THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

PEOPLE AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

24/28 A meeting of the People and Culture Committee was held on Tuesday 19 November 2024 at 10.00 am in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House

Present:

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

Also in attendance:

Dr S Marston, Head of Institute of Education
Mrs C Smith, HR Partner

Apologies were received from Mrs D Grout , Professor A Laville and Mrs C Rolstone.

24/29 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2024 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

It was agreed that as the Director of Human Resources was unable to attend the meeting the matter arising from minute 24/26 (Staff Wellbeing and Engagement) – namely that she would provide the Committee with a verbal update on the responses received from members in relation to the two questions posed by the Chair of the Committee - would be carried over to the next meeting.

24/30 Performance and Change

The Chair of the Committee invited the speakers to make their presentations.

Getting value from PDRs – what can we learn from the sector and beyond
Susan Thornton, Assistant Director of Human Resources said that colleagues in Human Resources and People Development were reviewing the current

Performance Development Review (PDR) process and sought the Committee's views, insights and perspectives with the current process. She explained that the review would include a review of the documentation designed to guide and support reviewers and reviewees through the process, as well as looking at how PDRs / appraisals are conducted across the Higher Education sector.

She reminded colleagues that the PDR process had been in place for approximately ten years, and takes the form of an annual review. The normal format for the review meeting is i) an opportunity to reflect on, review and evaluate someone's contributions / performance over the previous 12 months, ii) an opportunity to plan for the next 12 months including the setting of objectives that focus on an individual's role and development. The expectation is that the PDR process is not a one-off review but part of an on-going dialogue between the individual and their line manager.

She recognised that Schools and Directorates were applying the PDR process differently and welcomed Sarah Marston, Head of the Institute of Education (IoE) to the Committee. Dr Marston provided the Committee with an overview of how the PDR process worked in the IoE and started by providing some context.

She explained that the Line management at the IoE is structured through a system of appointed Senior Academic Managers (SAMs) who are academic colleagues ranging from Lecturers to Professors. Each SAM line managed approximately 7 members of staff (who are typically <u>not</u> colleagues they work closely with), and a Lead SAM managed the team of SAMs. The Lead SAM reported to the head of the Institute.

SAMs were responsible for leading, managing and developing staff under their line management. This included conducting the PDR review as well as having ongoing dialogue with each member of staff. They would be expected to actively work with each member of staff on personal and professional development plans and aspirations, tracking progress and providing opportunities for reflection and discussion. They would encourage and improve the level of engagement and involvement of staff across the University and Sector with the aim of increasing both individual and Institute profile. They would also support each member of staff with cases and proposals for promotion via the Personal Titles process where applicable.

She said that SAMs would be expected to meet with each member of staff 3 times per year formally plus have 1 meeting at the start of the academic year. Additional informal ad hoc meetings were encouraged. Each of the 3 formal meetings had a clear structure, namely:

Meeting 1: discussed work allocation and well-being
Meeting 2: discussed aspirations and a review of the PDR objectives and points raised at the PDR review meeting
Meeting 3: formal review of the PDR

The University Secretary thanked Dr Marston for her presentation and sought the views and comments of the Committee.

Dr Marston was asked what happens in terms of the PDR process for those colleagues in the IoE who are not academics. She confirmed that she conducted a PDR with the Executive Support Manager who in turn conducted PDRs with her Executive Support team. She also said that postdoctoral research staff have a slightly different process.

Professor Charlton-Perez said that his School (School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences) had a similar process as the IoE for conducting PDRs. He stated the challenge he faced was the difficulty when attempting to monitor and manage performance as it was difficult to obtain the relevant data (funding, papers etc). He also stated that postdoctoral research staff, given the fixed term nature of their contracts, followed a slightly different process – as their objectives tended to be focused on the delivery of the project.

Dr Marston explained the SAM system addressed issues with performance and the SAM Lead would flag these with her as Head of the Institute.

The Committee agreed that it was important to be clear about the purpose of the PDR process, and acknowledged that perhaps the process was being used differently across the University.

Colleagues suspected that in some areas the PDR process was viewed as a one-off review when there was widespread agreement that it should be one part of an on-going dialogue between the individual and their reviewer/ line manager.

The Director of Corporate Services viewed the PDR process as a review of performance and development and said they went hand in hand. She said the discussion should discuss what the individual was supposed to do, the setting of objectives and then meeting regularly to find out how they were getting on. She confirmed that in Legal Services the timing of PDRs coincided with the planning process.

The Director of Research Services said that her function had a similar process to Legal Services. Reviewers are encouraged to agree 5 to 7 objectives that fell into three categories: strategic, role specific and wellbeing. The objectives were reviewed every 3 months and the expectation was that the reviewer and reviewee would meet fortnightly. She said the PDR process also considered the reviewee's training / development needs, and where an individual was demonstrably exceeding expectations, consideration would be given to rewarding them via the University's reward arrangements.

The Committee pondered whether greater consistency was required across all Schools/Directorates, for example, when agreeing the number of objectives.

The University Secretary thanked the Committee for the considered and insightful discussion and made a number of closing points:

- The PDR process needs to be meaningful and timely;
- There should be no surprises when carrying out a PDR with someone – its part of an ongoing continuum;
- It would be useful to share good practice – what works and what doesn't work;
- There is value in taking a step back from the day to day role – the PDR should be viewed as an opportunity to focus on the reviewee;

He suggested that it would be useful to find out how the HBS conducts PDRs, given comments during the meeting about whether scale of organisational unit had an effect upon the effective running of a PDR process .

The Assistant Director of Human Resources thanked colleagues for their input and said HR and People Development would take away their comments and reflect on next steps.

The University Secretary left the meeting and the Assistant Director of Human Resources acted as chair for the remainder of the meeting.

Embedding the Change Principles

Cathy Smith, HR Partner provided the Committee with an overview of the 5Cs of Change Model, a change management framework developed by the University of Reading to help bring people through change effectively. She stated that the 5Cs serve as the foundation for our institution's approach to change management and provide a consistent and considered way of thinking about the impacts of change. The 5Cs are:

- Case for change
- Change roles
- Change impacts
- Communication
- Considered approach

She explained that the Change and Continuous Improvement team had created a Change Management Toolkit to help support colleagues responsible for making change happen at the University.

She described the workshops she had organised with the HR Advisory team and discussed the role of HR in change related activities. The workshops covered:

- An introduction to Change – where are HR as a team;
- A series of practical workshops exploring the Toolkit Tools
- Follow up sessions looking at action planning and evaluation

She explained that members of the HR Advisory team discussed how the embedding change principles could be applied to not only large scale changes but smaller day to day activities.

The Committee asked how the model and toolkit had been received across the University. Cathy said that the Change and Continuous Improvement team had run a series of workshops all of which had been well received. The Committee noted the extensive suite of practical tools and techniques available and agreed that the principles could be usefully applied when making small changes.

Members of the Committee described their experiences with change at the University and a number of colleagues agreed that institutionally we sometimes rushed ahead without making the case for change or engaging with relevant stakeholders first.

There was agreement that the 5Cs of Change Model provided a useful framework for managers when managing change.

The Committee thanked Cathy for her informative presentation.

24/31 Employee Engagement Survey – update on implementation

The HR Advisory Lead provided the Committee with an update on the plans to conduct an employee engagement survey.

As had been reported at the last meeting the University has now agreed a contract with People Insight, a new market leader for Higher Education, to conduct employee engagement surveys from February 2025.

She explained that the employee engagement platform will allow the University to be more agile when conducting surveys. She also said the functionality will allow surveys to be run for segments of the University staff community (for example by School or Directorate), or on particular topics, and confirmed it would be possible to benchmark against other Higher Education Institutions.

She explained that 35 questions had been devised that were designed to measure employee engagement and enable the University to better understand the employee experience. She summarised the key topics included in the survey as:

- Purpose – understand the University's aims, and how good it makes employees feel;
- Enablement – how much communications is received and the resources employees have to do their job well;
- Autonomy – mastery is referring to the learning & development provided or supported by the University. Asking about Wellbeing and meeting demands of the job, balancing work and home life;

- Reward – asking about reward and recognition to check how valued staff feel;
- Leadership – confidence in senior leadership, relationships and line managers;
- Overall experience – open ended questions.

She said that 5 key indicators of engagement would be asked, namely Pride, Advocacy, Endeavour, Longevity and Care.

She outlined the proposed timeline for launching the employee engagement survey in February 2025:

December 2024	Build questionnaire and sign off;
January 2025	Participant data sent to People Insight and launch of communications;
February 2025	Survey to open on 4 February and close on 25 February;
March 2025	dashboard released to the University and summary report of data made available.

She confirmed that Schools and Directorates would receive a dashboard of results for their respective areas.

The Committee thanked the HR Advisory Lead for the update and made the following comments:

There were questions about i) UEB members and ii) your line manager but not about your Head of School / Directorate. Is this something that could be added to the questionnaire?

The Committee debated the importance of acting on the feedback received from the survey, and the need to have a carefully thought through action plan. Professor Charlton Perez remarked that Heads of School and Directorate may not be sufficiently empowered to take forward / address actions and may need UEB approval. There was widespread agreement that it would be useful to have some "quick wins" and not to over promise.

The Committee recognised the need to have a range of standardised questions in order to benchmark against other similar organisations, and noted that over 60 Higher Education Institutions use People Insights for conducting employee engagement surveys.

There was an acknowledgement that staff are often asked to complete surveys and the University would need to be mindful of survey fatigue. The Committee discussed the plan to launch the survey and promote it as widely as possible – a high response rate will help the University to identify trends and form actionable insights.

The HR Advisory Lead confirmed that thought had been given to communicating the survey to those colleagues who may not have easy access to computers / laptops. She indicated that the University knew who these individuals were and alternatives were in place, for example the use of QR codes.

She also clarified the three questions participants would be asked to respond to in the free text. They were:

i. Use 3 words to describe the University;
ii. The best thing about the University;
iii. What can the University improve.

The HR Advisory lead thanked the Committee for a very engaging discussion and confirmed that this would be fed back to colleagues working on the launch of the employee engagement survey.

24/32 Dates of meetings for the 2024/25 Academic Session:

Thursday 27 February 2025 10.00 am – 12.00 pm
Wednesday 11 June 2025 10.30 am – 12.30 pm

All meetings will be held in Committee 2, Whiteknights House