

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

JOINT COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION, 17 October 2022

**Joint Committee for Consultation and Negotiation:
Minutes of meeting held on 13 June 2022**

PRESENT

Sir Richard Atkins (Chair)

University Representatives

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lisa Roberts

Provost, Professor Janice Kay

Registrar & Secretary, Mike Shore-Nye

Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources, Imelda Rogers

Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Service, Andrew Connolly

Trade Union Representatives

UCU Branch Secretary, Alex Prichard

Unite Branch Secretary, Chris Forrest

Unison Branch Secretary, Tim Hortopp

Also in attendance

UCU Regional Officer, Alison Chapman

Assistant Director of Human Resources, Andrew Johnson

Human Resources Business Manager, Gail Reeves

Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2022.

Vice-Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor gave an oral update and advised the Committee of the following:

- Professor Roberts has been elected to the Board of Universities UK for a term of three years from August 2022.
- Professor Roberts has been asked by Michelle Donelan (Minister of State for Universities) to chair a ministerial working group on spiking in the student community with the aim of implementing policy by the end of 2022. The VC is being supported by UUK and DfE in this work. At Exeter the work in this area led by Prof Janice Kay is considered to be sector leading.
- Horizon Europe – there continues to be deadlock regarding the UK's ongoing participation in the programme and the UK government is developing alternative plans. Exeter has signed up to the 'Stick to Science' initiative – a signature campaign to put science collaboration before politics. Exeter will need to be at the forefront of any alternative plans that the UK government implements, being particularly mindful of the potential for research partnerships with Australia, India and Canada.
- Exeter has been celebrating an excellent set of REF results from REF2021. Universities across the sector are making the case for QR funding to be held at least the same as for the previous REF or uplifted to recognise the increase in research power. Exeter will invest any uplift strategically.
- The latest HEFCE report highlights the effect of industrial action and COVID-19 on the student community across the UK. In a recent academic and student experience survey mental health remains a significant concern. Mental health issues and course content are the most common reasons cited for students leaving university. The report also underlines: the importance of academic staff support alongside professional support for students; quality of feedback; quantity of face to face feedback; impact of industrial action; student loneliness

(one quarter of students reported feeling lonely all or most of the time). In light of these concerns affecting the student experience, the University thanked UCU for calling off industrial action at this time.

- Exeter is now 163 in the QS world university rankings. This is a drop of 74 places compared to last year. Exeter ranks 23rd in the UK and 21st in the Russell Group in these rankings. Exeter's rankings declined in all six indicators with the most significant factor affecting ranking being staff-student ratio, which continues to be a lagging indicator. 17 Russell Group universities fell in the most recent ranking. There is continued focus on quality of outputs (publications and citations) rather than quantity.

Shaping Our Future Structures

- The University's Future Structures programme is progressing and the new Faculty structures will be launched on 1 September 2022. Academic year 2022/23 will be a transition year. The second round of academic appointments has opened with a closing date of 6 June and most appointments are expected to be made by the end of June. Vacancies after this point will be advertised externally. The roles of Deputy PVC of the Medical School and Head of Law are currently being advertised externally.
- Appointment to thematic director roles in Faculties e.g. Education, Research & Impact, are underway.
- The role of academic lead is also under review and Prof Janice Kay is leading on development of skills and mentorship support for academic leadership positions.
- Consultation with professional service staff on the new structures ended on 10 June. Recruitment to vacant positions will proceed once UEB have approved TERS requests on Monday 20 June. Subsequent to this PS leadership positions by Faculty will be communicated.
- 98 different systems are being adapted to reflect the new structures including significant additional work on SITS. This work has received additional investment and support from external consultants.

UCU's branch representative congratulated the VC on her UUK appointment and clarified that the industrial action had been called off at national level by UCU and that staff had found industrial action difficult as well as students. UCU's branch representative indicated they will look at the impact of SSRs on workload and recruitment to programmes, and to accredited programmes in particular.

UCU's branch representative expressed the importance of supporting academic colleagues in leadership roles such as Academic Lead and underlined the need for training.

UCU's branch representative expressed the importance of keeping the academic community up to date with progress in terms of the changes been made to SITS, especially in relation to anticipated problems.

The UCU Regional Officer underlined the high support for industrial action nationally from the student community; the large number of staff in the sector on fixed-term contracts; high-workloads and a national mental health crisis among staff.

The Provost highlighted the University's Transition Plan to help students joining Exeter. This plan focuses on welfare and wellbeing coupled with accelerated induction and welcome including buddying, mentoring and gender safety.

The Vice-Chancellor gave an oral update and advised the Committee of the following in relation to workload, equality, and fair employment for all (FEFA):

Workload

As part of new People Strategy we have established a Workload Inclusion and Culture Committee chaired by the Provost. The Committee is responsible for the governance and implementation of five workstreams that were identified throughout Big Conversation as being crucial for the support, development and wellbeing our community. These workstreams comprise:

1. Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group
2. University Inclusion Group
3. Colleague support and progression groups – including Exeter Academic, Exeter Professional, Pay Gap Committee, Workload Allocation and Equity
4. Future of Work Board
5. Gender Safety Group

We are taking a whole university approach to staff and student mental health and wellbeing including improved and clearly signposted support from our Wellbeing and Occupational Health services and Employee Assistance Programme (Spectrum Life). We recognise that supporting the mental wellbeing of our teams is all of our responsibility and we have recently launched a new training package for all managers. We will also be training local Mental Health Champions over the summer with the aim of role modelling positive mental health behaviours, challenging stigmas and encouraging open conversations around mental health.

Workload was a significant issue raised throughout the development of Strategy 2030. To respond to this decisively an improved approach to workload management is underway via a dedicated Workload Allocation and Equity Group chaired by Prof Alex Gerbasi (Interim) PVC in the Business School. UCU colleagues are represented on this group.

Equality

The University ensures that we pay men and women equally for work of equal value. We know that the main drivers behind the widening of our media pay gap are the uneven distribution of men and women in different grades across the University and the over-representation of women in our ad-hoc/claims worker population, which comprise 13% of our workforce. When analysis excludes this population, both our mean and median pay gaps are continuing to narrow. But we are by no means complacent and continue to identify further measures to improve our position and close the gap across the entirety of our University community.

We regularly review the actions we are taking on our pay gap statistics, which are starting to show positive impact. Since we first reported our gender pay gap figures in 2017, we have seen a 91% increase in the number of female professors, corresponding to an 8% increase in female representation in senior roles, while the proportion of female professors at the University now stands at 32%.

Our gender equality initiatives have also been recognised by the Athena SWAN accreditation for the institution and for all our STEMM disciplines and we continue to work towards the aims and goals set out in our Athena SWAN action plans and will support departments in this endeavour as they transition to new Faculties next academic year.

We have also submitted our application to achieve Race Equality Charter status with the outcome expected in August. We are proud to have achieved our highest ever ranking in the Stonewall Workplace Equality index – testament to collaboration with LGBTQ+ colleagues.

Crucially we are committed to understanding and being held to account for our progress across all these initiatives. As such, UEB are currently reviewing and agreeing meaningful and robust KPIs across EDI, Wellbeing and Cohesion.

Fair Employment for All Initiative

We are fully committed to fair employment for all and have made significant progress as follows:

- Introduction of guaranteed minimum hours contracts for Postgraduate Research Students employed as teachers
- Implementation from 2021/22 of University-wide Guidance on Payment for PTA Preparation Time 2021/2022
- Agreement of Fair Employment For All principles

- Review of longer fixed term contracts leading to more than 370 colleagues being moved on to permanent contracts and there is an ongoing review of longer fixed term contracts.

We are working with UCU to determine how to take the next steps in this project and are meeting them on a regular basis. The VC thanked the TU representatives for the progress made in this area.

UCU's branch representative noted that as a branch they were pleased with the progress on casualisation, although the branch considered that there is some way to go. Regarding student loneliness and transition to University the UCU's branch representative supported a clear strategy for engaging with these students, particularly those from a WP background. UCU's branch representative also underlined UCU's commitment to Athena SWAN and their support for applications to be reviewed and renewed post COVID. The UCU Regional Officer also asked whether the loneliness was particularly associated with the pandemic period.

The Provost explained that Athena SWAN is at the top of the University's agenda and that a new application at institutional level would now be prepared in light of the changes that have come with Future Structures. The Provost also highlighted the submission of the University's Race Equality Charter action plan to Advance HE. Regarding loneliness the Provost agreed that this had been exacerbated by the pandemic but had always been an underlying problem hence the University's continued focus in this area through the Welcome Centre for Culture and Environments for Health and the Guild's 'Give it a Go' programme.

Trade Union Engagement Report

The meeting noted the ongoing engagement with trade unions in relation to the Future Structures Programme and the additional meetings that had been arranged between UCU and the new PVCs during the transition period to deal with issues as they arise.

Next meeting 17 October 2022