

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

18/19 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House, on Friday 9 November 2018 at 2.30pm.

Present:

The Acting Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair)
The President of Reading UCU
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor G Brooks)
Dr M Schroeter
Ms N Willmott
Ms R Balestrini
The University Secretary

In attendance:

Head of Student Information Systems (Secretary)

Apologies were received from the Director of Human Resources, Dr C Fuller, Mrs S Pellow and Mr S Alexander.

The Committee received a statement of its membership for 2018-19. It noted that Mr Moray McAulay had been replaced as Regional UCU Official by Mr Scott Alexander, and expressed its thanks to Mr McAuley for his contribution to the Committee. The Committee welcomed Ms Rita Balestrini as a representative of Reading UCU to her first meeting, and also welcomed Ms Nat Willmott who was attending in place of Mrs Pellow on this occasion.

The Committee also noted the requirement to disclose any interests.

18/20 The Minutes of the meetings held on 23 May and 25 June 2018 were approved and signed.

Arising on the Minutes:

Minute 18/02 (17/20, 17/11, 17/06): UCU post-Brexit Policy Charter

The University Secretary reported that implementation of the online form for exit information from staff had been delayed, but work was ongoing.

Minute 18/04: Report of the President of Reading UCU

The University Secretary reported that the mapping of changes to contracts and probation arrangements for professional and managerial staff had now been completed by Legal Services and he would share the changes shortly with the President of Reading UCU.

Minute 18/10: Report of the President of Reading UCU

The University Secretary reported that the revised policy on harassment had recently been approved by the University Executive Board, and information about the new policy would be communicated to all staff.

Minute 18/13: Review of the support provided for UoR staff seconded to UoRM

The University Secretary reported that a meeting had been held to discuss the issues raised in relation to support for staff seconded to UoRM. The Provost of UoRM was considering the issues around allowances and tax. The University Secretary undertook to send to the President of Reading UCU a note of the responses to the concerns raised.

Minute 18/17: Formal status and transparency of university Working Groups

The University Secretary reported that he had compiled a list of UEB-approved working groups, which had been circulated to the Committee and which would be published on the University website in due course. The Committee welcomed the list and made a number of suggestions for additional information, including (i) the committee which originally set up the group, (ii) a brief summary of the remit, and (iii) the chair and secretary of the group.

The University Secretary undertook to make these amendments and to add information about other working groups as resource permitted. Guidance would also be provided on the circumstances in which UCU representatives would be invited to join a group from the outset.

Minute 18/18: Staffing Committee

The University Secretary reported that the relationship policy was being re-drafted and would be completed shortly. He would share the latest version with UCU representatives.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Van de Noort) reported that the further information about the use of research performance metrics had been circulated.

18/21 Report of the Acting Vice-Chancellor

The Committee noted the Report given by the Acting Vice-Chancellor to Senate at its meeting on 7 November 2018.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor further reported that there had been agreement at UEB about the need to maintain quality in relation to student recruitment, despite the ongoing decrease in the number of students applying, which could be ascribed to the demographic dip. The financial shortfall in the current year would be addressed by the voluntary severance programme, which he regarded as a necessary step, given the current uncertainties about funding, including the government's ongoing review of funding and tuition fees and the potential ring-fencing of tuition fee income.

In response to a question from the President of Reading UCU about the relative priority and cost of the "key strategic projects" cited in the report, the Acting Vice-Chancellor stated that he regarded these as securing the strategic position of the University. Strong partnership arrangements, such as with the European Centre for Medium-Term Weather Forecasting, and local business links, such as those provided by companies in the Thames Valley Science Park, would bring benefits to the University and enhance its reputation. He acknowledged that UoRM was currently making a loss, but plans were in place to mitigate this, and he felt strongly that the students and staff should be supported in this endeavour.

In relation to a question about the projected timescale for the upswing of the demographic dip, the Acting Vice-Chancellor stated that it was expected to ease in 2021-22 onwards. The intervening period gave Schools an opportunity to reflect on the impact of other external factors and to consider strategies to deal with them.

In relation to a query about the potential increase in cost of pensions, the Acting Vice-Chancellor stated that the University supported the outcome of the first stage of the Joint Expert Panel's deliberations.

18/22 **Report of the President of Reading UCU**

The President of Reading UCU reported that there was concern from staff about the following matters:

- (i) the robustness of the IT infrastructure, particularly at the beginning of term, with the loss of the "N" drive.

In response, the University Secretary commented that he shared the concern about the loss of the "N" drive, but the University was committed to finding appropriate resource for new projects and for maintaining the current provision;

- (ii) the impact on Schools of receiving lower NSS scores, which in some cases (notably the Library facilities) were the result of central decision-making beyond their control.

In response, the Acting Vice-Chancellor commented that the significant impact of the Library refurbishment on NSS scores had not been expected, given the efforts to mitigate the inconvenience for students. However, he also noted that the NSS results had been variable across Schools, with other factors playing a part, such as effective communication to students;

- (iii) the apparent lack of awareness within the EMA training programme of issues relating to accessibility, health and safety, given that staff were now expected to spend longer periods of time on screen-based work when marking electronically.

In response, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor commented that he believed the issues had been raised within training sessions and were addressed in FAQs on the programme website, but he would report the concerns to the programme lead. He acknowledged that staff might unexpectedly experience such issues and should be able readily to access the support and advice available.

The President of Reading UCU also requested that the University review the current facilities time arrangement, in the light of the 50% increase in membership in the past year and the consequent increase in casework. The University Secretary undertook to discuss the procedure for considering this matter with the Director of HR, who had already received notification of the request.

The Committee approved a suggestion that its agenda for the next two meetings include a standard item relating to the ongoing work of the Sub-Committee considering the local claim by Reading UCU.

18/23 **Personal Titles – outcomes from 2017-18**

The Committee received and noted the report on personal titles conferred in the Session 2017-18, together with supplementary data on age, gender and ethnic origin of applicants. Percentage data had been provided this year, as requested, but the percentage changes were based in some cases on small numbers which made it difficult to read their significance. The University Secretary undertook to circulate the written comments made by Professor Highwood, Dean of Diversity and Inclusion, on the statistical data. He stated that she was continuing to analyse the data in more detail, and he would discuss with her the possibility of sharing the findings with Reading UCU.

18/24 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee received and noted the report summarising the key matters which had been discussed by the Staffing Committee at its recent meeting. The introduction of a written report was welcomed, and it was agreed that it would not be necessary to attach routinely the papers submitted to the Staffing Committee. However, it was agreed that in some cases the papers would be useful for Reading UCU to see, particularly where they related to new or amended policies.

The University Secretary undertook to share with members of the Sub-Committee the report considered by the Staffing Committee on Rewarding Excellence.

18/25 Dates of meetings in the Session 2018-19

It was noted that further meetings of the Joint University/UCU Committee in the Session 2018-19 had been scheduled for:

Tuesday 5 February 2019 at 10.30 am
Wednesday 22 May 2019 at 10.30 am