Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30am on Monday 1st December 2014 in G02 Palmer Building, 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
Rachel Thorns (Secretary)

Apologies were received from:

Jessica Bennett
Kate Tetlow
Maureen Martin
Carole Allison

14/10 Welcome and Introductions

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

14/11 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

Sue Mott raised a point of accuracy – that she was formally a trade union representative for Unite not UNISON. The rest of the minutes were approved.

Actions in relation to agenda item 14/03 “The efficiency and Effectiveness Programme” were reviewed. John Brady noted that now the monthly project board meetings were up and running that monthly updates would be sent to all Staff Forum members. John Brady noted this month’s meeting was the coming Wednesday and the update would be sent approximately one week afterwards.
Action 1: John Brady to provide monthly updates from E&E project board meetings to all Staff Forum members

It was noted by Rhiannon Vaughan that, at the time, the Staff Survey was compulsory and some staff now feel as though it is being advertised as having been optional. John Brady made it clear that completing the staff survey was an instruction to be complied with.

Rhiannon Vaughan raised the issue of the short implementation time for new policies or processes which have not left enough time for the changes to be fed down to all staff. An example given was that departments had not been made aware of the changes in relation to expense forms which has caused issues for departments across the University. Michelle Hargreaves requested feedback from David Savage so that she could respond to concerns which had been raised to the Staff Forum representatives’ attention by members of staff.

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.

Actions in relation to item 14/04 “Staff Forum Agreement” were discussed. Michelle Hargreaves raised the point that it had been agreed that the meetings of the Staff Forum would be included in the University Calendar. It was noted that this would not be possible for 14/15 session but every effort would be made to try and facilitate it.

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.

John Brady noted that the Staff Forum Agreement was ready for signing and suggested the Staff Forum employee representatives could sign the document at the end of the meeting if they wished.

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

In relation to item 14/06, “Reform of the University Charter, Statute and Ordinances”, Michelle Hargreaves noted that there were no policy documents on the website. John Brady stated that these would go up once they had been finalised and agreed. John Brady confirmed that the first phase of formal consultation with UCU had been completed and that there were outstanding issues raised by UCU which needed to be addressed. So this would need to be completed prior to any policies being put onto the website.

In relation to item 14/08 “The operation of the Forum”, it was raised that not all employee representatives had met with their relevant HR Partner.

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

It was raised that following the last meeting, the employee representatives had requested a budget to facilitate the running of the Staff Forum. John Brady confirmed that it had
been agreed to see how it goes during the first year to take a view on related costs so that an official budget could be considered for next year which the Staff Forum employee representatives would then manage themselves.

In relation to item 14/09 “Membership of the Forum”, Michelle Hargreaves noted that there were still some employee representative vacancies and suggested that existing employee representatives could assist in trying to identify suitable individuals to fill these roles. John Brady noted that following advertising for additional representatives in August/September 2014 he had received a number of nominations but these were disproportionate in some areas the individuals would be representing. John Brady confirmed that the Staff Forum needs to have cross-representation across different areas of the University. A number of the employee representatives suggested that technical staff and men should be targeted. John Brady confirmed that there should be a clear process to nominate new staff forum employee representatives but that he would welcome employee representatives bringing forward names and promoting the idea of becoming an employee representative. There was some discussion of undertaking a further round of advertising for nominations.

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

14/12 Review Information and Consultation Agreement and update on Membership of Staff Forum

Actions already discussed when reviewing minutes and actions from previous meeting

14/13 Working Groups – Updates from employee representatives on progress with actions and activities

Subgroup 1 (Facilities, Communication & Training): Rhiannon Vaughan advised that Michelle Hargreaves had drawn up an action table scheduling tasks for completion. She confirmed that the Staff Forum website has been created with updates (almost ready to publish), flyers have been created, Staff Forum representatives were now lined up to attend staff Induction days, a link has been put onto the e-payslips, several training sessions have taken place with employee representatives (Reward and Pensions) and a voicemail only phone line has been set up.

Subgroup 2 (University of Reading Charter, Statute and Ordinances consultation): Rhiannon Vaughan noted that consultation on the Statute amendments is ongoing and that there is a meeting in January 2015 to discuss this further. Rhiannon Vaughan asked John Brady whether there could be some briefing sessions for staff on this in ‘plain English’. John Brady noted that it is very difficult to translate the Statutes into anything close to “plain English” and asked whether the employee representatives could provide some ideas of things which might need to be less dense or explained in “plain English”.

Michelle Hargreaves updated that the employee representatives had undertaken a staff survey (tabled). Michelle went through some of the responses to the questions asked. ‘Are you aware of the Staff Forum?’ 73% responded yes and 27% responded no. In relation
to a question about the Charter changes, 74% of respondents were aware of the proposed changes and 26% were unaware. Furthermore, when asked whether Staff know what this meant for them, 76% didn’t know what it meant for them. Michelle Hargreaves requested that there were some briefing sessions, perhaps delivered by Julie Rowe, Director of Legal Services with specific information in relation to what the changes will mean for staff at Grades 1-5.

In relation to the question “Are you aware of the Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme?” 64% of responses were aware and 36% were unaware.

Robert Van De Noort confirmed that simple messages could easily go out and it would be helpful for all to have a good understanding. John Brady confirmed that more direct communication could come out in January 2015 but not before Christmas due to time constraints. **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.**

**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.**

14/14 The University Strategy – key Organisational Change Projects - Professional and Administrative Services (PAS)

John Brady noted that an update on PAS was sent out last week to all staff. John Brady confirmed that there are a number of process working groups being set up and that Heads of Schools/Functions have nominated staff to help with this work which is very useful.

John Brady confirmed that a lot of work is ongoing and although this is not always visible, things are happening behind the scenes. John Brady confirmed that information about the voluntary redundancy scheme is due to go out to all staff this week and confirmed that Staff Forum employee representatives would have sight of this first alongside line managers. John Brady said that he could not confirm the details of any offers or whether any offer made at this stage would be the same as any offer made at later stage in the change process – if indeed there were to be any further opportunities. John Brady confirmed that whilst anybody within the target group can express an interest this interest is not binding and it will have to be discussed with line managers to investigate whether it would be suitable to agree to the request for voluntary redundancy. John Brady confirmed that he has recruited additional temporary resources into the Pensions and HR team to deal with staff queries so they can receive the information they need in a timely manner.

Michelle Hargreaves noted that some staff feel as though their role does not fall under PAS. John Brady confirmed that whilst there may be small pockets of staff who are unlikely to be affected for example some cleaning or catering staff, there may be some administrative staff sitting within these areas that may be affected.
It was noted that the University is still recruiting and the question was asked whether this should be limited to internal advertising only. John Brady noted that whilst there may come a time for this to be the case, at the moment the University were not yet at the point to decide to do this yet. John Brady confirmed that at the moment it is “business as usual” but when everything is clearer then a decision would have to be taken about how the University continues to fill vacancies. Michelle Hargreaves raised the concern that new staff who are being recruited were unaware of the PAS review and only appear to be finding out about this once they have started work. John Brady suggested that a small message could be put into the recruitment pack.

John Brady noted that the situation would be clearer by March 2015 and that they would be in a better position to see what the professional and administrative services might look like. A question was raised in relation to whether staff would be able to apply for positions a grade higher than their own. John Brady noted that the current focus is on the process review work and we are not yet at a stage to determine how we will run any selection process.

**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.**

### 14/15 Reward Arrangements

John Brady noted that it is important, but difficult under the current financial difficulties, to reward staff. John confirmed that the Reward Committees granted 52 additional increments and 56 contribution points. John noted that for the 13/14 session 456 lump sum rewards were given totalling £234,000 with the average award being given was £512. John confirmed that 620 nominations were made for Celebrating Success Vouchers, of which 600 were awarded, 18 were rejected and 2 are currently awaiting decision. John confirmed that the spread of awards, for area and gender, are currently being analysed. Steve Boon asked whether departments could receive feedback on whether they are using more or less of the budget than the average. John requested that people contact Claire Eckett, HR Reward Manager and noted that some departments top up the budget from their own funds. John confirmed that Claire chases managers who do not use their allocation but that some save theirs for a particular time of year whilst some use it gradually.

### 14/16 Equality and Diversity Initiatives

**Athena Swan** - Professor Richard Ellis, Chair of the Athena Swan Steering Group, noted that this was up for its third renewal. It was explained that Athena Swan is about encouraging women in Science (students and academic staff) and that 6 of the 8 Science Schools at the University of Reading have Athena Swan awards and that the remaining 2 have recently put forward a submission (November 2014). Rachel Thorns explained that the University submission is in and it’s a good recap on what we are doing and what we are going to do, considering how far we have progressed the action plan which was agreed three years ago. John Brady noted that many of the issues that come out of the Athena Swan initiative have been useful to change practice for the benefit of the whole University. Richard Ellis confirmed that details of the current action plan will be
published on the HR webpages. Rachel Thorns confirmed the action plan covered areas such as student recruitment, appointments and promotions, work-life balance, gender balance on committees, embedding learning from Athena Swan

**Race Equality Charter Mark** – Rachel Thorns explained that the University is involved in a trial to obtain an award from the Equality Challenge Unit for the Race Equality Charter Mark. Rachel confirmed another 31 Universities were also involved in the trial and that the scope was broader than Athena Swan in that it relates to all relevant staff and students working across the University. Rachel explained that a staff and student survey was underway and that staff/students had to self-select (if they met the criteria) to answer questions covering a variety of topics. Rachel confirmed that PVC Professor Enzo Raimo is championing this submission and is chairing the self-assessment team.

**Stonewall** – Rachel Thorns updated that the University has now joined Stonewall (UK good practice employer’s forum in relation to sexual orientation). Rachel confirmed that she was aware that a staff network is currently being set up.

**14/17 AOB**

- Friday (28/11/14) Blackout: it was reported that staff across campus shut down everything that could be switched off for the weekend and this led to an 8% reduction to normal weekend electricity usage.
- Rhiannon Vaughan thanked all employee representatives and said it was recognised that a lot of effort is being made to undertake Staff Forum work alongside day jobs. John Brady noted that he appreciates the hard work and engagement which Staff Forum representatives have been demonstrating to date.
- Michelle Hargreaves asked where any feedback from staff activities on campus could be fed back to the Staff Forum i.e. welcome week. John Brady suggested that they if things come to him then he will pass this on as appropriate.

**Date and time of next meeting:** Tuesday 10.30am 17th February 2015, Room 101 Carrington House, Whiteknights Campus.