact of broader changes

It seems likely that we are not at all far from a situation where schools and day-care facilities may close. Can we also ask for consideration to be given to the situation of staff who have caring responsibilities should schools or day-care facilities close and dependents end up needing to be cared for at home during closure periods?

We had hoped these would be among your key concerns as well, hence our surprise at your lack of an earlier communication addressing them.

This is an unprecedented situation, and we fully appreciate that everything may not yet have been thought through. We are sure you appreciate that it is our responsibility to ensure that your staff's well-being does not – unintentionally perhaps - fall by the wayside. Central emails saying that staff 'will be working hard over the vacation' when their own questions over their conditions of work remain unaddressed are not helpful. We do have serious

concerns leaving staff over the weekend with nothing more than the promise of an 'absence helpline' to be launched on Monday.

Finally, we urge you to start to work closely with UCU exec and our sister unions at this crucial time for all in our University community, and we urge you to arrange a joint union – management meeting as early as possible.

We await your prompt response to our concerns.

With regards

Southampton UCU Executive Committee

**47 University Road
Highfield, Southampton
SO17 1BJ**

Tel: 023 8059 2364

Ext: 22364

Mobile: 07870 846135

You can join UCU (or ask a colleague to join) at www.ucu.org.uk/join

Southampton UCU blog: <http://southampton.web.ucu.org.uk/>

Local website: www.soton.ac.uk/~ucu

National website: www.ucu.org.uk

You can access UCU's online support here: <https://ucu.custhelp.com/>

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From: Chief-Operating-Officer

Sent: 13 March 2020 15:45

To: ucu <ucu@soton.ac.uk>; Vice-Chancellor <vice-chancellor@soton.ac.uk>

Cc: Cross M. <M.Cross@soton.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: COVID-19 - UCU concerns

Hello Amanda

You won't be surprised to hear that today, like all this week, has been very busy working with colleagues across the University to ensure that we can give advice and take decisions in the best interests of students and staff.

I have asked relevant colleagues for advice on your questions. I will answer today to the best extent I can and I may need to provide further details next week.

Best wishes

Richard

Richard Middleton

Interim Chief Operating Officer

University of Southampton

From: ucu <ucu@soton.ac.uk>

Sent: Friday, March 13, 2020 1:40:17 PM

To: Chief-Operating-Officer <chief-operating-officer@soton.ac.uk>; Vice-Chancellor <vice-chancellor@soton.ac.uk>

Cc: Cross M. <M.Cross@soton.ac.uk>

Subject: RE: COVID-19 - UCU concerns

Dear Richard

Since our correspondence below, we have had a number of calls and emails from concerned members about COVID-19 and would like to reinforce the urgency of your reply to our letter. In order that we can provide an update to our members today, we would appreciate a reply by 3.30pm this afternoon.

We look forward to receiving this from you very soon.

With kind regards

Amanda Bitouche
Southampton UCU
47 University Road
Highfield, Southampton
SO17 1BJ

Tel: **023 8059 2364**
Ext: **22364**
Mobile: **07870 846135**

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From: Chief-Operating-Officer
Sent: 12 March 2020 11:20
To: ucu <ucu@soton.ac.uk>; Vice-Chancellor <vice-chancellor@soton.ac.uk>
Cc: Cross M. <M.Cross@soton.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: COVID-19 - UCU concerns

Dear Amanda

Thank you for your letter and the copy of the Branch motion.
As you will know from my earlier briefings with the University trades unions and the several communications to staff and students about COVID19, many colleagues are working hard to protect staff and students in the context of widespread infection and to sustain the University's mission of teaching and research.
The VC and I will respond to your letter with more detail by tomorrow. We are expecting further guidance to emerge following COBRA today and a further meeting of our own Business Continuity Group this afternoon.

Best wishes
Richard

Richard Middleton
Chief Operating Officer (Interim)
Tel: +44(0)23 8059 2805
Mobile: +44(0)75 8410 3138

From: ucu <ucu@soton.ac.uk>
Sent: 12 March 2020 10:57
To: Vice-Chancellor <vice-chancellor@soton.ac.uk>

Cc: Middleton R.H. <R.Middleton@soton.ac.uk>

Subject: COVID-19 - UCU concerns

Importance: High

Dear Vice-Chancellor

Please find attached letter from UCU Executive Committee regarding the COVID-19 virus.

We look forward to hearing back from you regarding our concerns.

With kind regards

Amanda Bitouche
Southampton UCU
47 University Road
Highfield, Southampton
SO17 1BJ

Tel: **023 8059 2364**

Ext: **22364**

Mobile: **07870 846135**

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12 March 2020

Professor Mark E Smith
President and Vice-Chancellor
University of Southampton

Dear President and Vice-Chancellor

We welcome the move by University of Southampton to begin issuing regular advice on COVID19 in line with Public Health England, and we acknowledge that UCU, as one of the campus trade unions, has been invited to the briefings with the Chief Operating Officer and until recently the Head of Employee Relations. It is indeed the case that a University such as ours, with staff and students from all over the world who are travelling frequently, and the pattern of teaching in such a university, gives us as an institution a high-challenging set of issues. We attach a copy of our motion that was passed unanimously at our General Meeting on 10 March.

We recognise this is an unprecedented situation but our members have expressed concerns about the potential impact on staff and students and would like to raise the following issues.

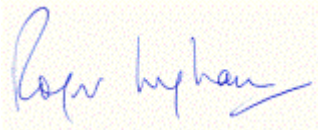
1. Please issue remote-working guidance to staff as soon as possible. As we are sure you know, the employer has a particular duty of care in this regard to staff who have underlying health conditions or suppressed immune systems, and others who fall in to the most vulnerable categories, as well as to family members of these groups.
2. Please issue guidance for the sake of staff who are pregnant, or who have partners or close family members who are pregnant; such guidance should reassure staff that they will not face recrimination for taking action to protect the health of themselves and their unborn children.
3. We welcome the recent announcement regarding daily updates regarding COVID-19. In providing information that is kept accurate and up-to-date with UK government and WHO advice and is delivered through the full range of appropriate channels, including the use of the organisation's text message service to notify staff when advice has been updated. We draw your attention to the fact that many students from China and other Asian countries use WeChat as their main channel of social media.
4. We are particularly concerned about the financial impact on hourly-paid staff and those on casual contracts who may not receive sick pay or paid leave to care for dependants in the event of sickness, quarantine or institutional closure. Please clarify university policy towards all casual workers in these situations, including the cancellation of field trips, and guarantee, where appropriate, that you offer parity of rights in terms of sick pay (from day one of isolation or sickness), and paid leave to care for dependants. These measures are necessary parts of any serious institutional commitment to the well-being of our community.
5. In the event that the university is closed, what measures will be taken to support students who are unable to attend classes but probably (in the case of many international students) also unable to return home? Whether or not it is possible to arrange for online teaching, these students will need substantial practical and emotional support, and the halls of residence will need to be maintained. Please clarify the implications of your policies on all relevant staff; for example personal academic tutors, senior tutors, student life, etc.

6. It is likely that students will want to travel during the Easter Break. How will University management protect their continued study (and visa status) in the event of disrupted return travel? Students must be confident that they will not be penalised, or they will not feel able to disclose their travel histories, increasing the risk to our community. We recognise that there is likely to be pressure to increase the extent of online delivery, but wish to stress that this cannot be introduced at short notice for obvious reasons.

We understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and that all the implications may not have been thought through and we look forward to clear and frequently updated information and assurances concerning the wellbeing of our members in all respects.

We look forward to receiving your prompt attention to our concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger Hyman', is placed on a light yellow rectangular background.

On behalf of Southampton UCU Executive Committee

Cc: Richard Middleton, Chief Operating Officer