

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

JOINT COMMITTEE FOR CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION, 27 March 2023

## **Joint Committee for Consultation and Negotiation: Minutes of meeting held on 17 October 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

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

#### Trade Union Representatives

UCU, Joao Florencio

UCU, Professor Brian Rappert (until 2.30pm)

UCU, Nick Chavasse

Unite, Michael Worth

Unison Branch Secretary, Tim Hortopp

#### Also in attendance

Assistant Director of Human Resources, Andrew Johnson

Human Resources Business Manager, Gail Reeves

#### Apologies

UCU Branch Secretary, Alex Prichard

Unite Branch Secretary, Chris Forrest

UCU Regional Officer, Alison Chapman

### 1. Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2022.

### 2. Vice-Chancellor's Update

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

#### Recent University developments

##### Race Equality Charter bronze award

The University has secured a Race Equality Charter Bronze award that recognises our commitment to and efforts towards advancing race equality in Higher Education. The Bronze award recognises our work to develop an inclusive culture that values and supports all colleagues and students, acknowledging commitment and preparation to act. The management of the University recognise that further action is necessary to progress this.

##### Economic Impact Report

A new economic impact report by Oxford Economics is being published today<sup>1</sup>. This shows that the University now contributes more than £1.5 billion of output to the UK economy and supports

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<sup>1</sup> [www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/the-economic-impact-of-the-university-of-exeter/](http://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/the-economic-impact-of-the-university-of-exeter/)

15,500 jobs through our economic activities and the impact of student and visitor spending. The last report of this kind was published in 2018.

The report shows that the University generates £900m annually towards GDP and has engaged in hundreds of millions of pounds worth of research and development over the past five years. In the South West, the generation of Gross Value Added (GVA) is equivalent to 9% of Exeter's GDP, supporting around 3% of Devon's workforce – where we are the third largest employer in the county. And in Cornwall we create more than £125 million in output for Cornwall's economy.

#### Biomedical Research Centre

The University has secure significant funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research funding for the region's first Biomedical Research Centre. The award is funding a partnership led by the University and the Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and includes the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, Devon Partnership NHS Trust, Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust – and also St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The centre builds on our strengths in medicine and health and will translate emerging science into new treatments, diagnostics and medical technologies.

#### League Tables

Since the summer term meeting of the Committee, there have been a number of positive league tables updates for the University:

##### *Times Good University Guide 2023*

The 2023 Times Good University Guide was published in September and the we were runner-up in the Guide's 'University of the Year' award, which is a fantastic achievement and testament to everyone's hard work over the past year. We were ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the League Table, moving up 8 places compared to last year. This has in large part been driven by our improved performance in the NSS.

##### *THE World University Ranking*

The University has risen six places in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Exeter is now ranked 137<sup>th</sup> in the world, an improvement in placement from 143<sup>rd</sup> in 2021/22.

#### Sector developments

Events are changing rapidly in government with the appointment of new Chancellor. The Minister for Skills currently has higher education in her remit (but not in her title). The sector is awaiting clarification of the new government's policies towards research and development, R&D spending and association to Horizon Europe. This is a priority of the UUK and the Russell Group's engagement with government, together with supporting the long term financial sustainability of the sector, recognising that our fee income is declining in real terms value.

On the plus side, there is still strong demand for higher education – demonstrated by the recent admissions round. UCAS has reported record progression to higher education for exam-sitting students. This year, 19% more 18 year olds in the UK have gained a place at their firm or insurance choice. Demographic shift will see demand for 30,000 more HE places in coming years – 350,000 students over the next ten years.

### 3. Joint Trade Union Claim

Professor Brian Rappert explained the context in which the joint claim has been put forward. As part of the current discussion between trade unions and the University's senior management regarding the joint statement, trade unions have highlighted the ability to make changes to the University's grading system outwith the national pay bargaining arrangements. In particular, trade unions are concerned about helping those on the lowest pay grades with a view to supporting recruitment and retention as well as cost of living concerns. The joint statement sets out the trade unions' request to see for all staff up to point 38 on the scale to receive an uplift of four spinal points; and for all staff on spinal point 39 and above to receive an uplift of one spine point. This would equate to a 10% increase for all staff up to Grade G and 3% for staff thereafter.

Imelda Rogers advised the Committee that considerable work was currently underway to model potential changes to the grading structure, and a range of options were being discussed with UEB and Council. A full Equality Impact Assessment would be carried out on any preferred option. The Executive were also waiting to see what changes the new Chancellor would implement, especially in relation to the potential reversal of the National Insurance increase. She committed to discussing the joint claim in a future monthly meeting with TU colleagues.

The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that our pay has to be sufficient to attract and retain good staff. While the reversal of the increase in National Insurance Contributions would provide a budget that can be recycled into pay, any amendments to pay grades would have to be met from within our income, recognising that the value of the undergraduate fee is reducing in real term. Increasing income by taking more students has an impact on colleagues' workload and whilst we have tried to ameliorate this we cannot keep growing UG numbers. Growing our proportion of international fees (31% growth this academic year) will rebalance our funding. Additionally, it is necessary to take account of the possibility that the next pay negotiation round may award more than is currently budgeted and utility inflation is expected to lead to cost exposure above budget of £2.2M with an increase to £8.8M as fixed tariffs fall away. The University's finances have been resilient during the pandemic but inflation and the need to invest remain challenges. However, we are mindful of getting the balance right and of the need to pay salaries which attract and retain staff in order to deliver Strategy 2030. The University's capacity to increase spending against the back drop of no inflationary increase in fees for the last ten years was limited, particularly with the significant current inflationary pressure. The sector would continue to highlight these challenges to government.

Speaking for UCU, Joao Florencio welcomed the University's consideration of reviewing grades. He commented that the University is performing well financially: since we have an operating surplus there is scope to do pay more than the national 3% increase. He asked what the University and UUK were doing to press the government and USS. Nick Chavasse commented that while the adoption of the Living Wage increase was welcomed, this created a problem where grades at the bottom of the scale now overlap.

Speaking for Unite, Michael Worth advised the Committee that staff in some trade groups had been allowed to progress through contribution points, while staff in equivalent skilled roles have not. He also raised concerns that promotion from Grade D to Grade E led to a significant increase in an employee's pension contributions because they were moving from ERSS to USS.

The Vice-Chancellor advised the Committee that the University was part of the national pay negotiations where the financial sustainability of all institutions had to be taken into consideration. She reminded the Committee that the University had implemented the Thank You payment in July 2022 (which had cost over £5M) and the Living Wage increase in September 2022. If the increase to national insurance is reversed then consideration will be given to putting this back into pay, particularly in relation to lower paid staff. She advised the Committee that any changes must be affordable and would require the approval of Council approval. She assured the Committee that conversations with government about sustainable funding were taking place.

The Registrar reminded the Committee that, with the support of Union colleagues performance increments were paused in 2020 in response to the pandemic, but the University was able to reverse this the following year. He advised the Committee that our focus continues to be on parity and fairness with particular focus on those grades where colleagues have less flexibility in their budgets. The University would, however, wish to avoid pay increases which could only be funded by freezing recruitment.

The Provost advised that Committee that the University acknowledged the impact on staff-student ratios of the cohorts of students who started with teacher assessed grades, but these student numbers would now be reducing.

#### 4. Draft Joint Statement

Imelda Rogers advised the Committee that five productive meetings have now taken place between University senior management and UCU representatives on the proposed joint statement. Discussions have focused on pay, pensions, workload, parity and equity. She added

that it would be necessary for the University to agree with trade union representatives how the joint statement would be communicated to staff and be used and she invited comments on this outwith the meeting.

#### 5. Trade Union Engagement Report

Andrew Johnson reported that two special meetings had taken place between UCU representatives and PVCs in relation to the changes made through Future Structures. These meetings also discussed the Senior Academic Lead position and the support that departments and academic colleagues would receive. Further discussions on the embedding of future structures will be brought into the monthly HR-trade union meetings going forward. The monthly meetings have focussed on constructive discussion regarding Fair Employment for All and implementation of the Future of Work programme.

Date of next meeting 10 February 2023