

Lucy Watson on Behalf of the UCU Executive

18 January 2022

Dear Lucy

I am replying to your email to the Vice-Chancellor and me of 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022. In the email you ask a number of questions to which I have provided responses below.

As stated by Professor Alex Neill in his email of 11<sup>th</sup> January, it is correct to say that we are only using venues which have sufficient space to enable COVID safety measures to be put in place. The rooms used for exams have been checked by Estates and Facilities to ensure that we use rooms with suitable ventilation in accordance with sector guidance. With respect to teaching spaces more generally, in light of your comment, I have asked the interim Executive Director for Estates & Facilities to send you the updated and relevant information about the checks carried out for ventilation in teaching spaces.

I have nothing further to add regarding the special considerations process as I believe it is in place for circumstances such as illness and thus would include COVID-related illness. The University is of course very mindful of student wellbeing and will do what it can to ensure that students are not inconvenienced any more than necessary.

The provision of in person exams was a decision that was not taken lightly, but as an educational establishment it is important that students receive the full educational experience, and this includes exams in the most appropriate form. It's worth pointing out that the majority of exams will still be online.

I strongly disagree that we have mis-read the guidance as you suggest. We have had a very clear steer from government and in particular the Department of Education to continue with student education and experience to as near pre-COVID conditions as possible. In person exams are part of the student experience and important for ongoing educational delivery.

I'm disappointed to hear that UCU disagree that the University has done everything they can to reduce potential risk to both students and staff. There has been a very comprehensive risk minimisation programme in place since early 2020 when we became aware of COVID-19 and union members have been a part of that. The trades unions' health and safety representatives will know that mitigation is not focused on one measure, but on a combination of measures. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of face coverings as per government guidance and space ventilation. As I've mentioned before both students and staff can choose to use masks instead of face coverings should they wish to provide their own. The University will only supply face masks free where the local risk assessments identify a clear need in line with Health & Safety legislation.

As already stated above, the use of spaces for exams has been based on the size and ventilation identified by Estates and Facilities as being suitable in accordance with sector guidance. Therefore, I disagree with your comment that this is insufficient.

With respect to invigilators, many of them were temporary staff and some had dropped out from their duties. As stated above we have very carefully considered and mitigated the risk from COVID-

19 for invigilators and do have a generic risk assessment in place to which you can have access via the usual COVID-19 Health & Safety SharePoint site should you wish to review it.

With good wishes

Wendy

Wendy Appleby

**Vice-President (Operations)**