

Branch position on online teaching:

The union notes:

1. The national UCU position is that all non-essential teaching should be moved online.
2. The call for a move to online teaching is based on evidence and advice from SAGE, independent SAGE, and the experience of universities in the United States and elsewhere.
3. That there has been a dramatic rise in Covid 19 cases at universities, and in areas surrounding universities, on a national level.
4. That Durham currently has approx. 1,565 cases, which is 6.67% of the total university population (as of 22 Oct). This is the highest infection rate of any UK university (UCU Covid Dashboard, 22 Oct).
5. Other universities with Covid-19 outbreaks have moved all of their teaching online (e.g. Newcastle, Northumbria, Manchester, Liverpool), and did so at lower rates of infection.
6. That the 14-day positivity rate of 22.5% in County Durham, much higher than the maximum of 5% recommended by the WHO, suggests that positive case numbers are vastly underestimated.
7. That in a town hall meeting on Monday 19th October the Vice Chancellor provided no clear answer as to why UEC were ignoring SAGE and Independent SAGE advice to move to full online teaching as far as possible.
8. That no contact tracing is being undertaken by the university in teaching settings despite reports of exposure and possible transmission being reported by the NHS app following face to face teaching.
9. That there is no union representation on the Covid planning group.

The union believes:

1. The rapid rise in cases shows that the university's precautions for residential areas were inadequate.
2. That the Covid measures put into place by the University in teaching spaces do not eliminate the risk of infection. Evidence from institutions in the US and elsewhere shows that infection still occurs in teaching spaces when distancing, face coverings, and ventilation are in place.
3. That we need to protect not only staff and students, but also the Durham community at large.
4. That non-teaching staff in student-facing support roles, especially in colleges, are at even greater risk.
5. That all face-to-face teaching (except in very limited circumstances), along with all other non-essential in-person contact, must cease.
6. That students are not just at risk of Covid-19 itself but of other physical and mental health conditions, due to inadequate support within lockdown and self-isolation.

7. That the university's refusal of individual and departmental requests to provide online teaching or services heightens stress and constitutes a mental health issue.
8. That the university's refusal of individual and departmental requests to provide online teaching or services contravenes the Respect at work policy, specifically it constitutes: "Coercive or menacing behaviour which interferes with dignity and privacy or which undermines an individual's self-confidence."¹
9. That the university should be providing contact tracing where face to face teaching is necessary, and install CO2 monitors in all teaching and common rooms which are in use, including mechanically ventilated rooms.
10. That the university should be providing raw data on new cases for download.
11. That many workers at Durham are undertaking a heavy workload.

The Union resolves:

1. All non-essential face-to-face teaching must cease immediately, and must not recommence until scientific advisory bodies like SAGE and Independent SAGE deem it safe. *As a minimum, the default should be online learning unless staff who wish to do face to face teaching to opt in to face to face teaching. If this demand is not met to take the following steps in turn:*
2. *To send a failure to agree letter to the Durham University management.*
3. *Lodge a collective grievance on behalf of all those who are being made to teach or work in face to face conditions against their will.*
4. To initiate a vote of no confidence in the Vice Chancellor and the University Executive Committee if this demand is not met.
5. To initiate a ballot for strike action and action short of a strike if this demand is not met.
6. To work with DSU where possible and support any campaigns to place pressure on university management to ensure that all students have appropriate IT equipment and a reliable wifi connection, thus guaranteeing equal access to online teaching and learning for all.
7. To work urgently with the other campus unions and student bodies to produce further demands on safety and conditions, and where possible to support these through the above industrial action.
8. To demand DUCU have a representative on the Covid Planning Group as is the case for DSU. [Crisis Planning Group]
9. To demand that the university undertakes a full mental health risk assessment of the effects of forcing workers to provide face to face teaching and of working long hours in the current context.
10. To demand that contact tracing be applied to teaching settings for as long as any form of face to face work continues for our members.

¹ <https://www.dur.ac.uk/hr/policies/respectatwork/>

Proposer: Sol Gamsu

Seconder: Kerstin Oloff