

Branch Meeting 17 February 2021 (on-line)

Chair: Dai Moon

53 members in attendance

1. Welcome and update

Chair welcomed new members and asked permission for meeting to be recorded for minuting purposes. No objections were raised.

2. Cost savings

Documents were circulated last week detailing cost saving proposals. The University desire is to achieve a collective agreement over this, which is also desirable from UCU perspective, albeit not at any cost. As always, UCU Reps will enter negotiations in good faith but bearing in mind that any deal needs to be agreed by members and that members' views need to guide the negotiations.

Context to cost saving discussions

Cost saving measures are being discussed nationally; the position at Bath is better than others in the region, however this is not a rosy picture. Some of the proposals being put forward now were already part of the document shared with Joint Union Negotiators in Summer 2020 (Secretary note: please refer to August 2020 Branch Meeting minutes) but that could not be discussed with full membership. The response to that document was circulated amongst members and at that point our view was that there was no basis for staff-based cost savings. This is still the view of negotiators and they have requested that the framework information is updated with financial information and that this is shared amongst members.

Cost saving measures implemented by the University to date:

- Closure of Pall Mall and Executive Education Team – it is important to note that this involves staff loss, albeit no redundancies have arisen from this (colleagues made use of the VE scheme prior to their jobs becoming redundant);
- Closure of The Edge Arts Team (same as above);
- Change in Research Recovery Rates;
- Reduction of Studentships;
- Delayed Estates projects spend;
- Delayed strategic investment;
- Internationalisation non-pay;
- Other Departmental non-pay;
- Printing costs;
- Utilities;
- Reduction in agency staff spend.

The list above came with no saving figures attached so the magnitude of savings cannot be compared to the other proposals on the table.

Further update on financial projections will be considered by Council at the end of the month. Financial recovery is expected to take 3-4 years but is very dependent on student recruitment and the effect of the pandemic on next year remain very uncertain.

Proposals currently on the table:

- Increments: this is an important issue as these are a contractual agreement. An agreement on this will have to be a collective agreement for a temporary variation in contracts. UCU's view is that for this to happen the contractual nature of increments must be recognised and that during this period there should not be compulsory redundancies;
- Promotions: this point need to be clarified as this could either result on promotions being delayed or promotions taking place but with a delay in pay increase (which, potentially, could lead to issues with respect to equal pay).

Members would need balloting to define negotiating position and we need to be mindful of that at present the only commitment is to avoid large scale compulsory redundancies.

The following issues were raised from the participants:

- Members expressed frustration with the lack of information sharing, they felt it is important to have figures against cost savings and a clear understanding of extent of reserves before commenting is even possible;
- Some members expressed the view that it is desirable to reach an agreement but that they are not prepared to give up contractual rights at a time when workload has gone through the roof (and is being exacerbated by the fact that positions are not being replaced);
- Members workloads (across all job families) have all increased and we have collectively taken that burden; for the University to be considering breaking our contracts seemed a bit much;
- The use of consultants on the part of the University was queried;

Workload emerged as a major issue, with many members reporting the current model to be grossly inaccurate. WLM currently does not even cover the time spent teaching, let alone accounting for any preparation, so the question to be asked is what purpose does it serve?

A member of the committee was called onto explain the origins of the WLM: this was originally introduced as preparatory work for TRAC, which was based on percentage time spent on different activities. The University management position has, for a number of years, been that WLM should record real hours spent on the job and to be based on a national working year of about 1600hrs. Deans should be considering the workload of colleagues falling short or exceeding this number by more than 10% as WLM is supposed to be used (amongst other things) to monitor staff wellbeing. It is clear that current changes in working practice have been accommodated by colleagues as a matter of goodwill, but it cannot be expected for these to carry on indefinitely. Sadly, the University is not accepting input from UCU on determining the tariffs underpinning the WLM algorithm. The Rep reminded members that there are legal implications surrounding the WLM but, equally, that this should be a true reflection of time spent.

A member highlighted the fact that on 9/02 the Doctoral College emailed to say they were unable to fulfil their duties, this is a clear indication that already there are parts of the University which are facing significant difficulties and are unable to deliver services. It was not clear University management had a plan to alleviate this situation.

There was concern that ECRs found it difficult to meet their probation goals given the amount of time spent on teaching activities. ECRs had been informed last year that they would not be unduly penalised, however no further communication has been received.

3. Update on USS Pensions, Gender Pay Gap, Professorial Pay, anti-casualisation

There were no updates on USS Pensions and Professorial Pay.

Gender pay gap

A draft statement of intent to commit the University and the Trade Unions to work towards a collective agreement has been signed off by UCU committee. The statement is currently being considered by the other interested parties. UCU welcomes this statement in particular as it commits the University to looking at intersectional pay gaps.

Anti-casualisation

Some of the proposals being put forward by UCU are being considered.

4. AoB

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.