

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

21/18 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Thursday 7 October 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
Professor F Hwang
Mr B Knowles
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Dr Laville, Professor Parish, and Mrs Rowe.

The University Secretary welcomed Professor Hwang and Mr Knowles to the Committee.

21/19 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 agreed that the Terms of Reference needed to be refreshed and the Director of Human Resources would bring a paper to a future meeting.

Action: The Director of Human Resources to bring a paper to a future meeting to discuss updating the terms of reference

21/20 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2021 were approved

Arising from the minutes:

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

The Committee noted that mental health awareness training for the UEB and Leadership Group will now be delivered by the University's Occupational Health Manager, and will be delivered in the form of a one-day workshop for a maximum of 16 participants, repeated over three dates in the Autumn term.

Minute 21/11 (21/06): Joint Working Group - review of workloads

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Joint Working Group. Facilitated focus groups will shortly be convened to discuss a number of University processes identified as having significant impacts on workload, including certain teaching & learning activity. The groups will also take the opportunity to identify and share good practice.

The original intention was for the working group to provide an interim report to the UEB by the end of the 2020-21 academic year. However, this has proved to be unrealistic and it is now anticipated that an interim report will be taken to the UEB in the spring term.

21/21 Probationary Procedures for Non-Academic and Academic Staff

The Committee considered a paper from Professors Carol Wagstaff and Helen Osborn that recommended the University's probationary procedures (for both academic probation and "ordinary" probation) be reviewed and revised to allow the short-term and long-term impacts of Covid-19 to be taken into account. It also recommended that "personal circumstances declarations" are introduced for both probationary procedures.

The Director of Human Resources explained that the University operates two probationary procedures:

- Contractual probation applies to all newly appointed staff (both academic and non-academic) to the University apart from those appointed as Lecturer. The probation period is normally six months.
- Academic probation applies to newly appointed Lecturers - the probationary period is normally three years.

The Committee heard that the Academic Probation Review Sub-Committee review all academic probation cases and had already discussed and given due consideration to the impact of Covid-19 on probation cases.

There was widespread agreement that the current academic probationary process works well and should not be changed. It was also agreed that the

current arrangements allow for the proper consideration of personal circumstances.

It was acknowledged that both probationary processes were intended to be supportive and to enable new staff to successfully complete their probation period. Only in very rare instances would someone's employment be ended, and where probation may be extended (for contractual probation) it is often due to other factors such as periods of ill-health and unrelated to the probationer's capability.

The Committee agreed that it was important to clearly communicate to probationary staff that the Academic Probation Review Sub-Committee had recognised the potential impacts of COVID-19 and agreed that these would be taken into account when considering any probation case, and asked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) to review the current published information on probationary arrangements to ensure this was the case.

Action: The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) to review the current published information on Academic Probation to ensure that reference is made to the way in which potential impacts of COVID will be considered.

21/22 Parents and Family network – Staff Survey

The Committee heard that the Parent & Family network had published the findings of a staff survey in June 2021. The survey focused on the impact of Covid-19 for members of staff with childcare responsibilities. The report states that prior to going to publication it was taken to the UEB for comment. The University Secretary had no recollection of this being formally received at UEB. The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) also confirmed that HR had not been invited to comment or discuss the survey findings before the report was published.

The Director of Human Resources raised concerns about some of the comments contained in the report including comments that were stated as "matter of fact" when this was not the case. It was noted that the survey did provide some useful insights and did highlight pockets of good practice. The Assistant Directors of HR noted that they had met with the new Co-Chairs of the Parent & Family Network and discussed both the survey results and the approach taken by the Network. It was recognised that the University had a number of excellent diversity and equality networks, all established to support and promote diversity and inclusion at Reading.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) referred to a recent example where the Women@Reading network had reached out to HR as they were keen to raise awareness and promote women's health and associated issues. This has led to discussions about a joint initiative and a

collective approach to raising awareness of an important subject. Further discussions will continue with the Parent & Family Network.

21/23 Grade 9 Annual Review process

The Director of Human Resources outlined the current process for reviewing the activities and achievements for senior colleagues (i.e. those at Grade 9 or equivalent), and confirmed that an analogous process exists for senior staff within the Leadership Group.

He stated that even though the process is well established certain elements of the process were not always fully understood. As a result the paperwork has been refreshed to better capture the key elements of the process, to make clear expectations and likely outcomes, and to make the process more transparent.

The Committee welcomed the revised documents and asked that relevant colleagues have sight of the relevant paperwork in advance of the start of the process.

21/24 Implementation of Leavers' Questionnaires

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) informed the Committee that a leavers' questionnaire was introduced in January 2021.

She informed the Committee that 86 leavers' questionnaires had been completed out of a total of 605 leavers in this period and provided the Committee with a summary of the response themes as at the start of October 2021, including:

- Colleagues leaving the University who completed the online questionnaire gave both positive and negative feedback about their experience working at the University;
- Some specific issues were raised which were already known about and had been or are being addressed with the appropriate colleagues;
- Positive aspects of working at the University were mainly around quality of line manager and relationship with them and the team, as well as a great working environment. The VC listening to staff was also highlighted by some;
- Although pay and benefits received a few positive mentions, it was an area which many respondents commented on negatively, sometimes linked to feeling undervalued which also featured as a negative aspect of working at the University. Some issues with local

management and Heads of School/ Function were also raised, as were bureaucracy/ time taken to make decisions, and workload being too high (again sometimes linked to remuneration);

- A couple of respondents mentioned bullying, which is always a concern as we operate a zero tolerance approach to this. These instances were already being addressed by HR;
- IT resources and infrastructure were also seen to be in need of improvement in some instances.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) for the report and asked that the Committee continued to receive annual updates.

21/25 Professor of Practice

The Committee considered a proposal from Professor James Walker, Director of Research, Henley Business School on behalf of the Business School, to create the title of “Professor of Practice” as a specialist role within the Business School.

The proposed title was to recognise the expertise of non-academic individuals who make an extensive contribution to the Business School and University, and would not come with a financial contribution but would provide recognition of exceptional contribution of individuals. The proposal made clear the desirability of the title to convey credibility to reassure corporate clients and course participants. The expectation is that the title would be used rarely.

The proposal included the CV of a colleague who was put forward as being a potentially credible candidate.

The Committee carefully considered the proposal, and made the following comments:

- The title of Professor is considered the pinnacle of an academic’s career;
- The University already has clear and well-established arrangements for conferring staff with the title of Professor – via the Personal Titles process, or individuals other than a current member of staff – via the Honorary, Visiting and Courtesy Titles arrangements (Emeritus Professor and Visiting Professors);
- The proposal does not provide any suggestions as to the governance arrangements for conferring such a title;

- There was no significant evidence to suggest that other Business Schools (competitors) were using the title of Professor or Professor of Practice for similar (non-academic) roles in their Institutions;

The Committee unanimously agreed that the proposal to create the title of “Professor of Practice” as a specialist role within the Business School should not be supported.

21/26 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 scheme. Highlights included:

- The University’s position vis-à-vis the national pay bargaining process via the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) remains unchanged.
- Formal notification of the pay-freeze period was provided to colleagues over the summer months. For those on grades 6 and above a collective agreement with UCU applied, and no further action was required. For those on Grades 1-5 individual agreement was required; at the time of writing c.40 colleagues had yet to sign their acceptance letters and individual meetings were being facilitated.
- Colleagues are reminded that normal incremental progression (for our Grades 1-8) remains in place, as do the normal arrangements for rewarding staff.
- A further review of the University’s financial position with colleagues from UCU and the Staff Forum is scheduled for 19 October 2021.
- In respect of pensions matters, the USS Joint Negotiating Committee (comprising equal members from UUK and UCU, plus an independent Chair) decided to progress a proposal from USS employers aimed at keeping employer and USS member contributions at a sustainable level. As things stand this is set to avoid higher contribution rate increases that had been expected in October 2021, and sets in train a series of benefit reforms to be effective from 1 April 2022. The proposals have been accepted by the USS Trustee, subject to a 60-day consultation with scheme members that will commence shortly.
- UCU will be balloting members with a view to industrial action to begin, if a mandate is achieved, before the end of the Autumn Term. He confirmed that formal notification had just been received from the USU. The ballot is likely to open on 18 October and close in the first week of November. The ballot will be dis-aggregated (i.e. each relevant institution will be balloted separately). The ballot will cover the USS

issues and a range of additional disputes. To note, the ballot at Reading is restricted to the USS issues only.

- The University of Reading Employees' Pension Fund (UREPF) has concluded its latest valuation cycle. The scheme showed a small surplus and Trustees have agreed ongoing support from the University in discussion with UEB.
- Mr Keith Hodgson (former University Secretary) has completed his second term of office (covering six years) as Chair of Trustees for both the UREPF and the University of Reading Pension Scheme (URPS) and has now stepped down from the role. The Director of Human Resources on behalf of the Committee thanked Mr Hodgson for his excellent work during this period. Following a Trustee-led recruitment process Mrs Joanne Livingstone has been appointed as the new Chair of Trustees for both schemes.

The Committee thanked the Director of Human Resources for the update.

21/27 Annual Leave Purchase Scheme

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) updated the Committee on the introduction of the Annual Leave Purchase (ALP) Scheme. A summary of the main points is below:

- The introduction of an ALP Scheme was agreed as part of the Phase 1 proposals with UCU and the Staff Forum in summer 2020. It was put forward as a potential cost saving measure with agreement to trial the scheme in the 21/22 leave year.
- It is useful to note that over the period of the COVID pandemic, the University has agreed changes to the normal annual leave policies, most notably in adjusting carry forward allowances to 10 days and now 8 days. Significant numbers of colleagues took advantage of these changes given the restrictions on travel, although messaging was clear that it was important to continue to take leave throughout the year. It is anticipated that we will return to the normal policy of 5 days at the end of this current leave year (2021/22).
- The scheme allows for colleagues to purchase up to a maximum of 10 additional days annual leave, pro-rata for part time colleagues, subject to approval by line managers and with the oversight of Heads of School/Function. The cost of the additional leave is spread across the full leave year. The scheme is open to all colleagues who use the online annual leave system, excluding casual workers, those for whom inclusion would take their income below the national minimum wage and those for whom inclusion would affect their visa eligibility.

Purchased leave is added to the online system and booked and taken in the usual way. The salary adjustment is equivalent to 1/260th from gross salary. Employer and employee pension deductions are maintained on normal salary.

- Inclusion in the scheme represents a temporary change to terms and conditions of employment and colleagues were asked to sign and agree to this change through the application process.
- For this year, there was a single window for applications between 1 June and 31 July 2021. Applications were made on an online form, requesting approval from the line manager, before eligibility checks by HR colleagues. Oversight approval was then requested from Heads of Schools and Functions before notifications of pay adjustments and processing in Trent for payroll and additions of annual leave purchase to the online leave booking system.
- Running the scheme on a trial basis has allowed for the effectiveness and popularity of the scheme to be considered before making significant investment in changing existing systems and processes. However, this has meant that the process was not automated and has been manually intensive for HR colleagues. For example, in checking eligibility, chasing approvals from line managers and where colleagues change their hours of work or change roles within the University during the leave year, manual re-calculations and adjustments will be required at the end of the leave year.
- In total there were 116 applications for the ALP scheme. 3 were rejected due to being ineligible for the reasons noted above and 1 was subsequently withdrawn by the individual because their circumstances changed, a total of 5 requests were rejected by the line manager or the Head of School/Function. Of those going forward, 42 requested the full 10 days and a further 52 requested between 5-10 days, with the remainder requesting less than 1 week of additional leave.
- We intend to run a short survey with colleagues who have purchased leave this year to gather views on the effectiveness of the scheme, however we have already received a number of positive comments from colleagues, many seeing it as a positive benefit.
- The scheme has not contributed in any significant way to cost savings. Some line managers have been concerned about the impact on their teams, particularly within a small team or where there were multiple requests from within the same team. The survey will also gather

feedback from Managers, including in respect of the rejected applications.

- For the scheme to go ahead next year, we would need to invest in developments in iTrent to allow the scheme to operate without the manual interventions.
- Subject to the outcomes of survey, and any views from Staffing Committee, it is our current intention to continue to offer the scheme, it is a positive benefit that has been welcomed by colleagues.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) for the comprehensive update. She agreed to provide the Committee with a breakdown of applications by Grade and by job family (academics v non-academics).

It was further agreed that the Annual Leave Purchase (ALP) Scheme should continue to be offered as it was viewed by staff as a positive benefit, and noted that for the scheme to proceed, the University would need to invest in developments in iTrent.

Action: The Assistant Director of Human Resources (Advisory Services) to provide the Committee with a breakdown of applications by Grade and by job family (academics v non-academics)

21/28 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2021/22 Academic Session:

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