

Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30 am on Tuesday 23 October 2018 in Room G06, Palmer Building, Whiteknights Campus.

Present: -

- James Magee Co-Chair (Employee Representative) – JM
 - Steve Guest Co-Chair (Employee Representative) - SG
 - Debby Livermore (Employee Representative) - DL
 - Dawn Turner (Employee Representative) – DT
 - Gail Gilbert (Employee Representative) - GG
 - Alice Williams (Employee Representative) - AW
 - Emma Marshall (Employee Representative) – EM
 - Louise Crompton (Employee Representative) – LC
 - Sharon Burton (Employee Representative) – SB
 - Geoff Gardner (Employee Representative) – GG
 - John Jack (Employee Representative) – JJ
 - Lisa Powles (Employee Representative) - LP
 - Nick Crouch (Employee Representative) - NC
 - Sharon Burton (Employee Representative) - SB
 - Becky Kite (Employee Representative) - BK
 - Deni Trifonova (Employee Representative) – DT
 - Sian Walsh (Employee Representative) - SW
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- Samantha Foley (Employer Representative) - SF
 - John Brady (Employer Representative) - JB
 - Claire Rolstone (Guest Speaker) - CR
 - Alex Benneyworth, HR Advisor - AB

19/27 Welcome and introductions and apologies (Chair – James Magee)

Apologies were received from:

- Dani Hotolean (Employee Representative)
- Sharon Burton (Employee Representative)
- Becky Kite (Employee Representative)
- Rachel Thorns (Secretary)

19/28 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

JM asked for clarification on the Staff Forum Chairs action to provide an annual report on the use of Staff Forum time to Director of HR. JB advised that it is a legal requirement on use of facility time to report to demonstrate that money is not being wasted. JB said completed for UCU and given the Staff

Forum receive an allowance for buying out time it would be good practise if the Staff Forum could monitor their use of their time and budget allowance.

JM advised that going forwards a spreadsheet has been set up which they would share when appropriate.

No other comments were made regarding the minutes.

The actions from the previous meeting were reviewed.

Action: for the Staff Forum to provide feedback to Governance on the Relationship Policy.

JM advised comments had been provided from the Staff Forum for consideration regarding the Relationship Policy.

JB advised that a mutual date would be agreed with UCU and the Staff Forum to meet to discuss the Relationship policy.

JB added further to the recent communications by RVDN that the University would be consulting with UCU and the Staff Forum in relation to the VR scheme.

Action: JB to take forward formally setting up the “common interest” meeting in the academic diary for 2018.

JB advised had been in discussions with UCU but to date no positive response regarding agreeing a date for a ‘common interest’ meeting. JB advised that UCU had lodged local pay and equality claim so their interest was in dealing with other matters. JB advised would continue discussions with UCU but it was agreed to close the action point.

Action: JB to ask RH if the VC is to hold further meetings.

JB advised that the Acting VC was continuing to meet termly with Professional staff and a recent meeting had taken place on the 9 October 2018.

19/29 Verbal Headline Updates

Update on Health and Safety and Wellbeing Committee

NC advised that discussions taking place with what constituted as welfare rather than H&S and provided an example where the Disability office was experiencing high levels of sickness amongst staff and it was believed it was due to the complex nature of student cases that were triggering the sickness.

Jenny Mcgrother, H&S Director was working closely with Mark Fellows and Selina Patankar-Owens regarding the matter as it needs to be addressed. CR advised working closely with OH and JM with regards to identification of stress management and providing support for individual cases but discussions ongoing at what point becomes organisational concern. Team meeting with OH and HR to discuss stress management as working together on the matter.

Update on Equality and Diversity Board Committee – Race Equality Charter Mark

NC advised that unfortunately the application was unsuccessful that had been submitted in the summer 2018. A debriefing meeting had taken place and it was felt the action plan that had been agreed was not 'smart' and there were insufficient actions to change and not sufficient student engagement.

JB advised it was always going to be a difficult process and all Charter Marks start the same way and although disappointing the feedback was very helpful and will help to take things forward in agreeing an action plan.

Faces of Reading

DT advised that the committee had not met recently but it was an ongoing project putting profiles together. Due to resourcing being an issue, individuals were being asked to send in their own profiles rather than MCE writing the initial profile.

DT expressed that she had recently been involved in a Recruitment and Selection Process and a candidate had reviewed the website and had expressed they found it confusing as too many profiles from different areas. JB advised that the link had been included in the VC's recruitment pack and the feedback was that it had been very well received and it had provided a feel for what the University is really like.

CR advised that HR Colleagues had met with Jobtrain, the University's application tracking system. An update to the system was taking place in November and the new platform would allow people to look at our jobs with better links and explanations provided to the School / Function the job sat within. It would hopefully provide an opportunity to address feedback where candidates may find our website confusing.

Staff Forum Malaysia

JM gave DH's apologies as she was not able to attend the Staff Forum meeting. JM advised that they had hoped for the Staff Forum in Malaysia to be able to skype in to the meeting, but the timings hadn't worked out.

Staff Welfare Projects

SG advised that there are 4 projects that are 'live'

- The Harris gardens pathways is being managed by Estates, so this will free up funding for other projects
- Benches / Meeting pods. A first meeting had been held to discuss the design as the Staff Forum would like to put their own stamp and make the seating areas stand out. SG advised he had spoken with Steve Boon and RVDN and was aware of a design standard at the University but RVDN was supportive of introducing something different. Consideration needs to be given to the design and where to place the seating areas.
- Parent friendly facilities, initially it had been costed as £2k per room but it was felt the cost per room wouldn't be as high and it was a matter of sourcing available space. Meetings had taken place with HoS's and it was identified some Schools already had an available room they were using for this purpose. Henley Business School advised they had a policy and were able to

make a room available when there was a requirement for it. It was agreed by all there should be one University Policy and not a number of local policies.

Employee Representative Constituencies

DT advised that the Staff Forum had agreed constituencies and to ensure a balanced representation that representatives had agreed to represent different constituencies. For the most recent recruitment everyone who had applied had joined the forum.

DT advised that currently had 7 vacancies at Grade 1 – 5 and 1 vacancy at Grade 6 – 9.

JB advised that the Staff Forum had been established due to the de-recognition of the trade unions for grades 1- 5. It was more important to have a good spread of representatives across the University, rather than filling the vacancies at all cost. SF suggested aligning with Malaysia and having a seat for someone representing Malaysia. CR advised that Malaysia had expressed an interest in setting up on their own and were looking for guidance and DH was their link to the UK Staff Forum.

SF advised that Malaysia has 150 members of staff and the Staff Forum could make a real impact in assisting their colleagues in setting up a Staff Forum. SF is due to go out to Malaysia in March 2019 and whilst there she could meet with the Forum and pass on any relevant information that the Forum provided.

19/30 Staff Forum representatives – confirmation of end of tenure / resignations

JM advised that Luke Cantellow and Louise Crompton had resigned. JM thanked them for their contribution to date.

JM asked if there were any questions in relation to the Planning document that had been shared prior to the meeting. JB confirmed there were no questions on the document and reiterated the University's support for the Forum. JB expressed it was clear from other experiences that it was more and more obvious how little staff look at the portal and would encourage representatives to talk to Head of Functions and Schools to raise the Forum's visibility.

SF advised that a lot of work is being done on improving the main website as it's part of the People Plan. It was suggested if maybe the Forum could do a profile on a representative on why they joined and what they get out of being a member. JM expressed that the Forum has spent a great deal of time thinking about the objectives for the Staff Forum and what as a group they were trying to achieve. They all appreciated it was difficult for members of staff to engage with the Forum as they don't currently understand what the Forum is about.

SF advised given the recent communication by RVDN that staff would be looking for support from the Forum and the University cannot over communicate with what's going on. SF would be looking for the Forum to take on an ambassador role and provide reassurance in helping staff through the process.

JM advised that had hoped would be in a position to share the work had been creating with MCE but not quite finalised. It was the intention the campaign brief would capture what the Forum are trying to do.

19/31 Guest Speaker

Claire Rolstone, Assistant Director of HR – CR to provide a summary on the overview of People Plan Projects

Action: For CR to provide to the Staff Forum a written summary of the People Plan Projects

19/32 Questions or concerns raised by Staff – Employee Representatives to highlight any issues

- It was raised that in response to the pulse staff survey that it would be useful to share with the Staff Forum a brief paragraph confirming that the representatives could reassure members of staff that the survey was anonymous. CR advised she would speak with Susan Thornton as Acting Assistant Director of People and Talent and who was taking the lead on the survey to share something with the Forum.

Action: For CR to speak with ST in relation to explanatory paragraph about the survey.

- JM asked for clarification on the unwritten rule of being appointed to a higher-grade role and being offered at the bottom of the spinal point range.

JB advised it was the normal practise and the only variation would be if a member of staff was on a contribution point. It is not outlined in our Procedures, but it was the normal practice of the University.

It was expressed that the practise was not applied consistently by all managers on external / internal recruitment. JB advised it was vital the University was consistent in its approach. JM asked if there were any plans to document the practice. CR expressed that currently the recruitment guide was being reviewed and consideration would be given if it could be built into the guidelines.

It was discussed that colleagues at HBS felt the practice was not being applied consistently. JB request if there was any evidence to support their concerns that he would be happy to review it. CR advised she would speak with HRP who supported HBS.

Action: CR to speak with KD with regards to the concern being raised by internal applicants.

- JM asked JB and SF in the Staff Forum Information and Consultation Agreement 7.7 what quantified reasonable time to perform Staff Forum responsibilities, as it was a question that was frequently asked by new members.

JB advised it was tricky to quantify and the use of the word ‘reasonable’ was deliberately opaque. The time spent may vary at certain times of the year and be intensive so therefore very difficult to put an absolute value on it. JM expressed none of what JB discussed sounded unreasonable, but it would be useful to have a guide so if a forum member was coming under pressure from their Line Manager, they would have something documented to refer them to.

JB confirmed he was happy to confirm it broadly but if there were concerns from members of the Forum JB advised he would be happy to speak with the managers. It was getting the balance

right and Line Managers were perfectly entitled to understand how their member of staff was using their time away from their role.

Action: JB to provide clarity to the Staff Forum on what quantified reasonable time to perform Staff Forum responsibilities

- It was raised that an email to the Staff Forum prior to the Acting VC's communication regarding VR would have been most welcome. JB advised it was a balance between what can be and can't be communicated. Mark Fellows, PVC would be working with colleagues in developing the VR scheme. JB advised the University is obliged to consult with UCU and parallel with the Staff Forum regarding the details of the scheme.

It was expressed that as Staff Forum representatives how could they support staff if they didn't know where to sign post them for further information and it would have been appreciated to have been given the tools to do this. JB advised to signpost individuals to EAP but for most individuals their question they are thinking will be 'is it going to be me'. Every School / Function had a level of saving to make and consideration was being given to regards to the VR scheme.

JB advised that no questions in relation to staff concerns had been communicated from UCU or the Co-chairs so in future let us know. The best advice to offer is for colleague to take the process bit by bit and to break it down. The University has to follow a process.

It was expressed that the Acting VC had mentioned VR in the staff induction and maybe this was a bit early when employees had only joined. JB expressed the Acting VC can't win as continually criticized for not sharing. SF expressed comms is important and a great deal of consideration had been and would continue to be given how members of staff would be communicated to.

- The Staff Forum asked for JB to clarify the difference between redundancy and severance.

JB advised there is a subtle difference due to tax status and it was being mindful of the tax implications.

- The Staff Forum asked for further information regarding the saving the University needs to make.

SF advised at this point in time they didn't quite know as only had the Strategy and Finance meeting that took place yesterday. SF explained that there are less students' due demographics for the next 4 years and the University would be experiencing increasing costs due to pension, inflation and Brexit. This year the Russell group has increased their own student numbers and dipped into what would be UoR students. The UoR is an upper middle University and it's been agreed by UEB that's where we see our place in the market. We won't know final student numbers until later on in the term. It's a case of working or way through all these numbers and VR is away of us reducing costs.

19/33 Update from the Director of HR

JB advised recruiting for new VC. The process was open and transparent and there was an opportunity for staff to feed in to the process. The process is ongoing, the advert is live and is attracting lots of interest and looking very encouraging. Currently there are 6 other institutions looking at appointing a VC. The shortlisting was planned for January and final interviews to take place 14 and 15 February. On the 14 February the candidates would be shown the campus and get an opportunity to meet staff. It would then be for Council to approve the appointment before any announcement could be made to staff.

With regards to National Pay bargaining a 2% increase had been agreed. UCU had balloted member for industrial action and it was voted in favour of strike action, but they hadn't met the threshold so were not able to strike.

JB advised the Joint Expert Panel (JEP) had reported back in September on the pension and had made slightly different recommendations regarding the approach to contributions. The recommendations were currently being considered by UEB but the University were likely to broadly support the recommendations. Consultation with members closes at the end of November.

UCU had presented local pay and equality claim. JB advised he would keep the Staff Forum updated with the regards to the claim. JB discussed that he was due to meet with UCU on 9 November and the local claim will supersede everything for the moment for UCU.

JB discussed that Brexit was an ongoing concern for the impact on a number of members of staff. The University had sponsored a number of information sessions but for a long period of time there was no further information.

JB advised a paper had gone to UEB to get support in the respect of the introduction of a loan scheme, by way of a salary advance, to cover individual visa application costs. JB confirmed he was working with Finance / Internal Audit colleagues to discuss tax and other implications prior to implementation and would update the Staff Forum once the scheme has been finalised.

JB advised would be launching loan scheme, hopefully this term for colleagues coming to the UK from abroad. The loan would be to support members of staff with the NHS charge as if coming with a family the costs were very high. Currently working through the last of the tax implications.

JB advised that the Staffing Committee had welcomed the recent articles appearing on the Staff Portal from members of the People Plan Programme Board. The next Staffing Committee scheduled for 27 November 2018 would be set aside to discuss the People Plan.

It had been agreed by UEB that celebrating success would still be available and two meeting per year was deemed appropriate and should be approximately 6 months apart.

19/34 AOB

There were no further questions or any AOB

The next Staff Forum meeting will be held on 21 February 2019, 10.30 am to 12.30 pm, Palmer G03.