

14 January 2022

09.00

Online via Microsoft Teams

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present:

Martin Atkinson; Director of HR and OD, Chair [MA]

Jane Higham; Chief Financial Officer [JH]

Wendy Green; Reward and Recognition Manager [WG]

Gordon Vernon; Payroll and Payment Services Manager [GV]

Chris Henry; UCU [CH]

Triona Fitton [TF] UCU

Baliyar Sanghera; G7+ Staff Representative [BS] – *left the meeting at 09.30*

Paul Ducker; Unite Representative [PD] – *joined the meeting at 09.15*

Karen Cherpin (minutes) [KC]

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from Charlotte Ransom, Maria Bakali, and Russell Jordan.

All agreed to the recording of the meeting for the purpose of the minutes.

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 14 December 2021

Members of the committee to review the minutes from the last meeting during the course of the coming week, and advise KC of any comments/amendments.

Otherwise, the minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters Arising

Actions from the last meeting: JH to follow up with Caroline Mitchell [CM] regarding the specific point around the University not being able to pay into a different pension scheme. This point is to be included in the FAQs section of the website.

Update: KC has been in touch with CM regarding the work being done on the FAQs and confirmed this is in hand.

Action: KC to follow up on this specific point with CM and ensure FAQ section is updated on the website.

BS asked for further facts and figures, including the take-up rate [to join the USS pension scheme] among new colleagues.

Action: WG to go back to Alan Gazzard [AG] for further information.

Update: Full information provided in the meeting pack. WG noted that these figures fluctuate throughout the year. From the figures provided, it appears that almost a quarter of new starters are not joining the USS scheme, which is a concern. MA suggested that this should be monitored closely.

Action: GV to ask AG to run the report regularly so that monitoring can take place and presented periodically to JSNCC.

BS agreed that the figures are somewhat of a concern, and income seems to play a significant part in it. For those earning less than £40K, there seems to be a considerable amount of opt-out. GV clarified this point by adding that he is working on data based over a number of years, rather than looking only at one year. The numbers shown in the document provided are TOTAL numbers, rather than percentages. More detail could be gained from the data, if the information was tweaked slightly.

Action: GV to work with AG on this report to provide more analysis.

It was noted in the last meeting that JH & MA are working on a more formal response to the UCU demands. A formal response has now been drafted to specifically address these demands, and has been sent to CH for consideration. It will be shared more widely once CH and other UCU members have had time to consider it.

4. Final consultation feedback and latest responses

WG confirmed that a final reminder had been sent out ahead of the closing of the consultation on Monday 14th January. A few more responses had been received following the reminder. All responses were shared with the committee in the meeting pack, with new responses highlighted in green. 23 responses had been received at this stage, with comments generally reflecting discontent with the proposals. The area for registering comments will close at 5pm on Monday 14th January. All responses will be downloaded and added to the Kent pensions webpages after close on Monday. WG confirmed that all member responses go to USS as well as to the employer, and that the University can send an employer response, should it wish to do so, by close of play on Wednesday 16th January. No emails had been received to the dedicated USS consultation mail box, which has been monitored daily throughout the consultation period.

JH felt it might be worth reflecting on the member responses received and the matters that have come up for discussion in the committee, and putting together an employer response based on this. MA agreed that this should be looked at over the next couple of days.

5. Equality Impact Assessment

WG introduced this piece of work by noting that the version that had been shared with the committee was not the final document. The final version would be submitted to UUK on Wednesday 19th January, so there was an opportunity for any feedback to be given to WG. WG noted that she had included data from the scheme in the meeting pack, and had looked

at the overall scheme makeup and protected characteristics; particularly age and ethnicity as disability data tends to be patchy. It should be noted that most of the proposals are negative for everybody, regardless of protected characteristics, so attention had been given where there is a particularly negative impact. There is more analysis around the threshold with one page in the data specifically highlighting this. As one would expect, the greatest impact is around age. As there is a higher BAME population in the lower age groups, there is an impact on these protected characteristics as well. In terms of the threshold, although there are more women in the lower age bracket, and lower earnings bracket, they stay below the threshold and this has therefore been marked as neutral. In doing this work, WG added that where she had looked at a particular percentage, she had looked at the overall makeup of the scheme, to come up with any negative impact.

MA thanked WG for her efforts on this difficult piece of work, adding that he had learnt that other universities were struggling to complete it.

WG referred CH to Page 10 of the Equality Impact Assessment document in answer to his question regarding base level numbers across the University in the BAME category. There is a comparison of the USS overall scheme and Kent and the overall profile for Kent is very similar to that of USS membership. CH added there does not seem to be any disproportionate impact as it is negative all round.

WG confirmed that the report will go to UUK and uploaded to the USS consultation website. JH added that if there are any strong conclusions coming out of it, they could be included in the employer response to USS.

MA asked members to send any further comments to WG before the submission deadline of Wednesday 19th January.

6. Progress on the three workstreams coming out of the 2020 USS valuation

MA referred members to the relevant document in the meeting pack. He felt this was a useful update on reforms to the scheme.

Section 1 of the report covers a working group to explore low-cost options in USS. Some good work has been done here and it is positive to see that there is a commitment to have a report by April 2022.

Section 2 concerns a working group to explore conditional elements of USS scheme design. Work has started but it states that UCU is not able to participate in this as yet. The work should be concluded by the end of 2022, with outcomes to go into the next formal valuation. MA added that this should allow for UCU involvement.

Action: CH to investigate why UCU is not able to participate in discussions at this time.

Section 3 concerns an independent governance review of USS. A timeline has been identified but there is yet to be any real work done in this area. JH felt this part of the update is disappointing as this could make a difference to the whole valuation process and outcome.

To see this is only in its design phase and has not yet kicked off is disappointing. The timeline of 6-9 months suggests in practice nothing will come out of it before the end of 2022. This would mean that bringing the valuation forward to March 2022 would be very difficult if this work has not been done. This could be included in the consultation response.

GV agreed that this last section is a bit disappointing but the rest is positive.

Action: This information is useful and should be shared on the website. KC to add to the pensions webpages.

GV also noted that it would be useful to receive regular updates. MA agreed and noted that this should also be included in the employer response.

7. Any Other Business

There was none.

MA concluded by recapping on the opportunities members have been given to add their feedback to the consultation. He thanked WG and KC for ensuring all information was readily available throughout the process.

The University remains in dispute with UCU over the proposed benefit changes and will continue discussions outside of the sub-JSNCC meeting. The sub meetings have now concluded.