



STAFF FORUM DISCUSSION SESSION SUMMARY

Topic: Pay freeze

Date/ Time: Tuesday 30th June 2020 at 1pm & Thursday 2nd July 2020 at 1pm

The Staff Forum representatives welcomed attendees to the discussion session and explained that the Staff Forum were hosting discussion sessions during the current consultation period to give colleagues the opportunity to give their views, ask questions and have a discussion about how the options being considered as part of the response to the Covid-19 situation. Colleagues were also invited to send through any other questions, comments or suggestions to staff-forum@reading.ac.uk. It was also noted that staff could access the summaries from the discussion sessions via the Staff Forum website.

Staff Forum representatives introduced the topic for discussion and what this would mean if implemented:

- Temporary withdrawal from the National Pay Bargaining for 3 years;
- No annual increments for 1 year, which also included reward cases usually submitted for additional increments and contribution points;
- Other rewards (e.g. lump sums and celebrating success vouchers), academic promotions and regrading cases would continue.

It was also explained that any figures were based on the model of 80 – 90% of UK/ EU students return and 50% of international students return to their studies.

There was a general consensus across both discussion sessions that a pay freeze would be preferred to a pay cut as it would be easier to manage long term, especially for part-time employees. However it was noted that 3 years is a long time to go without a wage increase to manage inflation costs. Staff in the discussion sessions also expressed that the loss experienced by staff should be reinstated to them at the end of the implementation period.

Staff in the discussion sessions mentioned that they would prefer a 'cafeteria' approach to the options proposed so they could choose what best suited their individual circumstances. Staff in these discussion sessions seemed to have a general agreement that staff would not be willing to work more for less money and they would find it hard to take on additional work following redundancies when they are already working at full capacity.

The attendees of the discussion sessions seemed to have a stronger preference to a 9 day working fortnight as opposed to a 4 day working week, noting that a 10% cut would be more manageable and could give a better work life balance. However it was recognised that it could be a more complicated option where days shift in some roles; make it harder to accommodate a second job; and it would save less money so another option would be required with it.

There was a strong feeling that staff should be able to vote on the options proposed during the consultation period.

The discussion sessions covered the following themes:

Pensions: Concerns were raised about how pensions would be impacted if a pay freeze was implemented.

- The Staff Forum confirmed that they have asked for information on any pensions impacts to be disseminated to staff. The Pensions team are currently designing models so staff can see this.
- It was also highlighted that the options proposed would impact pension schemes and possibly members of staff who are close to retirement.

Cost of living: specific concerns were raised regarding how a pay freeze could impact lower paid Staff.

- This concern was acknowledged and has been shared with the consultation group. It was explained that HR have said that any impacts would be monitored to ensure staff aren't put into hardship and colleagues who would fall below the minimum wage wouldn't be included in the model.
- Staff raised concerns regarding the cost of travelling to work via public transport if a 4 day week was implemented.

Workload: Concerns were raised about workload if a 4 day week was implemented and whether staff would be expected to do 5 days of work in 4 days.

- It was expected that staff would only carry out duties for the equivalent of 4 days and that it is not in the University's interests for staff to do more work for less pay.
- It was recognised that a reduction in students won't necessarily reduce the workload of all staff as some roles don't involve students and the same tasks will still be required.
- There were concerns around staff being asked to do higher graded work for less pay following redundancies and the current consultation options. It was explained that it's not in the University's interests for staff to do more work for less pay and UEB want to keep the situation fair. The VC has said he would like to avoid this but how this will be done depends will depend on departmental decisions.

What colleagues in the discussion sessions have asked for:

- More clarity on whether the specific details on the consultation options would be released to staff. The lack of details was strongly felt by staff in the sessions.
 - The Staff Forum have raised this with UEB and papers should be released to staff soon containing this information on the modelling and how it will impact staff, including models for pensions. The specific date for this was unknown.
 - It was explained that staff need to be mindful that the information is based on a model and it's not a definitive answer (since the model is constantly changing). The Staff Forum have asked if the model could be further broken down to demonstrate the costs of the separate pay freeze actions.
 - The Staff Forum have also asked for broad examples of what scenarios will look like with any impacts to help staff with their decision making, but it isn't known whether this will be feasible yet.
- Information on how the proposed changes will impact those on fixed term contracts.
 - It was explained that the changes will impact all members of staff but the Staff Forum would ask for further clarification on this.

- Early retirement option: A staff member asked whether there could be an option for those close to retirement to take early retirement prior to other measures being put into place. This would potentially allow staff to retire without lowering their final salary, and would allow Schools to rehire at a lower grade point and not lose the capacity of the role, as you would with it being made redundant. The Staff Forum advised that they would take this point away, but it was dependent on the cooperation of others and whether it would save enough money.
- Staff asked if redundancies are required following the implementation of the considered option(s) what the redundancy pay would be based on.
 - The Staff Forum advised that there was no formal answer yet but they will put forward the question again.