

UCU/UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held on Monday 27 November 2023

Present:

Professor Nalin Thakkar (NT), Vice President for Social Responsibility (in the Chair)
Patrick Hackett (PH), Registrar, Secretary and COO
Adèle MacKinlay (AMM), Director of People and OD
Andrew Mullen (ASM), Deputy Director of People and OD
Carol Platts (CP), Head of Employee Relations
Charlotte Allen (CA), UCU
Dr Molly Geidel, (MG), UCU
Dr Simeon Gill (SG), UCU
Dr Nicola Hutchings (NH), UCU
Ümit Yildiz, (UY), UCU

Apologies:

None received.

1. Minutes of meeting held on 4 July 2023

Subject to the replacement of “agrees with all of them” with “feel these adequately addressed concerns” in the second sentence of section 2.3 relating to academic promotions, the minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record.

2. Matters arising and Action Log update

2.1 Negotiations on proportionate deductions and a resetting of relations

Following discussion about the wording in section 6 of the minutes about reported disruption at summer Examination Boards, it was agreed to meet separately to discuss the matter further in order to understand whether this related to colleagues expressing views about the voracity of the assessment process or, rather, how they conducted themselves in so doing.

Action: ASM/UMUCU

2.2 Health, safety and well-being

NH noted that the two actions relating to practice of scheduling of meetings and ensuring colleagues took adequate lunch breaks were separate. NH asked when the guidelines cited would be available. ASM agreed to double-check and inform her.

Action: ASM

3. Proposed areas of joint working for 2024

The University proposed that as well as the current priority areas of casualisation, workload and building productive relations, there should also be priorities for review of the single pay spine and employment related Statutes and Ordinances. It was noted that it would be helpful to be clear which aspects of Statute and Ordinance we would seek to

review and articulate what outputs we were seeking where these were not already governed by terms of reference.

Action: AMM/UMUCU

4. Joint Casualisation Task and Finish Group update

ASM reported that:

- The first meeting of the Joint Working Group had taken place with UMUCU with a further meeting scheduled this week.
- A detailed analysis of use of fixed term contracts had been prepared with summary commentary to inform next steps.
- There had been two separate meetings to discuss issues pertaining to GTAs and the current operation of the Contracts of Employment Policy.
- The Contracts Working Group had been re-established to oversee the appropriate use of contracts under the provisions of current policy.
- As the matters applied to all staff groups, UNISON and Unite had been invited to join the Group.

5. SEP evaluation update

AMM reported that terms of reference to govern a review had been drafted. An Extraordinary meeting of Senate will take place on 20 December 2023 to review the draft terms. Following these discussions, the terms will go to SCSC and PRC in January 2024 with a view to the review starting in February and finalising recommendations in May 2024.

Following discussion, it emerged that there had been some confusion about the role of this group *vis-à-vis* a Task and Finish group led by PH which is aimed at reviewing operational challenges at the start of the current academic year with a focus on identifying and addressing any remaining University-wide issues ahead of Semester 2.

SG suggested that the confusion may have arisen from the low trust environment in which UMUCU believe we are currently operating within UoM.

UMUCU noted that it would share the findings from its current survey of members on the experience of SEP with an associated report to inform the University's evaluation. To date, over 100 responses had been received. UNISON is running a similar survey of its members.

In response to concerns expressed about staff well-being associated with SEP, AMM and ASM highlighted that the University planned to run a University wide pulse survey on well-being in February 2024 to gain a richer picture of well-being issues. Data produced from the new sickness absence reporting process and system was also beginning to provide much clearer and granular details of the reasons for colleagues' absences.

NH requested that any survey included an open field for respondents to provide free form narrative comments.

Action: UMUCU/AMM

6. Academic freedom

UMUCU raised concerns about the need to uphold principles and values of academic freedom in the context of discussion and debate about the current situation in Gaza and Israel. This was important given the responses at some institutions and, in particular, the action of the UKRI in suspending its EDI advisory group following the involvement of the Science Minister. This action followed what were characterised as extremist views expressed by some members of the Panel about Israel's response to the 7 October attacks by Hamas.

UMUCU noted that they were happy with the President & Vice-Chancellor's response to the situation in the Middle East, though they would like to see a reiteration of the University's commitment to principles of academic freedom and assurances that academics will not be challenged for discussing difficult issues and particularly not in response to representations from external parties or pressure groups.

PH and NT noted that they believed the University and UMUCU were aligned in this position and that a revised statement of our position on academic freedom was in preparation and would be circulated as soon as it had been approved through the necessary governance routes.

Action: NT

The particular challenges associated with the introduction of the new Higher Education Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 were noted and how its provisions sat alongside the current understanding of academic freedom as well as how it fed into our policies and practices.

UMUCU raised concerns about the police presence at recent demonstrations in support of Palestine on or close to the campus. PH and NT explained the police determined the level of attending officers based on their own intelligence and agreed that sometimes the presence seemed large given the nature and scale of the protest. It was noted that while some colleagues believed a large police presence could actually aggravate tensions, others had reported feeling assured by the presence.

It was noted that GMP had been informed that, generally, the atmosphere on campus has been calm and colleagues and students feel safe.

7. Pay and pensions “windfall”

UMUCU reported that representatives had attended a productive meeting with Ash Field, the Head of Pensions and understood the changes that would be implemented to USS as early as January 2024. UMUCU noted that this would mean there would be an unaccounted surplus within the financial year and wanted to know how this money would be used. They asked the University to consider this matter in the light of the on-going cost-of-living challenges experienced by colleagues. PH agreed to take this request for further consideration with senior colleagues.

Action: PH

8. Update on the appointment of the new President and Vice-Chancellor (P&VC)

UMUCU asked when the decision to elect the new President and Vice-Chancellor would be announced. PH noted that the role was not an elected position but would be made in January following a very rigorous selection process and wide consultation with stakeholders on the role.

SG observed there would be a review period during the new P&VC's tenure and asked how student and staff views would be considered as part of the process. PH observed it would be up to the Board how that would happen, though the current Chair of the Board had been very inclusive in her approach to such matters.

9. IT staff on agency contracts

UMUCU reported that it had received information that there were members of IT who had been engaged on agency contracts for more than four years and wanted to understand the plans to address this and the wider use of such colleagues. ASM confirmed that he had obtained a comprehensive picture from PJ Hemmaway (PJH), the Chief Information Officer which showed the current usage as well as measures taken and planned to reduce reliance further. It was agreed that ASM would arrange a meeting with PJH to discuss further as well as share information with UMUCU in advance.

Action: ASM

10. Use of Teaching Unit Survey scores in AMBS

MG raised concerns that UEQs were being used by some managers within AMBS to measure and evaluate teaching performance. UMUCU indicated that research showed UEQs were biased and they do not regard them as an effective measure to evaluate teaching.

ASM noted there was one instance of which he was already aware of where scores had been cited as part of a case of underperformance, but asked MG to let him know of any further cases that came to her attention. As discussed extensively previously, the University was well aware of the limitations and risks associated with using scores in isolation from other sources of information and they only fed into probation, promotion and academic promotion processes alongside these other measures.

11. Finance Transformation Project

SG understood the project had been paused and asked what was going to happen next to address the needs identified originally for the project and its planned deliverables. PH confirmed he would circulate a briefing note on the subject from Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer that provides a helpful explanation. PH noted that the reasons for initiating the project remained valid, but alternative solutions were now being considered. This could include an interim 'cloud' solution. There was discussion about the reasons why the project had been unsuccessful and there was consensus that some fundamental lessons should be learned and incorporated into future change programmes, including more transparent and realistic communications to colleagues about benefits to be gained, and a reflection on whether the benefits had been overstated by the supplier.

12. Recognition Agreement

UMUCU recognised the desire to address the procedures agreement which had not been revised since 2004, separate to the simple updating of names. There was some

initial discussion about what changes were perceived to be required and AMM reflected that the prime focus of discussions around the agreement should centre on what was needed to help parties have a productive relationship that met their respective interests. A separate meeting would be organised to discuss further at an early opportunity.

Action: AMM/UMUCU

13. Publication and circulation of minutes of the NCC meetings

UMUCU requested that the minutes of NCC meetings, including those of past meetings, be made available to staff. ASM agreed to look for a suitable place on StaffNet. There was acknowledgement that some items may occasionally be confidential and would need to be removed or redacted. PH felt this could be agreed during meetings. It was also agreed that the minutes would be circulated after the meeting for agreement/amendments within a 2-week deadline to achieve sign off in advance of the next meeting.

Action: ASM

14. Cyber-attack-colleague issue

NH asked if further support could be given to individuals who have been advised by Experian their ID had been stolen. (It was noted that it may not have been related to the University cyber incident). This support could include, for example, letters to banks confirming ID etc. AMM confirmed if there was only a handful of impacted people UoM would help where it could and asked NH to forward the details to ASM in the first instance.

Action: NH

15. Scheduled date and time of next meeting

Date and time in March 2024 tbc