

UCU/University Negotiating Committee

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 4 November 2019

Present: Professor Philippa Browning (PB), Caroline Martin (CM), Professor Wendy Olsen (WO), Dr Adam Ozanne (AO), David Swanson (DS), Patrick Hackett (PH) [in the chair], Karen Heaton (KH) Andrew Mullen (AM), Shelley Khan (SK) [minutes]

Apologies: Professor Luke Georghiou, Professor Nalin Thakkar

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2019

The minutes were accepted as a true record subject to an amendment to the wording on the item relating to student mental health.

2 Matters arising

2.1 Equality & Diversity Action Plan and Gender Pay Gap (GPG)

It was agreed that a further attempt would be made to arrange a meeting with UCU and other trade unions to discuss the GPG report and associated actions to reduce the gap. This followed earlier unsuccessful attempts to schedule a meeting.

AM/UCU

AM noted the University was seeking to publish the annual report earlier this year and aimed to do this by January. It was noted that in previous years the vast majority of employers had published their reports in late March, which was just before the statutory deadline. This risked creating the impression that the matter wasn't being treated as a high priority.

2.2 Teaching Assistants

It was noted that all TAs were now being paid for compulsory training. Although UCU had received reports of incidences of TA engaged on zero hours contracts, AM said there was no evidence of this. He undertook to double-check that no casual arrangements were being used. It was noted that such arrangements would only be appropriate in the most limited of circumstances (e.g. if there was a need to provide cover at short notice). UCU was asked to highlight where and when it understood casual arrangements had been used.

AM

AM confirmed that at a recent meeting the University examined arrangements for allocating preparation and marking time in a meeting with UCU. Whilst the University isn't comfortable with current arrangements, where TAs believe they have been allocated insufficient time, they should raise the matter with the Course Convenor in the first instance,

It was further noted that UCU and University representatives were meeting in December to (i) review arrangements for the timely payment and issuing of contracts to TAs in Semester 1 and (ii) to consider the results of a survey UCU was undertaking of its TA members.

2.3 Support for international staff

It was noted that University web pages relating to support for international staff had been updated. AM undertook to circulate links.

AM

2.4 Contracts Working Group (CWG)

UCU expressed concern that reasons for use of fixed term contracts wasn't always clear and that it wished to examine trends and scrutinise reasons for their use as well as undertake impact assessments.

It was agreed that these matters should be picked up by the CWG as part of its established terms of reference. KH undertook to discuss with HR colleagues on the CWG.

KH

KH understood that all FTC's were converted to permanent contract in the IT helpdesk team a year ago and will seek to have this information confirmed with HR colleagues in IT.

KH

2.5 Language Tutors

It was reported that arrangements were well advanced for reviewing job descriptions (jds) and harmonising terms and conditions as part of the plans to move non-English Language Tutors from the University Language Centre to work alongside other LTs already based in language departments in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures. Letters and revised jds would be issued to staff this week as part of consultation on the changes.

It was noted that as part of the discussions, UCU had raised matters relating to LTs' access to promotion as well as some of their working arrangements. These discussions were on-going.

2.6 Personal property cover under University insurance

It was noted that this matter had been resolved.

2.7 Arrangements for retired academics

In response to UCU's concerns that arrangements and access to honorary status for non-professorial academics are unclear and inconsistent, it was agreed that the University would review its policy and practice in this area.

KH

3 **General University Update**

3.1 Student numbers

PH reported that the general position for student registrations for 2019/20 was positive and that though home numbers had reduced by a modest amount, this was offset by an increase in international student numbers.

3.2 Strategic Plan

It was noted that the University's new vision, mission and values, and associated Strategic Plan is to go to the Board of Governors for consideration on 20 November 2019. Roll out is scheduled to commence early in 2020 with the development of operational plans.

3.3 Finance update

The report to go to the Board this month shows an operating surplus of £40.75 million for the year 2018/19, which is less than 3 per cent of income. This is less than half of the level of the University's target surplus.

It was noted that because of the way pension scheme deficits are reported in accounts, results across the sector will present a picture of serious financial difficulty.

3.4 Office for Students (OfS)

It was noted that in undertaking its role as the independent regulator of higher education, some disquiet had emerged within the sector about the OfS's approach. Whilst recognising the need for regulation and scrutiny, there was a growing sense that the OfS should take a more positive and less adversarial role in its dealings with the sector.

4 HE pay/equality and USS ballots

UCU noted that the ballots at Manchester had produced a mandate in terms of outcome and turnout for industrial action to oppose proposed changes to USS and in rejecting the employers' pay offer for 2018.

It was noted that following a meeting of its National Executive, UCU would shortly be issuing details of its plans, though it is expected that this will involve serious and rapidly escalating strike action.

UCU asked that the University act to influence a settlement on both matters.

PH noted that UCEA represented many member institutions in relation to pay and had to act with the mandate of those members.

PH noted that the position and governance in relation to USS was complex with a need for employer and employee representatives to find a way to address what is a difficult matter. Even if the employers were unanimous in supporting a position and the Joint Expert Panel (JEP) agreed on a proposal in the form of a JEP2, this would have to be acceptable to the USS trustees and the Pensions Regulator. There was also a need to have a sustainable outcome that didn't result in the need to revisit the scheme's provisions again in the foreseeable future.

UCU noted that as well pay, that dispute was also about promoting equality and opposing casualisation. Following discussion, it was agreed to hold a separate meeting about issues of workload as this was an identified area for attention following the 2019 staff survey.

5 Student Experience Programme

UCU referred to the meeting between trade union and University representatives on 10 October 2019 and noted that it was helpful to have an early indication from the University that there were likely to be staff placed at risk as a result of proposals to restructure activities within scope of SEP. UCU noted its suggestions in response:

- In order to improve chances of redeployment, provision of training of staff potentially at risk to equip them to do jobs where there is a demand;
- Conduct a specific HSE stress assessment in relation to the proposed restructures;
- Postpone any possibility of compulsory redundancy and try to secure the necessary staff reductions through Voluntary Severance (VS) and natural wastage.

In discussion, University representatives noted that it is difficult to see how it is feasible to identify and meet gaps in training as proposed. The way to maximise opportunities for redeployment was to use measures identified in the agreed Security of Employment Policy and, specifically, through vacancy management controls. With this in mind, the University will begin to hold back certain vacancies.

The University is seeking to mitigate the adverse impact on staff of the changes by being open about our plans, minimising the period of uncertainty and supporting staff more generally throughout the process. The SEP is set up to ensure we manage the change with great care and as well as we can. We know from the staff survey our issues in relation to the HSE management standards relating to stress.

On the question of postponing putting staff at risk whilst seeking staff to apply for VS, it was noted that this approach would only serve to prolong the period of uncertainty for

staff, as it was unlikely that sufficient numbers would be secured by this means. The University has a generous VS package, and, as part of its Security of Employment Policy, significant supporting policies, including a long lead time before any departures under CR would become necessary.

UCU raised concerns that managers were giving staff different messages in relation to SEP. KH noted that the University aimed to ensure a consistency of message to staff and it would be helpful if UCU could indicate the sorts of issues on which there seemed to be inconsistency. Measures would be put in place to address this such as through frequently asked questions.

Assurances were given that the thematic approach to SEP change would not restrict the areas in which staff could be redeployed where it was necessary. UCU was also assured that whilst SEP would take two years to complete, no member of staff would be placed at risk for that length of time.

UCU requested information on money spent on SEP-related technology through Accenture.

6 P&DR forms

UCU submitted a suggested form for the P&DR process for use with academic and research staff. This was informed by forms in use at some other universities and UCU's views of best practice.

KH noted that the University is reviewing the form and will consider UCU's suggestions as part of that review.

UCU noted that in the meantime it was advising members not to participate in the process as they are not comfortable with it.

KH replied that P&DR process was distinct from the content and format of the associated form.

It was agreed to revisit the matter at the next meeting.

7 Change to working hours in IT Services (ITS)

UCU expressed concern that the working hours of network team members in ITS had been changed without consultation with the staff affected. The changes had removed a significant degree of flexibility staff previously enjoyed. UCU was also concerned that the staff were managed by a contractor, Roc.

In response, KH stated that she understood that the change wasn't significant and that staff still had flexibility. Furthermore, there had been no concerns raised by the staff with IT Services management or with HR. It was proposed therefore that the ITS Network and Security Manager and the HR Partner for ITS meet with UCU to discuss the matter further.

It was noted that Roc does not manage the staff.

8 Wording used in some adverts

UCU highlighted an advert which referred to starting salary being no more than two increments higher than current salary. Although it was noted that current salary was one material factor in determining starting salary, it wasn't the only one. The normal practice remained to advertise the full salary range for the grade/level of the job in question.

9 Fossil fuels and greener transport practices

UCU asked whether the University planned to divest from investments in fossil fuel industries and whether it planned to change the travel booking system for staff so it defaulted to the greenest option.

It was noted that the University was actively discussing options as part of its commitment to sustainability, including moving towards divesting from such investment. It was also reviewing the provisions of its Cycle to work Scheme, car parking charges and its travel system.

10 Student Voter Registration

UCU asked whether the University planned to raise awareness of /encourage student voter registration ahead of the General Election on 12 December 2019.

The University replied that plans were in hand to encourage students to register.

11 Next meeting

The next meeting-date tbc