

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

24/10 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Wednesday 24 April 2024 at 11.30 am in Room 212A, Whiteknights House

Present:

Dr R Messer (Chair)
Professor A Charlton-Perez
Mr E Gregory
Dr K Henderson
Professor F Hwang
Professor A Laville
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
Mr J Russell, HR Operations Lead
Rachel Thorns, HR Partner

24/11 The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 24/02 (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 replace the University's HR System (Trent).

She confirmed that whilst day to day work on the project was progressing, there had also been a significant period of re-planning to map additional requirements (such as related to Campus Jobs) and the work required towards the revised go live date in late Summer. The re-planning is being reviewed and confirmed with senior stakeholders during April with decisions to be ratified about delivery timelines and resources, both internal and external.

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that a change management and communications plan had been drawn up and it was anticipated that organisation-wide communications would begin shortly with regular updates thereafter. She expressed her appreciation to the many colleagues who had put in a huge amount of time and effort on the project, including colleagues in HR, DTS and other colleagues who had been involved in the project.

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

Minute 24/02 (23/22): Immigration update

The HR Operations Lead provided the Committee with a verbal update following the immigration rules changes from the 4th April 2024 in respect of the Skilled Worker visa sponsorship route.

He reported that two different sets of rules now exist:

- New Skilled Worker applicants – including those switching from other visa types (student, graduate visas);
- Current Skilled Worker visa holders – including those who held a Skilled Worker visa prior to the 4th April and can extend (with the same employer) or switch Skilled Worker visa to another employer.

He explained that having two sets of rules had created significant additional demands for members of the HR team as well as for those line managers who recruit large numbers of visa holders and for the colleagues/candidates themselves.

He reminded the Committee that New Skilled Workers visa holders will have to be paid £38,700 pa. However, the rules now include some exceptions which will improve our ability to recruit and retain postdoctoral staff (PDRA) at the University of Reading. He explained that these exceptions (referred to as tradeable points) will allow us to appoint a PDRA at the bottom or close to the bottom of Grade 6 – this includes individuals who hold a relevant PhD, or are PhD holders in a STEM subject and are in a PDRA role.

He indicated that the new rules still posed problems for Grade 6 Professional & Managerial roles as most of these roles do not require the appointee to have a PhD. Dr van Dodeweerd confirmed that this was a real issue in her Function where they have had difficulties recruiting to certain roles and have needed to appoint non-UK nationals.

The Committee discussed the potential legal implications of these new immigration rules in respect of equal pay and race (including nationality) and the Chief Legal Officer and Director of Planning Governance and Legal confirmed that Legal Services would be able to provide advice.

The HR Operations Lead indicated he would provide the Committee with a paper at a future meeting setting out the impact of these changes on our ability to recruit and retain staff.

Minute 24/08: Employment Legislation Changes

The Committee noted that the UEB approved a request for the Carer's Leave provision to be paid. The new provision for Carer's Leave became statute from 6 April 2024.

24/12 Review of the Reward Committee process – an update on progress

The HR Partner provided the Committee with an update on the approaches being worked on following the discussion at the last Committee meeting.

In particular, the views of the Committee were sought in relation to the new accelerated pay progression procedure.

The Committee welcomed the requirement to limit the additional documentation when making a submission, in the interests of consistency.

It was noted that self-nominations would not be considered, and that proposals would normally be made by an appropriate line manager. It was also noted that Heads of School / Directorate would be accountable for decisions made – a question was asked in relation to what happens in the event that a Head of School / Directorate is the line manager?

The HR Partner suggested that in this event, as with other cases, the Head of School / Directorate would be expected to take appropriate advice from their HR Partner.

She confirmed that she had sought input and feedback from a selection of relevant Heads. In terms of next steps she confirmed that she would be formally communicating with Heads of School / Directorate on the new pay progression procedures and timelines for implementation, with a wider communication / announcement to all staff due to take place over the summer vacation.

The Committee were informed that it would not be possible to move the proposal forms to an online system in time for the 2024/25 academic year, and that Word documents would be used in the first year.

The Committee thanked the HR Partner for the update and asked that she bring a paper back to the Committee after the first year of running the new procedures to include lessons learned and reflections.

The HR Partner agreed to provide the Committee with a further update on the new procedure for Grade 6-7 Research staff promotions at its meeting in June 2024.

24/13 New Terms of Reference for Staffing Committee

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that a recent review of the University Remuneration Committee had resulted in the Committee (now titled People and Remuneration Committee) now having oversight of a range of people related issues, including staff wellbeing, development and support, workforce planning, employee engagement, change management and organisational capability, leadership and talent development, and succession planning.

It was agreed that a similar review of the Terms of Reference of the Staffing Committee would be undertaken, and the Director of Human Resources provided the Committee with an overview of the proposed changes, namely:

- The Committee would become the People & Culture Committee;
- The purpose of the People & Culture Committee will be to ensure colleague engagement in HR and People related strategies, policies and practices;
- The Committee will seek to provide opportunities for colleagues to contribute their experience and perspectives to help to shape activities, priorities and projects to positively impact the staff community and staff experience;
- The membership of the Committee could be extended, whilst maintaining current members, to ensure wide representation from Heads of School and Heads of Directorate/Function plus up to 4 other Senior Members of University Staff from across Schools and Professional Services;
 - Standing invitations will also be available for the Dean for D&I, the University Occupational Health Manager (in respect of staff wellbeing), and the Senior HR Lead Team;
 - Other colleagues will be invited to participate in discussions as relevant to the topics.

The Director of Human Resources stated that the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee currently had oversight for staff wellbeing and it is proposed that staff wellbeing would now fall within the remit of the People & Culture Committee – she confirmed that she had consulted with the Chair of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee and with the Director of Health & Safety Services who were both supportive of this proposal.

She said that it was proposed that the People & Culture Committee would take effect from the start of the new academic session (2024/25). The Committee was asked to discuss and consider the draft terms of reference.

The Committee welcomed the proposed changes to the terms of reference, and to the membership. There was some discussion on the size of the Committee, with general agreement that it shouldn't be overly large. Colleagues welcomed the proposal to invite guest speakers as appropriate.

The Director of Human Resources responded to a question in relation to career / personal development and confirmed that this area would fall within the remit of this Committee – she clarified that colleagues in the People Development team had overall responsibility for career / personal development.

The Committee welcomed the proposal for this Committee to have oversight of staff wellbeing and agreed that in order to support staff wellbeing it was important to obtain the views of staff.

The Director of Human Resources thanked the Committee for their views and would revise the terms of reference accordingly.

24/14 University Mental Health Charter – an update

The HR Advisory Lead provided the Committee with an update following the University's decision to sign up to the University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) Award in 2022. The UMHC framework provides a set of evidence-informed principles to support Universities to adopt a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing for staff and students.

She explained that in April 2023 the University submitted a self-assessment of our progress against the framework set out in the Charter, and received formal ratification on the outcome of our submission in February 2024.

She informed the Committee that this matter had been considered by the Committee on Student Experience & Development (CoSED), and the University Board for Teaching & Learning and Student Experience (UBTLSE) where the following was agreed:

The Committee welcomed the update and agreed that it was important for this Committee be consulted on any proposal

It was further acknowledged that any strategy document should be meaningful, relevant and useful to the University.

Professor Charlton-Perez reported that his School (School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences) were running an event focusing on mental health.

The HR Advisory Lead agreed to keep the Committee informed of progress

It was further agreed that a summary of the recommendations of the UMHC assessment panel in respect of staff wellbeing/staff development would be shared with the Committee.

Action: The Committee Secretary to share the recommendations of the UMHC assessment panel in respect of staff wellbeing/staff development with the Committee

24/15 Remaining dates of meetings for the 2023/24 Academic Session:

Wednesday 12 June 2024

2.00 pm to 4.00 pm