

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

PEOPLE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

24/22 A meeting of the People and Culture Committee was held on Wednesday 25 September 2024 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House

Present:

Dr R Messer (Chair)
Mrs D Grout
Dr K Henderson
Professor F Hwang
Mrs N Johnson
Professor T Reid
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs J Rowe
Mr J Russell
Mrs S Thornton
Dr A-M Van Dodeweerd
Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Also in attendance:

Mrs S Humphries, Director of Sports and Active Wellbeing
Mrs L Powles, Co-Chair of Staff Forum

Apologies were received from Professor A Charlton-Perez, Mr J Haxell and Professor A Laville.

24/23 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were approved.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

24/24 Membership and Terms of Reference

The Committee received a copy of its new membership and Terms of Reference.

The Director of Human Resources reminded the Committee of the rationale for replacing the Staffing Committee with the People & Culture Committee. She outlined the new set of Terms of Reference, and confirmed that the new Committee now had oversight of a range of people related issues, including staff wellbeing and employee engagement.

She explained that the Committee would focus on HR and People related strategies, policies and practices, with a theme for each meeting. There would be opportunities

for colleagues to contribute their experiences and perspectives to help shape activities, priorities and projects. She confirmed other colleagues would be invited to participate in discussions relevant to the topics on the agenda. She was delighted that Sarah Humphries (Director of Sports and Active Wellbeing) and Lisa Powles (Co-Chair of the Staff Forum) were able to attend the meeting with the focus of the meeting on staff wellbeing and engagement.

The Chair of the Committee added that a review of the Committee would take place after 12 months.

24/25 Disclosure of Interests and Risk

The Committee received 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.

The Committee noted the comments contained in the memorandum from the University Secretary in respect of disclosure of interests.

The Committee considered the risks on the register relating to the Committee and identified those relevant to the new Terms of Reference.

24/26 Staff Wellbeing and Engagement

The Chair of the Committee invited the three speakers to make their presentations and stated that the remainder of the meeting would be set aside for Committee members to contribute their experiences, insight and perspectives in respect of staff wellbeing and engagement.

Supporting the Physical and Mental Wellbeing of Staff

Dawn Grout, Occupational Health Manager provided the Committee with an overview of wellbeing, recognising that it means different things to different people.

She outlined the wellbeing support and offerings currently available to University staff, including:

- The University's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) currently provided by Confidential Care;
- The Wellbeing Peer Support (WPS) staff network;
- A staff wellbeing page that provides staff with information and resources to support wellbeing in day to day life;
- A wellbeing map – containing advice and information to help staff get the most out of different wellbeing activities across Whiteknights campus, and includes the 5 steps to mental wellbeing;

In addition, she reminded the Committee of the other services available to staff and managers, including:

- Occupational Health (OH) Services;
- Human Resources
- People Development – provide a wide range of learning / e-learning offerings in relation to staff wellbeing / mental health awareness;
- Health & Safety Services;
- Trade Union (UCU) and Staff Forum;
- University Chaplaincy;
- Diversity & Equality staff networks promoting diversity & inclusion at Reading;
- Central induction for new staff includes a slot on staff wellbeing.

She stated that up to now the University's wellbeing offerings and training have evolved, rather than having been as a result of a coordinated approach. She set out what a coordinated approach could look like – by having a whole organisation approach to mental health good practice and awareness, and linking this with the University's established Wellbeing Peer Support network.

She explained that a whole organisation approach required support from senior leaders and that line managers should make staff wellbeing a key responsibility. She explained the importance of ensuring staff at all levels were appropriately skilled and trained in relation to mental health awareness, and ensuring that momentum was maintained.

She stated that currently People Development run an Open Programme that includes delivery of a suite of mental health awareness sessions for staff from half day Mental Health Awareness training (for all staff), through to one day Mental Health Champion training (typically for Heads of School, Directorate or Function) and the two day Mental Health First Aid training (for nominated individuals – for example, those joining the WPS network, and colleagues in student/customer facing roles).

She proposed that in future staff wishing to attend the 2 day Mental Health First Aider training would i) need to have the support of their School/Directorate ii) agree that upon completion, they will become a member of the WPS network. In return they would receive an initial induction and would be able to attend regular drop-in support sessions.

Sarah Humphries, Director of Sports and Active Wellbeing informed the Committee that the Sports and Active Wellbeing vision was launched in November 2023 and is aimed at inspiring, growing and embedding sport and active wellbeing into the University and wider Community. She added that the mission statement is to deliver an improved, impactful and inclusive sport and active wellbeing offer to meet the evolving and growing needs of our students, staff and the wider community.

She explained that a sports and active wellbeing survey for staff, students and the community was being developed with the intention of obtaining base line data in

this area. She anticipated the survey would be rolled out in October 2024 and was expecting to use the findings from the survey to determine if the SportsPark is doing enough and to obtain ideas about future activities.

She described a number of ideas that are being considered, namely i) having a set time / day focused on wellbeing related activities - for example “Wellbeing Wednesday” and ii) establishing staff wellbeing/active wellbeing champions.

She informed the Committee that she had been contacted by
(in her capacity as a member of the Staff Disability Plus network) who was proposing to run a wellbeing week in the Spring Term 2025, having led on a wellbeing week in the Autumn term 2023 where she hosted a number of events during the week for staff to enjoy for free.

She reiterated the point raised by Dawn Grout - that whatever wellbeing initiative is being proposed / planned it was important to have senior management buy-in.

Staff Forum Led Events to Support Wellbeing

Lisa Powles, Occupational Health Administrator (and attending in her role as Co-Chair of the Staff Forum) highlighted a number of wellbeing related events led by the Staff Forum. These included:

Two “Get Together” events in May 2019 and June 2022. The first event enabled staff to meet new colleagues and learn something interesting in a relaxed, friendly environment. The second event had staff wellbeing at its heart – with representatives from Confidential Care, Occupational Health, the WPS network, and some of the EDI staff networks; A “staff appreciation day” was held in June 2024 that the Staff Forum was invited to attend;

She said that the Staff Forum was planning to run a further event in the Spring Term 2025 and would be liaising with relevant colleagues including those from the SportsPark, Occupational Health and the EDI staff networks.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Dawn, Sarah and Lisa for their comprehensive presentations and opened up the discussion to the Committee.

There was a general recognition that the University has a wealth of wellbeing support and resources available for staff to access. The discussion picked up the point raised by Dawn Grout, that staff wellbeing would benefit from having a more coordinated approach, and it was felt that the Communications team would be well placed to coordinate any staff wellbeing initiative or event. It was acknowledged that a lot of the initiatives and events do not always get noticed by colleagues, and that not everything on offer may be beneficial to everyone.

There was support for the initiative raised by Sarah Humphries – that of having a University wide approach whereby a regular dedicated time slot is set aside for staff wellbeing such as Wellbeing Wednesday, and encouraging staff to focus on their

wellbeing. Events and wellbeing activities could take place during this time, and staff encouraged to focus on their wellbeing and, for example, encouraged to take a break from their desks. The counter view was that having a set time would not benefit everyone given that staff may work part-time – and that having events / activities at different times would help in this regard. There was strong support for ensuring that activities and involvement is on a voluntary basis with no mandatory requirements.

It was noted that workload is often cited as having an impact on staff wellbeing and that when the University has put on wellbeing related events there are individuals who say they don't have time to get involved in these events. It was also noted that for many staff being active and taking part in wellbeing activities is an important part of their lives – but it is undertaken away from the work setting.

The Committee discussed whether wellbeing events and activities should be targeted at particular groups – for example inactive colleagues who wouldn't normally get involved in such events. Is there anything the University can do to break down barriers and to build up these individuals' confidence?

The Committee discussed staff wellbeing and the use of technology. Sarah Humphries said that a number of Universities use tracking Apps that have been tailored to their institutions and these have been positively received. It was recognised that such technology would require ongoing investment/funding.

The Chair of the Committee thanked the Committee for a very engaging discussion and provided a useful summary:

- I. The University provides a wealth of staff wellbeing resources, but that having a coordinated approach to supporting staff wellbeing is important. There is also a recognised capacity issue;
- II. It is clear we are all different – and being able to offer variety and choice in terms of staff wellbeing offerings will help – be mindful that some activities may appear to be frivolous especially when the University is facing significant change and uncertainty;
- III. Dawn Grout made a good point in relation to momentum – having activities / events that are consistent and repeatable seems a more sensible approach than having one-off events;
- IV. There is clearly a lot of knowledge about staff wellbeing in the room and many colleagues have experience of what works - we should continue to pull our ideas together. Thought also needs to be given in relation to measuring the success of events and initiatives being offered;
- V. Resourcing and capacity – there is no dedicated budget set aside for staff wellbeing. Should the University provide resource for wellbeing initiatives it would be preferable if a coordinated approach was adopted rather than a

fragmented approach – this would enable the University to make best use of the resources available;

- VI. Targeting individuals and/or Teams/Departments is an interesting idea – especially if this led to health benefits. This is worth considering.
- VII. We shouldn't aim for perfection – we should focus on what's most impactful;
- VIII. Mental health awareness training for staff / managers – this seems like a sensible thing to continue doing. Having a coordinated and well thought out approach as outlined by Dawn Grout makes sense – should training be for everyone; at what level should the training be aimed at. These are all important questions that need to be carefully considered;

The Chair of the Committee posed two questions to the Committee:-

- 1. If resources were available for staff wellbeing what would we use them for?
- 2. In relation to staff wellbeing - if there was one thing that you don't do that you would like to do what would it be?

He asked colleagues to give these questions some thought and send them to Claire Rolstone.

Action: Members of the Committee (plus guests) to consider the questions posed by the Chair of the Committee and send them to the Director of Human Resources.

Proposals re: Employee Surveys

The Director of Human Resources reported that the University had used an external organisation (Capita) to conduct employee engagement surveys in 2018, 2019 and 2020. She stated that Capita had withdrawn from the market and no longer offered this service. Following a gap where the University has not had a contract in place to run employee surveys, she reported that the University was now looking to re-establish this capability

A new market leader for Higher Education has emerged during this time and with technological advancements, the new capability will allow the University to be more agile when conducting surveys. Discussions are underway to run a new survey programme from February 2025. The functionality will allow surveys to be run for segments of the University staff community, or on particular topics, she also confirmed that it would be possible to benchmark against other Higher Education Institutions.

The Committee thanked the Director of Human Resources for the update.

24/27 Dates of meetings for the 2024/25 Academic Session:

Tuesday 19 November 2024	10.00 am – 12.00 pm
Friday 10 January 2025	2.00 pm – 4.00 pm
Thursday 27 February 2025	10.00 am – 12.00 pm
Wednesday 30 April 2025	11.30 am – 1.30 pm
Wednesday 11 June 2025	10.30 am – 12.30 pm

All meetings will be held in Committee 2, Whiteknights House