

UCU/University Negotiating Committee

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 20 July 2021

Present: Professor Philippa Browning (PB), Dr Molly Geidel (MG), Dr Simeon Gill (SG), David Swanson (DS), Dr Umit Yilditz (UY), Patrick Hackett (PH), Karen Heaton (KH), Professor Nalin Thakkar (NT) [in the Chair], Andrew Mullen (AM)

Apologies: N.A.

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021

The minutes were accepted as a true record.

2 Matters arising

2.1 Academic role descriptions

It was noted that following concerns raised by SG that certain department level academic service roles not being well defined following changes to the FSE structure, he had discussed the matter with the FSE Head of HR and changes were being made to role descriptions to provide further clarity. SG confirmed in discussion with FSE HR that he was assured role descriptors were being updated with direct input from staff engaged in the roles and these would be made available to all staff, possibly through the teaching college. It was agreed that it would be helpful for SG to receive an update on progress.

AM

2.2 Academic staff workload and GTA staffing

Following issues raised by UCU about workload of academic colleagues in Humanities, AM reported that staffing for Humanities in support of teaching had been reviewed in preparation for 2021-22. UCU reiterated concerns that in Semester 1 academic staff had been used to fill gaps where Humanities had initially not engaged GTAs in some areas where it had been usual practice.

3 General University Update

3.1 Further re-opening of campus plans

NT noted that while COVID cases were high and rising following the previous easing of restrictions in England, the corresponding rates of hospitalisations and deaths remained *relatively* low due to the impact of the vaccination programme. Following the removal of restrictions by the Government in England from 19 July 2021, the DfE had issued guidance to the sector as follows:

- Universities should continue to discharge their health and safety responsibilities in terms of, for example, duty of care, risk assessments and risk management;
- Planning should be made for two scenarios in terms of teaching delivery from next semester;
- There should be no on-going limitations placed on teaching and wider student experience and activities on campuses.

This meant that the focus for the University now had to be different. The University has already decided on and communicated its intention not to allow an unrestricted return of additional colleagues to campus until 1 September with a decision and announcement to be made on 19 August.

The focus will be on risk assessments, some social distancing where practicable, providing guidance to staff and students on home testing and an on-going vaccination campaign aimed at both students and staff. Risk assessments would be developed locally, be dynamic and respond to local circumstances.

Until 16 August, staff will have to continue to self-isolate unless they have had received two vaccinations. Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) staff should continue to work from home for now as well as those who are unable to have the vaccination for health reasons. The use of face coverings is strongly encouraged in indoor settings when colleagues are away from their desk. In all these measures the University is going further than Government guidance requires. All of this has been communicated on StaffNet and cascaded via managers.

UCU raised a question in relation to plans to use ventilation systems and airflow to minimise risk and how staff would be made aware of this. NT noted that there was relevant information on StaffNet which would be signposted. Measures included:

- Adjusting ventilation recirculation systems, where air taken from a room and conditioned (e.g. heated/cooled/filtered) via central air-handling plant and returned to the room, to operate on full fresh air only;
- Increasing ventilation plant operating periods by starting earlier and shutting off later by two hours. This provides purge and flush of the air in spaces they serve.
- Altering ventilation systems based on occupancy levels (e.g. carbon dioxide levels), to maintain higher ventilation levels continuously.

In terms of air conditioning systems, HSE guidance is that they can run as normal. Multi-occupancy spaces are being assessed for ventilation rates and, where appropriate, consideration is also being given to the provision of mobile filtration systems.

NT provided assurance that appropriate guidance to appropriate PS managers would be promulgated before September, though certain aspects would have to be managed locally using the sort of dynamic health and safety assessments used to deal with other types of hazard. At the suggestion of DS, who indicated carbon dioxide testing was often seen as a minimum commitment to determine airflow, NT undertook to look at the possibility of supplying carbon dioxide monitors so that airflow could be checked.

NT

SG asked how assessments would be cascaded given the different management structures across the University and given that Schools, Departments and other organisational units don't map on to buildings. He was also concerned that PS staff may not be empowered to take the necessary decisions and be placed at risk.

PH reiterated that risk assessment was a normal business activity and PS colleagues to risk assessments all the time. No PS staff would be placed at risk as part of this process.

DS asked what models had projected as to infection rates in September. NT noted that Sage had five models based on different assumptions about behaviour. This modelling suggested that if many people are now much less cautious, then we would expect an earlier but higher peak in cases. If the behaviour tends towards the more cautious, then the peak would be later but lower. The best guess scenario is that peaks would be reached in middle to late August and be dropping by September.

3.2 NSS results

NT reported that our results had been very disappointing at almost 10 per cent down on the previous year. This was particularly disappointing for our staff who have worked so hard to teach and support students in such challenging circumstances. The headline results had been published on StaffNet on Friday 16 July.

DS asked whether the outcome for Manchester had been relatively worse than other Russell Group universities. NT confirmed that while many competitors had faced similar issues, ours was among the biggest drops.

SG asked whether in the light of the NSS being a flawed and unreliable tool, the sector would seek to lobby to get a better and more reliable means of measuring the student experience.

NT noted that there had been many arguments advanced over the years for reform of the NSS and, though there was some value in the feedback, it remained an imperfect tool. PH added that the stock response to the criticism was an invitation to propose another means of evidencing the student experience. He noted that the University was open to concrete suggestions from UCU.

MG noted that part of the issue related to messaging to staff and students. Staff should be more openly praised for what they have done and it should be highlighted to students that staff were working hard and delivering quality teaching online.

PH acknowledged this, but noted that the University was always mindful in its communications to recognise colleagues' contribution as well as challenges faced.

DS made the point that measuring performance was often an obstacle to improving performance.

4. **P&DR & PREP**

UCU requested an update on negotiations over the P&DR forms having fed in concerns on the current forms and their limitations. Representatives remain concerned that the forms have not been agreed in negotiation.

KH replied that the University had recently decided to set up a small working group to conduct a root and branch review of the P&DR process. The working group would be cross-University in its membership and chaired by Professor Colette Fagan. UCU and the other campus trade unions would be consulted on emerging proposals.

SG asked if UCU could see details of the membership. UCU proposed that it had representation on the Working Group in order that important considerations were not overlooked. It believed that otherwise the process would be prolonged unnecessarily.

KH undertook to consult with the group on the matter, though it was suggested an alternative option might be to hold a joint meeting with the trade unions as work was progressing. In any event, all trade unions would be consulted.

KH

5. **Research Expectations**

UCU raised concerns that the University's statement on Research Expectations, which is not contractual, is being used in performance management and disciplinary cases relating to performance. It does not believe that this is an appropriate benchmark by

which to judge academic performance. It is aspirational and doesn't take account of different disciplines or levels.

In response, NT noted that the statement on research expectations is an important benchmark for judging the research performance of colleagues as well as setting out institutional standards. Where colleagues consistently fall below or are well below these expectations it is entirely reasonable to hold them to account and to expect them to engage with a process where we seek to support them in reaching acceptable standards. Expectations are calibrated to look at all round contribution and to consider discipline norms. NT added that the expectations also made clear the University's commitment to provide appropriate support.

SG suggested that while the expectations and the monitoring of performance against them may be perceived to have value to the University in measuring performance and in making comparisons between institutions, they did not motivate or support colleagues to achieve them.

PB added that while some of the responses provided were assuring, the formal research expectations should be framed with these caveats and assurances.

UCU had also received reports from some areas that some colleagues had been directed to research in certain areas and publish in a limited range of journals. This served to penalise inter-disciplinary research.

MG added that in Humanities the use of the PREP form was not well received by colleagues when they already had their time seriously challenged by greater teaching demands and other issues during the pandemic.

AM noted that the PREP form was an integral part of the P&DR in the Faculty and not a separate process. It was intended to inform a constructive and supportive conversation about plans and performance.

6. Workload, including FSE FCM

UCU stated its wish see actions related to workload increases due in part to COVID. It was aware of the FSE FCM and the high workloads this indicates as well as reports of high workload elsewhere, especially in Humanities.

PB noted that it was concerned about two specific issues raised in FSE relating to:

- Insufficient workload reduction for new academics;
- Measures which led to research and teaching academics having their teaching load increased if their research grant income doesn't meet certain thresholds.

AM replied that he understood FSE is currently consulting on its FCM and will consider all feedback including that received from UCU. He therefore agreed to facilitate feedback to FSE on the subject.

AM

MG asked that given student numbers will increase again in 2021-22 in Humanities, what measures will be taken to ensure adequate staffing. AM undertook to facilitate the provision of information, as planning was in hand for this.

AM

UCU noted that changes in 2021-22 to a blended learning model of teaching delivery would create additional preparation work again as not all current materials could be used or repurposed. PB proposed that time needed should be taken into account and the necessary support provided e.g. in the form of e-learning support.

7. **UEQs**

Notwithstanding previous discussions on the subject, UCU requested a specific meeting to discuss further. Having seen the evidence presented by the University, UCU representatives are not convinced of their suitability against existing, and what they believe to be well-grounded, reports summarising published research into the use of UEQs. Notwithstanding the internal reports they had received that showed no bias on the basis of protected characteristics, they believed the analyses only consider the perception of satisfaction, but not learning achieved. The raw data from these analyses had not been made available to UCU as requested. They were therefore concerned about the use of UEQ scores as evidence of underperformance.

It was agreed that a separate meeting would be organised to discuss.

AM

8. **Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of Antisemitism**

UCU raised concern that the University had adopted the IHRA definition without consultation either at Senate or via academics with expertise in this area. It reported that members have expressed concern at the process, which seemed to ignore internal experts on this area. Clarification was therefore sought on the following:

- How was the IHRA definition, with the added clauses from the Home Affairs Select Committee 2016, passed, why did it not go to Senate, why were academic experts not consulted?
- What does “added anti-Semitic intent” mean? Who defines it, who sits on the committee that decides this, and what is the procedure to challenge false accusations of "added anti-Semitic intent" for example those emanating from pro-Israel supporters opposing the advocacy for Palestinian human rights?

So, UCU was concerned about both the definition and the process by which it was adopted.

UY added that the definition conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, threatened academic freedom and was weaker than UK anti-racism legislation already in force. UCU nationally was opposed to the adoption of the definition and this opposition extended to members locally with expertise in this area. UMUCU would campaign to have it withdrawn.

NT noted the IHRA working definition is used by many (over 30) countries, (including the US and European countries), and organisations. The government has asked for the guidance to be adopted by all universities. We do not believe that there have been any cases where the definition has been used to suppress free speech or academic freedom here and we are clear that the University’s obligation to protect both is paramount. It can only be used as guidance and does not override our obligation to protect free speech and academic freedom. Nor does it override or replace our legal obligations under the Equality Act. The view of Hugh Tomlinson, QC is that the guidance has no legal status and could not be used legally to suppress free speech. For the University it is intended to be used as guidance where issues of potential anti-Semitism arise.

As the time allocated for the meeting ended, it was agreed to send any further response in writing as soon as possible

9. Remaining agenda items

Responses to questions or issues to be raised by UCU will be sent in writing and, if necessary, discussed again at a future meeting.

10. Date and time of next meeting

Monday 22 November 2021 at 10 a.m.