

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the UCU JNC Meeting held on 12 February 2025 at 2pm via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Damian McAlister

Paul Davidson

Mark Latuske

Fiona Wills

Linda Moore

Aisling O'Beirn

Norman Hagan

Paddy Mackel

Ricky Mitchell

Apologies:

Joanne Doherty

Mary Hannon-Fletcher

25.01 Welcome and Apologies

The CPO welcomed the Committee members to the meeting and passed on apologies from Joanne Doherty and Mary Hannon-Fletcher.

25.02 Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 1 November 2024

The draft minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

25.03 Matters Arising from the meeting held on Friday 01 November 2024

Minute 24.12: UCU raised concerns about the time pressures for union representatives created by the ongoing negotiations and the availability of senior staff, which can delay progress.

The CPO commented that it was pleasing to see the significant progress that has been made to date on ongoing negotiations. He encouraged UCU to make further requests for facilities time should they need it.

UCU responded that their concern related to the availability and commitment of senior leaders to attend consultation and negotiation meetings. UCU requested that smaller negotiation teams incorporating fewer senior leaders would aid the progress of negotiations. UCU added that they would prefer negotiation meetings to take place in blocks of time rather than over a series of shorter meetings.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) acknowledged that it is more difficult for senior leaders to set aside blocks of time for negotiations. Moving forward, negotiating teams will comprise of fewer members.

UCU added that the negotiating team must have authority to agree any decisions made as part of the negotiations on behalf of the University.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) stated that the negotiating teams for the management side are clear on their negotiating authority.

UCU also raised a concern that some policies were not being presented for consultation and negotiation with trade unions but appreciated that the JUCNC and HSW Policy Working Group was making progress in addressing this issue.

The CPO added that there are a number of policies and procedures that have not been reviewed for many years which need to be updated. He is confident that the negotiating teams will deliver on this.

Minute 24.13: UCU requested an update on pay negotiations for PhD students who participate in ad hoc hourly paid lecturing opportunities.

UCU reaffirmed the union position that they should be able to negotiate on PhD pay as some PhD tutors are UCU members. UCU also objects to two-tier hourly rates of pay for PhD tutors and other tutors.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) responded that this Committee does not have authority to negotiate on this issue, and currently there are no ongoing negotiations in respect of such payments.

The CPO added that rates of pay will be kept under active review in accordance with national pay negotiations. However, there is currently nothing to report in this regard.

Minute 24.15: UCU queried the process for paying Ulster University employees who are based overseas.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) responded that the company that manages international payroll matters on behalf of Ulster University is called Vialto. Vialto handles payroll matters and related social security and tax liabilities of Ulster University employees who work overseas. (Tax is paid in the jurisdiction within which the work is performed rather than where the employer is based.) There are currently approximately six employees who fall into this category on Ulster University's staff list. These employees have the same employment rights as Ulster University staff based in the UK.

Minute 24.25: UCU requested more frequent or longer JNC meetings. The CPO responded that he would consider this request and provide a response to UCU.

25.04 Update on professional services and non-academic career pathways

The Employee Experience Director informed the Committee that two colleagues have been recruited and are in place to develop a Career Pathways programme for non-academic and professional services staff and work on this project has already commenced. The Employee Experience Director informed the Committee that an informal meeting would be set up to introduce the new team.

UCU requested further information on the nature of the work that would be carried out. They asked if a process similar to the Academic Promotions scheme would be developed.

The Employee Experience Director responded that there were no plans to establish a promotions scheme similar to the process available to academic staff. The purpose of this initiative is to better enable professional services and non-academic staff to explore career development opportunities and career pathways.

UCU asked if the project would include training on interview preparation and confidence building.

The Employee Experience Director stated that while this was not the original intent of the programme, this idea is not entirely off the table. The Career Pathways framework will be designed to identify any gaps in people's competencies that would need to be developed in order for them to progress in their chosen career. He noted that there is an ever-increasing array of training opportunities available to staff. In terms of timeframe for the project, the Employee Experience Director anticipated that it would take up to two years to complete the project.

UCU commented that professional services staff rarely have time during the working day to avail of learning opportunities so adequate time would need to be set aside for colleagues to participate in training courses and successfully complete the pathways.

The Employee Experience Director responded that a more consistent focus on DAR will support access to training.

UCU stated that while the scheme appears to be a useful initiative, they were disappointed to hear that non-academic staff would not be able to avail of a promotions process similar to the Academic Promotions Scheme as in some other universities. UCU added that it seemed unfair that colleagues who are not academic staff are required to go through external recruitment processes in order to achieve promotion within the University.

The Employee Experience Director replied that UCU's point was well made and that the team would investigate what is happening across the sector to inform the project.

UCU asked if staff would be informed about the HERA process.

The Employee Experience Director advised the Committee that the HERA process is used for job evaluation. The purpose of the Career Pathways initiative is to

enable staff to better understand the development opportunities and career paths available to them.

UCU commented that the work of the Employee Experience team was appreciated. However, UCU clarified that they would like to see the introduction of an effective career development scheme involving a promotion process for members who are not academics.

25.05 Valuing Voices update

The Director of Employee Experience summarised key recent activities that have been undertaken as part of the Valuing Voices initiative. The team are currently chasing up responses to requests for feedback on the implementation of local actions arising from the survey from some areas of the University. They have also requested feedback on positive actions that have been implemented to address issues raised in the survey so that these ideas can be shared more widely with others. Overall, local initiatives are gaining traction. A report on Insight was due to be published in February highlighting five areas where there has been positive progress made as an outcome of the Valuing Voices initiative.

Members of the Valuing Voices panel had recently met with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and there were now plans for a member of SLT to join the panel of the Valuing Voices Oversight Group.

The CPO stated that he was pleased with the progress made to date. He added that work was ongoing to address issues arising from the survey such as workload and wellbeing matters.

UCU said that they appreciate the work of the team, and they look forward to the next meeting with the team and hearing what is working positively for staff.

The Director of Employee Experience responded that the team valued the input of the trade unions in this process.

25.06 Local initiatives around workload in UUBS and School of Art

With respect to UUBS, UCU reported that staff have received correspondence regarding the allocation of workload for the academic year 2025/6 based on a total of 1650 hours. UCU requested a discussion with the Executive Dean on this matter.

In relation to the School of Art, UCU raised a concern that extension of a number of fractional posts was due to expire this summer. UCU requested a meeting to discuss future work planning with the Executive Dean and the Head of School.

25.07 Anti-casualisation including etutor issues

UCU requested a breakdown of the number of etutors across different schools.

The CPO responded that this aspect of the University's business is not as prolific as it was previously. Current figures would be forwarded to UCU.

UCU stated that they would like to ensure that etutors are able to access staff and trade union communications as they have the right to join UCU.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) suggested that the trade union pages on the University portal could be used for such purposes.

25.08 Teaching and Learning Issues

UCU requested a written response from the PVC Academic Quality and Student Experience regarding issues raised by UCU prior to the Christmas break.

The CPO advised UCU that he would follow up on this request.

25.09 Update on current academic and academic-related negotiations

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) informed the Committee that there are five live negotiations at present.

With respect to the Disciplinary Procedures, the negotiation teams had been working through the main themes of the procedures, and the management-side had committed to presenting a first draft at the next negotiation meeting.

Negotiations were progressing in relation to the Academic Workload Allocations Model. Ideally, the Academic Workload Allocations Model negotiations would be concluded in advance of the academic planning cycle for the following academic year, ideally by Easter.

Negotiations on Academic Promotions were due to close following one further negotiation meeting.

Professorial Progression negotiations were due to start in March led by the PVC Life and Health Sciences. Early-stage engagement with the JUCNC and HSW Policy Working Group Committee had already taken place, and the negotiation teams would now take this forward.

Negotiations on the Bullying and Harassment (Dignity at Work and Study) Procedures were also due to commence on completion of the Disciplinary Procedures negotiations.

25.10 Follow up on any University plans for promotion of Ulster Scots and Irish Language

UCU asked if there are any plans for the University to progress the promotion of the use of the Ulster Scots and Irish languages.

The CPO responded that this is not a strategic priority at this point in time. This is due in part to the lack of progress politically to appoint language commissioners who could offer guidance on this matter. It is also due to the other priorities that the institution is now facing concerning finance and jobs. If funding streams are resolved, then progress could be made in this area in the future.

25.11 AOB

UCU raised concerns about the consistency of job advertisements for academic staff. They stated that academic staff should not be asked to fulfil the role of Course Director during their probationary period.

The Director of People and Culture (Partnerships and Services) responded that advertised job descriptions are not limited in scope to the probationary period alone but to the wider role.

UCU also raised a concern that some advertised academic jobs involve teaching across two campuses. UCU's view is that the requirement to teach on two campuses is not ideal from a Health and Safety perspective.

Meeting ended at 15:52