

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

Minutes of a Meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 7th November 2019 at 1.30 pm in the Board Room.

Present: Mr M Thomas – Chair
Mr M Lewis
Mr P Nixon
Mrs A Haycox
Dr D Llewellyn

In attendance: Miss D Crowther - Secretary
Dr C Baxter
Mr A Allen (for items 12ii, 12iii, 13 and 14)

Apologies: Mrs C Snell
Dr M Simcock

Members were reminded to update their entry in the Register of Interests if required.

19/01 Terms of Reference

Reviewed: the Terms of Reference were reviewed and it was confirmed that they accurately reflected the purpose and structure of the Committee.

As Mr Lewis will leave the committee on the 27th November 2019, it was identified that there was a need to appoint a new independent governor. It was suggested that Mrs Snell be asked to step off the committee at this time, due to the fact that she found it difficult to attend meetings. It was agreed that Mrs Debbie Winstanley and Mr Dominic Wong would be approached in the first instance.

CEB

19/02 Minutes

Approved: the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th June 2019 (18/34 – 18/47).

19/03 Matters Arising

Received: a report from the Head of HR on matters arising.

Noted: that in respect of the Armed Services Covenant it was proving useful having the option to recruit via the Careers Transition Partnership. There had been some good applicants via this route for recent vacancies in the Estates Department. There had been no further information in respect of an event to mark the formal signing of the agreement and Dr Baxter agreed to follow this up.

CEB

19/04 Risk Management

Received: a report from the University Secretary on risk areas monitored by the Committee.

Noted: i) that some recommendations around the management of risk from a recent audit had been followed up. This had resulted in adjustments to around 8 of the identified risks. A thorough review was anticipated

for 2019/20. Areas of the University with specific risks had been asked to discuss these with their teams so that feedback could be sought. The register would be going forward to Audit Committee for approval week commencing 11th November followed by Board of Governors on the 27th November for final approval.

- ii) that with regard to item 2 this should be amended to “risk of not following through on staff and *organisational* development activities”.

CEB

19/05 **Pay and Negotiation – 2019 / 20 Pay Round**

Received: a report from the Head of HR on proposals for the deletion of spine point 2 with effect from 1st April 2020.

Noted: i) the latest position in respect of ballots for action with regard to the 2019/20 pay round.

At the beginning of August, UCEA had communicated that they regarded the pay negotiations as concluded and that member institutions should implement the pay uplifts offered with effect from 1st August 2019. The uplifts were implemented in the September payroll, with a backdating to August. This was due to the fact that there was no indication that a settlement was achievable with the five trade unions. The five trade unions then communicated their intention to ballot.

Ballot results were received this week. UCU was the only trade union to report that they had secured a mandate at 52 HEIs, plus the two in Northern Ireland where the 50% threshold does not apply. The University was not one of these HEIs and therefore there was no mandate for action at Harper Adams. There are four HEIs where no results have been reported. Unison, EIS and Unite have failed to secure mandates and results were awaited from GMB, however, they only conducted ballots at 3 Universities in London.

Noted: ii) an oral update on plans to delete spine point 2 by April 2020, as part of the wider agreed actions from the 2019 / 20 pay negotiation round, was given by Miss Crowther. A working group had been set up including members of staff from HR, legal and finance, as well as the University Secretary and Chief Financial Officer. A proposal was made to move all substantive staff currently paid on spine point 2 to spine point 3 with effect from 1st April 2020. The proposal also included a recommendation to make the spread of grades 2 and grades 3 more consistent – with spine points 4 – 7 forming grade 2 and spine points 8 – 11 forming grade 3. The proposal also included a recommendation to pay genuine casual staff on a ‘spot hourly rate’ rather than a point on the 51 point pay spine.

A discussion was held with regard to the way in which Student Ambassadors and other casual staff are currently engaged at the University. It was confirmed that a separate piece of work is being undertaken to review every single casual member of staff to determine their status and the contractual arrangements that are most appropriate moving forwards. The need to distinguish between the work of genuine casuals and those employed on a substantive basis was highlighted.

Approved: that with effect from 1st April 2020 the following will apply:

- all genuine casual staff and student ambassadors will be paid a 'spot hourly rate' rather than maintaining their employment on the 51-point pay spine. No further cost of living increases or other uplifts will be applied to the 'spot hourly rate' until such times as national minimum wage requirements need to be considered.
- that option 2 as outlined in the paper will be put into place.

DC

19/06 **Staff Consultative Group (SCG)**

Received: the Committee received a copy of the minutes of the SCG meeting held on 9th October 2019 and noted the contents.

- Noted:
- i) that it had been a positive meeting with one minor issue raised around the temperature in the halls of residence.
 - ii) that Jane Richardson, Director of Operations for the Harper Keele Veterinary School had commenced employment as planned on the 28th October 2019.
 - iii) that a decision had been taken to retain Stonefish for application and shortlisting, but that iTrent would continue to be utilised as planned for requisition and approval. An upgrade would take place to Stonefish in order that logos and content were up-to-date and refreshed.

19/07 **Joint Consultative and Negotiating Committee (JCNC)**

- Noted:
- i) that a copy of the minutes of the JCNC meeting held on 5th November 2019 would be to follow.
 - ii) that it had been a positive meeting with an agenda that included a lot of the items for information that were on the agenda for the Staffing Committee meeting today.
 - iii) that four issues had been raised by UCU in the meeting. The first related to timetabling. UCU had undertaken a survey of their members with regard to continuing difficulties. UCU had been asked to send the results of the survey so that further work could be done to address the specific issues. The second issue related to the appointment of course managers and the University's process. UCU had been asked to send the details of some particular concerns in respect of Animals, Food and Business departments to Professor Mills, so that he could carry out the necessary investigation with the relevant Heads of Department. The third issue related to a request that had been made of academic staff in respect of GDPR. The issues related to the timescales and practicalities of carrying out the work that was required. A meeting was being set up so that solutions could be found and the timescales had been extended. The fourth issue related to concerns that had been expressed to UCU from two members of staff in respect of the monitoring of email, internet usage and file content. UCU had been reassured that no such monitoring takes place on an ongoing basis, however, it was the University's expectation that all staff would follow the Acceptable Use Policy and the Information Security Policy. Arrangements were in the process of being made for the concerned individuals to meet with a senior member of IT staff.

19/08 **Review of HR Strategy Action Plan**

Received: the Committee received a copy of the updated HR Strategy Action Plan.

Noted:

- i) that once e-recruitment had been launched attention would turn to the learning and development, performance management and sickness absence modules within iTrent.
- ii) that with regard to the health and safety elements of the Action Plan it may be worthwhile exploring support mechanisms for lone working. Mr Nixon recommended an application called 'What Three Words' and Dr Baxter confirmed that she would explore this further with Emma Osborne, the University's Health and Safety Officer.

19/09 **UCEA Programme of Work**

Received: a copy of a UCEA briefing note on the proposed programme of work for 2019/20.

Noted: the contents of the briefing note. It was also noted that UCEA provided sound support to their member institutions, however, there had been a lack of communication to the HEIs who were affected by the need to delete spine point 2 by April 2020, which Miss Crowther agreed to follow up.

DC

19/10 **Post-Brexit Planning for Staff**

Received: the Committee received a report on the situation with regard to planning for staff who would be impacted by Brexit.

Noted: the contents of the paper were noted. It was also noted that a reissuing of travel guidance would be beneficial at this stage. Dr Baxter agreed to contact Helen Armishaw, the University's Procurement and Insurance Co-ordinator in this regard.

CEB

19/11 **Induction Process**

Received: the Committee received a report on the work that had been carried out to refresh and update the University's approach to induction processes for new staff.

Noted: the contents of the paper were noted and the changes were seen as positive. The committee noted that they would be interested to see any results from the effectiveness survey at the next meeting. It was also suggested that the 'Employee Guide' be added to and expanded on as and when new questions were suggested. It was also agreed that the content and links should be regularly reviewed.

DC

19/12 **Policies and Procedures**

Approved:

- i) the new Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure was approved. As well as continuing to contain a procedure for dealing with complaints, this new procedure also now included additional information and guidance including, a clear policy statement in respect of dignity at work, clear expectations of staff in respect of protecting the dignity of others at work, general principles for handling the process, a responsibilities section, an added appendix giving examples of conduct which would

contravene the policy, an added appendix giving guidance on dealing with complainants and respondents and suspension guidance. The latter stages of the procedure had also been amended in respect of those individuals who may wish to pursue a formal complaint in respect of an allegation of harassment or bullying. The procedure now highlighted that the same formal process would be followed as outlined in the University's Grievance Procedure.

It was noted that the procedure read clearly and dealt with a difficult subject sensitively. It was confirmed that there had been two formal complaints of bullying and harassment since March 2018.

Mrs Haycox raised a number of helpful suggestions:

- In Section B 1.b. that an amendment be made to read, "formal complaints should be made *wherever possible* within a maximum of three months from the last incident(s) occurring, or the conclusion of an attempt at informal resolution".
- In Section B 3. fourth paragraph – that an amendment be made to read, "in certain circumstances the University may consider it in the interests of all concerned to suspend (on full basic pay) or *make temporary changes to working arrangements* while the investigation takes place. Suspension or a *change to working arrangements* does not imply guilt or blame and will be for as short a period as possible".
- In Appendix B. Complainants section b) – that an amendment be made to read, "the individual will have the opportunity to be accompanied / represented by a University-based colleague or union representative *during a formal process*".

Mr Lewis raised a helpful suggestion that with regard to 2.b. on page 56 of the policy – that an amendment be made to read, "vigorous speech and comment, academic debate and legitimate management of staff performance *is distinguished* from true bullying behaviour".

Approved: ii) the updated Staff Development Policy, PDR Record of Discussion Form and new Guidance for Managers document.

It was noted that sound communication would be needed for the launch of the new process, so that it was not seen by staff to be 'just another form'.

It was agreed that as part of the launch the requirement would be communicated that all staff, regardless of the date of the last PDR discussion, would be met with between date launch and the 31st August 2020 in order to reset timescales for reporting purposes.

AA

Noted: that Chair's action had been taken to approve revisions to the University's Criteria and Procedures for Conferment of the Posts of Reader, Principal Lecturer and Professor. The amendments had been largely made to address the recommendations from Dr Alison Parken's work with the University.

19/13 PDR Completion Rates

Received: a report which highlighted PDR completion rates by department area.

Noted: i) that since the report had been written completion rates had risen to 64% overall. This was the highest completion rate recorded at the University in the last 10 years. Further notification had been received

of 26% of PDRs that were 'in progress'. Academic Services had risen to 75%, DVC to 42%, Finance / IT 44%, Learning and Teaching 93%, Marketing and Communications 60% and University Secretary 100%.

19/14 **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Quarter 2 Results**

Received: a report on the Quarter 2 results for the Health Assured EAP following the launch in March 2019.

Noted: that the EAP was offering excellent support to staff and their families, with specific regard to waiting times for counselling as opposed to timescales via NHS referral. It was noted that our usage rates are reassuringly within the benchmark range for the sector.

19/15 **Equality and Diversity**

Received: the annual Equality and Diversity data monitoring report.

Noted:

- i) that the numbers of 'not declared' were increasing in some areas and this was more than likely due to the access members of staff had to Employee Self-Service.
- ii) that resignation was not in itself a reason for leaving. Further ways of tracking 'good' leavers and as opposed to 'bad' leavers should be explored.

DC

Received: a report on the Gender Pay Gap action planning work.

Noted: the contents of the report were noted. Dr Llewellyn shared that the 2019 statistics that are due to be reported by March 2020 will unfortunately show a larger mean and median gap than the statistics for 2018, however, not as large a gap as the statistics for 2017. Dr Llewellyn commented that he had received a letter from ministers with regard to the size of the gap, which he had responded to in order to explain the reasons for the gap, ie. structural issues. No further communication had been received.

19/16 **Any Other Business**

Noted: that the committee expressed their gratitude to Mr Mike Lewis for the valuable and insightful contributions he had made to the committee over the last few years. The committee wished Mr Lewis all the best for the future.

19/17 **Date of Next Meeting** – Friday 28th February 2020.