

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

24/01 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Tuesday 6 February 2024 at 14.00 in Room 212A, Whiteknights House

Present:

Dr R Messer (Chair)

Professor A Charlton-Perez

Mr E Gregory

Dr K Henderson

Professor F Hwang

Professor T Reid

Mrs C Rolstone

Mrs J Rowe

Mrs S Thornton

Dr A-M Van Dodeweerd

Mr A J Twyford (Secretary)

Also in attendance:

Mrs N Johnson, HR Advisory Lead

Apologies were received from Dr A Laville.

The Committee welcomed Mr Gregory, President, RUSU.

24/02 The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 were approved, noting that Mrs Thornton did not attend the meeting.

Arising from the minutes:

23/18: Membership, Terms of Reference and Disclosure of Interests

The Committee noted that the Secretary to the Committee informed the University's Risk Management and Business Continuity Officer of the Committee's concerns following the University's decision to pause the reward processes during the 2023/24 academic year and the impact this may have in respect of Risk 1. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that this matter would be picked up by the Risk Management Group.

The Committee noted that the Secretary to the Committee asked the Head of Governance Services if the University could produce a one page overview of the

University's Committee Structure, to help better understand and have transparency of the Committee structure. The University Secretary confirmed that Governance Services were working on an interactive version of the University's Committee Structure.

Minute 23/19 (23/08, 23/02, 22/19 22/14): HR System

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) provided the Committee with an update on the work undertaken to re-tender the University's HR Systems (Trent).

As mentioned at the last meeting, she reported that it had been decided to extend the HRMS project go-live date into 2024. The focus currently is on the main HR/Payroll system and early stage testing, alongside building the Learning Management System (LMS/UoRLearn) and the Applicant Tracking System (ATS/JobTrain). The Project Committee are working closely with the new provider, NTT Business Solutions.

The University Secretary confirmed that following the launch of the new HR system the University would consider lessons learned. He acknowledged that for business continuity purposes it was important not to rely on a few key people.

The Director of Human Resources reassured colleagues that the University had purchased a product that is a known market leader, and was a more integrated system than the current system.

The Assistant Director of Human Resources (People and Talent) confirmed that those colleagues who had put themselves forward as "champions" were continuing to use and test the product. She also reported that members of the Project Committee were working with Communications to develop a communications plan, and this would include a process for effective communications with stakeholders and the wider staff community.

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

Minute 23/22: Immigration update

The Director of Human Resources reported that since the last meeting the UK Government had announced wide-ranging changes to the visa costs aimed at reducing legal migration to the UK. The measures included increasing the skilled worker earnings threshold by nearly 50% from £26,200 to £38,700, ending the 20% salary discount for occupations on the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) and increasing the minimum income requirements for those joining on a family visa to £38,700.

She stated that colleagues in Human Resources were working through the changes and in particular were looking at how these changes may impact our ability to recruit and retain staff at the University of Reading. She confirmed that the University

would continue to feed any comments and views to UCEA who would in turn continue to engage with the UK Government.

It was agreed that a further paper would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee.

24/03 Review of the Reward Committee process – an update

The HR Advisory Lead provided the Committee with an update on the approaches being worked on following the discussion at this Committee last Summer. The proposals were:

- i. Removal of the current Reward Committee structure and for pay progression decisions (i.e. accelerated increments / contribution points) to be made by Heads of School and Directorate.

Heads of School and Directorate would be accountable for decisions made, and would have discretion to involve a defined group of managers to assist them in considering cases and making decisions.

A suggested timetable for considering cases was proposed.

- ii. Improve the process and clarify the criteria relating to Grade 6-7 Research staff merit-based promotions and identify an alternative career development pathway for Professional Services employees.

Assessment criteria will be drawn up and agreed. The criteria will be based on that contained in the Academic Probation criteria which identifies the minimum expectations for a Grade 7 academic (in relation to research and citizenship and leadership capability and performance). HR are in the process of seeking input from the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development and a representative group of Heads of School and Research Deans.

As above, Heads of School would be accountable for decisions made, and would be advised to involve and seek input from the relevant Research Dean and Research Division Lead.

It is proposed that there is no set timetable in the academic year when the proposals are reviewed for approval – it is envisaged that this will give the flexibility Schools need to recognise where research staff have developed the appropriate skills and capabilities in a timely manner to enable opportunities for promotion to Grade 7.

She indicated that Human Resources would continue to seek input from relevant Heads of School and Directorate on the proposed reward approaches with a view to

finalising the new arrangements and bringing back a paper to a future meeting of the Staffing Committee.

The following comments were made:

The Committee discussed next steps as one comment was that some Heads may not have been given the opportunity to consult on the proposals. It was noted that Human Resources would continue to seek the views of a selection of Heads of School and Directorate in relation to the process for pay progression (consolidated salary increases) and would involve the Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development and colleagues in the School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences (SMPCS) in relation to the process relating to Grade 6-7 staff merit-based promotion. This would be followed by a more wider engagement with Heads of School and Heads of Directorate. The general view was that continued engagement and discussion was sensible. One comment was that in seeking feedback, it may also be worthwhile engaging with colleagues who have recently been through the Reward Committee process.

Some colleagues felt uncomfortable with Heads of School and Directorate being accountable for decisions – they felt they didn't have the appropriate levels of expertise. Other colleagues welcomed this proposal. The HR Advisory Lead reiterated that the proposal allowed Heads of School and Directorate to have discretion to involve a defined group of managers to assist them in considering cases – the intended process fits into the distributed leadership model.

It was noted that the proposed process relating to Grade 6-7 Research staff merit-based promotions recommends that there is no set timetable in the academic year when the proposals are reviewed for approval. One comment was that this felt a bit vague as applicants wouldn't have anything to aim for. The HR Advisory Lead said that Schools and Directorates were free to set their own timetable.

24/04 Embedding Change Management Principles

The University Secretary reported on the work undertaken by the Change and Continuous Improvement team to embed change management principles and practices at the University. The team have engaged with relevant colleagues across the University and the paper has been shared with the Planning and Change Board, the University Executive Board, the Heads of Directorate, and with some members of Council. He was pleased to report that the paper has been positively received.

He confirmed that the paper would be shared and discussed with the Leadership Forum and with Heads of School in due course.

The Committee welcomed the paper and unanimously supported the work being carried out on change management principles and practice. It was acknowledged that the University is facing financial challenges that require changes to be made at

rapid pace, and it was important to ensure that the impacts on people are properly considered and managed.

The University Secretary thanked the Committee for their comments.

24/05 Employee Surveys

The Director of Human Resources reported that in recent years the University had used an external organisation (Capita) to conduct employee engagement surveys in 2018, 2019 and 2020. She stated that Capita had withdrawn from the market and no longer offer this service.

The University was now considering the best approach to conducting employee engagement surveys,

She confirmed that it was unlikely the University would run an all staff survey, and that would allow the University to be more agile and to obtain the views of a particular staff group or a particular topic.

The Director of Human Resources was aware this would have implications for DTS and was mindful that the University already runs lots of surveys. She reported that the University was currently considering tender options and at this point in time it was difficult to provide more precise timelines for running employee engagement surveys.

The Committee thanked the Director of Human Resources for the update and made the following points:

Why has the University decided to ask an external provider to carry out the surveys as opposed to conducting surveys in-house? The Director of Human Resources said the main reason relates to confidentiality. Survey's are anonymised and confidential and sometimes staff are less likely to complete a survey if it run in-house given their perceived concerns about confidentiality.

Full staff surveys have tended to take a lot of time and resource, for example when analysing the data and results. The Committee agreed that when conducting employee surveys in the future the University should carefully consider the scope and aims of the survey.

There was widespread agreement that this Committee was a suitable place to oversee the governance of future employee engagement surveys.

The Director of Human Resources confirmed that it would be possible to benchmark against other HE Institutions. However, it would not be possible to use the historical benchmark data from previous employee engagement surveys.

24/06 Closure Days 2025/26

The Committee considered and agreed the closure days for the 2025/26 academic session. To avoid the University opening for one day on the 2 January 2026 and incurring additional operational costs, it was agreed that there would be 5 closure days over the Christmas period and 1 closure day over the Easter period:

Tuesday 23 December 2025: Normal working day

Wednesday 24 December 2025: Closure Day 1

Thursday 25 December 2025: Christmas Day

Friday 26 December 2025: Boxing Day

Monday 29 December 2025: Closure Day 2

Tuesday 30 December 2025: Closure Day 3

Wednesday 31 December 2025: Closure Day 4

Thursday 1 January 2026: New Year's Day

Friday 2 January 2026: Closure Day 5

Wednesday 1 April 2026: Normal working day

Thursday 2 April 2026: Closure Day 6

Friday 3 April 2026: Good Friday

Monday 6 April 2026: Easter Monday

Tuesday 7 April 2026: normal working day

Action: The Secretary to the Committee to inform the Head of Governance that the closure days for 2025/26 have been approved (5+1) and to update the relevant HR webpage

The Committee also discussed the inconsistency of practice across the University on the last day before the Christmas closure. On the last day in some areas staff are required to work the whole day, but in other areas staff are allowed to go home early. It was agreed that the University Secretary would write to managers to re-emphasise that staff should not be allowed to leave early on the last day before Christmas.

Action: The University Secretary to write to managers to re-emphasise that staff should not be allowed to leave early on the last day before Christmas

It was mentioned that one reason why staff were allowed to leave early might be due to the heating being turned off at lunchtime on the last day before the Christmas closure period. The University Secretary agreed to write to the Director of Estates to ask that the heating should not be turned off especially early.

Action: The University Secretary to write to the Director of Estates to ask that the heating shouldn't be turned off especially early on the last day before Christmas

24/07 Pay and Pensions update

The Director of Human Resources reported that the 2024/25 pay bargaining round had just commenced but was not yet at the stage to begin consultation with the national trades unions.

She indicated that she had had initial discussions with the UEB in relation to the proposed changes to the National Living Wage (NLW), to be effective from 1 April 2024. This would likely result in a revision to the local grading structure to Grades 1 and 2 and possibility of further grade boundary changes which are subject to discussion with the Staff Forum.

As reported at the last meeting from January 2024 colleagues in the USS pension scheme (Grades 6 and above) were now benefiting from a decrease to employee contributions and employer contributions have also decreased. She stated that she had discussed with the UEB the disparity with those colleagues on the lower grades (Grades 1 to 5) who have not enjoyed the same uplift to their take home pay.

24/08 Employment legislation changes

The HR Advisory Lead reported on some employment legislation changes relating to flexible working, maternity leave and carers leave that will come into force from the 6 April 2024. Given these timings she proposed to make changes to relevant HR procedures and guidance and to seek the Committee's approval by circulation. The University Secretary on behalf of the Committee agreed to this suggestion.

24/09 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2023/24 Academic Session:

Wednesday 24 April 2024	11.30 am to 1.30 pm (reserve)
Wednesday 12 June 2024	2.00 pm to 4.00 pm