

NOTES OF MEETING - JOINT UNION CONSULTATIVE AND NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JUCNC).

Tuesday 24 March 2020, Videoconference and Skype.

Meeting start 10:30am

Present:

Paul Bartholomew - Interim Vice-Chancellor; Cathy Gormley-Heenan - Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Peter Hope – Chief Financial Officer; Niamh Lamond - Chief Operating Officer; Damian McAlister - Director of People & Culture (Chair); Paul Davidson - Deputy Director People & Culture; Mark Latuske – Deputy Director People & Culture; Christine Irwin - Employee Relations Partner; Lindsay Dawe - UCU; Linda Moore - UCU; Aisling O’Beirn - UCU; Richard Young – Unite; Gareth Scott – Unite; Marianne Buick - Unison

Apologies:

Paddy Mackel – UCU.

NOTE: This meeting was held via videoconferencing and Skype under UK Coronavirus restrictions.

20:01 Welcome

Damian McAlister welcomed all to the meeting.

ITEMS FOR SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION

20:05 University’s Financial Position.

Paul Bartholomew provided an overview of the University’s financial position and particularly as it related to the future financial stability of the organisation. The proposed SR2034 Sustainability Review has been stood down, having listened to staff, however the issues that prompted its suggestion haven’t necessarily been addressed and perhaps are now magnified by the COVID-19 and GBD issues.

As part of the drawdown of funds for the GBD loan the Department for Economy (DfE) have requested an assessment of the University’s financial position and we are now taking this forward in terms of a written report which we aim to submit shortly. The current academic plan projects our income upon which our expenditure is projected and assessing that presently suggests a possible £14 million deficit which included budgeting for the re-site of Health Science.

Paul Bartholomew called for Union and Management to work together and wished to begin a dialogue today as to how such a projected deficit could be managed within the organisation and proposed that a further meeting be arranged soon, to share the intended paper which will contain, as well as more information on the projected deficits, possible identified actions to address the projected deficits.

UCU recalled BRG 2015 for which they said planning was woeful and mistakes were made. For Union involvement in working with Management in financial planning, transparency is key. UCU advised of a real concern about the sustainability of H.E in NI and described the current model of moving from crisis to crisis with lack of career development for upcoming academics and older academics being scheduled for redundancy. UCU called for a strategic review re: how UU plays a

part in H.E in NI. UCU also asked for a copy of last year's annual accounts report in addition to the plan to share the paper which would be submitted to the DfE.

Paul Bartholomew said that he was currently active in HE discussion at a National level and said that the NI model of 'part-funded', may be closer to what we see nationally in future.

Niamh Lamond said that underlying sustainability had been embarked on under SR34 which was stood down and is now addressed under business as usual. Changes to become sustainable are in the medium to longer term. The plan for action, is required in the short -term setting out scenarios for future action.

Niamh Lamond advised that certain income streams and activities under the 5 & 50 Strategy have not been realised – particularly international student growth. The removal of the cap in GB and low demographics of 18 year olds in a competitive market have led to not being able to deliver on all planned growth streams. With the breakdown of the NI administration and the existence of more priority issues, particularly health, to contend with, assuming a flat line is an optimistic assessment of the future financial investment from Government. Niamh spoke of tough assumptions that have to be made; a cautious view of growth; a wind back in the growth of the support functions; considerations of pension costs; inflationary rises; a growth in grades and grade inflation, all need to be managed going forward. With COVID-19; the uncertainty of outcome to A-Level examinations and admissions; global recession and its likely impact over the next 5 years, the University needs to assess a wide range of potential scenarios and how we manage financially in those scenarios. This has had a severe impact on operations. All staff recruitment has been paused as a result of COVID-19 however it is likely this may need to continue for some time and we will need to develop a policy for managing vacancies that arise in future. The focus is on protecting the employment existing staff and as such we may need to redeploy staff to priority areas as a means of protecting their employment and upskilling them for new roles.

Peter Hope spoke of tuition fees only going up by CPI inflation (2.5%) which is a real time cut in living. The University has to remodel and look at their cost base. In 2021/2022, there is an extra 1.6 million cost going into system. The University need to make savings in order to operate on a cash neutral basis, going forward. It was agreed that this be detailed in a document for the trade Unions.

Damian McAlister advised that a more diligent review of the restructure of ISD and Estates would be taken and that If current plans were altered, the Unions would be involved.

Linda Moore advised that UCU would expect to be consulted on the financial position and that there may be a requirement for a special JUCNC to consider the paper management had indicated would be shared.

Damian McAlister concurred that a special JUCNC may be required and suggested that this take place just before or after Easter given the timeline upon which the SLT were working to provide a paper to the University Council for consideration before anything is submitted to DfE. Mr McAlister agreed that providing a copy of the 2018/19 annual accounts would be helpful and these would be sent asap.

Niamh Lamond: said that a presentation was to be made at SLT week commencing 6 April. UCU requested the presentation ahead of SLT in order that they have the opportunity to input and consult. Damian McAlister expressed support for Union approach and proposed a meeting between management and Trade Unions to consider this.

Richard Young addressed a number of issues relating to consultation including; consultation on job descriptions, criteria for grade 5 roles, compromise agreements and the requirement to declare posts at risk of redundancy.

Damian McAlister advised that People and Culture would ensure that there is respect for the legal position to consult.

Unite requested a projected number of possible workforce reductions to meet the projected deficit in the financial plan. Paul Bartholomew outlined the equivalent of 250 posts would need to be reduced but that potentially as a result of holding vacancies at the current level of 4% the figure would fall to there being an additional 120 positions to be removed. This estimate is based on current average salaries.

Unite asked that consultations include those providing a continued service after any redundancy.

UCU requested a full equality quality impact assessment (EQIA). People and Culture will comply with University equality screening which will determine whether a full EQIA is needed.

Damian McAlister advised he would undertake to arrange a further JUCNC meeting before Easter to allow for more detailed discussions with supporting information to be provided to the Trade Unions in advance.

20:07 Coronavirus

Damian McAlister thanked the Unions for their collegiality and support over the last 2 weeks with an evolving situation and for the leadership they have shown in helping to calm staff anxieties.

Richard Young talked about the requirement to consult on matters of Health and Safety and as an example referred to the locking of the service street in Jordanstown. Damian McAlister to discuss the concern with Michael Fitzpatrick.

UCU requested a paper showing which issues were being considered as short, medium and long term.

Mr McAlister agreed to same.

Paul Bartholomew spoke on the work that has been done since 17 March 2020 to deliver teaching and assessment online and thanked all those involved.

UCU advised that they had not been consulted about changes and requested that the University schedule special JNCs over the next few months to come to agreements. UCU advised that they expected that the University to conduct risk assessments and equality screening exercises. Damian McAlister proposed twice-weekly meetings with the unions.

Richard Young raised a concern about Covid-19 risks associated with the tearoom facilities.

UCU asked if Noonan staff would be paid. Damian McAlister agreed to look into this issue. Marianne Buick advised that Unison were not consulted by Mount Charles about the staff lay-offs in catering.

UCU said that they understood that the University had committed to pay Mount Charles employees. Mr McAlister advised that this was not the case.

Cathy Gormley-Heenan spoke on work being undertaken by Tim Brundle to assess how best to take forward each research grant during the pandemic. This will involve direct dialogue with the funders.

Cathy Gormley-Heenan also spoke on the contribution that Ulster researchers are making towards the fight against Covid-19. As an example, two recent graduates are delivering 500 free Covid-19 tests a day in the San Francisco bay area. The University is considering how it can help with the testing in NI including the use of its premises for public coronavirus testing.

Aishling O'Beirn welcomed the University's civic role and asked that the University call on Randox to stop charging £120 for each Covid-19 test. Marianne Buick talked about holding Randox to account and should be named and shamed.

NL: Left the meeting 12:25

20:06 Health Sciences.

Damian McAlister spoke of the extraordinary JUCNC on Friday 6 March and advised of the University plan to stand down the current consultation exercise and establish a working group to conduct a full EQIA.

Mr McAlister asked UCU to volunteer someone to sit in on the EQIA panel.

20:08 A.O.B

The following issues were addressed under AOB:

- UCU asked that it be put on record that that their General Secretary has written to UKRI asking for additional funding to support fixed term contract research staff.
- UCU asked for an update on progress in addressing the Gender Pay Gap. Damian McAlister advised that People and Culture will engage with the unions on plans to address the Gender Pay Gap.
- Damian McAlister requested a response from UCU in relation to the proposal to change the monthly pay day.
- UCU advised that they have some responses to the minutes of the December JUCNC which can be addressed in a separate meeting.
- Marianne Buick to be added to the circulation list for minutes.
- Marianne asked that if Mount Charles cannot pay the additional 20% to furloughed workers, the University should consider funding the 20%.
- Marianne raised concerns about the campus being closed and the impact of this on Noonan staff.
- Richard Young requested clarity on ISD and Estates restructuring, and Mr McAlister committed to discussion with the relevant managers.

Meeting ended 12:37