

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

JOINT UNIVERSITY/UCU COMMITTEE

20/09 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Wednesday 20 May 2020 at 10.30 am.

Present:

President of Reading UCU (Ms D Driver) (Chair)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor P Yaqoob)
Dr M Schroeter
Professor C Collins
Mrs S Pellow
Ms R Balestrini
Mr M McAulay
The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
The Director of Human Resources

In attendance:

Ms N Easton (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Dr S Knox and Ms H Schaumberg.

20/10 Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2020 were approved and signed.

19/19 NIRD Trust update to OfS

The update given to the OfS relating to the process for adjusting the arrangements for the trust had been circulated.

20/02 Risk Register for Microsoft Teams implementation

Comments had been passed onto the Director of DTS.

20/02 Right of appeal against redundancy

The Director of HR confirmed that he had sent a template letter and a recent update on a planned new workflow. Dr Schroeter agreed to make colleagues aware of it for information.

The Director of HR reported that no appeals against ending of fixed term contracts had been received in the last academic year, but that he would seek to give examples of previous appeals which had been received and how they had been processed. The Chair expressed an interest in getting the joint panel involved in this process and how to monitor fixed term contracts and their endings. It was queried what would happen in the current circumstances if there was an appeal against the end of a fixed term contact, and how it would be handled

remotely.

20/04 Hay Review of Grade 9 non-professorial staff

The President of UCU confirmed that they had received some further information on the Hay Review and were conferring with members to see if there were any further queries.

20/04 Grievance policy review

Dr Schroeter confirmed that [redacted, section 40] had agreed to be involved in this review.

20/04 Request for observer status at Council

The Vice-Chancellor had made a formal request to the President of Council that the incumbent of President of Reading UCU was invited to attend Council meetings as an observer and was waiting for a response.

20/11 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor reported on various subjects:

Student recruitment and financial support

The Vice-Chancellor clarified that in his report to Senate there was a degree of uncertainty about what financial support might be received from the government for HEIs and what conditions would be imposed regarding student recruitment. The OfS had now confirmed that institutions can only recruit their forecast numbers plus 5% and there would be stringent regulations to ensure that institutions stayed within these limits.

In terms of funding, the government was unlikely to put any significant cash into the HE system. There was a potential for additional research funding, but this would have to be directed towards research to improve the social economic recovery after Covid-19, for retaining Early Career Researchers and PhD students and to make the research system more efficient. It was clear from this that the government had views about what it values most in the HE sector and wants to ensure that HEIs are supported in line with this. The long-term aim of the government was to increase R&D funding by 2.4% of GDP, which can only happen if PhD students are developed.

There is an insolvency regime in place if an institution was in serious financial trouble, but it was more likely that the government would take more direct control over potential mergers to offer stability. The scheme was only to be utilised as a last resort, to protect the rights of students. Reading was not in a position where it was likely to be forced to merge with another but could potentially be asked to accept a merger with a failing HEI or FE college in Berkshire.

Whilst a formal bail-out of HEIs was not on offer, it was expected that the Treasury would deal with any failing HEIs on a one-to-one basis. In the case of London Metropolitan University, the University Council and Vice-Chancellor were asked to resign and new posts were put in place. Two-thirds of its programmes were cut.

Major Recovery Team and Phased Return

The Major Incident Team (MIT) had now become a Major Recovery Team (MRT), demonstrating that the University had moved from dealing with an emergency to planning about how to put systems in place to get the University up and running. The Director of HR confirmed that there was a meeting later today involving UCU and the Staff Forum to provide an overview of the

work of the MRT.

MRT was currently looking at how to arrange a phased return to campus and ensure the wellbeing of staff and prioritising key activities, taking into account emerging government guidance. Consideration was also needed about how to deal with actual or suspected cases of the virus once staff had returned to work. The government had published a 60 page report alongside 8 workplace guides, most of which applied to the University. In each guide, there were five principles to adhere to:

- 1) to share a Covid-19 risk assessment with employees – The University had drafted safety note 76 which was an overarching document covering all University activity. Detailed risk assessments for specific activities would sit underneath. There would be a separate guide relating to teaching.
- 2) hygiene and cleaning
- 3) reasonable steps were in place to allow staff to work from home – HR will be running a Pulse survey to ask staff about home working and identify any issues
- 4) social distancing of 2m
- 5) where 2m distancing could not be adhered to, everything practical should be done to manage the risk.

There were 3 sub-groups of MRT:

- 1) Student Welfare, led by Paddy Woodman and Matt White - looking at accommodation, food, student services
- 2) Staff Welfare, led by Claire Rolstone and John Brady - reviewing existing arrangements to make sure they were fit for purpose, updating all wellbeing webpages to include specific advice re Covid-19 and working with the Disability staff network to make sure that the immediate needs of disabled staff were met. Occupational health was still working, staff networks were continuing to support staff and EAP was still available 24/7.
- 3) Estates and Infrastructure, led by Janis Pich and Stuart Brown – considering safe use of common spaces, redesign of workplaces, cleaning and hygiene building maintenance. Currently two thirds of buildings were open or at least accessible.

Remote working

UEB was considering ways to encourage staff to take annual leave and around revised practices for accrual. HR was mindful that colleagues may need to continue to work remotely for a prolonged period of time and so were working with H&S and DTS to ensure that staff were fully supported. A new module had been created to support staff with remote working and a Pulse survey would be released to all staff shortly.

UCU asked that further consideration be given to vulnerable BAME members and those shielding and how their situations will be managed. They asked that extensions be provided for marking deadlines as many members were under pressure trying to meet the 15 day deadline. It was suggested that mental health support be provided for both staff and students who require it when they return to the University.

Professor Collins asked that information be added to the University website on raising awareness of domestic abuse during lockdown. The Director of HR agreed, and will work with Professor Collins and [redacted, section 40] on this.

ACTION: The Director of HR

Restructuring

The Vice-Chancellor reported that UEB was working on a plan for the next three years, in response to the predicted effects of COVID-19, but also beyond. A paper would be submitted to the Strategy and Finance Committee in the first instance, and once approved to Council via the Senate for comment. He expected formal consultation to commence in mid June, immediately after Council had made its decision. He encouraged the formation of a Redundancy Avoidance Group (RAG) to work up to the beginning of formal consultation. He stated that he, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Director of HR would form the management membership of the RAG. The President of UCU welcomed the establishment of the RAG, and asked that in variation to the Restructuring Policy, there could be up to five rather than three UCU members, in order to spread the burden of work. The Director of HR indicated that this would be acceptable. The Vice-Chancellor advised that he would also invite the Staff Forum to have similar early discussions as representatives of colleagues on grades 1 to 5. The UCU Regional Official confirmed the Director of HR's statement that the RAG would be superseded by the Consultation Group, the establishment of which was a procedural requirement should Council decide that there was a potential for redundancies.

The President of Reading UCU asked a series of questions about the University's proposals, supplemented by questions from other members of the committee. The Vice-Chancellor and the Director of HR made the following statements in response:

- (a) The consultation would be meaningful, and could be extended beyond the statutory minimum of 45 days if required;
- (b) UEB had not finalised for its part what should be in the consultation paper, and whatever was submitted to Council would be further informed by the Strategy and Finance Committee;
- (c) However, the level of savings consequential upon COVID-19 would need to be in the order of £100m over the next three years, with in the region of half of that saving required in 20-21;
- (d) The consultation paper would set out the relationship for the proposed savings between staff and non-staff costs, and the rationale for that relationship;
- (e) Cashflow would need to be protected to ensure that the University could meet all of its obligations to paying staffing salaries, bills and so on;
- (f) Compulsory redundancy would form part of the consultation paper given the scale of the financial challenge. Voluntary redundancy was not thought likely to be attractive in the current environment. The UCU Regional Official, while recognising the difficulties of a VR scheme given its financial implications, encouraged the University to ensure that it was part of the consultation;
- (g) Staff on fixed term contracts would be considered as part of the consultation process, recognising that the University would need to continue to take management decisions as necessary; there was and would not be a blanket statement that all fixed-term contracts would not be renewed;

- (h) The potential negative publicity of the University's need to make significant savings and its effect on students and applicants was being actively managed;
- (i) UCU's request that an Equality Impact Assessment would be part of the process was noted;
- (j) As mentioned in the Vice-Chancellor's e-mail on the subject, he was not prepared to agree that Reading UCU could share the University's management accounts with their proposed external advisor, given the University's experience of his previous dealings with the University; rather, he repeated his offer that Reading UCU pass their detailed financial questions to the University's Director of Finance, Andrew Grice, who was well placed to provide the explanations sought;
- (k) In terms of financial impact on this year, originally a £20m shortfall forecast from refunded halls fees had been reforecast as £10m because more students than expected had stayed in halls; an additional £5m shortfall from catering and conference income was also forecast;
- (l) The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that there were no issues relating to loans currently held by the University and that he would check that the revolving £50M credit facility was fully utilised.

ACTION: Vice-Chancellor

- (m) As part of the work of the Major Recovery Team, access to equipment to support remote and on-line learning was being prioritised. In addition, staff would be able to book space on campus in order to record their lectures whilst adhering to social distancing rules – it was hoped this would be set up during June.
- (n) The Vice-Chancellor would provide Reading UCU with a copy of the University's Risk Register, a statement of costs on Blackboard and Canvas during COVID-19 as compared to usual, and an explanation of the governance arrangements for UPP;

20/12 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU advised that matters in her report had been covered during the discussion under the previous agenda item. She emphasised the importance of ensuring reasonable adjustments for staff working remotely. She promised to circulate a written report on additional matters should she on reflection so determine.

20/13 Report from the Sub-Committee considering the Reading UCU local claim

The UCU Regional Official reported on a positive meeting recently held between himself, Dr Schroeter and the Director of HR, which had concluded that there were no major matters unresolved in relation to the claim about sessional lecturers and teaching fellows. He expected the matter to be put to Reading UCU members soon before being considered by the UCU at national level.

20/14 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee received and noted the Report from Staffing Committee, which had met on 11 February 2020.

20/15 Dates of meetings in the Session 2019-20

It was noted that meetings of the Joint University / UCU Committee in the Session 2020-21 have been scheduled provisionally for:

Thursday 5 November 2020 at 2 pm

Tuesday 2 February 2021 at 10.30 am

Wednesday 19 May 2021 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>	