

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

22/01 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 8 February 2022 at 2.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)

Mr J J Brady

Professor C Harty

Dr K Henderson

Mr S Hunt

Professor F Hwang

Professor H Parish

Mrs C Rolstone

Mrs J Rowe

Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Dr Laville and Mr Knowles.

22/02 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021 were approved

Arising from the minutes:

21/09 Membership, Terms of Reference and Disclosure of Interests

The Committee noted that in light of the retirement of the current Director of Human Resources a paper to discuss updating the terms of reference will be deferred until the incoming Director of Human Resources is in post.

Minute 21/18 (21/04, 20/13): Staff Wellbeing

The Committee noted that three one-day “Mental Health Champion” workshops for the UEB and Leadership Group were delivered by Dawn Grout in the Autumn Term. There are in the region of 25 members of the UEB and Leadership Group who have yet to complete the workshop and steps are being taken to run further workshops this term or the summer term.

Minute 21/21: Probationary Procedures for Non-Academic and Academic Staff

The Committee noted that the current published information on Academic Probation has been updated and now makes reference to the way in which potential impacts of COVID will be considered.

Minute 21/27: Annual Leave Purchase Scheme

The Committee were provided with a breakdown of applications by Grade and by job family (academics v non-academics). A summary is provided below.

Academic	4
P&M	60
G1-5	42
Male	25
Female	81

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) indicated that in future years it is likely that it will be possible to run this scheme through Trent, the University's HR system.

22/03 Recruitment Challenges

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of staff at the University. She stated that at the start of the pandemic, staff turnover reduced. This has been driven in part by the effective closure of some University services and the use of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough), combined with other colleagues most probably putting off making decisions about their employment and careers during such an unsettled time.

She explained that as the University has moved through the stages of the pandemic, this has been replaced by a higher turnover of staff and some specific recruitment and retention challenges across the University. These included:

- colleagues re-assessing self-employment opportunities;
- withdrawing from the labour market through retirement;
- an increase in remote working, flexible working and part-time working or relocation;
- with the private sector becoming more buoyant after COVID there is a high demand in some sectors for talent and this has led to job opportunities for professional services colleagues who are more able to move outside of the HE sector;
- losing candidates if the recruitment process takes too long.

She reported that work is underway to address some of these challenges and put forward some further suggestions that are being considered. These included:

- The use of bonuses – a “golden hello” one-off bonus for new colleagues or a “golden handcuff” to encourage the retention of colleagues, particularly those in fixed term / project roles;
- The use of market supplements (the University already has a market supplement policy);
- Advertising and appointing within the contribution points where appropriate;
- Making greater use of the apprenticeship scheme, and the creation of trainee roles;
- Increasing the use of secondment opportunities across the University.

A useful discussion took place where the following issues were raised.

Colleagues recognised the occasional limitations of appointing roles within the University’s grading structure and acknowledged that advertising within the contribution points and/or making use of market supplements are two potential ways for addressing these recruitment challenges.

The importance of keeping a record when using contribution points / market supplements was noted as this provided objective justification for paying above the normal grade (from an equal value point of view).

The Committee discussed the increase in remote working and flexible working, and the University’s commitment to hybrid working evidenced by the launch of the Smart Working policy. The Committee also discussed the University’s commitment to maintaining working time on campus, and the local flexibility afforded to Heads of School and Function when allowing remote working. It was reported that there were a few examples where it had been agreed that staff could work 100% from home. The Committee acknowledged that some roles could be more easily undertaken from home than others.

Whilst it was recognised that for some of these initiatives there was limited evidence to demonstrate success, the Committee supported the use of these interventions where appropriate.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) for the paper and welcomed the initiatives being considered to address some of the recruitment and retention challenges.

Action: The Committee Secretary to generate a brief report to the UEB highlighting the recruitment challenges facing the University and outlining the initiatives being considered to address these challenges

22/04 Relationships Policy

The Director of Legal Services informed the Committee that the University has been working for a number of years on developing:

- a) Staff Relationships Policy, setting out the circumstances in which staff must report personal relationships they have with colleagues; and
- b) A Staff/Student Relationships Policy, which sets out that staff must report all personal relationships (as defined in the policy) with students, and in some cases prohibits such relationships.

She stated that whilst it is understood that some colleagues may consider these policies to place unnecessary restrictions on them, the primary purposes of the policies are to:

- protect students from improper conduct by members of staff (it is a welfare and, in its broadest sense, a safeguarding issue);
- protect staff from accusations of improper conduct by providing a mechanism for reporting, so that appropriate safeguards (for staff and students) can be put in place; and
- protect the University from complaints, claims and disruption.

She confirmed that UCU had reviewed both policies and sought the views of the Committee.

Members of the Committee provided the Director of Legal Services with feedback in respect of both policies. They found the covering note extremely useful as it clearly outlined the main purpose of these policies – to protect staff, students and the University.

Colleagues sought clarity on a number of points including the use of certain phrases, the tone of the policies, the need to keep records and the storage of data, and the reference to not tolerating any form of harassment. The Committee also discussed the definition of student, views on the reporting of relationships, and the definition of “personal relationship”.

The Committee agreed that having robust policies in place provided the University with an important safety net. It was agreed that it was important to carefully consider how these policies are promoted and communicated to the staff and student communities so that they are fully engaged and understood the need for these policies.

The Director of Legal Services thanked the Committee for their views and confirmed that final comments from UCU, the Staff Forum and RUSU would now be sought.

22/05 Academic Staffing in a Research Intensive University – Proposals for Changes to Academic Recruitment and Planning Processes

Professor Zaum, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) asked the Committee to note the analysis and ideas presented to UEB in respect of examining trends in academic staffing in the university compared to trends in comparator institutions, and comment on the specific proposals relating to recruitment processes and panels.

The analysis showed that:

- Significant growth in student numbers has not been accompanied by concomitant growth in staffing.
- Growth in academic staff numbers has almost exclusively (92%) come from growth in teaching intensive (TI) staff, in contrast to more balanced growth in comparator institutions.
- The pattern of growth has had implications for both the staffing profile and the research intensity of the university, and is challenging in light of the university's strategic objectives for excellence (in particular research excellence).
- We are increasingly subject to (successful) attempts by other universities to "poach" strong researchers, especially major grant winners.
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Specifically, he sought the view of the Committee on three proposals, namely:

- 1) that as part of the sustainable planning process, all Schools should develop a staffing strategy to identify the staffing profile they need to meet their objectives over the five-year period;
- 2) that T&R should be the default for new appointments and for T&R replacement posts; and
- 3) that to ensure that the "R" in academic posts aligns with the wider strategic priorities for research of a School and the University, a Research Dean or PVC (R&I) should review relevant aspects of role descriptions and adverts for T&R and RI (Grade 8 and above) staff and be represented on the appointment panels.

The Committee provided the following feedback:

- The inclusion of a staffing strategy that included development needs was positively received. Up to this point the planning process has been finance driven;

- A staffing strategy would help Functions to better align themselves with the mid to long term needs of Schools;
- Broad support for the long term strategy to strengthen research excellence across the University;
- A recognition that the University has a well-established Personal Titles process that rewards both research excellence and teaching & learning excellence;

The Committee discussed the challenge for Heads of School if TR is the default for new appointments and for T&R replacement posts. Does this mean Heads of School will not be able to appoint a new academic post as teaching-intensive (TI)?

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) stated that Heads of School should continue to have the autonomy to lead and take decisions locally and if a School had sound strategic reasons for making a new TI appointment then this would be supported. He stated that the proposal is in part to send out a clear message to colleagues that Reading is a research intensive University.

Members of the Committee debated the potential implications on teaching capacity if more appointments are TR and fewer appointments are TI. On the one hand it implies the University is doing less teaching when the evidence suggests we are doing more teaching. It was recognised that there are resource / capacity considerations.

In respect of the proposal for a Research Dean or PVC (R&I) to review relevant aspects of role descriptions and adverts for T&R and RI (Grade 8 and above) staff, and be represented on the appointment panels, a question was asked about the need to include a Teaching and Learning Dean on appointment panels. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) agreed to discuss this matter with the Pro-Vice Chancellors (Education and Student Experience).

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) thanked the Committee and confirmed that the proposals would be fully developed and would take on board the views of the Committee before being taken to UEB for approval.

22/06 Reward Committee arrangements

The Committee considered a paper setting out the views of the Science & Life Sciences Reward Committee in relation to the Reward Committee process. Members of the Science & Life Sciences Reward Committee have debated whether the current arrangements should be reviewed and Professor Harty, on behalf of the Committee, sought the advice of the Director of Human Resources. It was agreed that as a starting point the views of the Staffing Committee should be sought.

The main issues discussed by the Science & Life Sciences Reward Committee related to:

- Having one Reward Committee a year instead of biannually, in line with the Personal Titles process.
- Considering merit-based promotion cases (research Grades 6 to Grade 7) under the Personal Titles route.
- In respect of merit-based promotion cases, to consider whether Schools should provide a contextual statement. It was felt that a contextual statement would provide more objectivity and boundaries when judging cases.
- The Committee felt that it would be helpful to be provided with more information about the decisions taken by the other Reward Committees. This would enable the Committee to gain a better understanding of the overall University reward processes and ensure a more consistent approach.
- An acknowledgement that Schools have different approaches for promoting cases for staff reward and recognition, and for bringing forward cases to this Committee. The Committee wondered if further guidance might be available to ensure a more systematic process.
- Consideration of a word limit to the Rewarding excellence-contribution pay scheme form, along with additional boxes for staff to detail clear evidence and how they have gone above and beyond.

The Committee discussed the relative merits and limitations of the current arrangements and agreed that a review of the process was a sensible way forward.

There was an acknowledgement that some issues were worthy of discussion e.g. reviewing the arrangements for merit based promotion of G6 researchers to G7 – and others less so e.g. having one Reward Committee a year.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) reported that the HR Advisory team was currently considering progression routes and could incorporate a review of the Reward Committee process into this piece of work.

The Committee agreed that the process needed to be consistently applied across all Schools and Functions and supported a review of the current arrangements by the HR Advisory team. It was further agreed that the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) would bring a paper back to a future Committee once this piece of work was completed with their findings and recommendations.

Action: The HR Advisory team to lead a review of the Reward Committee arrangements and to bring a paper back to a future meeting of the Committee

22/07 Pay and pensions update

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on matters relating to pay, and summarised the current position in respect of the USS scheme. Highlights included:

- The UCU has notified the University of industrial action consisting of strike action from Monday 14 February to Tuesday 22 February 2022. These dates coincide with reading week and the first part of school half-terms, and as such seem an odd tactical choice. With that in mind we anticipate little real disruption, but the Contingency Operations Group has re-convened to monitor the action.;
- This follows three consecutive days of strike action on 1-3 December 2021. A total of 198 staff declared participation in at least one of the three strike days. The action was monitored by a Contingency Operations Group chaired by the PVC (International). Disruption was minimal with only a very small number of classes cancelled.
- The industrial action also includes a continuous period of action short of strike (ASOS) extending to 3 May 2022. As things stand this is restricted to predominately working to contract. There has been no impact as yet, but we are alert to the likely escalation of ASOS as the dispute continues.
- Nationally, the UCU conducted re-ballots in those institutions where they had initially failed to reach the statutory 50% threshold. A small number (about a quarter) of these re-ballots achieved the threshold.
- The University's position vis-à-vis the national pay bargaining process via the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) remains unchanged.
- A formal review of the University's financial position with colleagues from UCU and the Staff Forum was held on 19 October 2021. At that meeting the University was able to confirm that student recruitment and other factors impacting the University's financial position were such that it would now be possible to provide a pay award to all staff for the 21-22 period.
- The level of pay award was equivalent to that agreed through the national pay bargaining process (1.5% on all spinal points, with some bottom-loading applicable to the lowest paid staff).
- The UEB recently approved a small revision of the local grade structure to ensure compliance with forthcoming changes to the National Living Wage (NLW), to be effective from 1 April 2022.
- The Director of Human Resources also noted that progress is being made towards the production of the University's statutory Gender Pay Gap

report. The data cleansing and analysis process is underway for the report due by 31 March 2022, but no preliminary figures are yet available.

- In respect of pensions matters, the most pressing matter is the forthcoming changes to the USS pension scheme, to be effective from 1 April 2022. These have been commented on comprehensively at previous meetings.
- A statutory consultation with scheme members closed on 17 January. The consultation was facilitated via individual employers. Reading received 52 responses in total. This is a larger number than in previous similar exercises, but a tiny fraction of the number of USS members (in excess of 2000) locally.
- In addition to feedback from staff and their representatives the University conducted an equality impact assessment. For the most part the University identified a largely neutral impact across the range of protected characteristics, with our commentary focused predominately on the potentially disproportionate impact on younger scheme members (or newer members of the scheme who were more likely to be younger).
- In respect of the University's two local pension schemes things are much more stable. The UREPF valuation process has been completed successfully, Deeds of Appointment have been processed for the new Chair of Trustees (Mrs Joanne Livingstone), the new Chair has had an introductory meeting with the University's CFO and Director of Finance, and with both schemes in mind Trustees are preparing to implement the forthcoming Consolidated Code of Practice (consolidating TPR's 15 existing codes).

The Committee thanked the Director of Human Resources for the update.

22/08 Retirement of the Director of Human Resources

The University Secretary, on behalf of the Staffing Committee, thanked the Director of Human Resources for the significant contributions he has made to the Committee since its establishment in 2002, and wished him a happy retirement.

22/09 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2021/22 Academic Session:

Wednesday 27 April 2022	11.00 am to 1.00 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 15 June 2022	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm