

Minutes for Bath UCU Branch meeting today 08/06/2020 at 1.30 PM

Apologies none

[Minutes of last meeting. 1st May 2020](#) Approved

Attendance over 100 on Zoom

1. Proposed Workload Alterations.

Meeting opened with a discussion of proposals for alterations to workloads raised in the Deputy Vice Chancellor's (DVC) recent email.

Branch President outlined the position as set out by the DVC in a meeting attended the previous Thursday, including the Head of HR, and the branch's VP and H&S Officer. This meeting was arranged following the correspondence sent from the branch committee raising questions and concerns regarding the announcement in the email.

Presenting the position of Senior Management, it was explained that the University has decided that, for a temporary (but indeterminate) period, that time in academic workloads for university funded research will be decreased and time for teaching increased. The stated goal is to recognise the need for increase work to shift to online/hybrid teaching in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Assurances have been given that there is no plan that the increase cover a loss in teaching capacity through the ending of fixed term contracts and GTA teaching.

The Branch President noted that the UCU Branch has no oversight of workload issues and then gave an introductory overview of how the current workload model was generated through a process involving the DVC, Deans and HoDs. Under the current model, individuals who feel that the hours set in their workload for particular tasks are unrealistic should inform their HoDs who will inform their Dean, who can make a judgement on any requirement to make alterations. The position as set out by the DVC was that where staff have ongoing/existing research commitments that do not have research funding that HoDs would be expected to recognise this in workloads.

The Branch VP then ran through the issues that raised with Senior Management by the committee in the email circulated to members the previous Tuesday (see Appendix 1) and opened to members' discussion. The following points were raised and discussed:

- It was noted that academics will be tempted to work on unpaid research as well as increased teaching loads, but this is not advisable.

- The University has made assurances that the shift in workloads is not to cover a loss in teaching capacity, however a member pointed out that the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) will mean loss of staff and subsequent rise in workload. The Branch President noted that Impact assessments are meant to be taken with applications to the VES, but this is something that needs to be watched. Where teaching requirements remain following an 'exit' they should be covered by employing staff rather than redistributing additional work to remaining staff.
- Mental health issues need to be considered if taking on greater teaching workload. Individual research is actually a great help for mental health.
- To change online teaching to an online format takes immense hours of preparation – far more than the Wiley model, which has additional support in place. Preparing new intakes of students online is harder than online courses for students you know.
- It was noted that there were severe ramifications for staff careers of a 'research holiday' and that while promotion and probation criteria could be changed internally, externally it would harm staff's ability to move elsewhere. There are severe risks to reputation for individuals and the institution.
- The rights academics have in their contracts specify 1600 hours. If academics go above their 1600 hours quota by 10% their health may be affected, and it becomes a management issue.
- The University's reluctance to enable increased transfer of holiday days from one academic year to the following, combined with increased summers workloads in preparing online courses from scratch, means many staff will lose annual leave. The advice is to take your holidays, they are yours and book it with ITrent now.
- A member raised the proposal by an individual at the Academic Assembly of promotions without pay increases and asked the branch's position. This was noted to have major Equalities issues.
- A member stated that the VES made it inevitable that some previous permanent posts would become fixed term posts and argued that any such post should have a minimum contract of one year. The meeting felt that any such contracts should be open ended.
- It was noted that SU and student demands on teaching quality could lead into conflict with demands on staff and their overloaded workloads, and this needed management.
- A member asked about proposals about professional services staff and their workloads, specifically how such staff would cope with the impact of the VES, job redeployment and increased workloads. The Branch President stated there was no such communication yet.

The Branch President noted that the committee was awaiting a response to all of its questions from the DVC and would keep members up to date.

2. Reopening Campus

The Health and Safety (H&S) Officer provided an overview of the current situation.

Senior Management have initially pushed pilot schemes on campus, starting with particular research labs and with plans for the sports training village and extending opening to other research facilities planned. The H&S Officer reports that pilots have taken place without as full a consultation with the trade unions as might be desired. Staff may have concerns in returning to work and there are concerns that they may feel pressurised.

The trade union advice is that issues concerning return to work, as a matter of health and safety, is not an individual's responsibility. There is a legal requirement of employers to provide a safe and suitable systems of working. The issue is in safety where does the burden of proof lie? A judge can determine legal obligations but an individual refusing to go to work on due to health and safety issues needs a well-established case.

With H&S issues, a collective strategy that involves all university unions is the correct way to ensure strong legal H&S rights are put into practice. Staff demonstrate their strength and feeling collectively and to ensure this the three campus trade unions are working towards a joint approach that would provide members with a route to voice concerns collectively, to ensure proper consultation and that proper guidelines and health and safety is provided as it should be before any decisions are made.

If any member feels pressurised to return to work, they can contact the H&S Officer

3. Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES).

The Branch President noted that the three campus trade unions had been consulted on the VES and the details would go live the following day.

If anyone feels they are being pressured to take the VES then they should contact a member of the Bath UCU committee. There are two schemes Academic and Professional services schemes. The scheme is neither particularly generous or poor, but rather somewhere in the middle (see details at : <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/voluntary-exit-scheme-get-an-estimate-of-what-you-would-receive/attachments.bho/VES - Webpage - Get an Estimate - 05.06.20.pdf>)

Discussion centred on age related and age discrimination; what numbers of VES take ups were expected; and following the figures given in the Vice Chancellor's address to Academic Assembly, if there were not enough VES takers would this be the first steps to redundancies

and would there be expectations of pay cuts. The Branch President noted that no such plans had been formally proposed but the meeting felt that all “what if” possibilities had to be considered, but that it was not the union’s position to propose or advocate pre-emptively.

A member raised concerns that the university’s VES strategy was to reduce salary costs by reducing professor numbers and replacing their teaching roles using lecturers/casual staff.

4. AOB

Concern over age discrimination and the response to Covid19 as a *prima facie* was raised. The H&S Officer noted that if staff were approached on the basis of age and pressured to take the VES scheme this would be acting in a discriminatory manner.

Members noted that the University’s plans to provide face to face contact and accommodation was to ensure the students tuition fees and accommodation fees would continue. The ideas raised of 20% students per day being on campus and the ability to socially distance within classrooms and accommodation seemed problematic to the meeting. Members noted that, assuming it would not be the same 20% of students on campus on any given day of the week, there would still be an obvious means for the virus to spread between different groups of students. The University has not set out its strategy for accommodating students on campus give the vast H&S logistics involved. The meeting felt it was not feasible to clean the whole campus and clean thoroughly after every lecture. The University had to provide more details.

The branch voted to send our congratulations to the people of Bristol and #BlackLivesMatter for pulling down the bronze statue of the slave trader Edward Colston and throwing it into the harbour on Sunday 7th June 2020 (Appendix 2).

Date of Next meeting TBA

Appendix 1:

Dear Bernie,

I write in my capacity as branch president, on behalf of the University of Bath UCU branch committee, in regards to your recent communication on ‘Our Next Academic Year’ as a result of a significant number of concerns that have been raised by our members. I had intended to send a form of the contents of this communication in response to the draft minutes of the recent JACNUC, in which discussions therein would be clarified, however your communication preceded those.

Specifically, in your correspondence to staff you state that “it has been agreed that workloads will be adjusted accordingly, away from unfunded research towards teaching for this period.” Bath UCU has significant concerns about the manner in which this decision has been reached and agreed.

Job Descriptions for staff on Research and Teaching contracts explicitly contain descriptions such as “carrying out research for publication”, “applying for funding to support this research” and “contributing to the research culture” of departments – examples can be provided, of course. The proposed change, even if temporary, would leave such staff not working to their job descriptions, which would not accurately describe the work being carried out. Members are concerned that this is a change of job description by stealth.

Furthermore, where not explicitly codified in contracts, through custom and practice a significant element of time for research has become established as an implied contractual term for impacted staff – evidence for this can be provided in the form of working time allocations for said staff over any previous period of years.

The changes have implications for issues surrounding Health and Safety and Equality, as well as for job security for staff on precarious contracts.

As such, Bath UCU’s position is that any such change is effectively a change in terms and conditions of employment, which also has Health and Safety and Welfare implications, requiring collective consultation with UCU through the proper mechanisms.

In light of this we submit several initial requests for clarification:

The proposed change to workload allocations introduces further risks for staff mental and physical health, which would make continued performance of duties potentially unsafe and unworkable. Can you therefore confirm that a Health and Safety risk assessment has been carried out and share it with the local branch’s Health and Safety Officer.

The proposed change to workload allocations also brings concerns that the impact will not fall equally. Emerging research already shows that the impact of Covid-19 is unequal in terms of race, gender, age, class, and disability. Re-allocation of workload risks exacerbating this inequality. Can you therefore confirm that an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and share it with the local branch committee.

Can you clarify who “agreed” the adjustment and what the mechanisms were, since we are aware that the proposal has not been put before Senate. Can you also clarify what it is proposed “this period” would be, providing a guarantee of an end time, that the measures are entirely temporary, and that impacted staff would revert back to previous conditions in respect to the balance between research and teaching at the end of said period.

A request has already been made to Human Resources for information on the numbers of staff on Fixed Term and casual contracts that have either come to an end, or will do so in the coming month, alongside comparative data for the previous academic year, including numbers extended or converted to open ended contracts. As the branch awaits this information, can you confirm that there should be no decrease in the existing teaching capacity in the form of job losses at a time of increase teaching workload – this includes a guarantee that there will not be a reduction in available teaching time for

GTAs. Can you specifically confirm that the proposed increase in teaching elements of workloads will only be used to cover the increased workload related to the shift to online/blended teaching, and will not be used to cover teaching carried out by any staff whose contracts have not been renewed, or who ultimately choose to avail themselves of the advertised Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Can you provide details on alterations that will be made to probationary expectations and promotion criteria in light of the proposed decrease in research time.

Finally, can you clarify how the workload allocation will be developed for the unique teaching form we are shifting to with hybrid teaching, with a new, untrained staff beginning from scratch with limited time. In our recent JACNC discussions, you raised the existing time allocation for Wiley Online courses – however these courses are in no way comparable to what is now being asked of staff and there is no evidence that the amount of support Wiley provides will be mirrored internally. How will the university make sure that there is an accurate workload model for the coming year?

As a final point of emphasis, many members of staff have research and publication commitments that are not externally funded and at the same time cannot be simply ‘dumped’; to do so would bring huge danger of reputational damage to both individuals and the University of Bath. Granting that the response to Covid-19 will see changes in workloads to recognise changed teaching practices, it is nevertheless incredibly important, for all these reasons, that such plans are not rushed – and that there is proper consultation with the recognised trade union, before decisions are to be made by Senate.

best wishes,
Dai Moon
UCU Branch President
on behalf of Bath UCU Committee

Appendix 2:

[Anna Martin](#)

[7 June at 19:11 #BlackLivesMatter](#)

Here's a bit about the Colston statue, from the perspective of someone who lives in Bristol. Colston was responsible for transporting over 100,000 enslaved African people across the Atlantic, and selling them into slavery in America. This is how he made his fortune. 20,000 of those enslaved people died during the crossing and their bodies were thrown overboard. Bristolians have long petitioned the local council for the removal of the statue - and suggested that it should be re-housed in the M Shed museum, a short walk away, where there is a permanent exhibit on Bristol's history and the slave trade.

The council refused.

Then we petitioned for a plaque to be erected on the base of the statue explaining Colston's history. The plaque was cast, but more local politics and squabbling prevented it from being installed. THEN a local artist created a piece in front of the statue, depicting enslaved African people in chains, laying in rows, as they were held on slave ships. The council saw fit to have the art piece removed.

I really don't want to listen to a single person whining that the statue should not have been ripped down and dumped in the harbour. Bristolians have tried, for YEARS, to have it removed. Bristol City Council have had ample opportunity to do the right thing - now it's been done for them, and not a penny of our council tax money was spent doing it.

[#BlackLivesMatter](#)
