



Health and Safety Committee

Covid-19 Meeting

26 February 2021, 2.00pm

Minutes

Present Members:

Ms Fiona Ryland, (Convenor)

Dr Matthew Blain, Executive Director of Human Resources

Miss Hayley Boakes

Ms Sandra Bond

Dr Theo Bryer

Ms Sonia Buckingham

Miss Yasmeen Daoud

Dr Rachel Hadi-Talab

Mr David Ladd

Dr Matt Lougher

Mrs Hayley Ramsay, Deputy Head of Safety

Mrs Eira Rawlings

Mr Paul Stirk, Director of Safety Services

Ms Joanne Tapper

Dr Rob Wilson

Attendees:

Mr Ian Dancy

Dr Bettina Friedrich

Mr Richard Jackson

Mr Andy Minnis

Miss Fiona O'Farrell

Mr Duncan Palmer

Ms Tracy Pearmain

Prof Irene Petersen

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Ms Karen Smith

Apologies:

Mr Colin Byelong

Dr Alun Coker

Mr Max Hill, Director of Workplace Health

Part I: Preliminary Business

43 Minutes

43.1 The Health and Safety Committee (HSC) approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2021.

44 Matters Arising (Paper 6-30)

44.1 Regarding minute 39.9, arrangements for the Trade Unions to meet with Estates Division to discuss the prioritisation of ventilation, the Estates EM&I team had made several attempts to arrange a meeting to discuss ventilation and were still awaiting confirmation of a convenient date.

44.2 Regarding minute 39.11, to take to the PHAP the Trade Unions' request that UCL's guidance recommend that people be tested with a lateral flow test prior to return to work after isolation. The PHAP agreed with the guidance on the UCL website that if you have tested positive for Covid-19 within the past 90 days through NHS Test and Trace and been recorded as a positive case on the national system, you do not need to be tested again within that time period if you are asymptomatic. The PHAP stated that if you had been self-isolating for 10 days or more you shouldn't need to take a lateral flow test on return to work after isolation.

44.3 Members of the HSC commented that the 90 days ruling applied to PCR rather than lateral flow tests – clarification would be sought and reported back to the committee.

Part II: Strategic Items for Discussion

45 Covid-19 update

45.1 The Convenor summarised how the university was preparing for the government's recently-announced roadmap out of lockdown.

46 Covid-19 outbreak response

- 46.1 Mr Richard Jackson presented a paper detailing UCL's approach to managing outbreaks, the response to the outbreaks and the lessons learned. The HSC had requested that UCL inform a wider group of individuals (particularly, those who had been sharing a space) when a positive case had been identified. At the subsequent PHAP meeting, members expressed their concern over this approach. The minutes of the meeting on Thursday 28th January noted that 'concerns were raised about the potential risk of increased anxiety amongst the community, as well as potential mistakes being made between people who are actually contacts and people who have shared a space but are not defined as a contact. There is also a requirement to protect the identity of individuals who report symptoms or test positive and maintain the trust of those coming forward.'
- 46.2 To date UCL had identified 17 outbreaks, which had primarily taken place in student accommodation and Estates operated environments, with one case in a laboratory or associated administrative space. There had not been any identified outbreaks within teaching spaces.
- 46.3 Students living in student accommodation received a range of support for their welfare and to ensure compliance during periods of self-isolation. Staff working in these environments were informed of Covid-19 incidents so that protective measures were implemented to ensure their safety.
- 46.4 As a result of the investigations into outbreaks, the daily review and the weekly PHAP meetings had considered how to reinforce and strengthen the approach to the safety of staff and students. This had primarily been in reinforcing the necessary hygiene behaviours required to prevent the spread of Covid-19 on campus; social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing face coverings at all times. It had also resulted in UCL reviewing communications to staff and students to ensure that they were aware of the measures including the testing facilities available.
- 46.5 It was agreed that a separate email to staff reminding them of the importance of reporting a case of Covid-19 would be considered.

47 Quarterly performance report (Paper 6-32)

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47.1 Mr Andy Minnis presented the report of health and safety performance data for the first quarter of the academic year 2020/21.

47.2 It was noted that the Senior Management Team received key safety performance data in weekly and monthly reports produced by Safety Services.

48 Genetic Modification Safety Committee quarterly report (Paper 6-33)

48.1 Mr Andy Minnis presented a report of key updates and reporting performance for the past quarter.

49 Ionising Radiations Committee quarterly report (Paper 6-34)

49.1 Miss Fiona O'Farrell presented the report of providing key updates and reporting performance over the last quarter.

50 Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan (Paper 6-35)

50.1 Ms Karen Smith presented a paper providing an outline of the Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan which launched in January 2021. The plan outlined Workplace Health's approach through four objectives, each with a set of actions and measures. An annual report on the plan would be presented to the HR Policy Committee and shared with the HSC.

51 Items for discussion from the Trade Unions (Paper 6-36)

51.1 The Trade Unions requested a report on how the risks associated with staffing issues - exacerbated by the increased workload associated with the pandemic and the rise in student numbers - were being addressed.

51.2 The Convenor reported that £15 million had been released to faculties for staff recruitment and another £10 million was due to be provided. The Executive Director of Human Resources quoted from the Your Wellbeing staff survey which showed a consistently good level for reported mental wellbeing and workload management for a 30-week period (the Senior Management Team reviewed the results of the wellbeing survey every fortnight). It was reported that sickness absence days due to mental health reasons had been at a fairly stable level for the past year. The trade unions commented that the staff

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survey results couldn't show the level of wellbeing and workload at individual departments or locations.

- 51.3 It was agreed that a new review of workload would be undertaken, to be led by a UCL academic and to include members of the Committee.
- 51.4 The Trade Unions suggested that a risk assessment associated with stress and workload could be initiated. The Head of Wellbeing reported that after discussions with the UCL Institute of Mental Health it had been decided not to pursue an institutional risk assessment but to focus on helping staff with mental health and wellbeing initiatives now.
- 51.5 The Trade Unions requested a report on the measures in place to ensure that decisions about increasing student numbers were taking account of space constraints, particularly given that there will be an expectation of social distancing in autumn term 2021.
- 51.6 The Chief of Staff to the Chief Operating Officer reported that UCL was being cautious and had put a number of mechanisms in place to address social distancing in its approach to timetabling.
- 51.7 The Trade Unions welcomed the recent installation of screens in the Chemistry building and asked that screens be placed at all reception desks.
- 51.8 The request was declined as each reception area had individual requirements, but it was agreed that a process for requesting a screen would be established to include requests from contractor staff.
- 51.9 The Trade Unions recommended a review of areas on campus where outdoor seating might be an option. Concern was raised at the lack of social distancing by students that had been observed in the Refectory Café. It was agreed that these concerns would be addressed and an update brought to the next meeting.
- 51.10 The Trade Unions asked whether reducing the number of people onsite to 25% of capacity and introducing the 1 in 4 rule, where all gatherings must take place in a room four times the size of the group, had now been applied to all spaces.
- 51.11 The Chief of Staff to the Chief Operating Officer reported that the rule had been instigated mainly to make people think about how they use spaces on campus with regard to social distancing. With very little face to face teaching

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happening in this and in next term applying the rule to all spaces was not seen as necessary.

- 51.12 The Trade Unions requested that the key worker disturbance allowance which ended in June 2020 be reinstated, alongside a clear policy on who is classified as a key worker.
- 51.13 The Executive Director of Human Resources responded that with the safety measures and risk assessments in place – the efficacy of which was reflected in the low number of reported cases of Covid-19 infection on campus - key workers did not face additional risks necessitating the reintroduction of the allowance.
- 51.14 The Trade Unions asked for clarification on the systems in place at UCL for monitoring which staff are clinically extremely vulnerable or living with people who are, in the light of the government's recent announcement that more people in this category will be asked to shield.
- 51.15 The Convenor requested that any problems with the application of UCL's policy covering the clinically extremely vulnerable should be reported to The Chief of Staff to the Chief Operating Officer. As part of the process staff are asked to provide confirmation that they fall into this category.

52 Status update of DSE assessment compliance (Paper 6-37)

- 52.1 The Head of Safety presented an update on the compliance status of Workstation (DSE) assessments issued to staff and post-graduate students.
- 52.2 All faculties continued to have a low uptake of DSE self-assessment. The percentage changes were universally low and four faculties had had no movement at all since the last report.

53 Any other business

- 53.1 The Committee warmly thanked Mr Andy Minnis of Safety Services for his significant contribution to health and safety at UCL and wished him well in his new role.

The meeting finished at 3.35 pm

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Jon Blackman

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