

People and Remuneration Committee

25/01 A hybrid meeting of the Committee was held on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 2.30 pm via Teams and in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House.

Present: Vice-President of the Council, Kate Owen (Chair) via Teams
The President of the Council, Helen Gordon via Teams
Lay Member of the Council, Sian Butler via Teams
Lay Member of the Council, Kevin Corrigan via Teams
Lay Member of the Council, Sue Maple via Teams
An elected member of the Council, John Jack

By invitation: Vice-Chancellor
University Secretary
Director of Human Resources
Head of Governance (*Secretary*)

Apologies: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

25/02 Minutes of the last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the last meeting, held on 15 October 2024 as a correct record.

25/03 Matters Arising

At the outset of the meeting Lay Members raised a number of issues for discussion in the future, in particular:

- Productivity Statistics – what data was available to understand the workforce in a more quantitative way
- HEI Sector current picture and further announcements of redundancies at other universities

In respect of news about redundancies at other institutions, the Vice-Chancellor reported that a number of institutions had opted to address their underlying deficits through one significant cut to address the full size of their deficit hence the size of some of the potential redundancy numbers being reported in the media. A number of institutions who had started addressing their deficits earlier were now in the process of additional rounds

of redundancies. In addressing deficits many institutions had forgotten the impact on student recruitment and reputational damage, essentially making it difficult to recruit to target. The negativity around the sector was being spread by Trade Unions, OfS, Government and the media, and this was creating a problem. Locally at Reading, issues being raised with the Vice-Chancellor were around post pandemic arrangements (colleagues not attending campus/no sense of belonging) and pay matters (whilst recognising that a pay deferral was preferable to redundancies) particularly for those colleagues in the professional services. John Jack concurred that the pay deferral alongside ongoing issues around cost of living was impacting a number of professional services colleagues.

The Director of HR informed the Committee that on the professional services side the University was likely to see more colleagues leaving the sector for positions outside of HE. The University's approach to the pay deferral had been commended by national UCU to UCEA.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Vice-Chancellor informed the Committee that UEB were very concerned about the downturn in student recruitment and negative picture of HE. Current admissions at Reading for undergraduates were positive with the University outperforming its competitors, but like most institutions international and PGT numbers were challenging.

The Vice-President (Kevin Corrigan) urged the University to continue to push a positive Reading centred narrative – not all institutions were in trouble despite the challenging environment.

All other matters arising were covered below.

25/04 Staff Voice

The Director of HR informed the Committee that the University would be launching a full staff engagement survey in the next week. The platform used would also give the opportunity to run further pulse surveys or specific surveys to particular groups/on different topics. The data collected would allow HR to report on KPI 1 again. The results of the survey would be shared with the Committee. The Director of HR agreed to share a short paper on the survey with the Committee.

Action: Director of HR

In respect of discussions at previous meetings on the staff voice it was suggested that during May/June 2025 meetings be set up with a small number of Lay Members and UCU, the Staff Forum, and a representative group of staff. It was intended that a topic be chosen from the results of the survey as a focus for discussion and that colleagues attending be asked to prepare three things the University should be considering on that topic. This approach would be dual purpose in the Committee meeting with colleagues and engaging with the staff voice whilst gaining feedback on important issues raised through the staff survey.

The Committee were supportive of the approach outline, the President and Vice-President (Kate Owen) offered to be involved with the meetings.

25/05 Governance Review Project

The University Secretary gave a brief overview of the Governance Review, in particular it was noted that:

- The Governance Review was part of a border Transformation Programme developed by the Heads of Directorate
- As the Review was foundational for other work it was given priority for implementation
- The overall aim was to ensure that governance processes and structures effectively supported delivery of the University structure and strategic objectives through creation of a robust and agile governance framework
- Work had just commenced on understanding the 'as is' phase for the committee structure and decision making. The intention was to develop a new framework towards the end of 2024/25
- The CUC were about to issue a new Code of Governance which would need to be taken into account
- As part of the review discussions would need to be held with Lay Members of Council, particularly in regard to reporting through to Council

Sian Butler linked the Governance Review with the Staff Engagement Survey suggesting that some quick wins to remove bureaucracy and giving delegations to colleagues would make them feel empowered and engaged.

Sue Maple queried how the Review sat alongside work on restructuring the Professional Services. The University Secretary responded that this was foundational piece of work that would inform the overall Transformation Project.

It was noted that external challenges were being sought from a number of organisations including SUMS.

The Committee agreed that Lay Members must be able to offer their input into the Review given Council's overall responsibility for governance.

25/06 Change and Transformation Update

At its last meeting on 21 January 2025 the Council had been given an update on:

- Plans to accelerate savings as agreed by Council on 20 November 2024. Colleagues were working hard to bring a number of these plans forward, although it was challenging
- Right size and shape of Schools – Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Zaum was working with Heads of School on this, proposals would be made to the Council via Senate

25/07 Severance Payments and Early Retirement Arrangements

There was no report on this occasion.

25/08 Out of Cycle Salary Increases

The Committee received and noted out of cycle salary increases since the last meeting.

25/09 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 3 June 2025 9.30 – 11.30 am