

Bristol UCU – Branch Officers’ Report for Branch AGM – May 2016

University’s Vision and Strategy

The University’s Vision and Strategy process is reaching the end of its consultation phase. Feedback has been collated and the final strategy will be presented to the Board of Trustees on 27 May. During UCU’s engagement with the strategy process we have maintained our focus on the Branch’s agreed priorities:

Promotion and progression

There is considerable support for a review of promotion and progression processes for pathway 2 (research) and pathway 3 (teaching) staff, however, this will inevitably mean a review for pathway 1 staff too. Guy Gregory and Nick Lieven reported at a recent JCNC that there are many strong and differing views amongst Heads of Schools about the current system which has been in place since 2007. Has the expectation that staff should progress to Senior Lecturer worked or should we move back to promotion? It is said that high-performing Schools have no problem with the current system but others often struggle and aren’t timely with those “difficult” conversations. The fact that staff face capability and potential dismissal for failing to meet the criteria for progression is certainly an issue for UCU - take Alison Hayman’s dismissal for example. Guy and Nick were clear that any review certainly won’t satisfy everyone due to the potential resource issues and “business need”. We will ensure that UCU is an integral part of the review.

Equality

The support promised for equality and diversity in the university’s Vision and Strategy statement and consultations is welcome. So too is the University’s new gender action plan. However, the trends we have seen of both disability and gender discrimination in various forms (direct and indirect) in spite of claims from university management that there is no problem with disability support and that it has been unclear what can be done about the gender pay-gap and other inequality means we must take concrete steps. The Joint Unions Equality Group is developing a response to the new HR document on gender. The Disabled Staff Network and Joint Unions Equality Group are organising follow-up meetings with Nick Lieven and Tracy Brunnock on equality and diversity within the context of the University’s Vision and Strategy and on gender inequality within selection, progression, and promotion. Sue Porter, Pete Barrett, and I are meeting the new Student Union Officer for liberation, Hannah Dualeh and Louise Miller, the University’s Disability Services Manager

about fighting DSA cuts after a meeting with the outgoing SU liberation officer, and meeting the SU's sabbatical officer supporting the SU's Mental Health awareness month. The aim of the former meeting is to help create a toolkit of resources to support disabled students and staff, the latter to come up with best ideas for increasing publicity and awareness of challenges facing and resources available to staff and students with mental health conditions.

Workloads

The University's new Vision and Strategy document and consultations have outlined key areas which could impact workload and exacerbate problems with workload management: changing focuses of teaching and research and related administration and continuing or increasing investment in capital projects. The changes to what is taught and researched could result in more upheaval in what staff do. Here issues of workload management and contracts would be particularly important. Increasing capital investments could create budgetary pressures and constraints that further increase pressure of staff to be more productive. Again, workload management will be key. This focus could also in theory lead to increased financial pressure on staffing by squeezing Faculty/Divisional budgets. All of these factors highlight the importance of transparent, fair and universal workload modelling as recommended in UCU's new Workload and Wellbeing survey report, to address issues of overwork and resulting critical levels of anxiety and other problems in the workforce. We know our members are overworked and undervalued. We will be working with them through area meetings and an email consultation to find out what they feel can be actually done in moving towards our goal of transparent, fair, and comprehensive workload modelling and allocation.

Reinstate Alison Hayman Campaign

For a good chunk of last year, Bristol UCU was running the Reinstate Alison Hayman Campaign. To recap, Alison, a Lecturer in Connective Tissue Biology in the Vet School, was dismissed at the end of 2014 on account of not progressing from Lecturer (1c) to Senior Lecturer (1d). We campaigned for Alison's reinstatement because her dismissal for not securing sufficient external grant funding was reductive and draconian. A petition requesting Alison's reinstatement got nearly 2,000 signatures; her story was covered by Times Higher, Epigram, Bristol Post and Huffington Post.

Unfortunately the news from the Campaign's point of view is bad. Alison lost her claim for unfair dismissal. The ET judge's verdict weighed far more than was reasonable the extent to which Alison was subjected to a long, drawn-out

process and was thus treated appropriately according to University's existing policies and employment law.

The ET judge did not take into account the extent to which Alison's performance targets were unreasonable, vague (often deliberately so in an effort to avoid being seen to set specific, rigid grants targets as we are seeing at other universities) and not 'SMART' - actively looking to secure funding and seeking peer and institutional feedback is, for sure, specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related; the actual obtaining of highly competitive grant monies, Alison's objective, is not within an individual's direct control or competency.

Plus, the issue of academic freedom was not given due regard, the way Alison was expected to forgo curiosity-driven research.

As things stand, Alison now has a dismissal on her record. She is considering retraining.

In terms of future campaigns, Bristol UCU has been a part of a general discussion and growing movement in UCU to try and get some more teeth to UCU's national policy of opposing grant-related performance management.

Tackling this issue on an individual, case-by-case basis is not having much of a national impact. Grant-related performance management is in stark relief nationally at the moment: see Newcastle University's Raising the Bar initiative and the requirement for probationary staff to successfully gain a research grant as Principal Investigator (PI) at Queen's University Belfast.

Ordinances Review

A two year review of the University Ordinances (our terms and conditions) was implemented in October.

Fixed term contracts policy - all new staff are now being appointed on open-ended contracts unless their posts are 12 months or less or are time-bound projects. All research contracts over 12 months (with a few special exemptions) should now be made on open-ended contracts.

Redundancy policy - all staff now follow the same process. The University's redundancy committee has gone and decisions are now made at school/divisional level. The £20K cap on redundancy pay has been removed.

Hourly-paid to Fractional Part-time Teachers policy - 30+ staff in Arts (primarily long-term, hourly-paid, grade G Language in Modern Languages and CELFS) were converted to open-ended contracts in summer 2015. Whilst still

very low-paid, and not on an academic pathway, some staff teaching 15 hours+ per week saw their salary increase from around £11K on an hourly-paid contract to £19K on a permanent contract.

Mediasite – Recording of Lectures

Last summer, Bristol UCU reps negotiated a “no questions asked” opt out to Mediasite (lecture capture). Important to note: UCU’s national policy is opt in: ‘UCU’s position is ...we do not accept that our members should be filmed or recorded without their agreement’, Recording and Filming of Lectures - UCU Guidance, UCUHE/193, 23 May 2013.

This UoB opt out was always conditional in that it only applied to the current 2015/16 academic year. As stated in the current, soon to be revised ‘Recording of Educational Activities Policy’:

...in the respect of the academic year 2015/16, lecturers may opt out for any good reason (except where the University has an overriding legal obligation to provide a recording) provided that they notify the Mediasite Project Team and their Head of School of their reasons for opting out. The Mediasite Project Team will monitor the reasons given by lecturers for opt out and the University will review the proposed opt out policy towards the end of the academic year in the light of the experience gained.

The University is now seeking to revise this opt out element. The above paragraph will be cut. The proposed revision would see the Policy revert back to a previous, more stringent pre-negotiation version of opt out. The removal of ‘for any good reason’ means that the policy now clearly states ‘opt out of a unit will be appropriate if a large proportion of its lectures’ only for a set number of reasons such as confidential information, politically sensitive, degree of interaction with students, the use of whiteboards or chalk boards. It does also state ‘there may other valid reasons why opt out may appropriate’: here though Heads of School would need to sign this off.

It is worth noting that the above mentioned 2015/16 consultation has indeed taken place. This concludes that ‘less than 12% of units opted out in 2015/16’ and ‘many of the reasons given for opting out were already covered by the current policy’.

As you hopefully have seen, an e-ballot has been circulated to members. This will inform any Bristol UCU position we have in future meetings, and the extent to which we lobby for keeping the liberal version of opt out.

Prevent

It is pretty clear that nationally Universities are going to be under great scrutiny in regards to “extremism”. Recent events such as the ongoing controversy around anti-semitism and proposed Queen’s Speech legislation; the hosting of events; the controversial campus presence of individuals and groups; the monitoring of staff and student: all mean campuses are likely to be in the public spotlight.

In this context, the Prevent Duty and its implementation at the University of Bristol is very much a live issue. See the Bristol UCU blog posts [‘The Prevent Duty@Bristol: The Duty in Context, Bristol UCU Response and Next Steps’](#) and [‘The Prevent Duty at the University of Bristol – Open Letter to University of Bristol Senate Members’](#) for more information.

In short, the Prevent Duty states that public bodies, such as universities, need to have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’. According to the Government’s Prevent Duty Guidance for Higher Education Institutions in England and Wales, this means universities need to police external speakers with a view to stopping events where ‘extremist views’ may be expressed, to train staff in ‘factors that make people support terrorist ideologies’ and to make ‘clear’ to student unions ‘the need to challenge extremist ideologies’.

Dissent as regards Prevent amongst Higher Education professionals is rife. Ken MacDonald, warden of Wadham College, Oxford and a former Director of Public Prosecutions, has pointed out the ‘chilling effect’ of the Duty on academic debate and day-to-day business. ‘Read literary,’ he argues, the Duty ‘envisages a future in which people might be constrained from arguing, in a university of all places, that democracy is wrong in principle’. Vice Chancellor of Kingston University Julius Weinberg has recently said ‘there is no respectable evidence that radicalisation is happening at our universities’. Sorana Vieru, NUS VP Higher Education points out ‘an atmosphere of suspicion, monitoring and not to mention profiling undermines the possibility of such a space that allows research to flourish and learners to develop’. ‘The creation of a legal duty on universities,’ highlights Rizwaan Sabir, lecturer in criminology at Liverpool John Moores University, ‘to report extremists or “potential terrorists” therefore has a deeply damaging impact in so far as it creates a climate of fear and self-censorship’. A letter to The Independent, 10th July 2015, signed by several Bristol academics notes ‘while much of the PREVENT policy is aimed at those suspected of “Islamist extremism” and far-right activity, there is a genuine concern that other groups will also be affected by such

policies, such as anti-austerity and environmental campaigners - largely those engaged in political dissent'

At the University of Bristol, this has meant demonstrating to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the HE Prevent monitoring body, our UoB Prevent readiness. This has meant the revision and generation of the following policies and documents – Freedom of Speech Statement; External Speakers' Procedure, Risk Assessment and Action Plan, IT Services Policy

In terms of branch involvement, branch Vice President Jamie Melrose has helped organised Preventing Prevent events on campus and sits on the UoB Prevent Compliance Group. Bristol UCU has also lobbied Senate and the Board of Trustees, in the form of an open letter, in advance of these bodies consideration of the policies and documents.

The latest news here is that the Freedom of Speech statement and the External Speakers' Procedure drew a number of critical comments at Senate and have been re-tabled for the next Senate in June.

Academic Role Profiles

Bristol has been involved in the changes to the Academic Role Profiles since the beginning of the academic year. The changes were introduced in November last year.

In short, these changes centred on i) new additions around citizenship, engagement and impact expectations, ii) new job titles on Pathways 2 and 3, iii) obligations around CREATE, the UoB academic professional development scheme, and iv) the insertion of indications of expectation of quality of delivery.

Bristol UCU in September last year noted these changes, registering our concerns, not 'signing-off' the changes but not triggering any formal, industrial dispute-like response. We noted the language around quality could impact negatively on staff in relation to performance management and progression. In response, HR stated that the role profile criteria were to be considered in the round and in context.

Recently the RED document 'Guidance and exemplars of engagement and impact' was brought to Bristol UCU officers attention. Following consultation with branch Exec, branch officers asked for a change in a draft version of the document.

The document comes in the wake of the November changes to the Profiles and to the assessment of progression and promotion.

Further to Bristol UCU representations, instead of the sentence:

...The engagement must also be successful, having led to uptake of the work and outcomes beyond academia...

it is proposed to have:

...The academic should provide evidence of how these efforts have achieved engagement and impact beyond academia...

Further context can be found on the Bristol UCU website:

http://www.ucubristol.org.uk/files/2016/04/Academic-Role-Profiles_Summary-April-2016.pdf

Divisional Restructurings

You are probably aware that the Divisions are now subject to review in the same way as Schools. In 2014/15 reviews included Sports, Exercise and Health, Estates and Communications and Marketing. Sports and Estates are now going through the final stages of restructuring with many roles changed or removed. Many staff have retired or left through redundancy. Estates currently has two sets of staff in redundancy ring-fence selection pools (ie more people than roles available) so they face selection for their own job. Summer last year saw many Careers Advisers leaving through redundancy following the downgrading of their roles. The joint trade unions played a key role in supporting staff through these changes.

Divisional reviews this year include Residential Services, RED and HR - it will be interesting to see what follows.

Casework

Individual and group casework continues to be a key part of support for our members. Our caseworkers are either UCU Officers or volunteer reps from Schools and Divisions who tirelessly give of their time to support colleagues in need - huge thanks to all of them. We have a constant stream of casework requests and have dealt with upwards of 60 cases this year. It is because of the increase in casework that the Executive have decided to create the new role of Casework Coordinator to recognise Stephen D'Evelyn's workload in this area.

Got a problem - you need to be part of the union

Due to the increase in casework this year, the Executive has agreed to change its policy so that the branch no longer supports staff with an issue if it was pre-

existing before they joined. This may not apply if the new member is adding to the strength of a collective grievance within a School or Division.

National Issues

Pay Campaign

Following the second negotiating meeting with the employers (JCNCES) a final offer has been made. The offer is 1.1% on all points with additional payments at the bottom of the spine. Point 1 of the spine will be deleted with increases of 3.1% on point 2 and tapered higher increased through to 1.6% on point 7.

Our ballot on industrial action closes tomorrow - by the time of our AGM we should know the outcome and whether we have a mandate from our members for action.

USS

We will all have noticed the increase in our National Insurance this April and if you're a member of USS you will also have seen an increase in your pension contribution. Whilst we did see the end of the final salary scheme we must remember that our industrial action did bring about significant compromises with the increase in the CRB scheme maximum from £40K to £55K and the lowering of the accrual rate from 1/80 to 1/75.

The next valuation is fast approaching – at national level UCU are raising the need for a full review regarding the approach to scheme funding prior to the 2017 valuation. Discussions nationally with employer representatives have started and UCU have made it clear that they expect the matter to be discussed formally within the USS negotiating structures.

Tracey Hooper, Jamie Melrose and Stephen D'Evelyn

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