

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

Date: 12 October 2022

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); Gareth Scott (Unite); Richard Young (Unite); Paul Agnew (Unite); Rhonda Black, (Unite); Judith Hough (Unite); Paddy Mackel (UCU); Linda Moore (UCU); Aisling O'Beirn (UCU); Norman Haggan (UCU); Stephen Baker (UCU); Nuala Conlon (UNISON).

Apologies: Odette Hutchinson (Pro Vice Chancellor); Tina Gallagher (People & Culture); Elaine Hartin (Chief Strategy and Finance Officer).

Attending: Christine Irwin (People & Culture).

Format: Meeting held via Microsoft Teams.

22.28 Vice Chancellor's Update

The VC advised that the University Strategy is finalised and will be communicated across the University in the coming weeks. The strategy is built on the University values and makes 9 commitments:

1. Placing sustainability at the centre of what we do.
2. Providing vibrant campus-based higher education.
3. Enhancing the social life of our campus.
4. Maintaining a multi-campus model for our region-wide delivery.
5. Investing in a broad-based research-led higher education offering.
6. Being a key partner in industry.
7. Being a key partner for the cultural and social life of our communities.
8. Taking proactive stances on equality, diversity and inclusion.
9. Helping our staff to achieve a work-life balance that allows them to flourish.

The VC advised that the strategy is not intended to signal a significant change in direction, rather it acknowledges our very significant success and achievements.

The following matters were raised by the unions.

- In relation to the commitment to 'partner for the cultural and social life of our communities', Unite noted the significant work that has been done in sports but suggested that more work needs to be done using vehicles other than sports.
- In relation to the commitment to a 'broad-based higher education offering', Unite asked if any of the subjects which were discontinued in 2016 could be brought back. The VC advised that there are no plans to bring back these subjects, but we are a university, and we will ensure a broad subject range.
- Whilst welcoming the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, Unite note that some of its members do not feel that this commitment is yet a reality and feel unwelcome.

- UCU commented that the idea of the University being inclusive is only meaningful if seen in practice. UCU advised that their experience as case workers shows the need to make sure that no colleague is left behind.
- UCU noted the need for further training for managers and well-being advisors on reasonable adjustments and equality legislation.
- UCU welcomed the launch of the menopause policy and the white ribbon campaign but noted that the University needs to ensure that the commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is more than just words in a document, the University needs to 'walk the walk'.
- Commenting on the relocation from Jordanstown to Belfast, Unite advised that some reasonable adjustments that had been approved for staff in Jordanstown had not been carried forward to Belfast. Unite called for managers to be fully briefed on their staff as a duty of care. Unite also noted that the terminology used is important – it is for an employer to consider whether an adjustment is reasonable but once it is determined to be reasonable then there is a legal obligation on the employer to make the Reasonable Adjustment. Mr McAlister noted that the University is committed to ensuring that this happens.

The VC recorded his thanks to all involved in the Jordanstown to Belfast relocation and the Jordanstown to Derry relocation. The Jordanstown to Derry relocation of Health Science has helped deliver the highest ever number of students on the Magee campus. The VC thanked the unions for the extremely important role that they played in ensuring that the voices of their members were heard in relation to these relocations.

The VC noted concerns in relation to the potential for budget cuts from government for higher education in NI. He advised that the University is committed to working in partnership with the unions when details are known.

22:29 Minutes of Last Meeting

Mr McAlister invited comments on the accuracy of the draft minutes of the meeting of 29 April 2022.

UCU requested a change to minute 22:11 on the 'Joint Declaration of Protection – Sexual Violence and Sexual Misconduct'. The draft stated: 'UCU are concerned that the unions were bought in at a later stage but now understand why'. UCU requested that the words 'but now understand why' should be deleted.

22.30 Matters Arising

Mr McAlister updated on the following matters arising from the minutes of the meeting.

22:11 Mr McAlister thanked the unions for their comments on the 'Declaration of Protection – Sexual Violence and Sexual Misconduct' which has now been agreed. All parties agreed that the current Bullying and Harassment Policy needs to be reviewed.

22.07 This minute from the meeting on 29 April noted that a meeting should be arranged to discuss union recognition agreements. It was noted that this has not yet been arranged.

22.15 This minute from the meeting of 29 April relates to the Development Appraisal Review (DAR). It was noted that Mr Crothers from P&C had met with UCU. UCU noted that they have continuing concerns which need to be discussed.

Discussion took place in relation to whether DARs should take place annually or every other year. UCU stated that it was concerned about a suggestion that professors could do some of the DARs rather than Heads of School.

The DVC suggested that perhaps this could be discussed as part of the planned discussion on the workload model.

22.17 This minute from the meeting on 29 April relates to the Foundation Living Wage. The CPO noted that this will be discussed further at agenda item 8.

Unite raised an issue in relation to interpersonal relationships in the academy restaurant. P&C to follow-up with the Faculty.

22.31 Student Admissions Update

The DVC provided an update on admissions for 2022/23. It has been a very successful admissions cycle with exceptionally high conversion of applicants to enrolments. There are now 16,500 students at Belfast and student numbers at Magee are higher than they have ever been. We have also had our most successful year ever in recruiting international students. Professor Seawright referenced the ROI campaign which had tripled the number of ROI applicants to 750.

The four faculties have made bids to SPG for additional staff, and these have been approved.

Professor Seawright advised that whilst we have been very successful in recruiting new students, the University is between 300 to 600 short on MaSN due to retention issues. A mitigation plan is being developed. Some of the retention issues may be Covid related.

Unite referred to the successful 'don't drop out drop in' initiative.

Discussion took place on why some of the grammar schools seemed to promote QUB over Ulster. UCU suggested that it might be useful to partner with the three main teaching unions and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to promote Ulster University as a destination for A level students. The CPO said that an introduction leading to discussion would be useful. The DVC suggested that there might be an opportunity to offer CPD opportunities to school teachers as a way of introducing them to the University.

22.32 Update on REF 2021

Professor Maguire updated the meeting on the University's performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021.

The results of REF2021 were released publicly on 12 May 2022. Ulster's performance in REF increased significantly from REF2014 to REF2021. The REF results are important to the University from a financial, reputational and strategic perspective.

Increases in Ulster's 2021 submission include:

- Overall results show a 44% increase in world-leading 4* research.
- 53% increase in world-leading 4* research outputs.
- 48% increase in world-leading 4* research environment.
- Ulster University now ranks in the Top 10% of UK universities for 4* or 3* research impact.
- 97% of Ulster's research impact was judged as having 'outstanding' or 'very considerable' impacts and significance.
- 80.1% of Ulster's research outputs have been assessed as 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent'.

- 13 of 17 Units of Assessment have 100% at 4* or 3*, world leading or internationally excellent.
- 10 of 17 Units of Assessment have 100% at world leading or internationally excellent for research environment.

The CPO stated that the results pay tribute to the calibre of staff at Ulster.

UCU indicated that whilst they have a national position on REF, they will continue to work constructively with the Research and Innovation team and noted that they had done so when Professor Gormley Heenan was PVC Research.

Discussion took place on recognition rights for PhD students. The CPO advised that UCU do not have recognition rights for PhD students. Recognition rights are with UUSU. UCU expressed their disappointment in this response and noted that they have increased the number of PhD students who are UCU members.

22.33 Workload Allocation

It was noted that workload issues are on the agenda for the Special JUCNC on 21 October 2022. The CPO advised that the University is keen to progress discussion on the academic workload model. UCU stated that this is a JNC issue and as such should be dealt with at a JNC rather than a JUCNC.

22.34 Foundation Living Wage

Reflecting on the recently announced increase in the Foundation Living Wage (FLW), the CPO confirmed that the University remains committed to paying the FLW plus 50 pence per hour. He advised that although the Living Wage Foundation indicated that employers have until May 2023 to implement the new rate, the University will be implementing it from November 2022.

UNISON asked for confirmation that the FLW increase will be implemented for Noonan and Compass staff in November. The CPO advised that while this is a decision for Noonan's and Compass, the University understands that it will be implemented in November. UNISON further requested that the University consider bringing these services back in-house.

UCU and Unite welcomed the decision for early implementation of FLW plus 50 pence. They stated that whilst the services were outsourced they would expect the University to encourage Noonan's and Compass to implement in November. Both unions stated that they would strongly encourage the University to bring services back in-house.

Mr McAlister said that bringing services back in-house is always considered at re-tender stage.

22.35 Policy Development

Discussion took place on the need to progress a number of Policy reviews. It was noted that the Policy Subcommittee has now been established and this should provide a vehicle for progressing some of the reviews.

It was noted that People and Culture had requested detail of UCU's negotiating team for the review of the academic promotion scheme and the workload allocation model.

Discussion also took place on the potential for additional facilities time to support policy development. The CPO advised that the University would be happy to consider any requests where it relates to new activities.

22.36 Library Issues

The unions requested a separate meeting to discuss the restructuring of the Library and issues related to the implementation of the Hybrid and Flexible Working Framework in the Library. It was agreed that a meeting will be arranged.

22.37 All Staff Survey

The CPO advised that the all-staff survey will take place early in 2023.

UCU indicated that they were disappointed not to have been involved in the tendering for the survey provider. The CPO advised that it has never been our practice to involve the unions in tendering processes.

Both unions stated that they wish to be involved in the development of the survey questions.

22.39 AOB:

UCU requested further discussion on the Cost of Living crisis. UCU noted that QUB have measures in place and they would welcome similar from Ulster. The CPO advised that the University will be giving active consideration to this issue.

Meeting ended 12:47.