

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

21/01 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 9 February 2021 at 2.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)
Professor A Bell
Professor D C Berry
Mr J J Brady
Professor C Harty
Mrs S Hayward
Dr K Henderson
Mr S Hunt
Miss R Osborne
Professor H Parish
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Professor Kennedy, Dr A Laville, and Mrs J Rowe

The University Secretary welcomed Professor Parish and Miss Osborne to their first Committee.

21/02 Membership, Terms of Reference and Disclosure of Interests

The Committee received a copy of its membership and Terms of Reference and a copy of a memorandum from the University Secretary in respect of Disclosure of Interests and the Committee's obligations in respect of the University's Risk Register.

The Committee noted that the University's Risk Register was lacking references to staff and agreed to review the Register at a future meeting.

Action: The Committee to review the University Risk Register at a future meeting

21/03 Learning Management System (UoRLearn)

Mrs Steph Hayward, Learning & Development Manager, People and Talent, gave a presentation highlighting how UoRLearn has been used since going live in May 2019.

She described the key drivers for the purchase of UoRLearn including the need to modernise the learning & development model, the improvements to the delivery of learning events (complementing classroom based delivery with online delivery), enabling more devolved learning opportunities and easier reporting of training records.

Currently, the University has 4,000 licences and around 607 active users daily, and all new starters are sent mandatory online training modules to complete as part of the induction process. Currently, there are 397 courses available on UoRLearn – she explained that one course could have numerous classes / modules.

She explained that UoRLearn had been particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic, as colleagues were able to access online learning modules during the lockdown and when working remotely. The return to work modules that staff were required to complete prior to returning onto campus were held on UoRLearn.

Mrs Hayward mentioned a number of new / future developments:

- TIM (Intelligent Mentor) – this function recommends courses appropriate to the user based on your prior usage;
- LinkedIn Learning – this function will link to the People Development Open Programme to provide more opportunities for colleagues as post and pre course options (to be introduced from March 2021).

As colleagues become familiar with virtual learning, People Development will look to roll out Social Learning functionality. By way of an example, she mentioned that colleagues on the Springboard programme would be able to be linked as a cohort and be able to contact each other through UoRLearn.

The Committee thanked Mrs Hayward for her comprehensive presentation. A number of questions and comments were made, including:

- i. How user feedback is collected;
- ii. An acknowledgement that some colleagues are less likely to use UoRLearn and these tend to be colleagues who are less likely to make use of any learning & development provision;
- iii. Since March 2020 (the start of the first lockdown) UoRLearn has mostly been used to complete the mandatory online modules and the COVID-19 modules;

- iv. The Committee speculated on the future delivery of learning and development offerings and the balance between classroom based training and online training as things start to return to normal. The Committee also discussed the continued need to make colleagues aware of what UoRLearn can offer, and the best ways to promote this important system.

The Director of Human Resources noted that HR continued to carry the full cost of UoRLearn licences despite the platform being used in some quarters for delivery of specific non-HR learning and development activity, and hoped a fairer distribution of such costs could be arrived at in due course.

21/04 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2020 were approved

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 20/13: Staff Wellbeing

The Committee noted that the UEB approved funding for mental health awareness sessions for the UEB, the Leadership Group and for line managers. Dates to run four half day workshops for line managers have been organised for late February / March with 64 places available. These workshops will be delivered by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).

People Development will then organise one day workshops for the UEB and the Leadership Group to be delivered in-house by Mrs Dawn Grout, OH Manager.

The University Secretary informed the Committee that the Council have asked about staff wellbeing and are interested to know what the University is doing.

The Committee discussed the possibility of running a further staff survey to include questions in relation to staff wellbeing. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) explained that the University was exploring the merits of running a further survey and will be discussing this with Capita, the external provider that ran the most recent survey's on behalf of the University. The Committee agreed that the timing of running another survey was critical, and acknowledged that the current pandemic made this even more difficult to gauge.

Minute 20/14: Visa fees

The Committee noted that the UEB approved the recommendation to allow Schools discretion to pay visa costs on behalf of employees where grant funding is available. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) informed the Committee that to date there have been no claims under the Visa Expenses policy.

21/05 UK Visa and Immigration

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) reported that with effect from 1 January 2021 free movement within the EEA ended and the UK has introduced a new points-based immigration system. She discussed some of the key details of the new regime and highlighted the implications for the recruitment and retention of staff.

The two new visa routes to the Higher Education sector are the Skilled Worker Route (SWR) that replaces the existing Tier 2 (General) route, and a new Global Talent Visa (GTV) that replaces the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) category.

The SWR is a points based visa with applicants obtaining points based on having a job offer from a Home Office-licensed sponsor, having a salary at the relevant minimum salary threshold, and having proficient English language skills.

There are visa fees for the applicant and for the University under the SWR, and the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) highlighted the additional visa costs associated with contract extensions – hiring managers will be provided with guidance to encourage more awareness of costs and to encourage better planning of extensions.

The GTV is designed to attract recognise global leaders, and may be a useful route for attracting experienced academic colleagues. Applicants would need to be endorsed by a recognised UK body (e.g. Royal Society, British Academy). It was felt the GTV provides highly flexible leave to remain which allows applicants to work for employers or be self-employed.

Colleagues were reminded of the support provided by the University to existing EU colleagues, particularly in relation to the process for applying under the EU settlement scheme.

The Committee discussed the impact of the immigration system changes on recruitment processes including the need to ensure that we remain attractive to prospective applicants and the need to provide recruiting managers with information on the new visa regime.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) for the comprehensive summary.

21/06 Joint Working Group – review of workloads

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with information on the membership and terms of reference for the joint working group established in respect of workloads across all staff groups.

The working group comprised University representatives, UCU and Staff Forum representatives.

The intention was for the working group to report joint recommendations via the Joint University and UCU Committee and the Staff Forum in the first instance, with proposals to the UEB no later than the end of the 2020 - 21 academic year.

He confirmed that the Staffing Committee would play an important role in testing the working group's recommendations, and hoped that something would be brought to this Committee in time for the summer meeting.

The Committee noted the tight timeframe for bringing recommendations to the UEB, and commented that there was a risk that the focus of the discussion on workload would be centred around the pandemic and associated challenges, for example as a result of the increase in online teaching. The Director of Human Resources expressed his hope that the discussion would take a broader perspective and avoid too narrow a focus.

It was requested that the working group acknowledges the distinction between workload and work allocation / outputs.

21/07 Pay and pensions update

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on matters relating to pay, nationally and locally, including early headline figures from this year's statutory gender pay gap (GPG) report. He also summarised the current position in respect of the USS valuation process.

Key headlines included:

- The UCEA has tabled a 0% settlement for this year (1 August 2021). The national trade unions have recommended non-acceptance of the 0% settlement and there remains a risk of associated industrial action;
- Any potential local impact is tempered by the wide-ranging agreement reached with the UCU and our Staff Forum that allowed for, *inter alia*, a three-year pay freeze and a series of tiered pay cuts for 12 months;
- The local tiered pay cut scheduled for this year will not now be necessary;
- As at the 31 March 2020 the mean GPG is 20.64% - the 2019 figure was 18.33%. The median GPG is 23.18% - the 2019 figure was 18.48%. There are a number of local factors that have a distorting effect on the figures, the most significant of which is the inclusion of Campus

Jobs workers (a legal obligation, but an activity unique to the University of Reading) – excluding Campus jobs workers from the headline figures makes a significant difference. The mean GPG is 16.99% - the 2019 figure was 15.93%. The median GPG is 16.18% - the 2019 figure was 16.17%;

- The 2020 USS valuation – USS launched a consultation with UUK, and the University responded with a detailed set of suggestions and further questions regarding the technical aspects of the consultation document. The University has urged further consideration of benefit reform.

It was noted that the Director of Human Resources recently brought a paper on the USS valuation process to the University's Remuneration Committee.

21/08 Athena SWAN Action Plan on Gender Equality

The Director of Technical Services reminded the Committee that at its meeting in October 2019 she and the Dean for Diversity & Inclusion outlined the progress made in preparing for the University's Athena SWAN submission due in November 2019. At the meeting the views of the Committee were sought on a number of the proposed actions. Further work was then undertaken to review and refine these, and additional actions, for inclusion in the submission.

It was agreed that the Director of Technical Services would provide the Committee with a report on the actions contained in the University's Athena SWAN submission.

Action: The Director of Technical Services would provide the Committee with a report on the actions contained in the University's Athena SWAN submission

21/09 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2020/21 Academic Session:

Wednesday 28 April 2021 at 11.00 am (reserve)
Wednesday 16 June 2021 at 2.00 pm