

Dear Nick and Guy,

In the meeting at the start of term with UCU branch offices, we undertook to write to you outlining our concerns, and position, on questions of progression and promotion for academic staff at the University of Bristol.

Our starting point is the successful work done a decade ago by the University together with the campus trade unions to implement locally the National Framework Agreement in which I know Guy played a central part. As well as the single-spine, this created a strong set of local principles around progression and promotion. Progression from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer was established as a career expectation at the University of Bristol. Across the University as a whole, the evidence is overwhelming that our excellent staff routinely and comfortably meet the expectations delineated for progression from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. Indeed, given the quality of appointments commonly made at Lecturer level across the institution, there is value in revisiting the policy on accelerated progression to ensure that unfair impediments are not in place that prevent exceptional early career staff from developing their career appropriately. We see no substantial evidence that staff who should not reach Senior Lecturer are doing so. We do, however, have concerns that in (the relatively rare) cases where staff might need support and effective mentoring to progress, this is not always forthcoming. We also have concerns that the original intention of the Reward settlement for there to be some flexibility in movement across the pathways - for instance from pathway 1 to 3, or 3 to 1 - has not been fully realised in practice. We know from our case work that greater fidelity in this regard to the founding principles of Reward could have positive results for individuals and the institution as a whole.

Whilst, therefore, we have identified instances in which the progression framework for pathway 1 staff has been misapplied, we believe the basic principles to be essentially sound. We have, however, graver concerns with regard to Pathways 2 and 3. The University has struggled to develop appropriate descriptors, at both the broad HR level and more especially in Faculty-specific guidance, to ensure that excellent Pathway 2 and 3 staff progress as smoothly as they should from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer.

This issue is magnified if we turn from progression to promotion. As we have discussed previously in person, we need to ensure as an institution that 'gate keepers' to the promotions process (chiefly Heads of School) are fully aware of the (often very good) guidance provided, especially the localised guidance particular to specific Faculties. Some kind of regular 'refresher' training would be justified here. In terms of promotion for pathway 1 staff, we would suggest that there remains progress to be made in achieving a holistic view of a candidate that pays due and sufficient attention to aspects of the role beyond research, notably teaching and citizenship. There has, though, been some progress on this in recent years, albeit more in some areas of the institution than others.

The picture is, though, as already noted, less rosy if we turn to pathways 2 and 3. As I think is widely accepted across the university, there is considerable work to be done to create a fully functioning career ladder for pathway 2 and 3 colleagues. Too often, talented and deserving

pathway 2 colleagues are stymied from realizing their ambitions, leading to unhappiness and the loss of fine colleagues. The recent initiatives recasting guidance about the inclusion of pathway 2 colleagues in funding applications are welcome, though it is yet to be seen what practical difference this will make. Nonetheless, as we have previously highlighted to you in correspondence, our policies and systems continue to create - sometimes bizarre - situations where it is unclear how highly experienced and esteemed pathway 2 colleagues can achieve due recognition for their excellent work through promotion. The key here to improving matters must be to enlist the expertise of these staff themselves. Bristol UCU members have much to offer here, and are eager to play a central part in ensuring genuine parity of opportunity for promotion across the pathways.

The challenges faced by too many pathway 2 staff in securing appropriate recognition are paralleled for those on pathway 3. As an institution, we have not done as well as we should and could in producing guidelines that capture the pedagogical contribution and expertise of pathway 3 staff. Just as with pathway 2 colleagues, the way forward here is surely to harness better the insights of our staff. We would propose that a group be set up, consisting primarily of current pathway 3 staff, to review and revise the institution's guidance here. Whilst a role for HR expertise of course necessary and appropriate, it is a group chiefly composed of pathway 3 colleagues that is best placed to address these issues. Fortunately, we have the staff already in place at the University to do this. My colleague in the School of Humanities, Tom Sperlinger has, for instance, expressed his willingness to contribute to these essential reforms.

In keeping with some of our discussions in JCNC this term, we think the approach needed to address issues around progression and promotion is one that draws more heavily, inclusively and imaginatively upon the collective talents of our staff than we have done hitherto.

Yours sincerely,

James Thompson

VP, Bristol UCU