

# Thank . . .



University and College Union

December 2020

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*We wish all our members very happy holidays and a peaceful new year*

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Thank you to all our members for what has been an extraordinary year! We began the year taking industrial action (again!) to tackle excessive workload, inadequate pay, inequalities at work, job precarity and pension cuts. We end the year still deep in a global pandemic that has not only exposed the structural inequalities in society that are too often obscured, but which has also laid bare the flaws in our commodified model of higher education. The support of UCU members throughout the year has been amazing – whether supporting our action or working tirelessly to support students, and each other, through the pandemic. Thank you for all you have done in 2020. We look forward to working together in 2021 – making sure that ‘Building Back Better’ isn’t a meaningless slogan, but is about building a public university system that genuinely puts people first.



**We Stand Together**

We stand together – UCU members at Nottingham make the case for change!

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*What members may consider as acceptable in a crisis – is not what is sustainable longer term. The ‘new normal’ cannot be a worse version of the ‘old normal’! Now is a time to ‘reset’ – to genuinely re-build something better.*

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## Working in a pandemic – what has it been like for you?

In November, several weeks into the semester, 501 UCU members responded to a branch survey about working conditions during the pandemic. Here we set out some of the results, and highlight the key issues in respondents’ own words. The responses need no further commentary. In 2021 the UCU branch will continue to work hard to tackle all the issues raised. If you completed the survey – thank you! Please be assured that every response has been read. What is presented here is a tiny fraction of the feedback you provided.

### The focus on teaching:

Changes in teaching have been dramatic. As a union branch we recognise that this was inevitable in a pandemic, in whatever ways teaching would be organised. This was acknowledged by many respondents. However, this has had a huge impact on colleagues.

The workload implications of developing new teaching materials were identified as a problem by 72% of respondents and adapting materials for online delivery was highlighted as problematic by 86% of respondents (a serious problem for 42% of respondents).

*(A) Major problem has been massive increase in work due to staff cuts. All our teaching assistant budget gone, temp/casual staff not renewed and voluntary redundancy. Student numbers held up so I now single handedly have responsibility for approx three times as many students as last year . . . The increase in marking load and pastoral care is unmanageable. I cannot do it all. Students are suffering. Family life suffering. This is the worst I've ever known it. I don't know what it's like in other departments but we are really suffering.*

*(B) I've been working 12 hour days consistently since March, with no end in sight. It's difficult to address, as many colleagues are similarly affected - reducing my workload would likely increase someone else's. There's a denial that voluntary redundancies have had an impact, and the whole situation is exacerbated by a failure of central systems (e.g. campus 'solutions').*

*(C) I have never ever had to work so hard in my life!*

*(D) I am doing all my teaching online this semester. I would like to add though that getting agreement from my school for online teaching has involved a cumbersome and emotionally draining bureaucratic process of application, refusal and negotiation.*

Similar issues were highlighted in discussions related to **administration**.

***“To fulfil current workload, I have been working an extra 16 hours across the weekends since the start of term. I have not taken a day of rest and I do not anticipate being able to have a weekend off until the end of term in December. I am also aware of other colleagues in worse-off situations than myself.”***

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Many respondents highlighted that new forms of electronic working (online teaching, Teams meetings, increased email traffic) were a significant source of additional workload – identified as a problem by 78% of respondents. However, of most concern was the workload associated with trying to ‘unpick’ problems caused by university IT systems. In the survey 78% of respondents indicated this was problematic, with a majority (53%) identifying this as a serious problem

(E) *A good deal of low level admin has been distributed to academics. I am awash.*

(F) *Campus Solutions overall is appalling and has meant a terrible burden on our exams teams. However, individuals within the Timetabling Team have been superb in sorting out those issues.*

(G) *The lack of working admin systems has been a major burden. It's week 7 and I am still encountering students who aren't correctly registered.*

(H) *Campus solution is not working - some students did not have a time table by week 4. The chaos of students turning up in different groups (and we are all teaching more seminars) made it so hard to make sure that they are not lost.*

Many respondents highlighted the extra time required to support students because anxiety levels have been high and support resources have been limited. These were identified as problematic issues by 75% of respondents. Colleagues did not resent providing this support – quite the reverse. Colleagues were eager to support students facing problems. However, the impact on staff has been significant.

(J) *Students are anxious. Their tutors are the ones they see everyday and they want to talk or need issues resolved that then you take on board as their tutor with the promise to try and sort it for them.*

(K) *I feel like I am close to tears a lot of the time. I sincerely hope the students do not sense this - as we are meant to be supporting them!*

#### **In summary . . .**

Staff at the University have moved mountains to make this Semester ‘work’ - in particular for students who have been badly let down by government. Faced with a crisis, staff have responded accordingly, recognising that additional work would be inevitable (45% of respondents believed workload was ‘acceptable’ given the situation). However, 72% of respondents described their workload as ‘unsustainable’ in the long term. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated their workload had increased by 30+%. Many of the costs have been borne disproportionately by those already disadvantaged in the labour market – women, BAME colleagues and those on precarious contracts. Making sure we genuinely ‘build back better’ will be UoN UCU’s goal in 2021.

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*Help us make a difference – forward this newsletter to a colleague who isn't in the union and suggest they join. It's easy online -*

[www.ucu.org.uk/join](http://www.ucu.org.uk/join)

*We stand together – and together we are strong*

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## A new year: UCU priorities in 2021.

The last year has been an extraordinarily difficult one – 2021 will be no less difficult. As a union we will continue to fight all the issues that challenge us in our working lives. In particular the branch committee will focus on our UoN UCU 'five priorities'. In the new year we will be setting out our demands in each of these areas – providing further details about what we want and about the campaigns we are building to make change happen.

To all members - have a well deserved break over the holiday period! We all need and deserve it. But come back in the new year and help us build something better – join the debates, get involved in the campaigns and help make our #fivepriorities everyone's priorities!

### @UoNUCU's #fivepriorities

1. **An alternative financial strategy that puts people and jobs first**
2. **Sustainable workloads and quality work**
3. **Safe workplaces and working practices**
4. **Equality at work – an end to structural racism**
5. **Full rights for precarious and casualised workers and an end to outsourcing**

