Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30 am on Tuesday 24th October 2017 in Room G04, Palmer Building Whiteknights Campus.

Present:

- Michelle Hargreaves (Co Chair and Employee Representative) - MH
- Debby Livermore (Employee Representative) - DL
- Dawn Turner (Employee Representative) - DT
- Gail Gilbert (Employee Representative) - GG
- Alice Williams (Employee Representative) - AW
- Helen Robson (Employee Representative) - HR
- Nick Crouch (Employee Representative) - NC
- Luke Cantellow (Employee Representative) - LC
- Becky Kite (Employee Representative) - BK
- Professor Robert Van De Noort (Co Chair and Employer Representative) - RVDN
- John Brady (Employer Representative) - JB
- James Magee (Employer Representative) - JMa
- Julia Munro (Employer Representative) - JM
- Rachel Thorns (Secretary) - RT

19/01 Welcome and introductions and apologies (Chair – Michelle Hargreaves)

Apologies were received from:

- Rhiannon Vaughan (Co Chair and Employee Representative)
- Sharon Burton (Employee Representative)
- Sinead O’Flynn (Employee Representative)
- Tracey Lunn (Employee Representative)
- Marguerite Gascoine (Employer Representative)

19/02 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

The minutes were approved although RVDN highlighted he had not been in attendance at the previous meeting. There were no other changes. The actions from the previous meeting were reviewed and all actions had been completed.

Action: JB to take forward formally setting up the "common interest" meeting in the academic diary for 2017/2018.

MH requested an update on section 18.3 from the previous meeting. RT circulated draft paper of meeting held.

MH asked about section 18.6 however, there was no update from IT. DL confirmed that Windows 10 rollout still in progress. Library has computers for students. DL is unaware when the rollout for staff will be. DL confirmed that there has been an improvement to emails for staff. Office 365 hosted emails so it is better supported. We have volunteers to test progress to the new system. The Service Desk has seen positive results of service issues. At the start of October there were issues with the server which meant no OWA connections but this has now been resolved. The same
problems have not reoccurred. MH requested that this action for an update from IT was carried over. RT suggested a meeting is held and is reported back at next meeting if a discussion is required.

MH requested the progress of section 18.8 which is the setup of common meeting. JB confirmed that Dr Paul Hatcher (UCU President) doesn’t have a problem with this happening. He undertook to discuss with UCU Regional Branch and will hopefully come back to let know update.

MH checked everyone else was happy with the previous meeting notes.

19/03 Verbal Headline Updates

Update on activity from Staff Working Group 3 in relation to the proposed extended membership/expansion of Staff Forum to be representative for staff grades 6+ & revision of information and consultation agreement & next steps (John Brady)

JB confirmed a paper was submitted to UEB in relation to the plans to expand the Staff Forum which was supported but they wanted some reassurances. There were concerns raised about ensuring that by expanding the group the Staff Forum voice for G1-5 was not lost. So, there was a proposal to have a fewer number of 6+ representatives to allow steady progress. An area of concern was around voting arrangements for recruitment and with the form. Previously looked at constituencies and people within these areas. We ideally want specified numbers with specified areas and good candidates to take forward.

RVDN stated that UEB technically says yes to the proposed expansion but needs to know more details around the process of voting. We have indicative numbers for grade 6+ but if Staff Forum is agreed JB can take forward.

JB suggested that we can draft the intentions as a communication and the Staff Forum could review it before it then goes back to UEB. We want to be able to hear the voices of the Forum and don’t want to risk people being drowned out.

MH stated that there are some concerns of grade 1-5 being drowned out as DT and I have attended some focus groups and academics were more vocal which is daunting.

JB advised that they want everyone to have the opportunity to speak and therefore we all need to work on it together.

MH checked if anyone wanted to raise anything with proposal.

JMa stated that if the proposal is going forward and there are individuals whom are more vocal then we need to remain balanced and look at the purpose.

AW wanted to say that it was nice to see we are looking at all staff not particular staff. It is a good opportunity to see different grades of staff and hear their voice.

RVDN stated that the position of the Staff Forum was very important. Once the Staff Forum has been expanded it would be hard to revert the decision so it was important for UEB to take any matters of concern from the existing Staff Forum on board.

MH stated she is aware that pockets of groups of staff feel they don’t have “voices” and this offers a solution for them to be heard.

RT states that by having the Staff Forum Handbook guidance it will provide operating standards for the whole Staff Forum and explain the purpose and expectations of the Forum and the purpose of the different representatives and specific roles e.g. Chairs.

DL stated that it was positive having documentation that could be referred back to and assist the Forum.
RT advised that we need to look at how to engage new representatives in relation to showing what their role would involve.

Update on activity in relation to development of training/induction process for new and existing Staff representatives (Debby Livermore & Alice Williams)

DL advised that there is one training session coming up, Pension and Benefits on the 2nd November 2017. We also now have knowledge base and representatives profiles updated. There are seven tabs of different topics. We have started the Training Handbook. We have not had much input as yet so it’s mainly on knowledge base. RT stated she was going to help with developing the Staff Forum Handbook. DL circulated a skills / experience matrix form which she said had been useful for IT colleagues.

JB stated the matrix form was a good document and was helpful to identify gaps in knowledge/experience and training needs for Staff Forum representatives.

DL suggested that the matrix form could have information on what you do at the University, what you did before working at the University and what you could bring to the Staff Forum.

RT advised that she was going to meet with MCE to see how they can help and support the Staff Forum in terms of developing and updating the webpages and thinking about communication and marketing of the Staff Forum.

MH suggested that the matrix form can be useful for PDRs as well as a good development tool. MH asked everyone to add information to the knowledge base at their earliest convenience.

AW confirmed that the document was a live document and wasn’t set in stone.

Update from VCs termly meeting with Professional Services representatives (Nick Crouch)

NB advised that these meetings stem from comments from the staff survey that UEB don’t effectively engage with the wider University. NC advised that he is the representative for Executive Support and that he put a call out to the wider executive support team for comments. There was no formal agenda however they spoke about TOIL and wellbeing. They also spoke about how executive support feel there is a lack of respect from academic staff towards them. NC confirmed that they want people to use executive support for help but this doesn’t happen. The next meeting will be more formal. It was noted that there is nothing documented to see who within teams does what or a structure. This would be helpful for new staff if it existed. There is a general email which is causing issues however this is currently being sorted out.

DL asked if they spoke about the staff induction as this is somewhere where these topics could be discussed.

JB suggested that Hannah Henretty, Learning and Development Officer from the People Development team might be a relevant person to come along and talk about the main staff induction.

DT suggested that once we know what is happening centrally we can look at what to do locally. A communication could go out so it is known what is expected locally compared to centrally.

Action: RT to invite Hannah Henretty to the next Staff Forum meeting.

Update on Faces at Reading Project (Michelle Hargreaves)

DT confirmed she was on a Steering Committee which has met several times. They have been looking at who to approach for profiles. 38 completed (39 people as have part time people), 10 in progress and 7 we’ve approached. 55 profiles as in job shares but 57 people. DT said the loading of profiles was in the testing process at the moment and the Committee were hoping to launch the
profiles by mid-November. We want to continue adding to profiles. We haven’t been able to fulfil every profile and they are not as representative as we would like but the profiles are varied.

MH advised that nominations can still be put through. DT confirmed it is an ongoing process. DL advised they are now using “face of the month” as you wouldn’t know it was there. People have been approached directly to provide nominations (99 people in total and that they have got 57 profiles). It will be an ongoing piece of work to add profiles.

JB stated this was started as a Diversity and Inclusion initiative but that it will be used in support of other projects linked to the people strategy.

19/04 Staff Forum Representatives – confirmation of end of tenure / resignations (Michelle Hargreaves)

MH confirmed that Chris Harris had left employment and that Helen Robson was due to leave Reading University shortly.

MH confirmed that the following individuals had given notice that they were standing down following the end of their tenure:

- Gail Gilbert
- Rhiannon Vaughan
- Michelle Hargreaves
- Tracy Lunn
- Sinead O’Flynn

MH thanked all of the representatives for their contribution over their time as Staff Forum representatives.

JB and RVDN reiterated their thanks and thanked all representatives in general for their contribution to the Staff Forum.

19/05 Discussion on approach to advertising /attracting new Staff Forum representatives (Michelle Hargreaves)

MH noted that although a number of staff were stepping down, they are still happy to support, help and be “buddies” to new representatives to be appointed to the Staff Forum. MH mentioned that the Staff Forum need to decide on the advertising approach and recruitment for new representatives. MH asked about ideas or suggestions.

RT suggested that the Staff Forum consider what they might do to build up interest before and during when we advertise. RT reminded the group that there has been discussion in the past, and in the working group, that there is a concern that lower grades (1, 2 and 3) may not want to become representatives of the Staff Forum so the Forum needs to look at ways to be more proactive and to encourage them to think about this more seriously. MH stated that she has approached Colin Robins, Director of Estates and Facilities and that he and his senior management team are supportive. MH has been asked to write a piece to show why we have a Staff Forum, including the impact the Staff Forum has had to be circulated within Estates and Facilities to encourage people to nominate and put themselves forward.

GG suggested that we could circulate MH’s communication to all grades 1-5 so everyone can see what the Staff Forum is about if MH is in agreement.

JB emphasised that this was the Staff Forum’s opportunity to promote this however JB was happy to endorse it. JB said that it was not an HR lead activity but that it belonged to the employee representatives but that HR can help with advertising and endorsing.
GG suggested that if RT is meeting with MCE that someone from the Staff Forum should also be involved. RT stated she would get a meeting arranged and if someone from the Staff Forum wanted to attend then that would be useful.

BK said that she feels that getting buy in from managers, particularly where staff are doing shift work, is difficult. BK said that the Staff Forum needed managers to buy into the idea. DL said it can be difficult for lower grades to get time off to attend meetings. DL said that other work colleagues may feel aggrieved at supporting colleagues to attend meetings by covering work. AW suggested if the Staff Forum talk to managers about the Forum then there would be a better understanding on what would be required and how often staff would need to be released. DT suggested that the Forum needs buy in from line managers that it’s good for the Function and/or School so they are prepared to support people who are representatives. BK suggested that line managers could give a statement to put on adverts to show that they support the Forum and the need for time off to undertake the duties. RVDN said that he would ask Heads of Function to encourage the idea of becoming a Staff Forum representative for lower level staff. JB suggested that from time to time we could take a discussion to staff at other times and maybe we need to understand it doesn’t need to be just one person.

19/06 Guest Speaker – Erin Cooper, Project Manager for Organisational Processes Project. (Erin Cooper - EC)

EC outlined that she had joined the University a year ago looking at executive support activity. EC said that through that project it was recognised that a one year project was required to look at departments who work together for a process but aren’t working well together or to their full potential. EC said that the project she was now working on was looking for connections and solutions to bring people together and working on a solution rather than giving a solution without employee involvement. EC said that the Steering Group needed people to suggest processes which need to be looked at. EC confirmed that they did have some projects which have been carried over from the Executive Support project but that the Steering Group are also open to new projects.

EC went through some examples of processes and projects that had already been identified: Technical Services, Buildings Services and Timetabling, spreadsheets to manage School commitments and managing manually as Agresso doesn’t work effectively. EC said that the Steering Group had 40 examples of projects so far. EC said that at the Steering Group meeting (which was due to take place that afternoon), they would be looking at impacts on student and staff, compliance risk, financial implications, are we checking right to work, compliance risk, CMS training. EC said that they might get students involved in round table discussions to see how to improve processes. EC said she thought the Group would be able to complete 10–12 of the projects. EC confirmed that there were 6 carried over from Executive Support project which will, hopefully, be done by Christmas. EC confirmed that the Steering Group has representatives from HR, Finance, IT, Business Change and Knowledge Transfer and is chaired by Rachel Stewart, Director of Planning and Strategy Office. EC said that if there were any other channels of communication or groups the Staff Forum wanted her to talk to then she was happy to do that. EC said that any projects which are not completed or addressed will be escalated to UEB. EC said that finding the best way to communicate with staff is difficult.

19/07 Update on Staff Survey & upcoming focus groups (John Brady)

It was noted that Alison Hackett, Deputy HR Director (People and Talent) had provided a paper with an update which had been circulated to members of the Staff Forum. In summary the paper confirmed that:

- A paper went to UEB in September 2017 outlining the feedback from the focus groups – this is now available for all staff on the staff survey web pages as is the D&I report. UEB were open to the feedback and took it on board but commented there was complexity in taking this forward in terms of the links with other work due to start and work currently in progress (see below)
- The next round of focus groups will start on 6th November 2017 to early December 2017 and will focus on: Reward and Recognition and Leadership and Management. In relation to Leadership and Management, the focus groups will explore what the expectations are from staff at Reading and what development and support is needed for
managers at all career stages (including those not yet in management positions but who would like to be in the future).

- The focus groups will be advertised next week and other topics identified in the survey results to be looked at are Values and Behaviours and Performance Management. AH confirmed that there would be consideration of setting up focus groups for these in the New Year.

- AH confirmed that a Programme Board had been established for the People Strategy/Plan to be chaired by Steve Mithen, Deputy Vice Chancellor and many of the issues raised in the focus groups will be addressed via projects in the people plan. AH confirmed in her report that there would be the opportunity for Staff Forum representatives, UCU representatives and also other staff to have a voice on these projects.

19/08 Update from Director of HR

- The University Strategy – key Organisational Change projects (in particular the People Plan) – current / upcoming restructures

JB confirmed that Steve Mithen, Deputy Vice Chancellor is Chairing the Project Board and that a call for 6 places was put out and that these places could be taken from members of staff across the University. JB confirmed there had been 20 nominations which were all excellent so everyone has been accommodated and that he would be writing to them to confirm this. JB said that he would keep the Staff Forum updated.

JMa said it is nice that all 20 people had been included and clearly the University is interested to see what people have to say. JB said it is positive and they hope the Programme Board has good ideas and suggestions like the Staff Forum.

- Key issues/matters arising from UCU Joint University meeting and Staffing Committee

JB confirmed that the UCU Joint University meeting was scheduled for a couple of weeks’ time but that no papers had been issued yet. JB said he was happy to share the agenda as before once it had been agreed.

JB confirmed that the Staffing Committee had met on 10th October 2017. An update was given on USS which is going through valuation at the moment. JB confirmed that there were significant implications as employer and member of USS and that there would be financial implications for the University. JB updated that UCU had held a consultative ballot with members to oppose changes although we don’t know what the changes are yet. JB confirmed that 84% of members were in favour of protest.

JB confirmed that he had provided an update on Campus Jobs which launched formally on 18th September 2017. JB said that with the launch, software issues were one of many challenges but that students have been very happy with the work opportunities given to them.

JB said that the University was still waiting on review of Brexit and that FAQs had been circulated in the summer term but as soon as there was a significant development then they would be getting someone in to come and talk with European colleagues. JB confirmed that he had been keeping an eye on recruitment and retention of staff and that there was no evidence of recruitment of staff diminishing or staff leaving.

JB confirmed that they had talked about the new Personal Titles process and that some tweaks have been made this year but that this was an ongoing piece of work.

JB confirmed that he had provided an employment law developments update to the Staffing Committee. For example, covering the issue about deducting pay when employees go on strike and that from next year the University would need to produce a detailed report on facility time and time spent on TU duties as this would need to be reported via annual accounts. JB said that the University wanted to report a positive impression of what UCU representatives do.

JB said that he had updated that Employment tribunal fees have been declared to be illegal. People who have paid fees since being introduced are being refunded. People who didn’t make a claim due to fees
may now be able to still make a claim although they may be outside the stipulated timeframe to bring a claim.

JB said that he also updated that the immigration Tier 2 appointment minimum salary level is now £30,000.

JB confirmed that the University and signed up to the Technician Commitment, a sector wide initiative led by the Science Council and that they currently have over 30 people working towards to obtaining a professional registration and to take up continuing professional development opportunities on offer by the Science Council.

NC questioned if there will be any Campus Jobs user feedback sessions. JB stated he would be happy to do that although not at the moment as the team wanted to reflect on the launch. JB said that there was a project group that he chaired which would be changed into a management group and that they would be focusing on working on improvements.

19/09  AOB

- Identify which Heads of Functions to invite to Spring and Summer term meetings

- BK stated there has been confusion on what staff discount is available for formal training (masters, MBA). BK asked what staff were entitled to discount wise. RVDN stated that since 2014 the University does not give a discount centrally but if through the PDR process specific needs are identified then the Department may support an individual financially to undertake a course of study.

- DT asked if payment of Professional Membership fees was supported. RVDN confirmed that it would only be supported if the HMRC recognised a Professional membership body. BK suggested that this information needs to be clearer on the staff portal. JB stated that it needed to be in more places rather than just one.

The next Staff Forum meeting would be held on Thursday 22nd February 2018, 10.30 am to 12.30 pm, G05 Chancellors Building, Whiteknights Campus