

Dear members

UKSU is receiving messages of concern from staff about returning to work at their offices. UKSU has been told by some members that their line manager has advised them to return, otherwise they will be considered for retrenchment as part of Project Renewal.

It is important to note that COVID working arrangements and Project Renewal are two different unrelated processes. This message addresses this and includes a brief update on the negotiation meeting held yesterday.

Members have been cautioned before about engaging with rumours about Project Renewal in particular.

RETURN TO OFFICES

Thanks to the proposal by Professor Moshabela, the unions have recently been given a seat on the Return to Campus Task Team. This will enable clearer and quicker information to unions and also allow for the direct tabling of questions and concerns before this Task Team.

Although the country is now on level 1, the regulations still state that those “who are able to work from home must do so”, with return to work being phased in, based on health protocols to mitigate the risk of infection. The protocols include rotation to allow for social distancing.

At this time, there is no change and those who are over 60 and / or those with comorbidities should continue to work from home, along with all those who can do so. Line managers should be explicit about what necessitates a return to one’s office.

UKSU would like to acknowledge and express its appreciation to its members who are essential services staff, who have worked on campus throughout this past year.

PROJECT RENEWAL

Very little has been shared with the unions, apart from the initial meeting during 2020 when the unions were addressed by the VC on his proposal for the project that he was taking to the University Council. The unions have asked for the Terms of Reference but this was refused by the VC.

The Act states that when an employer “contemplates” operational requirements dismissals, the employer is obligated to consult. In particular the Act requires the employer to “engage in a meaningful joint consensus-seeking process and attempt to reach consensus on: appropriate measures (i) to avoid the dismissals; (ii) to minimise the number of dismissals. UKSU’s view is that it is time to engage with the unions.

UKSU understands the need for sustainability of the institution but at the same time, believes that unions and all staff are important stakeholders and engagement and communication needs to improve. Vesting knowledge of the project in the most senior staff only, is a template for non-acceptance of any recommendations. To obtain buy-in by staff, there needs to be engagement with unions and improved communication, without which the problem of fear and real negative perceptions of management’s intentions are exacerbated. The sad part at this stage, is an apparent lack of transparency.

Is this going to be all about operational staff, what about ineffective senior leadership, is this going to be addressed? Why did this happen, needs to be answered in order to make sure it does not continue or re-occur at some later stage.

UKSU does not have an issue with the rationale for the project but it does have an issue with the manner in which it has been conducted so far, with regard to transparency, openness and communication.

UKSU's understanding at this time, is that the project is at the investigative phase with sectional reviews taking place and it may take until the end of 2021 or even beyond to finalise this phase. On this basis, it is clear that threats of possible retrenchments are not imminent.

In terms of linking this to return to campus work, is mistaken. *Last In First Out* is applicable for any dismissal for operational reasons (retrenchments), it is stated in the Conditions of Service. This makes it clear retrenchments cannot be linked to or necessitate a return to work, especially by those who may be over 60 and / or have comorbidities. Any such suggestions in this regard should be ignored. If your line manager uses Project Renewal as a warning / threat / suspicion / coercion to make you come to work, please advise UKSU urgently. This is seen as intimidation of subordinates and needs to be reported.

REMUNERATION NEGOTIATIONS

At the meeting, management tabled a zero % salary increase for 2021 in response to the union's demand of 7%. The unions advised management to return with an actual offer at the next meeting to be held on Monday.

The other 8 items forming part of the Remuneration Issues will be discussed further at the next meeting.

Regards
UKSU Executive