

**Surrey
Branch**

UCU
University and College Union

Newsletter



Surrey UCU 2020/21

On 16th November 2020 @UCUSurrey held its AGM and a 20/21 committee was formally elected. Full details can be found here: <http://surrey-ucu.org.uk/about/>

Alongside the standing annual reports, the committee reported back on current 'Surrey Futures' survey responses. So far, the survey has generated constructive responses (from approx 10-15% of membership), with lots of qualitative data. The survey is still open so please check your inboxes and encourage colleagues to participate.

Surrey UCU is currently in the process of

presenting member responses to Senior Management, so this is your chance to make sure your voice is heard.

In addition to discussions on preliminary survey results, there was also discussion and feedback on the upcoming institutional 'Strategy Review' process. As a consequence of concerns expressed, the @UCUSurrey committee has sent an **open letter** to the Vice-Chancellor (26.11.20). We are hoping for a positive response on the critical question of job security.

Please see page 2 and 3 of this newsletter for the content of the open letter.

UCU represents academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, administrators, managers, computer staff, librarians and postgraduates.

Open Letter from the Surrey UCU Committee re 'Strategy Review'



Surrey UCU Branch

University of Surrey
Guildford GU2 7XH

Professor Max Lu
University of Surrey
Guildford
GU2 7XH

26th November 2020

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

Open Letter from Surrey UCU Committee re 'Strategy Review'

We are writing with reference to the '[Strategy Review](#)' (referred to as such by Martine Carter in her 19th October blog post on Surreynet) being undertaken by the University. As you will understand, the prospect of a 'Strategy Review' raises questions regarding job security and staff working conditions, especially given the history and roll out of institutional restructuring programmes over recent years (for example, Operational Review 2016, Vision 2020, Continuous Improvement Programme 2019).

We would like to stress, from the beginning, our appreciation of the more consultative approach that the University has taken this year to union involvement, with particular reference to your acceptance that staff/union input should be a key component of this review. As you may be aware, UCU is currently conducting a wide-ranging survey on institutional operation, and we will be presenting both the data and various recommendations which arise from it to senior management.

Open Letter...Continued...

Further to this, at a recent joint fortnightly meeting with Provost and HR Directorate [26.10.20], we reiterated our request for more granularity on the institutional non-staff expenditure figures, and we place this request at a very high priority. No one could have foreseen the Covid-19 pandemic, and its subsequent impacts on our sector and our institution in particular, but it is vital that we do not see the staff body as a 'cost' that is compared negatively to other institutional expenditures. On the contrary, now more than ever, the staff body should be protected *at all costs*. This position is in line with the national UCU **Jobs First / Fund the Future** campaigns.

We are aware that 'Strategy Review' departmental consultations are taking place, and that staff have been advised that recommendations will go to Council early February 2021 for ratification. If this is the case, we are concerned that there may not be enough time for the staff voice to be properly heard and for full discussions to develop, particularly with the Christmas/New Year break. As a consequence, we are sending this open letter to formally seek reassurances that job security will be considered paramount and that compulsory redundancies and/or changes to staff contracts are not being considered as part of the current 'Strategy Review' process. This reassurance is all the more important as we have already lost staff to redundancy processes over the summer, including those who took enhanced voluntary offers in order to stave off the threat of compulsory redundancy.

We look forward to your response, and to working further with the senior management body on constructive discussions as to how we can all improve working conditions at our University; and therefore ensure the viability of the institution moving forwards. We hope you agree with us that these are inextricably linked.

Kind regards

Surrey UCU Committee

Health & Safety Update: Covid-19

UCU has raised concerns as to air quality control in teaching spaces and we had been informed that Estates and Facilities will monitor this. However, we had outstanding concerns as to arrangements in the Teaching Block, especially given that windows are to remain open and this may not be sustainable as we approach winter (these rooms are without mechanical ventilation). We had been informed that if a lecturer is concerned then a request can be submitted and Estates and Facilities will check the space with a CO₂ monitor. However, we have not seen communications to this effect, and staff may not be aware of this process. As a consequence, UCU requested that CO₂ monitoring is made continuous in teaching spaces, in a place that is openly

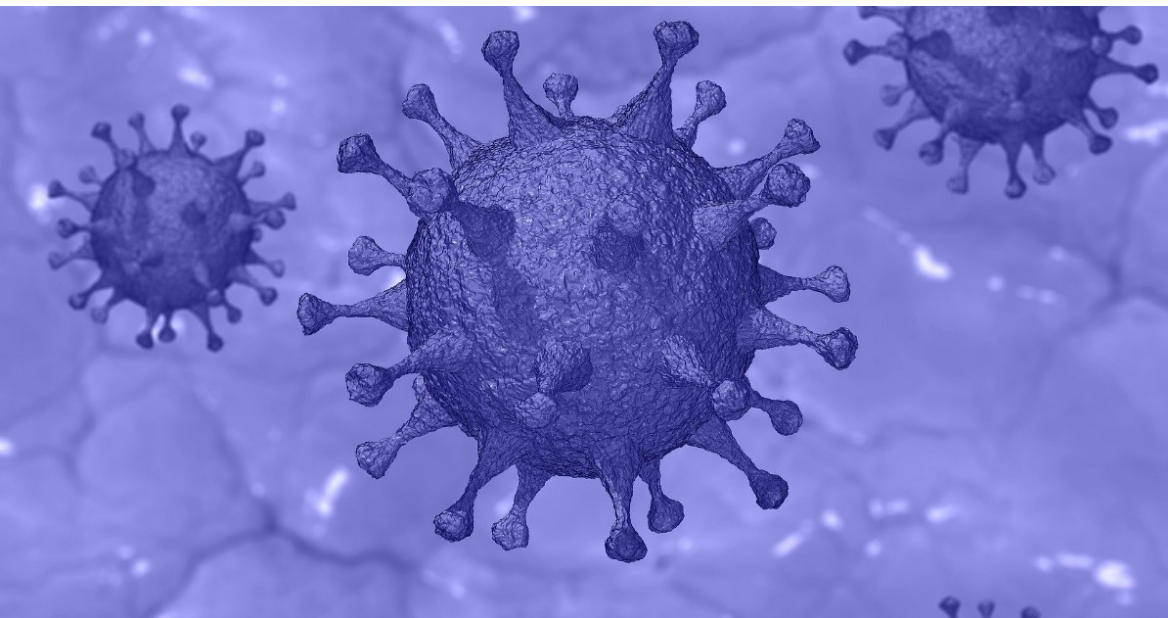
visible to users.

We have had confirmation that monitors are now being fitted in the Teaching Block (TB10, TB18, TB6, TB11, TB12A, TB12BTB19, TB20A, TB20B, TB21, TB22, TB23 are all on the list).

The visible displays will show CO₂ (in ppm) and temperature (degrees C).

The University is following REHVA guidance and we have been informed of considerations to be taken into account in terms of threshold limits. These thresholds will be discussed with UCU and it has been agreed that stats will be jointly reviewed on a regular basis.

Contact: cmxfield@ucu.org.uk



Template letters for members with COVID-19 safety concerns

UCU has released guidance to branches concerning negotiations and consultation with employers to ensure Covid-19 risk assessments are reviewed urgently and to ensure appropriate preventative and protective measures are in place. UCU's position remains that the majority of teaching should be online unless risk assessments demonstrate that adequate control measures are in place to ensure face-to-face teaching can be undertaken with a low risk of Covid-19 transmission. In any event it is our view that a mix of face-to-face and remote delivery will be necessary as a minimum control measure.

In addition to the guidance on collective approaches to address Covid-19 health and safety concerns, we realise that individual members may also have particular concerns about the safety of a return to on site work and face-to-face teaching in light of their particular individual circumstances. UCU has produced a series of template letters for use by members who reasonably believe that a request or demand that they return to on site working would place them in serious danger from Covid-19, in order to raise their concerns directly with their manager.

The letters are drafted for use by members in different circumstances; the relevant template will need to be tailored to the circumstances of an individual member.

There are nine template letters for use by members in the following categories:

- 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 from a white background
- an employee with no particular relevant characteristics
- an employee with no particular relevant characteristics but with vulnerable household member(s)
- disabled staff at increased risk.

Each letter covers issues relevant to the circumstances/characteristics of the employee and includes reference to the employer risk assessment (or lack of one) to raise concerns with the member's manager.

To be most effective the letters should include reference to the employer's risk assessment, to highlight deficiencies in that and the reasons why the member considers it to be unsafe to return to onsite working in the current circumstances, until deficiencies have been removed and adequate control measures implemented

Members may not have seen the employer risk assessment and this element of their letter is likely to be the one that they will need assistance with. Please get in touch if you have any questions or are considering using one of these letter templates, as these are designed to be used with Branch assistance. When completed, member's letters should be sent to your line manager, copied to their local branch for information.

More information can be found on our Surrey UCU website: <http://surrey-ucu.org.uk/template-letters-for-individual-members-with-covid-19-safety-concerns-branch-guidance/>

Please contact:

cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk

Challenging Sexual Harassment in the workplace: 11,18,25, January 2021, Online, (National course)

Course meeting dates: 11th, 18th & 25th January 2021

Course meeting times: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (a course debrief will also be held later in the afternoon 3:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. for those who can make it)

Duration: 3 weeks

Total hours: 12-15 hours

Location: Online

This course is aimed at branch reps who may be dealing with individual harassment cases, negotiating around policies that protect members or wish to challenge harassment, in particular sexual harassment more broadly in the workplace.

The course will cover the following;

- Legislation covering harassment
- UCU women's sexual harassment survey
- Harassing and sexually harassing behaviour, impact, and barriers
- Policies and procedures for dealing with harassment
- Handling harassment cases
- Challenging harassment in the workplace
- Involving members
- Organising around equality

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/11148/Challenging-Sexual-Harassment-in-the-workplace-111825-January-2021-Online-National-course>

Join UCU today!

Join UCU now, it takes only 10 minutes online: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/join>

Alternatively you can ring the Membership Team: 0333 207 0719

Non academic staff at University of Surrey could choose to join our sister union UNISON. Academic-related staff may consider joining UCU or Unite – contact a representative to discuss which is most suitable for you.



Unions are effective through the strength of their membership. Members can contribute in ways that suit their personalities, spare time, skills and capabilities. All queries on this subject will be warmly welcomed: cmaxfield@ucu.org.uk