

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

JOINT COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION, 19 February 2024

**Joint Committee for Consultation and Negotiation: Minutes of meeting held on 16 October 2023**

PRESENT

Sir Richard Atkins (Chair)

University Representatives

President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lisa Roberts

Senior Vice-President and Provost, Professor Dan Charman

Deputy Registrar and Executive Divisional Director of Education and Academic Services, Linda Peka

Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources, Imelda Rogers

Chief Financial Officer and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services, David Stacey,

Trade Union Representatives

UCU, Professor Brian Rappert

Unison, Tim Hortopp

Unite, Chris Forrest

UCU, Michael Flexer

Also in attendance

Assistant Director of Human Resources, Andrew Johnson

Human Resources Business Manager, Gail Reeves

Apologies

Unite, Michael Worth

UCU Regional Officer, Alison Chapman

UCU, Alex Prichard

Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary, Mike Shore-Nye

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023 were approved.

2. Vice-Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee of the following achievements over the last year:

- Shortlisted for Times Higher Education University of the Year and runner-up in the Sunday Times University of the Year.
- Triple Gold award in the Teaching Assessment Framework.
- Strong performance in NSS - top 10 in the Russell Group for all areas apart from Assessment and Feedback.
- Total income increased to £640M in 2022/23 and research income was 12% above target at £118.7M.
- Launch of Green Futures Solutions.
- Signed civic agreements in Cornwall and Devon.
- Launch of the Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste (CREWW) a joint venture with South West Water.

- Launch of Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) funded through a £15M award from the National Institute for Health Research. This is the first of its kind in our region and will deliver tangible benefits to patients by translating research discoveries into treatments.
- Launch of Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste (CREWW) in partnership with South West Water.
- Recipients of a £15M award from the National Institute of Health Research to establish the regions first Biomedical Research Centre.
- Launch of the South West Social Mobility Commission chaired by our Chancellor Sir Michael Barber.

The Vice-Chancellor also provided the Committee with the following updates:

- With a general election expected next year, it is not yet clear what the major party manifestos will say on higher education but it is unlikely that the next government will provide more funding for institutions in the short to medium term. Both of the major parties recognise that universities are facing a funding issue but any additional investment is likely to be aimed at supporting students through maintenance grants.
- The UK government's immigration policy is making it less attractive for international students to come to the UK. When Exeter joined the Russell Group in 2012 the rest of the RG accelerated their international student recruitment (ISR) and we still have ground to make up in this area: we are below the RG median in terms of % of international students in our student population. Improvements in ISR will significantly support our financial sustainability.
- One of the main drivers for ISR is global league table performance, especially QS ranking. Exeter is below the RG in QS rankings and we need to break into the top 100. This will be driven by research performance and investing in boosting our reputation.
- On NSS, the Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the huge effort made by colleagues which had led to an improvement in Exeter's position in the sector and RG rank. However, we are still below the benchmark on assessment and feedback, which has been a feature for a number of years and address this will be a priority going forward.
- On research we need to focus on research quality as well as growth. We need to improve research quality as well as grow research income and improve cost recovery. Some areas carrying too much 2\* quality.
- We are proud of being a research intensive RG university but research does not cover its costs – we only recover 70p of every £1 spent on research. This is a sector issue but our research cost recovery is below the RG median. If we could achieve the median this would result in an additional £20M of income a year.
- All this comes in a context of severe financial pressure. By 2025-26, the home fee of £9,250 per student will be worth £5,800 in 2011-12 prices. This puts increasing pressure on ISR and how we can operate more efficiently.

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee of the following priorities which were considered by UEB at their planning event in September:

- Student recruitment – particularly international student recruitment (ISR). Our projected growth in ISR did not come through this year. This is a sector-wide problem – up to 20% fewer students have come to the UK this academic year – particularly from China, and sector-wide demand for courses in Business and Management has dropped away - but demand for Data Science and AI courses have increased. It is therefore necessary to consider the portfolio we are offering. This coming year will be challenging in terms of finances because of the shortfall in ISR.
- Global reputation and ranking – focus on research performance and lagging metrics.
- Student experience – focus on assessment and feedback.
- Research – focus on quality and cost recovery.

- Financial considerations – falling unit of resource. What we can do innovatively to make us more financially sustainable?

The Unison representative asked whether philanthropic income is included in the institution's total income. The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that it can depend on the nature of the donation but philanthropic income does not normally count towards income due to its non-recurrent nature. Donations tend to be capital in nature.

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that philanthropy donors tend to be very specific about what they want their donation to be spent on and therefore generating recurrent income this way is very difficult. But philanthropy is certainly an important way of raising funds for big investments.

UCU representatives referred to the joint trade union pay claims, commenting that UCU was concerned that levels of pay and progression at Exeter were less than comparable institutions. UCU sought further conversation with the University to consider what could be done locally on pay within the challenging financial environment and limitations described. The Director of HR advised the Committee that the recent joint pay claims put forward by the trade unions were not affordable. However, the University has agreed to conduct a data-informed review of pay scales for roles which are difficult to recruit to, which will be overseen by an independent body. At a national level UCEA and UCU have started discussions about the pay spine but there is no agreement so far on way forward. The University does not consider it appropriate to make changes locally while these national negotiations are ongoing.

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that the management of the University was grateful that dialogue has remained open with trade unions during the industrial action and confirmed that the University has agreed to conduct the benchmarking exercise for hard to recruit roles. She reminded the Committee that the current financial climate for the sector remains extremely challenging. Some Universities have not been able to implement the most recent pay award. The falling value of the home student fee and under recruitment of international students this year both present financial challenges for Exeter.

The UCU representatives noted that the joint statement is constructive and requested to be part of future discussions focused on productivity and efficiencies. UCU representatives also asked what action was being taken to influence government to support a different funding model for Universities. The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that she was a member of the UUK task and finish group exploring the funding model, but it was unlikely that government would increase funding and institutions would be expected to manage their own funding. There are opportunities to share good practice across the sector, and to explore ways of bringing in new income and how to operate more efficiently.

### 3. Joint Statement Progress

The Director of HR advised the Committee that in a meeting with trade union representatives on 3 October it was agreed that the University would undertake a review of pay for difficult to recruit roles. The Director of HR further advised the Committee that the Workload Allocation and Equity review and Exeter Academic review are both now in the implementation phase. UCU will be kept updated on progress. The Director of HR also advised the Committee that Trade Union representatives will be asked to join a new Pay Gap Review Group. The University proposed that the joint statement is updated twice a year with progress reported to UEB and JCCN.

In response to a question from UCU representatives, the Director of HR advised the Committee that consideration would be given to revising the statement to include all campus Trade Unions.

### 4. Trade Union Engagement Report

The Assistant Director of Human resources advised the Committee that there had been regular monthly meetings with Trade Union colleagues covering a wide range of issues summarised as follows:

- Our Culture Conversation - the University is committed to further engagement with trade union representatives on the next iteration of the Our Culture Conversation survey to maximise engagement and aid action planning.
- Exeter Academic review – further meetings are planned with trade union representatives.
- Performance Development Review Refresh – trade union colleagues are involved in this work to ensure that the PDR is an effective tool for meaningful conversation and outcomes for career progression.
- Joint claim – these discussions are moving forward within the context of the joint statement.
- Digital Learning – following the stage 2 collective dispute meeting on the new Digital Learning Resources Policy, there was an ongoing exchange between the University and UCU.

The UCU representatives asked how the JCCN forum could be used to monitor and formally report progress and outcomes from other joint groups which trade unions were involved in. The Director of HR agreed to consider this.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that she would be happy to mention partnership working with Trade Unions on projects e.g. Exeter Academic, in future all staff talks.

5. Date of next meeting

9 February 2024.