

# UPDATE

for UCU Reps in the

## North West Region



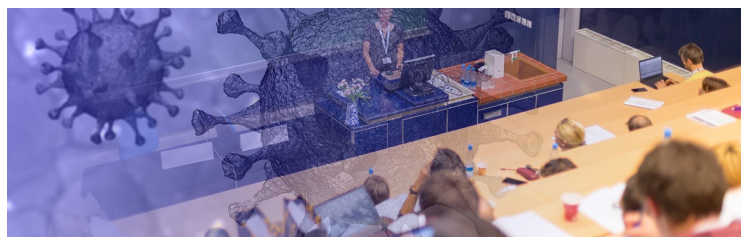
University and College Union

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## UCU Reps have a key role in addressing PM's return to work 'chaos'

### TUC denounces government plans

Last week the UK's death toll from Covid-19 became the highest in Europe. Reports continued to emerge of continued failures to procure sufficient quantities of much needed PPE for workers in the health service and care sectors, let alone for other key workers in the retail sector. And [public opinion polls showed that the majority of the British public](#) was in favour of continuing the lockdown. Yet in a televised address Boris Johnson announced on Sunday that anyone who cannot work from home should be "actively encouraged" to return to their jobs.

However, trade union leaders denounced Johnson's statement as vague and lacking measures to protect workers. Speaking on Sunday evening Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC, said: "The government still hasn't published guidance on how workers will be kept safe. So how can the prime minister – with 12 hours' notice – tell people they should be going back to sites and factories? It's a recipe for chaos."

### UCU BRANCHES SHOULD DEMAND CONSULTATIONS OVER RISK ASSESSMENTS TO ENSURE SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

[The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy](#) envisages a return to face to face teaching for some FE colleges from 1 June. UCU NW Regional Office is also aware of employers in FE and HE who are modelling plans for returning to on-site teaching. At this time UCU branch officers should demand that the employer engages in **consultation** with recognised Trade Unions to ensure safe working conditions are in place for any return to work. Employers have a **legal duty to consult established health and safety reps** and committees, and reps have the right to play an active role in consultations over risk assessments. Look out for new national bargaining guidance due to be published shortly. **Please seek advice from the Regional Office for support in assessing return to work proposals and for advice on risk assessments.**

## Branch organising

### Virtual organising is vital and popular

The impact of the coronavirus crisis means the work unions do is more important than ever. Whether it's saving workers' jobs or protecting their health and safety, it's essential we organise. Social distancing measures just mean we need to do it a little differently. TUC Education has a new [online resource here](#). And we've put together some other suggestions here:

- **Online branch meetings:** UCU branches across the North West are reporting huge turnout and participation in online meetings. Digital communication tools will help you reach more workers and scale your campaigns up quickly.
- **Keep in touch:** With people working in isolation and online, it's easy for people to fall 'out of the loop'. Guard against this by keeping in touch regularly with newsletters, or even host a weekly virtual drop-in surgery or "UCU Tea Break" using a video conference call.
- **Taking Care of Yourself interactive UCU webinar:** UCU CPD has developed an interactive webinar for members that brings together the union's advice on how to work safely in the current context. If your branch would like to host one of these sessions, contact us [here](#).
- **UCU NW Webinars:** The first webinar for FE reps takes place this Wednesday, 13 May at 12:30. Book a place [here](#). The first webinar for HE reps will take place next week and details will be emailed to branch reps in the coming days.
- **No return to work until it's safe TUC Webinar:** As the government eases UK lockdown, many of us will be asked to change the way we work. Some of us may be asked to return to unsafe working conditions. [Join the TUC](#) at 16:00 on Thursday 14 May to find out the actions we must take to ensure safe working conditions.



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