

## Joint University/UCU Committee

21/16 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Wednesday 19 May 2021 at 10.30 remotely, via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor [*Chair*]  
Dr Ian Bland, UCU Representative  
John Brady, Director of HR  
Professor Claire Collins, Senate Representative  
Dr Rob Jubb, UCU Representative  
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official  
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary  
Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU  
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor

Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

21/17 Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

21/18 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

a) Minute 21/03 c) (20/27) *Social Media Policy*

The Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary advised that the action to update the Social Media Policy was now with MCE who were aware of the urgency and had provided assurance that this would be updated as soon as possible.

b) Minute 21/05 *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that an arrangement was now in place for UCU Representatives to meet regularly with the MRT.

c) Minute 21/05 *Report of the President of Reading UCU*

The Director of HR confirmed that they had liaised with Dr Jubb regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the Personal Titles and Probation processes. It had been agreed that, following its completion, it would be useful to reflect on how Personal Circumstances had influenced the decisions made during the Personal Titles process this year. Further to UCU raising instances of staff being required to take unpaid leave to provide childcare during the pandemic, the Director of HR advised that no specific cases had been identified; however, a message had again been communicated to relevant colleagues which confirmed that flexibility should be offered.

d) Minute 21/08 *Update on Phase 1*

The Director of HR confirmed that the collective note regarding the update on temporary pay cuts had been shared with UCU and the Staff Forum and had since been circulated. The next review meeting would be taking place the following week.

21/19 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Committee received the Vice Chancellor's most recent report to Senate. The Committee was advised that there were three bills directly relevant to the University being proposed in the Queen's speech. The first was in relation to freedom of speech; the Vice Chancellor confirmed that the University would be working closely with UUK in efforts to ensure the bill would be balanced and not

detrimental to freedom of speech. The Vice Chancellor also noted UCU's national response to this. UCU requested continued dialogue should the legislation be passed and to work together with the University to clarify how this would be implemented. It was acknowledged that the University would not have a choice in the matter and the Vice Chancellor advised that the University would be as pragmatic as possible in the situation. The second bill was in relation to the Advanced Research and Innovation Agency and a move towards more risk-based research. The third bill was the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill – the government's answer to the Augar Review on post-16 education, which followed the implementation of a number of other interim responses such as the removal of London weighting on fees, the splitting of the C1 taught category into C11 and C12 and the removal of the £250 annual grant per student in areas such as Archaeology and Art. The Committee was advised that the Vice Chancellor was a member of the UUK Taskforce considering how to respond to the bill. Lifelong Learning Entitlement would be added to the bill at a later stage and the Pro-Vice Chancellors (Education and Student Experience) had been asked to represent UoR on another taskforce to look specifically at this element. As such, the University was doing as much as possible to influence through UUK on these matters.

The Vice Chancellor advised that, as agreed with the Vice President of Reading UCU, conversations would be taking place regarding the issue of USS the following week. UEB had considered its answer to the UUK consultation and would be supporting the alternative proposal for consideration by the Joint Negotiating Committee, subject to endorsement from the Strategy and Finance Committee. An all-staff talk would further explain this position to colleagues in due course. The President of Reading UCU queried how the University had reached its conclusions and to what extent the response to the recent survey on the staff portal had influenced this decision, noting concerns such as the fact that individuals had not been emailed regarding this and the survey had been open to all staff rather than targeted to members of the scheme. The Director of HR confirmed that the survey was intended to capture a quick 'snapshot' of staff opinions - this had not been a consultation survey nor intended to influence the University's position in response to UUK, which had to be approached from an employer's perspective. The University was willing to share the confidential outcome data with UCU if requested, with the understanding that this had played a small, limited part in discussions. UCU also raised concerns around fully accepting the position of USS trustees, which was suggested to require further investigation; however, the Director of HR emphasised the need to engage with UUK and trustees properly and in the most effective way possible. UCU representatives requested that the University further consider the possibility of joint engagement on this matter.

#### 21/20 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU asked whether there was an update following the Vice Chancellor's previous open letter to colleagues regarding disability and neurodiversity. It was confirmed that this work was actively ongoing, led by Professor Elizabeth McCrum (Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education & Student Experience)) and Dr Allan Laville (Dean for Diversity and Inclusion); it was suggested that the President of Reading UCU liaise with them directly regarding the involvement of members.

UCU welcomed the progress made on the Joint Covid Working Group, which it considered to be a good model for health and safety going forward, and it was noted that issues regarding returning to campus would be covered at the upcoming meeting.

UCU reiterated its request for a means of communicating with all members of staff, noting that the Staff Forum was currently able to direct communications to all staff, including staff who were in fact represented by UCU, in the absence of a trade union for Grades 1-5. It was confirmed that there was no additional communications facility provided to the Staff Forum, who were thought to make use of the staff portal and email lists such as 'deptsecs' which were also routes available to UCU. The Director of HR confirmed his willingness to discuss UCU's reasonable communication needs if they so wished.

The President of Reading UCU noted that the Vice Chancellor had recently written a number of opinion pieces which referenced a southern network of universities and it was queried who was

included within this group. The Vice Chancellor clarified that the network was called 'S10', included Reading, Royal Holloway, Surrey, City, Sussex, Essex, Kent, Goldsmiths, UEA and Brunel, and was an informal grouping of non-Russell Group research intensive universities in the South East. Work was currently ongoing following the recent call from this group, as well as student's unions and businesses, on the Government to invest in skills through greater flexibility of apprenticeship levy funds, to enable unspent funds to be used to support graduating students, for example.

#### 21/21 Update on the local UCU claim

The Director of HR thanked UCU colleagues who had been involved in discussions regarding the local claim. The Committee was advised that 110 Teaching Fellows had now agreed to move to Grade 7 and had been issued with new contracts; those who had returned their contracts would receive backdated pay in due course. It was clarified that Grade 7 academic contracts had been issued with 'TI' classification. In terms of sessional teaching staff, discussions were ongoing regarding continuation of service and conversion into permanent status. All colleagues who had been on sessional contracts in the last 12 months had been written to and 20 responses had been received, some of which were still with Schools for consideration. Old sessional contracts had now ceased and work was underway on changes to the SRF system - any new contracts would be on the new terms. Following discussion at the previous meeting, regarding contracts issued before the final agreement had been reached, HR had undertaken to review all relevant contracts issued since January as soon as the immediate conversion work was complete.

The UCU Regional Official expressed gratitude for this welcome news. It was noted that UCU communications had unfortunately resulted in some confusion regarding the agreement reached; while the President of Reading UCU and Director of HR had already liaised regarding this, UCU were keen for this discussion to continue outside of the Joint Negotiating Committee and to work with the University to ensure the best possible understanding of the agreement for members. The Director of HR confirmed that a small number of queries had been received regarding this but these had been dealt with satisfactorily. UCU Representatives confirmed that they were content with how the Joint Panel had been operating and that decisions made had been in the spirit of the agreement. The President of Reading UCU asked whether it would be possible to review the coding used, as contracts may come under 'AR' groupings and a more neutral name might be beneficial. The Director of HR noted that individuals could find the relevant details within their contracts but agreed to look into whether the Trent labels used could be improved.

**Action: Director of HR**

The Committee discussed moving on to the third part of the claim, regarding the gender pay gap. UCU advised that elections would soon be held for every place on the committee – it was considered appropriate to await the outcomes of the elections before moving forward. The UCU Regional Official advised that the election results should be available for the AGM on 10 June and it was agreed that UCU would follow up progressing to the third part of the claim once the new Branch Officers were in place.

**Action: UCU Representatives**

#### Items brought forward by the University

#### 21/22 Update on Phase 1

The Vice Chancellor noted that a formal meeting was scheduled the following week for discussion of Phase 1 and advised that a minor improvement from the previous position was anticipated, due to the return of more students to their accommodation than expected. There was still significant uncertainty in relation to student recruitment but this would become clearer over the coming months.

The President of Reading UCU advised that a motion concerning the Phase 1 consultation, and subsequent Memorandum of Understanding, had been raised at the Ordinary General Meeting on 23 March. The motion was passed with 83% of members in favour and mandated that the University be asked for the following:

- to publish full minutes for all reviews that had already taken place (both formal and informal) so that they were available to all staff members by 12 April 2021.
- to publish full minutes for all future review meetings no later than 15 working days after the relevant meetings had taken place.

- to publish the full details of the wider financial information, including the detailed description of the University's current financial position, the revised income projections and associated assumptions, upon which the discussions during review meetings were based (as referenced in the MoU) to accompany the minutes for all past and future reviews.

The President of Reading UCU confirmed that this motion would be formally sent to the University in due course and acknowledged that the deadline of 12 April 2021 had already passed. The Vice Chancellor agreed to these requests in principle, noting that it would be necessary to redact any commercially confidential information, which the University was contractually required to not make public. It was highlighted that it had previously been agreed that joint statements would be produced after certain meetings rather than minutes. UCU Representatives emphasised that the scope of this request included information relating to UPP; the Vice Chancellor agreed to discuss this with the Chief Financial Officer.

**Action: Chair/Vice Chancellor**

21/23 Update on the Strategic Foundation Programme (formerly known as Phase 2)

The Committee was advised that good progress was being made on the reviews covering portfolio, workload and ways of working. Use of space was closely linked with investment in IT (e.g. in terms of working flexibly); workshops were currently underway regarding this and a report would be submitted to UEB in due course.

UCU asked whether any work had been undertaken on the likely impact of the portfolio review and what modelling had been done on the implications of closing a large number of programmes/modules, including whether this could threaten the financial viability of any areas. The Vice Chancellor confirmed the intention to avoid undermining financial viability, highlighting that this was in fact a key driver of the work as the fragmentation of modules/programmes meant that there was not always the capacity to bring in new programmes where there was a genuine demand. It was also queried how and to what extent the workload review was being linked to the work done by the Workloads Working Group. It was confirmed that Professor Dominik Zaum (Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)) was leading both elements and could therefore integrate this work and that the relevant part of the Phase 1 agreement had been included within this remit. The Director of HR also advised that a number of meetings had taken place regarding that particular element of the Phase 2 agreement – while some immediate wins were likely to emerge from discussions, other aspects of a more substantive nature would inform the work done as part of the Strategic Foundation Programme.

It was noted that the rationalisation of modules linked with workload; there would be differential approaches between Schools which could lead to opportunities to learn good practice and more innovative ways of using workload models to properly reflect the work being done by staff. It was suggested that Senate further consider the matter and the Vice Chancellor confirmed that they were willing to facilitate this. It was confirmed that the workload review was also looking at blended learning. The President of Reading UCU requested that the University be mindful of the impact of any decisions made on all areas, including time and resource costs as well as contractual/legal obligations - for example, any course changes would also have an impact on the professional services side.

21/24 Update on ECMWF

The Committee received an update on ECMWF noting that, following the unsuccessful UK bid to house the ECMWF-hosted Copernicus services, the UK had reiterated its offer to build a new headquarters to host ECMWF and its core weather-forecasting operation on the UoR Campus. Since January, the UK government, through BEIS and the Government Property Agency (GPA), had been working with ECMWF to agree the requirements for these new headquarters and discussions were ongoing. BEIS and GPA were expected to bring an update on the proposal and state of discussions to the June 2021 ECMWF Council for approval in principle, to be followed by a full and detailed final proposal for the December 2021 Council. It was confirmed that a business case would be shared with UCU, the Staff Forum and Senate for comment in due course.

21/25 Joint Review – Grievance Procedure

The Committee was reminded that the University had previously agreed to review the grievance procedure (as part of a core set of policies) with UCU and the final version of this document was noted. It was clarified that there had been some minimal changes to wording, however the substantive change was the inclusion of appeal provision for those who were the subject of a grievance in addition to those who raised the grievance. HR and Legal Services had reviewed the procedure thoroughly and considered it fit for purpose. UCU representatives suggested that it would be helpful to receive feedback following use of the procedure, from both the complainant and respondent. The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that there were areas in the policy which were not applicable to racial micro-aggressions; the Race Equality Review would be recommending the provision of an alternative procedure more applicable to such behaviour, which would apply to all protected characteristics.

It was noted that the Disciplinary Procedure was the next policy to be reviewed with UCU.

*Items brought forward by Reading UCU*

None

*Routine items*

21/26 Matters from the Staffing Committee

It was noted that the minutes of the most recent Staffing Committee, held in February, had been circulated for information.

21/27 Any Other Business

The President of Reading UCU advised that several complaints had been received from members in relation to parking. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that retrospective refunds on parking would not be made, noting that the cost of maintaining the car parks continued and it would be inappropriate for staff members who had needed to be on campus over the past year to incur additional costs whilst other colleagues had saved commuting costs. Additionally, colleagues could rescind their permit at any point, as had been made clear at a previous all-staff talk.

It was noted that this was the Senate Representative's final meeting and Professor Collins was thanked for her contributions to the Committee.

21/28 Date of next meeting

The dates of meeting in the session 2021-22 were to be confirmed.