

Joint University/UCU Committee

25/11 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Thursday 5 June 2025 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 Workload and Health & Safety Officer – via Teams
Dr Simon Clarke, Senate Representative
Dr Deepa Driver, President of Reading UCU – via Teams
Colette Maxfield, UCU Branch Administrator – via Teams
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official – via Teams
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary
Ellen Owens, Reading UCU Secretary – via Teams
Claire Rolstone, Director of HR
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor – via Teams
Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [Secretary]

Apologies were received from:

James Hallett, Reading UCU Branch Committee Representative

25/12 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

25/13 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere in the meeting

The Committee went through the action list as follows:

a) Minute 25/02

The Director of HR had confirmed further points regarding future minutes to the President of Reading UCU by email.

b) Minute 25/02

The Director of HR had liaised with Reading UCU regarding their suggested amendments to the JUUC minutes of 31 October 2024 and a resolved set had now been agreed.

c) Minute 25/03 a)

The Secretary had arranged for the JUUC minutes from May and September 2024 to be published on the website. The JUUC minutes from October 2024 and March 2025, now agreed, would be published in due course.

Action: Secretary

d) Minute 25/03 a)

The November Council minutes had now been published on the website.

e) Minute 25/03 d)

The performance management policy remained a matter for discussion between the President of Reading UCU and the Director of HR.

Action: President of Reading UCU and Director of HR

f) Minute 25/03 e)

The finalised Terms of Reference for the new People and Culture Committee had now been shared with Reading UCU.

g) Minute 25/03 h)

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

Action: President of Reading UCU and Director of HR

h) Minute 25/03 j)

The Director of HR confirmed that a meeting had been scheduled for a sub-group to consider updates to the Academic Probation and Personal Titles procedures.

i) Minute 25/03 l)

An action list was now included at the end of the JUUC minutes.

j) Minute 25/04

With regards to the action for the President of Reading UCU to clarify on the Reading UCU website that the University had not taken a closure day away from staff at Easter, it was confirmed that the website still needed to be updated but an email had been sent to all members.

Action: President of Reading UCU

k) Minute 25/04

The University Secretary had emailed the President of Reading UCU regarding the number of closure days each year and the balance of these between Christmas and Easter.

l) Minute 25/05

With regards to their action to keep Reading UCU updated on the progress of the Space Use work, the University Secretary advised that nothing had happened since the last meeting of JUUC and suggested keeping this action option for one further meeting.

Action: University Secretary

m) Minute 25/05

With regards to their action to consider a timeline for the provision of anonymised information relating to senior remuneration, so that it was not necessary for UCU to wait for the publication of the next annual report, the Vice Chancellor advised that they had asked Finance to provide this information. Once the relevant colleagues had themselves been informed, this would be shared with members of the committee.

Action: Vice Chancellor

n) Minute 25/05

With regards to their action to table Reading UCU's request to Council that UCU be able to provide a 15-minute intervention at Council twice a year, to share a rounded picture of the concerns of staff, the University Secretary confirmed that the President and Vice President of Council would be meeting with the Director of HR and representatives from Reading UCU on several occasions over the next academic year to discuss items of particular interest, with the intention to then review this approach. The Director of HR confirmed that they would soon be in touch with Reading UCU to organise a date for the first meeting.

Action: Director of HR

o) Minute 25/05

In terms of their action regarding options for UCU involvement in staff induction, the Director of HR advised that they had been liaising with the team who ran the staff induction. The staff induction had changed over recent years, for example – it was now shorter to encourage better attendance and there was no longer a 'marketplace' element. The Director of HR was open to making more of UCU and the Staff Forum in the morning induction session and suggested that a short

video could be provided. The Director of HR would discuss possible options with Reading UCU outside of the meeting.

Action: Director of HR

p) Minute 25/08

Further clarity was required with regards to the action Reading UCU had requested for the Director of HR to provide an update on the University's participation in AUCSO. The President of Reading UCU clarified that this related to the Association of University Chief Security Officers; Reading UCU wanted to understand the extent of the University's role and participation in this, particularly the contribution being made in relation to Palestine protests. The President of Reading UCU also sought confirmation that the University continued to uphold the principle of freedom of speech and, in doing so, recognised that surveilling particular groups – irrespective of their activity – was contradictory to this, with particular reference to the handling of pro-Palestine protestors. The Director of HR advised that they would need to engage with the Director of Estates in order to be able to respond.

Action: Director of HR

The Vice Chancellor was not aware of any occasion where Security colleagues had handled Palestinian students in any formal way; a tent had been set up for Security staff during the encampment in consultation with the relevant students, more for their protection than anything else, and the feedback from students was that this had been appreciated. The Vice Chancellor did not know whether any information on Palestinian protests at the University had been passed on to any other organisation. The President of Reading UCU understood a recent report to have stated that the University was involved with intelligence sharing and emphasised that Reading UCU supported the Vice Chancellor's prior commitment to freedom of speech and wanted this principle to continue to be upheld.

q) Minute 25/08

The Director of HR had arranged a meeting for further discussion of casualisation.

The President of Reading UCU emphasised that Reading UCU considered it important for the year ahead that any work undertaken by smaller groups continue to report back to JUUC.

25/14 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

Senate had not met since the previous meeting of JUUC so the Vice-Chancellor's usual written report to Senate had not been circulated on this occasion. The Vice

Chancellor invited Reading UCU to raise any items they wished to discuss.

25/15 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.)

- With reference to the October meeting, it was emphasised that Reading UCU expected there to be no difference of treatment between fixed-term contracts and temporary-increase-of-hours contracts. The President of Reading UCU formally requested an update in writing about the status of these contracts and how they were currently being used.

Action: Director of HR

- The President of Reading UCU highlighted growing concerns about the way in which the 'Report and Support' system militated against principles of natural justice, especially in relation to occasions where a student/group of students/ other member of staff might wish to make things difficult for a member of staff. It was suggested that this could lead to unintended consequences, for example – because the reporting was anonymous it could not be investigated as thoroughly as it should be. Furthermore, if the complainant believed that action would be taken but the complaint was not actually dealt with, neither the complainant nor the person complained against could deal with this, as staff were not necessarily aware that a complaint against them had been raised. The President of Reading UCU asserted that these kinds of anonymous complaints could have a very significant harmful impact on the lives of staff and the ways in which other colleagues perceived them. Reading UCU was hearing from colleagues in other branches that 'Report and Support' was causing serious issues. Reading UCU requested various data, the details of which they would send to the Director of HR and the Secretary. *[Post-meeting note: the list was as follows -*

- *Template process of how it is followed through*
- *Template report that is being used to collect the information*
- *How many complaints have been made, split into numbers of who are making complaints e.g. anonymous, staff or students*
- *Who complaints are made against, split into numbers of staff and students*
- *Who is investigating the complaints*
- *Numbers regarding whether the person the complaint was made about was informed or not*
- *How right of reply is being dealt with*
- *Any comments on how these interact with both HR policies and natural*

justice principles.]

The UCU Regional Official highlighted the importance of considering how different policies mapped onto each other; UCU sought assurance that a clear distinction existed, and was understood operationally, in terms of policies which related to student complaints and that which related to the conduct of staff. It was suggested that mapping out areas where there might be tensions or a lack of clarity could be beneficial and could feed into the policy-making process and developing HR practices. There was scope for UCU to be able to work with the University in a way that would be beneficial to all stakeholders. The Director of HR agreed the importance of ensuring links and consistency between policies and clarified that the number of reports in relation to staff was very low in comparison to students; however, they would be happy to provide an update on how the process was working, and to consider any wider sector guidance that UCU would like to share. The Director of HR also confirmed that there was no intention for 'Report and Support' to distract from any other core HR processes or policies.

Action: Director of HR

- The President of Reading UCU requested an update on the recent Staff Engagement Survey and, ideally, a presentation to go through the various elements. The Director of HR suggested that they organise a meeting with the Reading UCU Branch Committee to run through the headline results and the President of Reading UCU gratefully accepted this offer.

Action: Director of HR

- Noting that the formal outcomes of the upcoming AGM would be shared the following week, the President of Reading UCU advised that, in terms of workload planning for next year, Reading UCU were expecting to use the currently agreed 1.75 for caseworkers and, if the branch work remained the same, 0.3 for health and safety work. The President of Reading UCU noted that some universities currently classified paid time off for health and safety representatives as facilities time; however, they quoted [Regulation 4\(2\) of the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations \(SRSCR\)](#) which stated that employers must allow union health and safety representatives time in working hours to perform health and safety duties, therefore this time should not be called facilities time. The President of Reading UCU wanted to make it clear that a minimum of 0.3 would be used next year for health and safety work, potentially more, which was separate and distinct to the time allocated for facilities time. The Director of HR advised that Reading UCU should bring this matter back formally for approval by UEB of all paid trade union time following their AGM. Reading UCU emphasised

that it was not possible to predict at this stage how much facilities time might be necessary for the work planned over the next year; the intention at this meeting was just to clarify the principle. The UCU Regional Official agreed that dialogue should take place following the AGM to also include discussion about how this would be approached in the future (e.g. it was expected that, by this time next year, there would be a very different employment law framework, with implications for facilities time). The Vice Chancellor concluded that the University was expecting a formal request regarding all facilities time with the necessary detail to enable an informed decision.

Action: President of Reading UCU

- The President of Reading UCU wanted to get a sense, potentially in a separate meeting, of any triggers for redundancies and cuts before the next academic year so as to understand senior management thinking and to ensure no unwelcome surprises. This would also help to build trust and to support members. The Vice Chancellor responded that the University did not look for triggers but would need to seek opportunities to reduce costs where it could. The Vice Chancellor would be giving an All-Staff-Talk the following week at which they would be setting out the financial approach to resolving the current deficit; this would be a multi-year process which might, at some stage, involve restructuring and processes that would reduce costs.
- The President of Reading UCU requested assurance that there would be no similar pay deferral in the next academic year. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that there was no intention to repeat the pay deferral.
- The President of Reading UCU also expressed concern and disappointment that a decision on the pay award deferral for this year had already been communicated to staff prior to a meeting about the same topic that was due to take place between Reading UCU and University of Reading senior management / finance later that afternoon. The Director of HR clarified that paying the pay award deferral in July was as required by the deferral clause; it had been considered beneficial from a staff perspective for this to be clarified as colleagues had been asking questions.
- The President of Reading UCU indicated that they wanted to understand the University's recruitment strategy for the next five years; they noted that a helpful session had been arranged with PSO and hoped for a similar session on the recruitment strategy (including triggers that would impact redundancies and cuts). The Vice Chancellor advised that the recruitment strategy figures were available on the PSO website to anyone within the University. A session could be arranged for a colleague in External Relations to run through future plans in

terms of student recruitment; however, it was clarified that this would not cover what would happen if those targets were not reached.

Action: Director of HR

- The President of Reading UCU noted an item for the July Council relating to the URS project and sought further information regarding this. The Vice Chancellor clarified that URS was expected to be brought to Council's meeting in September rather than June. There had been no formal request as of yet but, given the size of the project, the Vice Chancellor would ensure there was the time and opportunity for UCU and the Staff Forum to investigate the project and provide comments to Council (which would be passed on unedited).
- The President of Reading UCU noted an item for the July Council relating to a Professional Services programme implementation and sought further information regarding this. The Vice Chancellor advised that there had been a Staff Portal article regarding this – it related to the Professional Services programme, which was a process of seeking possible efficiencies and savings which had to be delivered as part of the University resolving its current deficit.
- The President of Reading UCU indicated that Reading UCU would like to discuss the use of AI in relation to Professional Services at a separate meeting. The Vice Chancellor responded that AI was not yet ready to be used on any great scale to create significant efficiencies; although, ultimately, if an AI solution arose that could make processes run more efficiently and help to save costs, this would be considered.
- The President of Reading UCU requested more information in terms of the Greenlands Library restructuring. The Director of HR responded that, as communicated previously, they would be happy to answer any questions and arrange a meeting to discuss the restructuring paper once available. The Director of HR highlighted that the restructuring was relatively small-scale and, as it did not affect any of the group of staff represented by UCU, the University would be engaging with the Staff Forum to consult regarding the impact on individuals.
- Reading UCU had recently found out that there was a new Head of Health and Safety in place; the President of Reading UCU asked why Reading UCU committee had not been made aware of this. The Vice Chancellor advised that this information had been published on the Staff Portal, as was standard for senior appointments. The President of Reading UCU emphasised that it would be useful for Reading UCU to be made aware of such changes to the senior team (particularly roles such as those which related to Health and Safety). In addition to requesting meetings with the new Head of Health and Safety, the President of

Reading UCU also noted recent changes in Finance and asked to have an initial meeting with the Director of Finance's replacement, followed by regular meetings regarding Finance.

Action: Director of HR

- Noting the fact that available Council and Senate papers could be accessed by staff for reasons of transparency, the President of Reading UCU wanted to understand what proportion of staff had a password/log in for access and what proportion had used this within the last 3/6 months. This was in order to establish whether or not it was a useful method of sharing information. The University Secretary advised that, although any member of staff could contact the relevant team in their office to gain access to the papers, there was not any data available in terms of access. Anecdotally, the University Secretary understood take up to be extremely low across the university in terms of accessing such papers and agreed that it would be beneficial to remind colleagues of their availability. The President of Reading UCU confirmed that their concern had not been that those asking for access were being excluded, but that not enough colleagues were accessing the papers; Reading UCU offered to work with the University to help support the Vice Chancellor's intention for transparency.
- The President of Reading UCU noted that the proposed dates for the next year's JUUC meetings had been received; however, Reading UCU requested that these meetings not take place on Wednesdays. Reading UCU also asked that no meetings be scheduled in August unless there were exceptional circumstances. It was also requested that the meetings be arranged during non-teaching periods. The Director of HR advised that the meeting dates were scheduled by Governance as part of a calendar of organised committees across the whole University and, as such, finding dates could be challenging. The President of Reading UCU agreed to liaise with the Secretary regarding dates for next year.

Action: President of Reading UCU

25/16 Items brought forward by Reading UCU

This was covered during the previous item.

25/17 Items brought forward by the University

The following items were brought forward by the University:

- The Director of HR noted that a meeting had been scheduled with Reading UCU to discuss the Lecture Capture Policy (as requested, Reading UCU were being included in the review of this).

- The Director of HR advised that minor changes were being made to a number of policies, including equal opportunities and harassment/bullying, as a result of the recent Supreme Court ruling and Freedom of Speech; they would send the President of Reading UCU copies soon, but these changes were not substantive but there were things they needed to do.

Action: Director of HR

The President of Reading UCU highlighted the importance of ensuring that the rights of trans colleagues and students were not undermined by the Supreme Court ruling. It was emphasised that UCU would continue to stand with LGBTQ+ colleagues and remained committed to the expectation that all colleagues would be treated with respect and inclusion. The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that a small working group had been established to review the spaces that might have to change in order to uphold the law. The Deputy Vice Chancellor confirmed that they, as LGBTQ+ champion on UEB, had met with the LGBTQ+ Action Group regarding this work to ensure that the law would be upheld in a way that was compassionate and sensitive, in line with the expectations that the President of Reading UCU had just outlined. Communications would be shared on the Staff Portal the following week. The President of Reading UCU requested advance notice of areas where changes were expected due to the sensitivities involved. The Deputy Vice Chancellor confirmed that this mainly related to toilet facilities; a detailed audit was currently being conducted (now 80% complete) to fully understand what was currently in place before making a decision about what might need to change. The audit included surveying disabled accessible provision in case some of that needed to be converted for gender neutral provision. The President of Reading UCU responded that there are tensions with re-classifying disabled toilets to gender neutral toilets and that there are deep concerns on a number of fronts. The President of Reading UCU was pleased to hear that there were conversations taking place with the LGBTQ+ Action Group and confirmed that UCU would share any concerns reported to them. UCU has a strong policy on this and Reading UCU's actions will always be consistent with UCU wider policy.

25/18 Any other business

The following was noted:

- The President of Reading UCU thanked all those present for their work on this committee; the Vice Chancellor also thanked the committee for their engagement over the year.

25/19 Dates of meetings for 2025/26 (provisional)

Wednesday 5 November 2025 10.00-12.00

Thursday 5 March 2026 14.00-16.00

Wednesday 27 May 2026 14.00-16.00