

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF MEETING

UCU JNC – 25 May 2023 – 2:00 pm (Microsoft Teams)

Present: Damian McAlister (People and Culture); Paul Davidson (People and Culture); Mark Latuske (People and Culture); Fiona Wills (People and Culture); Tina Gallagher (People and Culture); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O’Beirn (UCU); Adrian Grant (UCU)

Apologies: Mary Hannon-Fletcher

In Attendance: Rhona Reid (People and Culture)

23.14 Welcome and Apologies

The CPO welcomed everyone to the meeting and passed on apologies on behalf of Professor Hannon-Fletcher.

23.15 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2023

The CPO asked if there were any comments on the accuracy of the minutes of 24 February. None were noted.

23.16 Matters arising from the Minutes of 24 February 2023

- UCU requested a review meeting to discuss ongoing workload issues in UBS.
- UCU also asked for an update on the Academic Promotions Scheme in relation to their query concerning backpay for those candidates who were successful in the most recent round of promotions.
- Mr Davidson explained that, on this occasion, the period of time between a candidate’s application for promotion and any promotion taking effect did not attract backpay. This is due to the fact that the period of time taken to process promotion applications did not extend beyond six months and this would be considered a reasonable length of time to run the process given the sheer volume of candidates.
- UCU also requested an update on the academic workload project as the survey had recently been sent out to the Heads of School.

23.17 Casualisation

Mr Davidson advised that a recent update has been provided at JUCNC and there were no further updates to report at this meeting in relation to ongoing work concerning hourly paid lecturers. The CPO welcomed future discussions on rates of pay, the type of work that hourly paid lecturers carry out, job titles and other related matters.

UCU stated that their energies are focussed on casualisation. Pay and the fractionalisation of work are important matters set out under UCU’s heads of claim. UCU would like to understand more about how payment for this work is calculated. UCU highlighted the importance of integrating hourly paid staff into their areas of work.

The CPO stated that the University is committed to paying PhD research students an increase in pay in line with the national pay awards. He was interested in understanding more about why PhD students were asked to fill casual contracts to provide teaching cover within Schools. He was keen to set up specific principles on how temporary staff could be engaged in the organisation for cover for long-term sickness absence, maternity cover etc. He committed to discussing these issues further with UCU.

UCU brought up the small number of staff who do not fall into the categories being considered within the process such as those clerical, technical and professional services staff who are externally funded (eg through charities, research councils or businesses). UCU requested that this cohort of staff are included in any revised agreement.

Ms Gallagher confirmed that a meeting had been held recently with UCU representatives in attendance to discuss ongoing work on fixed term contracts. Meetings to discuss fixed term contract usage would be taking place every two months. The most recent meeting included discussions on the reasons behind the usage of fixed term contracts of employment. Reporting on the number of fixed term contracts which had been switched to permanent contracts of employment was also covered in the meeting.

Ms Gallagher stated that she welcomed feedback on ways in which improvements could be achieved in the future. The CPO pointed out that the data relating to fixed term contract usage has now been cleansed and validated.

UCU recorded their thanks to the People Partners in relation to the useful two-monthly review of fixed term contract usage and discussions on how staff can be supported towards permanency.

UCU asked for feedback regarding a meeting that had taken place with the School of Art. The CPO advised that a meeting had taken place with Brian Dixon and Paul Connolly. The meeting related to a concern raised that posts which were substantively vacant were being covered by hourly paid lecturers. The CPO reported that Ruth Patterson, People Partner for AHSS, was working with Brian Dixon and Paul Connolly to address this matter. Ms Gallagher advised that a paper would be issued in June. UCU stated that they were pleased to see that this work was being carried out.

23.18 PEOPLE MATTERS

People Plan

The CPO stated that he was keen to respond to the new People Strategy with a revised People Plan. He was keen to build upon engagement with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders including trade unions.

Mr Latuske reminded the Committee of the University's previous People and Culture Strategy which was the first of its kind across the institution. The ambition now was to develop a new strategy with an even greater focus on 'people' themes which has gained greater prominence under the new institutional strategy. Mr Latuske said that he was keen to create a document which could evolve in response to feedback received from stakeholders and staff across the University on different needs. As such, the next stage in this process would be to reach out to Executive Deans and other stakeholders across the organisation including the trade unions. The present aim is to have this document prepared by the end of the year.

Valuing Voices

Mr Latuske updated the Committee on the Valuing Voices project. He thanked the Committee for their input. The following Monday was to be the launch date for the Pilot Survey. The survey questions would be variants of the Capita survey which ran in 2017. The survey was designed to generate rich data to inform the development of the People Plan. The survey would also be used to test the external provider 'WorkL'.

The survey would include twelve questions with a maximum completion time of five minutes. For those staff without access to a laptop, there would be the opportunity to complete the survey in a dedicated room set up on each campus and this would be available over a three-day period and supported by the Employee Experience team. A series of optional staff and manager briefings were also available. Mr Latuske also advised of the intention to create an Oversight Group.

Mr Latuske made clear that the Wellbeing Surveys and the Stress Management Surveys would not be affected by the Valuing Voices project and care would be taken to ensure no overlap in the surveys.

UCU thanked Mr Latuske for the update and requested more information on the Oversight Group.

Mr Latuske clarified that the Oversight Group would provide oversight into the best ways to achieve feedback and oversight into how feedback is dealt with. The role of the Oversight Group would be designed to fit with existing structures and governance, but it was a work in progress at the time of this meeting.

The CPO added that if matters arose that were pertinent to JNC or JUCNC, contracts of employment, ways of working etc, the Oversight Group would be required to bring such matters to JUCNC.

UCU asked about the practical elements of the Oversight Group. How would it function?

Mr Latuske responded that the Group shouldn't have more than 15-20 members. The group should include a diverse range of members from all faculties, trade unions, and stakeholders, representative of different grades. He anticipated that monthly meetings would take place with the potential for additional sub-groups to deal with specific matters where necessary.

Valuing Voices was evolving and becoming more focussed on looking at ways of capturing the voices of individuals.

UCU stated that they would encourage members to complete the Valuing Voices Survey. They pointed out that there can be difficulties with surveys when responses conflict with other survey feedback.

DAR

Mr Latuske advised there was a lot of work ongoing in both the People Partnering team and the People Development team. There is now the option to use an online tool for DAR. Supporting documentation is also available on SharePoint. This process would enable a better understanding of the development needs and skills gaps within the University. UCU said that they were aware that DAR was being implemented in areas such as AHSS. They added that it is important that older members of staff are supported as well as younger members. UCU had received mixed feedback from different areas of the University on its usefulness and wished to know if there were any plans to review people's experiences.

Mr Latuske said he would check with the People Development team to find out if there were plans for reviews to be sought.

23.19 AOB

UCU raised the following matters:

1. The first issue was the Management Review. UCU had raised objections prior to this meeting and felt that they had to bring this matter to this forum. They made clear that they object to this process because it falls outside the University's existing negotiated policies. It was UCU's understanding that there was no right of appeal under this process, and they questioned whether it was the most appropriate way to deal with structural issues in a given area.

The CPO responded that he did not share UCU's view. In his experience, the employer has always retained the right to carry out workplace investigations into issues that don't fit neatly within any organisational policy. Workplace Reviews are normally used to investigate a set of dynamic employee relations issues that manifest themselves in incidents that occur in the workplace. It is necessary to try to establish facts by conducting investigations.

The CPO noted UCU's objections but made clear that it was in everyone's interest to get to the bottom of the issues being investigated under a Workplace Review. Depending on the outcome of a Workplace Review, there may be a requirement to initiate disciplinary proceeding in which case the full rigours of the University's policy would be applied which would ensure that a fair process was followed.

The Committee took at 5 minute break at 3:00 pm.

Following the break, the CPO suggested that he could offer a date for a separate meeting with UCU to further discuss this matter.

2. UCU requested an update on the schedule of the restructuring programmed for the Library, Student Administration, and Sports Services. Mr Davidson said that he would keep UCU updated on the timeline of restructurings which had not yet been finalised.
3. UCU asked if there was any update on UCEA negotiations.

The CPO responded that at this point in time and on a national scale both sides were "polar distance" apart on reaching agreement. Issues of affordability had been exposed. Matters underpinning the marking and assessment boycott had not been resolved although progress had been made in relation to negotiations on pensions.

UCU acknowledged the work done by the CPO and the VC in relation to negotiations with USS and on workload issues.

Meeting ended at 3:20 pm