Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30am on Tuesday 17 February 2015 in 101 Carrington House, Whiteknights Campus.

Present: -

Rhiannon Vaughan (Chair)
Michelle Hargreaves (Chair)
Debby Livermore
Tracy Lunn
Dawn Turner
Jacqui Thijm
Joanne Dormer
Sinead O’Flynn
Juliette Dack
Sue Mott
Professor Robert Van De Noort – PVC
John Brady
Julia Munro
Professor Richard Ellis
James Magee
Marguerite Gascoigne
Steve Boon
Jessica Bennett
Maureen Martin
Rachel Thorns (Secretary)
Alex Benneyworth (Note Taker)

Apologies were received from: -

Carole Allison

15/1 Welcome and Introductions

The members of the Staff Forum were welcomed and introductions were made.

15/2 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

Michelle Hargreaves prior to the meeting raised a couple of changes to the minutes and Rachel Thorns circulated revised minutes to the Staff Forum Representatives. The rest of the minutes were approved.

Actions in relation to last meeting minutes held on 1 December 2014.
Action 1: John Brady to provide monthly updates from E&E project board meetings to all Staff Forum members

John Brady provided all updates to date and advised there haven’t been any further updates to communicate. Completed

Action 2: Michelle Hargreaves/Rhiannon Vaughan to provide John Brady with feedback received from staff and any examples so that he can discuss with David Savage and obtain response to queries. John Brady to then feedback to Staff Forum.

Michelle Hargreaves / Rhiannon Vaughan provided update to John Brady. Next step, to arrange meetings with Carol Sherriff, Head of Technical Accounting and Financial Services and Lisa Jefferies, Director of Procurement to discuss concerns raised by staff directly with them. Completed

Action 3: Rachel Thorns to follow up the query she has already raised about whether dates could be added on the basis that the calendar is now electronic.

Rachel Thorns advised the action is outstanding but agreed would follow up on whether dates could be added to the calendar and to provide update at the next Staff Forum meeting. Update: RT confirmed that she has confirmed dates to Louise Sharman, Head of Governance who will be publishing these in the University calendar/meeting list for the next Academic session 2015/6

Action 4: Nominated Staff Forum employee representatives to sign the Staff Forum Agreement

John Brady confirmed the Staff Forum Agreement had been signed by the Vice Chancellor and provided a copy to Michelle Hargreaves. Completed

Action 5: John Brady to remind HR Partners of need to make contact with relevant Staff Forum employee representatives.

Rachel Thorns confirmed that all HR Partners have been advised to contact the relevant Staff Forum representatives but communicated that due to changes within the HR Partnering team the relevant representative may have not had contact to date. Michelle Hargreaves expressed that she had not been contacted by an HR Partner and it was noted several other staff forum representatives expressed that they had no contact either by an HR Partner. John Brady advised he would follow this up. Completed

Action 6: Rachel Thorns to liaise with Michelle Hargreaves/Rhiannon Vaughan to advertise for existing vacancies in the New Year.

Rachel Thorns advised delay in advertising due to recent resignations but the advert was now ready and would be advertised w/c 2/3/15. Completed

Action 7: Michelle Hargreaves to provide feedback to John Brady in relation to what difficulties staff were reporting to have with the information currently available about the Statute reform and how it may impact them.

Michelle Hargreaves reported she had provided feedback to John Brady. Completed
Action 8: John Brady to liaise with Julie Rowe to arrange some briefing sessions for staff Grades 1-5 in January 2015. Employee representatives to encourage staff to attend briefing sessions once dates and times are known.

John Brady confirmed he was in the process of setting up three sessions of approximately 1.5 hours in duration and that these would be held at the three campuses Whiteknights, Greenland's and London Road.

Action 9: John Brady to arrange for a small message to be put into new starter recruitment packs to alert new staff to the PAS review.

Rachel Thorns advised John Brady had tasked her with the action and the matter was being progressed.

15/3 Working Groups – updates from employee representatives on progress with actions and activities

Subgroup 1 (Facilities, Communication & Training): Maureen Martin requested that the advert for the Staff Forum Representatives was sent out from the Staff Forum Representatives and not HR and that all interest and nomination forms were addressed to the Staff Forum email address. It was agreed this approach was agreeable to all parties and that Rachel Thorns would liaise with Maureen to facilitate this.

Maureen reported that the Employee representatives felt that asking for individuals to express their interest from specific constituencies delayed the process of new staff forum members joining.

John Brady confirmed that the University had a flexible approach but were keen that every effort has been made to achieve a good representation from across various departments and Schools to try to avoid the Staff Forum group being dominated by one area. John confirmed that this principle should be maintained as a starting point but he acknowledged this should not impede the process.

Rhiannon Vaughan noted that herself, Jessica Bennett and Tracy Lunn were going over to Greenland’s campus to do an introduction to staff so more employees were aware of who the Staff Forum Representatives were, as feedback from staff has been that they don’t want to talk to someone who they work closely with so it would be useful for staff to become familiar with other Staff Forum Representatives.

Joanne Dormer proposed introducing a new “buddy” system for new Staff Forum representatives as a way of introduction to the Staff Forum as it has now been established for over a year. All members agreed with this proposal.

Michelle Hargreaves advised she had met with Anne Gallagher, Head of Learning and Development and Justin Hutchence, Research Staff Development Manager to discuss the University’s “Supporting you” events and to look at how these may be facilitated going forward. Anne Gallagher referred them to Claire Rolstone, Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) who they are due to meet to discuss how the Staff Forum can work with HR in relation to this and health and wellbeing initiatives.
Subgroup 2 (University of Reading Charter, Statute and Ordinances consultation): Sinead O’Flynn confirmed they had met with John Brady and Julie Rowe on two occasions to review the proposed new employment policies and proposed Statute reforms. Sinead O’Flynn confirmed that Julie Rowe, Director of Legal Services, was due to be making contact to arrange a date to discuss the revised contracts of employment for Grade 1 – 5 staff.

John Brady advised that the second phase will include a further round of consultation and a second wave of policies to be reviewed.

It was raised that if any employer representatives wish to join the working groups to let a member of the Staff Forum employee representatives know.

15/4 The University Strategy – Key Organisational Change projects

Efficiency & Effectiveness – Professional and Administrative Services (PAS)

John Brady confirmed that he was the project sponsor for PAS and there was a phased approach and reviews were taking place in relation to the Employee Journey (HR processes), Finance, Brand/Marketing and Technical Services.

John advised that HR had been running workshops looking at the recruitment process - looking at the broad process from when a vacancy is created to issuing a contract. John advised that at each workshop there have been approximately 40 people attending.

John advised that his expectation was that by the end of March 2015, each of the above work-streams would have an overarching/high level sense of what the future processes might look like and an organisational design model and/or structure identified.

John provided an update on the response to the invite for staff to express their interest in the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme. John confirmed that to date 284 requests for information and 52 formal requests to be considered have been received. John reminded everyone of the closing date - 28 February 2015 and confirmed that once the closing date has passed HR Partners will meet with Line Managers and any offers made will be in accordance with the time line set out in his original communication about the Scheme.

John advised that there will be other opportunities in the future for Voluntary Redundancy but that he could not guarantee whether the offer will be on the same terms. John confirmed that if an individual expresses an interest this time round and it is turned down and then they later find themselves in a position of compulsory redundancy at a later date, they would be offered no less favourable terms (in relation to redundancy) by the University.

A question was raised in relation to how individuals could attend the workshops if they wished to. John advised that Heads of Schools and Functions had been approached for nominations. John confirmed that workshops on “general administration” will be commencing imminently so there will be future opportunities for staff to get involved.
John confirmed that the final area to review under the PAS project was Teaching and Learning support and that he was hoping to appoint one of the new Deans of Teaching and Learning to take a joint lead on this work-stream. Michelle Hargreaves asked whether the Staff Forum could ask staff if they would be interested in participating in workshops via the Staff Forum website. John advised that it was not advisable as it was not possible to work with everyone but that feedback from the workshops could be provided through the Staff Forum.

Financial Services Review

Sarah Bartlett, Head of Finance Planning and Analysis provided an update on the Financial Services Review. Sarah advised she was standing in for Carol Wright who is leading Financial Management Review. Sarah advised that the workshops had been looking at Planning and Business Control, Audit Control, Quarter report and Purchase to pay and that they had been looking at what the current processes were in Schools, key themes, training, process improvement and the different systems currently being used.

Sarah confirmed that to date they had agreed level 3 processes. Sarah explained that actions were identifying a process which needed to be completed, how it is done and consider any system improvements. She confirmed that they were still in the information gathering stage at the moment.

Sarah went on to confirm that in relation to Level 4 processes, these had been distributed between members in the workshops and then forwarded to other people for their views and comments. Sarah also confirmed that they were contacting people who had completed the PAS questionnaire but had been unable to attend a workshop.

It was raised by several of the staff forum representatives that members of staff are unhappy with the new finance travel policy.

Technical Services Review

James Magee provided an update and advised that 13 meetings had taken place with staff and over 80% of the technical staff have attended with 264 participants over the sessions across the ten Schools.

James confirmed that each session was half a day and looked at what we are doing now and future opportunities. A six page summary of the outputs from the workshops has been produced and sent to all the technical staff.

James confirmed that there were a number of potential opportunities revealed and that the intention was to get nominations of academic staff in teaching and research to help build level 3 processes with descriptions that describe certain activities. James advised that the work-stream group were still taking comments from those who have been unable to attend the workshops to date.
Update on consultation regarding proposals for new academic structure

Robert Van de Noort updated the Forum on the proposed changes to the academic structure: that it will no longer be divided into Faculties, that there would be new Deans for Teaching and Learning and Deans of Research – 1 for each of the 5 of the University’s Research themes which will report directly to the University Executive Board (UEB). Robert advised that there would not be major consequences for other staff but it would create greater efficiency and effectiveness.

John Brady advised that there had been an opportunity for staff to put forward their comments and suggestions and that consultation in relation to the proposals had closed on 6 February 2015 and that the final proposals will be presented to Senate in March 2015.

15/5 National Pay Bargaining

John Brady advised that the consultation process was underway but nothing had been agreed at this stage. John confirmed that UCA were currently consulting with members of the University and in early March there would be a survey. John advised that UCEA were due to meet with the Trade Unions on 26 March 2015 and that he would provide an update in relation to this subject for the next meeting.

Action 1: John Brady to provide an update on the National Pay Bargaining position at the next Staff Forum Meeting.

15/6 USS – Changes to the Pension Scheme

John Brady advised that the proposed reforms affect mostly staff at Grade 6 and above, but there may be a very small group of ex-members of the Henley Management College affected. John updated that the final salary scheme would be closed to new members of staff.

John Brady advised the Staff Forum Representatives to direct members to the USS website for information or to the University’s Pension’s team for further information. A formal consultation with individual members would begin in March.

15/7 UCU Joint University and Staffing Committee Meetings

John Brady drew attention to an item on the Joint University/UCU agenda whereby UCU were highlighting their concerns regarding the travel and expenses policy and that they were currently gathering comments from members.

John also reported that the University was providing reassurance to UCU in relation to Equality and Diversity i.e. that the removal of the Equality & Diversity office was not a signal from the University that this diminished our commitment to Equality and Diversity issues and that UCU would be advised of the positive steps underway by the University as highlighted in the Equality & Diversity report i.e. Athena Swan, Springboard and the Leadership Programme.
John noted a further agenda item brought by UCU in respect of zero hour contracts. John advised that main reason the University used a version of zero hour contracts for sessional lecturers was for administrative convenience as it allowed colleagues to remain on the payroll and have ongoing access to facilities such as e-mail and the library.

In respect of the Staffing Committee (due to meet that afternoon) John noted that new Shared Parental Leave arrangements effective from April 2015 would be discussed. John also noted that the Students’ Union were presenting a paper on the “Living Wage”.

15/8 Equality & Diversity

Jacqui Thijm advised the Staff Forum that she attended the University Diversity & Inclusion Group and that there had been some discussions around changing the way in which Equality and Diversity was communicated. Jacqui updated that during the meeting it was agreed that two smaller committees would meet three to four times a year and a larger working group twice a year and there would be an opportunity for Staff Forum Representatives to attend that meeting.

Jacqui updated that the group had identified that Diversity & Inclusion were not currently integrated into everything we do at the University and there had been some discussion in relation to how we could improve and change that and encompass diversity into everything we do.

Jacqui Thijm advised that as she was resigning as a Staff Forum Representative Sinead O’Flynn would be attending the Diversity and Inclusion meetings going forward.

It was raised that the Staff Forum did not reflect a balanced ethnic mix and that they might need to consider what could be done to address this.

Action 2 – Sinead O’Flynn to ensure details of the Harassment Advisors are added to the Staff Forum website.

Action 3 – Rachel Thorns to organise facilitation of a training session with IT for Staff Forum Representatives to enable them to update the Staff Forum website.

15/9 AOB

- Professor Robert Van De Noort informed that UEB had announced a formal review of the School of Systems Engineering and the review would be led by him supported by Professor Dianne Berry and Dr Elizabeth McCrum. Robert confirmed that the review follows the recent return of the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) published in December 2014. Robert outlined that the School of Systems Engineering was in the bottom quarter of the lowest quartile of the REF. Robert confirmed that, to date, he had held one all staff meeting in the School and that he intends to hold another all staff meeting before report with recommendations about the future of the School goes to UEB.

- Professor Robert Van De Noort, on behalf of the Staff Forum, acknowledged it was Jacqui Thijm’s last meeting as she was resigning from her role as Staff Forum Representative and thanked Jacqui for all her hard work particularly noting her
involvement in the Procurement restructure, Equality and Diversity and helping to raise awareness of the Staff Forum more broadly.

Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday 16th June 2015 10.30 - 12.30pm, URS 2n10 (Whiteknights Campus)