A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House, on Monday 2 November 2015 at 11.00 am.

Present:

The Vice-Chancellor
The President of Reading UCU (in the Chair)
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor R van de Noort)
Dr E McCrum
Professor I Mueller-Harvey
Mr M Moran
Dr M Schroeter
The University Secretary

In attendance:

Director of Human Resources
The RISIS Applications Manager (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Mrs S Pellow.

The Committee received a statement of its membership for 2015-16.

The Committee also noted the requirement to disclose any interests.

Arising on the Minutes:

Minute 15/02 (14/15, 14/08, 14/02, 13/23): Use of zero-hours contracts at the University
The Director of HR reported that discussions with UCU representatives on zero hours contracts were ongoing, and he expected a policy to be brought forward within the current session. The Committee noted that a comprehensive policy on Postgraduate students teaching (as in the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme) and sessional teaching, and their rates of pay, would be welcomed.

Minute 15/10 (15/02, 14/17): Report of the President of Reading UCU
The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University was considering making more wide-ranging changes to the current process for staff booking travel and would keep UCU representatives informed.


**Minute 15/10 (15/03): Report of the Vice-Chancellor**
The University Secretary reported that the Privy Council had approved the changes to the University’s Charter, as anticipated. Further changes would be submitted for approval in relation to the re-structuring consequent upon the discontinuation of Faculties and Faculty Deans.

**Minute 15/10 (15/05): Standardisation of the rate of pay for hourly-paid lecturing staff**
The Director of HR reported that this would be considered as part of the wider discussion on contractual arrangements for sessional and zero hours staff and postgraduate teaching assistants.

**Minute 15/12: Report of the President of Reading UCU**
The Director of HR reported that discussions with UCU representatives were ongoing over the trigger point for the University to notify the union of restructuring plans. Some significant adjustments had been made on the clauses in contracts relating to work at the University’s overseas campuses.

The Vice-Chancellor supplied to the President of Reading UCU the information requested on the University’s recent use of external consultants.

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15/18 **Report of the Vice-Chancellor**

The Committee noted the report which the Vice-Chancellor had given to the Senate on 14 October 2015 and which had subsequently been published on the University website.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that:

(a) the University had come close to its recruitment target for undergraduates, but had fallen below target for postgraduates; he surmised that this was likely to be a common experience for a number of UK universities.

The President of Reading UCU asked if the University had a specific strategy for PGR recruitment, given the difficult climate internationally, the increasing stipulations made by sponsors, and the challenge from other English-taught courses in EU universities. The Vice-Chancellor responded that the University regarded PGR as very important; the University’s international position in the top 200 institutions globally, recently regained, was highly significant for recruiting postgraduate students;

(b) the University would need to adjust its budget forecast as a result of the shortfall in recruitment, and would be presenting a revised financial calculation to Strategy and Finance Committee with the aim of providing a £10m pa surplus by 2019-20. Small changes to forecast pay rises could make a substantial difference to overall forecasts.

The President of Reading UCU commented that the effect of the low increases in pay in the sector had been largely contained until now, given the low inflation rate, but would be likely to cause significant disruption in due course, and he urged that measured increases should be considered to avoid this;
Further information from the government was expected shortly on plans for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and potential re-structuring of the HE landscape;

HR staff had been compiling a paper on international equalities policies. The University expected, in principle, that its policies would apply in all its international instances, but also recognised that local customs and legal frameworks might present some conflict;

It was hoped that the capital projects for refurbishing the URS and main Library buildings would get under way this session. Other capital projects would be considered for go-ahead in the context of the wider financial plans. The University would continue to consider carefully the impact on staff and students of the building and contractor work, which was expected realistically to take some years;

The Professional and Administrative Services (PAS) review was reaching a critical juncture, with more detail being disseminated to staff in the next few weeks. He was aware that the lack of information more recently had created uncertainty and hoped that clarity would help.

In response to a question about the University’s measures to counter terrorism, the Vice-Chancellor explained that the University’s strategy at this stage was to use existing mechanisms to assess the risk, and thus avoid unnecessary bureaucracy. If the local organiser responsible for inviting an external speaker judged that the speaker was not likely to incite the audience to break the law, then, in principle, the event should be permitted to go ahead. The University would continue to monitor this closely.

Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU reported that, in his view, staff morale was being significantly affected by the uncertainty surrounding a number of new initiatives, notably the PAS review, but also the introduction of various working practices which were intended to make savings but appeared in fact to be more costly in relation to staff time, for example the Managed Print Service. There was concern that change was being introduced without appropriate communication and consultation, which could lead to unintended outcomes. He cited the change to the academic year which had decreased the time available for research, the impending loss of the Faculty structure which would reduce the support for Heads of School and the opportunities for sharing good practice across Schools, and the continuing lack of clarity around REF outcomes for a few members of staff. He suggested that change needed to be communicated and managed more effectively, in order to avoid loss of trust; the result of the ballot on charter changes indicated that many staff were uneasy about the purpose and pace of change.

Since the Section 188 notice to the unions had indicated that 1,500 members of staff might be affected by the PAS review, he was concerned that the processes would take considerable investment of time and effort from HR staff and from the union committee members within a compressed timescale.
In response, the Vice-Chancellor pointed to the wider HE environment, which was presenting substantial challenges in relation to funding and was subject to considerable upheaval. The University needed to be prepared for the future and thus needed to make difficult decisions at this juncture. However, he recognised that there were dangers in absorbing too many changes in a short timeframe, and accepted that time would be needed for embedding the restructuring before further change could be introduced.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor van de Noort) further commented that the new academic structure was intended to provide Heads of School with more direct sources of support and information and with more opportunities to take strategic action. He expected that the new line-management structure would be a positive step. He also commented that only a few members of staff were still affected by ongoing discussions about the REF outcomes.

Mr Moran asked if the University had a rough estimate of the numbers likely to be involved in redundancy procedures. In response, the Director of HR said that the dispersed activity across a number of resource areas meant that it was difficult to quantify; the picture for some individuals might not become clear until the end of the process. Additional resource had been set aside for supporting UCU committee members involved in the PAS process.

Dr Schroeter asked if the University had seen an increase in the number of academic-related posts at high grades. The Director of HR responded that the University had made an investment in professional staff in order to meet the requirements of its long-term plans. Dr Schroeter further suggested that it would be useful to monitor staff costs to see if this strategic investment had a positive impact.

15/20 **Failure to consult over a major change to the academic promotions criteria**

The President of Reading UCU reported his concern that the requirement recently introduced for academic staff to have achieved a Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowship in order to make an application for promotion constituted a major change in procedure, and, as such, should have been subject to consultation with UCU before its introduction. He considered that the University should have given notice of the decision to implement this requirement, which would have allowed staff appropriate time to prepare a submission to the HEA if they wished to pursue an application for promotion.

The University Secretary responded that he believed the change to be minor, since the requirement for an HEA fellowship was already part of the probation process and there was general acceptance in the sector and within the University of the value of the HEA fellowship for academic staff. The Director of HR commented that the timescale could be adjusted to accommodate individuals’ circumstances if this would be helpful; he considered that the work required for a submission was fairly minimal, so should not be a burden for staff within the promotions process.

The Committee noted that no agreement had been reached on this issue.
15/21 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor van de Noort) reported the following matters from the Staffing Committee at its meeting in October 2015:

(a) the Staffing Committee had received the report from the awards committee considering the data on staff being rewarded under the Lump Sum Award scheme, and had noted that female members of staff were more likely to receive an award and that male members of staff tended to receive larger sums. The Staffing Committee would be considering this further.

Dr Schroeter commented that the data on rewards should be taken in conjunction with data on applications for promotion, since both appeared to have a gender imbalance;

(b) the Staffing Committee was still considering RUSU proposals on introducing the living wage. He advised that UCU representatives should be aware that the University’s adoption of a policy on the living wage would in effect bring a third party into wage negotiations.

The Committee noted that no decisions had yet been made and that any proposals would be shared with Reading UCU.

15/22 Dates of meetings in the Session 2015-16

It was noted that further meetings of the Joint University/UCU Committee in the Session 2015-16 had been scheduled for:

Tuesday 9 February 2016 at 10.00am
Wednesday 24 May 2016 at 10.30 am