

## Without a bailout, HE faces widespread attacks on jobs, pay and conditions

**UNISON has warned that without a substantial government bailout, the higher education sector will be facing a wave of cuts to jobs, pay and other employment conditions.**

The warning comes as universities in the region begin to talk of suspending annual increments, reducing hours with a corresponding cut in pay, freezing promotions and reducing overtime, alongside plans for both voluntary and compulsory redundancies.

But the response from government has been little more than a cynical attempt to use the crisis as a way to ideologically influence the HE sector.

In a recent speech on DfE restructuring, Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson failed to guarantee that all institutions would be saved from closure and any additional financial support would only be in the form of a loan.

Critics believe this support could be linked to HEIs having to make certain government favoured reforms.

Mr Williamson also made repeated mention of 'high quality' courses and that the sector needed to focus on this without any real definition as to what it means.

He also stressed the need for compliance on freedom of speech and academic freedom, but one of the most worrying aspects of the speech was the focus on cutting back administration – which raises real concerns about our members' jobs.

UNISON has responded by launching the "Don't fail our future" campaign which is calling on branches to contact their Vice Chancellors and MPs to put pressure on the government to ensure we have a robust HE sector after the Coronavirus crisis has past.

You can find details of the campaign here:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/protect-higher-education/>



**Student numbers and income will be down this year**

*(c)Changbok Ko*

Sarah Pickett, Chair of the South East HE committee said: "The livelihoods of three quarters of a million people who work in HE have been plunged into uncertainty, along with the £73 billion a year universities generate for our economy."

"If some institutions are forced to cancel courses, merge or close altogether that means jobs gone, student ambitions thwarted and our country all the poorer for it", she added.

For many universities, key to their financial status will be the number of undergraduates that sign on to start their degrees this year.

UCAS forms were submitted in June and clearing will take place in August – so until that time many institutions simply won't know how their intake numbers are looking.

UNISON continues to argue that this is a short-term problem that doesn't require premature or drastic cuts to jobs and terms of employment, but proper financial support from government for a vital part of our society.

## Come along to regular HE catch-up meetings

All HE branches and branches with HE members are encouraged to let their activists know that they can join the fortnightly informal HE catch-up meetings that take place online. The meeting is an excellent way to hear about what is going on in the sector across the region and to share information with colleagues from other universities. For details please contact [n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk](mailto:n.duncan-jordan@unison.co.uk).

# H&S is key to any return to campus

WHILST some members have continued to work on campus throughout the lock down, many universities are now beginning to discuss what a return to campus in the Autumn might look like.

Key to this is ensuring that the proper risk assessments have been carried out in every building on site and that UNISON health and safety reps are actively engaged in the process.

One area of concern is where cleaning, security and catering have all been outsourced - we will need to ensure that universities and private companies protect all staff by providing the necessary PPE and rigorous safety standards.

For guidance visit:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/unison-health-and-safety/coronavirus-guidance-health-safety-reps/>



*Social distancing on campus will be challenging*  
(c)Clay Banks

## Universities and Black Lives Matter

THE murder of George Floyd and subsequent protests have shone a light on the systematic racism that black people in the UK experience every day and has been traumatic for many black students and university staff.

UNISON believes that universities have a responsibility to protect the welfare of their black students and staff who are exhausted by racism day in day out.

Whilst virtually all institutions have been quick to issue statements in support of the BLM movement, some of these are out of sync with university practices.

One example comes from the University of Oxford, who tweeted: "We're committed to supporting our community in opposing racism in all its forms, including upholding anti-racist values" – yet three months earlier the university rebuked students for disinviting Amber Rudd to an International Women's Day event – after acknowledging that her involvement in the Windrush scandal was against feminist values.

What's clear is that tackling institutionalised racism and discrimination takes more than just words – we've got to actively challenge it.

## Debt faces less prestigious universities

THE ongoing COVID-19 crisis poses a significant financial threat to the UK higher education sector, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned.

The IFS estimate that long-run losses could come in anywhere between £3 billion and £19 billion, or between 7.5% and nearly half of the sector's overall income in one year.

However, the IFS found it was not the institutions with the largest COVID-related losses that were at the greatest risk of insolvency, but those, generally less prestigious, institutions that entered the crisis in a weak financial position and with little in the way of net assets.

The IFS research shows that 13 universities could end up with negative reserves and may not be viable without a government bailout or debt restructuring.

A targeted bailout aimed at keeping these institutions afloat could cost just £140 million.

## Anger at 0% pay offer from UCEA

THROUGHOUT the pandemic, UNISON members have been working harder than ever to keep universities functioning.

Whether that's caretakers, cleaners and security staff still working on site or administrators working from home, most have found the experience difficult and challenging.

This is more the case where people have struggled with childcare and/or non-existent equipment and the need for quiet space.

So when UCEA (the national employers' group) use the potential crisis in student recruitment as an excuse to offer a 0% rise from August 2020, our members are furious.

This non-offer comes at a time when the concept of goodwill has been stretched as far as possible.

Over the summer there will be a campaign to put pressure on UCEA to make a realistic offer and prepare members for action if that is not forthcoming.

It's likely that a ballot will be held in September, hopefully coinciding with similar moves of other campus trade unions.

Our campaign will involve on-line surveys, petitions, letters, on-line branch meetings and posters.

Winning a national pay ballot can be difficult and a systematic campaign to get the vote out will be crucial.

Whatever happens over the next few months, UNISON in higher education will do everything it can to make sure the employers don't get away with driving our pay down and failing to recognise the crucial work we all do.

## Keeping in touch

You will find UNISON on social media and the internet. It's an easy way to keep up to date and find out what is going on:

@unisonse - @unisontweets -  
facebook.com/unisonsoutheast -  
facebook.com/unisontheunion -  
www.unisonsoutheast.org.uk