Staff Forum

14/01 A meeting of the Staff Forum was held on Thursday 19th June 2014 at 2.00pm in Room 101, Carrington Building.

There were present:

Employer Representatives
Professor Tony Downes (In the chair)
Mr John Brady
Mrs Ruth Busby
Mrs Mary Boitz
Mr James Magee
Mr Steve Boon

Employee Representatives
Mr Tracey Lunn
Miss Rhiannon Vaughan
Mr Rob Sassoon
Mrs Jo Dormer
Mrs Michelle Hargreaves
Miss Sinead O'Flynn
Mrs Dawn Turner
Mrs Jacqui Thijm
Mrs Debby Livermore
Miss Jess Bennett
Mrs Maureen Martin

Mrs Sue Mott (Previously Unison representative)
Mrs Carol Allison (Previously Unite representative)

The Chief Operating Officer, Mr David Savage, was in attendance for item 14/03.

Miss Erin Murphy was in attendance for item 14/06, and acted as secretary for this meeting only.

14/02 Welcome and Introductions

- The members of the Staff Forum were welcomed by Professor Downes and introductions were made.
• Professor Downes would act as Chair for the first formal meeting of the Forum, noting that he would be stepping down to take up his new role as Provost for UoRM. Professor Downes expressed his personal satisfaction that the Forum was now operational, stressing the importance to the University of effective staff engagement.

• It was noted that Mrs Mott and Mrs Allison were present at the Staff Forum meeting in their capacity as representatives of Unite and Unison respectively. It was confirmed that although they were not elected members, it was hoped that they would be able to use their previous experience to assist the Forum.

• It was noted that the Forum was created primarily to ensure that staff in grades 1-5 were able to fully understand and engage with the changes happening within the University and to enable the employee members of the Forum to receive information from and ask questions of the University.

14/03 The Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme

• Mr David Savage led the discussion on the Efficiency and Effectiveness programme.

• It was noted that there was an understandable tension between staff wanting to know how the programme might affect them personally and wanting a more general overview of the changes that the programme was intending to make.

• It was agreed that updates from the monthly programme meetings would be made available to the Staff Forum. As the meetings were held monthly and the Staff Forum met termly it was decided that the Forum Members would receive e-mailed updates.

Action: Mr Savage/Mr Brady

• It was suggested that a work-stream lead from the Efficiency and Effectiveness programme should attend each meeting to give the Staff Forum an update.

• It was noted that the Estates Strategy had now been completed and introduced as well as many other projects such as the ‘Student Journey’. It was confirmed that the University was making a significant investment in order to provide better services to students (it was confirmed that the University was investing in the region of £35 million on the project), and that the programme was not wholly concerned with reducing operating costs.
- It was noted however that efficiencies would inevitably result in fewer people employed at the University and that it would have personal impacts for individuals – both positive and negative.
- The Forum was informed that the University was making losses every year which wasn’t sustainable. It was noted that the intended savings created by the programme would enable reinvestment into the University.
- The Forum was informed that the Efficiency and Effectiveness programme was a way to put the University’s costs back in to balance in a structured way to enable Reading to carry on its activities more effectively.
- It was confirmed that the programme was a 3 year project, the 1st year being research into various areas of the University and the 2nd and 3rd years being implementation. It was noted that within the next 12-18 months the work that had been going on within the University would become clearer. The Forum was told that all staff views on how to make the University run as effectively as possible would be welcomed and encouraged.
- It was suggested that employee members give some consideration to their information requirements regarding E&E, for confirmation at the Autumn meeting.

**Action: Employee representatives**

- The Forum asked for projected figures in order to make a comparison of the cost of the project (£35 million) against the savings that the programme was intending to make. The Forum was informed that the programme should make recurring savings of c.£15 million annually when it was complete. It was noted however that some of the money invested in the programme was not intended to make savings directly but to instead make Reading a better University and attract students. The Forum was given the ‘Student Journey’ project as an example.
- Mr Brady noted the contribution made by staff to the recent data collection exercise as part of the Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) exercise, and in subsequent workshops. It was noted that although the summary reports from the data collection exercise had been circulated to the Heads of School, it had not been filtered down and made available to staff in some instances, as requested. Mr Brady agreed to re-circulate this information.

**Action: Mr Brady**
The Forum received a draft of the Forum Agreement for consideration: the following points were noted in the discussion:

- Clause 4.1 – ‘will be encouraged’ to be replaced by ‘will bring ideas’
- Clause 4.2 – ‘Inform’ to be replaced by ‘inform and consult’
- Clause 4.2(b)
  - ‘where considered appropriate by the Chair’ to be removed
  - ‘significant’ to be included before ‘changes in HR…’
  - ‘a significant number’ to be removed
- Clause 4.4 – ‘and its members’ to be included
- Clause 5.3 – the Forum discussed whether a time period should be applied here although it was noted that it may be difficult to define as occasionally a matter may need immediate attention.
- Clause 6.1(a) – ‘one of whom will be elected by the employee representatives to be one of the two Co-Chairs of the Forum (‘Chairs’)’ to be included
- Clause 6.1(b) – ‘who shall be the Chair of the Forum (Chair)’ to be replaced by ‘who shall be one of the two Co-Chairs of the Forum (Chairs)’ It was agreed by the forum that the employee representatives would elect a Co-Chair to work alongside the employer Co-Chair. The Chairs would work on an alternating basis, with the two Chairs taking it in turns to Chair the Forum meetings. It was further agreed that outside of the meeting the Co-Chairs would work alongside each other to determine agendas and other Forum business.

**Action: Employee Representatives**

- Clause 6.2 – the clause shall include that employee representative shall be notified about the appointment of employer representatives and any changes to that representation.
- Clause 7.1 – ‘Chair’ to be replaced by ‘Chairs’
- Clause 7.2 –
  - ‘Chair’ to be replaced by ‘Chairs’
  - ‘seven working days’ to be replaced by ‘ten working days’ It was agreed that the meetings of the Forum would be included in the University Calendar. It was noted that it may not be possible for this to happen for
the 14/15 session but that every effort would be made to try and facilitate it.

**Action: Secretary to the Forum**

- Clause 7.3 – The Forum discussed the limitations of relying on an internet connection or telephone line (for members who are unable to attend a meeting in person) in order to be quorate. It was agreed that ‘the University will seek to make provisions to allow Forum members to attend virtually, whether via telephone, Skype or an alternative medium in exceptional circumstances’ would be included. It was noted that the Forum would make proportionate adjustments in order to make sure as many members of the Forum as possible were able to attend the meeting. It was agreed that having the meetings arranged well in advance and in the Calendar would be the best way to ensure maximum attendance.

- Clause 7.4
  - ‘The attendance of’ to be included

- Clause 8.1 – The Forum agreed that in this clause ‘The Forum’ means a balanced membership of the Forum including both employee and employer representatives. It was further noted that the document belonged to the Staff Forum and would be a dynamic document. Changes to the document could be proposed at any time.

- Clause 9.4
  - ‘Chair’ to be replaced by ‘Chairs’
  - ‘in consultation with the employee representatives’ to be included

- Clause 9.5 – ‘Chair’ to be replaced by ‘Chairs’

- Clause 9.6 – The Forum discussed the proposed change in light of Data Protection issues. It was agreed that ‘The University shall provide employee representatives with up-to-date lists of employees whom they represent to allow employee representatives to fulfil their duties, in so far as this is allowable under data protection regulations’ would be included.

- Clause 10.4 – ‘If an employee representative is promoted to a position of grade 6 or higher of the University’s pay and grading structure, or the equivalent on Henley Management College terms and conditions, subject to the agreement of the
Forum they may be invited by the Chairs to be co-opted to the Forum in line with clause 8.2’ to be included.

- It was noted that ‘Pro-Vice-Chancellor’ had been replaced by ‘Vice-Chancellor’ on the signatory’s page. It was agreed that the employee representatives would determine three of their membership to sign the Agreement once any amendments had been made.

**Action: Employee Representatives**

- It was noted that any further proposed changes should be sent to Mr Brady as soon as possible. The employee representatives had sent a copy of the draft agreement to ACAS for their feedback and would provide Mr Brady with any comments once they had received the document back. The finalised signed Agreement would be placed on the Staff Portal.

**14/05 Pay Award 2014**

- It was confirmed that the National Pay Award had been agreed in advance. All relevant staff would be receiving a 2% pay increase effective from 1st August. A formal notification would be placed on the Staff Portal. It was agreed that it would be made clear in the announcement that this was a ‘national’ pay award.

**14/06 Reform of the University Charter, Statute and Ordinances**

- Miss Murphy gave a brief update on the reform of the University Charter, Statutes and Ordinances. It was noted that a website had been set up on the Staff Portal with a cover letter from the Vice-Chancellor explaining the reasons behind the project and setting out a proposed timeline.
- The Forum were given details of some of the changes that the Instruments of Governance were undergoing in order to make them less archaic, more easily understandable and compliant with employment law. It was noted that the Charter was being modernised and strengthened, the Statutes were being removed and the Ordinances were being rewritten in order to be more reflective of University procedure. The Forum heard that a set of policies relating to all staff would sit behind the Charter and Ordinances setting out key employment processes. It was noted that this was a change from the current situation whereby Academic Staff procedures are contained in Ordinance. It was further noted that for the first time non-academic staff would be recognised as ‘members’ of the University.
The members of the forum were talked through the current proposed timeline. It was confirmed that there would be a thorough Staff Forum consultation during the autumn along with a broad staff communication. It was agreed that a small working group should be set up nearer the time to consider the new Instruments of Governance in adequate detail and report back to the Forum.

It was confirmed that all information concerning the reform of the Instruments of Governance including specific dates for consultation would be put up on the website and made available to the Forum.

14/07 The University Strategy

The Forum were provided with a copy of the ‘Vision ambition strategy 2026 document’ and a paper that had gone to the Strategy and Finance committee titled ‘An update on Activity as part of the University Strategy’

It was noted that the ‘vision ambition strategy 2026’ document was very honest in explaining where the University is currently as well as where it is aiming to be.

The Forum was invited to look at the various tables and diagrams contained in the papers put to the Strategy and Finance committee, it was confirmed that these diagrams contained the key points of the strategy.

KPI’s relating to offer-conversion targets and student application targets were considered by the Forum. It was noted that the KPI’s listed in the ‘An update on Activity as part of University Strategy’ paper was simply a dashboard with many more KPI’s sitting underneath. Currently the University considered offer-conversion targets to be the priority which is why they appeared in the paper.

It was confirmed that ‘Strategy’ would be a standing item on the Agenda of the Staff Forum for the foreseeable future, members therefore having an opportunity to contribute to its development.

14/08 The Operation of the Forum

The Forum was asked to put forward suggestions of facilities that it might need in order to operate effectively. It was noted that the employee representatives should think about what they may need and give specific feedback to Mr Brady on suggested requirements. It was further noted that the offer was not time-limited and that members should feel able to put forward suggestions at any time.

Action: Employee Representatives
• It was agreed that the employee representatives would be provided with an opportunity to meet with the relevant HR Partner to be introduced to the key HR procedures and establish lines of communication.

**Action: Mr Brady**

• It was noted that the employee representatives requested a budget in order to help facilitate the effective running of the Forum. It was agreed that Mr Brady and Professor Downes would look into the matter and report back to the Forum.

**Action: Mr Brady and Professor Downes**

• The Forum raised a concern regarding communicating with employees within the University who do not have email. It was confirmed that if communications needed to go out to all employees HR would be able to assist with this. It was suggested that further down the line an independent website be set up for the Forum to display important information and communications.

• It was agreed that a sub-group of the Forum would be set up in order to establish how best to communicate with different staff within the University. It was noted that different constituencies would probably need different forms of communication.

**Action: Employee Representatives**

• It was noted that the employee representatives would be consulted regarding all future communications from the Forum, and that in so far as it was practicable any subsequent communications would be made jointly from the employer and employee representatives.

**14/09 Membership of the Forum**

• It was noted that the former representatives of Unite and Unison respectively were concerned as to what exactly their role entailed within the Forum. It was confirmed that they were not formally members but had been given the opportunity to attend the meetings to allow some continuity and transition following the decertification of Unite and Unison. It was noted that if there was ever a vote by the Forum the former Unite and Unison members would not be entitled to vote.

• The forum noted that there were still outstanding vacancies on the Forum that needed to be filled. It was agreed that Mr Brady would
put out another call for nominations in order to try and fill the vacancies. It was agreed that if the Unison or Unite members were eligible, they were welcome to nominate themselves.

**Action: Mr Brady**

**14/10 Any other business**

- It was agreed that the ‘any other business’ item on the agenda would not be used for major items. Anything of that nature that was raised after the agenda had been confirmed would be deferred to the next meeting or if urgent, an emergency meeting would be called.
- It was noted that the cycle to work scheme had been re-launched along with a salary sacrifice car scheme. The only cars included on the scheme were those that were considered to be reasonably environmentally friendly.
- It was noted that the Claret bus routes into the White Knights campus were changing which would potentially have a big impact on members of staff who are reliant on them. It was agreed that the concerns would be raised with the Head of Campus Services.

Date of next meeting: *to be confirmed.*