

UPDATE

for UCU members in the

North West Region

UCU

University and College Union

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Extra restrictions and red alerts in the North West

'Red alerts' in the North West

In the North West the situation is particularly acute with higher than average rates of infection. The region is now subject to numerous [local restrictions](#) including 'red alerts' in Greater Manchester and new restrictions in [Merseyside and Lancashire](#). Restrictions have also been [tightened](#) in Bolton where the rate of infection is the highest in the UK. UCU has also received reports of partial FE College closures due to confirmed cases of Covid-19 including at [Blackburn College](#). In higher education, [1,700 students](#) are subject to a lockdown at [Manchester Metropolitan University](#) following an outbreak of cases whilst the [University of Liverpool](#) registered over 100 cases in a week.

SAGE advice echoes UCU's concerns

The government's own Scientific Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) has echoed many of UCU's own concerns in its latest pieces of advice [for higher education](#) and [further education colleges](#). SAGE highlights the risks of outbreaks in both sectors and the possible need for a sector-wide lockdown in HE this term. But rather than heeding his own advisors, the English health secretary, Matt Hancock, [has engaged in a pre-emptive blame game](#) suggesting that students' behaviour will be the cause of any spikes in infections, rather than his own government's failures to prepare and provide for safe reopening. Although the government has issued updated [guidance for universities in England](#), the recommendations for enhancing ventilation include teaching outside or opening doors and windows. This latest guidance does not take into account the new national restrictions and the exponential rise in cases. The UCU position is that the current guidance is not a practical suggestion for England during the winter months. In the section about the need for protective measures to comply with health and safety risk assessments, the guidance offers no extra funds and says additional costs would need to be met from existing budgets.

UCU calls for online teaching as national restrictions are imposed

The health and safety of members is the top priority for UCU.

The UK's coronavirus alert level has been upgraded from 3 to 4, meaning transmission is "high or rising exponentially." [New restrictions have been imposed in England including a call for people to work from home](#) where possible. Nonetheless, the government and employers in post-16 education continue to sleepwalk towards another public health crisis by encouraging too much in-person work.

Workers should never be required to work in unsafe conditions. [We have repeatedly raised concerns](#) about the challenges facing post-16 education yet employers have not yet implemented the right measures to keep staff, students and local communities safe. It is clear that [despite rising cases](#), large numbers of staff are still being told to put themselves at risk when there is no need to. As UCU has repeatedly stated: [more teaching needs to be moved online](#) to keep people safe and to reduce the spread of the virus.

In the past few days a number of [institutions have increased online delivery](#) but much more is required across the region. UCU North West regional office is continuing to supporting branches to push employers to produce 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessments and to respond appropriately to the rise in cases by reducing in-person work. We have reported a number of employers, including Macclesfield College, to the [HSE](#) for breaking health and safety law as we protect the safety of our members.

New guidance

In order to help keep you safe, we are releasing the following pieces of guidance to all members.

Please read the next page carefully and download the appropriate documents. If you have any questions, please contact your local branch reps for advice in the first instance. Click [here](#) to find your local UCU branch contact.

 fenorthwest@UCU.ORG.UK

 henorthwest@UCU.ORG.UK

Requesting to reduce in-person work

Template Letters to request to reduce your in-person work

As the health and safety situation gets more worrying in our institutions and beyond, staff need to have a route to register their concerns about in-person working with their managers. All UCU branch reps now have a set of template letters which you can use to challenge your line manager and your employer's plans and instructions regarding in-person work.

There is a range of letters adapted for members with different circumstances, including:

- an employee who is clinically vulnerable or extremely vulnerable
- an employee from a BAME background
- an employee with anxiety/depression related condition
- an older employee
- a pregnant woman employee from a BAME background
- a pregnant woman employee from a white background
- an employee with no particular relevant characteristics
- an employee with no particular relevant characteristics but with vulnerable household member(s).

If you are worried about the work you are being asked to do and unsure how to act, please get in touch with your branch and ask for their help. The templates will need to be adapted for your institution and your specific circumstances and you will need your branch's help to do this.

Serious and Imminent Danger

UCU have provided your branch will some specific advice on how to deal with a Serious & Imminent danger incident. Ask your branch reps for a copy of Serious and Imminent Danger advice. [We have issued new advice to branches about actions which members and/or branches can take to ensure their safety at work.](#) up to and including: whistleblowing under Section 47B of the Employment Rights Act; use of individual rights under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act; and ballots for industrial action. Please contact your local branch reps for advice.



Use the COVID incident report form

Registering incidents with your union and with the employer is key to building support for a safer workplace.

This document—[available to download here](#) - is a safety notification form produced by UCU to help members alert their employer to any COVID incidents or concerns that arise. [This form will support any current reporting mechanisms.](#) The nature of the concern or incident will determine whether all questions require completion.

We urge all members to use this whenever you have a concern

An incident or concern can arise when a Risk Assessment control fails, is not sufficient or does not exist. It's important for these matters to be brought to your employer's attention. For example, this form should be used for a breach of social distancing guidelines, a lack of hand sanitisers, the breakdown of a cleaning schedule, or problems with ventilation etc. Do not wait for a number of incidents to occur; register each one as soon as possible. This will help your branch negotiators as they seek to ensure that suitable and sufficient safety controls are in place to keep you and your colleagues safe.

Please copy your local branch into any form submissions you make to your line manager. Where relevant this form can be used in association with **UCU's advice on how to respond to a Serious and Imminent Danger situation.** Ask your branch reps for a copy of Serious and Imminent Danger advice.

