

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

21/10 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Wednesday 16 June 2021 at 2.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)
Mr J J Brady
Professor C Harty
Dr K Henderson
Mr S Hunt
Dr A Laville
Professor H Parish
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs J Rowe
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Professor Bell, Professor Berry, Professor Kennedy, and Miss Osborne

The University Secretary thanked Professor Bell, Professor Berry, Professor Kennedy, and Miss Osborne in their absence for their contributions to the Committee.

21/11 The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 were approved

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 21/04 (20/13): Staff Wellbeing

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Talent and People) informed the Committee that five “Mental Health Skills for Managers” workshops were held in March and May 2021 following the decision of the UEB to approve funding for mental health awareness workshops. She confirmed that over 80 Line Managers benefited from these workshops run by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).

She informed the Committee that given the high demand by leaders and managers for the training in mental health skills, a paper will shortly be taken to the UEB asking for additional funds to run three further workshops.

She indicated that the planned mental health awareness training for the UEB and leadership Group has not yet been scheduled, and the UEB will be asked to identify their preferred training method.

The University Secretary suggested that thought should be given as to how the effectiveness of this training is determined. It was also pointed out that staff wellbeing is a regular item discussed at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee, including updates on staff take up of the Wellbeing Peer Support network.

It was agreed that the topic of staff wellbeing should be included at a future meeting.

Minute 21/06: Joint Working Group - review of workloads

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) provided the Committee with an update on the work undertaken by the working group, established to consider workloads across all staff groups. She acknowledged that given the UCU's wish to discuss "broader" issues including the marketisation of the higher education sector, and the best use of tuition fees, overall progress had been slow.

To date a series of surveys and drop-in sessions had been convened including those run by the Staff Forum, the UCU, and the University. Work was now underway to conduct a series of facilitated focus groups. Colleagues were in the process of analysing the data collected via the University survey.

She confirmed that the intention was for the working group to provide the UEB with an interim report no later than the end of the 2020-21 academic year but acknowledged that meeting the original timescale would be a challenge.

21/12 Managing staff in a flexible/remote environment

The views of the Committee were sought on the long term challenges arising for those with line management responsibilities in managing staff in a flexible environment.

The Director of Human Resources stated that the current working arrangements as a result of the pandemic have been borne out of necessity, and indicated the likely direction of travel was a move toward more hybrid working.

He stated that there was a need for better training and support for line managers to enable them to manage staff in a hybrid working environment.

A useful discussion took place with the following comments made:

- It was pointed out that the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) had produced guidance and undertaken research on hybrid working [CIPD Guide: Planning for Hybrid Working](#). The research undertaken by the CIPD showed that some 40% of employers said they expect more than half their workforce to work regularly from home after the pandemic has ended. Most employers recognised that, at least in the interim, a hybrid approach to working was necessary;
- The CIPD guidance suggested that organisations would need to consider the legal implications of hybrid working, ensure effective communication is in place, put in place effective learning and development, consider technologies to enable hybrid working, provide wellbeing support, assess the impact on performance management and be mindful of inequality issues;
- The Committee discussed the impact of hybrid working on the effective running of a Department/School/Function, and the potential to marginalise those colleagues who are home working;
- The Committee discussed the benefits of flexible working and the need to be mindful of unintended consequences where colleagues are unable to work in a hybrid way because of the work they undertake;
- It was noted that the teaching timetable needed to be workable, and individual needs would need to be worked around the timetable and not the other way round;
- There was widespread agreement that the language used in any guidance needed to be clear and consistent. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that any guidance produced would include a glossary of terms;
- Any approach adopted would need to ensure a consistency of application and decision making as it was important that all staff feel they are being treated fairly, whilst recognising that outcomes would vary;
- There was a recognition of the need to balance individuals needs against the needs of the business, and a one size fits all approach should be avoided.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for its views and indicated that further views would be sought, for example via focus groups. He anticipated guidance would be available prior to the start of the

next academic session but indicated it wouldn't be completely finalised until the Ways of Working project had concluded.

21/13 Staff Surveys – personal data questions

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) sought the views of the Committee on the proposed questions going forward for future staff surveys in respect of sex and gender identity.

The accompanying paper had proposed the following options for the Committee to consider and agree.

Sex/ gender

In order to ask a question about sex/ gender as a protected characteristic, we could either ask:

- 'What is your sex?' with response options Female, Male, Other, in line with HESA and Advance HE (and the 2021 census though that did not include Other). We may want to consider a free text box for 'Other', or
- 'What best describes your gender?' (Stonewall version) with responses Female, Male, Prefer not to say, Prefer to self-describe (with free text space for the last option).

It has previously been recommended by Capita that the 'Prefer not to say' option should be available for any personal data questions, so we could use the census version with this as an additional option.

Gender identity

Although this is not a protected characteristic it is recommended that we still ask a question about it. The 2021 census question, and the HESA version, is:

- 'Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?' with response options of Yes, No (the latter invites the respondent to enter their gender identity in their own words – with a limited space available). Again it would be recommended to also include a 'Prefer not to say' option.

The census question is very similar to the Stonewall version which is:

- 'Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?' which has response options of Yes; No; prefer not to say. Their alternative suggestion is 'Do you identify as trans?' with the same response options.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The reason why any survey question is being asked must be explicit and clear as this will ensure more participants are likely to respond;
- There was agreement that a standardised approach was sensible, and noted the two choices – adopting the questions used by HESA and Advance HE or the questions used by Stonewall, a charity that campaigns for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights. It was noted that the University of Reading is a participating Stonewall employer. It was also noted that it is a lobbying group and had a political agenda;
- The Committee agreed that the proposed questions on sex/gender and gender identity were relevant for our purposes and should be asked;
- The Dean for Diversity and Inclusion supported the use of the “prefer not to say” option, but suggested we avoid the use of the “other” option;

A question was asked about the Employee Self Service (ESS) function on Trent, the University’s HR system, and whether the categories being considered at the meeting would be added to ESS. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) confirmed that the University was currently looking at bringing the ESS function in line with the HESA requirements. The Director of Human Resources mentioned that any significant changes made to Trent and the ESS function would be an additional cost.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) thanked the Committee for its views.

21/14 Athena SWAN Action Plan

The Director of Technical Services reported on the actions contained in the University’s Athena SWAN submission in December 2019 and as detailed in the accompanying RAG report. She commented that the full action plan is currently under review to ensure the actions that cross over with the other Charter Marks and diversity initiatives are joined up to avoid duplication and fragmentation of effort. Once the action plans have been reviewed a working group will be established to agree the diversity and inclusion targets for 2026.

The Director of Technical Services reported that several University projects and pandemic associated activities tie in with a number of the Athena SWAN actions and these will also need to be taken into account when assigning revised timelines.

The Committee thanked the Director of Technical Services for the update.

21/15 Working remotely overseas

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) provided the Committee with an update on the additional issues of staff working remotely overseas as a result of the pandemic and Brexit.

As has been previously reported, there are personal tax, social security, corporate tax, legal and employment liabilities resulting from staff working remotely overseas, and there is now a greater need to ensure that arrangements are properly implemented in order to avoid financial penalties.

She informed the Committee that there remain approximately 40 colleagues currently based overseas as a result of the pandemic. Brexit has added some new challenges for social security arrangements, as there is now a requirement to notify the social security authorities when a member of staff is a multistate worker.

Other challenges included:

- The University has a limited oversight of the corporate tax implications;
- Identifying and managing individual arrangements, from the initial advice stages through to putting in place the correct tax and payroll arrangements, is not currently resourced within the HR (Advisory and Payroll teams) or Finance (Tax team);
- A lack of budgeting for additional costs.

The Committee agreed with the way forward proposed by the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services), namely to i) generate a policy framework to make clear when arrangements can be facilitated and what approvals need to be put in place in advance, and ii) outline an approval process to manage the social security notifications required and the corporate tax risks, and to ensure that resource needs can be identified and managed in advance.

The Committee agreed that the proposed policy framework and approval process could then be considered by the UEB.

The Committee were informed of the UCU's view in relation to staff working remotely overseas, with some members feeling they should be free to choose where they work. The Committee recognised that this

approach didn't take into account the various contractual, operational, legal and financial liabilities highlighted above.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) thanked the Committee for its views.

21/16 Pay and pensions update

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on matters relating to pay, and summarised the current position in respect of the USS valuation process. Highlights included:

- The University has withdrawn for a period of three years from the annual national pay bargaining process via the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) beginning from the 202/21 round. The three year pay freeze will achieve savings of c. £23m over the relevant period;
- The University to re-engage fully with the national pay bargaining process as soon as any period of local pay-freeze reaches its conclusion;
- During the period of pay freeze the University will maintain a “shadow” pay structure that mirrors any final national pay settlement. At the end of the three-year period our local pay structures will be updated to reflect the national pay progression;
- In respect of pensions matters, the USS Trustee has now issued its 76.1 Report (named after Rule 76.1 within the scheme rules) which reports a deficit of between £14.9bn and £17.9bn and indicates that as a consequence combined contribution rates (i.e. employer and member contributions) will potentially rise from the current level of 30.7% to a range from 42.1% to 56.2%;
- The University has now responded to a UUK consultation in respect of counter-proposals designed to avoid such significant contribution rate increases. The current member contribution rate is 9.6% of salary. A rise to 11% is scheduled for October 2021. This, and the employer contribution rates, are already considered by most to be at the limits of affordability;

The Committee commented that pay and pension matters seem to be more widely communicated to staff, and this was welcomed. The recent all-staff talk by the Director of Human Resources and Finance Director was highlighted as one positive example.

21/17 Provisional dates of meetings for the 2021/22 Academic Session:

Thursday 7 October 2021	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
Tuesday 23 November 2021	10.00 am to 12.00 pm (reserve)
Tuesday 8 February 2022	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm
Wednesday 27 April 2022	11.00 am to 1.00 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 15 June 2022	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm