

**Governance
Restricted
Minutes**

Joint University/UCU Committee

22/19 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Thursday 3 November 2022 at 14.00 in Committee Room 1, Whiteknights House/remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Professor Robert Van de Noort, Vice Chancellor [*Chair*]
Dr Simon Clarke, Senate Representative
Dr David Field, UCU Representative
Moray McAulay, UCU Regional Official
Dr Richard Messer, Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary – *via Teams*
Sally Pellow, President of Reading UCU
Claire Rolstone, Interim Director of HR
Nat Willmott, UCU Representative – *via Teams*
Professor Parveen Yaqoob, Deputy Vice Chancellor
Katie Smith, Senior Governance Officer [*Secretary*]

22/20 Memorandum on Disclosure of Interests and Terms of Reference

The Committee noted the memorandum and members were asked to disclose any interests.

22/21 Membership and Terms of Reference 2022/23

The Membership and Terms of Reference for 2022/23 were noted.

22/22 Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

22/23 Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

a) Minute 22/15 *Update on the local UCU claim*

It was confirmed that one meeting of the joint panel had taken place and that meetings would continue in accordance with the agreement.

b) Minute 22/16 *Matters from the Staffing Committee*

The Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary advised that a review of the Terms of Reference for Staffing Committee was currently underway and that UCU representation would be considered as part of this.

22/24 Report of the Vice Chancellor

The Committee received and noted the Vice Chancellor's June and November reports to Senate. Committee Members were invited to raise any comments or questions, and the following was noted:

- The President of Reading UCU expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak at Senate the previous day, having attended in the capacity of observer.

- In response to a query, the Vice Chancellor clarified that the University had initially been working on a request from Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to build Loddon Garden Village on Hall Farm. In the last election, the existing leadership at WBC had changed and the University had since been invited to present against two other housing propositions - a response was now awaited from WBC. It was noted that benefits from the development of Hall Farm would only be accrued in relation to research in agriculture and food science, as the land was owned by the National Institute for Research into Dairying (NIRD) Trust, for which the University was the trustee. It was recognised that this situation was unsettling for farm workers who lived locally and it was confirmed that they would be kept informed of any developments.

22/25 Report of the President of Reading UCU

The President of Reading UCU provided a verbal report and the following was noted in particular:

- In relation to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) dispute -
 - There had been a strong response to the recent ballot, with the majority voting in favour of industrial action, and UCU's Higher Education Committee was currently meeting to discuss what form this action would take. Whilst the proposals included options such as sustained, long-term industrial action, a survey of Reading UCU's own members had indicated a desire to return to negotiating. The President of Reading UCU observed that the overall issue was the way in which valuations were being undertaken and urged the Vice Chancellor to do all they could with UUK to reach a point where they could work together for a reasonable valuation.
 - The UCU Regional Official noted that Reading UCU was not involved in the other part of the national dispute, regarding pay and conditions; however, UCU believed that a consultation was taking place with UCEA members regarding this and UoR was asked to consider putting forward the position that it would be preferable for a solution to be negotiated. The Interim Director of HR confirmed that the UCEA consultation received the previous day was in relation to commencing the 2023/24 process early rather than the disputed pay award. It was again noted that the University was not in dispute with UCU regarding this matter.
 - The UCU Regional Official advised that UCU's current policy position in relation to USS was that, whilst they had a mandate to take industrial action (and action short of this), the strong preference was for a negotiated solution that would avoid that. They noted that there had been a further assessment from USS and a report from the USS trustee published the previous week; UCU considered this further information to have vindicated the position brought forward regarding flaws in implementation. Regarding the potential opportunity for members' pensions to be bestowed and universities' costs returned, UCU was asking each university to make their best endeavours to UUK to support reaching that outcome.
 - There was a discussion regarding governance of the USS, including the fact that both UCU and UUK had representation at trustee level. UCU representatives suggested that there was an appetite within its membership to take this opportunity to address issues, such as intergenerational fairness, at trustee/board level and that more could be done to reach a solution in relation to the pensions

scheme which also gave consideration to aspects such as retention within the higher education workforce.

- The Vice Chancellor recognised UCU's right to decide on further industrial action but proposed that a better solution would be to work constructively together and prepare for the 2023 valuation.
- UCU had been receiving a significant amount of feedback from members in relation to concerns regarding the cost of living. This was becoming an area of heightened concern, as colleagues were having to navigate issues around accommodation and food insecurity. UCU advised that they had received a range of responses to a recent UoR article; whilst some had welcomed the discounts referenced, other colleagues had not responded so positively to the piece and it was suggested that the message might not have come across as intended - for example, some of the initiatives listed had been in place for many years and were not a direct response to the cost of living crisis. UCU did consider the reminder regarding these to be helpful but suggested that this be further expanded to include signposting to third-party organisations, such as national helplines and charities. The Interim Director of HR advised that a collection of resources regarding the cost of living was being created on the wellbeing webpages, including links to external resources such as the MoneyHelper service and local council support webpages, and that further links to organisations or related resources could continue to be added, including any which UCU considered to be particularly helpful. The UCU Regional Official suggested the University consider including information regarding the charity Education Support and agreed to send the Interim Director of HR the link to this.

Action: UCU Regional Official

- The UCU Regional Official advised that, if there was to be industrial action, the University would be notified and a request would subsequently follow that any pay deductions taken from members be put into the student hardship fund – the Vice Chancellor confirmed that this would be the case. UCU representatives queried what would happen if not all of the student hardship fund had been claimed by the end of the financial year, and whether the money would then revert to central University funds. Whilst it was considered very unlikely that the student hardship fund would not be fully utilised, it was believed that previously on such an occasion, when pay deductions had been made, funds had been rolled into the next financial year.
- UCU representatives requested further information regarding the additional cost to the University of increased energy prices, including the amount being offset by solar energy, as well as how inflation generally was affecting the University and its overall budget. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that the previous year the University had paid the highest cost for electricity to date, although the progress made so far to decarbonise had significantly limited potential increases. It was clarified that, despite its solar energy provision, the University was still a significant net user; however, plans for moving to carbon net zero included decarbonising central heating and it was hoped to do much more in this area. UCU representatives queried whether the impact of hybrid working was being monitored in relation to energy use. The Vice Chancellor agreed to ask the Energy and Sustainability Director to provide a report for the next meeting on energy prices and the cost of inflation, as well as the impact of hybrid working on energy consumption.

Action: Vice Chancellor

- The President of Reading UCU raised the matter of the University re-joining the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES), highlighting that an

increase in queries regarding this had been received from members over recent weeks. It was suggested that this could potentially be due to dissatisfaction amongst members regarding their inability to take part in industrial action regarding the matter of pay. It was also recognised that the terminology involved might be unfamiliar to colleagues and UCU had been making efforts to address any possible confusion with clear communications. The President of Reading UCU noted that the University had previously stated its intention to re-join JNCHES but it would be useful to have a date for this to share with members. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that the intention had always been to re-join and that the University would want to be part of the JNCHES process when discussions began regarding the next pay round. It was noted that this matter would formally need to be brought to the University Executive Board (UEB) for decision and the President of Reading UCU agreed to liaise with the Interim Director of HR regarding the likely timeframe.

Action: President of Reading UCU

- UCU noted the changes to the National Student Survey (NSS) this year and requested confirmation that the University would not compare this year's results against the last. The Vice Chancellor noted that the ranking system would continue to operate in the same way and that the University would still need to be able to make comparisons to ascertain which areas were performing well or required improvement. Whilst the concerns of UCU were acknowledged, the importance of improving student experience and learning through addressing any areas where the University was performing less well was highlighted. It was noted that the rules of submission for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) were also different this year, but rankings and comparisons were still being used. It was suggested by UCU that the real reasons behind NSS scores were not necessarily reflective of what was being asked and should therefore be interpreted less literally.

22/26 Update on the local UCU claim

The UCU Regional Official advised that there was an ongoing working group as part of the local claim and a productive discussion had been held with the University in September, which had also considered issues adjacent to the agreement. It was noted that there had been a specific issue raised by UCU, which the Interim Director of HR had investigated, and correspondence was ongoing regarding this. Whilst UCU acknowledged the good work done so far, they considered there to be ongoing issues and emphasised their willingness to continue to be in dialogue regarding these. The Interim Director of HR advised that colleagues had worked hard to address any issues and were engaging closely with Schools to ensure that the terms agreed were being implemented and adopted in the right way.

Items brought forward by the University

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

Items brought forward by Reading UCU

This item was covered elsewhere in the meeting.

Routine items

22/27 Matters from the Staffing Committee

The Committee received a report from the most recent Staffing Committee, held in June, and the following was noted in particular:

- Much work had been undertaken recently regarding HR strategic frameworks and this would be shared with UEB the following week.

- A review was underway in relation to smart working, including gathering anecdotal evidence from colleagues, to consider what had been learnt and what would be done differently, or the same, in the future. It was clarified that a high-level review of smart working had previously been undertaken with Heads of School and Function. The next stage of the review would include Staffing Committee seeking the views of further groups of staff, such as the Staff Forum and various network groups; UCU were invited to be involved and the Interim Director of HR agreed to liaise with Nat Wilmott (UCU Representative) regarding this.

Action: Interim Director of HR

- It was recognised that the HR System Project was of significant importance and thanks were recorded to all colleagues involved for the work undertaken so far. The Committee received a brief update regarding the tendering process and the timescale for implementation was confirmed as the end of 2023, which was the end of the current licence. The Interim Director of HR confirmed that colleagues were very conscious that this would be challenging and that multiple contingency plans had been identified. The President of Reading UCU sought confirmation regarding the availability of resource within DTS to support this work; the Interim Director of HR noted current challenges in recruitment and advised that they were working with the Chief Digital and Information Officer regarding the resources required. The intention to be more innovative from a digital strategy perspective was noted and the benefits of a new, more integrated, system were highlighted. It was noted that wider engagement with colleagues was planned once the implementation stage had been reached.

The Chief Strategy Officer & University Secretary left the meeting

22/28 Personal Titles – outcomes from 2021/22

The paper regarding outcomes from the 2021/22 round of the Personal Titles process was noted. The Committee was advised that, following a recommendation from the Race Equality Review, an analysis of any ethnicity-related differences in success rates had been undertaken by a working group which included the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion. Recommendations from the working group included providing tailored mentoring for BAME female applicants for Associate Professor and this would be picked up in the initial Autumn-term meetings of Schools.

22/29 Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

22/30 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 31 January 2023