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Dear James and UCU Executive Committee

In response to the motion raised by UCU with members of the University Executive and senior team, please find below our response to the concerns raised by your members. We set out how we are responding to each of them. Our primary objective is to keep our staff and students safe as they undertake their research and learning activities. We trust that our responses will reassure the UCU Exec and its members. We note your commitment to working together with us and as ever we wish to resolve staff concerns in a meaningful and supportive way.

**Our responses in bold follow the points raised in the motion for ease of reading.**

- a. *To demand an immediate cessation of unnecessary face-to-face, in-person teaching at the University of Bristol, with an immediate transition to online learning in all possible areas, for at least Teaching Block 1 of 2020-21, guided by individual disciplinary needs and practical teaching delivery considerations.*

**We understand the concerns raised in relation to face to face teaching, but believe that the COVID secure working environment, which is in line the University Risk Assessment, and the distribution of face coverings and visors to all staff and students, mitigate as far as is possible the risks of face to face contact. In addition, following the UCU and SU walk around campus, we have removed more chairs from teaching spaces to give a bigger distance between staff and students and student to student. We have also agreed that if any rooms are not felt to be an acceptable teaching space by teaching staff they can raise their concerns locally and the space will be looked at, and if it is deemed not suitable another space will be found, but this may be at either the beginning or end of the extended teaching day.**

**We would stress that in-person education matters, including for the mental health and wellbeing of our students, particularly our WP students. , The benefits of social interaction in a moderated campus setting are significant, and reduce the challenges of having students in residence with significant on-line delivery.**

**When we surveyed our students at the end of the 2019/20 summer term (Covid 19 survey) they identified lack of motivation to study as a key issue with only 21% of undergraduates feeling motivated by online learning. In qualitative responses they described missing in-person interactions and expressed the hope that these could resume next year, and that they could have more online face to face learning opportunities. This is supported by research showing that lower motivation is an issue with online learning only <https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4228829> and lower student satisfaction ad**

engagement with online only courses is associated with lower continuation rates <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244015621777>

The decision to offer in person teaching also reflects our wider duty of care to students and the benefits of being able to come to campus and be part of a community. In the Covid 19 survey a quarter of students said they had been lonely in lockdown. Some students described difficulties with finding spaces to study at home and we are very aware of the disproportionate effect that Covid 19 and lockdown has had on students including those who are from a widening participation background, students from Black and South Asian families, care experienced student, student who face domestic violence and abuse and students with disabilities. For many of these students there are considerable benefits of returning to a more normal study pattern on a Covid secure campus, with the benefits of face to face social interaction with peers and staff.

The alternative to offering face to face teaching within a blended curriculum is to move to on-line only. The risk to student wellbeing and mental health of working online from a student house or hall of residence is very concerning in terms of isolation, motivation to study, anxiety and other mental health effects. Unlike the lockdown situation in March even those who have a family home elsewhere are unlikely to choose to relocate if a move to online occurs as they have committed to rental contracts, may not have a suitable or safe place to study or indeed face further isolation if they move away from friends in Bristol. In addition to concerns about the wellbeing of individual students there are implications of a disengaged population of young people causing disruption for our local community.

The Department for Education have made it clear that they view it as essential that we continue to allow our students to have face-to-face teaching wherever possible, as part of a blended learning approach. Their guidance, published on the 11th of September, set out a tiered approach in Higher Education that enables a balance of face-to-face and online learning within the context of the COVID risk, and which operate alongside local restrictions that are placed on the wider community in the area the university is in.

- b. *To demand that the University changes its current institutional policy and allows staff to teach online, where they do not feel safe teaching in-person, to do so.*

We understand the concerns raised in relation to face to face teaching but believe that the COVID secure working environment, which is in line the University Risk Assessment, and the distribution of face coverings and visors to all staff and students, mitigate as far as is possible the risks of face to face contact. In addition to known health issues, we have updated the individual risk assessment form to allow managers to discuss with staff any concerns that relate to their personal circumstances, such as personal anxiety about COVID19 and return to work, concern about commuting to work and concern relating to vulnerable family members. These discussions will be confidential and additional help can be requested to support the individual and the manager by contacting the local HR team or Safety and Health Services.

- c. *To demand that the University of Bristol immediately publish risk assessments relating to face-to-face teaching and other forms of on-campus working, its individual risk assessments for all rooms in which staff will be asked to teach, and its methodology and principles used when making these risk assessments, as well as COVID-19 institutional data such as infection rates and the locality of cases, on SharePoint or an appropriate information portal.*

Our University COVID risk assessment is universal across all of our buildings and spaces in terms of transmission ([Covid-19 Working Guide](#)). This is the same as across the UK, hence the mitigation measures of Hands, Face, Space. We have created a system of Comply, Clean, Certify, (36 point check list). The 36 point check list ensures we provide a safe place of work and safe access, egress from work. We have done this across 251 building and thousands of rooms/spaces. It is not reasonably practical to do a risk assessment for each room. We took out some basement rooms that did not comply with our risk assessment.

Some areas such as labs have further detailed risk assessments as the space and activity is so specialised. These areas have specific staff and student inductions. The return to work guide is the primary document that sets out the working mitigation measures and was the foundation for the COVID Study Guide, we request everyone needs to read this as a mandatory requirement.

Each space has been set up using the hierarchy of control and mitigation measures:

- a. Signage
- b. Cleaning of touch points and cleansing materials
- c. Routes
- d. Distancing
- e. Ventilation
- f. Removal of lapel mic
- g. Masks and visors.

In relation to sharing of infection rates Information is now available on a new, public-facing coronavirus statistics University web page. These figures will be updated weekly every Wednesday morning.

- d. *To receive confirmation from the University that where staff request to teach online, it is not grounds to reassign their in-person teaching to another member of staff, nor for them to lose teaching hours and pay as a result.*

**As described above, we will ensure that line managers take into consideration the concerns raised by their teaching staff and work through the individual risk assessment to see if their concerns can be satisfactorily mitigated. We have made a commitment to our student body that we will provide some in person face to face teaching and therefore we need to fulfil that commitment by having staff available in person to teach. Some rearranging of teaching may be needed to fulfil the commitment to students if some colleagues are unable to teach in person.**

- e. *The University continue to provide high levels of support and training for staff in online teaching, while ensuring that workload allocation models and other means of allocating work recognises the time needed to undertake this training.*

**We are committed to blended education which includes in person teaching because students across the country and in Bristol are coming to study for some of that dynamic human interaction and see it as a crucial part of their university experience. From an educational perspective, we know that students learn from social interaction and from connecting with their tutors and peers. We have reconfigured our teaching estate to ensure that some of this social learning can occur in live settings. The online learning is a brilliant complement to our in-person offer.**

Ideas and resources on in-person teaching and learning as part of our blended education to support colleagues in their practice are available in the BILT Briefing Issue 43.

Specific guidance on interaction and discussion in Covid-secure rooms is available here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/bilt/resources/blended-teaching-guidance/information-for-staff/>

This includes a really helpful video conversation between Tansy Jessop and James Freeman on activities and techniques to support in-class interaction:

<https://mediasite.bris.ac.uk/Mediasite/Play/cda539e1fdea41f9b1d9dadb29fea2141d>

**Any staff that need more help for online and blended ways of working will be given support and workloads will be taken into consideration at school/ department level.**

- f. If the University fails to safeguard our Bristol UCU members by meeting the demands detailed in (a) AND (b) AND (c) above, this branch reserves the right of using any and all action available to us under Trade Union and Health and Safety legislation. In this eventuality, Branch Officers on behalf of the Executive Committee would immediately consult with our UCU Regional and National Offices and Officials, and with our membership, on an appropriate way to proceed and, if necessary, to initiate a dispute on behalf of members.

**We believe that our responses comply with safeguarding staff and students as that is our Intention. We would be very happy to meet to discuss any of the above in more detail.**

Yours sincerely



Professor Judith Squires  
DVC and Provost



Robert Kerse  
Chief Operating Officer



Claire Buchanan  
Chief People Officer