

Sheffield UCU Emergency General Meeting Minutes 5th October 2020

Chair: Sarah Staniland, SUCU Branch President

Minutes: Jane Rodger, SUCU Branch Administrator

1. Welcome and introduction

- 1.1. Sarah Staniland welcomed all to the meeting.
- 1.2. We became aware last week of some serious H&S concerns through our colleagues in Unite. The concerns include staff being asked to return to campus without valid risk assessments being in place, or out of date risk assessments, and without effective risk mitigation measures being in place.
- 1.3. This Emergency General Meeting has been called to discuss the possibility of joining our colleagues in Unite and the other campus unions in submitting a grievance to University management.

2. Collective grievance

- 2.1. Robyn Orfiteli (SUCU Branch Vice President) explained the process and purpose of collective grievances. A collective grievance could be submitted on behalf of all members of SUCU or by all the campus unions. For example, a year ago we submitted a collective grievance regarding the University's handling of the USS Pension dispute issues. A collective grievance could be the first step before filing a dispute, and it was noted that whilst in dispute, there might still be a decision not to choose to ballot for action.

- 2.2. A draft grievance letter that could be used by the campus unions was shared with members present. Sarah read through the contents and explained, that should we go ahead we would add an appendix which gives specific examples.

Discussion included:

- We should include student support work that is face to face.
 Ans. We are happy to suggest this to the campus unions.
- The failure to provide risk assessments on request is shocking.
 Ans. Provision of risk assessments is part of the management regulations and the unions had an agreement with HR that all staff would see and sign off their risk assessments.
- What are the concerns around failure to consult, and refused access to planning meetings?
 Ans. The trade unions were denied access to the learning and teaching, and financial planning meetings. This also refers to localised Departmental level instances.
- The complete failure of the testing system should be included in this.

A vote was taken on the question, "Should UCU join a collective staffside grievance", the outcome of which was a majority of members were in favour, with 24 abstentions.

At this point a survey was circulated to all present. This will help us identify, and look at the extent of the problems, ie invalid risk assessments, out of date risk assessments, and mitigation measures not being in place.

- 2.3. The possible content of our collective grievance was then discussed

Discussion included:

- We need to capture examples.

- Stress and mental ill health is a H&S issue too. Many people are suffering under the pressure caused by the need to respond to rapid changes.
- The only risk assessment I've seen is a general one for teaching. I've asked for specific guidance about spaces and I've been waiting for a week for a response.
Ans. Moving around campus guidance is not in practice being communicated well. In practice things are not being done.
- We are already in a national dispute about workload so mental health should be part of this grievance. Covid has increased workloads as everything takes longer.
Ans. We will consider adding this to the claim.
- Biomedical Science offered testing to the University and this was turned down.
Ans. We will consider adding this to the claim.
- Huge numbers of students are isolating as they do not have access to tests.
- Line managers are making judgements about individual levels of risk in the absence of a central coherent risk assessment.
- There is a lack of confidence in the University's contact tracing system. For example, people are not being asked where they are sitting and this is causing delays in tracing contacts.
Ans. We will raise this issue immediately.
- There is no cleaning between lectures, and especially the lectern which is an obvious means of transmission.
- Cleaning colleagues are being put at risk.
Ans. This has been discussed and we will be careful of our wording.
- Signage is inaccurate.
- Risk assessments are not sufficiently granular as they do not take account of student and staff demographics.
- Guidance states that risks should be reduced to the lowest level possible. The University has not done this by continuing to offer face to face.
- The external situation in Sheffield should be included. Levels of infection amongst students are higher than the general population. What is the University saying about this, and when would they consider taking action?
Ans. We push this all the time.
- Contingency planning needs to be included for example for staff with caring responsibilities, and staff waiting for tests.
- The University may be adhering to the bare minimum guidance in some instances, but in others they do not even do this.
- Risk assessments need to be kept up to date, taking on board new information as it emerges, and are reliant on having good information on "likelihood" and "consequences". Most University of Sheffield risk assessments were written at a time when infection rates were low, such that the likelihood of having one or more staff or students in a given enclosed space was also low. With the huge spike in cases amongst the student population this is no longer the case. Thus there is now a strong argument that all existing risk assessments should now be reviewed, with current face-to-face teaching paused until this has been done.

2.4. A vote was taken on the question, "How should we progress the grievance?", with the following options:

- Enter into a formal dispute
- Note our concerns with formal letter
- Formal dispute if our demands are not met

The majority of members voted in favour of a formal dispute if our demands are not met.

