



JUSTICE UNIONS PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

To: LTE Group Board (by email)

1 June 2021

Dear LTE Group Board Member,

UCU dispute with Novus over health and safety measures

I am writing as Chair of the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group (JUPG) about the current dispute between Novus and the University and College Union (UCU) over inadequate covid-safety measures in prisons and young offenders institutions during the Covid pandemic. The JUPG comprises over 100 cross-party Parliamentarians campaigning on behalf of workers in the Criminal Justice System, and we have been shocked to learn about this increasingly bitter dispute, which we understand has so far led to two days of strike action at 49 establishments.

We have heard a number of alarming reports from UCU, including intimidation of their health and safety representatives by Novus, covert recording and exploitation of private union meetings and even fake social media accounts set up to discredit UCU. The union informs us that, in response, their members at Novus have overwhelmingly carried a vote of no confidence in CEO John Thornhill. However, we are told the Board has now involved itself in the dispute by making unfounded allegations against union representatives and commissioning an investigation without reference to any formal procedures, which UCU describes as counter to natural justice. This stands in stark contrast to the collaborative approach to working with UCU adopted by all the other prison education providers, and we are at a loss to understand why Novus has taken such a confrontational attitude towards the union at this dangerous time for prisoners and prison staff.

We urge the Board to listen to UCU's concerns in full and make every attempt to find a solution to this dispute without the need for further industrial action. We ask you to put staff health and safety first, withdraw any threats of action against UCU branch representatives and work with the union to address staff concerns in good faith. The JUPG stands willing to assist in resolving this dispute in any way, and I am keen to meet with you virtually to discuss how this may best be achieved. Please direct any response to the JUPG secretariat, details below.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Saville Roberts', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Liz Saville Roberts
Chair, Justice Unions Parliamentary Group