

UPDATE

for UCU Reps in the

North West Region

UCU

University and College Union

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Fury as Blackburn College announces plans to sack staff but boost bosses' pensions

Blackburn College has announced controversial plans to axe 11 posts, whilst giving senior managers a salary boost to help them avoid paying tax on million-pound pension pots.

Under the proposals, 29 staff are at risk of losing their jobs, with 11 expected to be made redundant by September. The plans, which include the closure of the Trade Union/Health and Safety Education Centre, were immediately condemned by UCU, Blackburn MP Kate Hollern, and Lancashire's trades councils.

UCU said the latest losses were another blow to a college where staff numbers have plummeted in recent years. According to the college's data, total staff numbers fell by 140 between 2016 and 2019. These latest plans are the fifth proposals for redundancies since May 2016.

UCU said the proposal to allow staff with pension savings of £1million to be given a salary boost to avoid tax was incredible. The change would see the college pay staff extra in salary instead of contributing to their pension. This would save those staff who had reached the £1million savings a considerable tax bill.

Six people at the college were paid an annual salary of over £80,000 in 2019, all of who were in the senior management team. The highest earner was the principal who was paid between £175,000 and £180,000.

UCU regional official Martyn Moss said: "We are in unprecedented and difficult times as we all try to deal with the current crisis. We find it incredible that the college is threatening staff with job losses while making plans to further feather the nests of senior managers. challenge employers."

Support the UCU campaign against redundancies: sign the petition [here](#).

UCU's five tests

UCU & Unions set out five tests government and colleges must meet before staff and students can return.

UCU, the GMB, UNISON, Unite, and the National Education Union (NEU) have called for stringent hygiene measures, protection for vulnerable people, and isolation for all suspected cases to avoid colleges becoming Covid-19 hotspots.

The unions outlined [five tests](#) which set out a clear roadmap to reopening at a time when the health and safety of all staff, students and others can be assured. The unions said that social distancing plans had to extend beyond the classroom to cover things like travelling to and from college and socialising. To help deal with those challenges, they said that staff and students who can work from home should continue to do so.

Test 1: Much lower numbers of Covid-19 cases

The new case count must be much lower than it is now, with a sustained downward trend and confidence that new cases are known and counted promptly. This includes open and transparent arrangements in place for testing, contact tracing and isolating those with Covid-19 symptoms.

Test 2: A national plan for social distancing

The Government must have a national plan in place which includes parameters for both appropriate physical distancing and safe levels of social mixing in all further education settings.

Test 3: Comprehensive testing

Comprehensive access to regular testing for students and staff, with isolation for all suspected cases, to ensure colleges don't become hotspots for Covid-19.

Test 4: A whole college strategy for health and safety

Risk assessments and safe ways of working for all tasks and spaces within a college should be established with relevant staff and unions in advance.

Test 5: Protection for the vulnerable

Vulnerable staff, and staff who live with vulnerable people, must work from home, fulfilling their professional duties to the extent that is possible.

UCU has also produced detailed and updated [guidance](#) and the [Five Ws](#) advice for FE branches. Please contact the Regional Office for support.

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Risk Assessments: a few useful points

Risk assessments to make our workplaces Covid-19 secure will play a key part in industrial relations for the foreseeable future. UCU has produced updated [guidance](#) and [Five Ws](#) advice. **Please contact Regional Office for support.**

Key terminology

A risk assessment is a systematic examination that your employer must conduct of the task, job or process that you carry out at work.

This is for the purpose of identifying the significant **hazards**, the risk of someone being harmed and deciding what further **control measures** must be taken to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. Employers have a duty to risk assess under the following legislation and:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Employers have a legal duty to consult with Safety Reps on anything affecting their members' safety. This would include the outcomes of any risk assessment.

A **risk assessment** is a systematic method of looking at work activities, considering what could go wrong (this includes thinking about who can be harmed and how, and how badly they could be affected), and deciding on suitable control measures.

These **control measures or controls** are designed to eliminate, reduce or minimize the risks of loss, damage or injury in the workplace

A **hazard** is something that can cause harm. In the case of making sure our work places are Covid-19 secure, the hazard is not Covid-19 but activities such as face to face teaching, working from home, access and egress.

A **risk** is the chance, high or low, that any hazard will actually cause somebody harm.

Implementation and Review

Remember: Risk Assessments are **live documents**, they should be reviewed regularly and updated when there has been any change in circumstances or risk factors.

Evaluating the risks

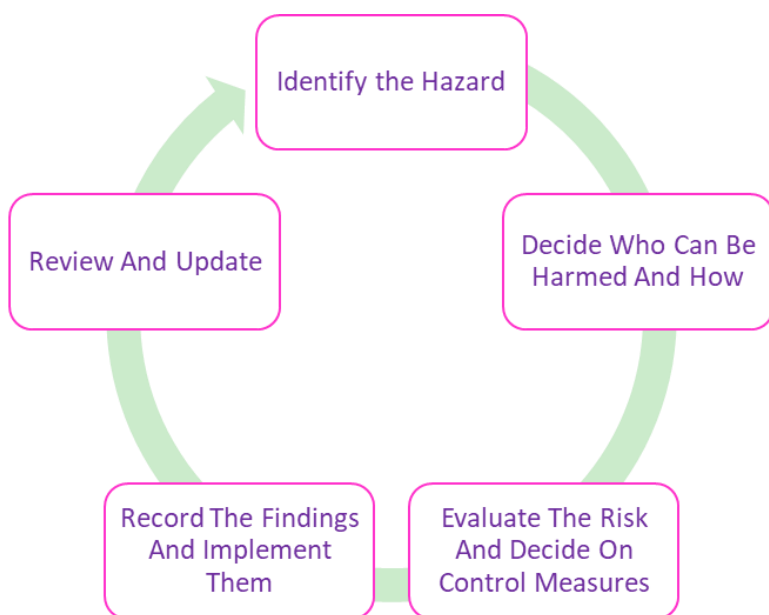
Having identified the hazards, employers must then decide how likely it is that harm will occur; i.e. the level of risk and what to do about it. Where possible they must eliminate the risk. If that is not possible employers must do everything that is reasonably possible to minimize it. It is not possible to completely eliminate the risk of you catching COVID-19, but it is possible to eliminate this risk of infection in your employer's workplaces by working from home.

A RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX:

		Likelihood				
		1 Rare	2 Unlikely	3 Possible	4 Likely	5 Almost Certain
Consequences	5 Catastrophic	5 Moderate	10 High	15 Extreme	20 Extreme	25 Extreme
	4 Major	4 Moderate	8 High	12 High	16 Extreme	20 Extreme
	3 Moderate	3 Low	6 Moderate	9 High	12 High	15 Extreme
	2 Minor	2 Low	2 Moderate	6 Moderate	8 High	10 High
	1 Negligible	1 Low	2 Low	3 Low	4 Moderate	5 Moderate

An employer should use this or a similar matrix to assess how serious a risk the spread of COVID-19 is. They do this by the multiplying the consequence by the likelihood. In this case any score above 8, the risk is high, and above 16 it is extreme.

Key Principles



Hierarchy of Control

A "Hierarchy of Control" is used to "rank" how effective controls can be and **the order in which they should be used**. Although it is often called a hierarchy all measures must be considered, and how they effective they are when applied together.

