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## City of Sheffield Branch

June 2020

We hope that everyone is keeping as fit and well as is possible in these extremely difficult times.

Whilst the Branch Office remains closed please be assured that we are still working on your behalf.

If you need to contact us please either email [lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk) or contact Convenors or the Branch Caseworker directly, details can be found on the last page of this newsletter.

Our Twitter page is being updated frequently so why not follow us @UNISONSheffiel1, as is UNISON's National website where you will find the latest advice on the Coronavirus situation, to access this please visit [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk)

Stay safe and keep up the amazing work!

*Camilla*

**Camilla Sherwin**  
**Branch Communications Officer**

### **Keeping In Touch With Members**

It is important that as a Branch we keep in touch with our members and the most effective way to do this is via email, not only is it quicker but it will also cut down on postage costs.

To do this we need to make sure that we hold up to date email addresses for everyone. If you have received this bulletin but your colleagues, who are UNISON members have not, then ask them to either email [lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk) with their preferred email address and permission for us to use it, or go to [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk) and click on 'My UNISON' where they will be able to log in and update their membership record.

# Sheffield City Council

Convenors are in contact with Sheffield City Council and daily zoom meetings and conversations are taking place with Corporate HR and Senior Officers as we strive to deliver and maintain as many key services as possible, working in a safe and effective way, whilst also looking to reintroduce services.

A number of key services have continued to operate during this crisis and the staff involved fully deserve all of the praise and recognition that they have received.

Many of these key services have been operating on reduced numbers as some employees with pre-existing illnesses are required to shield at home and others have been off work due to contracting the virus or isolating.

Discussions have been taking place about the potential for temporarily deploying staff, whose service is not currently in work, into other key services in order to bolster staff numbers and maintain service delivery. Of course, this would require Staff to have the appropriate knowledge, training and support to enable them to undertake a new role, but would also require their agreement to a temporary move.

The issue of PPE has obviously been an issue of regular discussion. UNISON has been at the forefront pressing for adequate supplies of appropriate protective equipment to be provided to employees at risk of contracting the virus.

Whenever and wherever members have raised questions/concerns about PPE these concerns have been raised with employers.

Hopefully all of these concerns have now been addressed, but if not please contact branch with details and we will raise your concerns

The council has agreed to continue providing free parking for SCC staff who are required to attend work in the city centre and who use their cars to get to work. This is reviewable, as an increasing number of service areas will be returning to work, probably on limited numbers, over the coming weeks. Passes will be required so discuss this with your manager.

For members whose service has not been operational discussions are taking place on how employees can be reintroducing back into a workplace, but this is far from straightforward as the Health and Safety of all concerned has to be the primary concern. This of course requires a considerable amount of planning and Risk Assessing, in which UNISON are involved, in order to meet the strict government guidelines, particularly around social distancing.

Discussions have been taking place with SCC regarding employee's annual leave. For employees unable to take all of their annual leave entitlement e.g. due to service delivery requirement or health issues, untaken leave can be carried forward. If your job role is in a service not currently in work the council position is that staff should still be booking and taking leave and therefore the annual leave policy would apply.

**Rob Gascoigne**  
**Joint Branch Secretary**

# SCHOOLS

## DEPLOYMENT OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

As you aware Sheffield City Council instructed its maintained schools not to open on the June 1<sup>st</sup> and strongly advised academies to do the same. That shouldn't however deter schools from preparing to open when it is safe to do so.

**Risk Assessment** - by now you should have seen your workplaces risk assessment (RA). It is likely to refer to working in "bubbles" of up to 15 children. Each bubble should have the same member(s) of staff working with them daily in order to mitigate against the spread of Covid19.

- **If you haven't seen your schools RA, ask to see it as a matter of urgency. Please also ask if it has been sent to UNISON as per our request.**

Unfortunately some schools have been telling our members they don't have enough teachers to cover the "bubbles" so TAs will be deployed as the lead - **this is not acceptable.**

**TAs Level 1 and 2** - TAs 1 and 2 should never be left with a class of children. The fact that the "bubbles" may contain 15 pupils **or less** does **not** mean your head or SLT can claim this isn't a class.

**TA Level 3** - TA3s can cover classes/groups for a short period. To reiterate, the bubbles should have the same teacher and TA allocated to them each day, which means **the short term nature of cover TA3s can provide does not allow them to take a class/group of children until the end of term.**

In addition UNISON has been told by a number of our members that TAs will only be expected to childmind – not teach. Not only is this disrespectful of the professional work TAs undertake on a daily basis, often with the most vulnerable and/or challenging pupils, it sanctions a 2 tier education system. Many of you will be parents and UNISON is sure you wouldn't advocate some children being "taught" and some children being "childminded", either as a parent or practitioner.

**HLTAs** - HLTAs can cover classes but they shouldn't be used for weeks on end to replace a teacher.

**PPA Cover** - PPA cover should be undertaken by an HLTA or teacher. No TA below HLTA status should cover PPA.

If your school can't accommodate the number of pupils in line with the expectation of support staff's job descriptions, they can and should limit the numbers of pupils attending.

If you are put under any pressure to take a class, group or "bubble" that doesn't have a teacher present, please contact UNISON as soon as possible by emailing [lqbranch@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:lqbranch@sheffunison.org.uk)

**Lisa Smith – Education Convenor**  
**Rod Padley – Education Convenor & Joint Branch Secretary**

### **Moving Home**

Moving or moved home?? Then don't forget to update your details with UNISON, either by emailing Branch Office [lqbranch@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:lqbranch@sheffunison.org.uk) with your details or go to [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk) and click on My Unison.

## **A word from the Branch Chairperson....**

Well, we are now in June and our normal lives seem increasingly like a distant memory.

Nothing is certain anymore, and the future is unclear.

Covid 19 is leaving a trail of disaster across our communities and we have all been touched by it some way. Many will have sadly lost a family member, friend, neighbour or work colleague.

Many UNISON members are in the front line in helping the most vulnerable in our communities, and in keeping vital services running. Our thanks go out to everyone involved in the continued battle against Covid 19.

As we start to come out of lockdown the questions about the Government's handling of this crisis have increased. From questions about the timing of the lockdown, lack of preparedness in the NHS, the PPE scandal in our care homes, delays over effective track and trace, the Dominic Cummings fiasco, the rush to bring more students back into schools and the likelihood of a second wave of infections.

However we look at it, despite the tremendous efforts of the overwhelming majority of the British people, we have a death rate that exceeds other comparable countries, and in some cases vastly exceeds the death rates in those countries.

There are important questions to be answered by Government, and they need to be held to account for the decisions they have taken. Proper scrutiny of their actions is vital, and that is a cornerstone of the democratic process.

They also need to urgently learn lessons from those countries that have much lower death rates, given the virus is not going to disappear anytime soon. Learning the right lessons will keep more of us safe and the death rate down.

UNISON has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that our families, friends and communities are as best protected as they possibly can be. Nationally and locally we will continue to raise your concerns with the multitude of employers covered by this Branch. We are having to organise differently in the world of Covid 19 but remain committed to helping our members.

So if there are things we need to know about in your workplace and virtual workplaces please let us know.

You are our eyes and ears.

If we don't know about an issue then we can't do anything to help address it! Please use the contact details in this newsletter to keep us informed of the important issues in your work life.

If you are interested in becoming a UNISON rep please get in touch. We are always on the lookout for new reps, especially at difficult times such as this. Full training and mentoring is provided.

So, thank you for reading this, stay safe and be kind to others

**Ken Curran - Branch Chairperson**

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What if I now need to return to my regular workplace?

Employers should make every reasonable effort to enable staff to work from home in the first instance but if it's no longer possible to work from home, then before you can return to your normal workplace your employer should undertake a risk assessment to make it 'COVID-secure'.

A risk assessment is what an employer must do to keep their workers and anybody else who may use their workplaces, safe from harm and must be 'adequate', 'suitable and sufficient' and not a cursory inspection.

A risk assessment identifies what hazards currently exist or may appear in the workplace. It defines which workplace hazards are likely to cause harm to employees and visitors. COVID-19 may cause you harm so employers must therefore put in place measures to prevent its spread.

Employers must identify all those for whom they have a duty of care, whether they are staff or service-users, who are classed as being either at most or moderate risk from COVID-19. For example, research has shown that Black workers are at increased risk of infection, serious illness and death through COVID-19.

We are concerned about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black workers. Our sector-based risk assessment advice includes guidance on taking account of the increased risk to Black staff.

## Should we social distance in the workplace?

If you have any coronavirus symptoms, regardless of where you are working, you should stay at home and self-isolate.

Government advice is that if you can't work from home and it's absolutely necessary to travel go to work, people should stay two metres apart from others.

Your employer should have steps in place to achieve this 'social distancing' where possible, and ensure staff are provided with, and instructed in the regular use of, the appropriate hygiene facilities.

Your employer should also:

- ensure the workplace is regularly sanitised
- provide you with appropriate [personal protective equipment](#)

Email the branch office if you are concerned your employer is not following the guidance.

## What if I don't feel my workplace is safe?

UNISON believes that our members should never be in a situation where they might endanger themselves and others in the course of doing jobs.

Putting you in that situation is potentially a breach of health and safety law and may spread coronavirus to people in high-risk groups.

As a last resort, when faced with a dangerous working environment which cannot reasonably be averted, every employee has the right not to suffer detriment if they leave, or refuse to attend their place of work (or take other appropriate steps) in circumstances where they reasonably believe there is a risk of being exposed to serious and imminent danger (section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996).

Although this is very much a right of last resort, the context of a situation will be key on whether refusing to return to work or any other steps are appropriate. This means that an employee cannot automatically refuse a reasonable instruction to return to work without a good reason.

If you feel you are being put at risk it is crucial to get advice and discuss the situation with your UNISON representative.

## Do I need Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

This depends on what you do, where, and with who you work. You are more likely to require PPE if you are providing direct care to service users, or cleaning premises contaminated by COVID-19.

For other groups of staff other measures such as [working from home](#), hand hygiene, [social distancing](#) and shielding those most at risk are most effective.

## Frequently Asked Questions cont...

The best protection against COVID-19 is, if possible, to remove yourself from any sources of infection. That is why UNISON have campaigned to make employers comply with social distancing guidelines.

Sometimes, keeping two metres apart is not be practical, for example, when you are looking after children in schools or caring for vulnerable adults. This will mean some form of PPE may be required. Our [PPE guide](#) provides further advice on this.

It's important that PPE is concentrated on those who need and are trained in its use.

Unnecessary and incorrectly used PPE may put yourselves, colleagues, family and friends at additional risk. The virus lives longer on plastics than ordinary clothes, so if not correctly used and disposed of items such as masks can become vessels for spreading infection.

### **If you need protective equipment (PPE) to do your job**

If it is absolutely necessary that you go to work, it's vital your employer considers all measures to keep you safe. Where measures such as social distancing and workplace adjustments have failed or are insufficient your employer will need to consider other measures. These include providing you with the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to do your job safely.

UNISON has asked government ministers to resolve problems with the supply of equipment and to provide clearer advice about what you need to protect you at work.

There is a 24-hour employer helpline to report any shortages in health and social care providers in England.

### **Do I have to go to work if my children can't go to school?**

If you need to stay at home to look after your children, you are legally entitled to unpaid dependant leave. However, many UNISON members will be entitled to paid dependant leave due to agreements negotiated with their employer.

Our advice is that you should explain your situation to your employer, and we would expect your employer to be reasonable in accommodating your circumstances.

See what your contract says or contact the Branch Office if you are unsure what your rights are.

## Contacting UNISON

Whilst the Branch Office remains closed we are unable to take telephone calls, however staff are working from home so if you need advice please email

[lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:lgbranch@sheffunison.org.uk)

Alternatively members can contact the following people directly:

### **SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

#### **Corporate Lead Secretary**

Rob Gascoigne (Tues-Thurs)

[rob.gascoigne@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:rob.gascoigne@sheffield.gov.uk)

0788 184 1171

#### **PEOPLE Portfolio**

David Padley

[d.padley@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:d.padley@sheffunison.org.uk)

Carol Ring

[c.ring@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:c.ring@sheffunison.org.uk)

0740 776 0594

Camilla Sherwin (Tues-Thurs)

[camilla.sherwin@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:camilla.sherwin@sheffield.gov.uk)

0753 000 6441

#### **PLACE, Resources and Policy, Performance and Communications**

Angela Hall

[a.hall@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:a.hall@sheffunison.org.uk)

Joanne Crooks

[j.crooks@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:j.crooks@sheffunison.org.uk)

0788 184 6280

#### **Schools (including Academies)**

Rod Padley – (Tues-Thurs)

[r.padley@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:r.padley@sheffunison.org.uk)

0771 073 7885

Lisa Smith

[l.smith@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:l.smith@sheffunison.org.uk)

0788 184 7044

### **PRIVATE & VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

Diane Mitchell (Mon-Thurs)

[d.mitchell@sheffunison.org.uk](mailto:d.mitchell@sheffunison.org.uk)

0790 803 7531