

Joint University/UCU Committee

20/16 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 14.00 remotely, via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor [*Chair*]
Dr Ian Bland, UCU Representative
John Brady, Director of HR
Professor Claire Collins, Senate Representative
Dr Rob Jubb, UCU Representative
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor

Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

It was noted that the Vice Chancellor would be acting as Chair for 2020-21.

20/17 Memorandum on Disclosure of Interests, Terms of Reference and Risk

The Committee noted the memorandum and members were asked to disclose any interests.

20/18 Membership and Terms of Reference 2020/21

The membership and terms of reference of the Committee were noted.

20/19 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2020 were agreed as a correct record. It was, however, noted that an action regarding the addition of information to the University website to raise awareness of domestic abuse during lockdown was missing from the table of actions at the end of the document.

20/20 Matters Arising

a) Minute 20/02 *Right of appeal against redundancy*

The Director of HR confirmed that all information requested had been provided to Dr Schroeter.

b) Minute 20/04 *Hay Review of Grade 9 non-professorial staff*

The Director of HR confirmed that all information requested had been provided to Dr Schroeter.

c) Minute 20/04 *Grievance policy review*

It was noted that Dr Jubb would be taking forward the grievance policy review, which HR were currently working on.

d) Minute 20/04 *Request for observer status at Council*

The Vice Chancellor advised that they were awaiting a formal response from the President of Council regarding the possibility of the President of Reading UCU attending Council meetings as an observer.

Action: Vice Chancellor

The UCU Regional Official joined the meeting

20/21 Report of the Vice Chancellor

It was noted that the Vice Chancellor's report to Senate would typically be received under this item, however many of the relevant matters were already included on the agenda.

20/22 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU reported on a number of items and the following was noted:

- A query had been raised in relation to the University not subscribing to the real living wage, as opposed to the national living wage. The Director of HR advised that this matter had been raised previously and had been the subject of full discussions by Staffing Committee, UEB and Council. It had been decided that the University would not adopt the real living wage but was satisfied with the range of other arrangements in place that fully demonstrated the remuneration and benefits package. Individual queries were occasionally received but no collective responses had been presented, with the Staff Forum and RUSU content with the current arrangements. It was highlighted that this would be considered further in relation to the Race Equality Review.
- UCU stated that they were conscious of higher levels of anxiety currently within the staff community. UCU representatives were advised that Health and Safety Services were skilled in delivering work-related risk assessments for teams which would shortly be promoted to line managers and the Leadership Group. The support available through the University's Occupational Health Service was also highlighted and it was noted that the Wellbeing webpages had received positive feedback and a significant amount of access. Additionally, Mental Health First Aid training had been well received by colleagues and UEB had agreed funding for its further dissemination. UCU welcomed these developments, especially in relation to raising awareness with line managers.
- UCU would shortly be running a survey of members in order to improve understanding of current opinions in relation to various Covid-19 related matters. This would only be open for a week and UCU agreed to share the outcome.

Action: President of Reading UCU

20/23 Update on the local UCU claim

It was noted that, as a result of other negotiations over the summer, it had not been possible to progress the local claim as quickly as had been hoped. The agreement had been reached in principle and was now just subject to UCU ratification, with which the UCU Regional Official did not anticipate any issues. The Committee noted UCU's intention to ballot members regarding the claim by the end of November, with the recommendation that this be accepted; the University would then be informed of the outcome. The Director of HR highlighted that, following completion of the ratification process and local ballot, it would be necessary to revisit some of the timelines included. It was also noted that three suggested titles for sessional lecturers had been shared and UCU were asked to inform the University of their preference.

Action: President of Reading UCU

The Committee considered when to initiate discussions on the element of the claim regarding the gender pay gap, noting that it had previously been decided to consider this after the summer. The UCU Regional Official expressed willingness to engage in dialogue with the University regarding this, however noted the need to be mindful in balancing capacity as there was already a programme of work required in relation to the Phase 1 proposal. The benefits of finishing the first stage of the claim before moving on to the second were noted. It was agreed that the President of UCU would advise the University when they wanted formal negotiations to begin.

Action: President of Reading UCU

It was noted that the gender pay gap was a national matter and that best practice elsewhere in the sector should be reviewed when considering how to address such challenges. Professor Collins (Senate Representative) advised that, as Chair of the Women@Reading network, she was keen to be involved in these discussions. The Director of HR confirmed that a final draft of the University's Gender Pay

Gap Report would be available for the next meeting, which could form a basis for discussion. In the meantime, members agreed to review any documentation available to them which could aid future discussions.

Action: all Committee members

Items brought forward by the University

20/24 Update on Phase 1

It was noted that a number of Committee members had previously met to review data in relation to Phase 1; the University was cautiously optimistic that a tiered pay cut would not be required, however this would be revisited closer to the time. The following actions from the agreement were noted:

- The Director of HR had submitted a paper to UEB regarding pinch points on the grade structure where there could be differential issues e.g. colleagues potentially earning less than those on the grade below; UEB had agreed modifications in such areas.
- It was confirmed that, if staff were going on maternity leave and the qualifying pay cut would have impacted the earnings up to the period of leave, then the material benefits would be calculated had a cut not been applied.
- It was confirmed that, should it be necessary to make any redundancies, any redundancy payments would be based on actual pay rather than the reduced pay.
- In relation to pensions, in the unfortunate circumstance of a death in service during the period of the pay cut, it had been agreed that dependants would receive death in service payments as if pay had not been reduced.
- The Director of HR proposed establishing a joint working group to take forward the commitment to addressing the issue of workload. It was noted that it would be necessary to consider any wider issues emerging from the Phase 2 work as part of this and to be clear regarding the membership and timescales for this specific group.
- A range of proposals had been agreed regarding enhanced participation and a paper on this would shortly be outlined to UEB. UCU highlighted that this included access to papers of Senate and Council. It was noted that Council papers could contain commercially sensitive material, however it had always been possible to request to read these in person in the office of the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary.
- The Voluntary Redundancy scheme was currently underway, closing on 20 November 2020.
- An interim review on the Phase 1 situation had taken place as planned and the outcome was well known.
- Further information would be released over the next few weeks including in relation to the opportunity to purchase additional leave, apply for early retirement/reduced hours etc.
- Arrangements for staff rewards would be reviewed to identify any scope for further changes.

20/25 Update on Phase 2

Following a meeting with the Vice Chancellor and Director of HR, the President of Reading UCU confirmed their preference to continue to be involved in the expanding Phase 2 plans. The Committee was advised that communications received from UCU members had included a variety of differing views and feedback was continuing to be sought in order to establish a consensus of views from members. Feedback from departmental representatives regarding the Phase 2 documentation had highlighted concerns regarding lack of detail in the consultation documents and that decisions might have already been made. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that this was a genuine consultation with the principle of finding a more efficient way to work without having to make redundancies; there was much work still to be done and no decisions had yet been made. The Senate Representative advised that frank discussions had taken place as part of meetings between stakeholders and members of Senate and it was hoped that the queries raised would inform the next stage of the process.

The Vice Chancellor asked whether the President of Reading UCU was content to use this Committee as a forum to share Phase 2 developments and they confirmed that it was dependent on the timescale. While UCU did not suggest establishing a separate consultation group for frequent Phase 2 discussions, they requested that lines of communication be kept open and to be kept informed of any developments in good time. The Vice Chancellor advised that a reserve Senate was as ever timetabled for January – if any items were put to that meeting the President of Reading UCU would be given sight of these and a meeting could be held if required.

20/26 Delivery of the Autumn Term

The UCU Regional Official welcomed the continuation of regular dialogue between the University and UCU colleagues in relation to the position on face-to-face teaching. It was observed that there was a great diversity of views from among UCU members and the University community more widely; however, the national UCU position was emphasised – that HEIs should not be continuing with face-to-face teaching in the context of the current pandemic and that UCU continued to believe the safest approach was to move teaching online.

It was confirmed that the University was prepared to move more, or even all, teaching online if it became necessary, although it was hoped that this would not be the case. It was noted that this was likely to reduce the workload of staff rather than increase it, as many staff were currently providing both online and face-to-face teaching. Following a RUSU survey, the University believed that the preference of the majority of students was to stay and receive some face-to-face teaching, although UCU responded that they had been producing joint statements with the NUS in relation to moving teaching online. University representatives noted that contact tracing had shown that Covid-19 was being spread socially rather than in classrooms, however UCU debated whether it was possible to make an accurate statement on the matter. It was agreed that the control measures in place (e.g. compulsory face masks) had resulted in the current low risk of classroom transmission.

20/27 Social Media Policy

It was noted that the University was keen to reach a resolution in relation to finalising the social media policy. The President of Reading UCU advised that they had liaised with the Head of Digital Campaigns and Engagement and had suggested that the policy be split into different sections for students and staff. An amended version of the policy was yet to be received; the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary agreed to ensure this was sent to the President of Reading UCU, who agreed to respond within a couple of weeks.

Action: Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary and President of Reading UCU

20/28 Major projects for information: ECMWF

UCU was informed of updates in relation to bringing ECMWF to the Whiteknights Campus. As a result of Brexit, it was unknown whether ECMWF would be able to continue to host researchers on a number of EU funded projects, which had implications for the size of the building required. The University had sought to encourage the government to make a formal bid to host these EU funded projects. Papers shared with the recent Senate had detailed the benefits this would provide, including opportunities to increase joint research income and contribute to work on climate change and environmental sustainability. [Section 43]

It was noted that there would be additional costs occurred in relation to the relocation of Art. UCU suggested that any communications regarding the project make a clear case about the value of the project to the University and its strategy. The Vice Chancellor asked the Secretary to send Dr Bland and Dr Jubb the ECMWF papers which had recently been shared with Senate.

Action: Secretary

Items brought forward by Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU advised that some members had been unhappy at the postponement of the Professorial Annual Review, despite the confirmation that any money would be back-paid.

University colleagues advised that this decision had not been taken lightly; this process was taken very seriously, despite being neither a contractual or legal obligation, and therefore would only be undertaken if it could be performed properly. It was added that this postponement was consistent with decisions taken regarding other salary reviews. UCU were invited to forward any queries in relation to the postponement to the Director of HR.

Routine items

20/29 Personal Titles – outcomes from 2019-20

The Committee received figures in relation to outcomes from the 2019-20 Personal Titles process. It was noted that these were also considered by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee. It was highlighted that there was an error in the tables provided, whereby some headings should have read 'gender' rather than 'ethnicity'. It was noted that the disaggregation of the BAME group would be discussed in relation to the Race Equality Review, which would be making recommendations regarding this. It was suggested that, in order to improve the balance of outcomes, the process could be considered to start earlier than the point of application and therefore further consideration be given to the opportunities or coaching provided to candidates in advance of this.

20/30 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee received the report from the Staffing Committee. It was noted that, during the previous year's planning round, Heads of School and Function had been asked to specify how they supported staff welfare. A variety of responses had been received and the Committee had encouraged the sharing of good practice. It was also noted that the Staffing Committee had recommended the additional closure days over Christmas 2020 which had now been approved.

20/31 Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

20/32 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 2 February 2021