

Report from Covid-19 Critical Incident group (Tues 17.03.2020)

1. Student Union

The report from the SU was detailed and well thought through; the closing of physical spaces, all staff working remotely, all student groups and societies being updated, the virtual support for front of house services.

Contingency for an extra monthly payment to staff to ensure their fixed term (termly) contracts are complied with. The discussion around those SU student staff members and others, who will lose work as a result of COVID 19 measures, was very helpful and reassuring; we appreciated that the Student Hardship Fund was cited as a vehicle for alleviating financial hardship that students are bound to face over the coming months. We are aware the Student Hardship Fund has been under-used in recent years.

Questions – raised as to how much money sits in the Student Hardship Fund currently? And requesting that it is publicised widely – with students encouraged to make applications in the current circumstances

2. Essential work during Covid-19 crisis

Our understanding from the meeting was that all but essential work on the campus is to be closed down. We remain deeply concerned however that some services remain open however, including the library, with various members of staff still being expected to come on campus for work. We have therefore sought further urgent clarification

- which services are still operating as essential services?
- How is essential work defined and what are the criteria?
- How are those working in essential services able to contribute to discussions?

In addition we stressed the importance of all unions and affected workers being involved in deciding these criteria and implementation on a case by case basis. In those cases deemed 'essential' all the necessary protections need to be put in place. We are well aware, that some colleagues work potentially deemed most essential, may also be those on the most insecure, low paid contracts as well as dealing with the additional issues vis caring responsibilities, equalities which must also be brought to bear on these considerations.

3. Universal credit

The impact of early salary payment, on low paid colleagues' entitlement to universal credit was a very important issue raised. Made with good intention to ensure everyone got paid in good time, it has unfortunately led to suspension of payments and distress for some staff. College are seeking to redress this issue and we are waiting an update.

4. CIG vs JNCC – role of trade unions and health and safety reps in Covid-19 responses

At the meeting, we were informed the CIG is an ad hoc body that has no official 'standing' within the college processes and it was suggested that trade unions would be involved moving forward via more frequent and regular JNCC meetings during this time of Covid-19 crisis, supplemented by regular telephone updates.

GUCU regards the proposal for regular JNCC meetings as very positive. However, GUCU also feel that the campus unions, have a crucial and basic role to play in the discussions at CIG meetings. We are far closer to the ground both in terms of our members, our students and

non-union colleagues with whom we have strong personal relations and work with on a daily basis. In addition, we believe it is vital in order to facilitate trade union health and safety officers in carrying out their statutory duties.

We have urged SMT to reconsider include in the membership of the GIG group, the UCU and Unison Health and Safety officers, who can bring their considerable knowledge and expertise around the issues that are under discussion.