

## Joint University/UCU Committee

22/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Tuesday 1 February 2022 at 11.30 remotely, via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU [*Chair*]  
Dr Ian Bland, UCU Representative  
John Brady, Director of HR  
Dr David Field, UCU Representative  
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official  
Claire Rolstone, Assistant Director of HR (Advisory Services)  
Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor  
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

Apologies:

Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary  
Nat Willmott, UCU Representative

22/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

22/03 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

a) Minute 21/31 *Membership and Terms of Reference 2021/22*

In relation to ensuring the accessibility of meeting documents, the Committee was advised that the Head of Governance would ensure that guidance was reinforced in future communications with Committee Secretaries. This would also be considered by the relevant working group.

b) Minute 21/34 *Report of the Vice Chancellor*

It was confirmed that the Vice Chancellor's November report to Senate had been circulated.

c) Minute 21/34 *Report of the Vice Chancellor*

It was confirmed that a paper had been circulated which explained how the University was ensuring its procurement processes were responsible and aligned with its Strategy.

d) Minute 21/35 *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The Deputy Vice Chancellor confirmed that feedback had been provided to Health & Safety Services regarding the fact that Health and Safety Coordinators could further reinforce the help they could provide with risk assessments.

e) Minute 21/36 *Update on the local UCU claim*

In relation to the action to establish which branch colleagues would be involved in the gender pay gap element of the claim, the President of Reading UCU advised that UCU were not yet in a position to progress this, given the strike action and continuing work on the first element of the claim. The Director of HR observed that key University colleagues were also currently focused on the production of the annual Gender Pay Gap Report, however it was hoped that this collective work could begin before the end of March. The Vice Chancellor advised that an all-female group

of senior colleagues had previously been asked to lead this work on behalf of the University - this already included the University Executive Board (UEB) lead for disability which would be appropriate if UCU chose to also include a disability element as part of the work on pay gaps, as had been discussed previously.

#### 22/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Committee was advised that Senate had not met since the previous meeting, other than a workshop-style event in January to consider proposals from the Blended Learning and Programme Expectations projects of the Portfolio Review Pathway, and there was therefore no written report to be shared. However, the Vice Chancellor provided a verbal update and the following was noted in particular:

- In relation to Covid-19, the Major Recovery Team (MRT) and Major Incident Team (MIT) remained available as and when required. A Smart/flexible working policy also remained in place which was helping to keep the University safe. While there had been an increase in the number of students and staff members reporting Covid infections, this was considered to be under control. UCU would continue to be kept up to date, including outside of this forum.
- Following reports in the news of such contact having been made with other institutions, the Vice Chancellor confirmed that they had not yet been approached by the Secretary of State for Education regarding the continuation of online teaching. It was highlighted that there were pedagogical reasons for continuing to have a degree of teaching available online, including positive impacts on attainment gaps for example. This approach was also reflected strategically through the University's Blended Learning pathway as part of the Portfolio Review, whereby it was intended that 30% of programmes would be online. The UCU Regional Official noted students' preference for a blended model of teaching and confirmed that UCU were generally supportive of retaining this, following lessons learned from the pandemic.
- The process of appointing a new Chancellor was ongoing - the job specification had previously been shared with colleagues for comment and the appointment would require recommendation from Council. The process of appointing a new President of Council had also started, with the advert having been published a few days previously. The recruitment panel for this role would include the Deputy Vice Chancellor and lay members of Council.
- Admissions figures at the closure of the UCAS cycle (which had been delayed by two weeks this year) were looking very positive, with an increase of 12% in applications and a strong increase in international students. It was hoped for a positive recruitment cycle in August, which would feed into discussions regarding Phase 1.
- The University was continuing to work with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to develop Thames Valley Science Park and consider a housing development on Hall Farm. An update would be provided at the All Staff Briefing the following day to coincide with the consultations WBC was undertaking.
- The European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) had approved the government proposal to move their headquarters to the Whiteknights Campus which was a very positive development. Conversations were continuing with the School of Art regarding their move; the government was underwriting the move which enabled the University to progress this with more speed.
- The Office for Students (OfS) had recently announced three consultations regarding the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a new approach to regulating student outcomes, and constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation. It was anticipated that there would be much feedback to these consultations and the University had invited colleagues to respond to the consultation regarding TEF. The Committee discussed the implications of these consultations, including in relation to defining a minimum quality for

programmes based on three indicators – continuation, completion and progression outcomes – all of which had percentages as minimum thresholds to be met. The Vice Chancellor advised that, while the University currently met these thresholds in terms of programmes, further analysis would be required in order to review the data when split into full-time/part-time and in terms of disability, ethnicity etc. It was clarified that, if OfS considered programmes were not adhering to quality standards set, the registration of the University could be questioned which could ultimately lead to sanctions such as potentially restricting access to the student loan system. The UCU Regional Official noted that these consultations were highly concerning and highlighted that there were other ongoing government matters, such as changes to the repayment schedule for student loans, which might also impact the University.

- The Research Excellent Framework (REF) outcomes would be released on 12 May.
- The University had recently signed the pledge to end the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) within universities to silence complainants in sexual harassment cases, although had already not been issuing them for such purposes. NDAs would still be used when required, when working with businesses or in relation to research results for example. The latest version of the staff/student relationship policy (incorporating comments previously made by the President of Reading UCU) was being reviewed by Staffing Committee the following week and would be shared again with UCU for further comment in due course. UCU's recent statement on sexual violence, following a report by the UCU Sexual Violence Task Group, was noted. The UCU Regional Official highlighted that there was further work to be done in this area by both the UCU and employers.

It was noted that this would be the Director of HR's last meeting prior to leaving the University and they were thanked for their contribution over many years.

#### 22/05 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU noted the update received in relation to the MRT and Covid cases. It was commented that a surge in measles cases had been reported in the press and it was hoped that lessons learned in relation to the management of Covid would come in useful in other such situations.

In relation to the appointment of the new President of Council, it was queried whether this appointment would be made from inside or outside of the current body of Council – the Vice Chancellor confirmed that it could be either as it was an open process and anyone could apply.

In relation to ECMWF, clarity was sought on the government underwriting the move of Art – the Vice Chancellor confirmed that the University had been encouraged to continue with the process and, if for any reason ECMWF no longer came to the campus, the costs incurred up to that point would be reimbursed directly by the government. It was highlighted that there was quite a significant amount of work still to be done in terms of ECMWF, including design and planning permission, and the Art move would be done in parallel with this. It was considered a positive sign that the government was helping to accelerate the process.

The President of Reading UCU advised that the Vice Chancellor would be receiving a letter later that day to ask whether they would be willing to support UCU's current proposals regarding the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) dispute and requesting a response by 11 February. It was highlighted that the next round of strike action was scheduled for the week after next, in the absence of any progress on this matter.

The proposals were:

- For USS to produce an evidence-based valuation of the scheme for consultation in June 2022 at the latest
- To agree a new cost-sharing approach for one year with small increases to member and employer contributions to protect benefits (from 1 April 2022 11% member, 23.7% employer; from 1 October 2022 11.8% member, 25.2% employer)

- To agree a limit on contributions in the future so members pay no more than 9.8%

The UCU Regional Official noted the clear prioritisation from the union to maintain the benefits of the USS pension scheme for scheme members and the intention to find a negotiating settlement to this dispute that would not require further industrial action. UCU representatives hoped that progress could be made by working with the University on this matter. The Vice Chancellor advised that such decisions needed to go through a process and could not simply be decided by themselves. Despite the very short timescale given, the Vice Chancellor would endeavour to work with relevant colleagues and proceed through the appropriate decision-making process, including working with UEB/ Council/ Committees of Council as required, and respond by the deadline.

**Action: Vice Chancellor**

The Vice Chancellor was asked to comment regarding the financial implications of the changes to contribution rates contained in the proposals on the University's current deficit and responded that a full analysis would be required and consideration would also need to be given to additional aspects such as long term sustainability.

It was noted that there had been three days of industrial action in December and behaviour was understood to have been respectful on both sides. Although UCU had chosen to not put a picket line at Pepper Lane on this occasion (due to this being a Covid-19 testing area) it reserved the right to do so next time; the Vice Chancellor confirmed that not having a picket line at Pepper Lane was much appreciated and contributed to the health and safety of colleagues as well as the wider community.

The President of Reading UCU noted that this would be covered as part of the Phase 1 work, but wanted to raise the matter of the cost of living increases from the summer and to suggest that salaries be kept in line with this, rather than the pay freeze continuing. The Vice Chancellor noted that it was in the interest of all parties for the pay freeze not to be implemented – it was hoped for a positive outcome following discussions, however this was dependant on student growth in relation to the cost of the pandemic. It was confirmed that the next meeting regarding Phase 1 was scheduled for 23 February.

22/06 Update on the local UCU claim

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

*Items brought forward by the University*

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

*Items brought forward by Reading UCU*

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

*Routine items*

22/07 Matters from the Staffing Committee

It was noted that the Staffing Committee had not met since the previous meeting of the Joint University/ UCU Committee.

22/08 Any Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

22/09 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 18 May 2022