

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

Date: 29 April 2022

Present: Odette Hutchinson (Pro Vice Chancellor); Damian McAlister (People & Culture); Paul Davidson (People & Culture); Darren Crothers (People & Culture); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture); Kathryn Wills (People & Culture); Richard Young (UNITE); Paul Agnew (UNITE); Judith Hough (Unite); Pearl Bartley (Unite); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Adrian Grant (UCU); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU); Nuala Conlon (UNISON).

Apologies: Gareth Scott (Unite); Mark Latuske (People & Culture).
Paddy Mackel (UCU), to attend the first half of the meeting only.

Attending: Christine Irwin (People & Culture).

Format: Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

22.11 Joint Declaration of Protection – Sexual Violence and Sexual Misconduct

Professor Odette Hutchinson proposed the development of a joint declaration between the University, the Trade Unions and UUSU to declare our joint abhorrence for all forms of sexual misconduct and violence.

A zero-tolerance statement was provided to the meeting for discussion.

Professor Hutchinson asked for the unions' endorsement on the spirit of the activity and a commitment to union involvement in building the infrastructure to provide resources such as the 'report and support' platform, building expertise and capacity for support, raising awareness and educating on acceptable and unacceptable types of behaviour and mechanisms for dealing with complaints.

UNITE advised of ongoing concern around the current Bullying & Harassment policy and of the need for a working group to deal with unilateral changes that were made without consultation with the unions, the need to review the policy and the requirement for panel training.

UNITE confirmed they have a default zero tolerance position in relation to sexual violence and misconduct but for this to work properly it needed to be a single policy under the B&H umbrella.

UCU were concerned that the Unions were brought in at a late stage after discussion had already taken place with the Student Union and would like to take the information away to review more fully.

Professor Hutchinson advised that at this stage it was just the statement that she sought union agreement on and was concerned that it would be extremely problematic for the University to remain silent on this matter, which had wide-reaching impact on students.

Discussion took place on what the statement should contain and it was agreed that the unions would review the wording and agree revised wording with Professor Hutchinson.

Management agreed that there was a need for an urgent review of current Dignity at Work and Study policy and if each union could confirm the names of volunteers to be involved it was hoped there could be demonstrable progress in agreeing policy in the next 3-6 months.

Paddy Mackel left the meeting.

22.12 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2022

Unions to write to Christine Irwin copying Damian McAlister in, with any required changes to the draft minutes of 13 January 2022.

22.13 Matters arising from the Minutes of 13 January 2022

22.03: UU strategy

A copy of the VC presentation has now been shared with attendees.

22.04: The impact of the proposed NI Executive Budgets on Ulster University.

A copy of Elaine Hartin's briefing was made available to the unions following the JUCNC 13 January. A meeting to discuss HE finances is scheduled for 10 May 2022 and all unions have been invited to attend.

22.07 Recognition Agreements

A meeting is to be arranged to discuss union recognition agreements.

22.10 Library restructure:

An email was sent to the Unions with an update from Janet Peden.

22.10R&I Review and the potential for restructuring

Tim Brundle provided a response to queries raised re: R&I structure change and advised that there is no active restructuring within R&I at this time. There has been some change to working practices which have not gone beyond current job descriptions or policy. Mr Brundle to provide further briefings on the R&I Review and its outcome in due course.

22.14 Hybrid and Flexible Working – Review at 3-month implementation stage

Mr McAlister talked through a presentation on the interim review of the implementation of hybrid and flexible working at the 3-month stage and invited those present to raise any concerns they had or that had been brought to them by their members so consideration could be given to any action required to address those concerns.

UCU asked for detail at an individual level, to review the effectiveness of the implementation e.g. how many people applied using the framework? How many requests were rejected? How many agreements are in place?

UCU requested that the use of the term 'non-academic' be removed when referring to the type of staff covered by the framework. Mr McAlister agreed that an alternative form of words should be used.

Mr Davidson advised that the review at this stage is an interim review and that a full review would be undertaken at month 12. The main focus of the interim review is to identify areas needing additional support with implementation. To date P&C had not received any feedback advising of anyone experiencing difficulties or conflict in relation to the implementation process for hybrid & flexible working.

UNITE advised of concerns being raised to them where the hybrid and flexible working is not being made available to some teams. Concerns had also been raised that in certain offices, due to lack of staff cover, staff were asked to attend campus at short notice, on days that they had agreement to work remotely. Mr Davidson asked that these issues be raised via the relevant People Partner.

UNITE requested that work life balance policy be brought in line with the flexible and hybrid working policy.

UCU asked to see template documents/pro-forma for team. It was confirmed that these are available on the HFWF SharePoint site, but it is not mandatory for the template to be used as they are just a guide and the team agreements are not held centrally.

Mr McAlister agreed to share ongoing feedback on the implementation of hybrid and flexible working.

22.15 Development Appraisal Review (DAR)

A paper was circulated to the meeting, in advance. Mr McAlister advised that DAR remains the extant process for people in relation to appraisal and personal review. The decision was made not to change the DAR process and policy but to shift the focus to ensuring quality conversations between staff and line managers.

The paper presented the work done by a task and finish group. The focus was to move from paper-based recording to using online functionality available through the University's HR information system (Core XD).

UCU expressed concerns about the online DAR process and as they had not been involved in the pilot and they needed to be consulted.

Mr McAlister advised that DAR process itself was not changing and whilst the online functionality was being made available, it was not mandatory. It was confirmed that if the appraisal process was to change, that would be a need for further negotiation with the unions.

In relation to the online system there is a template to record conversations regarding appraisal and objectives. This record shared between the manager and the individual. The manager can only see what has been written down and agreed as an accurate record.

It was agreed that Mr Crothers would meet with UCU to take them through the online system.

UNITE expressed concern for the need for staff to be given time for training and support before they could be appraised.

Mr McAlister advised that when DAR is conducted properly, it would identify a training need and then managers could provide for that need. The University's learning calendar is a source for some relevant courses.

22.16 Cost of Living Crisis

UCU raised this issue due to concerns regarding the effects of the increased cost of living due to rise in energy prices and the inflationary pressures that members are under.

UCU asked how the effects can be offset for staff and what is being considered by university management.

Mr McAlister acknowledged an incredible increase in fuel costs and advised that national level discussions are taking place between the University, UCEA and the unions as to what can be done regarding cost of living.

Discussion took place on the need for travel or whether staff can exploit the technology and continue with online meetings, where possible, with an aim to reducing travel without creating a divide between those who can and those who cannot attend.

UNISON asked for a timeframe for when commitments would be made and Mr McAlister advised that a national level decision is expected late June/early July, and the issue will be brought back to JUCNC, in September.

22.17 Ulster University and the Living Wage Foundation

UNISON advised that one of the University's service partners, Noonan Services, had said 'no', to paying their staff the living wage. UNISON is requesting the living wage of £9.90 per hour, for their members, and have provided detail of this to the University in a pay claim.

UCU advised that whilst the issue of the real living wage and minimum wage, is a subject of national negotiations UCU are keen to see the University as a Real Living Wage employer and other universities are implementing the Real Living wage now, without rather than waiting for the national negotiations to conclude. They would support the University introducing a wage that

meets the costs of living, not just the government minimum and believe it would be in line with University's values.

UNISON asked for an update on the additional closure day due to the Queen's jubilee and how this would be facilitated for their members. Mr McAlister advised that he had spoken with the Director of Estates and could confirm that on Friday 3 June, Campus will close its catering outlets and staff will have the day off with pay. The day will not be deducted from their annual leave entitlement. For Noonan staff, they will also have the day off with pay and the day does not come out of annual leave but this arrangement would differ for security staff who would be compensated as for other closure days.

22.18 Use of monies from strike deductions

UCU asked how the money from strike salary deductions is used by the University and indicated they are keen to have the deductions put towards the student hardship fund.

Mr Davidson advised that the money goes to the student hardship fund and to student support in general.

UCU indicated their preference that the money should go towards the hardship fund, rather than into something that the university should be funding.

Mr McAlister agreed to take this back for consideration.

UCU asked for clarity on strike deductions from staff who are funded from research cost centres and if the money was returned to the funder? Mr Davidson advised that where money is not paid to the staff it remains in the project cost centre from the grant. This will be confirmed after the meeting.

22.19 Request for extension of facilities time (GBD)

UCU and UNITE requested an extension to their facilities time related to GBD until Dec 2022. It was confirmed that the current facilities time is in place until 31 July 2022.

Mr Davidson advised that if the unions provided a detailed work plan of activities they would propose need to be delivered, the request for the funding to support this would be made to the GBD project office.

22.20 Update on sharing of Timetabling information

Given the time available for the remainder of the meeting it was agreed that another meeting would be required to discuss this agenda item fully.

UCU understand the pressure on the timetabling team but there has been a delay to the draft timetable which was expected before Easter and there is some criticality in relation to delivery of teaching in Belfast next year.

UNITE advised that technicians need to be included in timetabling for scheduling of labs and specialist workshops to ensure appropriate set up.

A query was raised on the current room booking system and how unions or staff can book rooms for meetings. Management agreed to seek clarity on room booking process and confirm to union colleagues.

22.21 Update on restructuring exercises

Mr Davidson updated the meeting on a number ongoing and planned restructuring exercises.

Library: The library team are working on a restructuring proposal which they hope will go to SMT in early June with a view to commencing once approval is given. Library staff have been notified of this and the associated timeline. Consultation in line with the OSC Policy will open as close as possible following approval to proceed from SLT.

Research & Impact: Early-stage discussions on a potential review of R&I are ongoing.

Reprographics: Early-stage engagement on a restructuring proposal began in December 2021 and a paper went to SLT in February 2022. SLT raised queries which the team are working through, and they need to get final approval to proceed from SLT before moving forward with this but this is anticipated to commence in June 2022.

Sports Services: Significant consultation on sports strategy and aligning the structure to the strategy has taken place. It is expected that the proposal for their restructure will go to SLT in June and formal engagement in line with OSC Policy will begin after this.

Office of the University Secretary: The preparatory work for a propose restructure has begun, and the team are in the process of drafting all of the job descriptions in order to have these evaluated before they commence with consultation. It is anticipated that consultation could open in the next few weeks.

UNITE requested an update on the commercial aspect of the **Academy restaurant** restructure as there were concerns that delays in recruiting the additional staff has impacted existing staff. Management will ask the School for an update and provide this to union colleagues.

In relation to the proposed library restructure and move to Belfast, UNITE requested that this should not be allowed to block progress on implementation of the hybrid and flex working policy. Mr Davidson advised that clarification would be sought from library management on this.

Mr Davidson and the unions agreed on the need for planning the sequence of consultations so that neither side is overloaded

22.22 Update on Casualisation – timeline for response to UCU heads of claim

Responding to a request for an update, Mr Davidson advised that University leadership has been giving consideration to the Heads of Claim and we will now schedule meetings with the unions.

22.23 Update on Health Sciences consultation / negotiation group

Responding to a request for an update, Mr Davidson advised that the next meeting of the Health Sciences consultation/negotiation group, is scheduled for 19 May 2022.

22.24 Update on Equal pay issues

Responding to a request for an update, management advised that following the recent meeting with the unions, management will draft a proposal as to how to take forward further discussions.

22.25 Upcoming policy reviews

Brief discussion took place on the importance of agreeing a 'priority list' of policies to be reviewed.

22.26 CTC – job evaluation and pay issue

It was confirmed that the University were aware of the commitment to reviewing the grading of the CTC posts. The first review would be 6 months after the 1 Feb 2022 go-live date i.e. by 1 August 2022 and the second around December.

22.27 AOB

22.25.1: Mr Davidson noted that due to the meeting over running, there had been insufficient time for items 22.20 to 22.24 to be fully addressed in the meeting. Mr Davidson to provide a fuller update in a future meeting.

Meeting ended 13:38 pm.