Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30am on Thursday 9th June 2016 in G04 Henley Business School, Whiteknights Campus.

Present:

Michelle Hargreaves (Co Chair and Employee Representative)
Debby Livermore (Employee Representative)
Tracy Lunn (Employee Representative)
Dawn Turner (Employee Representative)
Juliette Dack (Employee Representative)
Rhiannon Vaughan (Co Chair and Employee Representative)
Jo Dormer (Employee Representative)
Sinead O’Flynn (Employee Representative)
Mary Williams (Employee Representative)

Professor Robert Van De Noort (Co Chair and Employer Representative)
John Brady (Employer Representative)
Professor Richard Ellis (Employer Representative)
Steve Boon (Employer Representative)
James Magee (Employer Representative)
Cherry Bennett, Assistant Director HR, HR Operations (Guest)
Alison Hackett, Assistant Director HR, People Development (Guest)
Rachel Thorns (Secretary)

Apologies were received from:

Chris Malcolm (Employee Representative)
Marguerite Gascoigne (Employer Representative)
Gail Gilbert (Employee Representative)
Chris Harris (Employee Representative)

16/01 Welcome and Introductions

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

16/02 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

The minutes were approved with no other changes. There were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

16/03 Working Groups – updates from employee representatives on progress with actions and activities

Subgroup 1 (Facilities, Communication & Training): Travel, Expenses, Benefits Hospitality and Gifts Policy

Travel Policy - John Brady (JB) commented that there were various practical concerns raised by Staff Forum and UCU representatives which had been fed back at a meeting with David Savage, Chief Operating Officer. UCU were not able to attend and as a result aspects of the policy have been changed. JB noted this was a good example of a practical thing which the Staff Forum have been able to influence.
**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

Robert Van de Noort (RVDN) proceeded to provide an update in relation to the Living Wage Campaign. RVDN confirmed that the proposals in relation to implementing the living wage at the University have been taken to the University Council for discussion and a decision, with student representation in attendance. This was done following discussion on this issue at Staffing Committee, UEB and Finance Committee. RVDN confirmed that the University Council did not agree it wanted to implement the Living Wage at the moment. RVDN said that the reasons were that this would effectively mean handing over control of salaries to an external company and that the new national minimum wage was already making significant changes to our pay structure. For example, we will lose grade 1 by 2020 and a certain part of our current spinal structure will be defunct as it is below the new national minimum wage.

JB confirmed that he was part of a national working group who were looking at the impact of changes to the national minimum wage and was using this to inform the University’s own dialogue. JB confirmed there would be an immediate impact in terms of this year’s national pay award.

RVDN confirmed that there are wider benefits staff have as an employee (apart from their salary) such as holiday, pension contributions etc. RVDN confirmed that the national minimum wage will drive up pay anyway and that it was important that we keep control of how we set our salaries, also consider other benefits.

Michelle Hargreaves (MH) asked how many people on Spine point 1 were earning less than the living wage. JB confirmed that it was a very small number.

JB confirmed that any consultation in terms of a review of the University’s pay structures will involve Staff Forum representatives as it will be important to think about the practical things which may need to be considered.

Richard Ellis (RE) confirmed that the living wage campaign was a students campaign not instigated by RUSU.

Sinead O’Flynn (SOF) asked whether the cost of living in this areas was taken into account when taking this decision. JB one issue for introducing the living wage is recruitment and retention of staff but that the University doesn’t really have this problem. JB confirmed that the vast majority of people employed at the lower end of the pay scale are in casual or temporary roles. JB confirmed that there was a steering group looking at the establishment of a temporary agency run by the University to offer students temporary employment opportunities and what we pay will be reviewed for students to improve consistency.

MH highlighted a training need for the Staff Forum representatives – short course on mental health. Rhiannon Vaughan (RV) updated the group that she had experienced an external company running a half day course (short version of the fuller 2 day course) in Estates and Facilities and this had been very good. RV highlighted that this would enable Staff Forum representatives to be more aware of mental health issues.

JB said he was supportive of the suggestion and this fits with wider arrangements being discussed currently in relation to staff wellbeing. JB also highlighted that we have re-engaged an employee assistance programme and so we need to promote this.

JB confirmed that those who have used it have reported back positively and so the University wants to get the best use of this facility.
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.

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

JB confirmed that UCU had taken the proposed contract (applicable to Grade 6+ staff) and associated HR policies to members in October 2015 and that at that time, 88 UCU members rejected the proposals. JB reported that since then there have been further discussions between the University and UCU representatives in relation to how the contract is drafted and what certain parts mean in reality. UCU were given 2 months to discuss things further with local and regional UCU representatives. JB confirmed that a number of significant adjustments to documents have been made and a glossary of terms has been created (to outline what is meant/intention of various terms etc. The amended documentation was provided to UCU and the end of January 2016 for them to decide whether they needed to take this back to their membership for a further vote. UCU have still not done this, it is recognised that there have been lots of other priorities which representatives have had to be involved in, but JB confirmed he had spoken to Paul Hatcher, UCU President who had promised to take this forward. If there is no progress then the next step would be for the University to instigate the formal dispute procedure.

Then, once that has been concluded JB would be arranging to discuss the proposed changes to contracts for staff Grades 1-5 and the associated HR policies with the Staff Forum.

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

16/04 The University Strategy – Key Organisational Change projects

Efficiency & Effectiveness – Professional and Administrative Services (PAS)

Efficiency & Effectiveness - Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) – general update from John Brady (including update on Buildings Manager/H&S roles and arrangements and transition plans for each of the work-streams)

JB said that he wanted to record his thanks for the contribution made by Staff Forum representatives in relation to the overall PAS Consultation group and individual work-stream consultation groups. JB said that the amount of time which representatives had decided was incredible and demonstrated the significant degree of input and feedback which they provided throughout the formal consultation period.

JB confirmed that the formal consultation ended last week but that there was still a lot to do. JB confirmed that the average age of staff leaving via Voluntary redundancy was 51 years, the average service was 11 years and that the average voluntary redundancy payment was £14,000. JB said that the PAS Consultation Group had looked at the profile of those leaving via voluntary redundancy in relation to gender and ethnicity but that nothing had been picked up which was of concern.

JB confirmed that one of the next actions was to look at the breakdown of those staff who took voluntary redundancy on a School by School basis and that this was to be done over the next few weeks.

JB confirmed that following the matching exercise there are only 6 people in downgraded roles although as recruitment to vacant posts is still ongoing there may still be an opportunity for them to be redeployed to role at their current grade. JB confirmed that pay protection was in place for staff who may be in this situation. JB confirmed that at least 14 staff have been promoted (moved up a grade) as
an outcome of PAS recruitment activity and this is increasing due to ongoing recruitment activity. JB confirmed that the University has only issued 2 notices of compulsory redundancy and given the scope of the exercise this is a good outcome. JB confirmed that the affected individuals would have the right to appeal the decision to dismiss on the grounds of compulsory redundancy.

JB confirmed that the PAS Consultation Group have also been discussing some other practical things, e.g. building liaison and Health & Safety. JB confirmed that there are a number of substantive H&S Coordinator posts which have been created in the new Technical Services function to cover high risk areas and that 1 post remains to be filled. JB confirmed there were ongoing discussions about H&S coordination provision for low risk areas.

JB confirmed that there was progress being made in relation to clarifying arrangements for building management. He confirmed that there were discussion taking place to identify what reward/recognition could be put in place for individuals taking on associated tasks and responsibilities. JB confirmed he would bring forward proposals on this shortly.

JB confirmed that the in moving from consultation to implementation there were 2 big issues: recruitment (to fill remaining vacancies, particularly in Finance and Teaching and Learning support) and space. JB confirmed that a monthly Functions Head meeting has been introduced to look at practical issues with transition, implementation and moving to the new structures. JB confirmed that it had been agreed to keep the PAS Consultation Group alive to monitor the progression with implementation plans.

JB updated that there had recently been the first meeting for members of Executive Support staff. JB confirmed this was in the guise of a “Community of Practice” not a function with the idea being this group could help take forward the process changes.

Alison Hackett (AH) confirmed that it had been a positive first step and topics of discussion were staff members’ hopes and fears about the future, understanding what a Community of Practice was and how this could work and identifying any training and development needs. AH confirmed this was ongoing work.

JB confirmed that when he met with UCU colleagues (Joint UCU Committee) they talked about how much unease PAS has created. JB said he was grateful for the input from the Staff Forum and that he felt they had provided a good service to colleagues.

Debbie Turner (DT) highlighted that one of most regular queries IT had was around changes to authorisation routes.

Cherry Bennett (CB) confirmed that from a systems perspective a lot of work has been done to build in from 1st August. Richard Ellis (RE) commented that there were parallel difficulties in finance, what are we doing in next 8 weeks,

**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

JB confirmed that there were now planned weekly meeting for Heads of Function (within COOG) and that each Head has been asked to complete a template to set out who does what within each Function in order that this can be provided to staff so that everyone is aware of who is doing what in the new world and how their roles may interface with others.

JB confirmed that he was putting together an all staff communication update to advise on where thing are in terms of the Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) review and next steps to provide some reassurance and clarity for all staff.
Queries were raised by Staff Forum representatives in relation to the gap between the initial communication about staff being matched to roles and the staff then getting something more formal to confirm arrangements for transfer to their new roles – e.g. confirmation of working patterns/hours/area of work.

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

**16/05 Review of Staff Forum membership going forward**

MH confirmed that over the past few months there have been some informal discussions about whether the University should enable the Staff Forum to be representative for staff who are Grades 6+ who are not members of the University College Union (UCU). JB confirmed this has arisen due to feedback received during the formal PAS consultation from staff in this group as they felt they were not being represented and/or were not receiving the same level of communication in relation to the proposed changes as colleagues who were Grades 1-5 or who were members of UCU.

MH confirmed that the Staff Forum would be under-resourced to provide this level of support based on the current numbers of Staff Forum employee representatives.

MH also raised the issue that some representatives were leaving employment with the University, others had secured promotions which took them out of the remit of Grade 1-5 and the majority of employee representatives were coming up to the end of their term.

There was general agreement in the group that people were keen to open up the existing Staff Forum to incorporate being able to provide support to staff (who were not UCU members) from grades 6+.

It was agreed that a new Sub-group would be established to look at the practicalities for extending the Staff Forum to be representative of staff from Grade 6+ consider the approach to recruitment for new Staff Forum representatives going forward, considering any legal matters relating to our collective agreement arrangements with UCU, reviewing the terms of reference in relation to tenure and the current constitution, look at methodology for promoting membership and electing new membership.

**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

At this point in the meeting Cherry Bennett (CB) formally introduced herself and said the reason she was attending the meeting was as she was doing a Masters in Human Resource Management at Kingston University and her dissertation subject was to look at issues of the employee voice in the workplace. CB confirmed that an evaluation of the Staff Forum was part of what she wanted to look at as part of her dissertation. CB will contact members of the Staff Forum to see who would be willing to meet her for a focused interview as part of the research for her dissertation.

James McGee (JMG) commented that he felt one of the successes he had noticed was that a number of technical staff have felt empowered to hold their own meetings and inform the Technical leadership team of their issues.

**16/06 Update on National Pay Negotiations 2016-17 and Pensions**

**Update on national pay negotiations**

JB confirmed the University was in dispute with UCU about the national pay negotiations before the national pay bargaining started. As UCU were not in agreement we moved immediately in the dispute
procedure which was facilitated by ACAS. Unfortunately they failed to reach agreement. UCU announced strike action or action short of strike action and 107 (out of 533) members of UCU participated in strike action.

JB confirmed that strike action has had very little impact so far however, it is JB’s understanding that UCU’s intention is to escalate – e.g. consider boycotting exam setting and marking.

JB reported that this year he has received more complaints than previous years in relation to the behaviour of striking staff on the picket lines. JB wanted to confirm that if Staff Forum representatives receive any complaints this should be fed into JB so he can feed this back to UCU. JB confirmed that if there were serious concerns these should be reported through the normal processes i.e near miss so H&S committee can review and UCU are represented on this committee.

JB confirmed that the offer on the table is a 1.1% increase across all spinal points. JB confirmed there have been additional payments applied to lower end of pay scale 3.1% (Grade 2) - 1.6% (up to Grade 7).

JB confirmed that once the pay dispute was resolved the % increase would be applicable from 1st August. JB confirmed that if no agreement could be reached by December our stance would be to arrange payment on these terms but he confirmed he would keep the Staff Forum updated.

**Action: JB to provide an update at next Staff Forum meeting**

**Pensions**

JB confirmed that the changes which were implemented in April had been well communicated and this had been a huge amount of work for the HR Operations and Pensions teams to get to this point. JB confirmed there will be more work to facilitate auto re-enrolment (1st July 2016) and further changes occurring in October.

**16/07 Update on key issues/matters arising from UCU Joint University meeting and Staffing Committee**

JB confirmed the last UCU Joint University meeting was held on 24th May. Items for discussion were:

- Contracts for sessional lecturing staff
- The Vice Chancellor reported back to UCU in relation to discussions about the travel and hospitality policy
- Feedback on online absence recording system – next phase, recording for TOIL, developing the facility for recording unpaid and sabbatical leave
- Report from the Vice Chancellor
- Report from the President of UCU – this was on general issues, PAS, national pay negotiations and related strike action

JB confirmed that Staffing Committee last met in February 2016 and were due to meet again in a few weeks time. JB reported that they discussed the following topics:

- Pension changes
- Living wage
- Update on personal titles arrangements
- Efficiency and Effectiveness and PAS update
- First interation of the HR strategy – JB confirmed he was currently working on planned activity associated with that and included in this is the extension of the Staff Forum.
- Review the annual diversity report (which is available on the University website)
• Discussion about proposed changes to Tier 2 sponsorship – and the impact on our ability to recruit international staff
• General discussion about the arrangements for Staffing Committee going forward post 1st August

MH said that it would be useful to have sight of the terms of reference for the Staffing Committee and to be provided with a copy of the agenda in advance of any future Staffing Committee meetings and be sent copies of minutes.

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

16/08 Alison Hackett, Assistant HR Director (People Development)

Alison (AH) attended to provide an update on proposals of how the People Development Function will operate / how training provision will be delivered in the future.

AH confirmed the background to the People Development team – it had been created in August 2014, bringing together activity from CQSD and introducing a new Leadership and Talent manager role. AH confirmed that there have been some recent staff resignations which has given her the opportunity to review the structure and roles within the People Development team to ensure it is fit to meet the needs of the institution. AH confirmed that she has reviewed the 5 year plans (submitted by Heads of Schools and Functions) to help with identifying people development training needs.

AH confirmed that the summary of feedback she got from doing this was as follows:

• The People Development team was fairly top heavy in relation to management roles
• There was a question about whether there was the need for a dedicated post to support research staff development and for an IT training post
• There was a large demand for leadership and management development – AH confirmed that the current budget was ring-fenced for the leadership group but that she wanted to broaden out this offer
• There is a demand for bespoke training courses – aligned to schools/functions needs. AH confirmed that there is a demand for more flexibility in the way we deliver courses.
• It is apparent that coaching and mentoring is not available consistently across organisation
• AH confirmed that the information suggests that we are not dealing with talent management or succession planning in a coherent way
• There is considerable work to do in relation to diversity and inclusion training

AH confirmed that she was looking to recruit to 3 new posts: an L&D Officer post, an L&D manager post and an L&D Officer role (leadership development and research development).

AH confirmed that the priorities when they were in post was to look at induction, and in particular local inductions, looking at the procurement of L&D training and budgets, development of e-learning and what we might need to have in place to do this (as we do not currently have a learning management system in place), continue working with the Research Deans to look at reviewing the development offering for research staff.

MH said that AH would be welcome to use the Staff Forum to help with assessing training needs.

16/09 Update on review of current arrangements for long service awards

JB confirmed that the background was that historically long service awards were only awarded to people at the point of their retirement. JB confirmed that in the early 2000s UNISON had expressed
concern that there were a number of colleagues who had 25 years service who had left employment, died in service, or who had left via ill health retirement who had not been recognised. It was at this point that we moved to the new arrangements in recognising long service when people have 21 years of service.

Steve Boon confirmed that he had received an award (letter from VC, certificate, choice of vouchers to the value of £200) and that this had been very well received.

JB confirmed that what was being considered was whether there was an opportunity of having an online Long service award scheme (something along the lines of the celebrating success voucher scheme), although what we do want to retain is the personal touch. JB said that HR were undertaking some work to get some feedback on the current arrangements and take some views on how it might work in the future.

Action: Staff Forum members to provide some feedback on the proposals to JB

16/10 Equality & Diversity

RVDN confirmed that the University had re-submitted an application for a Bronze Athena SWAN award and that we were expecting a response in November 2016.

RVDN confirmed that he would be convening a review group to focus on looking at ways the University can continue to work on closing the gender pay gap as other industries appear to have been more successful at this than the HE sector. The review group is meeting for the first time on 14th June 2016 and it is noted that Sinead O’Flynn (Staff Forum employee representative) is part of this group. RVDN confirmed that currently there was an 18% pay gap, on the basis that there are more women employed on lower grades than higher grades. RVDN confirmed that the Government was promoting the idea of a mean pay gap - this is around 10% for us.

Sinead O’Flynn updated that she was part of the equality and diversity group for her school and as a member she was working with colleagues in relation to a re-submission of their Athena SWAN award and one of the things she was working on was an inclusive language document working group.

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

16/11 AOB

Dawn Turner said an issue had been raised to her attention about the cost of replacing a staff card. It had been reported to her that a member of staff had been asked to pay £10 for a replacement. Cherry Bennett confirmed that there should be no charge and that members of staff should contact the HR Operations team if they need to get a replacement card.

AH mentioned the staff survey. She recognised there was a gap in having a Staff Forum employee representative on the working group which was looking at designing the Staff Survey.

Richard Ellis (RE) thanked members of the Staff Forum for work he was aware they had been involved with in terms of dealing with some academic staff concerns over this year. RE said he wanted to thank Tracy Lynn in relation to his inputs. RE said that he felt the Staff Forum needed to re-launch in September to raise staff awareness of what they do.

JB said that in light of Chris Malcolm’s recent resignation he wanted to formally note his thanks for her work and commitment to the Staff Forum, particularly through the recent PAS collective consultation process.
Action: Debbie Livermore and Jo Dormer to review the Staff Forum website to refresh if required for September 2016