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FE ALERT!

Further Education News - March 2020

The official briefing of the
**UNISON SCOTLAND
FURTHER EDUCATION BRANCH
(USFE)**

BRANCH RESPONSE TO COVID-19

UNISON Further Education Branch Officers, stewards and our full-time official have all been working hard to defend the health and safety rights as well as the interests of our members in relation to job security and pay protection since Monday the 16th of March at this unprecedented time of public health emergency.

On Monday of last week, only one college in the sector had announced closure in response to the threat of COVID-19. By Friday of last week, and following a number of interventions and representations made to senior teams up and down the country about

government public health advice, all bar one college was closed to students and the majority of staff and/or had only skeletal staffing arrangements in place for staff initially being considered essential to the transition to homeworking for the college communities or for sanitation/childcare or estates work. These were predominantly in services such as ICT, Finance, HR, cleaning/janitorial/nursery. We made a number of interventions on behalf of members in these services to ensure they were at home unless there was an essential/urgent need for their attendance at work and we worked with college management teams to advocate the use of safe systems of work and Government and NHS specific COVID-19 advice in the very few cases where it was genuinely unavoidable for staff to attend their workplaces, reiterating the need for homeworking in all but the exception of FE roles.

Further direction to Scottish employers from the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon earlier this week on the definition of essential work was very much consistent with our position that college buildings should be closed and that homeworking should be the default position for all. Unfortunately, representations still had to be made as late as yesterday, despite that Government advice, to ensure that one or two non-essential members of staff across the sector were removed from danger and sent to work from home.

Last week, no small part of our efforts was also focused around protecting our members working in colleges but employed by outsourced service providers for cleaning, catering and security to fight to gain assurances on job security and pay protection at such a difficult and uncertain time for all. These workers are the lowest paid in the sector and work in 23 different companies across 12 Colleges. At the time of writing, we have managed to secure pay and job security (albeit, short term with a variable [picture across the sector) in most cases. We anticipate further work to be done to secure jobs and pay in the longer term.

Our Branch position is that, in accordance with Government advice, no non-essential workers should be asked to attend work. We also do not endorse members being called upon to perform duties outwith their substantive roles in order to fulfil work deemed essential in the eyes of employers. We anticipate that very few roles (if any), within FE will meet the Government definition of essential workers and therefore expect homeworking or special leave for the overwhelming majority of workers. However, the health and safety of any essential workers who may be called upon by exception should also be considered paramount by the employers and treated accordingly. If members are in any doubt about whether or not they are essential, they should speak to us before agreeing to undertake that work.

We are also working on a series of NJNC joint circulars with Colleges Scotland at the moment to ensure an agreed, consistent and sectoral approach to payment of staff, homeworking arrangements and special/annual leave considerations. The majority of our members will be working from home where possible already and pay protection has been secured for the duration of the crisis for staff across the sector. Also, notably, those who are at home without the possibility to work, will also be paid as normal.

Any member with an outstanding issue of which Branch is not already aware or already working on can email us at help@unisonfe.scot.

COLLEGE THREAT TO YOUR ANNUAL LEAVE

All members should have already received the pay circular and agreements on homeworking and the treatment of annual leave will follow when agreed and available.

UNISON believes that this is not a time when our members wish to consider annual leave, especially as the overwhelming majority are

unable to take it due to the current circumstances. We have received a number of complaints already suggesting that some colleges are opportunistically trying to deny members the option of cancelling any leave booked in advance of and coinciding with the crisis. Many of you are reporting back to us that you would like to take this leave at a safer time in order that it can be used properly. This is, we believe, a national matter and we are working with Colleges Scotland to try to reach agreement on many of these issues. We will update all of our members accordingly. **In the meantime, we would urge you to resist any attempts to push you into booking/using leave that coincides with the current ongoing emergency.**

HOW TO CONTACT THE BRANCH

Your first point of contact is always your local UNISON steward.

If, for any reason, you are unable to contact your local steward and you require a speedy response, you can email the new branch and we will aim to respond to you within 24 hours.

If your case or issue is an emergency, then you should phone the branch directly on the number shown below. If nobody is able to answer your call, you will be automatically redirected to a mobile number where you should leave a message and one of our lead officers will call you back ASAP.

1	CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STEWARD
2	E-MAIL THE BRANCH
3	PHONE THE BRANCH

**BRANCH ADDRESS, TELEPHONE
NUMBER & E-MAIL ADDRESS**

**UNISON Further Education Branch
UNISON Glasgow City Branch
84 Bell Street
Glasgow
G11 1LQ**

help@unisonfe.scot

0141 553 1034

**BUILD YOUR UNION AND RECRUIT A
MEMBER !**

As ever, if you know someone who is not a

member, encourage them to join. If they are not a member they do not have a voice in the big decisions ahead of us.

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/join/index.html>

Thanks for reading and if you have any suggestions or questions, or anything you want us to look into, be sure to let us know (through your local steward).

**UNISON Scotland Further Education Website:
<http://www.unison-scotland.org/service-groups-and-sectors/further-education/>**



