

Staff Forum

A meeting of the Staff Forum was held at 10.30 am on Thursday 7 June 2018 in Room G13, Chancellor 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
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- Professor Robert Van De Noort (Employer Representative) - RVDN
 - John Brady (Employer Representative) - JB
 - Rachel Thorns (Secretary) - RT
 - Alex Benneyworth, HR Advisor - AB

19/17 Welcome and introductions and apologies (Chair – James Magee)

Apologies were received from:

- Sian Walsh (Employee Representative)
- Luke Cantellow (Employee Representative)
- Dani Hotolean (Employee Representative)
- Colin Campbell (Employee Representative)
- Deni Trifonova (Employee Representative)

19/18 Review minutes/actions from last meeting

The minutes were approved without any changes. The actions from the previous meeting were reviewed and two actions have been rolled over to the next meeting.

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

JB advised that due to UCU’s ongoing priorities no meeting date had been agreed but JB was in discussions with Paul Hatcher, UCU President regarding suitable dates for the autumn term.

Action: JB to agree date with UCU for “common interest” meeting with Staff Forum

Action: RT to invite John Leary, IT Director as guest speaker for the next Staff Forum meeting.

RT confirmed that JL is attending the Forum meeting today as guest speaker.

Action: RT to provide update on MCE meeting

RT confirmed meetings had taken place with MCE.

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

JB asked NC to speak about the VC’s meetings. NC advised he was no longer involved with the meetings as he had not been attending in a Staff Forum capacity and had since moved roles.

Action: JB to find out whether further meetings are due to be held.

19/19 Verbal Headline Updates

Update on Health and Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

DT advised the HS&W Committee had met on 10 May 2018 and discussion had taken place with regards to the communication the Staff Forum had drafted promoting the Employee Assistance Programme and the services of Occupational Health. The communication has since been circulated to grades 1 – 5 but that the Staff Forum were still in the process of organising a distribution list for grades 6+.

DT reported that the Committee had recognised that there had been a significant increase in OH referrals and a number of the referrals related to work stress and the need to improve the mechanisms for reporting and monitoring. Agreement had been reached to train First Aiders in mental ill health.

JB advised that the funding was part of the wellbeing project to support the training of First Aiders.

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

NC advised the Staff Forum that details can be found on the shared drive. The application is due to be submitted in July 2018. EH and YA will continue to work on updating the submission form, producing the final version of the action plan and seeking feedback from stakeholders. An updated draft version will be shared at the next meeting on 27 June 2018.

Faces of Reading

DT advised that there are no updates to communicate at this time.

Staff Forum Malaysia

JM gave DH's apologies as she was not able to attend the Staff Forum meeting but confirmed that she had met with Andreas Kalckert, Lecturer in Malaysia regarding the Staff Forum and that they were in the early stages of discussing setting up a Staff Forum in Malaysia. JM confirmed that Andreas is keen to take a collaborative approach and that he wants to Skype into one of the UK Staff Forum meetings to get a feel for what is discussed and how it operates.

Staff Welfare Projects

SG advised that the Working Group has agreed criteria so the process is clear and transparent throughout each stage. Each suggestion was scored out of 25 based on the agreed criteria. SG and JM had met with RVDN and there were 10 suggestions to put forward to UEB. SG and JM reported they were putting together an information pack for UEB for the meeting taking place on 11 June 2018.

It was discussed prior to agreeing which suggestions went to UEB that they met with colleagues in E & F to understand in more detail the costings of some of the suggestions and to ensure that there was no duplication regarding the ideas and what the University was already progressing. It highlighted a number of the suggestions the University already had available for example bike sheds or changing rooms. The Staff Forum suggested it would be useful to devise a staff wellbeing map for the campuses to raise awareness of facilities and space available amongst staff.

BK expressed that it had provided the Staff Forum with an excellent overview of staff concerns and the common themes that staff raised for example safety on the campus and a closer knit community. The Staff Forum had received in over 50 ideas and are keen to present the suggestions to UEB so they can discuss the suggestions in more detail.

JM asked RVDN whether there would be an opportunity for the working group to meet with UEB to discuss the suggestions in more detail. RVDN felt it was important to outline the suggestions in a paper that could be read in advance by UEB members and for the Staff Forum to have a 20 - 30 minute slot to discuss the paper.

In light of this RVDN felt it was better not to rush the paper and maybe delay presenting the paper to UEB until the next meeting.

Employee Representative Constituencies

DT advised that the Staff Forum had met to discuss constituencies and to achieve a balanced representation across the University. A number of Staff Forum members had agreed to move Schools / Functions to achieve an equal balance. As it stands the Forum are slightly over represented in Schools and have 5 vacancies within grades 1-5. It had been agreed that when managing the Staff Forum email inbox that they would offer the opportunity to link members of staff with their Staff Forum representative for that School / Function.

DT and DH confirmed that they are in the process of setting up distribution lists for grades 1 to 5 and grades 6+ and for the constituencies.

JB advised in light of the recent GDPR legislation there needed to be careful thought with regards to distribution lists and mindful of UCU as they have raised concerns regarding some of the language used. In the past UCU have used a blanket approach with regards to communications and it has caused some complaints. JB suggested that to ensure compliance with GDPR that it may be more appropriate to allow people to opt in if they wish to receive communications from the Staff Forum. JB advised he would be able to meet outside of the Forum meeting to have a discussion regarding the best approach for the Staff Forum when dealing with communications.

19/20 Staff Forum representatives - confirmation of end of tenure / resignations

RT advised that Colin Campbell had resigned due to time constraints. JM thanked him for his contribution to date.

19/21 Discussion on Staff Forum, identify, roles and responsibilities of Staff Forum representatives

JM and JJ advised that the Staff Forum had been giving some thought to their identity and the expectations of the Staff Forum and the achievement's they should aim for. In light of these discussions JM expressed there was further work to do but they had agreed key principles in how they operate together and these are to be inclusive and fair so ensuring they share documents etc, to have equal opportunities to participate and to contribute and to be honest and respectful to each other.

LC advised proposing to have a planning meeting so they can all put forward their ideas and to work out work out their direction so can be clear on their goals. To ensure they are following on from the ACAS training of what the purpose of the Staff Forum is and what they would like to achieve.

JB expressed that the Staff Forum adds another voice but obviously don't have formal recognition like UCU. JB identified that the welfare project was a great platform and that the Staff Forum could take their lead from what members of staff want. JB advised he was currently completing an annual report for UCU facility time on trade union duties / activities and he has asked UCU to provide a breakdown. It would be useful if the Staff Forum could also on a yearly basis do a similar report.

Action: Staff Forum Chairs to provide an annual report on use of Staff Forum time to the Director of HR

19/22 Feedback on Relationship Policy

JB advised that the policy was in its very early draft form and Governance were requesting feedback on the policy. JB advised going directly to the authors of the policy with any feedback.

SG advised from reading the policy it could be interpreted in lots of different ways and needs to be written in a style that was easier to understand. Overall the policy felt very 'big brother' on the reporting of a relationship.

JB expressed that UCU's feedback was very similar. There had been a number of high profile cases around this matter leading to dismissal where there had been a conflict of interests which had not been declared.

It was discussed that it may be useful to have two separate policies to cover staff / student relationships to staff relationships. JB advised the policy was on the Staffing Committee agenda but the policy was a long off being finalised.

Action: For the Staff Forum to provide feedback to Governance on the policy.

19/23 Guest Speakers

John Leary, Director of IT Services - copy of presentation attached

Dawn Grout, Occupational Health Advisor - copy of presentation attached

19/24 Update from the Director of HR

JB advised that the Joint Expert Panel (JEP) in relation to the University's pension had been set up and had met a number of times but the matter of pension hasn't gone away.

With regards to National Pay bargaining, three meetings had taken place and 2% had been offered on a sliding scale to 2.9% for the lower grades. The unions are currently consulting with their members and are indicating it's likely to be rejected. It's likely to run on for some time before agreement is reached.

In relation to the People Plan JB confirmed that two bids were successful. The Employer Identity Project had agreed a formal project plan and would be looking to set up internal focus groups so JB advised he would like some of the groups to have Staff Forum representation.

JB advised at the Staffing Committee would be discussing the progress of the USS changes, the People Plan and the cost of recruitment of international staff. JB gave an example that, in relation to recruiting international staff if they are relocating with a family the NHS surcharge is a significant cost. The Committee would also be reviewing the proposed new Harassment and Bullying and Relationship policies.

JB commented that closure days were always a point of discussion. RVN expressed that overseas students did not normally go home during the Easter period and whether as a University it made sense to close over the Easter period. RVN said that he feels there is a better way to manage the closure days over the Easter period.

JB advised that work for the online exit interview form was put on hold and had been advised that a Trent update due to take in July 2018 would offer this facility. JB said he would be happy to organise a demonstration when the update takes place. JB commented that the University was keeping a careful eye on staff movements but to date there does not appear to be any real impact on staff turnover since the Brexit decision.

19/25 Questions or concerns from staff raised by Employee Representatives

GG it has been raised by a member of staff whether there would be the option of buying annual leave. I appreciate this has been previously raised as part of the focus groups from the staff survey.

JB commented that it is a question the HR team get asked and also whether staff can “sell back” leave as the University’s leave policy is generous. JB felt that unpaid leave offered the same benefit if members of staff wished to take additional leave but he was happy to give it further consideration as part of the Wellbeing project.

JM asked if the Performance Management procedure was a document written for the Line Manager or anyone involved in the process. JB confirmed the process was for everyone and if evoked covers all parties involved.

JM asked if examples could be provided when the formal process would be evoked. JB explained that if misconduct for example if a member of staff hits another member of staff then would there would be no other alternative option but to go formal. JB advised the University’s aim was to exhaust the informal process and with most employees’ capability was likely to be addressed informally. JB went on to say as with any process it is only tested in real life so asked the Staff Forum that if they had any feedback that would be useful as the policies were due to be reviewed in the near future.

19/26 AOB

AB advised the Staff Forum that the meeting would be RVDN's last meeting due to his appointment as Deputy Vice Chancellor. JM thanked RVDN for his contribution. RVDN advised that Sam Foley, Chief Financial Officer would be chairing the Staff Forum meetings going forwards.

JM asked for suggestions for future guest speakers and it was put forward that it would be beneficial if a representative from the provider of Employee Assistance Programme could attend. Also another guest speaker was suggested Patricia Woodman, Director of Student Services.

The next Staff Forum meeting will be held on Tuesday 23 October 2018, 10.30 am to 12.30 pm (G06 Palmer Building).