

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 21 October 2019

PRESENT

Ms Sarah Buck (Chair)

University Representatives

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Steve Smith
Provost, Professor Janice Kay
Registrar and Secretary, Mr M Shore-Nye
Director of People Services, Mrs Imelda Rogers

Trade Union Representatives

Dr Sharon Strawbridge (UCU)
Mr Chris Forest (Unite)

Also in attendance

Assistant Director of People Services, Mr A Johnson
Ms Philippa Davey (Regional Officer, UCU)

Apologies

Ms Rhian Keyse (UCU)
HR Policy Adviser, Mrs E Hilton
Mr Jim Milnes (Unison)
Mr Tim Hortopp (Unison)

19.09 Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2019 (JCCN/19/08).

Matters arising

- (a) Minute 19.04(a): UCU representatives asked for a copy of the standard confidentiality clause used in severance agreements and its references to disclosures under the Public Interest Disclosure Act.
- (b) Minute 19.04(c): Amend second sentence to read: "These are being considered in more details by staff focus groups throughout May and their recommendations will be considered by the PWE Board on 6 June."

19.10 Vice Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor briefed the Committee on the following issues:

- (a) Brexit: at this stage, unless and until the Withdrawal Agreement is agreed, there remains significant uncertainty about future funding for research. The University had been preparing for a potential No Deal outcome since March. Continued support was being provided to staff who were EU citizens to secure Settled Status. The University and the sector was also working with the Home Office to influence the shape of the post-Brexit immigration policy. The benefit of this could be seen with the announcement of the new post study visa scheme.
- (b) Student Fees: the Government had not yet responded to the Augur Review and it is unlikely that its position on fees will become clear until its election manifesto is published. Other parties were planning to reduce fees if elected, but it was not certain if a new Government would fully replace fees with direct funding. At best, the sector was likely to have 5 years with no increase in undergraduate fees, while other costs – including staff pay – would continue to increase.

- (c) Admissions: provisional figures (which would not be confirmed until December and were being shared with trade unions confidentially and not for onward circulation) indicated that:
- entrant numbers for taught programmes were marginally above target;
 - International PGT was expected to be 40% higher than the 2018 figure and 20% above the 2019/20 target;
 - overall international student recruitment was also expected to be higher than the 2018 figure and the 2019/20 target.
- (d) Financial Outturn: provisional figures for the 2018/19 financial outturn show a deficit of £72 million which is the consequence of the requirement for the University's "share" of the USS deficit to be charged to its accounts. Without this provision, the outturn would have been a surplus of £16 million. There has been an 8% growth in total income and a 14% increase in research income.
- (e) Casual Working: the University was committed to working with the UCU and Students' Unions to address concerns about the use of casual employment.
- (f) The University leadership team's priorities for the year were:
- Internationalisation: our ambition is for 35% of our students to be international, without significantly increasing our overall student numbers;
 - Teaching excellence and NSS;
 - Continuing to grow our research base, which is the most effective way to secure the sustainability of the University. This will drive our staffing and capital strategies.

Trade Union representatives asked what steps the management of the University was taking to maintain the safety of the University environment during the current phase of Brexit. In response, the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar advised the Committee that the University was working with the police and other local organisations to maintain safety. It was essential that all members of the University community, whatever views they may hold, maintained the University's values of respect and diversity. UCU representatives thanked People Services for the support they had provided to staff who were EU citizens.

In response to a question from UCU on USS, the Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that the second report of the Joint Expert Panel was expected to make recommendations on valuation methodology and it was important that careful consideration is given to that report. The USS Trustee and HE employers had to take account of the Pension Regulator's letter of 6 August 2019 which stated that the technical provisions in the 2018 valuation were at the limit of what was permissible. It was also concerning that gilt yields had fallen since the 2018 valuation.

19.11 Professional Services Strategy

The Registrar advised the Committee of the following developments:

- Changes had been made to the senior leadership in Professional Services. Education and Student Services had moved under the leadership of Linda Peka to ensure greater alignment of support to Colleges. In view of its strategic importance, Digital Transformation would now report direct to the Registrar. A new team had been established to support Professor Mark Goodwin's revised DVC Global portfolio. A new Director of College Operations for Penryn had been appointed to support the new PVC for Cornwall.
- Each Professional Service had prepared Annual Delivery Plans to provide an overview of all the issues they are working on and to ensure effective planning and resourcing of priorities.
- The Exeter App for staff would be launched shortly after testing was completed.

- The “Exeter Professional” was being developed to provide a framework for the development of Professional Services staff.
- As Professional Savings were being realised, the following reinvestments had been approved:
 - Additional capacity and extended hours for student wellbeing: £600K;
 - Support for the Industrial Strategy: £300K;
 - Funding for the South West Institute of Technology;
 - Additional posts in Technical Services, Hubs and College Professional Services: £800K.

Trade Union representatives welcomed the additional investment in administrative support in Colleges and in student wellbeing. They also commented on the value of the Mental Health First Aider training.

19.12 Trade Union Engagement Report

The Committee noted the report of the Assistant Director, People Services (JCCN/19/09), summarising engagement since the last meeting of the Committee in May 2019.

19.13 Trade Union Items

(a) Penryn

UCU representatives expressed concern that the arrangements for University staff at Penryn to raise issues about health and safety which were under the operational management of FXPlus were not working satisfactorily. UCU commented that this could be addressed by giving Health and Safety Representatives direct access to FXPlus managers so that issues were resolved locally without reference to Exeter. University representatives asked the UCU to provide examples of issues which had not been resolved effectively so that action could be taken to review processes and address their concerns.

(b) Details of new starters and leavers

In response to a request from UCU for a list of all new starters and leavers at the University, the Director of People Services advised the Committee that data protection legislation would not permit disclosure of this information without employees' consent. UCU representatives commented that other institutions do provide this information after obtaining consent from new employees as part of the starter process. The Director of People Services agreed to consider this, subject to consideration of the additional administrative cost, and UCU was asked to provide examples of HEIs which operated this arrangement.

(c) Trade union involvement in termly “Welcome to the University” events for new staff

The Director of People Services advised the meeting that trade unions were invited to run a “stand” in the World Café Marketplace at these events. She confirmed that arrangements would be made to invite UCU to future events and ensure that arrangements were made for all three trade unions to be invited when their lead representatives changed.

19.14 Dates of next meetings

The Committee noted the dates for the remainder of the 2019/20 University years:

Thursday 6 February 2020 (10:00 - 11:30)

Monday 11 May 2020 (14:00 - 15:30)