

DRAFT VERSION 3 (19/07/2021) subject to ratification at the Autumn Term meeting of the Committee.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

JOINT COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 10 May 2021

PRESENT

Ms Sarah Buck (Chair)

University Representatives

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lisa Roberts

Provost, Professor Janice Kay

Registrar, Mr Mike Shore-Nye

Director of HR, Mrs Imelda Rogers

Chief Financial Officer, Mr Andrew Connolly

Trade Union Representatives

UCU Branch President, Dr Sharon Strawbridge,

UCU Branch Secretary, Dr Claire Foullon,

UCU Branch Pensions Officer, Dr Ginny Russell

Unite Branch Secretary, Mr Chris Forrest

Unison Branch, Mr Tim Hortopp

Also in attendance

UCU Regional Officer, Ms Philippa Davey

Assistant Director of People Services, Mr Andrew Johnson

Apologies

UCU Branch Vice-President, Dr Christopher Boyle

21.10 Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021 (JCCN/21/07).

21.11 Vice-Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee of the following:

- (a) Covid-19 Pandemic: the University would be reviewing the impact on the University's operations of the announcement by the Prime Minister, expected later in the afternoon, regarding the next stage in the Government's roadmap. In the interim, the University was planning for the return of students to be permitted from 17 May. Arrangements for students to be tested were being put in place and new testing centres were opening on campus. Testing to support field trips was also being put in place. The University was working with the rest of the sector to support vaccinations for students.

The University has begun planning for the autumn term 2021. At present, the University was having to prepare for a variety of possible scenarios since the Government is not expected to publish its guidance for the beginning of the next academic year until the end of June. UUK is currently working with the Government on this issue.

Rate of positive test results among the University community and wider communities continued to be very low.

Students had been advised that the 2020 and 2021 graduation would take place in 2022. Arrangements were being made for this year's graduates to have Covid-safe on-campus celebrations if they chose.

- (b) Bonfire of Bureaucracy: over 100 suggestions had been received in response to the Bonfire of Bureaucracy. These covered a wide variety of issues including the number of meetings and how decisions were made and suggestions about processes, structure and ways of working. These suggestions were now being progressed. Some could be progressed quickly but others would take time to change. The first Big Conversation has also raised a large number suggestions to improve efficiency, which would be considered alongside those raised earlier.
- (c) Big Conversation: the second Big Conversation had closed the previous week. This had focussed on what the University was going to do in the next ten years. Key themes included a desire for the University to take a lead on climate change and social justice; to contribute both globally and regionally; to be a more inclusive and diverse community; and to achieve a better work-life balance and improved wellbeing. The management of the University wanted to be transparent about the challenges facing the sector and the University – including Government decisions on fees, skills, quality and research. Limitations on funding may mean that it is not possible to progressed everything we would like to.

In response to a question from UCU representatives about maintaining academic standards with respect to online examinations, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed the University's continuing commitment to academic quality. Digital resources would play a growing role in the University's provision, enhancing face-to-face learning and opening access to students who cannot enjoy the normal on-campus experience, but the University's education provision would primarily continue to be a largely on-campus experience. The Registrar advised the Committee that online exams had been beneficial to students' mental health and for students with disabilities; they had also had a positive impact on our carbon footprint.

Trade union UCU representatives welcomed the action taken by the University to engage staff through the Big Conversations, but commented that this was taking place during a particularly busy period for staff.

In response to a question from UCU representatives about access to information on new appointments, the Assistant Director of HR advised the Committee that the University continued to advise new appointments about the three campus trade unions, giving them an opportunity to join if they wished. Trade unions also participated in welcome events for new staff.

21.12 USS Valuation

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of HR and the Chief Financial Officer (JCCN/21/08).

The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that employers were not satisfied with the USS Trustee's proposals for the 2020 valuation and the UUK continued to challenge its approach. The Trustee's pricing options were very concerning for both employers and employees. However, employers recognised that the Trustee had legal responsibilities and a duty to the Pension Regulator and that it had the power to impose a solution if a consensus could not be agreed. If the Trustee was confident that stakeholders were moving towards an agreed solution, then it was expected to seek an extension to the 30 June deadline to complete the valuation.

The UUK consultation sets out a number of options aimed at finding a pragmatic and affordable solution based on all parties offering some flexibility: employers will need to commit to enhancing covenant support measures; the USS Trustee will need to reduce levels of prudence on assumption setting based on enhanced employer support; and scheme members will need to agree to changes in future benefits. However, this was not a long-term solution and it was important that the long-term recommendations of the Joint Expert Panel were progressed, recognising that they could not be implemented in time for the 2020 valuation.

The Chief Financial Officer reminded the Committee that unless otherwise agreed, on 1 October 2021, increase to contributions, agreed under the 2018 valuation – from 9.6% to 11% for scheme members and from 21.1% to 23.7% for employers - will come into effect. This will cost the University £4m in a full financial year.

The Assistant Director of HR advised the Committee that the staff questionnaire followed from the three all-staff talks given by the Chief Financial Officer, which had been well attended. The questionnaire was based on the illustrations in the UUK consultation document. The University recognised that the response rate was only 15% but, alongside comments from the three campus trade unions, this provided useful information on the views of scheme members.

UCU representatives thanked the Chief Financial Officer for his updates to staff. The branch had endorsed principles for the valuation which had been published by UCU nationally (copied below).

- (1) Progressive contribution structures to enable more low paid staff to join and stay in USS.
- (2) An end to contribution increases and cuts to retirement income.
- (3) The fund weighted towards return-seeking, ethical investments.
- (4) Commitments from employers on covenant support, governance reform, and lobbying for regulatory change.
- (5) Exploration of conditional benefits on terms acceptable to UCU members.

UCU representatives advised the Committee that the branch considered the Trustee's approach to be flawed and opposed any cuts to the current defined benefit structure. The branch considered that the question in the questionnaire about the University increasing its contribution was leading and commented that the outcomes of the questionnaire did not endorse the University's draft response to the UUK options.

The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that the University's response to the UUK consultation with employers would be approved by Council on 20 May, before the UUK deadline on 24 May. The draft shared with UCU last month was currently being updated for consideration by the Council Finance Sub-Committee. UCU representatives asked to see a copy of the updated draft response before commenting.

21.13 Fair Employment For All

The Committee considered the report of the Director of HR (JCCN/21/09).

The Assistant Director of HR advised the Committee that the University had developed principles for the engagement of teaching staff in the new academic year and it was discussing with Colleges how these could be applied in practice. There had been a constructive dialogue with UCU and PTA representatives about the employment arrangements for PGR students engaged as teachers. No changes to the guaranteed minimum hours contract were planned for 2021/22 but Colleges were being consulted on changing the job title from "Postgraduate Teaching Assistant" to "Postgraduate Teaching Associate". Colleges were also being consulted on a framework for assigning paid preparation time to PTAs (and other part-teachers) which provides more consistency while recognising differences between disciplines and teaching arrangements make a one-size-fits-all approach was not appropriate.

The Committee was advised that 238 fixed term contracts had been converted to open-ended contracts in the year to May 2021 and that, following a review of all long-term fixed term contracts, a further 135 would be converted to open-ended from 1 June 2021. The Committee was advised that arrangements would be made to include this in a communication to the University community, updating colleagues on the progress of the project.

In response to a question from UCU representatives, the Assistant Director of HR advised the Committee that, where open-ended contracts were dependent on time-limited external funding, Colleges would be expected to explore alternative funding opportunities. However, where alternative funding could not be secured, it may be necessary to consider making staff redundant.

21.14 UCU Claim on Lecture Capture/Performance Rights

The Committee considered the report of the Director of HR (JCCN/21/10).

The Assistant Director of HR advised the Committee that the draft policy had been developed following three meetings of a Task and Finish Group which had reached a consensus on some issues but had not agreed on others. The draft policy had been discussed at a Senate Deep Dive in the previous week and it would be updated to take account of their feedback and comments. UCU had been invited to comment before a revised draft policy was shared with the Taught Faculty Board for comment. UCU representatives advised the Committee that the branch was currently seeking the views of members, after which they would respond to the University.

21.15 Trade Union Engagement Report

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director of HR (JCCN/21/11), summarising issues discussed in the weekly meetings between the Director of HR and trade union representatives.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the conclusion of the review of the suspended reward procedures, which had been agreed in the July 2020 collective agreement. The January 2021 review had been deferred to February following the announcement of the third lockdown in January and the additional financial uncertainty this had created. The outcome of the review included backdating increments to eligible staff in Grades F, G and H from 1 January 2021 and the reinstatement of a reduced budget for the Above and Beyond recognition scheme.

The weekly meetings between HR and trade union representatives included discussions about the policy on Adjusting for the Differential Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on academic staff, which will inform the current round of academic promotion applications, and a parallel policy for Professional Services staff.

21.16 Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates for meetings of the Committee in the 2021/22 University year:

- Monday 18 October 2021 at 2pm
- Friday 11 February 2022 at 10am
- Monday 9 May 2022 at 2pm

UCU representatives commented that UCU representation of the Committee was agreed at the AGM later in the year when teaching calendars had yet to be assigned. The Committee noted that this may lead to a review of the dates set.

21.17 TRAC and Academic Workload

Under the provisions for either side of the Committee to raise for any other business of an urgent nature, which could not have been notified in advance for inclusion on the agenda, the Chief Financial Officer drew the attention of the Committee to UCU branch communications on TRAC. He advised the Committee that academic staff were being asked to sign off data for TRAC, which was based on SWARM, and that this information would inform future research income. If the University did not meet TRAC compliance standards, default rates would apply, to the detriment of the University. He commented that, while the senior management of the University understood colleagues' concerns about workload, this was separate from TRAC sign off. It is in the interest of everyone at the University to ensure that accurate information is used for academic costing.

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that concerns about workload would be addressed through the development of the new strategy. The Provost reminded the Committee that concerns about workload were also being considered by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Board, which included trade union representation. UCU representatives commented that TRAC was highlighting concerns about workload, and UCU did not consider discussions on this were making sufficient progress. Staff who were concentrating on

teaching did not consider their contribution was appropriately recognised, particularly for promotion.

21.18 Membership of the Committee

The Committee noted that this was the last meeting which would be attended by Sarah Buck and Philippa Davey. The Committee thanked them for their contribution to its work and wished them both the best for their future.