

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the UCU JNC Meeting held on 8 November 2023 at 2pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Paul Davidson
Mark Latuske
Fiona Wills
Tina Gallagher
Mary Hannon-Fletcher
Paddy Mackel (UCU)
Linda Moore (UCU)
Norman Hagan (UCU)
Aisling O'Beirn (UCU)
Dawid Stanczak (UCU)

In Attendance:

Rhona Reid (People and Culture)

Apologies:

Damian McAlister
Stephe Baker (UCU)

23.20 Welcome and Apologies

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) welcomed those in attendance and noted apologies.

23.21 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) asked if there were any comments on the accuracy of the minutes of 25 May 2023. None were noted.

23.22 Matters arising from the minutes of 25 May 2023

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) provided an update on current restructuring exercises as follows:

Library Services:

The restructuring process is underway in Library Services. The timeline has been extended to deal effectively with the matching process. After this process has been concluded, departmental trawls will take place if necessary.

UCU asked for commitment from management in relation to those staff who wish to challenge the outcome of the matching process. UCU also requested confirmation that

extensions of fixed term contracts or 'acting up' arrangements would be considered as part of the restructuring process.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) confirmed that the restructuring exercise was being conducted in line with the Organisational Structure Change (OSC) Policy. He added that the ambition is that everyone will get a permanent job as an outcome of the restructuring exercise and management there no intention to disadvantage anyone through this process.

The People Partnering Manager added that for those staff on fixed term contracts who do not have a substantive underlying post, 6-3-1 meetings would apply.

Student Administration:

The restructure of Student Administration is currently at a much earlier stage. A proposal is being formulated and job evaluations are being carried out. Consultation will open in December. This matter will be discussed as a substantive item at JUCNC

Sports Services:

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) advised that consultation is expected to commence at Easter depending on the progress of the Student Administration restructuring process.

UUBS Student Monitoring

UCU requested an update on UUBS matters including the monitoring of international student attendance. The Director advised that a separate meeting was taking place with the People Partnering Manager to discuss monitoring issues.

Exceptional Bonus Scheme

UCU asked if there were plans to extend the Exceptional Bonus Scheme. The Director of People and Culture (Partnership and Services) clarified that following a review in UUBS, there would be no reversal of the decision not to extend the operation of the exceptional bonus scheme.

23.23 Ongoing negotiations

The Director provided a brief update on the following ongoing negotiations:

Hourly Paid staff

Triggered by UCU's Heads of Claim document, discussions with UCU on hourly paid staff are progressing well with main themes agreed and a further meeting arranged to take place this month.

Academic Promotions Scheme

Two full day sessions of negotiations with UCU took place in August to discuss the scheme. The Committee is now looking at indicative criteria and this will be discussed as part of a series of forthcoming negotiations chaired jointly by Professor Gormley-Heenan and the CPO.

Academic Workload Model

Since agreement of the terms of reference earlier in the year, a HoS Survey has been conducted. A sub-team has been formed to agree the best way to analyse and assess the survey data. The sub-team is due to report on survey results to the committee in the new year.

UCU stated that they are keen to get negotiations moving forward.

UCU Facilities Time

The employer-side requested notification of UCU's elected office holders.

UCU responded that there is no president or vice president in place. Work is being shared on a collaborative basis. Dr Moore suggested that this might represent a more feminist way of working. UCU has different officers involved in different work and all have the authority to negotiate on behalf of UCU. UCU offered to re-send their committee list.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) suggested that if UCU believed it would be valuable to include additional UCU committee representatives in negotiations, UCU could put in a request for additional facilities time to accommodate a larger negotiating team representing a broader diversity of views. Management would look favourably at supporting this.

23.24 Athena Swan Update

The Dean of EDI shared a presentation updating the committee on developments in relation to the Athena Swan Charter. The University signed up to the Charter in 2012 and achieved the silver award this year with 13 Schools now holding awards. The School of Nursing is now hoping to apply for the sector leading gold award.

UCU questioned the figures showing female success rates in achieving promotion. The Dean of EDI said that she would share these figures with UCU.

UCU welcomed the clear progress made in relation to academic staff and asked for information regarding professional services, technical and operational staff with specificity for access to promotion for this category of staff.

The Dean of EDI explained that the team is looking at developing an action plan to integrate the new approach of including academic-related staff in the Athena Swan framework at Ulster.

UCU said that they welcome the extension of the Returning Carers Scheme to professional services staff and asked for the latest figures showing uptake of the Scheme.

UCU commented that Athena Swan is strong on protecting the rights of trans people and inter-sectional minorities. Some universities are making stronger statements on this than Ulster.

UCU questioned the low response rate to the survey and suggested that it should be split into academic, other groups, and by grade. UCU also requested access to culture surveys carried out within Schools.

The Dean of EDI responded that the low response rate was possibly due to the timing of the survey which was carried out as staff were returning to the workplace following lockdown. However, the team was not able to establish a definitive rationale for the low response rate.

UCU asked for the Athena Swan survey results to be shared with them.

The Dean of EDI made clear that the survey participants were advised that their responses were only to be used for the purpose of the Athena Swan application process and would not be shared more widely. It would therefore be inappropriate to share the responses with UCU.

UCU stated that their intention is not to obtain details set out in individual responses but rather to an overall perspective of trends in relation to gender equality issues.

The Dean of EDI explained that actions have been identified to deal with some survey outcomes. The issues and actions arising from the survey will be shared in a report which will be uploaded onto the University's Athena Swan webpages.

23.25 Valuing Voices

The Director of Employee Engagement acknowledged that in the last six months the trade unions have made a significant contribution to this project by advising on questions, the use of language, terms of reference, and through their participation in the oversight group.

To date, a pulse survey has taken place to test the new WorkL system which resulted in positive feedback and good data. For example, the extent to which the institution has implemented wellbeing initiatives was surveyed through this method and has resulted in more funding being made available to address wellbeing matters.

The Oversight Group had its first meeting in August and further meetings took place on different campuses to discuss the fuller survey. Communications around the fuller survey are underway and the launch is planned later this month.

The survey will not include as many questions as used in the previous survey conducted by Capita and the Director of Employee Engagement is working with WorkL to discuss the six question categories and finalise questions so that the survey results can be benchmarked against other institutions.

UCU requested that staff should be given the opportunity to give qualitative responses to questions.

The Director of Employee Engagement responded that he was working with the Oversight Group to develop 12 additional questions to enable this. He added that the team will also be running further pulse surveys which will be less time consuming for

colleagues. The employee voice will be augmented through the use of an employee panel from across all campuses. However, this is not intended to sideline consultation mechanisms.

Section 75 questions will also be included in the survey, but participants can opt out if they wish.

UCU asked if the final version of the survey has been shared yet.

The Director of Employee Engagement responded that it will be shared with UCU this week. The survey has been shared with SLT who approved the final version. A check had also taken place with Workl to ensure that the questions used don't compromise the option to benchmark the University's results with those of other institutions.

UCU stated that they would like to see final version before release.

The Director of Employee Engagement responded that he was happy to share the questions with UCU but would not be prepared to make changes to the final document.

UCU stated that they had expected to see the final questions at this meeting and not to see survey shared as a 'fait accompli' without consultation at JUCNC.

The Director of Employee Engagement responded that he and his team have worked collaboratively with trade unions and will try to find a solution and consider options if this is a procedural matter.

UCU acknowledged the value of the Oversight Group but stated that the Oversight Group is not the recognised body to consult with on this. Therefore, they were surprised that the questions were not being considered at this meeting. They requested that a meeting should be convened to ensure that the trade unions were given their place to look at the survey.

The Director of Employee Engagement responded that the questions would be shared with them within 24 hours.

The Director of Employee Engagement advised that the intention is that at the next Oversight Group meeting, they will be looking at longer term plans and additional features that could be considered to enhance the Valuing Voices initiative.

UCU advised that they would encourage their members to complete survey. However, they would have like to have seen a fuller survey including a workload survey.

23.26 DAR

This matter will be updated at a future JUCNC meeting.

23.27 Academic Related Career Progression

Approval was being sought from SPG to recruit a new role to deal with this matter due to a lack of capacity within the team presently. This matter will be discussed further at a future JUCNC meeting.

23.28 AOB

No matters were raised under AOB.

Meeting ended at 16:04