

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

20/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held in Committee Room 1, on Tuesday 4 February 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

The Vice-Chancellor
Dr M Schroeter (in the Chair in the unavoidable absence of the President)
Mrs S Pellow
Ms R Balestrini
The University Secretary
Director of Human Resources

In attendance:

Head of Student Information Systems (Secretary)

Apologies were received from the President of Reading UCU, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor C Collins, Dr S Knox, Ms H Schaumberg and Mr M McAulay.

20/02 The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2019 were approved and signed.

Updates were noted in relation to actions arising from the Minutes. In addition, the following comments were made:

Minute 19/19: Risk Register for Microsoft Teams implementation: Mrs Pellow queried whether there was a standard template for risk registers to focus on assessing risk, rather than presenting mitigations. The University Secretary undertook to pass the comment back to the Director of IT, who had overseen the risk register for this project.

Minute 19/19: Flexible working requests: the Director of HR reported that, having passed to Dr Schroeter the information circulated to staff, he had proposed that the Staffing Committee discuss further how to collect this information more effectively. He explained that informal arrangements were taken into account when determining the teaching timetable slots for staff, but that priority was naturally given to formal arrangements. Dr Schroeter suggested that clarification of this on the form would be helpful for staff.

Minute 19/17 (19/10) Right of appeal against redundancy: Dr Schroeter asked for an update on the formal arrangements for appeal in the specific circumstances that staff on fixed-term contracts were made redundant. The Director of HR confirmed that the right to appeal existed, and he undertook to send to Dr Schroeter the template letter plus examples of letters sent on those occasions, together with an account of the numbers of appeals, if any.

20/03 **Report of the Vice-Chancellor**

The Vice-Chancellor reported on various subjects which he had presented to Council at its recent meeting. He commented that a number of national developments were likely to have a substantial impact on the University, including the potential revival of the Augar Report and the

negotiations over the ongoing funding arrangements post-Brexit for Erasmus and Horizon 2000, which were as yet unclear.

In response to a query from Dr Schroeter over the potential effect of Brexit on staff recruitment and retention, the Director of HR said that, as yet, there was no statistically significant evidence of an impact; the University was monitoring the situation via information collected routinely from staff leavers.

20/04 **Report of the President of Reading UCU**

In the unavoidable absence of the President of Reading UCU, Dr Schroeter raised the following:

- (i) Information was requested about the Hay Review of Grade 9 non-professorial staff and the procedures being followed. In response, the Director of HR undertook to provide further details of the independent job evaluation work being carried out;
- (ii) The grievance policy could usefully be reviewed to address specific points, following issues which had arisen in a number of cases. The Director of HR concurred, and Dr Schroeter undertook to provide contact details for a committee member to take this forward;
- (iii) The President of Reading UCU wished to pursue her request at the last meeting for observer status at Council meetings. In response, the Vice-Chancellor said he had discussed this informally with the President of Council, and it was felt that the formal and individual accountability of Council members for decisions taken by Council did not sit easily with the concept of attendees. He undertook to make a further request to the President of Council;
- (iv) The President of Reading UCU felt it would be useful to hold regular informal meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, as had been done in the previous term. In response, the Vice-Chancellor commented that he would not wish to duplicate discussion at the joint committee meetings and there was a standing invitation to meet termly with the Director of HR, but he would be happy to consider meeting in order to focus on a specific issue;

Mrs Pellow asked about the timescale for the decision on re-locating the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) on campus, the plans for the re-location of the Department of Fine Art, and the situation in relation to refurbishing the URS building. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the final decision for ECMWF was expected in December 2020, with building work starting after that point, and that there were various options being discussed for Fine Art. No final decision had been made in relation to URS, which was currently being used as temporary study space for students; the costs of re-structuring the internal layout in a listed building were very high.

In relation to the impending strike action, Dr Schroeter reported that there was concern about the University's tone in communicating with staff over the plans, in particular about contractual duties and re-scheduling classes. She urged that the University should be seen to be aware of the sensitivities in this area, and suggested that communications should highlight the approach being taken by the Vice-Chancellor at national level to move the discussion forward. The Vice-Chancellor responded that the shift in regulatory body from HEFCE to the Office for Students, and this emphasis on the University's contractual relationship with students, necessitated careful wording in communications to staff, which was difficult to balance appropriately in all cases; he appreciated the feedback.

In relation to the formalities of the strike action, Dr Schroeter asked if the University (a)

would be deducting 1/325th again; (b) would agree to partially refund staff who had taken action when the deduction was 1/260th; (c) would split the pay deductions over six months, as other universities were doing; and (d) would continue to require a daily report from individuals over their strike action. In response, the Director of HR stated, seriatim, that the fraction for deductions was still under consideration, the previous decision to reject the request for partial refunds still applied, the pay deductions needed to be made to avoid the University being complicit in the strike action, and he would continue to ask for daily responses from staff taking action.

Dr Schroeter reported that the President of Reading UCU was extending an invitation to the Vice-Chancellor for a public debate.

20/05 Report from the Sub-Committee considering the Reading UCU local claim

The Committee noted that the Sub-Committee was continuing to make good progress.

20/06 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee noted that there was no report from the Staffing Committee, which had not met since the previous meeting of this committee.

20/07 Secretaryship

The Committee noted that Dr Crabtree was stepping down as Secretary to the Joint Committee after twelve years, and expressed its thanks for her work over this time.

20/08 Dates of meetings in the Session 2019-20

It was noted that the final meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee in the Session 2019-20 had been scheduled for:

Wednesday 20 May 2020 at 10.30 am

Minute and action	Action for	Outcome
<p>19/19 <u>Matters arising from previous meeting:</u></p> <p><u>NIRD Trust update to OfS</u> The Vice-Chancellor to provide the recent update given to the OfS relating to the process for adjusting the arrangements for the trust.</p>	<p>Vice-Chancellor</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>20/02 <u>Matters arising:</u></p> <p><u>Risk Register for Microsoft Teams implementation</u> The University Secretary to pass the comments on the risk register back to the Director of IT.</p> <p><u>Right of appeal against redundancy</u> The Director of HR to send to Dr Schroeter the template letter, plus examples of letters sent on those occasions, together with an account of the numbers of appeals, if any.</p>	<p>University Secretary</p> <p>Director of HR</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>20/04 Report of the President of Reading UCU</p> <p><u>Hay Review of Grade 9 non-professorial staff</u> The Director of HR to provide further details of the independent job evaluation work being carried out as part of the Hay Review.</p> <p><u>Grievance policy review</u> Dr Schroeter to provide the Director of HR with the contact details of a UCU committee member who would take this forward.</p> <p><u>Request for observer status at Council</u> The Vice-Chancellor to make a formal request to the President of Council for the President of Reading UCU to attend Council meetings as an observer.</p>	<p>Director of HR</p> <p>Dr Schroeter</p> <p>Vice-Chancellor</p>	