

NOTES OF MEETING – JOINT UNION CONSULTATIVE & NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JUCNC)

Date: 13 January 2022

Present: Paul Bartholomew (Vice Chancellor); Paul Seawright (Deputy Vice Chancellor); Elaine Hartin (Chief Strategy & Finance Officer); Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Mark Latuske (People & Culture); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture) Kathryn Wills (People & Culture); Richard Young (UNITE); Paul Agnew (UNITE); Judith Hough (UNITE); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU); Nuala Conlon (UNISON).

Attending: Christine Irwin (People & Culture).

Format: Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

Meeting to be held in 2 parts.

Part 1**22.01 Apologies**

Adrian Grant (UCU); Paddy Mackel (UCU).

22.02 Welcome

Mr McAlister welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Elaine Hartin, who has recently been appointed as Chief Strategy and Finance Officer.

22.03 Ulster University Strategy

The VC gave a presentation on the emergent strategy for the University. The strategy is focused on Sustainable Futures and its development has been informed through consultation with Council and feedback from the Senior Leadership Forum (which involved around 130 people). In summary the strategy is people centric and values base with "lived values" at the heart of the strategy.

In relation to the timeline for taking the strategy forward - The VC is hoping to present a draft version of the strategy to Council at the end of February and to have the overall strategy and aligned portfolio strategies endorsed by Council before September 2022 to allow the Sustainable Futures Strategy to be published by the end of September.

The VC presented on the main components of the strategy and it was confirmed that a copy of the presentation would be shared with attendees after the meeting.

Mr McAlister invited questions.

UCU expressed concern about the unions not being involved earlier in the stages of the strategy development process. Also as the unions had not received a copy of the presentation in advance of the meeting they felt it would be difficult to be able to make informed comments.

Initial comments from UCU on the strategy were:

- UCU indicated that they would prefer that the references to civic are retained.
- It is hoped that the focus on 'investing in people', would result in more staff being employed on permanent contracts.
- given Northern Ireland and the University's history and the political reality reference to 'One University' as opposed to individual campuses could be seen as just a change of language.
- Where the strategy talked about delivering sustainable futures for all – who is all?

- how would sustainability be measured?

The VC welcomed UCU's comments indicating that it was good to get a steer through these conversations regarding the language used and how the strategy would be interpreted by a broad range of people. The VC confirmed that the University is committed to looking at how we are investing in our staff. Discussion also took place on 'civic-ness' and what that means to staff and communities in Northern Ireland.

It was confirmed that there would be further opportunities for trade union colleagues to provide feedback on the draft strategy and that further consultation would occur after the draft strategy is shared with Council.

22.04 Department of Finance Public Consultation on NI Executive Budgets

Ms Hartin presented on the impact the proposed NI Executive Budgets could have on the University (available at <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/budget-consultation>)

Ms Hartin advised that the draft budget was out for consultation and whilst nothing certain it would be potentially challenging. The proposed 3 year budget allows for planning beyond the usual 12 months cycle but because COVID has brought challenges for society, particularly in healthcare and the budget prioritises Dept of Health with all other departments allocated cuts of 2 %, on average.

Ms Hartin noted that the Dept of Economy resources look as if they have increased, but that masks pressures such as EU funding losses and ring fenced money e.g City Deals and the broadband improvement plans for NI. Once those aspects are stripped out, there is a fall of 45% in the budget by year 3.

There are some positives for UU. The budget identifies money for the Medical School however, profiling and how money is to be allocated, is still to be determined.

Overall, reductions in the University budget are likely but the University has been given the opportunity to work with the DoE regarding modelling of the potential options.

Ms Hartin encouraged attendees to read the draft budget and asked that the unions work with the University on these matters.

UCU welcomed the chance to work with the University and commented that the idea of increasing fees and cutting student numbers, as proposed seems a backward step.

UNISON advised that they conduct a formal analysis on budget to include a focus on health and education. The 3 year budget is welcomed.

Mr McAlister said that Ms Hartin's briefing would be circulated to attendees, following the meeting. A separate meeting on budget is to be arranged in February, once the unions have had time to review the documentation.

22.05 Semester 2 Planning

Mr McAlister invited the VC to speak on planning semester 2 plans.

The VC advised the meeting that the University was watching the data in relation to infection levels and hospital admission levels. On balance, it appears the right thing to do is to continue with face to face teaching as semester 1 with all caveats in place in relation to CA3s process, support for those who are clinically extremely vulnerable and being mindful of our duty of care to individual circumstances. QUB are also planning to end their on-line teaching at the end of January.

The University is due to announce this tomorrow and Mr McAlister advised that views on this will be taken at the H&S meeting.

UNITE voiced major concerns that the mitigations in place are not being followed and the serious impact of this can have on members of staff. The University is also a workplace and UNITE are bound to protect their members.

Mr McAlister spoke of an increased presence of COVID Safety Advisers on campus and a strengthening of the message for staff and students in terms of respect for social distancing.

UCU welcomed having COVID Safety Advisers on-campus but raised concern that corridors were unsafe due to student behaviours. The lack of social distancing is a red line for UCU.

UCU are also concerned about the ongoing impact on the Health Service as we have not yet reached the anticipated peak of Omicron cases anything the University can do to take people out of the system, would be good to do.

Students affected by COVID and requesting extensions impacts marking/workloads as well as work dealing with increased communications to students reporting with COVID. Extensions to marking deadlines impacts staff ability to do their jobs.

Mr McAlister advised that he appreciated the points raised by the Unions which would be discussed tomorrow.

At 15:10 pm the VC, DVC and Ms Hartin left the meeting.

A 20 minute break was agreed.

22.05 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2021

The draft minutes of the meeting of 14 Oct 2021, were accepted.

22.06 Matters arising from the Minutes of 14 October 2021

21.30 - Organisational Structural Change (OSC) Policy

UNITE asked that this is noted in matters arising as Mr McAlister had agreed to continue talks on HERA and Organisational Structural Change Policy and UNITE want this to remain on the agenda.

UCU noted that the OSC Policy is due for review and want to consult with the University on this matter.

21.32.3 – Recent Overpayments in CTC.

A meeting regarding overpayments to some staff in CTC had been held. Further information is still required by the unions.

21.32.5 – Return to campus for professional services staff.

The University plan to have professional services staff return to campus on a hybrid basis from 1 November 2021 did not happen as COVID guidance overtook these plans and staff continued working from home.

21.32.6 – Trade Union Room on the Belfast Campus

The Union request for 2 PCs (separate facilities for UCU and UNITE) was resolved.

22.07 Recognition Agreements (issues arising from CTC)

Ms Gallagher advised that the role-player post has been evaluated as Grade 2. Prior to that the roles were not evaluated and the appointees had been issued with a standard casual contract which included access to USS pension.

Mr Davidson noted that UNITE has the sole collective bargaining rights for staff at this grade through their recognition agreement. The UNITE recognition agreements states that for **grades 1 to 5** “The University recognises and agrees to the sole right of the Union to represent and negotiate in respect of all staff employed in the grades specified above”.

The UCU recognition agreement states “The University recognises and agrees that the Association is the sole bargaining agent to represent all staff, whether employed full-time or part-time, on permanent or temporary contracts, who are paid on **academic and academic-related salary scales**”.

After some discussion it was agreed that UNITE rather than UCU have collective bargaining rights for the role-players in CTC.

It was acknowledged that UCU can represent individual members in case work regardless of grade but not for the purposes of collective bargaining.

It was agreed that a copy of the Recognition agreements should be sent to the 3 trade unions.

UCU advised that they are not seeking to impact on the recognition agreement. Individuals may opt to join UCU and they would continue to support them individually and direct them to UNITE where appropriate.

Mr McAlister said that the Union recognition agreements were quite dated and could benefit from a review to modernise. The LRA had also urged and advocated for these to change but the University recognises that this would require the consent of UCU and UNITE. Mr McAlister asked that the unions look at the recognition agreements as they are now and be reassured that we would like to aim for agreements which are more modern and help achieve 'best in class industrial relations' is aimed for.

UCU said that might be good for the Unions to talk amongst themselves. They may be open to change but are not pushing for it.

It was proposed that the matter be revisited after the 3 Unions had the opportunity to meet and discuss among themselves.

22.08 UNITE's role in Heads of Claim negotiations with UCU

Management noted that while the a Heads of claim document was submitted by UCU some of the matters for discussion would impact on other categories of staff not represented by UCU and the University would welcome the involvement of both unions and are open to treating the negotiations as JUCNC issues.

Mr Davidson advised that UCU had sent suggestions for how negotiations may be taken forward and these will be considered.

UCU confirmed they were happy for the other unions to be involved. UNITE advised that they were aware of the general matters and are happy for UCU to continue discussions and keep UNITE informed.

Mr Davidson advised that as there were implications that could be considered pan-university all unions would be invites to the meetings and if anyone was unable to attend the meetings would continue and the information would be shared.

22.09 Policy Prioritisation Exercise (i.e. prioritisation of policies for negotiation in next 12 months)

At the meeting of 4 July 21 there had been a discussion re: a broad range of issues to negotiate with the Unions on. The purpose of the meeting was to identify the long list and then consider the 4 or 5 to take forward in the next 12 months.

There were 18 policies on the long list and a pre-liminary shortlist of 5:

1. Agile framework;
2. Workloads and casual and fixed term contracts;
3. Redundancy policy;
4. 6,3,1 consultation process;
5. DAR .

UCU came back with the unions proposed shortlist on 17 January.

1. 6,3,1
2. Academic promotions
3. Research promotions
4. CPD
5. OSC Policy
6. DAR

UCU proposed that the unions pick one policy for review and then the University continue on that cycle. Mr Davidson said that there is a natural synergy between some of the policies and therefore they should be reviewed concurrently.

UNITE noted the need to get through all items identified and that this exercise is only a matter of prioritising and that those not prioritised should not fall off the scale.

UCU said that academic promotions was on the list as a review had been promised after 2 cycles.

Mr McAlister said that there were some other policies coming through such as domestic abuse policy and Mark and Geoff have committed to doing this through H&S. UCU advised that Menopause policy was also to be consulted on and they had provided comment on this policy but when the new draft came back with very little taken on board.

UNISON were also keen to get a Menopause Policy in place.

UNITE confirmed that the Domestic Abuse Policy and Menopause policy were a priority for them.

It was agreed that Paul would send an email to respond to the email proposal from UCU.

22.11 Employee Engagement Panel and other staff

UCU said that their reason for raising this item was due to a concern of being side-lined - not just on policy matters. They felt the unions were last in the loop too often and they want to work in partnership with the University.

UCU explained that the unions bargain for collective groups of staff not just union members. UNISON said that they had experience of other organisations that the creation of such panels was to denigrate Unions. UNITE agreed and said that Town Hall meetings, for example, should happen in parallel with Union consultation. Unions speak up for members who will never speak out for themselves.

Mr Davidson advised that it was not the University's intention to side-line the Unions. Mr Latuske advised that, specifically on the employee experience panel, the panel is not new, rather he recent communication on this matter was seeking to refresh the membership for the year ahead.

Mr McAlister advised that he was committed to consult with the Unions as well as wider group of employees and would consider how to ensure that happens without the unions feeling they are being side-lined.

22.10 AOB

UCU requested an update on the library restructure process. Mr Davidson to arrange an update from Janet Peden. Mr McAlister advised that there was no intention to replace permanent positions, with fixed term staff.

UCU requested an update on the reorganisation in Research Management/Research Contracts departments. UCU members have expressed concern about structure changes, workloads and lack of clarity and the unions would like to be consulted and informed. Management to follow up on this.

Mr Davidson advised that management was considering who should be the management representatives on JUCNC. Mr McAlister advised that DVC/PVC membership at JUCNC may be beneficial for partnership working with the Unions.

Meeting ended 5:16 pm