



29 January 2021

To the Board of LTE Group

Vote of No Confidence in CEO John Thornhill

On behalf of UCU members of NOVUS, we regretfully write this letter after 97% of members in attendance at our AGM on the 22nd January 2021 took a vote of no confidence in the CEO John Thornhill.

This is an unprecedented step but unfortunately circumstances have left us with no option. The latest handling of the Coronavirus crisis by NOVUS and the recent behavior and actions of Mr. Thornhill has left the UCU branch with no confidence in the decision-making and approach to keep staff safe in prison workplaces. There has been a failure to adhere to the established industrial relations machinery as set out in our recognition agreement and of deep concern is a complete disregard of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations.

Furthermore, the use of unlawfully obtained data, intimidatory emails and the appearance of fake and misrepresentative accounts/posts on social media have left members fearful about their participation in lawful and supposedly private union activities. This has left staff feeling that they can no longer report issues and has damaged the employer/employee relationship and the trust that is vital to effectively combat this current pandemic.

According to the LTE website, the remit of the executive team is to *“drive LTE Group to excel in its mission and outcomes for our learners, working closely with stakeholders, colleagues and communities”*.

Novus continue to be the only PEF prison education provider who are not engaging with UCU on the critically important issue of keeping our members safe at work.

The context of our concerns is the fact that according to the Ministry of Justice’s latest data there were 2,400 positive cases recorded in December, a rise of nearly 70% in a month with cases reported in 70 sites. Cases doubled in the week 11 –18 January 2021 and the infection rates in prisons are currently 4.2 times the national average per 100,000. Cases and outbreaks of Covid positive Novus front line staff are increasing daily and is worrying trend that needs immediate and decisive action.

UCU Members report consistent and continual concerns including:

- Breaches of HMPPS Safe Systems of Work, by HMPPS members of staff including lack of social distancing
- Sporadic and inconsistent cleaning of departments
- Lack of response or action to Near Misses e.g., multiple reports of cleaning not being carried out, social distancing not being enabled or adhered to, maximum safe capacity of rooms exceeded (meetings of 13+ in rooms designated for 6)
- Being discouraged by local management from reporting health and safety breaches
- Insistence on full attendance on site where work could be completed at home more efficiently and effectively and thereby placing staff and their families at unnecessary risk
- Being asked to put up displays, clean work areas and carry out general maintenance tasks which are not essential at this time
- Staff having to clean toilets because no cleaning or lack of sufficient cleaning is being carried out, having to share toilets with learners
- Lack of soap, hot water, cleaning materials and sanitizer
- Increased violence and assaults in the YCS estate. Two violent assaults on prison educators in the past two weeks alone.
- Prisons failing to provide temperature testing, PPE and access to prison educators to their vaccination programmes.
- Contractors using Education department as a 'through-route' and not following SSoW
- Lack of suitably ventilated work areas, staff instructed to work in rooms without any ventilation
- Staff sent to wings where officers and students are not socially distancing, wearing PPE and are vaping
- Bins overflowing with used face masks
- Contractors congregating in communal areas not wearing PPE or socially distancing preventing safe access to the workplace
- Incomplete and inadequate Risk Assessments and SSoW – copied and pasted from other sites, not updated or amended
- Inadequate resources (Quantum machines) to enable them to complete work on site
- Covid outbreaks not communicated or contained, staff unaware of cases amongst their team and staff not advised to self-isolate following contact, staff being sent to Covid positive wings to distribute workpacks
- Lack of recognition of increased cases and more contagious variant, told that the environment is "Covid-secure"
- Exposure to Covid positive students unnecessarily
- Increased stress, anxiety and mental health concerns

Your hardworking staff employed under your stewardship, their learners and fellow prison staff, all deserve better from the leadership of NOVUS and LTE Group.

Actions we are asking for your support in taking forward:

1) immediate re-engagement with UCU NOVUS branch so that they can fulfill their statutory functions in respect of H & S at Work Act and to meaningfully engage with the demands that were set out by UCU on the 5 and 13 January 2021.

2) A return of the 'go/no go' Risk Assessment review panels and a centralized monitoring of all planned future increases in provision with full involvement of UCU

3) Immediate joint review of all reported near misses and Covid cases and actions taken to resolve on a real time basis

4) A joint review of face-to-face teaching in YCS based upon increased reports of violence and breaches of covid risk assessments

5) Joint analysis and actions on staff wellbeing, sickness and stress

UCU representatives remain ready, willing, and able to meet with Novus as a priority. Our members are also happy to present to the board of governors our experiences and the very real and genuine fears that they are experiencing and the activity and behaviour they are witnessing that is placing them and their families in harm's way.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours faithfully

Brian Hamilton,

NOVUS Branch Chair on behalf of UCU NOVUS Branch

Cc Dr Jo Grady, General Secretary UCU