

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

18/07 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Wednesday 20 June 2018 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House

Present:

Professor R Van de Noort (Chair)
Mr J J Brady
Professor S Chandler-Wilde
Dr K Henderson
Dr R J Messer
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs S Thornton
Professor C Tissot

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Professor D C Berry, Professor R Jackson, Professor O Kennedy, Mrs J Rowe and Professor D Zaum.

18/08 The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2018 were approved. It was noted that minute 17/30 relating to Teaching Hours should have read “He reminded the Committee that there continued to be strains on the available teaching space on campus, especially at certain times.”

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 18/02 (17/25, 17/13, 17/02, 16/20, 16/10, 16/01, 15/22, 15/11, 15/01, 14/25): Consultation in respect of proposed changes to USS and UCU industrial action

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that UCU had undertaken strike action as part of its opposition to the proposed changes to the USS scheme. The strike action commenced on Thursday 22 February 2018 and totalled 14 days (ending on Friday 16 March 2018). He confirmed that UCU had also given notice of continuous strike action short of a strike (ASOS).

He stated that the University had established an Operations Group. The Group met regularly and provided guidance and advice to relevant Heads, to staff and to students. He reported that the strike action had been more

concentrated in certain areas and felt the industrial action had been reasonably contained.

He reported that in April 2018 the UCU had accepted a proposal to establish a Joint Expert Panel (JEP) to review the basis of the USS scheme valuation, and suspended all further strike action. It was agreed in national negotiations that there will be a pause in discussions over USS benefit reform while the review is undertaken.

He confirmed that the USS Trustee had expressed its willingness to engage with the JEP, but had issued a reminder of its statutory obligations to report acceptable arrangements to the Pensions Regulator by the 30 June 2018. He stated that the Trustee has now triggered scheme rule 76.4, under which contributions would be imposed on scheme members and employers to meet the costs of the benefits from 1 April 2019. These were an increase in employer costs to 24.11% and scheme member costs to 11.29% (amounting to an additional annual cost of £7.8m).

The Director of Human Resources reported on this year's national pay bargaining process. The JNCHES met in May 2018 at which the employers' representatives presented a formal pay offer of 2% (or £425, whichever is higher) on all pay spines. He informed the Committee that the trades unions were now considering the final offer and will be consulting their members.

He indicated that he had provided regular updates via the Staff Portal.

The Committee then discussed the provision of funds to the Staff Forum, to seek and implement ideas from all staff, to improve staff welfare across the University. The Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) reported that the Staff Forum had received, reviewed and discussed over 50 suggestions and presented their recommendations to the UEB. She confirmed that the UEB had approved the following recommendations:

- Parent friendly facilities;
- Support You programme;
- Free Coffee Friday;
- Staff Social Club;
- Harris gardens paths and Chemistry foot path
- Campus/lakeside seating;
- Outdoor meeting pods and picnic benches;

The Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) indicated that the staff welfare ideas would be taken to the first meeting of the People Plan Wellbeing Project with the intention of progressing proposals in a consistent manner.

Minute 18/02 (17/25, 17/13, 17/02, 16/21): People Plan

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that the People Plan Project was progressing according to the timescales set. At the last meeting of the People Plan Project Board (PPPB) in April 2018 the University Secretary and Dr Rachel Stewart, Director of Planning and Strategy attended and gave a presentation on the work undertaken so far by a working group established to look at change management.

The next meeting of the PPPB is due to take place in July where the various project groups will be reporting back on the progress made.

He confirmed that the PPPB had put forward a number of bids for University Strategic Funding and as a result the Wellbeing project and Employer Identity project had been awarded funds.

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that he anticipated the Staffing Committee would be provided with updates and would be asked to discuss developments and agree actions / recommendations, where appropriate.

He informed the Committee that the PPPB had continued to discuss internal communications with Victoria Pearson, Head of Corporate Communications, who was also a member of the PPPB. He confirmed that the PPPB was also aligning closely with the Staff Survey Group, and made the Committee aware that a staff survey was planned for the Autumn Term.

Minute 18/04: Working Groups looking at Teaching Staff

The Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) updated the Committee on the progress made by the 3 working groups established to consider teaching related matters. These related to:

- Teaching Fellow staff (Chair: Professor Gavin Brooks)
- Teaching Intensive staff (Chair: Professor Julian Park);
- Sessional Lecturers (Chair: Professor Elizabeth McCrum)

She confirmed that the working group looking at Grade 6 Teaching Fellows has predominantly looked at the numbers and types of roles undertaken, the fixed term or permanent nature of the contract, and the gender of role holders. The key issue for the group was the apparent lack of promotion routes for Teaching Fellows. She confirmed that the working group presented a paper to UEB who had asked the group to consider the promotion routes for Grade 6 Teaching Fellows and implications for existing processes such as Personal Titles and Academic Promotion. She confirmed that the group would now consider all options and would bring forward recommendations during the Autumn Term.

She provided the Committee with an update on the working group tasked with looking at Teaching Intensive (TI) staff. A questionnaire had been sent to all staff on a TI contract and as a result the group were able to obtain useful quantitative data. A key discussion point related to “scholarship”, as distinct from research, and how this is factored into a colleague’s workload. She anticipated the group would report back to UEB in the Autumn Term.

She confirmed that the working group looking at Sessional Lecturers was also due to report its findings and recommendations in the Autumn Term. It is apparent to the group that the employment and engagement of Sessional Lecturers varied between Schools, including the rate of pay and the fluctuations in demands from one academic session to the next.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) for the update.

18/09 Visa/Immigration costs

The Director of Human Resources presented a paper on the numbers of employees sponsored by the University under Tier 2 (General) and Tier 5 (Sponsored Researchers) along with information on employer and employee costs in relation to visas and immigration.

The Committee noted the increase in the number of employees sponsored under Tier 2 (General) in the last two years, suggesting that concerns in respect of the potential impact of Brexit on the recruitment of staff from overseas had not materialised.

The Committee also noted that whilst the University pays for each Certificate of Sponsorship it applies for, applicants are responsible for all other fees and visa costs when submitting their application. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that these costs have increased in recent years and he anticipated these trends are likely to continue.

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that the University does not cover any of the individual applicant costs in relation to visa applications, and some Schools would like to be able to offer assistance to staff who face significant costs. He believed there is a real possibility that the ongoing increase in visa costs might impact on the University’s ability to recruit. The Staffing Committee was asked to consider whether the University should introduce a loan scheme (by way of a salary advance) to cover individual applicant costs which is then repaid by the applicant e.g. in their first year of employment. The Committee approved the recommendation, and noted that other Universities had already introduced a loan scheme or were considering introducing such a scheme.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their comments and said he would now have a fuller discussion with Finance / Internal Audit colleagues to discuss tax and other implications prior to implementation.

18/10 Relationships policy

The University Secretary stated that the draft policy sets out the University's position on current and former close personal and intimate relationships between staff, and between staff and students. He confirmed that the policy strongly discouraged the formation of relationships between staff and students, given that such relationships are not symmetrical. It also included prohibition of relationships in certain instances and a mandatory reporting process to help mitigate any conflicts of interest where relationships do exist. He sought the views of the Committee.

The Committee welcomed the policy and made a number of observations/comments, summarised below:

Members of staff are encouraged to report relationships between staff and students or between staff to the Head of School or Head of Function. It would be useful to provide further guidance on what is expected when reporting a relationship;

Given the sensitivities surrounding such matters the issue of confidentiality was discussed at length. The University Secretary acknowledged the need to give due respect for the privacy of any individuals involved. However, the view taken when generating the policy was that there should be no normal expectation that the relationship will be kept confidential and staff should understand that it may be necessary to make specific University departments aware of relationships.

It was agreed that the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion could ask the LGBT Co-Chairs to comment on the draft policy.

The University Secretary thanked the Committee for their comments and said they would be fed back to the working group tasked with developing the policy.

18/11 Harassment/UUK Report

The Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services) and the University Secretary reported that a working group had been established by the UEB to discuss and review the University's current procedures in light of the Universities UK report on violence against women, harassment and hate

crime affecting University students. The UEB approved a number of recommendations made by the working group.

Among the recommendations was:

- the development of a harassment and bullying policy statement detailing how the University would investigate and manage harassment (including sexual violence) – the policy covers both staff and students;
- the development of a harassment and bullying procedure applicable to staff.

The University Secretary confirmed that HR was responsible for monitoring and reporting on staffing matters and Student Services was responsible for reporting on student matters. He informed the Committee of the introduction of a Welfare team to provide support to students and indicated that Student Services was looking to recruit Student Welfare Officers.

The Committee welcomed the development of both documents and noted that the University was looking to introduce the policy and procedure in September/October 2018.

18/12 Provision of contextual information for Recruiting Managers

The Director of Human Resources presented a discussion paper to determine the extent to which some further guidance in respect of starting salaries for new appointments might be of use to Recruiting Managers. He indicated that this had been prompted by a number of recommendations made by the Gender Pay Gap Working Group, which assumed that greater awareness of the context of salary offers will contribute to reducing the overall gender pay gap. He confirmed that the University's recruitment and Selection policy contains no formal guidance in respect of starting salaries. He said he was not in favour of an overly-prescriptive approach, but took the view that the provision of some better guidance and contextual information may assist Recruiting Managers.

The Committee acknowledged the complexities facing Recruiting Managers when determining the starting salary of new appointments, for example when appointing an internal applicant versus appointing an external applicant, or when appointing someone who has had a break in service (career break, redundancy etc).

The Director of Human Resources discussed the possibility of providing contextual information to further assist Recruiting Managers when making decisions in respect of starting salaries, including a summary of key gender pay gap statistics, and more bespoke reports for particular appointments.

He was mindful of resource implications and potential burdens placed on the HR Systems / Operations teams.

The Committee saw value in the suggested approach and were broadly supportive of the proposals presented. The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for its views and said he would work with the HR Systems team to develop the proposal.

18/13 Research Performance Metrics

The Committee noted the recent communication from the Deputy Vice Chancellor regarding research performance metrics and agreed that compliance with the principles of the Leiden manifesto would not be a requirement of this Committee. It did acknowledge that research performance metrics was relevant for those Committee's involved in cases for probation, probation and awards.

18/14 Re-Grading Committee - Appeal Process

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee of the University's job evaluation tool (HERA) that has been used by the University and across the HE sector since the mid-2000s and outlined the re-grading process currently in place, namely:

- Where the duties and responsibilities associated with a particular role(s) are considered to have changed to such an extent that the grading of the role should be re-considered, the relevant line manager will provide supporting evidence and the HR Partner will evaluate the role using HERA. HR will then forward the technical evaluation to a central Re-grading Committee together with a contextual statement.
- The Committee will then consider the technical (HERA) evaluation but has the right to challenge the context for any change to the duties and responsibilities of the role in question, and will on occasion seek further and better information before reaching a decision.

He confirmed that there is a right of appeal where a case for re-grading has been denied, and appeals are considered by a separate group of senior managers, independent of the Re-grading Committee.

He said in recent years the number of appeals have increased, and this had exposed some concerns regarding consistency of decision-making between the first stage and the appeal stage.

He stated that currently at the HERA appeal stage the panel convened has access to the minutes of the Re-grading Committee, the original

documentation and any further information provided. He pointed out that the Re-grading Committee does not have an opportunity to respond directly to the appeal and noted that in these circumstances it is difficult to avoid the appeal becoming a fresh assessment rather than a simple review.

Given the concerns regarding consistency of decision-making between the first stage and the appeal stage, the Director of Human Resources outlined a number of alternative options for appeals and sought the views of the Committee.

The Committee discussed at length the proposed alternative options and made the following comments:

It was noted that other similar appeal processes do not involve a re-hearing of matters, and “new” evidence isn’t normally allowed. Generally, at the appeal stage, the panel will look to assess that due process has been properly observed. The Director of Human Resources pointed out that for re-grading cases there are sometimes reasonable grounds for considering “new” evidence as often the case has been written by the line manager and relevant information may have been omitted from the original case.

Whilst the Committee recognised the technical element of the process, and the care needed if the technical evaluation is to be over-ridden or discarded, it was agreed that the provision of contextual information was necessary to challenge the circumstances and drivers for any change to the duties and responsibilities of a role.

At the end of the discussion the Committee agreed the following:

- i. An appeal stage should be retained with the case being considered by a panel of senior staff not previously involved;
- ii. Appeals should be based on perceived procedural irregularities and/or perceived defects in the information provided to the Re-Grading Committee;
- iii. The Re-Grading Committee will be given the opportunity to respond to the appeal in writing and/or for a representative of the Re-Grading Committee to attend the appeal meeting and to take questions from the appeal panel;
- iv. The Appeal Committee will either dismiss the appeal or, if it believes there has been a procedural irregularity and/or perceived defects in the information provided to the Re-Grading Committee, will invite the line manager to re-submit the case back to the Re-Grading Committee.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their comments and confirmed that he would ask relevant colleagues to update the existing Regrading procedure.

18/15 Closure days

The Committee approved the proposed closure days for the 2020-21 academic session. The dates are:

Wednesday 23 December 2020: Normal Working Day
Thursday 24 December 2020: Closure Day 1
Friday 25 December 2020: Christmas Day
Monday 28 December 2020: Boxing Day
Tuesday 29 December 2020: Closure Day 2
Wednesday 30 December 2020: Closure Day 3
Thursday 31 December 2020: Closure Day 4
Friday 1 January 2021: New Year's Day
Monday 4 January 2021: Normal Working Day

Wednesday 31 March 2021: Normal Working Day
Thursday 1 April 2021: Closure Day 5
Friday 2 April 2021: Good Friday
Monday 5 April 2021: Easter Monday
Tuesday 6 April 2021: Closure Day 6
Wednesday 7 April 2021: Normal Working Day

The Committee Secretary thanked the Committee and said, as a courtesy, he would inform the President of Reading UCU and the Co-Chair (employee representative) of the Staff Forum.

18/16 Membership

On behalf of the Committee, the Director of Human Resources reported that this would be the last meeting for Professor Van de Noort and thanked him for chairing the Committee so diligently.

18/17 Proposed dates of meetings for the 2018/19 Academic Session:

Tuesday 9 October 2018, 2.00 pm
Tuesday 27 November 2018, 10.00 am (reserve)
Tuesday 12 February 2019, 2.00 pm
Tuesday 30 April 2019, 11.00 am (reserve)
Wednesday 19 June 2019, 2.00 pm