

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

19/26 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 8 October 2019 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)
Professor A Bell
Mr J J Brady
Professor S Chandler-Wilde
Miss M Cleaver
Dr K Henderson
Mr S Hunt
Professor R Jackson
Professor O Kennedy
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs J Rowe
Mrs S Thornton
Professor C Tissot

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Professor D C Berry

The University Secretary welcomed back Professor Kennedy to the Committee and thanked Professor Jackson and Professor Chandler-Wilde for their contributions to the Committee.

19/27 Membership, Terms of Reference and Disclosure of Interests

The Committee received a copy of its membership and Terms of Reference and a copy of a memorandum from the University Secretary in respect of Disclosure of Interests and the Committee's obligations in respect of the University's Risk Register.

19/28 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2019 were approved

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 19/17: Attending Conferences - reimbursement of childcare costs

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that HR colleagues were still gathering information and would bring forward formal recommendations to a future meeting of the Committee.

Minute 19/18: Trainee / Development roles

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) indicated that preliminary work had been undertaken with a view to developing guidance and a set of principles. She planned to speak to the Leadership and Talent Development Manager in relation to Apprenticeships.

Minute 19/22: VR Scheme

The Committee received information on vacancy / turnover levels for the period 30 April 2019 and 31 July 2019, and by way of comparison, received leaver information for the corresponding period in 2018. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) informed the Committee that Human Resources was exploring ways to improve how the University captures and reports on recruitment data.

19/29 Gender Pay Gap

The Dean for Diversity and Inclusion was asked to provide a paper describing where the University was in respect of gender pay gaps, what the University has done so far as actions to address these pay gaps, and what is proposed, as part of the work of the University's Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (SAT), to do as actions into the future.

The Committee was asked to provide feedback and comments on the proposed future actions, as detailed in the appendix to the paper.

It was noted that the Gender Pay Gap is different to Equal Pay. The Gender Pay Gap is a high-level snapshot of pay and shows the difference in the average earnings of men and women in an organisation. It is an average across all jobs and encompasses all staff, including for example, cleaners, professors and senior managers. A gender pay gap is indicative of occupational segregation and does not equate to an equal pay issue. Equal pay is about ensuring that men and women carrying out the same work, similar work, or work of equal value, are paid equally.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) reported that the University was introducing Manager Self Service that would enable designated line managers to log into Trent (the HR system) and access salary information for their Team/School/Function.

The following proposed actions were considered:

GPG1: Provision of a guidance note on starting salaries & GPG3: Provision of salary information to interview panel chairs across the University for appointments at Grade 7 or above.

The Committee explored the rationale behind these proposed actions including getting recruiting managers to think about existing staff salaries/existing staff experience & skills, when determining the starting salary for a new member of staff. It was noted that a guidance note had been produced, and would be made available on Jobtrain in due course. The Committee agreed that a positive way forward would be to encourage recruiting managers to record their rationale for determining someone's starting salary, and to include this on their personal file (on Trent).

GPG4: Annual publication of key KPI pay gap data by school and function (including by gender and ethnicity) on the Diversity and Inclusion web pages.

Whilst the Committee noted the rationale behind the provision of this data, namely the wish to encourage transparency, it expressed concern that the provision of this data might be divisive. It was also felt that for smaller units, maintaining anonymity may be problematic.

The Committee suggested that as a way forward it might be useful to provide this data to Heads of School / Function for their respective areas, and to discuss the data with their HR Partners.

GPG6: Provision of a guidance note, as part of the recruitment materials, on achieving gender balance, and diverse shortlists more generally in senior appointments, with an expectation that gender balance, with more than one candidate of each gender, will be the norm.

The Committee felt this proposed action was possibly too prescriptive, and could be perceived as patronising to women. The overwhelming view was that it was important to develop appropriate practices for ensuring the best possible shortlist, including giving due consideration to the language used, and ensuring relevant colleagues are provided with, and have access to, appropriate training and guidance.

GPC7: Trial recruitment making use of the tie-break provisions under section 159 of the Equality Act. Specifically, to trial this in a school or function where there is significant female under-representation, and in another school or function where there is significant BAME under-representation.

The Committee expressed significant reservations in respect of this proposed action.

The Committee thanked the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion for providing such a comprehensive paper and enabling the Committee to be able to discuss and debate very difficult and complex issues.

19/30 Athena SWAN Action Plan on Gender Equality

The Dean for Diversity & Inclusion and Dr Karen Henderson, Director of Technical Services outlined the progress made in preparing for the next University Athena SWAN submission, due 30 November 2019, and sought the views of the Committee on a number of the proposed actions.

Flexible working (FW5): Work to encourage all senior managers, starting with the leadership group, to become positive about flexible working.

It was noted that improved technology would greatly improve / enhance flexible working. For example, one Committee member reported the challenges and restrictions when working from home and being required to dial into a meeting. The Committee endorsed the need to enhance awareness and training in this area and improve communications. It was also noted that collecting data in respect of flexible working was not straightforward with many arrangements being informal in nature. There was a suggestion that the University should consider changing the language used. Rather than describing it as flexible working it might be more appropriate to call it agile working.

Family leave (FL5): Increase the length of paid paternity/partner/adoption leave from 2 weeks to 4 weeks to bring it into line with other sector leading universities.

The Committee debated the proposed increase in leave, and was broadly supportive. However, they noted that this would result in an additional cost to the University. Dr Henderson reported that over the last 5 years the average uptake of paternity/partner/adoption leave had been approximately 35 individuals per year.

The Committee suggested that in the first instance the University should consider increasing paternity/partner/adoption leave from 2 weeks to 3 weeks.

PDRs (CD1): carry out an in-depth review with reviewers and reviewees to determine barriers to PDR completion and culture relating to regular manager and employee conversations. Outcome to lead to either a move away from PDRs or a move to invigorate the PDR process.

The Committee recognised that the approach to undertaking PDRs varies across schools / functions, and agreed that having a process that enabled greater flexibility for having regular manager / employee conversations was important.

It was hoped that any review of the PDR process would enable the University to look at trends and to capture and share good practice. The Committee agreed that PDRs must happen.

Workload model (WLM1): Review existing workload models with the outcome of either developing an institution wide model (at least for academic staff), or develop clear guidance for best practice (e.g. an institution wide template), including a steer on gender and wider diversity considerations.

It was noted that the UEB had already looked at workload models, and although they saw value in having these models, they felt it was important that they worked for each school. Their view, therefore, was not to have a university-wide model.

Professor Tissot agreed that a generic workload model would not work for the IoE. Her Institution had put in a lot of work to develop a model that worked for the IoE. Professor Jackson said he would welcome the University sharing good practice and guidance.

The Committee agreed that sharing good practice in respect of workload models would be welcomed.

Harassment & Bullying (HB4): Encourage a “No By-Standing” culture in the University where colleagues feel able to call out inappropriate behaviour, and feel supported in doing so, with a view to creating an environment where harassment and bullying become unacceptable.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) reported that she and [redacted] in English, as part of the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (SAT) had sought feedback from staff in respect of this matter. She said that colleagues who felt harassed or bullied didn't necessarily want to raise the matter formally.

The Director of Human Resources reminded the Committee of the findings of a previous staff survey. The feedback was that staff were sometimes reluctant to report harassment and bullying as they didn't think any action would be taken. The Director of Human Resources noted that where necessary robust action had been taken, but ensuring that this is commonly known was challenging.

The Committee agreed that the University would be wise to think about the mechanics of dealing with cases of alleged harassment and bullying. This included providing managers with the tools to manage these situations, so they gain the confidence to take appropriate action.

It was recognised that whilst the University had successfully managed alleged cases of inappropriate behaviour, it was bound by confidentiality and therefore couldn't communicate these cases more widely.

The Dean for Diversity & Inclusion and Dr Karen Henderson thanked the Committee for its feedback and confirmed that they would now seek the views of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

19/31 Interview Expenses

The Committee was asked to review the University's current policy of reimbursing interview expenses (mostly travel and accommodation) incurred by interviewees for attending staff recruitment interviews. The costs are currently contained in the HR budget.

The Director of Human Resources stated that whilst there was no urgent need to identify savings, it was sensible to discuss possible options. The Committee carefully considered the following options:

- Do nothing, and continue as we are.
- Restrict reimbursement to candidates required to travel from outside the UK (with the caveat that consideration be given to alternative approaches e.g. skype interviews).
- Restrict reimbursement to candidates for senior positions only (e.g. for Professorial and equivalent roles and above).
- As above, but with expenses only offered to those candidates travelling from outside the UK.
- No longer offer reimbursement regardless of the circumstances.

There were split views with some colleagues supporting the option to no longer offer reimbursement, given the advancements in technology including conducting interviews via skype. The Committee discussed the possibility of simply ceasing to make an explicit offer of reimbursement for a trial period and monitoring subsequent reaction.

A number of colleagues were not supportive of the option to no longer offer reimbursement. Their reasoning included the potential negative impact on the School's / University's reputation, as well as the concern that such an approach might make the University less competitive when looking to recruit the best candidates.

The Committee debated the pros and cons of restricting reimbursement, and saw some value in determining at the start of the recruitment process whether interview expenses should be offered.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee and said he would take on board their views and would bring a paper to a future meeting of the Committee for action.

19/32 Employee Travel Benefits

The Director of Human Resources sought the Committee's views on some

changes to the Cycle2work scheme, and MyCar scheme.

In respect of the Cycle2work scheme, the Committee agreed to the proposal to increase the limit on the scheme from £1,000 to £2,500, thus opening up a much wider range of bikes, including e-bikes.

In respect of MyCar, the Committee noted the changes introduced by HMRC in 2017 on salary sacrifice schemes and the impact this has had on the car scheme. In light of these changes, the Committee carefully considered the three suggested options and agreed to:

- Continue to offer a car leasing scheme salary sacrifice scheme, but limit this (or give greater promotion) to ultra-low emissions vehicles (ULEVs), so that staff can obtain an electric or hybrid car and this will support the University's carbon reduction targets. It was noted that ULEVs attract the full tax and NI savings available.

19/33 Pay and Pensions Update

The Director of Human Resources reported that the 2019 pay bargaining round had concluded without full agreement with the trade unions. On the advice of the UCEA the University had implemented the final tabled offer of 1.8% on all spinal points, and an element of bottom loading with a sliding scale of increases on spine points 3-16 from 3.65% to 1.83%. He informed the Committee that spinal point 2 on the national spine was to be deleted no later than April 2020.

The Director of Human Resources reported that the UCU had opened local ballots for industrial action in respect of pay and pensions, and the ballot will close on 30 October 2019.

19/34 UCU Local Claim update

The Committee noted that a special Joint Committee convened to consider Reading UCU's local claim, are currently discussing a draft document setting out an agreement in respect of the future arrangements for the appointment of sessional staff, and the terms of their employment.

The Committee also noted that discussions in respect of the use of Teaching Fellows at Grade 6 had also taken place, and broad agreement in respect of a common understand of the scope of activity (including a revised role profile) had been reached.

19/35 Rewarding Excellence - 2018/19

The Committee welcomed the report from the HR Manager (Rewards and Benefits) and noted that in 2018/19 34.26% of staff received some form of

award, whether this was a consolidated award, or a non-consolidated award.

19/36 Brexit

The Director of Human Resources updated the Committee on the work being undertaken by the University in respect of Brexit. He reported that a working group had been established - chaired by the Chief Financial Officer. The main purpose of the working group was to raise awareness and provide relevant colleagues with the latest information and advice.

The University has provided information (including the latest advice from Universities UK) on the implications of a no-deal Brexit, including the implications for staff who may be travelling to the EU around the 31 October 2019 and/or are on secondment to any country in the EEA.

19/37 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2019/20 Academic Session:

Tuesday 26 November 2019 at 10.00 am (reserve)

Tuesday 11 February 2020 at 2.00 pm

Tuesday 28 April 2020 at 11.00 am (reserve)

Wednesday 17 June 2020 at 2.00 pm