

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

18/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House, on Tuesday 6 February 2018.

Present:

The Vice-Chancellor
Mrs S Pellow (in the Chair *vice* the President of Reading UCU)
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor R Van de Noort)
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor S Mithen)
Dr C Fuller
Mr M McAulay
Dr M Schroeter
The University Secretary

In attendance:

Director of Human Resources
Head of Student Information Systems (Secretary)

Apologies were received from the President of Reading UCU.

The Chair welcomed Dr Carol Fuller to her first meeting of the Committee.

18/02 The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2017 were approved and signed.

Arising on the Minutes:

Minute 17/20 (17/11, 17/05): Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Committee noted that the list of objectives to be used for project reviews had been circulated for information by the Vice-Chancellor ahead of the meeting. The University Secretary reported that the details would be published in due course on the Planning and Strategy Office web pages, and he would provide information shortly on the timescales involved.

Minute 17/20 (17/11, 17/06): UCU post-Brexit Policy Charter

The Director of HR reported that a new online form for exit interviews for staff would be implemented shortly. He would share the template with Reading UCU representatives.

Minute 17/20 (17/15): Gender Pay Gap Working Group

The Committee noted that the list of key objectives towards reducing the gender pay gap had been circulated for information ahead of the meeting. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Van de Noort) commented that there was still work to be completed, for example on establishing criteria for making decisions between candidates of equal strength, and that internal consideration of the objectives was continuing.

The Director of HR reported that the statistical work on identifying the gender pay gap was complete and that an action plan was being prepared. The University had been concerned to address underlying issues, rather than to come up with quick solutions ahead of the reporting deadline at the end of March.

The Committee noted that this year all staff at the stage for potential promotion to professorial zone 2 had been considered automatically. It welcomed the work being done, the determination to review the situation regularly, and the stated aim for continual improvement.

Minute 17/22: Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Director of HR reported that the working group reviewing the discrepancies in rates of pay for hourly-paid lecturing staff was considering the guidance issued to Schools, with the aim of clarifying in which circumstances such staff should be employed via HR on fractional contracts or as workers to be paid via Campus Jobs. The Committee welcomed this move, which would be in place before the summer.

18/03 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported that:

- (a) the University was working towards registration with the new Office for Students as an official Provider. There was concern that the structural changes in national oversight and governance would be a loss to the sector;
- (b) the University had decided not to participate in the subject-level pilots for the Teaching Excellence Framework;
- (c) the University would present a paper to Senate in March on its plans for the next REF. The expectation was that all Research and Teaching & Research staff would be returned;
- (d) there was still uncertainty about the implications of Brexit for the university sector. The University would provide more support when appropriate to members of staff whose residential status was affected by Brexit;
- (e) the Government was planning a Funding Review of Tertiary Education, but the details and scope were not yet clear;
- (f) in relation to admissions for the autumn,
 - . The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Van de Noort) added that the University recognised that the increase in student numbers from last autumn had entailed problems for staff and students in relation to teaching space. Part of the difficulty related to the high proportion of unique timetables and the avoidance of unpopular slots, which affected the optimum utilisation of space. The refurbishment of the lecture theatres in JJ Thomson, along with an increase in seating capacity, should help. Another initiative might involve reducing the number of optional modules in Part 1, perhaps by arranging the choices in blocks. A re-designed form would be in place soon for staff to declare their need for flexibility in their timetabled contact hours, and the request would be checked by HR;
- (g) the University had booked capacity for student accommodation in a Unite-owned hall to cover the shortfall occasioned by the planning permission refusal for St Patrick's Hall;
- (h) the People Plan Project Board was proving a useful forum for supporting HR initiatives and for suggesting areas for improvement, for example on avoiding non-inclusive language;

- (i) the recent appointment of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor [Research] as a job share was a pleasing outcome.

18/04 **Report of the President of Reading UCU**

Mrs Pellow reported the following, on behalf of the President who was unavoidably absent:

- (a) changes to contracts and probation arrangements for professional and managerial staff had been suggested, but it was not clear what progress had been made by HR. The Director of HR undertook to provide an update;
- (b) an assessment of the effect of the University's Sexual Harassment Policy would be welcomed, looking in particular at how problems had been resolved locally and how many staff had been involved in raising issues. In response, the University Secretary reported that he was chairing a working group to look at processes for both students and staff in this area and would involve Reading UCU representatives in this in due course. The policies for students and staff might converge in principle but be kept separate in terms of language and formal process, given the different audiences;
- (c) preparations were being made by union members for the imminent industrial action over pensions, but it was hoped that a resolution to the dispute might yet be possible to avoid strike action. Staff felt strongly that the changes to pensions meant a significant cut in salary and remuneration, and that they had not been adequately consulted; the depth of feeling was evident in the number of votes cast for fourteen days of action and in the number of staff joining the union for the first time. The situation could be seen as a breach of trust by the employers towards their employees, and staff wanted to see that the University was serious about protecting the conditions of its staff in the short-term and longer term.

In response, the Vice-Chancellor stated that the formal process for reaching agreement on the action to be taken over the pension fund deficit had been correctly followed by the representatives of UCU and Universities UK, and that the University therefore stood by the outcome. The dispute, which related to complex issues, was at national level, and could not be resolved at local level.

Mrs Pellow urged the Vice-Chancellor to take the issue up with UUK.

18/05 **Staffing Committee**

The Committee noted that there was no report from the Staffing Committee which had not met since the last meeting.

18/06 **Dates of meetings in the Session 2017-18**

It was noted that the final meeting of the Committee in the Session 2017-18 had been scheduled for:

Wednesday 23 May 2018 at 10.30 am