

THE UNIVERSITY OF READING

STAFFING COMMITTEE

24/16 A meeting of the Staffing Committee was held on Wednesday 12 June 2024 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2, Whiteknights House

Present:

Dr R Messer (Chair)
Professor A Charlton-Perez
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:

Mr J Russell, HR Operations Lead
Rachel Thorns, HR Partner

24/17 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2024 were approved.

Arising from the minutes:

Minute 24/13: New Terms of Reference for the Staffing Committee

The Committee noted that the UEB had been asked to approve the new terms of reference for a new People & Culture Committee to take effect from the start of the 2024/25 academic session and will be considering this matter at its next meeting.

Minute 24/14: University Mental Health Charter – an update

It was noted that the recommendations of the UMHC assessment panel in respect of staff wellbeing and staff development had been shared with the Committee.

24/18 Immigration update

The HR Operations Lead presented a paper that set out the cost of obtaining a visa and associated fees for new staff joining the University and the current financial support provided by the University of Reading compared to other local Universities.

The paper highlighted:

- the number of Certificates of Sponsorship issued by the University since 2022;
- the sponsorship costs (split between the individual and the University) including some worked examples;
- the financial assistance provided by the University of Reading (including the Visa Loan scheme, the Visa Expense scheme; and the relocation assistance scheme) including the number of claims made against each scheme since 2022;
- a summary of the financial support provided by other Universities.

The Committee welcomed the background information and discussed two questions:

- i. Noting the considerable financial pressures on the University, should the current policy be changed to provide more financial support to colleagues requiring visas?
- ii. Should the current relocation policy be changed to provide similar levels of support irrespective of grade?

The Committee made the following comments:

The current arrangements for providing financial support are a disincentive in some areas, and for some roles. Professor Charlton-Perez gave as an example the difficulties of recruiting high quality early career researchers (ECRs) in his School;

There was broad agreement that the University's relocation assistance arrangements need to be reviewed. Currently, the amount of relocation assistance is determined by Grade and whether the prospective employee is relocating within the UK or overseas – rather than focusing on the difficulties with recruiting to a vacant role. It was noted that in the past relocation assistance was only available when recruiting to senior (Grade 9/Professorial) roles;

The Committee discussed the value of building in a discretionary element to the existing relocation / visa financial support arrangements recognising that a clear rationale would be required in order to justify any decisions taken – for example, to justify why relocation costs have been agreed for a postdoctoral fellow in one School but not in another School;

The Committee noted the financial support provided by other Universities, and discussed the benefits of being able to offer additional “softer” support to new staff such as providing support with finding schools, accommodation etc. It was noted that there are specialist relocation providers that can offer this service – however this would be a significant additional cost;

Currently, visa expenses can be reimbursed for employees and dependents, but only where specifically stated in the grant award. The Director of Research Services stated that some grant funders were now making it difficult to claim visa costs;

The HR Operations Lead thanked the Committee for their views and agreed to consider these when putting forward proposals to UEB.

24/19 Review of the Reward Committee process – update on progress

Rachel Thorns, HR Partner provided the Committee with an update on the new procedure for Grade 6-7 Research staff promotions. She confirmed that the new procedure had been circulated to all Heads of School and the Dean of Henley Business School for comments and feedback. She had also reviewed the draft procedure with a selection of Grade 6-7 Research staff for their views.

She summarised the main changes to the process:

- Four promotion assessment criteria have been identified;
- The assessment criteria align to relevant criteria set out in the Academic Probation procedure, which provides criteria against Research, Teaching and Citizenship / Leadership for new Grade 7 Lecturers;
- All Grade 6 research staff will be eligible to apply once they have completed 2 years' service;
- There is no set timetable in the academic year when the proposals are reviewed for approval;
- The application process will require a Grade 6 Researcher to complete a G6-G7 promotion application form, and provide a copy of their CV with publication record;
- The Head of School will be accountable for the decision made although they will be encouraged to involve senior colleagues from within their School, or from the wider University to assist them in considering cases and making decisions;
- The Reward Coordinator will action the increase in grade and the formal written notification of the promotion to the employee or record the unsuccessful case;
- On the application form there will be a word limit to enable candidates to provide focused evidence against the assessment criteria and to ensure consistency of information that is being considered by decision makers.

The Committee thanked the HR Partner for the update and made a number of comments.

Professor Charlton-Perez asked how this process relates to the process for making roles permanent as this was an issue in his School. The Director of Human Resources confirmed that consideration of grade was necessarily distinct and separate to consideration of permanency. She noted that HR were separately considering this matter as part of a longer term project.

The Committee noted that applications would only be eligible from colleagues who have been employed at the University and have held a Grade 6 research position for at least 2 years. It considered whether someone who has been employed as a Grade 6 researcher at the University for less than 2 years but has held a Grade 6 research position at another HE institution could be considered eligible, noting that applicants with a shorter length of service/position will require exceptional justification. The Committee agreed that this example could count as exceptional justification.

The Committee noted that there is no right of appeal and HR were asked to review this and consider whether this should be the case and/or whether staff should have an avenue to reasonably raise concerns about the application of the procedure.

The HR Partner thanked the Committee for their views and agreed to review the scheme with the Committee after the first year of running the new procedure..

24/20 Restructuring

The Director of Human Resources informed the Committee that the UEB had approved a paper to be presented to Council in July setting out an approach to University Restructuring activity commencing Summer 2024 and running throughout 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years, including the formation and membership of a Consultation Group under the terms of the University's Restructuring Procedure.

The Committee noted that the paper would now go to Senate, for comment, and Council, for approval.

24/21 Dates of meetings for the 2024/25 Academic Session:

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| Wednesday 25 Sept 2024 | 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm |
| Tuesday 19 November 2024 | 10.00 am – 12.00 pm |
| Friday 10 January 2025 | 2.00 pm – 4.00 pm |
| Thursday 27 February 2025 | 10.00 am – 12.00 pm |
| Wednesday 30 April 2025 | 11.30 am – 1.30 pm |
| Wednesday 11 June 2025 | 10.30 am – 12.30 pm |