

Higher Education Bulletin

April 2020 - 1

Coronavirus – Covid-19

GMB and sister unions have been discussing the current problems facing everyone in Higher Education with the Employers.

GMB continues to push for the best possible deal for workers in these extremely challenging times we are working with the employers to achieve this end. The employers association is the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), and covers the vast majority of Institutions involved in Higher Education.

Employers and Trade Unions have issued a joint statement on Covid 19 which reads:

UCEA and the EIS, GMB, UNISON and Unite have come together to agree this joint statement for the HE sector regarding staffing issues associated with Covid-19. We are aware that this is a fast-moving situation. The overarching approach in this statement is that institutions and unions seek to work together to help the sector navigate the staffing issues created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The parties to this joint statement are aware that HEIs have been working extremely hard to respond effectively to the risks posed by Covid-19. Given the diversity in the sector, it will be important for individual HEIs to develop their own local responses, tailored to their unique staff, student and operational profiles; however, we believe that all HEIs will benefit from partnership working between the employers and their recognised local trade union representatives.

In developing this joint statement, we have sought to collate the key issues that HEIs should consider, with reference to their local trade union partners, as well as relevant sources of information. The situation is changing on a rapid basis, and we understand that HEIs will want to be fully prepared to engage their staff.

In developing local plans in response to Covid-19, employers should continue consulting and following the latest guidance and advice issued by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE), Health Protection Scotland (HPS), Health Protection Wales (HPW) and the Health and Social Care Public Health agency in Northern Ireland (PHA), as appropriate, alongside advice from local infection prevention and control specialists.

The issues for consideration below are subject to the availability of the relevant staff and may be revised in the light of developments or changes in Government advice.

Key issues for consideration:

- Ensuring that any communication channels that HEIs have established in respect Covid-19 reach all staff groups, including any workers employed by an outsourced services provider.
- Ensuring that all staff and representatives are aware of procedures for the care of, and response to, suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19.
- Ensuring that relevant risks and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessments have been reviewed to identify who may be at risk of harm, how this may arise and identifying what measures can be put in place to control the risks with reference to PHE (or devolved equivalent) guidelines. This should include, where necessary, the provision of gender-sensitive personal protective equipment.
- Ensuring adequate provision of soap, paper towels, hand sanitiser, tissues and bins.
- Organising an enhanced programme of cleaning, concentrating on “touch points”.
- Ensuring effective procedures are in place to allow staff and representatives to raise any concerns at the earliest opportunity in relation to facilities, policies and processes for managing Covid-19. Ensuring staff feel able to raise concerns without detriment, and that feedback is given to staff on the outcome. While the expectation is that staff should raise their concerns with their line managers / supervisors in the first instance, they should be made aware of alternative local routes for raising concerns.
- Where staff are being asked to work from home, or in other alternative locations, in response to changes in the way that the HEI’s operations are conducted due to Covid-19, appropriate consideration should be given to risk assessment, the provision of equipment, and the mental and physical health of staff working in alternative locations. Consideration should also be given to how staff can remain connected with each other, with regular opportunities for virtual contact.
- Where staff are parents or carers, consideration should be given to how staff can work from home when schools are closed. In addition to the ability to work from home, consideration may also need to be given to flexibility in working hours. This should be balanced against the need to ensure the delivery of operations and services.

- In line with Government guidance, identifying business critical roles to ensure only essential services are operating. Where staff working in those roles have underlying health conditions, ensuring risk assessments are carried out and official guidelines are followed accordingly.
- Where staff are suspected or confirmed to have contracted Covid-19, ensuring their personal details are treated as confidential, and that staff are reminded of their duty to protect the confidentiality of other members of staff.
- Ensuring Government advice on staff travel is communicated widely.
- Where staff or members of their household are required to self-isolate, clearly communicating pay arrangements during this period of absence. Where staff are being paid under contractual sick pay arrangements, consideration should be given to treating any absence as related to compliance with national infection control guidance, rather than counting towards any sickness absence policy triggers.

Key Workers

If any Higher Education staff are formally in the key worker category, you will already have been written to, to confirm your status. If you have any concerns please contact your GMB Region.

Higher Education Pay

2020

Initial pay discussions had begun, but have been put into abeyance while the Covid 19 pandemic persists. The employers have agreed however that any settlement will be backdated.

Further bulletins will be issued shortly.

If you need any further information, please email: publicservices@gmb.org.uk or kevin.brandstatter@gmb.org.uk

Higher Education Bulletin

April 2020 - 2

Coronavirus – Covid-19

GMB and sister unions have been discussing the current problems facing everyone in Higher Education during the pandemic. Nearly all Universities have moved any teaching on line, but many GMB members continue to work on campus providing essential services to remaining students and staff.

GMB has also been pressing the Employers to clarify whether the Governments Job Retention Scheme applies in the sector. This provides funding for employers in the private sector, to avoid the need for redundancies.

While Universities are public sector institutions, many receive funding from the private sector for specific projects. The Guidance below was circulated by Government on 17 April. This is an extract of the Guidance as it applies to Higher Education is set out below:

Higher Education

During and after the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, our aim is for Higher Education (HE) providers to continue to:

- deliver HE provision
- support the needs of students, both on and off campus

We will work with HE providers to help them access the range of measures on offer to:

- support financial viability and sustainability
- safeguard jobs (including those staff on casual, hourly paid or fixed-term contracts)

We have confirmed that the Student Loans Company is planning to make Term 3 tuition fee payments as scheduled.

We expect that in most circumstances, HE providers will be able to continue paying their staff as usual because HE delivery has largely moved online, and staff are maintaining key services, including those for students remaining on campus.

Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Schemes (CLBILS) and COVID-19 Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF)

If HE providers meet the published criteria for the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS) or the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS), they should consider approaching their bank to apply for the scheme, if they judge that is needed. HE providers who do not meet the criteria, namely those with turnover exceeding £500m, may similarly wish to explore the COVID-19 Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF) and should liaise with their bank to discuss eligibility. If their bank does not issue commercial paper, UK Finance has published a [list of those banks that are able to assist](#).

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)

Where the above schemes are not appropriate, HE providers are eligible for the CJRS. HE providers should only furlough employees and seek support through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme if they meet the following conditions:

- the employee works in an area of business where services are temporarily not required and whose salary is not covered by public funding
- the employee would otherwise be made redundant or laid off
- the employee is not involved in delivering provision that has already been funded
- (where appropriate) the employee is not required to deliver provision for a child of a critical worker and/or vulnerable child
- the grant from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme would not be duplicative to other public grants that the HE provider receives and would not lead to financial reserves being created

Any grant from the CJRS should not duplicate other sources of public funding where these are being maintained, such as UK home student tuition fees. However, we do recognise the complexity of HE revenue and the role that cross-subsidy plays. If it is difficult to distinguish whether staff are funded through public or commercial income for the purposes of meeting the first 3 conditions as listed above, and some staff will be funded through multiple sources, as a guiding principle, HE providers should not seek to furlough a higher proportion of their wage bill than could reasonably be considered to have been generated through commercial income, including from non-public research grants and contracts. It is likely that decisions on whether to furlough staff will

need to be taken on a case by case basis. To be eligible for the CJRS, when on furlough, an employee cannot undertake work for, or on behalf of, their employer.

Where research work has been paused (for example, where grant holders have requested a no-cost extension to UK Research & Innovation grants) and therefore providers are not able to receive payments towards staff costs for a period, resulting in a loss of income due to ceased or reduced delivery of research programs, providers should consider their eligibility and apply for the wide range of financial support that HM Treasury has already announced for businesses, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in line with the above conditions.

The DfE is considering appropriate measures to monitor the use of these schemes in order to detect any duplication of funding, and will be considering potential options to recover misused public funding as required.

We will continue to engage with the sector and update this guidance, and provide further clarification as necessary.

Further bulletins will be issued shortly.

If you need any further information, please email: publicservices@gmb.org.uk or kevin.brandstatter@gmb.org.uk