

# UNITE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

MARCH 2020 – COVID-19 UPDATE

Unite branch reps, along with other campus union reps, met with senior HR executives on Tuesday to discuss our concerns regarding the University's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Since the meeting, the University has closed its libraries and retail outlets, and has been reducing operations to essential services. HR have clarified that you should stay at home if any of these conditions apply:

- 1 - You have symptoms and need to self-isolate
- 2 - Someone you live with has symptoms and needs to self-isolate
- 3 - [You or someone you live with has a pre-existing health condition as identified by Public Health England](#)
- 4 - You have to care for dependents whose normal care arrangements have ceased due to the impact of Coronavirus. This includes children who are home because of unplanned school closures\*

You must inform your line manager, but **you will not be penalised** for self-isolating during this crisis, and you will continue to receive full pay. If you do need to self-isolate, you will not be required to provide a sick-note, nor will you be asked to give further evidence of your need. If you run into any difficulties when discussing self-isolation with your line manager, let us know and we will assist with this.

\*University guidance states that annual leave "should be used to cover non coronavirus related childcare - for example taking time off to look after children during scheduled school holidays."

## **PAY FOR CASUAL WORKERS (University, Student Union, and Unicus)**

Unfortunately, the University's commitment to full pay during closure or self-isolation does not yet extend to casual workers at the University, the SU, or at Unicus outlets.

Unite and the other trade unions are pushing for a commitment on continued pay for casual staff, but HR were unable to provide this commitment at Tuesday's meeting. They have promised to update us on their policy for casual workers by the end of tomorrow.

We understand that this provides little reassurance to our colleagues on casual contracts, but we have been promised a decision by tomorrow.

In the meantime, we would like to hear from as many casual workers as possible. If you are a casual worker, please help us understand the issues you're facing by completing [this staff survey](#).

## **AMRC**

We have learnt tonight that the University's plan to close all buildings except for essential services does not apply to AMRC. We will be seeking answers on why this is the case in our meeting tomorrow afternoon.

Apologies for the brevity of this update - we are still looking into this. Please get in touch if you have concerns about guidance at AMRC

## **GOING FORWARD**

The University has committed to meeting with Unite and other campus unions twice a week, to discuss their response to the ongoing crisis. These meetings will happen on Mondays and Thursdays, and will provide us with an opportunity to raise any issues or questions staff may

have. Our current priorities are guarantees on pay for casual workers, clarity on the guidance for workers living with dependents, and information on what Risk Assessments have been carried out in areas where staff are still working.

Unite will continue to provide members with regular updates on our meetings with HR, and we would encourage members to pass these updates on to non-member colleagues. We are happy to speak to any concerned worker, member or non-member.

**Contact details for Unite reps can be found at the bottom of this email**

## HELP AND SUPPORT

*Claiming benefits:* To prepare for the eventuality of the University not being able to pay casual staff long-term, we would recommend you read the government's advice on coronavirus and claiming benefits. Some casual staff may be eligible to access Universal Credit or other benefits: <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

*If you're worried about being able to get food or medical supplies,* our friends at the community union ACORN have set up a coronavirus community support programme which you can access here: <https://acorntheunion.org.uk/corona/>

*If you're worried about struggling to pay your rent,* Shelter [advises](#): "you should speak to your landlord or letting agent as soon as possible, as they may be willing to agree a repayment plan. Some people may also be able to claim benefits like universal credit to help with housing costs... Paying off rent arrears should be a top priority before any other non-urgent debts."

*If you're worried about struggling to repay debts,* the Citizens Advice Bureau has advice here: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/help-with-debt/dealing-with-your-debts/work-out-which-debts-to-deal-with-first/>

## UNITE CONTACTS

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## FURTHER GUIDANCE

[NHS Advice](#)

[Official Government Advice](#)

[University of Sheffield Guidance](#)

Unite the Union  
Guidance