

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

STAFF LIAISON COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Staff Liaison Committee was held on Monday 13 February 2006 at 2:00pm in Committee Room B, Northcote House.

PRESENT Vice Chancellor, Professor S Smith (Chair)
Registrar & Secretary, Mr D J Allan
Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor P Webley
Head of School of Education & Lifelong Learning, Professor W Richardson
Director of Personnel & Staff Development, Mr S J C Cooper
Personnel Policies Manager, Mr A Johnson
Mrs M Grapes (Amicus)
Mr N Brooks (AUT)
Mr B Pearson (AUT)
Mr A Holcombe (Unison)
Mrs C Hebbard (Unison)
Mr T Tancock (TGWU)

APOLOGIES Director of Finance, Mr J Lindley

06.01 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2005 (SLC/06/01) were CONFIRMED.

The Committee noted that the minutes were reported to Senate as unconfirmed and that that they were also reported to the Strategy, Performance and Review Committee through the Human Resources Committee. The Director of Personnel & Staff Development agreed to circulate the minutes of future meetings of the Committee to all trade union side members for comment.

06.02 Vice Chancellor's Report

The Vice Chancellor reported that:

- (a) The University was currently recruiting to 83 new appointments, to add to the 52 appointments which had released at the end of 2004/5. These appointments would enable workload issues on academic and support staff to be addressed. These appointments included approximately 20 'Jubilee Lectureships' which enabled appointments to be made now, in advance of the next RAE, replacing staff who would be retiring after the RAE. The appointments were being made in areas which the University was developing and, in response to a question from the trade union side, the Vice Chancellor confirmed that none of the new appointments were direct replacements for staff who had left under the early retirement/voluntary severance scheme last year.
- (b) Under Funding Council guidelines, the University was expected to make a surplus of 4% of turnover each year (i.e. £4.2 to £5 million). The University would be working towards this over time. For 2005/6, the current expectation was for a surplus of £1.5 to £2 million, which would enable the management of the University to release funds (approximately £600,000) for CBR payments.

In response to a question from the trade union side regarding the extension of the Contribution Based Reward scheme to staff in Hospitality Services and Buildings and Estate Services, the Director of Personnel & Staff Development confirmed that the details had been agreed with the Heads of Service for a CBR scheme based on the

performance of the service (rather than individual performance) and a report would be made to the next meeting of the Human Resources Committee.

- (c) The management of the University aimed to continue productive partnership working with the AUT at local level, particularly relating to the implementation of the Framework Agreement, whatever the outcome of the current national AUT ballot. The AUT representatives welcomed this commitment. The Vice Chancellor also commented that he had replied to a letter from the General Secretary of the AUT regarding the use of fee income and he agreed to send a copy of this letter to local AUT representatives.
- (d) Government Office South West had approached the University to apply for funding of up to £450 million which had been made available by the European Union for Cornwall Phase III. This would enable the University to build a critical mass of research excellence in Cornwall and achieve a financially stable position earlier. In response to a question from the trade union side, the Vice Chancellor commented that applications for funding for Phase III had to be submitted before Phase II had been completed.
- (e) The Universities of Exeter and Plymouth had received approval for a new Dental School and the Peninsula Medical School had been awarded an additional 100 student places.
- (f) The University had been awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Excellence in Higher Education for Professor Andrew Hattersley's work in diabetes in the Peninsula Medical School.
- (g) Following Professor Paul Webley's appointment as Principal of the School of Oriental and African Studies, arrangements were being made to recruit a new Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources), using a new process which would invite applications prior to interview.

06.3 Staff Opinion Survey

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Personnel & Staff Development (SLC/06/03) summarising the main outcomes of the staff opinion survey which had taken place in the autumn term. The Vice Chancellor advised the Committee that the University was awaiting details of how this University's responses compared with other Universities and a report of the responses for each School and Service. The Vice Chancellor also commented that the 'top five issues' summarised in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report were the ones identified by the providers of the opinion survey.

(On this latter point, discussions were taking place with the providers of the opinion survey to ensure that the small numbers involved for some responses – particularly on the questions about harassment - could not lead to any staff being identified. The Vice Chancellor reassured the Committee that this was not the University's intention but the University did need to know which areas harassment occurred in order to address it effectively.)

The Committee noted that the 47% response at the University compared favourably with the 43% average response for other opinion surveys undertaken by the providers. Mr Pearson questioned what conclusions could be drawn from the 53% who did not respond and whether the limited response made the outcomes appear more favourable

Mrs Hebbard expressed concern about the proportion of respondents who indicated that they did not report harassment because they believed nothing would happen as a consequence. Professor Webley commented that the University's new Equality & Diversity Manager would be addressing this issue.

Mr Pearson questioned how the University would respond to the concerns identified by staff about workload. In response, the Vice Chancellor reminded the Committee of the

investment in new appointments, reported earlier in the agenda, which would address workload concerns. The Director of Personnel & Staff Development commented that a more detailed analysis showed that support staff were more concerned about workload than academic staff.

The Committee noted that the Senior Management Group and Human Resources Committee would also consider the outcomes of the opinion survey and that the summary report would be placed on the University's website.

06.4 Review of Information Services

The Registrar & Secretary reported on the review of the University's future requirements of information services which had been undertaken by the Librarian, Mr Alistair Paterson. The main proposal was the merger of the Library and IT Services. The Vice Chancellor's Executive Group, the Professional Services Management Group, the Information Services Committee and the Strategy, Performance and Review Committee had now approved the report. The Registrar and Mr Paterson had met with staff in both services to discuss the report and its recommendations.

Mr Paterson had been appointed acting head of the new service until a permanent head was recruited. The Director of IT Services, Mrs Sue Brooks, would be leaving the employment of the University before July 2006 and Mr Martin Myhill was continuing as Acting Librarian. Mr Paterson was establishing arrangements for the joint management of the new service and working groups were being set up to discuss implementation of the report.

The Registrar advised the Committee that there would be no compulsory redundancies and that the purpose of the review was to enable the development of the service and further investment in information services. In response to a question from the trade union side about the possibility of voluntary redundancy/early retirement, he commented that individual requests would be considered on a case-by-case basis if this was in the managerial interest, but a scheme would not be an open scheme to which staff could apply.

Mr Brooks commented that, while the trade union side did not disagree with the recommendations of the report, there was a concern that the report contained criticisms which staff considered to be based on false perceptions and which they had no opportunity of responding to.

06.5 Framework Agreement Steering Group

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Framework Agreement Steering Group held on 1 February 2006 (SLC/06/02). Mr Brooks commented that minute 1.2 should read: 'the AUT suggested that future meetings might occur direct between trade union representatives and the Framework Agreement Management Group'.

06.6 Tuition Refund Scheme

The Director of Personnel & Staff Development reported that the Human Resources Committee would be asked to endorse the establishment of a Tuition Refund Scheme for staff who wished to undertake professional (ie directly related to their employment at the University) and personal development. This scheme would address issues raised in the staff opinion survey about access to external training and development.

Where such training was approved, the University would fund the costs in the form of an interest-free loan to be repaid in monthly instalments, typically over a 12 month period. For professional development, the loan would cover up to 100% of the course fee; for personal development the loan would cover up to 50% of the course fee. If the member of staff successfully completed the course of study then the University would reimburse the costs.

In response to a question from the trade union side, the Director of Personnel & Staff Development advised the Committee that this scheme was independent of the current fee waiver and remission arrangements for members of staff and their families studying courses provided by the University, although the management of the University did intend to review these arrangements.

06.7 Recognition of UCATT

The Personnel Policies Manager advised the Committee that since UCATT (which was recognised for staff in the Buildings Section of Buildings & Estate Services) no longer had any members at the University, the University had taken steps to derecognise the union.

06.8 Research Assessment Exercise Equal Opportunities Code of Practice

The Personnel Policies Manager advised the Committee that an Equal Opportunities Code of Practice had been developed for the University in accordance with the requirements of the Funding Councils for the forthcoming RAE. A copy of the draft Code of Practice which had been submitted to Research Committee on 9 February was circulated to the Committee and trade union representatives were invited to comment on this before the next meeting of Research Committee on 3 March. It was intended that the Code of Practice would be approved at Senate on 20 March. The Committee noted that some minor revisions to the draft Code of Practice would be required to take account of the final criteria for RAE panels and sub-panels which had been published on 31 January.

06.9 Interim Arrangement for the Regrading of Support Staff

The Committee discussed the timing for the suspension of the current arrangements for regarding of posts, based on the grading criteria which would be replaced under the local implementation of the Framework Agreement. The trade union side proposed that the current arrangements should be suspended when staff had been advised where they would be placed in the new grading structure, which the management of the University planned to take place in late June or early July. In response, the management of the University considered that it would not be appropriate to devote resources to managing the old grading schemes beyond the end of April – when it was planned to agree the details of the new grading arrangements with trade unions – when the key requirements on Personnel and Staff Development would be matching other posts into the new grading scheme and notifying staff.

The Committee agreed that the current regarding arrangements should be suspended from the end of April 2006 provided the current project plan remained on schedule. In the event that there was a delay in this timetable, both sides would reconsider this.

06.10 Sustainability Committee

The Committee noted that the trade union side had not yet nominated a representative to sit on this Committee.

Mrs Grapes raised concerns which had been discussed by the Safety Committee regarding the absence of a footpath between the Harrison Building and the Innovation Centre and the risks which this posed to staff and students. The Registrar agreed to speak directly to the Director of Buildings & Estate about this matter.