



The University of Manchester

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Dear David

I am writing in response to your note sent to me on behalf of the UMUCU Executive Committee and UCU Branch members dated 7 April 2020. Unfortunately there was insufficient time during our meeting on 17 April to go through all the points you have raised and therefore I agreed to provide a broad response to any outstanding in writing as set out below.

### **General**

We recognise that we are facing a wholly unprecedented situation with a global pandemic (COVID-19) that is a significant threat to life and well-being and is likely to result in a major recession and to present real financial challenges in the coming months. We are also facing huge uncertainty about the severity and duration of these impacts, both of which are likely to be significant. The priority for the Senior Leadership Team has always been the safety, security and health and well-being of our staff and students. We recognise that this is a difficult time for all our staff and especially for those colleagues whose roles rely upon external funding and those on fixed term contracts due to end in the next few months. We are all having to adapt to the changes brought about by COVID-19 and in particular new and different ways of working and it is impressive how hard our staff have worked to get teaching on line quickly, to maintain essential services and to continue to work from home.

Like other HE Institutions in the UK, the University is facing significant financial challenges and we will need to respond quickly and flexibly if we are to ensure our financial sustainability. We are already taking actions to mitigate potential losses but the reality is that we will probably need to make rapid and radical changes to our University and the way we operate.

We have been actively involved in discussions with Government on measures to support universities and, in particular, to cover the shortfall in research funding which universities like ours is facing.

Our contracts of employment do not stipulate that staff should be working from home and while we would prefer to have a fully open and accessible campus we must follow the Government's advice and we believe that staff see the need for this in such unprecedented times. We are now considering what returning to work actually means particularly if social distancing, for example, remains in place for some time to come. We will continue to follow Government guidance on this and it is likely that there will be an impact on how we teach our students, how staff manage their research and how we undertake our daily work. It is therefore highly likely that some of the adjustments we have in place in response to COVID-19 will remain with us; some on the grounds that they are a better way of working.

The measures we have taken to date have been considered and taken quickly reflecting the fast evolving situation we have been faced with and have been made with the full approval of the Board of Governors which has given the Senior Leadership Team delegated authority in recognition of

the exceptional circumstances. We are holding fortnightly updates for the Board of Governors and Senate and now with the Heads of Schools and yourselves, UNITE and UNISON. The Senior Leadership Team is also holding a series of Zoom open meetings for staff.

In preparation for the Government's advice on non-essential travel and working from home, we rapidly adjusted our sickness absence and special leave policies and procedures to provide additional support for staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities, and gave two further days annual leave at Easter and were quick to reassure staff that we would continue to pay their salaries whilst the University campus is largely closed and they are working from home. We are also giving those staff delivering essential services an extra £75 per week in recognition of the importance of the work they are doing. We have developed a series of frequently asked questions for staff which are updated on a regular basis and we have provided advice and guidance to staff on how to work safely at home. Whilst we will be furloughing a number of staff under the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) we will be topping up salaries to their current level so no individual staff member will be detrimentally affected. We recognise that for some staff with caring responsibilities, working from home is difficult and so we encourage those staff to speak with their line manager to discuss the possibility of taking furlough leave or being flexible with the hours they can work. We have received positive feedback from staff on the changes we have made to these policies and procedures and for the leadership the senior team is demonstrating during these unprecedented times.

## **Jobs and Pay**

I have already informed you that we have achieved the number of Voluntary Severance applications required for the reduction in posts in Radiochemistry in the Wolfson Molecular Institute Centre. We have taken the decision to pause the Student Experience Programme and consultation on the proposed people and structural changes across applications and admissions and student marketing and recruitment.

You have raised a number of points about extending fixed term contracts and providing underpinning funding. This is a complex area with our research being funded through a number of different funding bodies. We also know that our research activities are often not fully funded, thereby meeting the full costs represents an additional financial commitment to the University. We are facing a significant reduction in the number of international students and home/EU students joining us for the next academic year and this will have a serious impact on our finances. We are therefore unable to provide extensions to existing fixed term contracts where there is no funding and the contract would normally have come to an end. Neither are we in a position to extend the redeployment period as a consequence of having paused staff recruitment except for strategically important roles. I appreciate that this reduces the pool of available alternative roles for staff whose contracts are coming to an end and this is regrettable but unavoidable in the current circumstances.

We are looking at whether we can furlough any of our research staff but this is a very grey area and we need to determine which roles are not publicly funded.

I understand that Andrew Mullen, Deputy Director of HR, has written to you separately about Graduate Teaching Assistants.

## **Home Working**

We have provided staff with information and guidance on how to work safely at home and as comfortably as possible. We recognise that this isn't an ideal situation for all and we are encouraging staff to take appropriate breaks from screen time and from being seated. We are not supporting staff coming into work to access screens or chairs as this would contravene the Government's advice on non-essential travel. We have advised staff who are registered disabled to contact the Disability Advisory Support Service for advice and support which may include the purchase of equipment. Working from home is a new way of working for a large proportion of our

staff and we recognise that this can be challenging when coupled with caring responsibilities and we expect our managers to take a flexible approach to working hours in these circumstances.

I am not aware of any problems with Duo but it would be helpful if you could provide more information and examples of where this isn't working effectively.

### **Online teaching**

As I said at our meeting on 7 April I was not aware of messages going out to students before staff and hopefully this is not or no longer the case. We are also conscious of issuing communications on a Friday and unfortunately as this is a fast moving situation it has been unavoidable though wherever possible we will seek to avoid this. I hope that your concerns about marking deadlines, examination boards and performance rights have been dealt with but do come back to me if this is not the case.

### **Research**

Research expectations will be managed within the context of the current working environment. It is easier for some than others to continue with their research whilst the campus is closed. I wasn't aware that staff were being discouraged from taking research leave next year and ask that you provide me with examples of where this has happened.

### **Goodwill**

We are proud of the way our staff have responded so positively to the reality of the current COVID-19 situation. However, and as I have said previously, it would not be appropriate to rescind strike pay deductions as we cannot recover the loss of activity, the dispute has not been resolved and the majority of our staff chose to work and had to endure, on some occasions crossing picket lines whose behaviour was, on occasions, unacceptable to their colleagues.

### **Other**

Of those staff who took strike action in February, 40 staff were listed as wanting to opt out of their pension payment. Unfortunately pension deductions were made as no forms had been received by payroll to the contrary. The payroll team quickly identified the error and contacted the 40 individuals concerned by email to raise this directly with them. Of the 26 who contacted the payroll team only two confirmed they did want to opt out. Of the others who responded, over 26 stated they did not know what the opt out meant and did want to pay their pension contribution. They have been paid correctly as had the remaining 300 staff who went on strike and who opted to continue to pay their pension contribution.

We have already scheduled fortnightly meetings with yourselves, Unite and UNISON and the President and Vice-Chancellor will attend as many of these as she can alongside other members of the Senior Leadership Team.

Yours sincerely



Karen Heaton  
Director of Human Resources