

**Joint formal meeting of The University and Campus Trade Unions – Covid 19 Update**

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 10:00pm**

**Meeting via zoom**

**Attendees- University**

Mrs Karen Heaton (KH), Director of Human Resources  
Mr Andrew Mullen (AM), Deputy Director of HR & Head of HR, Humanities  
Mr Graham Smith (GS), Head of HR, PS & CI  
Ms Tracy Pinner (TP), Head of HR Operations  
Mrs Anna Line, Notetaker, HR Services

**Attendees- Trade Union**

Dr Simeon Gill (SG), UMUCU  
Ms Paulina Hoyos (PH), UMUCU  
Dr Shiu Wan Chan (SWC), UMUCU  
Mr Gareth Dawson (GD), UNISON, Branch Secretary  
Mr Chris Goodwin (CG), UNITE, Assistant Branch Secretary

**Apologies**

Mr Jim Moodie (JM), UNISON, Regional Officer  
Mr Kevin Gaskell-Clow (KGC), UNISON, Branch Secretary  
Mr Ken Drury (KD), Unite, Branch Secretary

Minutes of meeting held 27 May 2021 were accepted.

Dr Shiu Wan Chan from FBMH introduced herself to the group and is a member of UCU.

**Action Log**

KH: Item 1 – Response received from Colette Fagan and Melissa Westwood, PGRs and GTAs have access to the PGR hardship fund. We have supported working from home for other staff but there is no additional monies available beyond the PGR budget. We will send a link to the hardship fund.

AM: Item 2 – Update on latest rates for England over 50/100,000, Manchester has gone up 230/100,000. Infection rates are being driven by the Delta variant. Vaccinations are now in the 25-29 age group, 77% of adults in the UK have had their first dose and 54% are fully vaccinated.

Uptake is around 80% but there are regional variations. The Government target is to get every adult fully vaccinated by end of July. Hospital admissions rising in the north west, advice from the Government because of the spike is to meet outside if possible and to minimise travel.

Notice on Staffnet [09/06] reiterating the current advice, staff continue to work from home wherever possible, advising staff to take up the option to get tested twice weekly information has been circulated about this previously, we are advising colleagues to take the vaccination when it is offered to them. Rates on campus are slightly up we are keeping an eye on that and we will consult with Trade Union safety advisors around the next step.

SG: Feedback from Bijan on the reporting of cases on Staffnet his personal preference is around how the MEN are producing figures. He makes an important point when the rate goes up in terms of what is acceptable, limit indoor activities and minimise travel out of the area, it is not easy to find some of that information. It is incumbent on us as an academic institution to be cautious and for us to escalate precautions on our own, without waiting for the Government to tell us. The page on Staffnet serves no purpose whatsoever, we are saying as a union we need to think about how we are communicating with staff and how we are taking a lead on helping people reduce transmission.

AM: On the question of the presentation of rates, the MEN information shows the 10 boroughs and the percentage increases or reductions week on week, is that what is being proposed?

SG: That is a starting point for some of the information that needs to be there. We are a world leading institution with world leading research and the opportunity to visualise and feed that decision making in a way that outstrips what the government are going to resource, it would be nice to see us doing that and how we might interpret information that exists in the public domain and use that to help our staff understand and better prepare and respond to the threat that is there.

AM: In what sense are the StaffNet pages inadequate?

SG: I have a note that says the current page serves no purpose whatsoever but feel free to send us something I can follow up in conversation with the Executive.

AM: The Staffnet update yesterday was repeating advice and around testing on campus and vaccinations, is there anything there you would say is inadequate or otherwise?

SG: That is something I can take back.

AM: Your point about advice, that comes from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer informing on policy are you saying we should be second guessing them?

SG: No, I am suggesting we are an institution at the cutting edge of research we shouldn't be second guessing things, we should be leading on it. There is absolutely no reason why an institution that develops and creates knowledge should be waiting for somebody else to come along and tell it how it might respond. I previously asked how many staff reside in areas of high Covid there was no response. We could map that information and use some of the resource we have at the University to be more proactive towards supporting how we respond effectively to Covid and give confidence to people that we leading on it. The University of Manchester has excellent resources to respond to things such as Covid.

PH: In terms of being more proactive how can we encourage staff and students currently on campus to take up the vaccination sooner rather than later now that it is open to a wider range of age groups? Is there a way the university and trade unions can emphasise the benefits of having that vaccination sooner rather than later, given the predominant variant and the start of hybrid working which will see more staff on campus which is likely to increase transmission numbers.

AM: Communication was sent out yesterday which referred to vaccinations, it does encourage colleagues to get the vaccination as soon as they are offered it, it would do no harm for you as a trade union and all trade unions to repeat that message to members.

### **Furlough Scheme**

TP: There are 49 UMC staff and 113 UoM staff and the total amount we claimed back is £13,255,16.96

SG: Have we a surplus or a deficit, how has it impacted on operating costs?

TP: Furlough should leave us completely neutral however as we have to phase down in terms of what we are claiming going forward. We have always topped up and carried a 20% cost for furlough against operational costs. As we go through July to September the amount we can claim in furlough decreases so that operating cost takes more 30%, 40% that we will take on board to keep pay at that 100% level. Furlough has always cost us money and it should not be thought of as a pot of money for us to use, it will just be keeping us a steady state.

SG: Even at 20% the cost we carry is significantly less than the cost of recruiting the staff I am interested what the narrative might be in terms of the neutral operating costs and the scale.

KH: To confirm we are continuing to top up to 100% until the end of the scheme in September.

PH: Will everyone who has been furloughed get their jobs back or has this year triggered a significant change in our operations which might translate into some of them not being able to return to their employment?

KH: We have experienced different ways of working over the last 15 months and we are talking about hybrid working but in terms of job roles, those roles still exist so we are looking at the 113 staff on the list and what roles do they do. Not all staff will be returning immediately, there will be a managed phased return, we would expect some of these staff to start coming back but we do need to look at each one on a case by case basis because there may have been a very specific individual reason why someone was furloughed.

### **Any Other Business**

SG: On homeworking and this relates to hybrid working, it is going to be difficult for some staff especially fixed term and lower grade staff to work from home if they can't fund a monitor, desk, chair. It would be helpful to know the figures for homeworking compared to the business in terms of productivity, recruitment, retention, energy costs. Almost 100% of the costs in many cases have been passed on to the employee, we haven't seen how the University is going to mitigate the savings they are making against the difficulties of some staff especially lower paid staff working from home.

We want reassurances that hybrid working isn't going to lead to a situation where all costs offset are on the shoulders of the lowest paid employees in the University and we would like to hear the University's plan how that is going to happen.

KH: We are not forcing anyone to work from home in terms of the hybrid working experiment if that is not what they want to do. We do recognise that for some people that will not be their best or preferred option for a number of reasons.

In terms of technology, we provided a significant number of staff with laptops when they were working at home throughout the pandemic and we are also looking at the technology package we provide for those where a hybrid working situation is agreed, all this information will be coming out in the next month or so.

We want the home working environment to be safe and healthy, we do not want staff sitting on the end of a bed on an ironing board that is not acceptable, people's wellbeing and balance is really important.

The working group had a meeting with the trade unions where we explained what we had done. It is not our aim to push the costs onto individuals whether they are lower paid, medium paid or higher paid. We are trying to find a much better work/life balance for staff who are able to work in that situation accepting that not all jobs can work in a hybrid way, it is an experiment we will see how things go over the next 12 months.

We have prepared a huge number of FAQs, we know there will be questions raised that we haven't got an answer for so we will have to learn and flex over the next 12 months as this new way of working emerges. The Government is drafting some guidance for organisations that are seeking to move into a more hybrid way of working.

SG: I appreciate the University is not forcing people to work from home but if working from home is in the best interests of an employee but they may not have the financial resources to make sure they have the best home environment to work in and it is how the University supports that.

I think this is a discussion that has to happen with everybody, if the working group isn't reporting weekly and it isn't reporting to all staff on an issue that will affect them whether they are unionised staff or not, then there needs to be some consideration on behalf of the University as this is something that will have a huge impact on working environments for us and for the next generations to come.

KH: It does affect a lot of staff, we have taken a lot of information from the pulse surveys which is the voice of the staff telling us this is the direction of travel they want to go in. We have held town hall meetings for managers, we are holding training sessions for managers, we have more and more communication going on to Staffnet about this so there is a huge amount of information on there. We have listened to what staff said and this is what they said they would like to consider, they see it as a positive from their viewpoint coming from the pandemic.

PH: I understand the University is not forcing anyone to undertake hybrid working and it will be unaffordable for the University to equip two workstations for everyone but is there anyway the University could make staff equipping their workstations at home more affordable for instance the University must have bulk buy discount to suppliers for office equipment and technology equipment, could staff benefit from those discounts when trying to make purchases to equip their home workstation, these are things the university could do which would have a positive impact on staff taking the transition to hybrid.

KH: That has been noted.

GD: Going back to the last meeting with regard to the security guards and are there anymore reports of these observers following them around campus at night time, has Simon Merrywest spoken to the Students Union on this. Graham said he was going to have another meeting with Gary and have some feedback around this, are the DSE aware of this issue at Fallowfield and is the situation calming down. We are not getting any more reports from the security guards at the

moment which may suggest it has quietened down as the students leave for home so just some general feedback please.

GS: I spoke with Simon Merrywest, Gary Rowe and Vicky Ackerley. Simon confirmed that Diana Hampson and Patrick Hackett were aware of the situation. This stemmed from a student pressure group called Cops off Campus which was formed in March. This group got a number of volunteers to get some legal briefings and they have nominated themselves as legal observers whilst they have no legal status. There was a report they produced which is freely available I will circulate the link.

As stated at the previous meeting Senior Management have taken an approach whereby this group have not been causing any particular problems, they were collecting evidence and formulating the report they produced. The security staff have been briefed and given advice how to deal with them and to turn on their body worn cameras if there are any issues or interaction with them as a group.

KGC went to campus on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> May and Gary Rowe confirmed the last reported sighting of the legal observers was 9<sup>th</sup> May. It seems to have dissipated given a lot of students have gone home. We can't stop people coming on to campus as it is open so rather than inflame any situation by confronting them, given the low impact of their observations they have taken a low key approach to it.

Vicky went to campus on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> June she reported it as being quiet, she spoke to security and she mentioned a lot of the initiatives that had been taken in the last 6 months in terms of improving lighting, CCTV and the coverage of body worn cameras.

It is all positive steps towards building a safer campus for the future. We hope it will be quiet through the summer time and in September we don't really know what will happen, it could be the return of legal observers at that point but we have no indication of that.

SG: To confirm something on that point, Cops off Campus that is not an isolated thing at the University of Manchester that is a global thing. The key motivation behind that arises from the fact that the University had invited the Police to patrol the campus and that caused quite considerable concerns. The concerns from students aren't about our security guards it is about the fact the Police are present on campus because they haven't always dealt sensitively with things that they would observe.

When 4 police officers enter a flat to ask a question I think there needs to be recognition that is something that can inflame the situation, Police Officers shouldn't at any time be entering flats. Cops off Campus is a direct reflection of what happens when you seek to police things with the Police, it is not a reflection of our security because I think they have a very good relationship with the students so maybe have a conversation with the students about how Police respond and behave when they are on campus.

### **Workload**

SG: There seems to be a notable increase in workload expectations that are going to be placed on staff through metrics based exercises and some of these seem to be things that wouldn't normally be coming through in the P&DR. It has been mooted in FSE an exercise on measuring where staff are, I have also noted in Humanities and in FBMH there seems to be some measures outside of the P&DR process which capture information that shouldn't be available in the P&DR process and increases workload.

We have had several conversations about increased workload on the back of the pandemic and from conversations with colleagues they are at breaking point because there is no recognition from the University.

Do you have any idea of how many people have cancelled leave this year to be able to fulfil their teaching duties because I think that is something that needs to be captured in a Pulse survey and then contrast that with these metrics based exercises capturing performance related data off the back of a pandemic.

We have been making the case for reducing workload and the University say we just can't possibly think how they can do that, you can do that by not imposing metrics based exercises to measure performance.

There are some instances where probationary staff who are coming to the end of probation haven't been renewed and haven't been afforded the opportunity for renewal of their probation. We have a policy that says as a matter of course we will extend probation and then we are hearing that it is being done on a case by case basis. There are elements here that I would suggest are negligent, increasing workloads when they shouldn't be and there are policies around probation which are supposed to blanket but are being treated on a case by case basis.

AM: I am not aware of some of what you have just said, that is not to say it is not real but there is an array of things there that belong to different meetings outside of this particular forum as they relate to academic workload.

SG: Will you run a survey of staff through Pulse to see how many staff have cancelled leave to meet their teaching and work requirements over the last year because until you have that information and have an understanding of the serious impact of Covid on people's ability to take a break from the working environment you have no understanding of the mental health crisis that is bubbling under for all staff throughout the University.

#### **Face to Face**

SG: There seems to be confusion among staff around what is happening with face to face. Comms went out from Humanities saying it will be 70% face to face. There seems to be no certainty what is going to happen with face to face next semester and it would be helpful if there was consistent messaging.

KH: We will try and get some clarity from colleagues on that.

**Meeting ended 10:50am**