Unconfirmed notes of the consultative meeting held on Tuesday 22 May 2018 between representatives of the University and representatives of the Oxford UCU

Ref. No. UCU/1

Present: Mr D Mackay (in the chair) Mr B Rodger
Mr T Hall Dr A Duncan
Dr P Inglesant
Dr P Thornton

In attendance: Ms Sarah Thonemann, Head of HR Policy, Ms Kate Butler, HR Policy Officer (for item 5), Mr Edward Wigzell (for item 6), Ms Mary Fridlington (for item 7), and Mr Stephen Purbrick, Head of Financial Planning and Analysis (for item 9).

Apologies: Dr Ian Watson, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Professor Steve Strand, Department of Education, Dr Roni McGowan, Department of Plant Sciences, Professor Jaideep Pandit, Department of Anaesthetics, Dr Nick Van Hear, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

Ms Thonemann said that Mr Mackay would take the chair, in the absence of Dr Watson.

1. Notes of the previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 13 February 2018 (UCU(18)ii-v) were approved. UCU asked that future notes reflect more specifically the questions that its representatives asked.

2. Chair’s business

The Chair welcomed the committee members and the visitors to the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Mr Rodger as acting Joint Secretary to the committee on behalf of the UCU and Mr Dickson who was providing cover for Ms Brotherston.

3. Secretarial action points

Mr Dickson said that Ms Brotherston was working with the union joint secretaries on an agreed approach to publishing information required by the Trade Union Act 2016. He reassured the UCU that the University recognised the benefits of facility time and explained that the University would need to publish the relevant information on its own website and a government website by 31 July 2018.

Mr Dickson explained that consultation with the unions continued on the HR self-service project and that the ‘go-live’ had been delayed to June. A member of UCU asked if it was the University’s intention to cease issuing paper payslips and Ms Thonemann confirmed that it would stop issuing payslips to staff, with the exception of those individuals who did not have access to computers at work.

Mr Dickson stated that the 2017 HR self-assessment and data collection survey is underway and that the data gathered would be reported to the joint committee in due course.
4. Fixed term contracts (UCU(18)06)

Mr Dickson presented the annual monitoring of fixed term contracts report, which analysed data for
staff in post on 31 July.

He explained that the figures showed a slight increase (by 0.7%) in the number of academic and
academic-related staff holding fixed-term contracts from 2016 to 2017 and a slight fall in the number of
staff holding permanent contracts in this period (by 0.6%). The proportion of staff on open-ended
(5.3%) and self-financing contracts (0.2%) remained stable.

He said that tables 1 and 2 in the annexe showed an increase of 1% in the number of academic staff
and researchers on fixed-term contracts. He stated that the University’s research funding has continued
to grow and where external funding is time-limited for specific projects, it can lead to the creation of
fixed-term roles for employees in the University. Ms Thonemann commented that when academic staff
took time out of their teaching duties to perform research, they were often back-filled by departmental
lecturers and this may explain some of the increase in staff classified as academic on fixed-term
contracts.

Mr Dickson said that the quarterly meetings between representatives of Personnel Services and of the
three recognised trade unions provide a useful means of reviewing practice across the University. The
group have re-reviewed those individuals who have been on fixed-term contracts for many years; a
number of them have been moved to open-ended or permanent contracts. A representative of the UCU
pointed out that some individuals had retired having spent their career on fixed-term contracts and a
suggestion was made that there was a culture in some departments of using successive fixed term
contracts. Ms Thonemann said that some departments extended fixed term contracts because they did
not want to risk redundancies if external funding was withdrawn.

The UCU quoted some union figures for University employees on fixed-term contracts, based on the
HESA return, and questioned why they were different from the figures produced by the HR information
team. Ms Thonemann requested the union’s figures and their definitions for comparison.

5. Personnel security (UCU(18)09)

Ms Butler explained that work had begun to review the University’s pre-employment screening
guidance. She stated that changes in Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) arrangements, the GDPR
and a recent incident within the University are the drivers for this. She noted that the University’s
Security Subcommittee is also reviewing the University’s strategic level of risk, which will inform this
review, and it has requested that an overarching ‘Personnel Security Policy’ is drafted to supplement
and inform existing guidance.

Questions were asked about vetting tutors and first aiders and Ms Butler said that occasional teaching
and first aid were not regulated activities.

6. Car parking (UCU(18)07)

Mr Wigzell presented the annual update from the car parking working group (CPWG). He explained that
they are currently engaged in two main pieces of work. The first is a triennial review of car parking
permit charges (from 2019 to 2021) and the other is developing a car parking strategy for the University (Central Area).

Mr Wigzell said that the CPWG will be recommending to BESC that the peak permit charge should be maintained at 1.75% of gross contractual salary which is equivalent to the cost of using the park and ride. It is recommended that the off-peak permit charge should be increased to £40 and the Osney Mead permit would rise to 0.35% of salary. He commented that generally, BESC would consult the Personnel Committee and the joint committees before agreeing to the implementation of any increases.

Mr Wigzell said that Estates Services were developing a car parking strategy with the guidance from the CPWG and a consultant. This would be available for wider consultation in Michaelmas Term 2018.

A representative from the UCU asked if there were plans to introduce battery chargers for electric cars in any of the University's car parks. Mr Wigzell replied that there would be 14 charge points at the new car park that was opening in August at the Old Road Campus.

7. Strategic plan (UCU(18)08)

Ms Fridlington summarised the draft 2018-2023 strategic plan, which was informed by the feedback received from University committees, the open meetings and from the on-line feedback form which was open to all University members. She explained that the second phase of consultation had now started and there would be an open meeting on 21 June. The draft strategic plan was available on the website: (http://www.ox.ac.uk/staff/consultations/strategic-plan-consultation).

The strategy would have an overarching vision and five themes: people, education, research, engagement and partnerships and resources. Each theme would have three commitments and five or six priorities for action during the agreed plan. The draft would be considered by Council in July and then go to Congregation for approval. The supporting action plan would be developed during the summer.

The UCU suggested that to recruit and retain the highest calibre of staff the University would need a good pension scheme and accommodation for staff. A UCU representative suggested that it was a reputational risk for the University to keep academics, who deliver tutorials, on fixed-term contracts. It was noted that academics who delivered tutorials are employed by the colleges, not by the University.

8. Retirement (UCU(18)10)

Ms Thonemann said that normally the report on retirement was annual, but no report was submitted in 2016-17 because of the five-year interim review of the EJRA. This report covered two years 2015-17, which correlated with the period when the 2015-17 procedures were in operation.

Ms Thonemann indicated that there had been a reduction in the number of applications from c. 40-50 per year in 2011-15, to half that figure during 2015-17. About a third of applications were declined, as more stringent criteria had been introduced to ensure that extensions were really exceptional. The average length of extensions was around two years; no applications for extensions were received from women. 249 people retired from academic and related roles during this period, 39 of them after the EJRA.
More applications were received from the sciences, from research staff, and from men. The majority are from research staff. The number of staff remaining in employment appears to have levelled off at 50-60 each year, with about a third vacating their substantive post and moving to part-time working.

The table on page 5 shows that the profile of academic staff continues to get noticeably older and research staff are also aging, but less sharply.

9. Finance (UCU(18)4)

Mr Purbrick presented a financial update covering the 2nd Quarter Forecast 2017/18 and 2018/19 Budget Targets. He noted that in general the academic divisions are broadly in line with their budget targets, with improvements in MPLS, Humanities and Continuing Education due to increased income.

He explained that the worsening in the financial performance of the services is due to the cost of supporting the capital programme and increased rates charges, both within Estates Services. He said that the worsening against the University Chest is due to an accounting adjustment and the ongoing cost of the apprenticeship levy, which ought to fall on academic and service departments.

He hoped that some financial improvements could be made with the introduction of a new expenses process and a more efficient use of teaching space.

He said that there had been an increase in student fees (£7.6m) due to higher than planned numbers of postgraduate students being admitted in 2017/18. This money will be allocated to the divisions in the subsequent financial year i.e. 2018/19.

He observed that the budget targets for 2018/19 had an operating surplus of 3.9% rather than the 5% which was usually expected. He explained that PRAC were seeking a broader definition of surplus instead of the 5% of money.

10. Professorial merit pay

Ms Thonemann said that the professorial merit pay (PMP) scheme was launched in the Gazette on 17 May, to replace professorial distinction awards.

She advised that PMP had three new criteria: leadership and citizenship, research and teaching. It covers all those with the title professor and only one reference would be required, from the head of department or their representative, form those seeking to move up within one of the three new, broad bands; external references would be needed only to move between the three bands.

PMP would begin with a salary review to identify outliers and divisional PMP committees would be able to award recurrent awards or one-off awards to recognise where an individual had met some but not all of the requirements. The PMP review would take place every two years and would assist with retention. The current application deadline is 6 July with payments to be made from January 2019.
11. General data protection regulation

Ms Thonemann explained that the General data protection regulation (GDPR) would come into force on 25 May and that it would bring new data protection rights for individuals, with a greater emphasis on transparency and record keeping, mandatory data breech reporting and larger fines where organisations are not compliant.

Ms Thonemann said that a University-wide programme of improvement is underway to ensure we are compliant with the legislation and that Council Secretariat is leading on the project, which will take an estimated period of 12-24 months.

Ms Thonemann stated that Anne Harkness, Head of HR Operations, is chairing the Personnel Services GDPR working group, which was formed in December 2017. The group have completed an internal audit of our data processing activities and have been updating key areas, such as templates for departments (contracts, job descriptions, letters), web guidance, recruitment practices, an updated individual user agreement and data protection course for HRIS users and ensuring ‘privacy by design’ in requests for HR system upgrades. Updated guidance for retention periods is also being developed. Some of these updates will be in place by 25 May and others will be completed later in the project.

Ms Thonemann explained that Council Secretariat had updated the staff privacy notice and developed a new privacy notice for job applicants.

A comment was made about the difficulty of personal data being held in historic emails and mailing lists. Ms Thonemann said that she thought the regulators would take action proportionately, given that the University had a compliance plan in place.

USS pension scheme

A question was raised by the UCU about the USS pension scheme. Ms Thonemann confirmed that it was not within the scope of the joint committee meeting to discuss matters that were resolved nationally. The joint secretary for the UCU requested an update on Council’s plans to match current provision as far as possible at the Michaelmas Term 2018 meeting.

AJWD/SJT
May 2018