

UNITE JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JNC)

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 12 May 2020. Meeting held via Skype under Covid-19 restrictions.

PRESENT

Richard Young (UNITE); Paul Agnew (UNITE); Judith Hough (UNITE); Gareth Scott (UNITE); Rhonda Black (UNITE); Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Mark Latuske (People & Culture).

APOLOGIES

John Mulholland (UNITE); Ivor McAleese (UNITE).

IN ATTENDANCE

Christine Irwin (People & Culture), Geoff Gillan (People & Culture); Brian McAuley.

20.08 WELCOME & ADMIN

Mr Davidson opened the meeting and welcomed all. Mr McAlister to arrive 10 minutes after meeting start. Geoff Gillan to leave at 3pm. Brian McAuley to join the meeting at 3pm.

Additional agenda item to be included, relating to a paper on Risk Assessment presented by Mr Scott.

20.09 ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF 6 FEBRUARY 2020

The following amendments were agreed.

20.01 Page 1, paragraph 4: Mr Young to send revised wording for this paragraph.

20:05: " Mr Young advised that UNITE has significant concerns about the remit of the external consultants" changed to "Mr Young advised that UNITE has significant concerns about lack of consultation on the remit of the external consultants".

20.10 MATTERS ARISING

20.01 Facilities time: Mr Davidson noted that in Spring 2019, the University had offered additional facilities time to UNITE (offer to backfill 0.5 FTE), but as yet had not received confirmation from UNITE on how they wish to use the backfill.

Mr Young noted some of the practical difficulties for UNITE in availing of the offer. After substantial discussion UNITE advised that they would give further consideration to how best to use the backfill.

20:05: Discussion took place in relation to the ongoing restructuring in Estates. UNITE raised concerns that they did not want to lose out on the opportunity of having a conversation with the external consultants because of lockdown restrictions. Mr Davidson advised that the University wish to ensure that the employee voice heard in the restructure process and to facilitate this, the period of engagement of the consultants will be extended to enable conversations to take place. Mr Young advised that the staff wanted to meet with the consultants without managers present as do UNITE. Mr Davidson took an action for People and Culture to talk with Stephen Doherty in Estates to ensure that this happens.

19:21 Discussion took place in relation to the provision of pre-retirement courses. UNITE and Management agreed that this is a good idea. The People Development section within People and Culture will explore how best to facilitate such courses.

Mr Young advised that UNITE wished to thank Lucia O'Connor for the provision of training on financial planning, from which he had received good feedback.

20.02. ISD & Faculty IT Restructuring. Mr Davidson advised that before the lockdown, matching had been completed and the recruitment stage commenced. With Covid-19 restrictions it had become necessary to pause recruitment.

20.04 GBD. Mr Young advised that UNITE are concerned about the content of the draft flexi-time policy noting that the policy is not sufficiently flexible around start and finish times and is not reflective of discussions which had been held in relation to the sickness policy and it's link to flexi-time. Mr Davidson noted that the policy is a draft and discussions will continue.

Mr Latuske spoke about the sickness absence policy noting that good engagement had taken place to date, but further engagements required. Mr Young asked that it be noted that UNITE's participation in working groups such as that for the sickness absence policy, should not be interpreted as an indicator of agreement. He noted that agreement can only be secured through the appropriate committees (JNC, JUCNC and HSW).

20.11 Risk Assessment

Mr Davidson thanked Mr Scott for his paper on Risk Assessment linked to the pandemic. Mr Scott emphasized the importance of Risk Assessment in relation to return to work arrangements.

Mr McAlister advised that he chairs Ulster University's Recovery Planning Group. Mr McAlister advised that the primary concern of the University is the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of staff and students.

Mr Young said that the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of staff and students is paramount for UNITE and UNITE appreciated that this is recognised at senior levels in the University.

Mr Gillan left the meeting at 14:58

20.12 Fixed Term Contracts

Mr Davidson advised that UCU had written to the University to request that no fixed-term contracts should be terminated during Covid-19 emergency. Mr Davidson noted that while the University could not agree in full to the request, a decision had been made that fixed-term contracts would be extended on a month by month basis until July 2020.

Mr Young said that it was excellent news in relation to the extension of current fixed term contracts and asked that the University recognise that there are fixed term staff waiting for restructure posts to come up, to apply for, with restructure not continuing at the same pace, this impacts availability of roles to apply for.

Discussion also took place on the ending of fixed-term contracts generally (i.e. leaving aside the particular issues relating to the pandemic). It was agreed that this will be further explored at future JUCNCs.

Mr McAlister left the meeting at 15:25

20:13 Technicians Charter.

Mr McAuley updated the meeting about work on the Technicians Charter. Mr McAuley advised of a useful meeting with faculty representatives two weeks ago in which a way forward had been agreed. A technician from Queens had agreed to co-chair a meeting where she would talk about her experiences of the Charter. All technical staff were invited to join the meeting. Representation from each of the faculties had been sought to form a technician's charter working group. Mr McAuley said that there was a technician's commitment group, chaired and sponsored by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and that Professor Bartholomew was preparing a statement of University commitment. A charter was expected to be in place by the next academic year, which would have been designed and delivered by staff.

Mr McAuley advised that he had a budget which would enable staff to join certain conferences and he had tasked senior staff in the faculty of Life and Health Sciences to find guest speakers and provide training sessions.

Mr Young said that UNITE was very grateful to Mr McAuley coming to talk to the meeting. UNITE wanted to be assured of union involvement and spoke of past experience where only senior managers went on training courses. The Union position is that all staff should be allowed to attend courses as relevant to them and that there be some recognition for course attendance.

Mr Young asked about the involvement of further education colleges. Mr McAuley advised that he had reached out to the FE providers to discuss shared opportunities and costs.

The meeting agreed that Mr McAuley should continue to update JNC and attend future meetings using JNC as required.

Ms Black thanked Mr McAuley saying that this was a fantastic opportunity which was a long time coming. Ms Hough said that it was a great initiative and that UNITE appreciated the hard work, time and effort.

Mr McAuley left the meeting at 15:42

20:14 Homeworking

Mr Davidson invited UNITE to share experiences of homeworking for their membership.

Mr Young spoke of the importance of ensuring that all staff have suitable IT equipment and support.

Discussion took place in relation to the challenges linked to childcare and home schooling.

20:15 Furlough.

Mr Young asked for the Furlough Q&A to be published so that UNITE could refer people to the site. Mr Davidson agreed to post a set of Q&As

20:16 AOB

Mr Davidson invited any other business. No items were put forward for discussion.

Meeting ended 16:06