

# ULSTER UNIVERSITY

## CONFIRMED NOTES OF MEETING

### UCU JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JNC)

Date: 24 February 2023

Present: Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture); Fiona Wills (People and Culture); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU); Stephen Baker (UCU); Adrian Grant; Damian Gallagher.

In Attendance: Fiona Wills (People & Culture)

Apologies: Mark Latuske (People & Culture)

Format: Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

#### 23.08 Welcome

The CPO welcomed all attendees and noted that Mr Gallagher would be present for the agenda item related to the Exceptional Bonus Scheme and Mr Grant would join later in the meeting.

#### 23.09 Minutes of the meeting held on 08 December 2022

The CPO invited comments on the accuracy of the draft minutes of the meeting held on 8th December. No changes were requested.

#### 23.10 Review of UUBS Negotiations

UCU advised that they sought clarification on the Exceptional Bonus Scheme introduced into UUBS following a series of intensive discussions in January. The seniority and authority of the management negotiating team was questioned. Concerns were raised around the assessment of the workload and capacity of those affected and the decision-making process used to grant access to the Scheme.

Mr Davidson responded that as well as the relevant Heads of School for the areas affected by the Scheme, Professor O'Neill was also on the negotiating team. He summarised the underpinning principles of the Scheme as follows:

- Where work is displaced to the evening or weekend due to the requirement to provide additional classes, the bonus scheme will be made available to those teaching in the two affected Schools.
- The Scheme is entirely voluntary. There will be no obligation on any individual to participate in the Scheme.
- There is no obligation on the University to offer the Scheme to any individual.
- In circumstances whereby additional staff have already been recruited, there will no longer be a requirement for the Scheme.
- Similarly, as soon as additional members of staff are recruited, the Scheme will no longer be applicable.

UCU advised that they have concerns around an increase in pastoral care, teaching and assessment resulting from a higher intake in international student numbers.

The CPO responded that as an institution, academic workloads will be addressed, and this issue has been identified as a key priority for 2023.

UCU left the meeting for a separate, brief discussion on these matters.

The meeting resumed at 10.21.

UCU commented that their members had been angered by the Scheme and were worried about its implications for the future. They stated that additional recruitment alone would not spontaneously eradicate the issues presented by the increase in international student numbers. Concerns had been raised by members around the requirement for trust to be implicit in relation to the disclosure of additional workload.

The CPO responded that the University accepts that taking in more students will bring more work. He stated that SLT has prioritised this issue of workload and the Committee is keen to gain a clear understanding of all perspectives on this matter. There is a requirement to assess how workloads have changed using an evidenced-based process. The ambition is to adopt principles of transparency, equity, equality and wellbeing as key elements of the academic workload scheme.

### 23.11 Workload Distribution

Mr Davidson advised UCU that the management negotiating team comprises the following colleagues: Professors Seawright, Hutchinson, Connolly and Maguire, Mr McAlister and Mr Davidson.

UCU advised that their negotiating team includes Dr Moore, Dr O'Beirn, Dr Mitchell and Mr Mackel.

UCU expressed concern over the size and gender balance of the management team and advised that they may increase the size of their team by one person.

Mr Davidson offered to reduce the management team to five. He had hoped to include the new Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion but it was unlikely that she will be in post in time for the start of negotiations.

Mr Mackel questioned what might happen should it emerge that the University has an inadequate academic staff headcount.

The CPO explained that while the University has already significantly increased its headcount, he believes that the organisation must become more intuitive about the way in which workloads are managed. He committed to share the number of new staff recruited in the last academic year. He commented that the University has invested in the recruitment of additional academic, student support and wellbeing staff. The CPO made a commitment to invest more into the recruitment of additional staff if deemed necessary. He pointed out that Ulster is number two in the UK for international student growth and work is ongoing to assess what the best size might be.

UCU stated that they would like to commence negotiations with a discussion on the remit, scope, ToR, and the desired outcome of the academic workload scheme. During the negotiations, they would like to see fractional staff prioritised. They would also like to discuss the notional reduction in working time from a 37.5 to a 35-hour working week. They added that some issues could be immediately ameliorated.

The CPO responded that it would be important to understand more about these demands which would be discussed in more detail in the negotiation meetings.

### 23.12 Academic Promotions Schemes

Mr Davidson provided an update on the current round of academic promotions. Final decisions were due to be made by 10<sup>th</sup> March and results would be communicated to applicants thereafter. There had been a delay in the process due to sickness absence.

UCU requested that pay increases arising from the promotions should be backdated to September 2022 because of the delay in the process.

Mr Davidson said that he would look into the dates from when the promotions were due to be effective to ensure that nobody is unnecessarily penalised as a result of the delay in the process. Mr Davidson explained that there were over 80 candidates in the current academic promotions round with senior academic leaders dedicating approximately 90 minutes to each application.

UCU commented that the scheme needs to be run more efficiently and there is a clear need for a review of the process.

The CPO recognised that the assessment process should be run more consistently. He stated that he is committed to the review and would indicate timelines to the trade unions as soon as the dates have been confirmed.

He announced that the CRS Promotions Scheme was concluded on time before Christmas and a management negotiating team comprising Professors Maguire, Meenan and Gault had already been organised. He commented that the four Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching within the institution are all female and

the four Associate Deans for Research are male. This is why our negotiating team for the review of the CRS Promotions Scheme is male.

### 23.12 Update on Fixed Term Contracts

Prior to the meeting, a paper had been shared by Mrs Cowan showing the expected end dates of staff on fixed term contracts for the AY 2022-3. Mr Davidson explained that the data includes e-tutors, hourly-paid lecturers (some of whom who have retired from their permanent role), and externally funded CRS.

UCU requested that a separate meeting is held to discuss the details received. They wish to examine the reasons why, in some Schools, there are larger clusters of staff on fixed term contracts. They also wish to find out if any of the predicted redundancies might be avoided and whether 6-3-1 conversations are taking place in reality. They are keen to look at job security for hourly paid and other on fixed term contracts.

The CPO commented on and questioned the considerable trend for using part-time lecturers on fixed term contracts. He would like to include this matter in the workload allocation conversations.

Mr Mackel highlighted that in the School of Art, in particular, there appears to be an over-reliance on the use of fixed term contracts to cover vacancies. Dr O'Beirn confirmed this and requested that this is looked into immediately. The CPO offered to meet to discuss the issues in the School of Art. He offered meeting dates at the beginning of March.

Mr Mackel also remarked that more than 100 staff are due to lose their jobs by the end of April 2023 which could cause legal issues for the University. He also noted that some people have been working on a fixed term contract basis for up to 19 years, and 15 people having worked on fixed term contracts for more than 5 years.

Mr Grant suggested that the data is audited to assess and establish a fair reflection of the current circumstances. He recommended that a meeting is set up to look in detail at the data.

The CPO agreed that a meeting should take place. He confirmed that he receives updates on a month-by-month basis with the numbers of staff who have converted from fixed-term and temporary contracts to permanent contracts of employment. He confirmed that the 6-3-1 process is being implemented by the People Partners.

The meeting ended at 11:27