

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

23/01 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 7 February 2023 at 2.00 pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Dr R J Messer (Chair)
Professor A Charlton-Perez
Dr K Henderson
Mr S Hunt
Professor F Hwang
Dr A Laville
Mrs C Rolstone
Mrs S Thornton

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Mr Allen and Mrs Rowe. The Committee welcomed Mrs Johnson, HR Advisory Lead to the meeting to discuss item 2.

23/02 The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 22/19 (22/14):HR System

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) provided the Committee with an update on the progress made with re-tendering the University's HR system (Trent). She confirmed that the new provider is NTT Business Solutions and the new system is SAP.

The project team were working closely with NTT Business Solutions colleagues to commence the build process. She explained that there are slightly different build processes for the payroll system versus the core system. For the core system, this requires consideration of the whole system on a field by field basis, plus consideration as to how the data in Trent can be migrated to the new systems. The design and build process will go through three iterations, with trials and testing between each iteration, involving members of the HR teams and other users.

She explained that three parallel pay runs alongside the normal pay run will take place in August, September and October with a go live date for the payroll and core system scheduled for November 2023. Whilst there are contingency plans in place it was important that there was no slippage in timeline. This was mainly due to the fact that the University's contract with Trent ends in November 2023.

The go live dates for the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) are not scheduled until early in 2024, in line with the end dates for the current contracts.

The Committee thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) for the update.

Minute 22/20:HR Strategy

The Committee noted that a spreadsheet setting out the future HR projects for the next year was contained in the Committee papers. The Committee welcomed having sight of the HR projects and asked if the Director of Human Resources was planning to discuss the HR Strategy at a future meeting of the Leadership Group. The Director of Human Resources said she would discuss this suggestion with the Vice-Chancellor in the first instance.

The Committee discussed one of the strands within the staff engagement and wellbeing theme, namely the running of staff surveys. At this stage it wasn't certain if a staff survey could take place in 2023 due to the need to identify and contract with a new supplier. It was confirmed that any survey would need to be run by an external organisation given the need to maintain confidentiality. The Director of Human Resources explained that it was also easier to benchmark against comparable institutions.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) usefully explained the factors that determine whether benchmarking data can be used or not.

Minute 22/24:Closure days 2024/25

The Committee noted that the closure days for 2024-25 had now been uploaded onto the HR webpage.

23/03 Disciplinary Procedure

The HR Advisory Lead explained that HR is in the process of reviewing all relevant HR procedures. She confirmed that as part of the review of this procedure the UCU and Staff Forum had both been consulted.

She went through the proposed amendments as detailed in the schedule of amendments document. She highlighted three of the main changes, namely:

- Annex 1 - examples of gross misconduct – addition of examples of sexual harassment to make clear reference to this type of behaviour. This mirrors the wording used in the Student Disciplinary procedure;
- Investigations – at the request of the UCU, the paragraph had been expanded to include more description when a companion will be considered for an investigation meeting. The aim is to provide clarity about the circumstances when a request will be accepted;

- Suspension – the concept of alternatives to suspension had been added to incorporate revised guidance from ACAS on suspension.

The Committee welcomed the proposed changes and highlighted a small number of minor changes.

The HR Advisory Lead thanked the Committee for their comments. She confirmed that the procedure would now be implemented following approval by the appropriate University body.

The intention is to move onto other procedures, with the performance management procedure next.

23/04 Recruitment Challenges update

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that at its meeting in February 2022 she had reported on the recruitment challenges facing the University following the covid-19 pandemic and the work being undertaken to address some of these challenges.

She reminded the Committee of some of the ongoing challenges including:

- a lack of quality applicants for key professionally qualified and /or highly technical roles;
- whilst the number of applications for Grade 4/5 Administrative roles has improved the recruitment and retention of these roles remains a challenge with relatively high turnover, particularly for Grade 4 roles – the University continues to offer good career development opportunities;
- recruitment challenges remain for hospitality and trade roles given the broader challenges affecting the sector;

The Director of Human Resources reminded the Committee of the work undertaken by the University to address some of these challenges, including:

- The carefully considered use of market supplements (the University already has a market supplement policy);
- Advertising and appointing within the contribution points where appropriate;
- Increasing the use of secondment opportunities across the University;
- Where appropriate, the use of bonuses – a “golden hello” one-off bonus for new colleagues or a “golden handcuff” to encourage the retention of colleagues, particularly those in fixed term / project roles.

In addition work is ongoing on projects to consider the impact on recruitment and retention of, for example, real living wage rates; increasing the use of apprenticeship and trainee schemes; reviewing reward opportunities and developing more progression routes. The impact of high workloads was also touched on during the discussions.

She sought the Committee's view on the University's terms and conditions offered to staff on Grades 1 to 5 and those on Grades 6 and above, and whether they should be more closely aligned. Specifically, she sought the Committee's view on:

- i. whether we should consider reducing the standard working week for staff on Grades 1 to 5 from 36 hours to 35 hours;
- ii. whether we should increase the annual leave entitlement for staff on Grades 1 to 5 from 21 days (increasing to 25 days after 4 years' service) to 25 or 26 days from day one to bring it in line with staff on Grades 6 and above.

The Committee welcomed the update and broadly supported the proposal to consider a review of the terms and conditions for staff on Grades 1 to 5. There was broad support for being more radical than the suggestions proposed.

The Committee acknowledged that increasing annual leave entitlement and reducing the standard working week for staff on Grades 1 to 5 wouldn't necessarily improve staff recruitment but it may make staff on these grades feel more valued and improve retention.

It was felt that reward schemes were not really the solution when considering Grade 4/5 Administrative roles as the data suggests that newly appointed staff in these roles are progressing or in some cases leaving in the first 6 to 12 months.

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

23/05 Pay and Pensions update

The Director of Human Resources reported that the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) had concluded a series of negotiations with the trade unions in respect of the 2023-24 pay round. She confirmed that UCEA had made a pay offer recognising that the cost of living pressures falls disproportionately on the lower paid staff. The pay offer sets out the intention to make a percentage of the uplift as an early interim pay uplift from February 2023, with the remainder of the uplift being awarded in August 2023.

The pay offer (a sliding scale of between approximately 5% and 8%) has been rejected by UCU, and a series of dispute resolution meetings are currently being held. She informed the Committee that if there is no agreement at the end of these negotiations, UCEA can recommend to employers to pay the award.

The Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an update on the industrial action by the UCU taking place in February and March 2023, in relation to pay and pension reform (although at Reading the UCU is only in dispute regarding pension reforms). She confirmed that to date 187 people had declared participation in the strike action on Wednesday 1 February, and so far she had received notifications from 33 people who took part in strike action on Thursday 9th February and 20 people who took part on Friday 10th February.

She confirmed that the UCU would be balloting their members again to extend their mandate beyond March 2023. In terms of action short of a strike she indicated that the University was continuing to monitor the situation and was looking at contingency plans should the ASOS include a marking and assessment boycott.

The Director of Human Resources reported that in relation to the pension dispute, the key development would be the next USS valuation which is due to take place in March 2023.

23/06 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2022/23 Academic Session:

Wednesday 26 April 2023	11.30 am to 1.30 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 14 June 2023	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm