

12th January 2022

Dear Southampton UCU Executive Committee

I write in response to your email dated 5th January 2022 and further to our discussion at the informal catch up meeting that day. I can assure you that the safety and wellbeing of our students and staff continues to be a high priority and has been discussed extensively at senior level at the University throughout the pandemic and our trades union representatives have a weekly meeting with colleagues from the Health, Safety and Risk Directorate. The University as always will continue to follow government guidance whilst also being compliant with Health and Safety requirements.

More specifically in response to the points made in your email:

- *We believe that the University should cancel large in-person teaching sessions and assessments and consider online alternatives...*

There is an ongoing strong expectation from Government to continue with education and face-to-face teaching which the University is following. To that end we have carried out rigorous risk assessments to identify and implement COVID-secure measures for the safety of our staff, students and visitors. We are therefore confident that face-to-face exams and assessments remain as safe as our in-person teaching arrangements have been thus far. This year there will be a mix of in-person and online exams, an approach which has been very carefully considered at both School and University levels. For those students impacted by self-isolation or illness including, but not limited to, COVID-19 there is a special considerations process in place to address that they can follow.

- *We believe that the University should avoid the use of teaching spaces which have not been demonstrated to have an adequate flow of outside or virus-filtered air...*

Those teaching spaces rated by Estates & Facilities as red have been taken out of use for multiple occupation. These spaces either have inadequate air flow through natural or mechanical means and/or they do not meet current guidelines or criteria. Guidance has been provided to enable these spaces to be safely used for single occupancy only.

Additional monitoring using CO2 monitors has been installed in specific teaching spaces identified by academic teaching staff as potential concerns. The University has also procured independent specialist support from Arup to review and verify all of our protocols in line with guidance. Our COVID case data suggests that there is no reason to believe that our existing controls are not operating effectively.

If anyone has concerns about a particular space they can still raise a Health & Safety incident report via SUSSED. Each report is fully investigated and responded to within 24 hours during the working week, including the implementation of additional controls where necessary.

- *We believe that the University should recommend the use of non-valved FFP2 or FFP3 masks...*

There would need to be a requirement on safety or health grounds within the risk assessment to identify this as necessary because the use of masks as opposed to face coverings falls under personal protective equipment used for the purpose of preventing harm from work related hazards. In most cases, COVID-19 is not specifically a work-based hazard so whilst anyone can wear a face covering, the use of masks has more specific Health & Safety implications. Such masks have been identified as necessary within healthcare settings, research labs carrying out COVID work and for those who are required to clean spaces occupied by those known to have COVID-19, but these are the exception rather than the norm. Government guidance has always specified face coverings rather than masks for this reason. Face coverings have been provided to all students and employees at the University free of charge.

- *We believe that the University should provide appropriate remote support for staff and students who are unable to attend in-person because they care for vulnerable people or are vulnerable themselves...*

The completion of person-specific risk assessments for staff identified as vulnerable are a requirement from each line manager where applicable. The assessment should be carried out in consultation with the employee and will determine any further actions required which the line manager should ensure are put in place. Guidance on completing such assessments is available from the [Health & Safety SharePoint site](#).

Finally, I would point out that the article quoted from the British Medical Journal is based on opinion, a point which you have already acknowledged. As stated above we are following government guidance and specifically that of the Department of Education whilst also regularly consulting with our in-house specialists.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy Appleby".

Wendy Appleby
Vice-President (Operations)