

# ULSTER UNIVERSITY

## Minutes of the UCU JNC Meeting held on 23 May 2024 at 2.30pm via Microsoft Teams

### Present:

Damian McAlister  
Paul Davidson  
Mary Hannon-Fletcher  
Mark Latuske  
Tina Gallagher  
Linda Moore (UCU) (present 14:39 – 14:46)  
Aisling O'Beirn (UCU)

### In Attendance:

Léan McBrearty (People and Culture)

### Apologies:

Fiona Wills  
Paddy Mackel (UCU)  
Stephen Baker (UCU)

## 24.08 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief People Officer welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) asked if Dr O'Beirn was happy for the meeting to start given that she was the only UCU member present at this time. Dr O'Beirn was satisfied for the meeting to start and said that substantive matters could wait until Dr Moore's arrival.

## 24.09 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2024

The CPO asked if anyone had any comments on the minutes of the last meeting. No comments were raised. Dr O'Beirn said she did not have any comments either, however suggested that Dr Moore might have upon her arrival.

## 24.10 Matters arising from the Minutes of 15 February 2024

The following matters arising were discussed:

### *Changes to teaching and learning-related practices*

UCU asked for an indication of timelines for discussions with the PVC AQSE in relation to changes to teaching and learning practice taking place. The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) advised that there has been email exchanges between the PVC of Academic Quality & Student Experience and UCU to arrange discussions.

## 24.11 Valuing Voices

The CPO asked if there was any update regarding Valuing Voices. The Director of Employee Experience reported that informal meetings have been happening monthly with UCU and Unite to ensure local actions were being taken forward. There are two new team members, and he will look forward to introducing them in the near future. The programme of work continues.

## 24.12 Conduct of Negotiations

UCU introduced this agenda item. UCU suggested that in recent negotiations the amount of time set aside for the meetings was not sufficient and there were long gaps between the meetings. UCU's preference is to set aside full days and concentrated blocks of days for negotiations.

The employer-side agreed but noted that diary challenges both on the employer-side and the union-side sometimes make this difficult. It was agreed that representatives from both unions and People and Culture would meet to attempt to resolve some of the scheduling issues.

## 24.13 Update on Ongoing Negotiations

A brief update was requested to record and minute progress in relation to the three ongoing negotiations relating to academic staff. The following update was provided by the Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services):

*Hourly Paid Staff.* A draft workplace agreement has been exchanged and it is hoped we are close to agreement.

*Workload.* The group agreed to do a refocus and go back to look at the original terms of reference. They discussed how the group were going to engage more widely across the University and agreed to develop focus groups. It was also agreed that a joint statement will be circulated to academic staff. The most recent draft has been sent by the Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) to UCU for comment. In addition, the DVC will engage with Heads of Schools in relation to the current workload model.

*Academic Promotions.* Detailed discussion has taken place on the scheme and each of the three assessment areas and a draft document has been issued. UCU has provided feedback and suggested amendments. The next meeting will review the comments received.

It was noted that the groups are working well together.

## 24.14 Update on REF 2029 by PVC Research

The PVC Research joined the meeting at 15.00 to update the group on REF 2029. He said the process has gone into a slight hiatus as we wait on the People, Culture and Environment guidance from UKRI.

The PVC Research said he has started to arrange six monthly meetings with the Directors of the Units of Assessment so they can begin to plan towards the next REF submission.

The PVC Research noted that the next REF submission will use HESA data to identify the number of research active staff. Therefore Research Directors will begin trilateral conversations with staff to ascertain if they have SRR.

It was confirmed that the University's existing REF Code of Practice that was previously agreed is being used as a structure for determining SRR.

UCU asked if there would be conversations with all staff and if they are going to be individual conversations and outside of the DAR process. The PVC Research indicated that it is likely that there would be a discussion with all staff so they can identify anyone who wants to change their research status and to discuss SRR with new staff.

UCU queried if there will be a cut-off point to confirm if staff are research active. The PVC Research confirmed that HESA numbers would be averaged over the two years before the census date, so there will be a need for an indication of how many people are likely to be included so that an assessment of the number of outputs and case studies required.

The Dean of EDI raised the point that EDI is going to be important in REF. She asked if there will be any working groups to represent people who are disabled or who require reasonable adjustments.

UCU followed up on this and stated they do not agree with REF, partly because it tends to emphasise inequalities and is quite 'ableist'. They asked if there is going to be an Equality Impact Assessment carried out to ensure that everyone can participate in research. UCU highlighted the importance of communicating information relating to this to staff so that where necessary, Reasonable Adjustments can be made to enable people to participate.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) advised that whilst the REF 2029 rules are not confirmed yet, it is expected that (as in previous REFs) there will be a requirement to do Equality Impact Assessments at specific points in the process and all participating universities will be compelled to do them.

The PVC Research noted that REF has evolved to be more inclusive and reflect the wide variability of researchers.

He indicated that he is trying to build a timetable working backwards from the submission date. The information and guidance is under development at this point, but he is working on populating information as he receives it and will share when there is sufficient information for this to be clear to staff.

UCU requested ongoing updates.

The CPO thanked the PVC Research for joining the meeting. He pointed out that Technicians can now be included in the REF process which will in turn involve Unite therefore future updates may be more appropriate at JUCNC.

The PVC Research said he will be happy to come back again to update the group on developments and left the meeting at 15.20.

#### 24.15 Discussion on International Remote Workers (Salary and taxation matters)

The People Partnering Manager explained that a small working group has been looking at how we progress payroll and contractual issues for staff who are living outside the UK and Ireland.

Income tax and social security is due in the country in which work is performed rather than the country in which the employer is based, and that awareness of this issue has been heightened in the post-Brexit and post-pandemic world.

Those employed by Ulster University who are living and working in the rest of the world are very small in number (currently 6 x full-time/fractional staff and 4 x eTutors). These staff carry out their work on a fully remote basis.

Currently, some of the remote international workers are paying UK tax and National Insurance Contributions and others are not. This inconsistent approach is a risk to the University but also for the individuals themselves who may not be making the correct personal tax payments in the countries they are residing in. There are also USS 'out of country' rules that may restrict their ability to be members of the USS pension scheme.

The University has recently engaged Vialto - a 'world-wide' payroll agent. Vialto are working through the list of countries these international remote workers are residing/working in and will be advising us of the appropriate tax information for each individual. We will then contact the affected staff to share this with them and ensure they are aware of the issues and corrective approach proposed.

The staff will continue to receive payments directly from the University, but tax deductions will be calculated by Vialto and paid by us to the country of residence.

We may also need to re-negotiate the related clauses in their contracts of employment.

There is a significant cost to engaging staff who work internationally, but the University will cover the cost for the six people currently working outside UK and Ireland.

eTutors are issued with their contracts on an 'as and when required' basis. Given the costs of processing payments to international workers, those engaged on an 'out of country e-Tutor contract' will be paid quarterly.

#### *Future Employees Working Overseas*

In relation to future employees, one option is to insist that all new employees must reside in the UK. The working group is of the view that this option is not practicable, given the University's worldwide ambitions.

However, it is anticipated that new requests for staff to work and live internationally will only be granted in very exceptional circumstances where there is a compelling business justification for the person to be based overseas.

UCU asked if they will be updated about contractual issues and queried if affected staff will still be able to benefit from the USS pension scheme.

Management confirmed the only changes made to contracts will be to the way in which salaries are paid unless there are specific jurisdictional laws that define a need to amend a clause. If that happens it will be driven by a legal requirement rather than negotiations.

UCU requested updates as this develops.

#### 24.16 AOB

No AOB items were brought forward. The CPO thanked the group for attending the meeting.

**The meeting ended at 3:30pm.**