

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 May 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

Assistant Director of People Services, Mr A Johnson

Trade Union Representatives

Dr Sharon Strawbridge (UCU)

Mr Jim Milnes (Unison)

Mr Tim Hortopp (Unison)

Mr Chris Forest (Unite)

Apologies

Interim Director of People Services, Mrs Imelda Rogers

Ms Rhian Keyse (UCU)

Ms Philippa Davey (Regional Officer, UCU)

HR Policy Adviser, Mrs E Hilton

19.01 Membership of the Committee

The Chair welcomed Mr Jim Milnes, Unison Branch Secretary, to his first meeting of the Committee.

19.02 Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2019 (JCCN/19/03).

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2019.

19.03 Terms of Reference

The Committee considered a paper (JCCN/19/04) which included revised Terms of Reference for the Joint Committee for Consultation and Negotiation which had been discussed between University representatives and trade union representatives. The Chair of the Committee thanked the representatives for their contribution to the review.

The Committee approved the revised terms of reference set out in appendix A to the report subject to the correction of typographic errors in paragraphs 3.3 and 7.4.

The Committee agreed that the terms of reference should be reviewed at the first meeting of each new academic year with the next review in the Autumn Term 2020.

19.04 Vice Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee:

- (a) Media reporting on the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs): the recent reporting on the use of NDAs at the University of Exeter was misleading. The University only used NDAs as part of commercial contracts. Outside of TERS, there have been a small number of severance agreements with former employees which included a standard confidentiality clause requiring both parties to keep the terms of the agreement confidential. Trade union representatives should be reassured that the University does not use severance agreements to prevent whistleblowing or complaints about harassment.

- (b) Living Wage: Following the University's introduction of the Living Wage in 2014, the first point on the University's pay scales has increased significantly more than inflation and is 7.8% higher than the lowest point on the national pay scale. Prior to the introduction of the Living Wage in 2014, the lowest salary at the University was £13,621 – it is now £17,082. As a further step, the University will be making further changes to grades B and C from August 2019: the progression point for experienced colleagues in grade B will be set at 1.5% above the Living Wage and grade C will start at 5% above grade B.
- (c) PWE: The PWE summit has identified four themes from the Employee Engagement Survey: (1) Involvement in Decision Making; (2) Effective Resources and Minimising Barriers; (3) Valuing Contribution; and (4) Leadership. These are being considered in more details by staff focus groups throughout May and their recommendations will be considered by on 17 June. The University has changed the way it makes strategic decision, inviting colleagues to comment on strategies at an earlier date. This change has resulted in significant engagement on the Professional Services Strategy, the REF strategy, the Global Strategy, the Education Strategy and changes to car parking. Around 680 staff had attended the Vice-Chancellor's meetings with academic departments and approximately 250 had attended the first two of his all-staff briefings.
- (d) Brexit: it was likely that, from 2021/22, EU students would pay international student fees. This was likely to result in a significant reduction in EU students studying in the UK. The impact at Exeter would be limited since only 6% of our students are from the EU, but the at some other institutions would be more significant impact.
- (e) USS: The Joint Expert Panel is beginning the second phase of its work. From April 2019, employer contributions increased from 18% to 19.5% and employee contributions increased from 8% to 8.8% - and there would be further increases in October 2019 and April 2020 unless an agreement can be reached with the USS Trustee on the 2018 valuation. The Trustee's proposal on contingent contributions posed significant challenges for institutions.
- (f) Auger Review: The report, which has now been put back to late May/early June, is expected to propose a reduction in the maximum undergraduate fee to £7500 per year. While the University and the sector would lobby for the reduction to be made up by the government, this was not guaranteed and the University had to model for every eventuality.
- (g) Casual working: the University took steps at the beginning of this academic year to address concerns about the employment arrangements of Postgraduate students. We are working with UCU to address concerns about the new arrangements. Looking at HESA data (2017/18), only 4% of our total academic FTE are "atypical workers", so this represents only a small proportion of our academic activity. The University is open to working with trade unions to address concerns about casual working, but many casual workers do not want to commit to contracted working and value being paid at the time they work rather than it being spread throughout the year.

19.05 Professional Services Strategy

The Committee considered a paper (JCCN/19/08) which provided an update on the Professional Services Strategy, including engagement actions and progress towards the delivery of savings and associated reinvestments.

The Registrar and Secretary advised the Committee that decisions on TERS applications had taken account of where work would be reallocated and how ongoing activities would be delivered. The outcomes implemented the intention to reduce layers of management and widen spans of control, which were necessary following the consolidation of Professional Services teams into a single service. The University had identified where the majority of savings would be made and discussions were beginning on priority areas for reinvestment, with a view to the reinvestment beginning in autumn 2019. Over 250 staff had taken part in the engagement activities and over 275 ideas for improvements had been generated. Further work was being carried out on Professional Services career development frameworks.

19.06 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants

The Committee considered a paper (JCCN/19/05) summarising the actions the University was taking to review the employment arrangements of Postgraduate Teaching Assistants with representatives from the UCU, the PGR student community and Colleges with a view to introducing revised arrangements for the 2019/20 academic year.

Sharon Strawbridge commented that many of the issues which have arisen this year were a consequence of the changes being introduced at short notice. The UCU's preference was for everyone to be engaged on a contract but employment arrangements had to provide for ad hoc work (such as marking and revision workshops) and in-year changes (such as teaching arrangements in STEM disciplines that allowed PGRs to change the sessions they were allocated to support). She asked for clear procedures and instructions to be ready for Colleges to recruit PGRs for the next academic year.

University representatives reminded trade union representatives of the offer to work with trade unions to identify where casual working arrangements were used and develop appropriate solutions. It was regrettable that frequently the conversations about "casualization" did not define what this meant or recognise the instances where casual working was appropriate, such as ad hoc marking.

19.07 Trade Union Engagement Report

The Committee noted the report of the Assistant Director, People Services (JCCN/19/06), summarising engagement since the last meeting of the Committee in February 2019.

19.08 ERSS Governance Group

The Committee noted the report of the second meeting of the ERSS Governance Group (JCCN/19/07).