

Ulster University

## Confirmed Notes of Meeting

### JOINT UNION CONSULTATIVE & NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JUCNC)

**Date:** 19 January 2023

**Present:** Paul Bartholomew (Vice Chancellor); Paul Seawright (Deputy Vice Chancellor); Liam Maguire (PVC Research); Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Mark Latuske (People & Culture); Kathryn Wills (People & Culture); Fiona Wills (People & Culture); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture); Gareth Scott (Unite); Richard Young (Unite); Judith Hough (Unite); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU); Stephen Baker (UCU); Nuala Conlon (UNISON).

**Apologies:** Odette Hutchinson (PVC Academic Quality and Student Experience); Paul Agnew (Unite); Norman Hagan (UCU); Rhonda Black, (Unite); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Adrian Grant (UCU)

**Attending:** Rhona Reid (People and Culture)

**Format:** Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

## 23.01 Vice Chancellor Update

### Industrial Dispute

The VC noted the ongoing context of national and localised industrial disputes and stated that he was open to talking with those involved to discuss ways in which some substantial areas in which there was agreement could be dealt with effectively together, as had been the case in the past. He suggested that it would be good to set up some meetings prior to the dates set for strike action scheduled to take place from 01 February. The VC stated his intention to visit the picket lines and hear the perspectives of those involved as he had previously done.

In relation to the disputes with USS and UCEA, UCU responded that they would welcome and appreciate any work that could be done by the VC to influence fellow Vice Chancellors to protect staff pensions, pay and conditions. UCU stated that the VC was welcome to talk

to staff on the picket line and said that his visit to the picket line during previous strike action was appreciated as staff felt able to communicate to the VC concerns about their own particular areas of work. UCU commented that they were hopeful that the picket lines would not need to take place and that the disputes would be resolved sooner rather than later.

UNITE thanked the VC for attending the picket lines and chatting to members which was appreciated. UNITE pointed out that while the strike is a national strike, crafts members do have local issues related to pay and grading. UNITE would also like support staff to be considered as they are seeing a doubling of wage agreements in the private sector in comparison to the public sector. Any influence the VC may have with UCEA to increase pay rates for support staff, technical staff, and clerical staff would be appreciated.

The VC responded that he would do whatever he could bearing in mind the context of the national dispute and in terms of affordability 'within the University's envelope' given that there is agreement on many themes especially in relation to where things could be achieved in the pensions space.

### [DFE's '10X Economy' Strategy](#)

The VC reported that DFE wrote to the University before Christmas regarding an exercise to establish what was being done to advance the intentions of DFE's '10X Economy' vision. The VC confirmed that DFE had reassured him that this exercise would not be used as a form of assessment measure to make budgetary decisions, rather it was simply an assessment of current ongoing activities. An outcomes-based approach was to be discussed the following week with DFE. Instead of setting targets, the VC's intention was to provide narratives and case studies to reflect the impact of the University's activities, as well as KPIs to measure and demonstrate impact in areas such as deprivation and ethnic mix.

The VC commented that he was involved in discussions with DFE on ways of using qualitative output metrics to express on the value of the work carried out through '10X'. He believes that the ambition of '10X' is synergistic with UU's values and our strategy document which sets out that we put people first.

The VC invited the trade unions to ask any questions about the above.

UCU thanked the VC for informing them of the ongoing work with DFE in relation to the '10X Economy' strategy and stated that the unions would be keen to have discussions on how they could play a part in the future, given that many of UCU's members carry out research on equality issues. UCU stated that they are keen to explore ways of reducing inequality both in society and in the University. UCU added that engagement in the work on '10X' would provide the University with the opportunity to lobby for increased investment in higher education to achieve a long-term societal impact. UCU requested a revisit to conversations about addressing part-time fees which would make the University more accessible to those on lower wages.

The VC responded that there was a role that the unions could play in the work related to addressing the 'Gini coefficient' in Northern Ireland by reducing the gap in income distribution between the richest and the poorest. The DFE had expressed interest in the

work that had already been done at the University in introducing the foundation living wage and its impact on social mobility and the 'lived social experience'.

UNISON referred to their statement recorded on the agenda document expressing members' thanks to University for the introducing 'the real living wage' which represented a 14% pay rise.

The CPO stated that the University was delighted to extend the pay rise in time for Christmas to colleagues working for Noonan and Compass.

## 23:02 Minutes of Last Meeting

The CPO invited comments on the accuracy of the draft minutes of the meeting of 12 October 2022.

The CPO requested that Professor Liam Maguire's name should be recorded on the minutes of 12 October 2022 to correctly reflect his attendance at the meeting.

UCU requested that the minutes should be shared at least two weeks prior to JUCNC meetings.

The CPO agreed to this request.

With reference to minute 22:28, both UCU and UNITE requested a change to the wording related to reasonable adjustments. UCU offered to forward alternative wording.

## 23.03 Matters Arising

The CPO updated the following matters arising from the minutes of the meeting:

22:34 UNISON once again requested for consideration to be given to bringing back in-house the services provided by Noonan and Compass following the expiry of contracts in August 2023. The CPO stated that the University will look into this and will provide feedback on any developments. UCU and UNITE expressed broad trade union support for this action.

22:36 Due to an absence related to a bereavement, a date is still to be arranged to discuss the restructuring of the Library Directorate and issues related to the implementation of the Hybrid and Flexible Working Framework in the Library. The CPO committed to getting the meeting set up as quickly as possible following continued concerns raised by UNITE members. Impetus and effort would be placed on progressing the implementation of the Hybrid and Flexible Working Framework, the restructuring, and the transformational change needed in Library Services.

## 23.04 Student Recruitment Campaign 2022-23

Professor Seawright advised that Ulster University is almost 400 students below the prescribed MASN. This is due to a higher proportion of non-returners and LOAs, possibly as a result of Covid. Approximately 900 cases of non-continuation would normally be expected, but this year's number was closer to 1500. In terms of income, there has been a

significant decline and so this will be a focus moving forward as there may be a reduction in the block grant.

The University has been allocating a lot of investment into global recruitment over the last 4-5 years which is starting to bear fruit. For example, Ministry of Education approved programmes for China have enabled 70 students from China to come to study in NI.

The University had anticipated around 1476 enrolments for 2022-23 but the actual number rose to 1986 (510 more students than expected). The current intake of students consists largely of post-graduate students on one-year courses which run from January to January. One of the key challenges has been that the additional 510 students mostly applied to one faculty (on just two programmes).

In order to deal with the growth across non-MASN streams including the international intake, 36 new posts have been approved. However, it is taking some time to recruit these new staff members.

The DVC indicated that over 200 students will be coming to the Derry Campus where the University is trying to grow student numbers. However, there are accommodation pressures across all campuses. The University is able to meet all accommodation guarantees at this stage and strong messaging is being communicated to international students advising them not to bring their families to NI until suitable accommodation has been arranged. This issue is widespread across all universities in Ireland due to accommodation shortages arising, in part, from refugee pressures.

The DVC invited Mr Paul Davidson to comment on ongoing work taking place at a local level.

Mr Davidson advised that a number of colleagues attending had been actively involved in dealing with this issue and, while some progress has been made, there was still work to be done. Five meetings with the trade unions had already taken place and the dialogue will continue beyond this.

The DVC added that he was due to chair an Academic Planning Framework meeting to see if it would be possible to forecast future enrolments more accurately.

All offers to international students were paused before Christmas for the September 2023 until the impact of the current situation on the system can be assessed. The intention is to bring together representatives from Campus Life, Timetabling, Wellbeing, and the faculties, to understand fully what the University's capacity actually is before applications are opened again to international student for September admissions.

UCU responded that there are seriously concerned about the workload and wellbeing of staff working to deal with these issues and is working constructively with UU to get to a workable solution to this problem. UCU suggested that talks should continue until the current cohort has graduated.

With reference to MASN and non-MASN numbers, UCU would like access to figures and explore the reasons why there has been a change. UCU asked if the raise in part-time fees had had any impact on the numbers of part-time students.

The DVC responded that the figures were conclusive showing a correlation and a dip in part-time recruitment at the time when part-time fees were increased and prorated with full-time fees. However, income was similar and possibly higher than before the change in fees because the University was teaching fewer students for more money.

The DVC felt that the 'cost of living' crisis would also have affected part-time student intake. The intake of international students has insulated the fall in income resulting from a drop in part-time student numbers. However, there is a trend towards micro-credentials and smaller units of study whereby students pay hundreds of pounds to access individual modules rather than thousands of pounds for whole courses. The University needs to look at the capacity to deliver this type of part-time teaching as there is no intention to overtrade for the sake of income.

UCU stated that they are committed to widening access and it is concerning that there are fewer part-time students.

In terms of students from China, UCU requested an update on how the Human Rights Working Group is functioning.

The PVC Research responded that he chairs the ethics oversight group which was established through senate and is in the early stages of taking advice on the assessment process in relation to establishing ethical partnerships.

UCU requested that they are kept apprised of the activities of this group.

UNITE raised a concern regarding the lack of support for clerical admin staff from the International Office.

The DVC reported that he took two papers to the Resources Committee proposing six new 'Attendance and Engagement' posts spread across faculties and campus to work with School Officers. An additional five staff are to join International Admissions to alleviate the pressure from the increase in the number of applications over the last 18 months. The DVC confirmed that all new posts are permanent.

UCU added that they felt there is now a need for an investment in resources to provide more pastoral support for students.

The CPO responded that a proposal was made at SPG for further investment of over £2 million over the next twelve months to provide pastoral support for students.

## 23.05 All Staff Survey

Mr Mark Latuske advised the group that the last 'all-staff' survey took place in 2017. In the meantime, a number of other surveys have been carried out including pulse surveys and the 'Valuing Voices' survey. The provider of the previous survey, Capita, have now exited this business. Therefore, the Employee Experience team carried out a procurement exercise last year and engaged a new provider called WorkL who work with other UK universities. The team would now like to engage with the trade unions in a dedicated meeting to explore the best approach to taking the survey forward. Mr Latuske acknowledged the trade union support in achieving around 70% engagement in the last staff survey and would seek similar engagement with the trade unions in the roll out of the

survey to achieve a similar uptake again. The intention is not only to run a one-off survey. There is also scope to run a co-ordinated series of pulse surveys on particular topics of importance. Mr Latuske expressed the intention to arrange a meeting as soon as possible to established how best to work closely together on the staff survey.

The CPO added that the new survey will involve fewer questions, followed up with pulse surveys, to achieve richer data. However, the core questions asked in the last survey will be repeated to ascertain whether progress has been made. One of the most critical aspects of the survey will be how we deal with the outcomes of the survey.

UCU reiterated their disappointment in not being involved in the pre-procurement phase of the project. The unions want to be involved centrally in the remit and the questions and would like to work in partnership on this.

UNITE added that previously in 2017 a working group had been established with trade unions to create bespoke survey questions which would address the diverse nature of this large and complex organisation and enable staff to express their views. It would be imperative that a similar approach is adopted this time.

## 23.06 Standing Items

### Equality-related issues:

The CPO noted that separate meetings have taken place in relation to equality matters.

UCU responded that they are keen to keep up the discussions with the EDI team on these issues.

UCU requested an update on equality pay gaps.

The CPO responded that the trade unions would be offered a seat on a steering group that is being established to deal with equality pay gaps in relation to gender, disability and BAME+ colleagues. The most recent 2021 gender pay infographic have now been published on the website.

### Casualisation:

The CPO updated the group that ongoing work is being carried out on a month-by-month basis to enact the agreements made in May and in October. The CPO committed to providing a written update with how many people have been affected to date.

### Update on restructurings:

Mr Davidson stated that the University is approaching the point when the formal OSE part of the conversation in relation to Sports Services and Library Services would commence.

UCU brought up CTC role player job descriptions in the context of the restructure of their particular area.

## JUCNC and Health and Safety Committee Policy Working Group:

The CPO advised that the Committee has continued to meet. Mr Davidson commented that the group has had three meetings and is currently considering three policies including Anti-fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Safeguarding, and the Reasonable Adjustments Protocol. The Working Group has proved to be a useful platform to have a timely progression of these policy negotiations.

UCU agreed that the meetings had proven very useful but would be dependent on the degree to which different groups would be prepared to engage with the trade unions. UCU thanked Angela Getty and the Office of the University Secretary who were constructive in their engagement with the trade unions.

### 23.07 AOB:

- UNITE requested that the People and Culture webpages were updated to reflect the new appointments made in People Partnering, Employee Wellbeing, and Employee Relations.
- UNITE noted that the Hybrid and Flexible Working Framework has had the effect of enabling staff to work from home during periods of inclement weather when travelling to work could be hazardous. UNITE expressed a concern that this does not apply to staff who have not yet been able to avail of the Hybrid and Flexible Framework. Mr Davidson responded that most departments have always adopted a sensible approach under such circumstances, and this should remain the same irrespective of the Framework. He offered to discuss the matter offline with Mr Young to find out more about individual circumstances.
- UNITE requested that the dates and times for JUCNC and JNC meetings are included on the University calendar.
- UNITE asked if staff who have recently retired could retain access to their UU email address for the purpose of maintaining access to personal content such as online bank accounts which had been used during Covid due to being unable to access a bank in person. UNITE asked if this matter could be discussed in more detail at a future meeting.
- The CPO announced that Kathryn Wills was leaving the University and he wished her every success for the future. Both UCU and UNITE thanked Kathryn for her collegiate work with the trade unions.

Meeting ended 16:00