

**NOTES OF MEETING - UCU JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JNC)**

**Date:** 25 November 2021.

**Present:** Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU), Adrian Grant (UCU); Paddy Mackel (UCU).

**In Attendance:** Amanda Castray (Director of Campus Life); Claire Drummond (Head of Student Experience & Wellbeing); Andy Jaffrey (Head of the Office for Digital Learning); Christine Irwin (People & Culture).

**Apologies:** Kathryn Wills (People & Culture); Mark Latuske (People & Culture); Norman Hagan (UCU).

**Format:** Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

**21:19 Draft policy on Assistance Animals on Campus**

Ms Castray spoke on the draft policy concerning animals on University property. The focus of the policy is on assistance dogs and on meeting the accessibility and wellbeing needs of staff and students. The policy is being consulted on and the next step is to work with the EDI team on screening.

Ms Castray advised that this is a live document and updates had been made to the version provided, following feedback from UUSU. An updated copy was shared after the meeting.

Ms Drummond said that in developing the policy, guidance had been sought from Guide Dogs NI and Assistance Dogs UK to ensure clarity on what constitutes an assistance dog and the level of training required. There was also discussion on public liability insurance as well as associated Health and Safety concerns.

UCU confirmed they are keen to support students and staff on accessibility issues and would provide feedback when they have had a chance to look at the draft policy in more detail.

Mr McAlister advised that the item was brought to JNC with a view to bringing it to January's JUCNC, at a point where it was hoped it would be ready to be agreed as an approved policy.

Feedback to be received by Friday 10 December 2021.

**21:20 Implementation of Blackboard Ally**

Mr Jaffrey spoke to the meeting about technical implementation projects and sought agreed ways to communicate with UCU on future projects.

Funding has been secured through SLATE for a pilot project this academic year for Blackboard Ally and the Office for Digital Learning would like to move forward with this in Semester Two. The project is currently paused to allow for consultation.

Mr Jaffrey provided an update on Blackboard Ally which converts documents uploaded to the VLE into accessible forms of content. If a word document is uploaded, it can be converted to a pdf or HTML as well as other accessible versions of text i.e. e-pop versions for kindles or electronic and audio files for particular needs.

Under the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations it is expected that all content uploaded to the VLE must be accessible and Blackboard Ally would facilitate this.

Mr Jaffrey explained that one of the concerns that staff may have, is that there is an accessibility score for the content as part of the dashboard. ODL has asked if this functionality can be disabled but that is not possible however the accessibility score will only be seen by those teaching on the module and staff in ODL.

UCU advised that they could see the benefits to Blackboard Ally, provided the institution has control of content and can say what must not be converted to downloadable format. Discussion took place on the use/re-use of materials and controls for copyright of content and retention rights. Mr Jaffrey confirmed that the technology only works on material that is already downloadable, access can be restricted.

Discussion took place on the impact on staff workload for providing training on the use of new technology.

In order to provide feedback, Mr Jaffrey confirmed that the paper he provided could be shared with UCU members and Mr Jaffrey (with Clare Thompson), agreed to attend a UCU Committee meeting to demonstrate the software functionality. Ms Gallagher is to facilitate this.

UCU requested that where the technology brought more demands on University staff, that the University commit to providing resource.

Mr McAlister advised that the introduction of the software was in line with the organisational value of Inclusion and consideration would be given to the resources required to ensure accessibility. It was unclear what the resource need would be but this would be considered on a case by case basis.

### **21.21 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 7 June 2021**

The minutes from 7 June 2021 were agreed as accurate.

### **21.22 Matters Arising**

**21.17 Gender Pay.** Mr McAlister confirmed that he had shared the documents as agreed and was keen to make progress on gender pay which may require a separate meeting

As this was a matter that also impacted on UNITE members, UCU agreed to set aside time outside of JUCNC for this discussion.

Mr McAlister to send out dates and times for a meeting in towards the end of January.

### **21.23 Research Staff Promotions**

UCU said that they were not aware of any progress on the review of the research staff promotions scheme and proposed that, whilst they had issues of concern with the existing scheme, reopening the old scheme at this stage would be preferable to having no scheme.

In relation to promotion through the scheme, UCU were concerned that because research staff tend to be on fixed term contracts, following promotion these research staff will face redundancy or re-deployment to a post at a lower grade which has the effect of taking the promotion away. It also has implications on the issue of gender pay.

Mr Davidson advised that in research promotions process was not currently on the shortlist of 5 policies management/unions were considering for review this year but he was still waiting on the outcome of the discussion between UCU and UNITE on the agreed list of policies to be reviewed.

Mr Davidson suggested that when the Unions revert on the list of priority policies, that a determination could then be made on the re-opening of the scheme.

UCU requested back pay for anyone promoted or re-promoted in the period when the promotions scheme was not available. Mr Davidson to come back on the matter.

Discussion took place on the impact of the scheme on the REF and how important research and research staff were to the University. Mr McAlister said that the University was committed to addressing the concerns on casualisation of research staff and to try to retain the talent pipeline and he proposed inviting Liam Maguire and Tim Brundle to join the meeting on 8 December when discussions were opening on the Heads of Claim document which had been submitted.

### **21.24 EQIA – Bilingual Signage**

Full EQIA had been completed on bilingual signage but the matter had been paused within the University pending the proposed introduction of legislation the Irish Language Act

The University is committed to the support of the use of Irish language in society and committed to continue to work to afford better access to Irish speakers who wish to study at the University. In Dalriada Student Village the Irish language quarter enables Irish speakers to practice their language.

While the EQAI is currently stayed, pending the introduction of the legislation, it is hoped that there will be progress on the matter in 2022.

UCU advised that it was their position that the University should not have had to wait for the legislation but thanked Mr McAlister for the positive update.

### **21.25 Academic Promotions**

UCU referenced figures related to promotions as sent to them by Mr Davidson. Further explanation of the figures was required and was provided by Mr Davidson.

UCU requested the figures expressed in numbers and percentages, rather than just numbers. It was agreed to do this where possible, but Mr Davidson advised that where figures related to fewer than 5 people there were potential concerns in relation to protect confidentiality so numbers would not be provided in those instances.

UCU asked if the updated figures could include a breakdown for those on fractional contracts who applied for promotion.

UCU raised concern that there was no appeal process included in the academic or research promotion scheme. Mr Davidson advised that the University is committed to reviewing the scheme in line with the priorities identified in the policy prioritisation exercise. UCU said that the priorities list would be reviewed but it may be that the Academic Promotion Scheme needed to be discussed in addition to the list as there had now been 2 promotion rounds and no policy review. UCU to come back, re: prioritisation.

### **21.26 Magee Expansion**

Mr McAlister advised that the VC was committed to the planned expansion of Magee and that Professor Liam Maguire was leading a project on this on behalf of VCEG. Discussion on ways to

enhance provision at Magee were under way and links with other institutions such as LYIT were being explored

In relation to the proposed 10,000 students at Magee it was clarified that the restriction on MASN numbers was outside of the University's control. An increase in student numbers also requires infrastructure provision and to this end discussions were under way with Derry City & Strabane District Council.

The emerging University strategy and update on campus expansions at Magee and Coleraine would be brought to a future JUCNC. Mr McAlister would invite the VC and DVC to attend and provide an update.

UCU proposed that a ground up rather than top down approach would be better with staff engaged in discussion on new course provision rather than being informed of this by their Head of School. UCU would like greater involvement and involvement in a task force on the project and are willing to assist in getting support to lobby on this matter.

Mr McAlister welcomed UCU support in constructive discussion.

The item is to be discussed at JUCNC.

#### **21.27 AOB**

UCU are looking forward to how the University will respond to the strengthening of statements from Stormont around COVID and what mitigations will be put in place. Mr McAlister advised that this would be addressed at the HSW meeting.

There was a reminder that UCU will be taking part in 3 days of strike action from Wednesday 1 December to Friday 3 December 2021.

**Meeting ended 16:07**