Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30am on Tuesday 25 October in Room 201, Carrington Building.

Present:
- Gail Gilbert (Employee Representative)
- Michelle Hargreaves (Co Chair and Employee Representative)
- Chris Harris (Employee Representative)
- Debby Livermore (Employee Representative)
- Dawn Turner (Employee Representative)
- Rhiannon Vaughan (Co Chair and Employee Representative)
- Professor Robert Van De Noort (Co Chair and Employer Representative)
- John Brady (Employer Representative)
- James Magee (Employer Representative)
- Cherry Bennett, Assistant Director of HR, HR Operations (Guest)
- Rachel Thorns (Secretary)

16/12 Welcome and introductions and apologies (Chair – Robert Van De Noort)

Apologies were received from Steve Boon (Employer Representative), Marguerite Gascoine (Employer Representative), Julia Munro (Employer Representative), Sinead O’ Flynn (Employee Representative) and Jo Dormer (Employee Representative).

16/13 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

The minutes were approved with no other changes. The actions from the previous meeting were reviewed as per the below.

Page 2 - Action: JB to follow up and report to Staff Forum about what parts of the policy has been changed in light of the feedback provided by Staff Forum members

John Brady (JB) stated that he had checked with David Savage and although there is no specific wording which can be pointed to, he hoped that certain changes (e.g. accommodation that was allowable) did pick up on their points.

Dawn Turner (DT) noted that greater flexibility was being employed as the University/individuals cannot be seen to be making profit from EU grants, which meant that things can be sourced from outside the University. JB agreed that as with most policies, the University is transparent about the fact that workarounds are available. The group confirmed that there were no further problems which needed to be raised. Action closed.

Page 3 - Action: RV to update Rachel Thorns (RT) on numbers for training, timeframes for when the Staff Forum representatives wanted this to take place and details of the training provider & costs so this could be taken forward.
Action completed.

Page 3 - Action: JB to send Staff Forum representatives copies of revised documentation which is currently being consulted on with UCU for their information.

JB informed the group that the University has been partaking in detailed discussions with UCU about the changes to academic contracts. He stated that since the last Staff Forum meeting, the University had invoked and exhausted the formal dispute procedure after an agreement could not be reached, and that two months ago the changes went out to vote again and the changes were finally approved two weeks' ago. He explained that he had not send out copies of the revised documentation as it had been through multiple iterations throughout the process, but that he would ensure that the Staff Forum had sight of it before it formally went out once Legal Services have finalised it. JB stated that formal communication about the outcome would also be going out soon.

Page 5 - Action: CB to check what may impact online leave (in terms of any change of contract and position on TRENT) and provide update to RT so she can report back to Staff Forum

Rachel Thorns (RT) explained that this action was still outstanding and that she would speak to Cherry Bennett before the next meeting to provide an update. DT fed back that there are still some issues with online annual leave out in Schools.

Page 5 - Action: JB to provide an update on PAS and expectation of timeline to get final communication to affected staff who were matched so they know when they will all receive letters

Action completed. JB informed the Forum that following on from PAS a group had been set up to meet every Wednesday night focussing on looking at service delivery.

Michelle Hargreaves (MH) informed the Forum that she was due to have an introductory meeting with the new Executive Support Project Manager, Erin Cooper, later this week. She stated that DT was gathering feedback for Erin via Survey Monkey so asked that any feedback about the Executive Support work-stream be communicated via this channel.

A discussion took place about the advantages and disadvantages of Executive Support becoming its own function. RVDN stated that one of the clearest advantages of this would be the clear progression routes which become available to staff if it is recognised as a function, which are important not only for staff themselves but the University's diversity and inclusion agenda and is missing whilst Executive Support staff are integrated into Schools’ at present. Gail Gilbert (GB) stated that a clear shift in loyalty from School to function had been noted in Teaching and Learning Support staff since it moved away from Schools, and raised concerns that the same would happen with Executive Support staff were it to become its own function. DT added that it was important to note that many Schools had ad hoc needs unique to themselves which still need to be provided for and that it would be difficult to provide this centrally. RVDN stated that these were all points which the Project Manager would look at in consultation with Executive Support staff and their current line managers.

RVDN informed the group that Schools had been provided with a transitional budget for the 2016/17 academic year which Heads of Schools were free to use as they pleased in order to ensure a smooth transition following on from PAS.

The Staff Forum raised concerns that they felt that people on the ground often miss out on these types of conversations being held around PAS, and that there needed to be a clear route for addressing those peoples’ concerns. JB recognised this and stated that this was one of the reasons for continuing
on with the PAS Consultation group, despite the fact that the restructuring was now complete. He also added that Claire Rolstone (Assistant Director of HR, Advisory Services), had been feeding back a lot of the feedback she had received from ‘the ground’ to David Savage.

Page 5 - Action: JB to confirm proposals to Staff Forum in relation to reward/recognition for staff taking on Building Management related work activities.

JB explained that a paper had been presented to UEB which had been approved, which included a £350 honorarium for staff taking on Building Management related work activities and a number of new Building Management roles, which are currently being recruiting to. The Staff Forum queried which type of duties fall into ‘building management’. JB stated that a document which listed the duties had been created and that he would ask Claire Rolstone to circulate this.

Action: Claire Rolstone to circulate list of building management duties to Staff Forum.

Page 6 - Action: MH to confirm which Staff Forum employee representatives would like to be involved with the new Subgroup (Subgroup 3) to RT so this work can begin

RT confirmed that MH and Rhiannon Vaughan (RV) have been confirmed as Staff Forum employee representatives to be involved in this project. JB, Julie Rowe (Legal Services) and RT are due to meet on 26th October 2016 to discuss some of the legalities of membership at G6+ level (particularly in relation to advice on approach to inclusion of staff who may be either UCU members and/or representatives at the University).

JB explained that UCU have a recognition agreement which raises some legal challenges as a Staff Forum for Grades 6 and above could encroach upon UCU’s membership, which the University must be careful not to do. However, JB added that Paul Hatcher (President of UCU, University of Reading) was entirely comfortable with the prospect of extension of the Staff Forum for Grades 6+ but that there is still a lot of work to be done in terms of thinking about numbers, constituencies and balance of grades for extension.

Page 6 - Action: JB to provide an update at next Staff Forum meeting

JB to provide an update at Agenda item 5.

Page 7 - Action: JB to ensure the Staff Forum are provided with the Staffing Committee agenda and papers before any future meetings and that previous minutes from this academic year are emailed to them.

JB informed the group that he had asked Alan Twyford (HR Partner and Secretary for Staffing Committee) to provide the Staff Forum with the dates for the next Staffing Committee meetings held this year, in addition to the agendas and any previous minutes.

Action: Alan Twyford to circulate list of future committee dates, previous agendas and minutes of Staffing Committee meetings to Staff Forum.

Page 9 - Action: Staff Forum members to provide some feedback on the proposals to JB.

Completed.
Page 9 - Action: JB to provide the reward and recognition spend report to Staff Forum for next meeting (to review from gender perspective)

JB stated that this report was action was still in progress, as Claire Ecket was still in the process of finalising the report.

Action: Claire Ecket to circulate the reward and recognition spend report to Staff Forum once finalised.

Page 9 - Action: Debby Livermore and Jo Dormer to review the Staff Forum website to refresh if required for September 2016

Debby Livermore (DL) informed the Staff Forum that this action was still ongoing and that she and Jo Dormer were working on the website from time to time.

Action: RT to touch base with DL in order to progress this and ensure new Staff Forum members details were updated on the webpage.

16/14 Working Groups – updates from employee representatives on progress with actions and activities

- Subgroup 1 – Facilities, Communication and Training.

The Staff Forum highlighted that training and development needs identified for Staff Forum employee representatives in relation to Mental Health awareness training was a priority and was needed urgently, particularly in light of the fact there would soon be new members. MH stated that they would facilitate a buddy system for new employee representatives and would like the new recruits to receive the same training as previous members.

Action: RT to arrange training for new recruits

- Subgroup 2 – University of Reading Charter, Statute and Ordinances Consultation

This item was covered in the review of minutes/actions from last meeting.

- Subgroup 3 – Extended membership/expansion of Staff Forum to be representative for staff grades 6+ and revision of information and consultation agreement.

RT informed the group that following on from recent/forthcoming departures of members of the Staff Forum and a recent advert, 6 nominations for employee representatives had been put forward. She explained that she, MH and RV had identified that they wanted, if possible, to improve gender balance and the spread of employee representatives in relation to their work locations. RT provided members with a list of the nominees’ names, job titles, School/Functions and where they were based and stated that following a discussion with JB she would contact the individuals to inform them that they could take up the roles. RT stated that she would work with MH to ensure that a buddy system is put in place for the individuals so that they are brought up to speed with the work the Staff Forum has been doing
The University Strategy – key Organisational Change projects

- Overview/introduction to the new People Strategy

JB informed the group that the new People Strategy falls within the ‘Thriving Community’ thread of the University’s overall strategy and that he had been working on the People Strategy with a number of HR colleagues for a period of time. He explained that it had been presented to UEB and was now being refined by the HR leadership team before being finalised, with the hope that it would be launched in the New Year as a formal document in conjunction with the Staff Engagement Survey. He stated that there are a range of actions of varying timelines (ranging from immediate to five years) which fell within key strands of the strategy, and that the Staff Engagement strategy intersects with that. JB stated that he was keen to shape these actions through discussions with the Staff Forum. RVDN stated that he and UEB had been impressed with the ambition of the strategy and were supportive of it, although they expressed the danger of being too ambitious and the need to focus on and identify a number of key strands.

- Update in relation to the Staff Engagement Survey

JB informed the Staff Forum that an external company named Capita have been commissioned to put together the Staff Engagement survey with the intention of launching it in Spring 2017. JB explained that Capita have implemented staff surveys at 59 other institutions within the sector and that a first meeting with them was due to be held next week in order to discuss key issues around providing the survey. A short discussion took place regarding the pros and cons of a Staff Engagement survey, with the key plus discussed being the fact that it would give all staff an opportunity to engage and voice their opinions.

Action: DL to provide feedback at the next meeting as she is the Staff Forum employee representative, on the Staff Engagement Survey project group

- Update from University Pay Gap Working Group

RVDN stated that the working group was put together off the back of the University’s recent Athena SWAN application. He explained that the University currently looks at the gender pay gap grade by grade, and then at spinal points/zones within the grade, and that grade by grade, the gender pay gap was very small in all grades other than Grade 9, where men were earning more.

RVDN continued that moving forward, the government wants organisations to look at the gender pay gap by median, which is problematic for institutions as typically you will find a large number of females in the lower Grade 1 cleaning roles comparative to the males in the higher grade roles, which skews the median. RVDN explained that this a potential government requirement and the threat of publishing pay gaps by median could lead to many organisations choosing to outsource things such as cleaning services as this would diminish the gender pay gap when looking at the median. RVDN confirmed, however, that the University’s view on this is that this would be the wrong thing to do and has no intention of doing anything like that but that it was just to illustrate the point. He stated that the University does not want to do something which erases the problem on paper but does not truly address gender pay gap issues. He stated that structural and cultural changes needed to be made in order to fully tackle the problem and this would take time.
JB added that any University which has a Business School will typically have a gender pay gap. He also highlighted that over recent years, more females have been successfully promoted from Associate Professor to Professor through the Personal Titles process, which means that they are appointed into Zone 1 of the Professorial Zones, which immediately also creates a gender pay gap.

JB stated that it was also worth noting that during the current recruitment campaign for the University’s new Chief Financial Officer, who will sit on the University Executive Board, the University asked for a longlist of candidates which was at least 50% female. He stated that of these individuals, one very strong candidate has made it through to shortlist and will be interviewed.

16/16 Update on National Pay Negotiations 2016/17 and Pensions

JB stated that as per 99% of institutions nationally, the University decided to give effect to the national 1% pay rise in September, backdated to August, despite the fact that the increase is still in dispute with Trade Unions. He stated that if this were to change, any differences would be retrospectively implemented.

JB informed the group that UCU have balloted with an intention for further strike action; UNITE balloted in favour of strike action but turnout was so low that they withdrew from the strike; and UNISON balloted against strike action.

JB informed the group that the University auto re-enrolled 140 members of staff into a pension scheme over the summer, and that only 40 immediately opted back out again. He confirmed that auto-enrolment had increased membership of local pension schemes, although there is a pressure on pension schemes nationally as many, such as USS, are currently operating at a deficit (USS last reported a deficit of £13bn).

16/17 Update on key issues/matter arising from UCU Joint University Meeting and Staffing Committee

JB informed the group that the agenda for the last Staffing Committee held this term included an update on USS changes; pay bargaining; the People Strategy; and promotions routes for Grade 6 and above academic staff.

JB informed the group that at the last UCU Joint meeting, members were provided with an update on the work the University have been doing, in conjunction with UCU, around the use of sessional teaching staff. He confirmed there were further discussions around the travel policy and around the report of the VC and President of UCU. JB confirmed that no formal items were tabled by UCU on this occasion.

16/18 Equality and Diversity

RVDN informed the group that the University has received confirmation that it has been successful in our institutional application for Bronze Athena SWAN award.

He stated that Ellie Highwood & Simon Chandler Wilde (the Deans for Diversity and Inclusion) are reviewing feedback in relation to the proposed action plan but this is being taken forward and being monitored by the newly established Athena Swan Implementation Team (AIT), comprising of a range of staff from across different parts of the University and has representation from the student body via Sed Joshi (new D&I Student Officer RUSU).
RVDN explained that the intention was for the University to move towards applying for a silver award in 2019, which requires us to show significant progress and a more ‘evangelical’ approach to diversity and inclusion, which would involve sharing best practice with other institutions. RVDN added that moving forward, Athena SWAN now encompasses the whole University, including staff and students, academics and non-academics, and Science and non-Science schools alike.

RVDN informed the group that as part of the Diversity and Inclusion agenda, the University is currently in the process of launching new Diversity and Inclusion webpages.

RVDN discussed other items on the University’s D&I agenda, including the ‘Faces at Reading’ project.

16/19 Update on launch of Campus Jobs (Cherry Bennet, Assistant Director of HR, HR Operations)

Cherry Bennett (CB) informed the Staff Forum that Campus Jobs was a project she had been leading on for a while, working with others in HR, Procurement and Careers. She explained that the purpose of Campus Jobs was to act as a recruitment ‘gateway’ and talent bank for Schools/functions to recruit individuals to temporary, ad hoc roles which are either difficult to fill or need to be filled quite quickly, or point them in the direction of the normal SRF route or an agency if applicable. She explained that the purpose of this would be to simplify and automate, where possible, the University’s current system of recruiting and paying students who are taking on temporary, ad hoc roles, and to make the whole process a better experience for students and their employability.

CB confirmed that Campus Jobs is headed up by Jay Russell and that the intention was to formally launch Campus Jobs in September 2107, with a pilot date of January 2017 in chosen areas across the University. CB confirmed that student demonstrators would fall within Campus Jobs’ remit, and that whilst the creation of Campus Jobs would mean that management information would be more readily available, this would be more financially driven. CB confirmed that students would no longer have an employment relationship with respective Schools but with Campus Jobs.

16/20 AOB

MH asked what was the University’s position following the recent BBC report by the Sexual Harassment Taskforce about Universities and how they deal with sexual incidents on campus. RVDN explained that RUSU have already done a substantial amount of work on how to tackle and handle such incidents, but that the University had formed a working group in order to look at the recommendations which came out of the BBC report and establish where there are any gaps, if any, and how these can be bridged. JB stated that from both a staff and student perspective, the University has always taken the hard line when responding to proven allegations of sexual harassment, but that due to confidentiality and legality issues, these cases cannot always be publicised or shared.

RVDN confirmed that the next Staff Forum meeting would be held on 21 February 2017.