

Joint University/UCU Committee

24/10 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Wednesday 22 May 2024 at 13.00 in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House/remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor [*Chair*]
Rita Balestrini, Reading UCU Anti-Casualisation Officer
Dr Simon Clarke, Senate Representative – *via Teams*
Dr Deepa Driver, President of Reading UCU – *via Teams*
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official – *via Teams*
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary
Claire Rolstone, Director of HR
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor
Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

Apologies were received from:

Colette Maxfield, UCU Branch Administrator
Ellen Owens, Reading UCU Treasurer
Hattie Robinson, Reading UCU Membership Secretary

24/11 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

24/12 Matters Arising

a) Minute 24/02 *Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023*

The Secretary confirmed that the amendments requested to the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023 had been made.

b) Minute 24/02 *Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023*

Further to the action for the draft minutes of Senate to be included in the JUUC

papers where possible, the Secretary advised that, having checked the dates, there was not sufficient time between Senate and JUUC meetings to enable this. The draft minutes of Senate were made available as soon as possible after the meeting and the President of Reading UCU received Senate papers routinely, having right of attendance. Redacted versions of the papers were available for anyone within the University to view upon request and the redacted minutes were also later published via the University's Publication Scheme.

c) Minute 24/03 a) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

It was confirmed that the President of Reading UCU and others had now met with relevant colleagues from Finance; further meetings would be arranged as required.

d) Minute 24/03 c) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The Director of HR confirmed that the President of Reading UCU would receive a written response to questions they had raised regarding the Lecture Capture policy in due course.

Action: Director of HR

e) Minute 24/03 d) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

Following the President of Reading UCU's previous request for observer status on Council, the University Secretary advised that the President of Council was still considering this.

Action: President of Council

f) Minute 24/03 g) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

It was confirmed that a further meeting of the formal consultation group on the new School of Humanities had now taken place.

g) Minute 24/03 i) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The Vice Chancellor reiterated that the move the Blackboard Ultra was externally driven and noted the need to be mindful of the workloads of colleagues.

h) Minute 24/03 j) (23/24) *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

It was confirmed that the minor changes proposed in relation to the Rewards Committee process had been agreed at the last Staffing Committee and an update would be provided to UCU regarding these.

Action: Director of HR

i) Minute 24/04 *Report of the Vice Chancellor*

The Director of HR confirmed that information on season ticket loans and bus travel schemes for staff was published on the HR webpages.

j) *Minute 24/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor*

The action for the Director of HR to provide a response in relation to KTP contracts was ongoing.

k) *Minute 24/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor*

The action for the Vice Chancellor to share data with the President of Reading UCU, showing that the University currently had no more students and no less staff than in 2014, was ongoing. The President of Reading UCU further commented that it would be useful to see the data split between front-line teaching staff, research staff and Professional Services staff, to assist with understanding the student/staff ratio.

Action: Vice Chancellor

l) *Minute 24/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor*

The University Secretary advised that, in terms of the teaching schedule, the usual process was being followed. Staff availability was being provided to the Timetabling team; work was also underway to improve the quality of this information.

m) *Minute 24/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor*

The Vice Chancellor again confirmed that the University had not invested in buildings such as Shinfield Studios and the British Museum site - these had been built by the companies using those facilities and UoR only provided the infrastructure.

n) *Minute 24/08 Any other business*

It was noted that changes to accommodate the recent National Living Wage changes had been included as an agenda item for this meeting.

24/13 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Vice Chancellor noted that Senate had not met again since the previous JUUC and a Vice Chancellor's report to Senate had therefore not been provided on this occasion. They offered to respond to any particular questions Reading UCU would like to raise.

24/14 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU raised the following matters in particular:

- The President of Reading UCU sought permission to share the proposed changes to University pay scales with the AGM on 13 June, so that members could confirm whether they supported these. The Director of HR had no objection to this; however, noted that communication to the broader University, as well as to the individual colleagues impacted, was planned for the end of June/early July. It was agreed that it be made clear in any communications that UCU were still seeking agreement and that confirmation would be provided following the AGM.

Action: President of Reading UCU and Director of HR

- The President of Reading UCU noted that workload pressures within the new School of Humanities, including risk assessments and the setting of workload tariffs, had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Consultation Group. Reading UCU would continue to liaise with the Director of HR if any further feedback was received. The President of Reading UCU hoped to discuss the best way for UCU to continue to have School-level (as well as University-level) engagement on issues related to workload.
- The President of Reading UCU suggested that additional meetings of JUUC on particular, mutually agreed, institution-wide topics (such as general principles/issues in relation to workload) would be beneficial and requested that slots be reserved in diaries to enable this, which could later be released if no longer required. The President of Reading UCU highlighted the importance of raising certain matters at University level, suggesting that it was important to protect time in which to discuss topics such as workload, which could potentially be perceived as less urgent.
- The President of Reading UCU raised a concern regarding the fact that some departments would require resource in order to reach the ambitious recruitment targets set by the University and to remain viable. The President of Reading UCU noted that numbers were potentially down across the sector in certain areas and highlighted that sufficient support would be needed across the University in areas such as marketing etc.
- The President of Reading UCU advised that the Reading UCU Committee had recently gone through various nomination processes; it was confirmed that the President of Reading UCU and the other UCU representatives on JUUC would be continuing in their current roles. Departmental Reps etc. would be confirmed in due course. The President of Reading UCU noted that they would be liaising with the Director of HR regarding the allocation of facilities time and suggested that more might be needed, given the scale of work

expected over the next year. The Director of HR advised that a request for additional facilities time would need to go to UEB. The UCU Regional Official highlighted that the facilities agreement was across the breadth of UCU roles, including Departmental Reps and Case Workers, and also included time for UCU training. The President of Reading UCU agreed to send details regarding their request for increased facilities time to the Director of HR.

Action: President of Reading UCU

- The President of Reading UCU advised that a comment the Vice Chancellor had made at a recent All Staff Talk regarding the potential for redundancies had caused much anxiety for members. The President of Reading UCU noted that the Vice Chancellor had clearly stated at the previous JUUC that there were no plans for restructure. Reading UCU sought reassurance that any information about potential restructuring or redundancies would be shared with UCU first; furthermore, they sought to reassure members that the University was not intending to make redundancies at this time. The Vice Chancellor advised that the All Staff Talk had been a forward look at the University finances. While they had said that it seemed likely that there could potentially be redundancies at some stage (given that the University was trying to reduce its £30m deficit), they had also confirmed that, at this point in time, there were no specific plans for any redundancies. The University would, of course, follow the agreed procedures if it did consider making redundancies. The President of Reading UCU indicated that they would expect the University to make cuts elsewhere (such as large capital expenses) before even considering redundancies. The Vice Chancellor responded that capital investments were often decisions that were essential for the long-term sustainability of the University. The Vice Chancellor noted that this was a very challenging time and they preferred to be honest and transparent with colleagues, many of whom welcomed this approach. Reading UCU representatives reiterated that the Vice Chancellor should avoid speaking about redundancies when it was not absolutely necessary. The Vice Chancellor noted that, had they not addressed the subject of redundancies, there doubtless would have been questions regarding this. The UCU Regional Official clarified that it was about how to shape discussions to enable honest conversations with staff without unduly causing alarm and suggested that thought should be given as to what assurances it was possible to give staff at this time. The President of Reading UCU suggested that it would be helpful if any potential conversations with staff regarding redundancies were discussed with UCU in advance. The President of Reading UCU thanked the Vice Chancellor for confirming that there were no concrete plans, explicit or implicit, for redundancies in the near future.

Items brought forward by the University

24/15 Proposed changes to University pay scales

The Committee received a paper regarding proposed changes to University pay scales as a result of uplifts in National Minimum/Living Wage. The UCU Regional Official noted that most of the UoR staff members directly impacted were outside of UCU's bargaining group. The proposed changes were generally considered to be positive, particularly the proposal that Grade 6 start one spinal point higher. The President of Reading UCU affirmed that UCU policy supported progressive pay structures and therefore any changes that helped with achieving living wage effectively were to be welcomed. The President of Reading UCU did also seek assurance that:

- this would have no impact on further discussions regarding changes to remuneration for staff in Grades 6 and above (who UCU represented);
- this did not in any way impinge on the University's willingness or ability to meet the JNCHES agreements as part of the JNCHES process.

The President of Reading UCU also flagged the potential for staff to be 'bunched' at the top of the pay grade and to struggle to move along the discretionary points.

The Director of HR confirmed that the University was engaging with UCEA as part of the new JNCHES process; the changes currently proposed were intended to address other challenges in terms of pay (particularly for the lower grades). It was confirmed that there was no reason that these changes should impinge on future involvement in New JNCHES. In terms of the suggested 'bunching' at the top of pay grades, UCU representatives were reminded that the Personal Titles process would return at the start of the next academic year. The President of Reading UCU welcomed the commitment from the University to support the National Living Wage. As previously agreed, the President of Reading UCU would seek the agreement of members on the proposed changes to University pay scales at the AGM.

Items brought forward by Reading UCU

24/16 Resourcing for schools, departments and functions

The President of Reading UCU sought further information in relation to the departments not targeted for growth and how they would be supported. The President of Reading UCU suggested that it was possible that some departments could seem to 'die a natural death' but in reality they had not been given the resources to be able to recruit students as per the new numbers. With this in mind, the President of Reading UCU suggested that it would be useful to receive projected

numbers on a regular basis ahead of the new academic year.

24/17 Update on student recruitment

Further to the previous conversation regarding resourcing, the President of Reading UCU requested an update on student recruitment and, ideally, interim updates to enable timely engagement. The Vice Chancellor noted that there was a degree of commercial confidence to the recruitment figures; however, they would consider how the President of Reading UCU could receive regular updates.

Action: Vice Chancellor

24/18 Restructuring

The Vice Chancellor again confirmed that there was no imminent, explicit or implicit, threat of redundancy to staff.

Routine items

24/19 Matters from Staffing Committee

The Committee received and noted a report from the most recent Staffing Committee held in February and the following was noted in particular:

- A number of changes had been proposed to the Terms of Reference of Staffing Committee; Staffing Committee was supportive of these changes and approval would be sought from UEB next week. These changes were quite significant and were intended to make the committee more strategic.

The following comments were noted:

- The President of Reading UCU noted the update provided on the University Mental Health Charter - in particular, the formation of a working group. The President of Reading UCU requested that UCU be included (or at least copied in) so that the Health and Safety Rep could engage as necessary.
- The UCU Regional Official requested further updates on the implications of the fact that New Skilled Workers visa holders would have to be paid £38,700 pa. It was queried whether this could potentially create difficulties for UoR staff who were on Grade 6 but not at this threshold and who did not fit into the exception for PhDs. The Director of HR explained that whilst current staff would not be affected these were live issues for the whole sector which could impact staff recruitment and would continue to be monitored. A paper was expected to be submitted to the next Staffing Committee and the Director of HR would keep UCU updated.

24/20 Any other business

The following was raised:

- The President of Reading UCU advised that they had discussed with the Director of HR work already undertaken in relation to performance management. There remained a couple of areas where agreement had not been reached; the President of Reading UCU hoped to continue to work with the Director of HR and colleagues to reach an agreement on these.
- The President of Reading UCU noted that the next meeting of JUUC was not until October and requested that an additional meeting be scheduled in case required. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that, if possible, an additional meeting of JUUC would be scheduled for early September.

Action: Secretary

24/21 Dates of meetings for 2024/25 (provisional)

Thursday 31 October 2024 at 14.00

Thursday 6 March 2025 at 14.00

Wednesday 28 May 2025 at 14.00