

Why Saying 'No' Is an Act of Solidarity

Dear UCU Members,

As we prepare to return to work, we know many of you are facing intense pressure to take on additional work due to the recent MARS redundancies, the introduction of Unicore, among many other things. You may be told that this is temporary, that 'everyone else is doing it,' or that you need to 'do your bit' for the team. We want to remind you of two crucial points:

1. The University Has Legal Responsibilities

The university is legally required to conduct preventative risk assessments (Business Unit Stress Risk Assessments) to ensure workloads are safe and manageable. The Branch UCU Workload Inspection has found that these are **not in place and the university is failing its legal obligations to protect its staff from stress**. These assessments should have been in place since 2022 and definitely before asking staff to take on more work. The university's failure to meet this obligation puts all of us at risk of harm.

Taking on additional work without these assessments is like walking into a building with a strong whiff of gas and being told, 'We'll sort out the gas safety certificate later.' It's unsafe, irresponsible, and unacceptable.

2. Saying 'No' Protects Everyone

The pressure to step in and 'help out' is immense. But every time we absorb extra work without clear boundaries, it sends the message that staff will always pick up the slack, no matter the cost. This makes it easier for the university to avoid its responsibilities and harder for us to fight for fair and sustainable workloads.

Saying 'no' is not selfish or uncollegiate—it's an act of solidarity. It protects your health and well-being, as well as that of your colleagues, by forcing the university to address the real issue: safe staffing levels and legal compliance.

How to Say No (and Why You Should) (please see attached script for further support).

If you're asked to take on additional work:

- Acknowledge the pressure: "I understand the team is under strain, but..."
- Be clear and firm: "I can't take on additional work without the Business Unit Stress Risk Assessments in place."
- Redirect responsibility: "The university must address staff shortages and ensure safe working conditions. This isn't something individual staff should be expected to fix."

We know saying no can feel uncomfortable, especially with coercive messages like "we're all doing our bit; work collegially in this school; it is only temporary." But the reality is that this

situation has been caused by management decisions, and it's their responsibility to fix it—not yours.

What to do if your workload is impacting your wellbeing?

If your workload is already above 100%, you should request an Individual Stress Risk Assessment (form available [here](#)) from your line manager. We understand the irony of having to take the time to complete another task, but it is important that if you are “experiencing excessive pressures” (to use the University’s words), these are recorded and acknowledged.

If you don’t know (or are unsure) what your WL% is, your line manager should be able to provide you with this information

If your unit does not have a workload model, or if it is below 100% but your workload stress is impacting your wellbeing, you should still request an Individual Stress Risk Assessment.

Don’t hesitate to get in touch with us or [your UCU rep](#) if you need further guidance on this.

What We’re Doing as Your Union

- **Demanding Immediate Action:** We are calling on the university to fulfil its legal obligations and conduct Business Unit Stress Risk Assessments without delay. We are urgently considering whether to report the university to HSE for failing its legal obligations and we will be in touch about this.
- **Protecting Members Who Say No:** If you experience pressure, coercion, or retaliation for refusing additional work, please contact [your UCU rep](#) immediately. We are here to support you.
- **Raising Awareness:** We’re sharing resources to help members push back against unsafe practices and call on the university to take responsibility.

Your Voice Matters

Saying no isn’t just about protecting yourself—it’s about standing together to ensure fair and safe working conditions for everyone. If you feel unsure about how to respond or need support, reach out to your UCU rep.