

Joint University/UCU Committee

21/29 A meeting of the Joint University/UCU Committee was held on Thursday 4 November 2021 at 1.00 remotely, via Microsoft Teams.

Present

was not possible to recruit the volume of international students that could be achieved by an external provider, who had the benefit of a stronger network of agents. In relation to space, the University was working towards making more efficient use of its estate, including rental agreements with the Royal Berkshire Hospital as well as various cafes and outlets. It was highlighted that increased recruitment and better use of space were essential for the University's financial viability. The intention to strengthen direct relationships with agents as part of broader plans to grow the Partnerships office was also confirmed, which would then enable greater control of how international students were recruited. UCU representatives requested that clear guidelines and boundaries be set in place to manage the expectations of students joining via CEG. It was queried how the pay and conditions of staff undertaking work for CEG compared with those of UoR staff. The Chancellor advised that

[Post-meeting note] the Deputy Vice Chancellor requested that information regarding the role of local HSCs in providing advice be included in a communication from the MRT the following week. He also asked the Health & Safety Services Director and Director of Technical Services to consider the visibility of HSCs and was advised that Safety Note 26 on the role of HSCs was due for review shortly. Additionally, there was a new learning module on risk assessments available to all staff on UoR Learn and another on Health & Safety Management would be available.

UCU representatives highlighted that while vaccination was very significant, it was also important to take a measured approach and keep in mind the continuing implications of infection, including on family members and the impact of Covid on staff who had existing vulnerabilities and disabilities. It was noted that research on long Covid was continuing to emerge. Concerns were raised by UCU regarding colleagues who, for whatever reason, did not want to return to campus. Messaging stated that they needed to assure that each case would be dealt with sensitively and personal circumstances would be taken into account rather than the application of disciplinary procedures. The Director of HR confirmed that the University would always expect Line Managers to be sympathetic and deal with any such requests reasonably and consistently, in any circumstances. It was however highlighted that this was not necessarily always in the best interest of colleagues. He encouraged staff to stay away from the University if an individual's concerns might be considered irrational, for example, it would be important to work carefully with them through Occupational Health and their Line Manager. UCU representatives queried what action a member of staff should take if they were living with others who were testing positive for Covid but were not themselves testing positive. The Deputy Vice Chancellor advised that PHE guidance should be followed in such a case – a pragmatic decision to staff campus might also be taken following discussion with the individual's Line Manager. UCU representatives suggested that a more explicit statement on this would be useful, however, the Deputy Vice Chancellor noted that such a decision would depend on a variety of factors and a blanket statement would not be appropriate. He suggested that the Covid inbox could be used to assist with enquiries such as this.

In relation to ECMWF, UCU representatives advised that concerns remained regarding the impact on the Art department, particularly in the context of the Augar review and a noted increase in costs for the new Art building. It was also queried to what extent colleagues within the Art department were aware of current plans. It was confirmed that staff in Art had been aware of developments for some time and had been very constructively engaged in the process so far. It was noted that certain documentation had been sent to the President of Reading UCU requesting the strictest level of confidentiality and further clarity was requested on what this meant in terms of consultation with UCU. The Vice Chancellor confirmed that this was provided for the attention of the Branch Committee only, noting that it was necessary to go through a formal tendering process for the Art building. It was important that the figures not be in the public domain to ensure best value for the tender. It was agreed that further clarity would be helpful as to the level of confidentiality required when documents were shared with UCU, e.g. that 'immediate branch colleagues' included the UCU Regional Official. UCU representatives queried why there was a separate paper on this. The Vice Chancellor responded that while it had been agreed that information on ECMWF be shared with Senate, UCU and the Staff Forum, typically capital projects below that level would not be included as part of that process.

21/36 Update on the local UCU claim

UCU noted that the remaining element of the claim was in relation to the gender pay gap and confirmed that they would be contacting the University within the next few weeks to establish a sub

the need to ensure that there were not any unintended consequences of progress on the gender pay gap that could impact on other pay gaps. The President of Reading UCU agreed to advise the University when it had been established which branch colleagues could be involved in this work.

Action: President of Reading UCU

UCU requested an update on the progress of focus groups reviewing workload and was advised that dates for these would be confirmed shortly. It was noted that UCU had launched a national survey on workload – the UCU Regional Official highlighted that this survey was open to everyone in the sector, not just UCU members, and suggested that the University might consider sharing this information. They also noted that there had been a specific section on workloads in a previous agreement, this was consistently identified as a key issue of concern to members and, while focus groups had a vital role in this, it was also hoped to progress the negotiation that the University had agreed to in principle.

In relation to the Portfolio Review, UCU representatives expressed concerns around the clarity of the rationale behind this and the fact that it would be a significant project progressed at speed which

There was no other business discussed.

21/41 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 1 February 2022