

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

22/17 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 22 November 2022 at 10.00 am via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)  
Professor A Charlton-Perez  
Dr K Henderson  
Mr S Hunt  
Dr A Laville  
Professor H Parish  
Mrs C Rolstone  
Mrs J Rowe  
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Mr Allen and Professor Hwang.

The Committee welcomed Professor Andrew Charlton-Perez, School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences.

The University Secretary thanked Professor Parish for her contributions to the Committee.

22/18 Membership, Terms of Reference and Disclosure of Interests

The Committee received a copy of its membership and Terms of Reference and a copy of a memorandum from the University Secretary in respect of Disclosure of Interests and the Committee's obligations in respect of the University's Risk Register.

The Committee noted the comments contained in the memorandum from the University Secretary in respect of disclosure of interests.

It was agreed that the terms of reference would be reviewed and brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

*Action: The Director of Human Resources to review the terms of reference and to bring back to a future meeting of the Committee*

The Committee considered the risks on the register relating to the Committee and identified those relevant to the Terms of Reference.

22/19 The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2022 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

### **Minute 22/14: HR System**

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) provided the Committee with an update on the work being undertaken to re-tender the University's HR System (Trent).

She confirmed that the University now had a new provider, subject to ratification by the UEB and the signing of a contract. The new system will incorporate a payroll system, a learning management system (to replace UoRLearn) and an applicant tracking system (to replace Jobtrain).

The next phase of the project will be to map out and where appropriate, simplify our processes with the aim of making them more efficient, functional and ultimately smoother for the end user. She said it was anticipated that over the next 12-18 months the new system will be built and the data will be migrated from the existing system.

She confirmed that as there will be better integration between the different systems it is anticipated that the generation of management information would be greatly improved. She reiterated that current users of Trent would be consulted at appropriate stages of the implementation process to better understand their needs and to identify what works well, and what improvements can be made.

### 22/20 HR Strategy

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on the progress made on the HR Strategy. At the last meeting she set out the seven themes and some of the key priorities against each theme. Since then the work has focused on:

1. The strategic delivery of the plan that sits underneath these themes including a discussion with UEB;
2. The activities and actions arising from the various Diversity & Inclusion initiatives and embedding these into the HR Strategy and delivery plan.

She outlined the next piece of work will be to consider how we communicate the vision that sits alongside the delivery plan and determine deliverables. She confirmed this will involve engaging with the Leadership Group to agree the best way of setting out the vision and welcomed the opportunity to informally discuss these plans with members of the Staff Committee.

*Action: the Director of Human Resources agreed to share a spreadsheet setting out the future HR projects for the next year.*

Professor Charlton-Perez noted one of the seven themes related to *infrastructure, core services and processes* and ensuring systems are efficiently utilised and managed. He

asked how this overlapped with the DTS strategy. The University Secretary stated that the Digital Strategy had been approved by Council and would include a review of digital processes to determine which process(es) to prioritise.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their comments.

#### 22/21 SMART Working

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that during the summer she obtained initial feedback and comments from Heads of School / Function in respect of the Smart working guidelines. She stated that overall the feedback had been positive and the guidance and information available had been well received. She confirmed that most Schools and Functions had added to the university's guidance with their own local interpretations and requirements.

A commitment has been given to undertake a fuller review and she sought the views of the Committee in relation to what the review should look like. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on the Smart Working arrangements.

A number of comments were made and these are summarised as follows:

- There was general agreement that a fuller review would not be necessary, and that it would more helpful to obtain more targeted feedback and /or carry out reviews locally (within each School or Function);
- For some Schools the move towards Smart Working was not seen as transformative as colleagues traditionally worked flexibly on and off campus – is there less of a culture shift in Schools compared to Functions;
- If staff are less likely to be on campus there was a concern that this may impact negatively on student satisfaction levels;
- A recognition that there are a group of staff who are on campus all the time and another group of staff who are less present on campus – this has created two distinct cultures;
- An offer from the Dean for Diversity & Inclusion to look at Smart Working and its implementation through a D&I lens;
- An acknowledgement that not every School and Function is working in accordance with the University's stated expectation, namely that *colleagues will spend, on average, the majority of their working time working from their workplace*. It would be useful to understand the extent that individual Schools and Functions are adopting their own local arrangements and how these differ from the stated expectations;
- A suggestion that we retain the University-wide Smart working policy and if a School or Function wishes to adapt it, approval would be needed. More work was needed to ensure that the policy is implemented consistently;

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their comments.

#### 22/22 Cost of Living and the impact on staff

The Director of Human Resources led a discussion on the cost of living crisis and the impact on staff. In particular the views of the Committee were sought on whether the University is doing enough to support staff during the crisis, and whether more should be done.

It was noted that the cost of living crisis was affecting staff at all levels, and that to date the University had put in place a number of initiatives to support staff. These included communications promoting financial planning / financial wellbeing and related webinars delivered by the University's Employee Assistance Provider, and campus meal deals.

She confirmed that UCEA would be commencing consultation early in relation to the national pay award for the 2023-24 period (*see agenda item 22/26*). The local branch of the UCU have made it clear that increasing staff pay would be the most effective way to support staff.

The Committee were informed of initiatives made by other HEI's including making one-off payments to all staff, making available financial planning advisors, and providing access to hardship loans for staff. It was noted that all these initiatives cost money and recognised that it would be difficult to gauge how successful these initiatives would be.

It was noted that the cost of living increase could influence staff decisions in relation to SMART working. For example, fuel costs and other travel costs (public transport) may lead to staff working from home, or increased energy costs resulting in staff working more on campus.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their comments and noted the support for a cautious approach.

#### 22/23 Rewarding Excellence: 2021-22

The Committee considered the Rewarding Excellence report that sets out the different reward and recognition arrangements for 2021-22. It was noted that there were no reward cases for Ancillary and Operational Support staff.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) for the report and made the following observations:

- In relation to gender balance, is there a correlation between the number of cases submitted as part of the reward arrangements and the Personal Titles procedure

- Will Heads of School / Function be presented with this data for their particular areas? The Director of Human Resources explained that the HR Systems team was developing a dashboard of staff data by School / Function with the intention of sharing it with them;
- Professor Charlton-Perez informed the Committee that the Science / Life Sciences Reward Committee had discussed the range and quality of cases and asked if any further guidance could be developed. There was general agreement that the processes in respect of Reward Committee cases needed to be simplified;

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) informed the Committee that the contract for running the Celebrating Success process was due to expire in 2023 and arrangements are being made to procure a new provider.

#### 22/24 Closure days 2024/25

The Committee received a paper from the Head of Governance. The Committee was asked to consider and approve the proposed closure days (4 Christmas and 2 Easter) for 2024/25. The Committee noted that this is the first year of the new semester structure and the dates of terms have already been published.

Following a useful discussion it was agreed to change the allocated closure days to 5 over Christmas and 1 over Easter. The new dates agreed are:

**Closure Day 1 – Monday 23 December 2024**  
**Closure Day 2 – Tuesday 24 December 2024**  
 Public Holiday – Wednesday 25 December 2024  
 Public Holiday – Thursday 26 December 2024  
**Closure Day 3 – Friday 27 December 2024**  
**Closure Day 4 – Monday 30 December 2024**  
**Closure Day 5 – Tuesday 31 December 2024**  
 Public Holiday – Wednesday 1 January 2025

**Closure Day 6 – Thursday 17 April 2025**  
 Public Holiday – Friday 18 April 2025  
 Public Holiday – Monday 21 April 2025

*Action: The Committee Secretary to upload the closure days for 2024-25 onto the HR webpage*

#### 22/25 Annual Report - tackling harassment and sexual misconduct (staff and students)

The Committee noted a report outlining the University's compliance with the Office for Students (OfS) Statement of Expectations to tackle harassment and sexual misconduct in 2021/22. The University Secretary stated that the expectation is that this is likely to become a regulatory requirement in the future.

The Committee noted the many examples of good practice in relation to the reporting on data in this area, and the need to continue to communicate and raise awareness of the University's expectations and standards in relation to dealing with cases of harassment and sexual misconduct.

#### 22/26 Pay Update

The Director of Human Resources explained that the University would be returning to the national pay bargaining process for the 2023-24 period and explained that the UCEA was intending to commence consultation early.

She reported that the UEB were supportive of UCEA's approach for an early pay settlement given the impact of the cost of living crisis.

She informed the Committee that the forthcoming changes to the National Living Wage (NLW) will be effective from 1 April 2023. She said this would require small revisions to the local grade structure to ensure compliance, and acknowledged that this would make it difficult to maintain grade differentials for the lower grades.

#### 22/27 UCU Ballot

The Director of Human Resources reported that industrial action announced earlier this month by the University & College Union (UCU) in relation to USS pension scheme reform commences this week. She said the industrial action takes the form of a strike on Thursday 24, Friday 25 and Wednesday 30 November, with a continuous period of Action Short of Strike (ASOS) commencing from Wednesday 23 November.

She confirmed that communications would be sent to all staff and students shortly.

#### 22/28 Bystander training

Mr Hunt asked if the University had plans to develop bystander / allyship training for staff. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) confirmed that following the various Diversity & Inclusion reviews undertaken by the University a recommendation to develop allyship training had been agreed. She indicated that the training was due to be launched during the Spring Term 2023.

#### 22/29 Menopause training

Mr Hunt asked if the University was considering developing any awareness sessions for managers and supervisors in relation to the menopause. The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that guidance and resources in respect of the menopause is being developed following a discussion between the Women@Reading network, the Athena SWAN Committee and HR colleagues.

She said the intention is for the resources to include information for managers and supervisors.

22/30 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2022/23 Academic Session:

Tuesday 7 February 2023	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
Wednesday 26 April 2023	11.30 am to 1.30 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 14 June 2023	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm