

Minutes for Bath UCU Branch online meeting 01/05/2020

Attendees:

Adalgisa Giorgio, Aline Courtois, Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, Anderley Askham, Andrea Abbas, Ania Zalewska, Ben Ralph, Claire Tylee, Cynthia Spencer, David Moon, David Skidmore, Emma Carmel, Eamonn O Neill, Frances Amery, Ian Corrick, James Davenport, James Fern, Jennifer Thomson, Joanna Clifton-Sprigg, Juan Ferrero, Julian Padget, Katerina Vrablikova, Keir Mobbs, Manuela von Papen, Mesar Hameed, Pamela Jacobsen, Peter Allen, Peter Hall, Peter Sloan, Philip Proudfoot, Rob Wortham, Sarah Parry, Shaun Stephenson-McGall, Shelley Bromley, Steph Calley, Stephen Payn, Tess Legg, Theo Papadopoulos, Tom Brumfit, Tom Hobson, William Trimble and many more.

Apologies: Tim Barrett, Elke Pawlowski, Hartmut Logemann

Minutes of last meeting . 12th February 2020 Informal strike meeting so no minutes taken.

Accepted

1. Furlough

The University was early in implementing furlough. It is assumed this will continue if lockdown continues. UK Government announced on 17 April Furlough was being extended to 30 June 2020. The university is in the process of identifying which hourly-paid (casual) staff and which roles can be placed on furlough and they will be paid 100% of their salary (80% furlough, 20 % university). It must be noted hourly-paid roles that are classified by the UK Government as public-funded are excluded from furlough.

It was noted many academic members are working from home and not on furlough.

2. Holiday entitlement.

Holiday entitlement for staff. The university position is for staff to take holiday while in lockdown. Whether working from home or furlough. It does not accept an increase of transfer of annual leave from one year to the next (Exeter University has done this). Our branch is pushing for more flexibility on when to take annual leave. It was noted we don't need permission as to when to take annual leave as our supervisor/line manger may be in furlough.

Emma Carmel stated academics workload is being increased while working from home and do not have time to take annual leave. Annual leave is not just a holiday it is a vacation. The increase of workload from changes in exam formats, more online teaching and preparing for

anticipated online teaching for next academic year. We'll also likely have a big increase on student work to mark and process for the September resit boards. There is not enough time for research let alone a holiday. Inflexibility in when to take holiday denies holiday.

Peter Sloan suggested the University buy our extra time worked, but this was criticised for many reasons including gender inequality, family etc.

Taking holiday is crucial for the wellbeing of staff. Overall academic and professional staff would have reduced holiday entitlement unless the university increases the amount of holiday transfer between academic years. The branch to put these concerns to management.

3. Casual staff positions; continuity, Furlough and Fixed term contacts.

It was suggested that the university extend casual contracts and use furlough to pay salaries. The university cannot do this as the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) would probably scrutinise university salary finances being a large organisation providing furlough.

4. Working from home Expenses and IT equipment.

The University cannot claim expenses as a tax deduction from HMRC, it is simply that there is no tax liability for the individual or employer for tax/NI on this amount. Also, IT equipment, network connectivity and health and safety issues were discussed.

Health and safety, it was suggested staff fill in the Health and safety Desktop assessment form.

IT equipment. Staff should apply for equipment needed from the university to work at home. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/ddat-software-and-hardware-support-for-people-working-remotely/> Though not enough hardware is being provided for home working. What about people who have a rubbish internet connection? Or if you live in an area where no fast-speed broadband is available? Sabina Gheduzzi suggested the University could provide broadband dongle to staff if needed and pay for the internet service.

Given the impact of the lockdown, staff expenses provided seem trivial. The meeting felt the opposite, that expenses for working from home need to be provided or we are short changed. MPs have granted themselves £10K GBP for working from home. At the university staff should not act a charity for expenses incurred working from home. The meeting felt we should not be offset expenses that the university should be paying. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein highlighted her extortionate printing costs with no reimbursement and suggested the

University provide a set monthly amount to staff to cover expenses. Peter Hall suggested that we should bombard claim forms to the university, but this was felt not applicable. Theo Papadopoulos suggests we keep an individual tally of all expenses incurred. With this information we can provide the university with actual costings for the to act upon. The meeting liked Theos suggestion.

Given staff are incurring expenses, Theo felt the current/future finance position of the university needs to be made public to our members. We are awaiting the governments providing information about extra costs for universities. Our university does have reserves however some of this is used in providing the 3% interest incurred in loans (building work).

5. Exam marking requirements

Exams and essays are separate and marked differently. Given the online exam format is similar to essays, student exam should not be marked like in essays (with feedback comments). Marking would take too long.

There are different approached to exam marking by different departments. A lot of departments are only giving marks and not feedbacks or comments.

Peter Sloan highlighted the increased workload or exams coming in different formats. Marking exams with no access to printing and limited Moodle functionality and lack of university guidance increased the workload.

Dai Moon suggests the Exam marking problems be raised at Senate.

6. Lecture capture.

Theo Papadopoulos felt lecture capture should be an opt in system rather than opt out. Is lecture capture a legal option? Lecturers can provide slides and lecture notes on Moodle but we should refuse to give the rights to capture lectures. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein mentioned students can record anything on their phones anyhow. Also, copyright belongs to you so recording lectures are in violation of your copyrights

Debate arose around the legal aspects of lecture capture and disabled students. Sabina Gheduzzi mentioned if student services 'prescribe' lecture capture is it difficult for us to say no. If they say lecture capture OR something else, we could opt for the latter.

Dai Moon to draft a consultation regarding lecture capture (Panapto), information gathering, a list of concerns and the ballot staff. Tim Barrett can help with developing a secure online anonymous questionnaire with key concerns. The results can go to management showing staff concerns.

7. Hardship concerns.

The poorest paid members of staff (mainly part-time) are most financially impacted by the Covid 19 lockdown. The branch needs to ensure GTA and other posts do not drop of the radar. The branch meeting unanimously agreed the following:

“The Branch use the local UCU hardship funds to support members who are poorly paid; on casual hourly-paid contracts. We encourage members to contribute financially to the hardship fund.”

The University strike fund deductions will be used to support cases of student and staff hardship over this challenging period.

8. Gender pay gap.

HR resources have signed a collective bargaining agreement regarding resolving the Gender pay gap by the end of the year. Fran Amery is to raise questions with HR.

9. Anti-casualisation. Currently, the VC welcomed the report into casualisation and new meetings are in place. We have collective bargaining to identify projects that work to benefit casual staff. Now the University is focusing on Covid19 issues and so there is a pause of meeting for 3 weeks.

10. Return to work next academic year.

Dave Skidmore felt we should not go back to work until full health and safety risk assessment was conducted. Here we would need TUC advice. See <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/preparing-return-work-outside-home-trade-union-approach>

The university will follow government on safety as to return to work. but we might not agree with government safety guidance, so we need to seek TUC advice. Peter Sloan highlighted the crazy increase of workload staff would face. Creating new online courses/tutorials/online lab workshops etc. as well as research. In this situation the University workload model are defunct as staff workloads go sky-high.

Dai Moon thought we would need to produce online courses that were on par with open university courses. This would not be feasible at short notice. Members were worried about increased workloads, as the University follows online teaching next term. It was suggested that Casual staff could continue by helping facilitate online courses rather than be made redundant.

11. Bath University future outlook.

The university and staff are firefighting to deal with the covid19 lockdown. A look to the future of universities after the shock response to lockdown was discussed.

Reports in the Times, Financial Times, Guardian and UCU report of massive financial deficits for Universities. There are questions into how the reports are written as they do not consider University reserves (Oxford and Cambridge are perceived to be broke in the reports). Any Government funding of Universities to facilitate the covid19 will come with strings attached which could radically alter the future of universities. Changes could include shock tactics of bi convocation of universities with a division of research and teaching institutions. Some universities are targeting casual staff cuts, citing perceived reductions in funds. Others such as Leeds University are proposing redundancies. University staff, UCU and other unions will face challenging times.

Members emphasised that universities aren't quite as broke as they claim. Compared to others Universities, Bath had reserve funds. It was noted that some was reserved for the 3% interest on loans (new buildings). The branch would need more transparency of the University finances.

There is also the issue of pay freezes / increment freezes which some institutions are talking about

David Skidmore suggests an open meeting take place to discuss the future of this university and how we should respond. TBA.

12. May 2020 Branch AGM Suspended until normal times resume. Agreed

Date of Next meeting TBA

AOB

Statement of solidarity with colleagues at Essex, Manchester, Glasgow etc who have been informed GTA work unavailable next year.

Motion 1 by Tom Hobson

“It’s now been all but confirmed that Graduate Teaching staff at a number of institutions nationally have effectively lost their jobs for the coming academic year. GTA staff at Essex, Glasgow, Sussex, Manchester – and possibly some others – have now been informed – whether told directly or informed by proxy – that they won’t have work next year.

As such I’d like the branch to approve a message of solidarity with Graduate Teaching Staff at the Universities of Essex, Glasgow, Sussex, Manchester. The UCU Bath University Branch stand in solidarity with these staff. And we call on these institutions to rethink a decision which will cause untold hardship for their poorest paid staff – who can least afford to bear such a burden.”

The Branch unanimously agreed this.

Motion 2 by Tom Hobson

At a time where management of the University are so generous in their praise of staff for pulling together and sharing the burden of this crisis – it would seem incumbent upon senior management to consider sharing some of this burden themselves. I wish to bring forward a branch motion suggesting the following:

- any detrimental alteration to T&Cs (or reduction in pay rewards & benefits) that is administered to staff in the university should be matched by the same reduction in pay, (or amendment to benefits, terms of employment) for the senior management and university executive.

An agreement to such terms from the University leadership would send a strong signal that we are, in fact, all in this together.

The branch agreed this unanimously subject to slight wording changes (to be circulated by email),

Dai, Kier and the executive were thanked for organising the online meeting.