

## Joint University/UCU Committee

23/01 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Tuesday 31 January 2023 at 11.30 in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House/remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor *[Chair]*  
Dr Simon Clarke, Senate Representative  
Dr David Field, UCU Representative  
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary  
Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU  
Claire Rolstone, Interim Director of HR  
Nat Willmott, UCU Representative  
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Caroline Redzikowska, Senior Governance Officer *[Covering Secretary]*

Apologies:

Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official  
Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer

23/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

23/03 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

a) Minute 22/23 – Matters Arising – 22/15 Update on the local UCU claim

The Committee noted that a number of meetings of the joint panel had now taken place.

b) Minute 22/25 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Committee noted that the UCU Regional Official had provided the link to the Interim Director of HR regarding the charity Education Support and this had now been added to the wellbeing pages on the website.

c) Minute 22/25 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Committee noted that a report from the Energy and Sustainability Director on energy prices and the cost of inflation, as well as the impact of hybrid working on energy consumption was included in the Agenda papers.

d) Minute 22/25 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The Committee noted that the University had now re-joined the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) for the 23/24 pay negotiating round. It was further noted that due to the UCEA recommendation for early payment of the 23/24 pay award, there would be some misalignment in timing between the ending of the Phase 1 agreement and re-joining New JNCHES.

The Committee were reminded that the local dispute was only in relation to pensions.

e) Minute 22/27 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee noted that discussions between HR and the UCU regarding UCU involvement in the next stage of the smart working review had yet to take place although smart working had been discussed as part of the regular catch ups between UCU representatives and Health and Safety Services and at the University Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

The Interim Director of HR advised that a member of the HR team had been tasked to do this and she would follow up on the action.

**ACTION: Interim Director of HR**

It was hoped that this work would be completed in the Spring

23/04 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Vice Chancellor provided an oral update for the Committee. The update covered a number of matters including:

- The Senate has not met since the last meeting of the Committee.
- Planning and budgeting work for the next year and coming 5 years was continuing
- The impact of the pandemic and 10% inflation had been included within this work and the resulting issues were quite serious.
- Whilst some factors may yet adjust, it was unlikely that this would be universal.
- A 10% increase in costs was contributing to a £30m challenge.
- The Planning and Change Board were in the process of preparing reports for UEB to consider and a first draft budget would be submitted to Scrutiny and Finance Committee on 26 February and then to Council on 13 March. This would allow Council to look at plans and proposals and have an open discussion. The budget would be resubmitted to Council at its July meeting for approval with enactment from 1 August 2023. Between the March Council and July, the University would be working hard to refine the budget in light of any comment Council made.
- The size of the challenge for the University was such that it was possible it may affect pay as well as terms and conditions of colleagues and it was possible that the University might have to consider redundancies. Additional meetings of the

Committee would be scheduled as need if indeed the outcome of the budget planning and Council discussions would affect colleagues and workforce planning.

- There would be a deficit budget this year, the budget for 2023/24 was supposed to be a return to a surplus, but this would not now be possible.
- No decisions had been made but the Vice Chancellor wanted to ensure he was open with UCU regarding the current position.

The President of Reading UCU thanked the Vice Chancellor for providing an early explanation of the situation and allowing the UCU an opportunity to prepare.

The Committee discussed the update during which the following points were raised:

- Following the departure of Sam Foley, had another Chief Financial Officer been appointed ? If so, the website needed to be updated.

The Director of Finance was now the most senior financial officer and a member of UEB with a focus entirely on finance. The post of Chief Financial Officer had not been re-appointed. The other responsibilities of the post had been shared amongst other members of UEB. The University would assess the position over the next 12 months.

- Had the University taken into account the c.20% increase in student applications ? Whilst there had been an increase in applications, it was not as much as 20%. At UG level, as might be expected, the increase was not universal across all Schools. 5 Schools had seen growth, but 2 had seen a decline in applications. The remainder were more or less similar to the last cycle.

The University was keen to grow student numbers, but this had to be done in a way that would not affect student experience.

- UCU asked whether papers for the upcoming Council meeting could be made available to them earlier than usual for preparation purposes?

Council papers were published and available to anyone in the University about 7 days before a Council meeting. Publicly available papers would not include commercially sensitive information.

- The Pension Dispute

Locally the dispute and industrial action was limited to pensions. The dispute was not with UUK nor the USS. The dispute was with universities directly.

The pension issue was discussed at length during which the following points were made:

- UCU stated that their position remained as published on the website. The UCU was a large union and as such had to embrace all views. Decisions about

industrial action were taken by the Higher Education Committee (HEC) on behalf of the Union. The UCU remained committed to ensuring that pension benefits were restored. The current line taken by the HEC was that the issue would likely need to wait until the March 2023 valuation been carried out and at that point benefits should be restored. The Vice Chancellor was clear that this position is similar to his own publicly stated position.

- The UCU had written directly to the Vice Chancellor on 8 August 2022 setting out what action needed to be taken to avoid a dispute. The letter sought a commitment to restore pension benefits to the former levels. This was a commitment the Vice Chancellor on behalf of the University could not give, it was technically not possible to change benefits between valuations.

The Vice Chancellor had replied (to [redacted Sec 40]) seeking clarification but no further response had been received from UCU.

The President of the Reading UCU had been unaware that individual Vice Chancellors had been contacted directly, as local branches did not see letters to individual Vice Chancellors. The President agreed to look into why there had been no response to the Vice Chancellor's request for clarification.

- UUK had no role in the valuation of the pension fund, that was a matter for the USS Trustees.
- UCU stated that in the absence of positive engagement from employers on the USS, industrial action was in the process of being planned. However, the UCU understood that negotiators were meeting regularly and routinely.
- The Vice Chancellor suggested there appeared to have been a change in the UCU's position which now brought them to a position similar to that publicly expressed by the Vice Chancellor. It seemed therefore that both sides were now more or less in agreement but nevertheless the strike action continued.
- Whilst both sides now agreed that the March valuation was key to the restoration of benefits, the UCU's position was that there should be a commitment to the restoration of benefits in advance of the valuation, whilst Universities believed that such a commitment was dependent upon the outcome of the valuation and could not be given in advance of the valuation.
- It was acknowledged that some progress had been made. The UCU did not want the current situation to be continually repeated but there were still concerns in respect of the way valuations were conducted. There was though an opportunity for both sides to have input and buy in as to how valuations were carried out.
- The UCU wanted to see a restoration of pension benefits and needed to know that Universities would be pushing for the same outcome.

## 23/05 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU provided a verbal report and the following points were noted:

- The University confirmed that the Bank Holiday for the Coronation would be granted to colleagues and was in the process of being added to annual leave allowances on Employee Self Service
- There had been an article in The Times Newspaper regarding universities in China and the risky nature of ties. The article referred to Nanjing but this was not reference to NUIST. BIT was referenced. In light of questions over human rights, spying and the hijacking of data, the UCU questioned the processes being used to mitigate the risks of UoR partnerships.

The Vice Chancellor confirmed that formal partnership agreements were in place.

Risk assessments and due diligence had been carried out.

There was little military application to the work that the University did in China.

The Vice Chancellor agreed to ask Legal Services for the process for establishing a partnership, the protections included and for risk assessing the relationship.

### **ACTION: Vice Chancellor**

Risk registers were usually reviewed annually and updated by the parties responsible for the partnership.

Risk was greater on the research side. UKRI had published guidance which was available on their website and the RES team looked carefully at how research would be used.

- The UCU raised that the KTP contracts used by the UoR appeared to be an outlier in the sector. The contracts did not provide sick pay or maternity leave benefits in line with the University provision.

The Interim Director of HR agreed to look into the matter but understood that such matters as sick pay, maternity and annual leave would align with the company individuals would be working with.

### **ACTION: Interim Director of HR**

It would be helpful to understand what the specific concerns of the UCU Regional Official were and their information on provision in the rest of the sector.

- The UCU noted that the Vice-Chancellor-to-staff pay ratio noted in the annual accounts had gone up. It was not clear why this was. The Interim Director of HR indicated that this may be for a number of reasons, it was possible that more senior people had left. Furlough during pandemic may also have had an effect and it was possible the number of students employed by the University through campus jobs might have increased. If so, the latter was a good news story and demonstrated how much the University tried to engage with students.

The UCU indicated that it would be helpful to know the reasons for the change.

Dr Field noted that increased use of campus jobs would result in an expansion of jobs that were not highly paid. The Interim Director of HR advised that the jobs involved were mostly in Campus Commerce and that there was a set list of roles for campus jobs.

There would be a big day of action the following day with pickets out 8.30-10.00am with the focus being the TUC day of action. It was hoped that there would be some progress before the next date. The UCU would be re-balloting on industrial action at the start of February to extend the mandate from April.

- Discussions were continuing between UCEA and the Trade Unions with regard to pay.
- Normally, both sides would agree that deductions from pay would be diverted to the student hardship fund. This was again agreed.
- Whilst it was not advertised, any staff with problems as a result of the deductions (hardship) were encouraged to contact the Interim Director of HR, who was happy to continue the same approach as her predecessor. The UCU also had its own hardship fund.

- [redacted Sec 40]

The President asked that if there were wider issues with Henley Business School, any advance notice would be helpful.

#### 23/06 Update on the local UCU claim

The Interim Director of HR advised:

- There was no further update for this meeting regarding the use of Associate Lecturers.
- It was noted that there are further elements of the claim which had not been discussed, for example , the gender pay gap, disability and other pay gaps. UCU were asked how and when they wished these elements of the claim to be considered.

#### *Items brought forward by the University*

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

#### *Items brought forward by Reading UCU*

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

#### *Routine items*

#### 23/07 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee received a report from the most recent Staffing Committee, held in November, and the following was noted in particular:

- Staffing report – The UCU noted that not all staff were spending most of their time on campus. It had not been understood that there was such a policy and it was considered this was causing problems. The Interim Director of HR advised that the Smart Working Policy recommended that colleagues spend most of their time on campus but that varied between roles and functions etc. If there were issues for individuals, the HR team would be happy to work with colleagues to try and resolve them.
- The Interim Director of HR advised that the replacement of the current Trent system was not intended to cover Malaysia and South Africa. Malaysia and South Africa had their own payroll systems. It was acknowledged that this meant they were reliant on manual updating of information, but it was not intended to integrate them into the new system which would require adjustments to payroll arrangements. However, it might be possible to make the join up between the systems smoother.
- UCU noted that BIT and NUIST staff did not have access to current staffing systems.

23/08 Any Other Business

None

23/09 Date of next meeting

Wednesday 17 May 2023