

Joint University/UCU Committee

25/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Thursday 13 March 2025 at 12.00 in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House/remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Dr Deepa Driver, President of Reading UCU [Chair]

Rita Balestrini, Reading UCU Workload and Health & Safety Officer

Dr Simon Clarke, Senate Representative

Colette Maxfield, UCU Branch Administrator – via Teams

Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official

Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary – via Teams

Ellen Owens, Reading UCU Secretary

Claire Rolstone, Director of HR

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor

Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor

Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [Secretary]

Apologies were received from:

James Hallett, Reading UCU Branch Committee Representative

25/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024

It was noted that comments had been received from Reading UCU regarding the minutes of the last meeting held on 31 October 2024; the changes had been substantive and the University had not been able to consider them prior to circulation of the papers. The Director of HR and President of Reading UCU had recently agreed that, in order to ensure the best use of time during meetings, the minutes of both JUUC and the Consultation Group would be shared with Reading UCU within 10 working days of the meeting, and that Reading UCU would respond to the minutes within 10 working days of receiving them. The Director of HR would confirm a number of other points to the President of Reading UCU by email.

Action: Director of HR

The Director of HR had now reviewed Reading UCU's suggested amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024; while many could be agreed, a number would be taken outside of the meeting in order to agree on a resolved set.

Action: Director of HR

25/03 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere in the meeting

- a) Minute 24/34 - Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024; Minute 24/35 a) (24/25) - Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2024

It was confirmed that the minutes of the meetings held on 19 September 2024 and 22 May 2024 had now been finalised and would be published on the website in due course; Reading UCU would be advised when this had been done.

Action: Secretary

UCU also noted that the November Council minutes were not yet published online.

Action: University Secretary

- b) Minute 24/35 c) (24/26 c), 24/12 k), 24/04) - Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Vice Chancellor had shared data regarding staff and student numbers now compared to 2014 by email since the previous meeting.

- c) Minute 24/35 e) (24/27) - Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Vice Chancellor had responded to Reading UCU's questions regarding assets by email since the last meeting.

- d) Minute 24/35 k) (24/28) - Report of the President of Reading UCU

Reading UCU noted that the Performance Management policy had now been published on the website and expressed surprise, noting the previous action to liaise with them regarding this. The Director of HR confirmed that the policy had been approved by UEB and published in order to get its many positive aspects in place now. The policy had already been discussed with Reading UCU at approximately five meetings; its use would continue to be monitored and reviewed, and Reading UCU could continue to feed into this process. The President of Reading UCU had understood that UEB's decision would come back to UCU before publication, following a request to make changes, and it was reiterated that UCU would expect policies to be fully agreed prior to publication, as had been the case historically. It

was requested that this will be discussed offline to be resolved before next JUUC.

Action: Director of HR and President of RUCU

- e) Minute 24/38 - Union representation on Staffing Committee (now People and Culture Committee)

It was clarified that the Director of HR would share the finalised Terms of Reference for the new People and Culture Committee with Reading UCU.

Action: Director of HR

- f) Minute 24/39 - Lessons learned from USS early retirement factors implementation

The Director of HR confirmed that no queries had been raised with Pension colleagues in relation to USS early retirement factors implementation.

- g) Minute 24/40 - University finances

In relation to Tanners Farm, the Vice Chancellor had apologised to Reading UCU regarding the lack of consultation with them, which should have taken place given that this was above the £10m threshold. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that there was not an exception made for investments in the collective agreement; however, money in excess of that amount could sometimes be moved around by the University's portfolio manager, Cazenove, as part of their role. The Vice Chancellor could only report such occurrences afterwards. President of Reading UCU noted that as per the agreement such spends could not simply be reported at JUUC two months after the fact. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that when the University moved more than £10m this would be reported, in advance where known (noting issues relating to commercial confidentiality), to both UCU and the Staff Forum as per the Phase 1 agreement. The Vice Chancellor also confirmed that nothing else of that magnitude had been spent since the Phase 1 agreement. President of Reading UCU thanked the VC for confirming.

- h) Minute 24/41 - PILON

PILON remained a matter for discussion by the President of Reading UCU and the Director of HR.

Action: President of Reading UCU and Director of HR

- i) Minute 24/44 - Union representation on Council

The University Secretary advised that, from the summer, People and Remuneration Committee intended to undertake engagement with various groups (including UCU) on matters of particular importance. This termly or twice-yearly engagement, which would be undertaken by senior members of Council, would be reviewed after a year.

j) Minute 24/45 - Updates to Academic Probation and Personal Titles Procedures

The Director of HR agreed to set dates for the subgroup to consider updates to Academic Probation and Personal Titles procedures.

Action: Director of HR

k) Minute 24/47 - Any other business

The Vice Chancellor had provided data to Reading UCU relating to implications from the recent budget announcement by email since the last meeting.

l) Minute 24/47 - Any other business

The Director of HR had provided an update regarding the impact of changes to the National Minimum Wage to the Consultation Group. President of RUCU confirmed receipt.

The President of Reading UCU suggested that an action list would be useful for future meetings. [Post-meeting note: an action list of new and ongoing actions from this meeting is included at the end of these minutes].

Action: Secretary

25/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Committee received and noted the Vice Chancellor's February report to Senate.

The Vice Chancellor also raised a number of matters, as follows:

- With reference to recent meetings that had taken place, and noting their duty of care to all staff, the Vice Chancellor requested that UCU be mindful of how their questioning of data/figures etc. could be perceived by those who produced them as effectively questioning the integrity of individuals and/or teams. The President of Reading UCU requested further clarity on questions that may have raised concerns and UCU Regional Official advised that there had been no intention to question anyone's professionalism or integrity, rather to ask questions to enable better understanding. UCU acknowledged the Vice Chancellor's comments and noted that it was regrettable if questions re the financial position are perceived in that way and confirmed that they are trying to understand the data and figures.

- The Vice Chancellor raised the matter of the accuracy of data being shared by Reading UCU, with particular reference to a £30m heat pump which did not, in fact, exist on campus. Another example given included commentary on Reading UCU's website which claimed that the University had taken a closure day away from staff at Easter – this was also factually incorrect. The President of Reading UCU explained that this had been included as a response from members to a recent survey, as a matter that would be brought to JUUC. The Vice Chancellor suggested that it was expressed as a statement of fact and received confirmation from the President of Reading UCU that this would be clarified on the website to note it was a member concern.

Action: President of Reading UCU

The University Secretary confirmed that the number of closure days did not change in any given year but the balance between Easter and Christmas did change depending on when Christmas and New Year fell. The President of Reading UCU asked that this information be emailed to them.

Action: University Secretary

- The Vice Chancellor noted that the Reading UCU website included reference to compulsory redundancies. As UCU had questioned the Vice Chancellor's decision to use the word 'redundancy' in a previous All Staff Talk, due to concern it might upset colleagues, the Vice Chancellor queried whether UCU had considered the impact on members of UCU referring to compulsory redundancies, which had never actually been on the table. The UCU Regional Official suggested that the role and function of a Vice Chancellor and a trade union were fundamentally different in terms of referring to redundancies and that it was reasonable to include this within dialogue with members, who were aware of the wider context of deficits within the sector. The President of Reading UCU advised that, when asked by members regarding the possibility of compulsory redundancies, UCU representatives tried to answer honestly without misrepresenting the University's position; however, it was not possible to pass on any assurances as UCU had not received any from the University. The UCU Regional Official confirmed that a lot of thought went into the messaging provided to members, alongside provision of a wider range of support.

25/05 Report of the President of Reading UCU

(For this item, matters raised by the President of Reading UCU have been noted together with the subsequent responses from University representatives.)

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- The President of Reading UCU raised the potential local consequences of the recent devolution bill. The Vice Chancellor advised that they would be hosting leaders of local authorities to make the case for working with universities whatever emerged. The President of Reading UCU offered their willingness to participate in this and engage with the many members living in the local area; it was acknowledged that UCU involvement would likely be at a later stage, in the context of political support. UCU's national view on devolution was not yet known but would be discussed the following day at the Joint Negotiating Committee. The Vice Chancellor noted the importance of awareness amongst university communities regarding the impact that devolved authorities would have on the core practices of teaching and research; if there was to be greater devolution, the University would want to use its institutional knowledge to make this a success. It would be important for there to be a balanced approach to research and education in the Thames Valley, for example.
- The President of Reading UCU shared the findings of a survey carried out in response to the University's decision to defer the nationally agreed pay award. There had been a good number of responses, with the main outcomes including that a significant number of members felt that the deferral of the pay award had made a significant difference to them. The kind of things that members were forgoing, that they had planned to use the money for, were considered to be necessities - not luxuries. A significant number of members also understood the implications of the deferral on their pensions.
- The President of Reading UCU raised concern that the PRP project appeared to have been closed, with its benefits now being discussed with Council. The burdens that the project had placed on staff were highlighted and the President of Reading UCU noted a clear indication from colleagues that they were not seeing the intended reduction in workload. Reading UCU would be launching a survey on PRP and semesterisation and offered to share the findings with the Vice Chancellor and Director of HR. While noting that UCU was free to survey its members, the Vice Chancellor clarified that the end of project report (following the end of the formal project/implementation) was different to the evaluation of PRP. While the factual outcomes of what had already been gained from this process had been independently researched by the Planning and Strategy Office, the formal review of the success of the project was expected to be available at the start of 2026, as had always been intended. The President of Reading UCU indicated that UCU might also run a further survey at a later stage but wanted to give members an opportunity to raise concerns now, in case these could be addressed. Noting that the optimisation of workload reduction was a central framework devolved to

individual Schools and departments (and that there had been some local resistance, meaning that maximum workload reduction had not yet been fully realised), the Vice Chancellor suggested that it would be interesting to know whether members had recognised their agency and role in maximising workload reduction. The Vice Chancellor noted that the distributed leadership model required this work to be done in partnership; the President of Reading UCU suggested that the University needed to acknowledge potential issues with the project itself, rather than blaming local implementation. The Vice Chancellor highlighted that the system had been designed to allow future workload reduction through continuous improvement; it would also be useful to know members' appetite for this.

- With reference to the increased automation of attendance monitoring, the President of Reading UCU highlighted that UCU had a strong policy position against hostile environments and the policing of these. There were also concerns in terms of the harvesting of data in relation to various software (Turnitin, Blackboard etc.) and the subsequent use of this data to train AI. UCU were concerned that there would be implications for jobs for members, as well as issues in relation to the privacy of staff and students. The Vice Chancellor responded that student analytics was much broader than attendance monitoring and was meant to support students at risk of dropping out; other universities had demonstrated significantly improved retention of students through this. The President of Reading UCU confirmed that while RUCU was obviously not opposed to data collection for student retention and support purposes, they were concerned about the repurposing of data both individual and anonymised. The Vice Chancellor highlighted that the University had a legal requirement to look after international students and their engagement, and attendance monitoring was part of this. It was confirmed that Professor Peter Miskell, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) was leading on this work and an effort would be made for offline discussions.
- With regards to the Space Use policy, the President of Reading UCU indicated that they would like to understand more regarding the monitoring of the space used within campus. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that this project was only in its early scoping stage currently; part of this was about how to make savings in the best possible way, to try and improve the efficient use of space and save non-staff costs. The University Secretary agreed to keep Reading UCU updated on the progress of this work.

Action: University Secretary

- The President of Reading UCU sought confirmation as to whether approximately £1m would be spent on the University's centenary celebrations. Members had indicated that the best thing the University could do to celebrate its centenary was to make sure that both students and staff were valued and that people had jobs. At a time when the University was cutting costs, and saving £5m from the delayed implementation of the pay award, Reading UCU was very uncomfortable with the proposal to spend close to £1m on centenary celebrations. The Vice Chancellor clarified that, as they had stated at more than one All Staff Talk, the £1m was a legacy gift to use for the University's centenary celebrations; regardless of whether or not it was used for this, there would be no impact on any other budget. The money was being used for items/activities that staff and students had applied for that were important to them, such as improvements to campus and a project about working class students at the University over the ages. The UCU Regional Official suggested that it might be beneficial to repeat the message (in signage etc.) regarding the funding being a legacy gift specifically for this purpose and suggested that there could be opportunities to use the centenary for marketing and recruitment purposes as well. The President of Reading UCU suggested that the legacy could be interpreted in a different way, and requested the continued preservation of jobs/courses etc and that as a way of genuinely preserving the legacy, staff request that this money is spent on staff and students as a way to mark the centenary. The Vice Chancellor advised that the University would be adhering to its charitable objectives with regards to how this was spent.
- [Redacted, Section 43]
- The President of Reading UCU asked for more information on the Reading Global Academy and its implications for ISLI. The Vice Chancellor clarified that ISLI currently ran both the international foundation and the home foundation; at ISLI's request, the decision had been made that ISLI would retain the international foundation, and the home foundation would be managed in a different way. 'Reading Global Academy' was a working title but was considered to be more explanatory for international students. There were no staff implications expected, other than potentially changes in terms of which School supported home foundation students.
- The President of Reading UCU asked for more clarity on senior remuneration and what had been approved in terms of performance-linked awards, to understand the scale and what had been approved for which year. The Vice Chancellor noted that the details were personal to the individuals concerned

and that during the postponement of the majority of the reward processes, there had been a number of other reward arrangements, such as retention cases which had been approved. The President of Reading UCU requested an anonymised indication of retention payments and senior management pay, to enable them to respond to members. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that senior remuneration was included within the financial statements; the President of Reading UCU considered this to be after the fact and indicated that UCU would like to be more proactive in this area. The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that the professorial salary review also provided important contextual information relating to senior remuneration. Following discussion, the Vice Chancellor agreed to consider a timeline for the provision of anonymised information, so that it was not necessary for UCU to wait for the publication of the next annual report.

Action: Vice Chancellor

- In response to concerns that Council members would not be able to speak freely were UCU to be present, the President of Reading UCU noted that many other universities permitted an observer from UCU at meetings of Council. In order to create a greater sense of comfort, the President of Reading suggested that UCU be able to provide a 15-minute intervention at Council termly or twice a year, to share a rounded picture of the concerns of staff. It was asked that this be tabled with Council on Reading UCU's behalf.

Action: University Secretary

- The President of Reading UCU raised a general point that some universities in distress were making various cuts and that others, not in distress, were either making cuts or introducing very unpopular programmes of change because of the broader climate of fear in staff across universities; UCU was therefore actively scrutinising everything to ensure that it was well justified.
- The President of Reading UCU raised concerns regarding casualisation and perceived breaches of the agreement across multiple schools, as a result of either direct or implicit advice given to managers. The President of Reading UCU suggested that Heads of Department (new or existing) be reminded of the agreement at the start of every academic year. It was added that it was disappointing to hear regularly from members that the reason given for why they had not been issued a proper contract at grade 7 was due to the agreement, considering how much effort had been put into this by UCU and senior management.

- The President of Reading UCU expressed gratitude for the facilitation of UCU's work through the facilities time supported by the University. Given the amount of work needed on the consultation, it was hoped to take a more proactive approach as to the prioritisation of projects in order to agree on a hierarchy of importance from both a University and UCU/staff perspective.
- The President of Reading UCU raised the continued desire for UCU involvement during the induction process for staff (as was in place at most other universities). There was a brief conversation about spaces for UCU to advertise on campus and Reading UCU raised the need to ensure that staff with line management responsibilities were aware of the role of UCU. The Director of HR confirmed that UCU was brought to the attention of staff from the beginning of employment via their offer letter. In terms of the induction session, this had now changed from what was in place before, but they would be happy to discuss options for UCU involvement outside of the meeting with potentially a video supplementing RUCU intervention in person.

Action: Director of HR

Items brought forward by the University

25/06 Academic Workload work

The Director of HR provided a brief update on the Academic Workload project. The Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Workload) was keen to meet with Reading UCU and was intending to do a survey of academic staff and others around workload.

25/07 Engagement Survey/Staff Voice

The Director of HR provided a brief update on the recent Engagement Survey. The results were just coming through and it might be possible to bring these to a future meeting with Reading UCU; this could also potentially link in with the engagement planned by People and Remuneration Committee.

Items brought forward by Reading UCU

25/08 Further items brought forward by Reading UCU

It was noted that Reading UCU had specifically requested the following agenda items, some of which had previously been covered during the meeting and others which Reading UCU now hoped to discuss outside of the meeting, or at the next JUUC:

- RUCU Collective Agreement 2020 (Local Pay and Equality Claim)/Joint panel meeting; University restructures;

- University recruitment strategy – next 5 years;
- clarity on triggers for redundancy/cuts;
- senior management remuneration;
- facility time;
- Sustainability Scholarships business case;
- subsidiaries and spin outs;
- pay review survey feedback;
- use of AI;
- AUCSO;
- Palestine surveillance;
- and Lecture Capture.

In particular, the President of Reading UCU noted the new Association of University Chief Security Officers and indicated that they would like to receive an update regarding the University's participation in this, with particular reference to the surveillance of students or staff participating in anti-genocide activities.

Action: Director of HR

There was a further discussion regarding casualisation. Reading UCU advised that members were often told that they could not have their contract renewed because Associate Lecturer contracts could not be renewed for more than one academic year; this implied that they could not continue and was not in the spirit of the agreement. The Vice Chancellor noted that it had been on the insistence of UCU that the University did not create permanent Associate Lecturers posts at grade 6. In response to Reading UCU's argument that a permanent post must be grade 7 if needed, the Director of HR clarified that it could not be assumed that a permanent grade 7 post would be created. Reading UCU asserted that there was often a constant need for support from junior colleagues and an example of their concern was shared relating to the introduction of the new GTA scheme. The UCU Regional Official expressed concern about the consistency of implementation of the collective agreement and the advice being provided, noting a possible mismatch with UCU's views about how the agreement should be implemented. The UCU Regional Official suggested that a commitment was needed from Schools in terms of developing such roles to potentially become either (ideally) permanent or in place for a number of years; the initial rational was to eliminate casual work from the University as much as possible, and this did not appear to be happening. The President of Reading UCU agreed to take this up outside of the meeting.

Action: President of Reading UCU

25/09 Any other business

The following was raised under any other business:

- The President of Reading UCU queried the nature of the sealing of documents in relation to Council papers and the management of conflicts of interest. After discussion, it transpired that Reading UCU had misunderstood the term 'sealed' which did not mean unavailable in this context, but rather a means of authentication as part of the legal signing process for the University.

25/10 Date of next meeting

Thursday 5 June 2025 at 13.00