

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

19/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House, on Tuesday 5 February 2019 at 10.30am.

Present:

The Acting Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair)
The President of Reading UCU
Dr M Schroeter
Mrs S Pellow
Ms R Balestrini
The University Secretary

In attendance:

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

Apologies were received from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professor G Brooks), Dr C Fuller and Mr S Alexander.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor P Yaqoob), Ms Wanda Tejada and Ms Rachel Thorn attended the meeting for Minute 19/02.

19/02 Code of Practice for the Research Excellence Framework

The Committee received a brief presentation on the work of the group responsible for drawing up the University's Code of Practice for the Research Excellence Framework, due to be submitted in June 2019. Professor Yaqoob explained that all academic staff with significant responsibility for research needed to be included in the REF and that the research outputs were not formally linked to individuals, in distinction to the arrangements in the last REF. The Committee noted that consultation with members of UCU was required, particularly in relation to the definition of "significant responsibility for research".

It was agreed that the initial draft of the Code of Practice should be circulated in the next two weeks as soon as it was complete, and that meetings should be established to take the discussion forward. The President of Reading UCU undertook to nominate members to be part of a working group or to attend the meetings of the existing group, as appropriate.

19/03 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2018 were approved and signed.

Arising on the Minutes:

Minute 18/20 (18/02, 17/20, 17/11, 17/06): UCU post-Brexit Policy Charter

The Director of HR reported that the new online form for staff to provide feedback at exit from the University was in final testing mode before being launched, and he undertook to provide a test login for Reading UCU members.

Minute 18/20 (18/04): Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Director of HR reported that the final version of the probation arrangements had been published on the university website, and he undertook to forward the document in pdf format to the President of Reading UCU. He also reported that the contractual arrangements for grades 6 to 9 had been mapped, with a view to being harmonised; the arrangements were being considered by Legal Services, and he undertook to arrange a separate meeting to discuss these with Reading UCU representatives.

Minute 18/20 (18/10): Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Director of HR reported that the harassment policy had been published last November. The intention was to report back to the University Executive Board on progress with implementation of the policy.

Minute 18/20 (18/13): Review of the support provided for UoR staff seconded to UoRM

The Director of HR reported that the concerns raised had been put on the agenda for the January meeting of the UoRM Board; he undertook to provide an update on the outcome.

Minute 18/20 (18/17): Formal status and transparency of university Working Groups

The University Secretary reported that the compilation of information on the working groups was in progress and he hoped it would be completed soon. In response to a question about the availability of information previously collated as part of the University Calendar, he explained that a governance area on the website had replaced this information, and undertook to check that the appropriate links were in place.

Minute 18/20 (18/18): Staffing Committee

The University Secretary reported that the relationships policy was close to being completed and he undertook to share the final version with the President of Reading UCU as soon as it was available.

Minute 18/20 (18/22): Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Committee noted the advice on screen usage within the EMA programme, which had been circulated by HR to Heads of School following the discussion at the last meeting. However, the President of Reading UCU expressed concern that the advice did not adequately address the issues; he felt that (i) the sources of assistance for staff were not readily available or fully signposted, (ii) in some cases excessive information had been required by Heads of School before they agreed to make adjustments, and (iii) there was little evidence that the possibility of staff developing new problems with screen usage over time had been fully considered. Academic staff had commented that the online marking was difficult on smaller devices, such as tablets or laptops, which meant that marking was more closely restricted to being done in an office environment, where the larger monitor screens were available. The inflexibility of arrangements for marking could lead to undue stress, compounded by the 15-day turnaround time, and was particularly problematic for certain subject areas and for part-time staff.

The University Secretary undertook to raise the issues with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Brooks), and suggested that a meeting would be helpful to discuss the matter with

UCU representatives.

Minute 18/20 (18/23): Personal Title – outcomes from 2017-18

The Director of HR reported that a proposal to adjust the facilities time arrangement would be considered by UEB on 11 March.

Minute 18/20 (18/24): Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee noted that the University Secretary had circulated to members the 2017-18 Rewarding Excellence Report considered by the Staffing Committee.

19/04 Report of the Acting Vice-Chancellor

Since the Acting Vice-Chancellor had been unexpectedly and unavoidably called away from the meeting shortly before this item in order to deal with a major incident, and was thus unable to give his intended oral report, the Committee agreed that the Acting Vice-Chancellor's report to Senate on 6 March 2019 would pragmatically provide a substitute, and the secretary undertook to arrange the circulation of the document once it was available.

19/05 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU reported that he had passed on to the Voluntary Redundancy Group some concerns about the arrangements for the VR Scheme; these included queries about the payment of pensions, the opportunities for staff to reduce their employed hours, and the possibility of extending the deadline for registering interest in view of these issues, plus the ongoing discussions around the review of Modern Languages. In response, the Director of HR commented that the concerns were due to be considered shortly by the VR Group.

The President of Reading UCU also reported that there was some confusion over the status of the VR letter to be signed by staff, and suggested that wording might be changed to clarify that staff were agreeing in principle to accept the offer, subject to approval. The Director of HR undertook to consider amending the wording and reminded the Committee that individuals could still withdraw from the process before the final stage.

The President of Reading UCU highlighted his concern that, in the context of savings to be made by Schools, there was a danger that vulnerable staff would be adversely impacted by permanent posts being withdrawn and hourly pay for marking being cut. The Director of HR commented in response that he hoped the work of the sub-committee considering the contractual arrangements for fixed-term and sessional staff would reduce this danger, and he would take steps to investigate any examples of malpractice at School level.

The President of Reading UCU stated that in his view the grievance procedure needed revision, specifically in relation to the need for clear guidance on how to treat staff where a grievance against them had not been upheld, since they might not be properly eligible for representation. The Director of HR agreed that a review of the procedure would be helpful in providing further clarity in this area. The University Secretary proposed that a review should be carefully scheduled for a convenient point, bearing in mind the current workload on HR staff in supporting existing reviews and the sub-committee's work.

The President of Reading UCU queried whether an individual member of staff had a right to appeal against redundancy when a fixed-term contract was coming to an end after a series of contracts which rendered them potentially a permanent employee. The Director of HR commented that grievance procedures might be applicable, but concurred that these situations were frequently difficult, and said he would arrange a meeting to discuss the procedures with UCU representatives.

Mrs Pellow reported concern that there were examples of probation procedures not being followed in all cases as rigorously as required. The Director of HR concurred that this would be a concern, and suggested that the grievance procedure should be pursued if processes had not been followed. The Committee agreed that grievance should be seen as a last resort, and that good governance was the primary aim. The University Secretary requested that UCU representatives bring examples to the attention of HR, so that it could be determined whether these were isolated incidents or indicative of a wider problem.

The President of Reading UCU expressed his deep concern that local radio had, in the context of reporting job cuts within catering, explicitly cited increases in staff pensions as the main factor. He felt that this might foster bad relationships between staff groups, and hoped that the wording had not been part of an official press release. The University Secretary suggested that the facts should be ascertained as the next step.

The President of Reading UCU noted that the process for academic staff to find information about the special provision to be made for students with disabilities had recently been changed, with the effect that staff now needed to search out the information themselves and interpret the data to determine the provision to be made. The secretary, as Head of Student Information Systems, undertook to investigate and raise the issue with the Director of Student Services.

19/06 Report from the Sub-Committee considering the Reading UCU local claim

The Committee heard that the work of its Sub-Committee was progressing well. Agreement had been reached in principle on the arrangements for employing sessional lecturers, with a draft framework to be completed by the end of March, and an intention to implement the framework for the session 2019-20. A group would be established to consider the issues around fixed-term contracts. The Sub-Committee would consider next the issues around grade drift.

19/07 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The University Secretary reported that the Staffing Committee had not met since the last meeting of this committee.

19/08 Dates of meetings in the Session 2018-19

It was noted that the final meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee in the Session 2018-19 had been scheduled for:

Wednesday 22 May 2019 at 10.30 am

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

Minute and action	Action for	Outcome
<p>19/02 <u>Code of Practice for the Research Excellence Framework</u></p> <p>It was agreed that the initial draft of the Code of Practice should be circulated in the next two weeks as soon as it was complete, and that meetings should be established to take the discussion forward. The President of Reading UCU undertook to nominate members to be part of a working group or to attend the meetings of the existing group, as appropriate.</p>	<p>President of Reading UCU</p>	
<p>19/03 <u>Matters arising</u></p> <p><u>UCU post-Brexit Policy Charter</u> The Director of HR reported that the new online form for staff to provide feedback at exit from the University was in final testing mode before being launched, and he undertook to provide a test login for Reading UCU members.</p> <p><u>Report of the President of Reading UCU</u> The Director of HR reported that the final version of the probation arrangements had been published on the university website, and he undertook to forward the document in pdf format to the President of Reading UCU.</p> <p>He also reported that the contractual arrangements for grades 6 to 9 had been mapped, with a view to being harmonised; the arrangements were being considered by Legal Services, and he undertook to arrange a separate meeting to discuss these with Reading UCU representatives.</p> <p><u>Review of the support provided for UoR staff seconded to UoRM</u> The Director of HR reported that the concerns raised had been put on the agenda for the January meeting of the UoRM Board; he undertook to provide an update on the outcome.</p> <p><u>Formal status and transparency of university Working Groups</u> In response to a question about the availability of information previously collated as part of the University Calendar, the University Secretary explained that a governance area on the website had replaced this</p>	<p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>University Secretary</p>	

<p>information, and undertook to check that the appropriate links were in place.</p> <p><u>Staffing Committee</u> The University Secretary reported that the relationships policy was close to being completed and he undertook to share the final version with the President of Reading UCU as soon as it was available.</p> <p><u>Report of the President of Reading UCU</u> The University Secretary undertook to raise the issues around screen usage in the EMA programme with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Brooks), and suggested that a meeting would be helpful to discuss the matter with UCU representatives.</p>	<p>University Secretary</p> <p>University Secretary</p>	
<p>19/04 <u>Report of the Acting Vice-Chancellor</u></p> <p>The secretary undertook to arrange the circulation of the Acting Vice-Chancellor's report to Senate on 6 March, once it was available.</p>	<p>Secretary</p>	
<p>19/05 <u>Report of the President of Reading UCU</u></p> <p>The President of Reading UCU also reported that there was some confusion over the status of the VR letter to be signed by staff, and suggested that wording might be changed to clarify that staff were agreeing in principle to accept the offer, subject to approval. The Director of HR undertook to consider amending the wording.</p> <p>The Director of HR agreed that a review of the grievance procedure would be helpful,... scheduled for a convenient point, bearing in mind the current workload on HR staff.</p> <p>The President of Reading UCU queried whether an individual member of staff had a right to appeal against redundancy when a fixed-term contract was coming to an end after a series of contracts which rendered them potentially a permanent employee. The Director of HR commented that grievance procedures might be applicable, but concurred that these situations were frequently difficult, and said he would arrange a meeting to discuss the procedures with UCU representatives.</p> <p>The President of Reading UCU noted that the process for academic staff to find information about the special provision to be made for students with disabilities had recently been changed, with the effect that staff now needed to search out the information themselves and interpret the data to determine the provision to be made. The secretary, as Head of Student Information Systems, undertook to investigate and raise the issue with the Director of Student Services.</p>	<p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>Director of HR</p> <p>Secretary</p>	