

UCU Report for University Safety Committee, October 2026

Recommendations to Newcastle University from Newcastle UCU (Health and Safety, October 2026)

1. **Carry out a specific stress risk assessment for all future restructures.** The four rounds of redundancies and policy changes count as a major workplace change, and the Branch expects the university to assess the foreseeable strain this places on remaining staff, as Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires. This assessment should focus on unit-level hotspots.
2. **Review the university's stress risk assessment.** It has not been reviewed since 5 June 2023. The blanket assessment cited by the PVC Education in response to concerns about the Leading Edge Curriculum is not fit for purpose when policy changes keep adding to workloads.
3. **Shift from wellbeing programmes to prevention.** The university should act on the causes of work-related stress, chiefly workload.
4. **Monitor work-related stress directly.** Future staff surveys should ask explicitly about work-related stress, its symptoms and stress-related illness, using the TUC stress survey template or the HSE Talking Toolkit.
5. **Share and negotiate workload planning.** Workload planning and allocation models should be transparent and negotiated with the Branch at institution and unit level, with staff wellbeing at their centre.
6. **Respect legal limits on working hours.** Allocations should not push staff beyond the legal maximum, and excess hours should be exceptional rather than built into a year's allocation.
7. **Follow the Student Minds recommendation.** The university should keep up continuous dialogue with teaching staff and monitor their workload while the curriculum transfer takes place.
8. **Show that managers are trained for their duty of care.** The current risk assessment devolves responsibility to managers and supervisors. The Branch asks for documentation showing that everyone with this responsibility has been trained and is competent to reduce work-related stress.
9. **Acknowledge the link between overwork and sickness absence.** People Services refused at the JNC on 13 May 2026 to accept a correlation between absence and work-related stress. The Branch also notes that the new sickness absence policy has not been formally agreed with the trade unions.
10. **Use student-to-staff ratios to predict and prevent stress.** Sickness absence monitoring should be cross-referenced with unit-level SSRs, compared against

Russell Group averages from HESA data. High-SSR units would then receive targeted occupational health support, stress risk assessments and resources.

11. Extend suicide prevention to staff. The university should explain how the recent HE taskforce on student suicide prevention applies to staff, aiming for parity of provision. The Branch proposes extending the principle of RIDDOR reporting to suicide and attempted suicide.

12. Learn from the Percy Building fire doors. Estates should set out what lessons were learnt after new fire doors on the first to third floors opened across office doors and had to be reinstalled, and what will prevent this in future installations. Members would also welcome an apology from Estates for the disruption.

Restructure. Lack of monitoring and preventive measures for work-related stress.

The impact of the 4 rounds of redundancies (Voluntary Severance/Redundancies and possible Compulsory Redundancies) and policy changes (Leading Edge Curriculum, pastoral tutoring, cuts in research time) continues to alarm our membership about the added workload this has created on an already excessive workload. Members are concerned about the impact of work-related stress, particularly for units and faculties that have faced increased workloads following colleague redundancy. Overwork is recognised to cause work-related stress, and consequently stress-related illness.

Stress is consistently the top health and safety concern for safety reps, according to the findings of the biennial TUC Union health and safety reps survey 2022-23. Over half of reps (59%) cited this as top five concern. TUC research indicates that the biggest causes of stress at work are:

- Workload (74%)
- Cuts in staff (53%)
- Changes at work (44%); and
- Long hours (39%)

Mental health issues are the number one reason given for sick days in the UK, with work-related stress, depression or anxiety resulting in more than 16 million lost working days in 2023-24. The latest Health & Safety (HSE) figures show that 776,000 workers were suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2023-24, of which 300,000 were new cases. And a March 2025 TUC analysis of official statistics shows the number of days lost to work-related ill-health, including stress, depression, and anxiety, has sky rocketed by a third since 2010, reducing economic output by £22 billion in 2023.¹

¹ Labour Research Department, *Health and Safety Law 2025* (London: LRD, 2025), 137-56.

Stress, depression or anxiety are more prevalent in public service industries, such as education, health and social care and public administration and defence. Professional occupations such as healthcare workers and teaching professionals that intersect with multiple public service industries show higher levels of stress when compared to all occupations. HSE 2025 data estimated that 178,000 education workers suffered from work-related ill health (new or long-standing), of which 53% were stress, depression or anxiety.²

Similar results are reflected in the Newcastle University sickness absence data. Between October 2024 to May 2026, roughly 16,888 working days were lost under the category of 'mental health', equivalent to 76 FTEs. Moreover, the NCL Occupational Health and Wellbeing Review Report (2025) reveals a total of 111 management referrals & assessments for 'mental health' and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) consultations data (July 2025-April 2026) discloses 38% of consultations were for a 'mental health enquiry' (142 out of 380 enquires). Out of the EAP enquires, some of the primary issues concerned: anxiety/worry (68); low mood (22); stress (18); complex mental health (16); burnout (5); pressure/stress (4); conflict in workplace (4); work-related burnout (2); work life balance (2); redundancy/disciplinary (2); bullying/harassment (2).³

The data above reveals prevailing employee stress hotspot patterns with end of term peaks driven by marking loads, admin, data entry, and cumulative fatigue from long stretches of work and intense operational pressures. Core contributing factors are: workload volume (relentless administrative tasks, lesson planning, and marking); inability to disconnect (expectations or pressure to manage workload outside of standard working hours [e.g. evenings/weekends]); cumulative exhaustion (the gradual erosion of staff resilience over extended teaching blocks without adequate recovery windows). This is reflected in the data from the NU Voice: Wellbeing and Workload Survey (2023).⁴ Across the university as a whole, only 5.64/10 'could meet the requirements of their job without regularly working excessive hours'. FMS with its retrospective 'reporting' approach to workload had the highest disparities. The three worst scores (out of ten) were SELLL in HASS 2.52, Psychology in FMS 2.63 and SNES in SAGE 2.65.

The past restructure has seen many colleagues having departed which has contributed to further mounting workloads for remaining colleagues (academic and PS) with situation worsening and exacerbating the contributing factors listed above.

² HSE, 'Education statistics in Great Britain, 2025,' accessed 17 September 2026, <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/education.pdf>.

³ NCL Health and Wellbeing Sub-Committee, 16 September 2026.

⁴ NU Voice: wellbeing and workload survey (2023), https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/hub/orgdev/Documents/Colleague%20Surveys/Faculty%20Report%20-%20Finance%20Hub_NU%20Voice_wellbeing_workload.pdf#search=Faculty%20Report%20%2D%20Finance%20Hub%5FNU%20Voice%5Fwellbeing%5Fworkload.

The Branch notes that under Regulation 3 of the 1999 Regulations, employers must make a 'suitable and sufficient' assessment of health and safety risks, which applies to foreseeable psychological and physical strain caused by a high workload during a restructure.⁵

The Branch does not consider the university has made adequate and competent steps in preventive measures to meaningfully monitor excessive pressures of work, added workloads, and ultimately, work-related stress.

We acknowledge the hard work that Occupational Health and Wellbeing have undertaken in 'wellbeing' programmes and other individual, lifestyle health promotion plan. However, these plans only treat symptoms and do not prevent the causes of work-related stress and illness.

Engagement Survey, August 2026. Inadequate monitoring of stress.

After 14 months, the university delivered on a workload survey that was promised in the June 2025 dispute settlement. On 2 September 2026, at a consultation between the Branch and the Head of Organisation Development and the Head of People Services about the Engagement Survey, management chose to ignore suggestions for the survey to follow questions provided for by the TUC's work-related 'stress survey template' or the HSE's 'talking toolkit: preventing work-related stress'. Despite a section on mental health and wellbeing, the items avoid directly asking about the work-related stress, its symptoms and stress-related illnesses that the university ought to be monitoring, actively preventing and mitigating.

The Branch notes the inadequacy of the survey to meaningfully monitor work-related stress with no question on the survey explicitly mentioning work-related stress.

To try gain a fuller picture of the issue, the Newcastle University Unison Branch have resorted to launching their own Workload and Stress Survey (September-October 2026) because of the rise of workplace stress at the University.

Inadequate workload planning and allocation models.

Workload has long been an issue in our Branch and the university as shown in both the NCL Workload and Wellbeing Survey (2023) and the NCL UCU Workload Report (August 2021).⁶ The Branch has had various members get in touch over high workloads in general, and the increases and pressures created by Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC), Research Excellence Framework (REF), and other organisational changes.

⁵ The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3242/regulation/3>.

⁶ NCL UCU Workload Report (August 2021), <https://ncl.web.ucu.org.uk/files/2021/09/Newcastle-UCU-Workload-report-Aug2021.pdf>.

In a response to UCU regarding the LEC's workload implications, the PVC Education pointed to the blanket university Stress Risk Assessment. We believe the culture of piecemeal policy-driven structural increases in our workloads renders such a generic Risk Assessment not fit for purpose. Policy makers cannot externalise responsibility for the stress of overwork they produce.

As the we begin the new academic year, the Branch has had reports from members of inadequate workload planning and allocation models. We have reports of staff workloads as 130% or more.

Any workload above 48 hours a week on average (normally averaged over 17 weeks) and not 'opted out' is in breach in breach of the Working Time Directive, not just the maximum in the contract, which should only be in exceptional circumstances according to the policy, not set as a year only workload allocation.⁷

As the recent feedback from the mental health charter Student Minds (students and staff) recommended, Newcastle University ought to be paying greater attention to 'maintain continuous dialogue with teaching staff and monitor their workload during curriculum transfer process'.⁸

The Branch demands that clear and transparent workload planning measures are shared and negotiated, at both institution and unit levels, which have colleague wellbeing at their core.

Review of stress risk assessments.

A major restructure counts as a notable change in the workplace; employers are legally required to review and update risk assessments when old ones are no longer valid.

A poorly managed change (e.g. restructure) is one of the six HSE Management Standards risk areas for a reason. The university should provide specific stress risk assessment to determine more fully the extent and causes of work-related stress (particularly at unit level hot spots). When organisations are in transition, stress levels can rise quickly. Conducting or reviewing a stress risk assessment during periods of change demonstrates proactive management rather than reactive firefighting later.

The Branch demands a review of the stress risk assessment that has not been reviewed since 5 June 2023.

Within the current stress risk assessment, responsibility/duty of care is devolved to managers and supervisors. The Branch asks for transparency on the documentation of this training in H&S for all those who have this responsibility, as ultimately, if

⁷ UK Gov, 'Maximum weekly working hours,' last accessed 6 October 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours/calculating-your-working-hours>; Workload Planning Policy, Working Time, 2.1, last accessed 6 October 2026
<https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/docs/HR%20Policies/Workload%20Planning%20Policy.pdf#search=workload%20planning%20policy>.

⁸ NCL Health and Wellbeing Sub-Committee, 16 September 2026.

Occupational Health devolves that responsibility, it must ensure that those with that duty of care are appropriately trained and competent to mitigate work-related stress.

Revised sickness absence policy and meaningful monitoring (SSR data).

Our members are enquiring to the Branch about what dialogue has taken place with People Services who deflected the link between overwork and stress in recent negotiations on sickness absence (JNC, 13 May 2026). Even though overwork and work-related sickness was raised during the JNC, HR responded by refusing to accept any correlation between sickness/absence and work-related stress, stating stress could come beyond the workplace.

Although the university has published the new sickness absence policy, it has not been formally agreed by the trade unions.

The Branch demands that there is an improvement in meaningful monitoring of sickness absence data to be informed by student-to-staff ratios (SSRs). High SSRs at unit level directly drive unmanageable workloads, chronic stress, and severe burnout among staff. SSR data can fundamentally shape sickness absence policy by serving as a predictive indicator and preventive measure of workplace stress and operational risk. Average Russell Group SSRs for specific subject areas could be collected from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data and cross referenced with Newcastle high-SSRs to map and predict exactly where mental health or stress-related absences are most likely to spike. High-SSR units could receive targeted occupational health measures, stress risk assessments, and dedicated resources.

Suicide prevention and extension of RIDDOR principle.

Our members are enquiring about what consideration has the university made regarding the recent taskforce on suicide prevention for students in HE and the implications for staff mental health. The Branch notes a parity of provision of mitigation between staff and students.

The Branch proposes that the principle of RIDDOR be extended to suicide prevention and attempt. It is noteworthy that the Hazards magazine pointed to several high-profile cases of suicides within Higher Education.⁹

Percy Building, new corridor fire doors. Lack of competence.

In June 2026, members in SELL have notified the Branch of the lack of consideration and competence on behalf of the Estates in installing the new fire doors on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors of the Percy Building. The fire doors had to be reinstalled as they

⁹ 'We won't die waiting: Union action call on work-related suicides', Last accessed 5 October 2026, <https://www.hazards.org/suicide/waiting.htm>.

opened across employee office doors, thereby trapping people in their offices if there were a fire.

The installation and reinstallation of the doors disrupted everyday operations for members in the Percy Building. The Branch would like some clarity into what lessons have been learnt from this mistake and what steps have been made to ensure prevention and safeguarding that it would not happen again on future fire door installations of fire doors.

Members in the Percy Building would welcome an apology from Estates for the disruption to operations and time-wasting.

Prepared by

Joe Redmayne (06/10/2026)

Newcastle UCU Health & Safety Representative