



UCU UWE Branch Newsletter February 2021

The uncertainty and confusion we have all experienced in our communities during the Pandemic has been mirrored for staff within UWE. Members frequently cite experiences and perceptions of inconsistent, ill-timed and ambiguous communications from within the university, received as unhelpful and unnecessarily stressful on their work at UWE during 2020/21. We might all wonder how an organisation which strives 'for excellence in teaching, a quality student experience as well as corporate and social responsibility' could not incisively anticipate the breadth of individual risk management concerns of staff. This newsletter brings together some answers to frequent member concerns over their current and future working conditions.

But first – A Victory! Academic promotion scheme for Associate Professors and Professors

The UCU Branch Executive welcomes the decision of the university to open a pathway for H and I Grades to progress their careers. However, had the management not insisted on linking this to the downgrading of the Module Leadership role we could have been here two years ago. Members will remember the clear message that they gave the University Senior management team at the well-attended EGMs. The Directorate proposed removal of the requirement in the Pay Equality Policy (PEP) for Module Leaders to be paid at H Grade in order to secure this progression pathway was not acceptable. It was pointed out to the management on a number of occasions that there was no need to review the PEP in order to secure the promotion round, yet management kept insisting it was necessary. At a meeting facilitated by ACAS the issue was discussed and considered at great length. Despite the management's inability to demonstrate why the PEP was preventing progress on this there was still no movement. Roll on 2021 and the membership's stance has been accepted. Module Leadership should still attract payment at H Grade and there should be tangible promotion prospects for hundreds of H and I Grade academics. A fantastic example of what can be achieved with the solid backing of the membership. So albeit a little late, this is a great result. If you are a Module Leader and not being paid as an H Grade, please contact your Faculty Rep immediately.

Volunteering for UWE?

Giving the many gaps members are trying to fill as staff and carers during this 3rd lockdown, staff in HAS were recently invited to volunteer to further support students on placement. The request called for an 'entirely voluntary' additional support for Students in Practice over 6 clinical sites in the South West. The email mentioned colleagues in NAM & AHP, although was circulated more widely in HAS and therefore created some confusion. Moreover, the invitation offered no workload resource, no clarity on the status of the role of volunteer and very little reference to risk or risk

assessment. Responding to member concerns, UCU raised this with the UWE Directorate and HR, and immediately offered general advice to members as well as specific support to staff worried about doing even more work. It is unfortunate that it took another week to reassure members that “meeting face to face is only to be undertaken if staff feel comfortable in doing so based on their own assessment of personal risk” and that workload resource for ‘volunteering’ would be allocated in due course.

This is good example of what can be achieved when members stand together on additional and unfair workload expectations.

Use of Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996

Even those of you closely watching government decision making over the winter holidays may have missed both government and press referring to NEU’s (National Education Union - formally ATL & NUT) huge and successful member drive campaign over demands for a safe working environment.

NEU officers recently attended our own UCU Wednesday members meeting to explain how Bristol members participated in Campaigns to #MakeSchoolsSafe and #ProtectCommunities. After a 400,000 strong zoom call, one of the biggest meetings in political history, members signed public letters to head teachers and their employers to highlight the “serious and imminent dangers” they faced in their work places, using Section 44. This was not a strike, and NEU members remained available for work – either from home, and also to provide cover for children of key workers and/or vulnerable children. However, this was a demonstration of how collective power can safeguard both members and the communities they live in.

By 4th January, the prime minister had conceded that that “schools may nonetheless act as vectors for transmission, causing the virus to spread between households”. It is unlikely that this crucial step to reduce infection rates would have occurred without courage and organisation of NEU members. NEU are also at the forefront of campaigns to provide disadvantaged pupils with laptops and additional tutoring.

As teachers await government plans for children to return to school, local NEU members, like many UWE members, said it ‘feels like limbo’. However the NEU General Secretary said they are prepared because of the highly effective networking of members.

Update on Dispute

Back at UWE, our own UCU Negotiation team have continued to represent member concerns in the Dispute lodged in Term1. Despite frequent expressions of sympathy from the VC, there has been no meaningful recognition of member concerns. In the latest meeting with the VC, he requested that UCU drop its dispute, but with no concessions made, and once again, the main criteria for decision making being government advice. It has been the uncritical adherence to government advice that led members to initiate the current dispute. The Prime Minister’s most recent announcement, offers little reassurance of consideration towards staff working in HEI.s.



UCU Members meeting

Members decided to continue the Wednesday afternoon meetings at 2pm, but to now hold them fortnightly. This has mainly focused on the current dispute, but has also adapted to the issues members have brought. The original motion remains central to the dispute, but given the circumstances of the current lockdown, key issues for members include high workload; balancing workload with caring responsibilities and continued concern for those in category C & D, especially as we see plans emerging for a move back to on campus teaching.

Computer says 'Meh...'

It's clear to us that members are working far beyond capacity at the moment. Members report layers of issues exacerbating stress, exhaustion and impaired wellbeing in a month when we are being encouraged to 'feel great'! All the emails telling staff how much we are valued wore thin some time ago. Unsurprisingly, the workload allocation system at UWE fails to reflect the extensive work that staff are doing and fails to mitigate the impossible burdens placed upon them. The workload allocation system does not accurately reflect the time and effort involved in adapting to a blended approach, it does not effectively compute additional workload, (e.g. for duplicate delivery or digital adaptations), it therefore does not protect staff from being over-bundled.

Moreover, the unrelenting push towards blended delivery has imposed a disproportionate and debilitating administrative burden on staff: several reiterations of timetables, additional communications to students, changes to assessments, implementing 'my engagement' and 'my attendance'. Despite this, your WAMS might suggest you are not busy at all.

Some reminders about the WAMS systems:

- You should be about 10% under 550 WLB pro rata at the start of the academic year- this is best practice
- 550 WLB is a CEILING, not a TARGET. It isn't a race to the top. It is ok to be slightly under. In fact there can be 10-20% tolerance under.
- Changes should not be made to your workload without consultation with you
- If your workload feels unreasonable, speak to your workload allocator
- If your line manager will not discuss your workload with you, escalate the issue to their manager

Carrying over Workload bundles or Annual Leave?

We are hearing confusing accounts from members about carrying over WLB's from 2020 to 2121

Further information can be found here: <https://intranet.uwe.ac.uk/tasks-guides/Collection/workload-management>

As for carrying over **annual leave**, UCU have sought clarity from UWE about this. The intranet confirms that "all staff can temporarily carry up to 2 working weeks ... of outstanding leave into the next 2 leave years..., but only with advanced agreement of a line manager and in exceptional circumstances". Full details can be found here: <https://intranet.uwe.ac.uk/tasks-guides/Guide/Annual-leave>

Recording of Lectures

There is also varying practice across UWE on the recording of lectures. Advice on the intranet states: "Generally, the University is the copyright owner for the work of its employees, while students or external parties themselves own the copyright for their work, unless there is an agreement to the contrary."

Usually, the permission or licence to use material in a live lecture will not also cover the recording of the lecture and may not cover use in Blackboard; there is no blanket licence that would allow recording of copyrighted material.

Responding to member concerns, clarification was sought from Todd Burton (Interim Dean of FET/ Academic Lead on Event Capture) who has reiterated that the use of event capture is personal choice by the academic who performed and with student consent.

It may be useful to remind members of wording that can be used in your module handbooks and other module materials: "*Jane Doe affirms her authorship and performance of the lectures that she delivers as part of this module. These lectures are also licensed solely for use in the academic year 2020-1, although reuse may be possible for the subsequent academic year at her discretion. Students are reminded that these recordings cannot be copied or disseminated further and certainly cannot be made available to anybody other than current staff and students at UWE Bristol*".

Further information can be found here: <https://intranet.uwe.ac.uk/whats-happening/projects/event-capture/event-capture-lecturers-and-participants-legal-rights>

Members getting active!

Many members are already active in their teams, sharing information, providing support, signposting etc. More recently, 5 members have stepped forward to be UCU Rep's in their subject areas, meaning more opportunities to communicate work-place issues and plan meaningful action to resolve problems in their settings.

If you would like to get more involved, contact your Faculty Rep or Organising Officer: elizabeth2.reilly@uwe.ac.uk

Nothing is going to change without active participation! We are a stronger union when members lead on the issues that are important to them.

Do you know what's happening in the new school of Health & Social Wellbeing?

The School came in to being on 1st February. Some staff have reported that plans are confused and unclear, whilst others are concerned about the failure to stop, reflect and review the rationale for the school in the context of the pandemic and all its disruptions. A series of 'breakfast' and other

'out of hours' events have been put in place to support the launch and integration of the new school. It is not that staff are reluctant to do an extra hour on the odd occasion - they can't attend because they are *already* working many extra hours. Staff genuinely wish to make meaningful contributions to the shape and culture of the school, but there is little recognition from senior management that staff are already beleaguered. Increased workload demands (including new gruelling interview schedules), significant staff shortages and complex caring responsibilities are the conditions in which staff are experiencing significant restructuring. Staff who can't get to the breakfast events should not be blamed for not being disengaged. There is not even the prospect of mini Danish pasties to tempt them! UWE needs to stop expecting something for nothing and exhausting the workforce in the process.

