

Joint University/UCU Committee

21/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Tuesday 2 February 2021 at 11.30 remotely, via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor [*Chair*]
Scott Alexander, UCU Regional Support Official
Dr Ian Bland, UCU Representative
John Brady, Director of HR
Professor Claire Collins, Senate Representative
Dr Rob Jubb, UCU Representative
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary
Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor

Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

Apologies were received from:

Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official

21/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

21/03 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere in the agenda

a) Minute 20/20 d) (20/04) *Request for observer status at Council*

The Vice Chancellor advised that the President of Council continued to consider the attendance of observers at Council meetings as inappropriate. It was noted that greater transparency would be introduced as part of the Phase 1 agreement; however, UCU Representatives were advised that, if they continued to consider observer status at Council necessary, this would be raised again.

b) Minute 20/22 *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The President of Reading UCU advised that a survey had been undertaken with members; although the results had been inconclusive, UCU were willing to share these with the University. The Director of HR stated that the outcomes of an upcoming 'pulse' staff survey could be made available to the UCU.

c) Minute 20/27 *Social Media Policy*

The Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary agreed to liaise with MCE regarding the updating of the Social Media Policy.

Action: Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary

d) Minute 20/28 *Major projects for information: ECMWF*

The Secretary confirmed that they had sent the ECMWF papers that had recently been shared with Senate to Dr Bland and Dr Jubb, as requested.

21/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Committee received an update from the Vice Chancellor and the following was noted:

- The reserve Senate scheduled for January did not take place due to insufficient matters of substance for the agenda.
- A series of consultations and decisions had recently been communicated by the Department for Education and the Office for Students, including a consultation on ‘skills for jobs’ and the confirmation that subject TEFs would no longer be taking place, with the interval between institutional TEFs increasing from 5 to 6 years.
- A series of Government announcements had recently been made which had various implications for Universities and their finances, such as the halving of the teaching grant for C1 subjects (Archaeology, Art, Typography etc.) and the removal of the pro-rata allocation of the capital grant for teaching, which would now become competitive and focused on strategic priorities and subjects of import for the local economy. UCU asked whether the University had any plans to respond to the Augar review, particularly in relation to protecting the subjects at risk. The Vice Chancellor advised that any response was likely to be collective (through UUK, for example). It would be necessary to prove through graduate outcomes and longitudinal education outcome data that UoR students in these subjects could progress into jobs which supported the economy. It was hoped that it would be possible to present a strong case, particularly with the recent agreement in relation to Shinfield Studios.
- The Vice Chancellor had co-signed a letter with six other Vice Chancellors to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, containing three suggestions of how to alleviate the current pressures on students, including: a 15-month period in which no interest be charged for student loans, IT support for students unable to connect to online learning and more flexible use of the apprenticeship levy to support graduates in securing jobs.

21/05 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU raised a number of matters and the following was noted:

- UCU expressed concerns regarding its current relationship with the University on matters of health and safety and the extent to and speed with which UCU Health and Safety Representatives were receiving information on Covid-related matters, such as outbreaks. UCU also raised concerns in relation to the University Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee in relation to its current structure, attendance and regularity. UCU advised that they had increasingly found that the mechanisms for receiving health and safety information in a timely manner were not working effectively, something which was particularly imperative in the current circumstances. The President of UCU recognised how hard all parties were working, however advised that the branch would need to consider its next steps if this matter could not be rectified. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that the health and safety of staff and students was paramount to the University. UCU Representatives were advised regarding the difficulties of sharing information they had previously requested, including an investigation report and risk assessments for all activities across campus, which amounted to thousands. UCU maintained the necessity of receiving this information. It was agreed that the Deputy Vice Chancellor and relevant colleagues would meet with UCU Representatives as soon as possible, noting that discussions would be more effective than written communications in enabling the swift resolution of these matters.

Action: Deputy Vice Chancellor and UCU Representatives

It was also suggested that a further discussion take place regarding the University Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and the role of UCU Health and Safety Representatives within this. The President of Reading UCU confirmed their intention to work with the University and the Vice Chancellor welcomed this constructive approach.

- UCU queried whether the University’s expectations on staff had changed since the start of the pandemic. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that the University continued to ask colleagues to do the best they could during the pandemic, recognising that many had caring

duties during lockdown, as a result of school closures for example. It was confirmed that guidance to line managers had not changed and they were asked to be as flexible as possible in these difficult circumstances. The importance of recognising and thanking the efforts of staff was also noted.

- UCU asked how probation and promotion processes were being adjusted in light of Covid. The Committee was advised that the probation and promotion processes were continuing to run, following feedback from colleagues. The Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary confirmed that, within the Personal Titles process, the existing Personal Circumstances form was being used to express the impact of Covid (alongside other circumstances) in relation to specific criteria. The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that academic probation applications were also being evaluated in the context of Covid. UCU highlighted that Covid could have a disproportionate impact on various protected characteristics.
- There was a discussion regarding the furloughing of staff and the Director of HR confirmed that the University had made the best, most appropriate use of the furlough schemes available. UCU reported that there had been cases where colleagues had been asked to take unpaid leave to cover childcare and were asked to bring any such incidents to the attention of the Director of HR. The Director of HR reminded Committee members that there were also formal avenues for requesting flexible working available to staff, if required. UCU queried under what circumstances work should be passed on to other colleagues and the issues surrounding this; the Director of HR agreed to continue this discussion with Dr Jubb outside of the meeting.

Action: Director of HR and Dr Jubb

- UCU were receiving increasing queries from members regarding the likely expectations of the University post-pandemic, particularly for those who had found working from home beneficial. Other similar themes arising included equipment, use of space, the digital strategy, lecture capture etc. The Vice Chancellor advised that this linked in with Phase 2 work and the intention to move to more flexible ways of working, and confirmed that UCU would be involved in relevant discussions.

21/06 Update on the local UCU claim

The Committee noted that, since its previous meeting, UCU members had voted overwhelmingly in favour of the claim. However, a decision on the name for future teaching activity at Grade 6 (or in some cases a higher grade subject to the duties required) was still outstanding. The President of Reading UCU advised that a survey had been held regarding the title and the response had been overwhelming in favour of 'Associate Lecturer' as originally suggested by the Director of HR; this would be formally confirmed to the Director of HR in writing.

There had been a recent email from the President of Reading UCU regarding the backdating of actions and the timeliness of implementing the agreement. The Director of HR highlighted that the agreement had only been finalised following UCU's necessary internal democratic process and the University had not been informed of the result until the afternoon of 18 December; the UCU Regional Official had specifically noted when advising the University of the outcome that it was recognised that work to implement the agreement could not begin until the new year. The Director of HR had established 11 work packets within HR to take forward the practical matters required for implementation. These included: drafting of new contract templates, revising the SRF workflow (which required input from DTS), revising tables within the Trent system and the Payroll pathways, re-negotiating licence limits with MHR (which incurred additional costs), producing a template to assist Heads of School in calculating hours/costs and revising fee forms. The Director of HR and the Assistant Director of HR (Claire Rolstone) had briefed Heads of School and they had been encouraged to operate in the spirit of the agreement while practical matters were proceeding. The Director of HR also reported that the letters (including the questionnaires) in respect of the review of Grade 6 Teaching Fellows had been

issued. Letters to current sessional staff with four or more years' service were also being issued this week and early next week. Returns to both these exercises would be available in good time to enable review by the proposed Joint Group in March – the Assistant Director of HR would be making arrangements to schedule a meeting shortly. The Director of HR stressed that this represented a significant body of work which was unlikely to be completed before the beginning of April. However, he noted that HR would review sessional contracts issued since 1 January with a view to conversion to the new contractual arrangements (with a note of warning that this would not be straightforward). It was emphasised that a very positive agreement had been reached and all parties wanted to implement this as soon as practicable. It was also noted that the Joint Group to review workloads would be meeting the following week.

21/07 Provisional Gender Pay Gap information

The Committee noted the provisional information circulated in relation to the Gender Pay Gap and was advised that the latest Diversity and Inclusivity report had been published the previous week.

Items brought forward by the University

21/08 Update on Phase 1

Following a meeting the previous day with UCU and Staff Forum Representatives, the Vice Chancellor again confirmed that the University was confident that, at the current time, a tiered temporary pay cut as part of Phase 1 was not required. This option would, however, remain as a matter of contingency available to the University if, in the future, any Covid-related impact on finances required this in order to avoid Covid-related redundancies. The Director of HR had drafted a collective note to capture this point and would share this with the UCU as soon as possible – the all-staff briefing on 12 February would also provide further details to staff.

Action: Director of HR

21/09 Update on Phase 2

The Committee agreed that this should remain on future agendas as a standard item. The Committee was advised that a paper on the teaching portfolio review was currently going through the Planning and Change Board, having previously been through the Change Sub Group. It was confirmed that Senate and Council would be involved with the governance of this review at a later stage. A Phase 2 Strategic Programmes Board was being established to consider how the different workstreams would operate. Professor Fellowes would continue to brief the UCU on the progress of this work.

21/10 Delivery of the Autumn Term

The Committee noted that the Deputy Vice Chancellors' recent all-staff briefing had summarised how the autumn term had been managed and included comparisons against other Universities in the South. The number of cases within the staff and student populations had both been low, partly due to the internal case management team which had achieved an 100% success rate in contact tracing. The prompt establishment of mass testing at the end of the autumn term had also contributed to this.

21/11 Social Media Policy

This item had been covered under matters arising.

21/12 Major projects for information: ECMWF

The Vice Chancellor advised that, unfortunately, the bid for Copernicus had been unsuccessful; however, the University was still hoping to bring ECMWF itself onto campus.

Items brought forward by Reading UCU

None

Routine items

21/13 Matters from the Staffing Committee

It was noted that the Staffing Committee had not met again since the previous meeting and therefore there was nothing to report.

21/14 Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

21/15 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 19 May 2021