

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

UNITE JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JNC)

CONFIRMED Notes of meeting held on 22 May 2023

Present:

Damian McAlister (People and Culture)
Paul Davidson (People and Culture)
Mark Latuske (People and Culture)
Fiona Wills (People and Culture)
Professor Mary Hannon-Fletcher (Dean EDI)
Richard Young (Unite)
Paul Agnew (Unite)
Judith Hough (Unite)
Tony Starrs (Unite)
Gareth Scott (Unite)

In Attendance:

Rhona Reid (People and Culture)

Apologies:

Tina Gallagher (People and Culture)
Rhonda Black (Unite)

Format:

Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

23.01 Welcome and Housekeeping

CPO welcomed all to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves as Mary-Hannon Fletcher was new to the Committee. Mary would be explaining her role later in the meeting.

23.02 Accuracy of the Minutes of the Meeting of 07 Dec 2022

CPO asked if there were any comments on the accuracy of the minutes of 07 December 2022. UNITE asked for the following amendments to be made to the minutes:

- 22.16 Grievance Policy – Change wording to (meeting with UCU was to take place).
- 22.19 – DWU Staff - second sentence – take out the brackets referring to (mainly JN now BT).
- 22.19 – DWU Team – Change SIPFED to SNIPEF and SNJIB.

23.03 Matters Arising from the Minutes of 07 Dec 2022

None

23.04 Introduction to the New Dean, EDI

The CPO welcomed everyone and introduced Professor Mary Hannon-Fletcher who spoke about her new appointment as Dean of EDI. The role has arisen because the University is placing EDI at the front and centre of the new strategy 'People, Place and Partnerships – Delivering sustainable futures for all'. This role encompasses EDI issues that involve students as well as staff and it is anticipated that some unique and innovative ideas will be introduced under the new strategy and in line with the University's values.

The CPO commented that Professor Hannon-Fletcher's new role is a pivotal element of the new strategy. He recognised that EDI has always been an important focus at UU and paid tribute to the work already achieved by Mr Latuske and his team in this regard to date.

Unite asked if UUSU would be involved in the work carried out by Professor Hannon-Fletcher.

Professor Hannon-Fletcher clarified that her intention is to work with a range of stakeholders across the organisation including staff, students, and community. Professor Hannon-Fletcher stated that her ambition is to embrace diversity and she is looking at how best to bring forward cases for resources to support ways in which this can be achieved across the student population. She would also be keen to engage with UUSU to establish how best to demonstrate inclusion across the University.

Unite asked for a definition of 'inclusion'.

Professor Hannon-Fletcher responded, "Equal access to resources for all. We have always focused on minority groups but we are now focused on removing barriers".

The CPO added that we need to allow people to come to work and be themselves. We can be a real force for good. NI has the lowest rate of disabled people in employment compared with the rest of the UK. We can show how to change the momentum for the wider community in NI.

Unite stated that protected characteristics are most important and are protected in law. Inclusion is wider than protected characteristics such as class, privilege and wealth and its impact on access to higher education.

The CPO responded that sustainability is part of our strategy, and we have an incumbent responsibility to look at this for our wider society. He added that he was unsure if the focus on community background should remain the primary focus in NI society.

People Matters

The People Plan:

Mr Latuske explained that P&C Strategy which has been in place in recent years was the first of its kind. We are now moving forward with a 'People Plan' which will be integral to the new People, Place and Partnerships Strategy and we are developing an operating plan to bring this strategy to life.

As an initial step, Mr Latuske has been engaging with People and Culture at senior management team level to develop the 'People Plan' which will have eight areas of importance:

- Work life balance
- Living our values and modelling them
- Employee Relations
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Investing in our people
- Environment to support academic and operational excellence.
- Wellbeing
- Academic and professional services working

The People Operating Plan will include more detail around these themes. We will engage and seek perspective from a range of colleagues and teams, and through the 'Valuing Voices' process.

Valuing Voices:

Mr Latuske updated the Committee on the Valuing Voices project. A five minute 'Colleague Pulse Survey' survey was due to be launched on 29th May with full details published on Insight. This initial survey would test the external provider WorkL and was to repeat some questions which had been included in the 2017 survey.

Mr Latuske had received feedback from Unite on how to engage with those who don't like to participate in surveys and announced that he will be running some 'in person' events to facilitate their engagement.

- Magee Campus: Monday 5 June 2023, 10:30am to 3:30pm – MD013
- Coleraine Campus: Tuesday 6 June 2023, 10:30am to 3:30pm – E213
- Belfast Campus: Friday 9 June 2023, 10:30am to 3:30pm – BD 04 027

Mr Latuske added that the survey isn't the main component of Valuing Voices. He made clear that he does not wish to exclude anyone from the valuing voices piece and will look at innovative ways in engaging with all staff in different ways.

DAR:

Mr Latuske provided an update on the implementation of the DAR process. He explained that People Development (PD) is effectively a team to develop skills

across staff at UU whilst Organisational Design and Change (OD) helps the University deal with the people aspects of how to make systems work better.

A combination of colleagues from PD, OD, and Trade Union representatives would be involved in focusing tailored support in areas including AHSS to provide training for appraisers, online videos, supporting documents, and videos to make people more comfortable with using Dar.

Unite commented that feedback from members suggests that they haven't been asked for their views and input on the DAR process. This would be the first time that many staff will have participated in a DAR.

Unite added that technical staff are increasingly being expected to demonstrate competence in a wide variety of IT skills in Word, Excel etc. Their training and development needs must be looked at. There needs to be more encouragement for staff to be able to go to managers to request training on the skills that they need to improve their ways of working.

Mr Latuske agreed that there is a need to make developmental conversations more frequent. There is a balance between training needs and DAR itself.

Unite made clear that there are members of staff community who need training on Excel and data sheets, Outlook and basic IT skills and the use of ipads. Unite's concern is that the training currently offered doesn't cover the needs of staff and there are a number of capable people who just need training. Digitisation is proving challenging for many staff as work is now constructed around digital skills. Older members of staff in particular need IT training. Some staff also experience difficulties with Planon.

Mr Latuske suggested that colleagues from Unite should meet with the PD team to discuss how best to approach these issues. He added that there are resources that in place already that can be used by staff.

The CPO reassured Unite that a key focus of the People Plan is to ensure that options are available to staff to develop themselves and their careers.

23.06 Estates Survey

Estates Services Survey

Mr Latuske provided feedback on the Estates Services Survey. He informed the Committee that the Culture Survey had been completed and ongoing work was in progress to develop an action plan informed by the survey feedback. From July/August, people managers will be able to attend a version of the Engage management programme which has been modelled specifically for Estates Services. There are also plans for training on DAR, and values and behaviours.

Unite expressed concern that a major issue within the HE sector is a sense of being undervalued. That is, jobs that are advertised now appear to be skilled down and there is concern that staff are being underpaid.

The CPO responded that there have been times when the University appears to have been paying more than other sectors. However, he is aware that Belfast Met is offering jobs at a higher pay band. Job descriptions will be looked at and subjected to an appropriate job evaluation score. The CPO is keen to ensure that those doing the job have appropriate input into the detail of role for the purpose of the evaluation. The National Job Evaluation Scheme will be used.

Unite responded that job specs appeared to have been “dumbed down” in job advertisements which would have impact on a fair evaluation. Unite shares the view with members that jobs are undervalued and welcomes engagement on job evaluation and will cooperate on the mechanisms used to achieve this.

The CPO stated that the University’s position is to ensure fair and equal pay. He has already spoken with the Director and Deputy Director of Estates Services and they are keen to ensure the same.

Unite welcomed the commitment to engage with trade union representatives on HERA. The joint unions would like this to happen in the near future. They stated that they would be interested in looking at HERA in light of JIB.

Mr Davidson clarified that JIB looks at the wider sector whilst HERA involves institutional job evaluations.

Unite responded that HERA doesn’t recognise advances in technology and staff need to be recompensed so that they are paid comparatively with other sectors.

The CPO pointed to the need to look at a range of factors including pay, and how we as an employer maintain the excellent service provided by the DWU workforce that we have.

1630 – Mr Agnew left the meeting.

The CPO recalled that in his experience, a higher wage can be achieved by achieving a better skillset and there are options to think differently in order to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome for the University and for staff.

Unite expressed their thanks to the CPO for agreeing to look into this matter.

23.07 Technician Commitment

The CPO announced that commitment has been signed, an action plan will be submitted and a steering group has been formed. A bid has been submitted to SPG to access investment into the technician commitment for events and training. He is keen to see work strands developing including a career framework and training opportunities for technical staff. The CPO acknowledged that the University doesn’t do enough to showcase and celebrate the contribution of technicians.

The CPO said that a presentation on the technician commitment will be delivered at the next meeting.

Unite mentioned that technicians have been told that they cannot become academics, but this is not the case. Technicians have been delivering teaching and

marking. Some managers appear to have the view that technicians should not be recognised as academics.

Mr Davidson clarified that there is a recognised pathway for technicians to achieve this status.

Unite responded that unfortunately some staff are leaving to do this work in other HEIs.

The CPO left at 1644.

23.08 Any other business

i. Invigilation

Unite raised this issue on behalf of individual members who had reported that they felt that staff communications make it appear that invigilation is a demand and not a request. Unite stated that staff should not have been led to believe that it is part of their job to invigilate. Also, it was inappropriate to ask Unite members to break the strike action of another trade union.

Mr Davidson responded that invigilation was entirely voluntary. In terms of the Student Admin. team, they have a combined examination and student administration role which is a core part of their work. The reality is that people haven't been asked or instructed to do anything different from previous years.

Unite reported that some members thought that they may suffer a detriment if they didn't volunteer. Also, training for volunteers should have been made available to volunteers because staff feared that if a mistake were made, they would be liable for disciplinary action. Unite added that there was a concern about additional workload. Members were worried that academics will offload this responsibility to support staff in the future.

Mr Davidson responded that there are no plans to make this a clerical job or to bring in external staff to carry out this role. However, if a staff member's job is to support exams and this is part of their usual role, this will continue to be so.

Unite stated that their viewpoint is that invigilation is not a fundamental part of their members job description. There is no problem with staff being asked to volunteer. However, there is concern about tone in the email received such that some staff felt that they were instructed to carry out invigilation. Unite doesn't view that invigilation is a fundamental and contractual obligation and they do not consider that it should become an implied term as a result of volunteering this year. There was concern that staff would be disciplined if they did not volunteer.

Mr Davidson responded that in the vast majority of cases volunteers were not needed and the university would not discipline anyone for not volunteering to invigilate under the circumstances.

Professor Hannon-Fletcher left the meeting.

ii. Facilities Time

Unite alerted the Committee to the problem that Senior Unite Representatives have not been able to make themselves available to carry out their trade union duties. There are occasions when local arrangements for appropriate release from duties need to be put in place to prevent this issue from arising. Unite asked if the University would consider funding an FTE rep.

Mr Davidson responded that a number of options are potentially available and this can be discussed as the University shares an interest in making such arrangements work. He requested that Unite puts in a formal request in writing setting out their specific ask so that a solution can be agreed.

iii. Trade Union Rooms

Unite requested that management look into allocated suitable accessible location for dedicated Trade Union rooms on Coleraine and Magee Campuses.

Mr Davidson responded that we will look into finding appropriate rooms.

Meeting ended at 5.40pm