

Branch meeting 16 September 2020 (on-line)

Chair: Dai Moon

71 members in attendance

1) Welcome and updates

Chair introduced himself and welcomed members to the meeting.

2) Open committee positions

Chair reminded members there are a number of un-filled positions on the committee and expressed his desire that members put themselves forward to fill these. Chair explained that elections are normally held at the AGM to fill vacant posts but the committee is able to co-opt members to fill posts until safe to hold an AGM and have elections.

3) HE special conference

Chair explained that a request for nominations to attend the HE special conference and for draft motions had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting and that Bath UCU is able to send two delegates. The conference will focus on the response to the covid-19 pandemic, four fights and pensions. No nominations or motions had been received before the deadline. Chair asked for volunteers amongst those in attendance of the meeting. Two members, Theo Papadopoulos and Dai Moon, put themselves forward as there was no opposition from the meeting the two members will represent Bath UCU at the HE special conference.

4) Re-opening of campus and report from UCU H&S Rep

Chair outlined the positive working relationship between the three Trade Unions on Campus and the University. This included weekly meetings between the TUs and HR and approximately monthly meetings with senior management to discuss the response to covid-19, its implications on returning to work, Health and Safety etc... Chair asked the H&S Rep to report back to members as to which control measures will be in place upon reopening campus, highlighting points on which there was agreement and issues still open.

The H&S Rep explained that the main mechanism for consultation and engagement on H&S related matters is the University H&S committee, where the TUs have a statutory position.

The current position of the University is not entirely satisfactory from Bath UCU's point of view: the University is moving towards having some elements of face to face teaching (IPT). UCU national position is that face to face teaching should be restricted to where absolutely necessary and/or essential.

The H&S Rep explained that signage is being installed on campus and one-way routes in and outside buildings have been devised to maintain social distancing. The University position on control measures is, however, confusing, especially with regards to face

coverings. Bath UCU has concerns over the exact status of such control measures, i.e. the measures introduced and implemented by the employer in response to identified risks. In the Risk Assessment (RA) documents the use of face coverings has been included as a control measure, but according to the current University position face coverings are not a control measure, hence they are not compulsory. Bath UCU would prefer face coverings are required unless there is a valid reason not to.

The University are issuing an app that will allow staff to easily access the RAs for each room in the University.

Bath UCU has concerns over carrying out RAs for any activity that falls outside 'normal' teaching patterns. Staff have been asked to carry out RAs for laboratory sessions for example with the legal requirement being that the RA is suitable and sufficient. Bath UCU recommends that staff who do not think that have the appropriate training and/or competencies to carry out a suitable and sufficient RA should notify their Head of Department that they are not competent to complete this activity. The H&S unit have stated they will support the RA process.

Members have raised queries on enforcement of control measures. Again, Bath UCU finds that this is not entirely satisfactory at the minute, with HR choosing to opt for peer pressure rather than enforcement. HR however, have said that they will take appropriate action where managers are actively discouraging people from carrying out control measures. If members are under pressure from managers not to carry out control measures please let Bath UCU know.

There have been reports of students having breached quarantine and it seems rules are being tightened to allow taking of action against students in such instances. Bath UCU would prefer that measures are properly operated in the first place. The view from Bath UCU is that if students don't observe proper measures in a class, for example, to ask them to comply once, if they refuse to ask them to leave the class, if they refuse to leave, close the class and report the student(s).

The contingency plan in the event of an outbreak on campus is to set up a testing facility on campus within 24 hrs. This is being coordinated with BANES. The University will not at the moment carry out routine testing of staff and/or students.

The H&S Rep's report concluded with the observation that the University as an employer has not gone as far as Bath UCU would want. It was noted that some of the messaging is fairly confused (especially on the question of face coverings as a control measure).

Before taking questions from members, the President tabled a statement on behalf of the committee, and to be forwarded to senior management. The statement reads:

The University of Bath UCU branch welcomes the University of Bath's productive approach towards the involvement of the trade unions in its work to enable the safe reopening of

campus; local branch officers have engaged positively with this work and will continue to do so.

Based upon the expert recommendations of the Independent Sage paper, however, branch officers are unconvinced that the developed control measures are sufficiently enforceable and thus able to offer the protection staff and students need.

Following consultation with members, the branch therefore supports the principle that the default position should be that all teaching provision should be undertaken through online/remote means except where this is practically impossible, in line with UCU national policy.

The President explained that the idea of tabling a statement was to gauge the current position of the Branch, especially in view of the current position on enforcement, it would not mean in any way that the branch would be encouraging members not to engage with their duties. The President explained it would be unlawful for any TU to ask members to break their contracts without a strike ballot. The floor was opened to questions and comments.

Colleagues expressed concern over the practicalities of IPT teaching. Many expressed concerns over the safety of staff and students. The President explained that he had a meeting with the SU president and that the SU had no official stance on IPT. The issues of postgraduate who teach (PWT) and staff on hourly contracts was debated.

The University's position on mass testing (like Exeter and Cambridge) was queried. The H&S Rep explained that the University stated they have not identified any coronavirus risks which require health surveillance in accordance with regulation 6 of the 1999 Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.

The position on face coverings was discussed with members giving examples of conflicting messages being received from different University representatives.

The statement was put to the vote with the following results

Agree 87%
Disagree 5%
Abstain 8%

The Branch committee will send an email to Senior Management with the text of the statement and the results of the vote.

5) AoB

- Concern was raised about colleagues in other job families being put under pressure to change their working patterns.
- Attention was drawn to the Times Higher report on a study carried out by Bristol and Exeter which estimated the number of students contracting covid at 20-25% if no interventions are in place and the best way to reduce this is to limit face to face teaching.
- Attention was drawn to the equalities conference to happen on-line in early December.

- Clarification was sought on meeting tutees, whether this had to be in person or on-line as different departments seem to adopt different approaches.