

## People, Culture and Engagement Committee

TIME /DATE / VENUE	1000, Tuesday 28 February 2023 in Room 0.32, Unit 1, St Andrew's Court
PRESENT	Claudia Iton (Chair) David Wilding Christopher Williams
IN ATTENDANCE	Becky Miles, Professional Services Staff Governor Fiona Hnatow, Chief People Officer Wayne Bowen, Head of HR Strategic Planning Rachael Lyons, Head of Student Finance (Minute 13 only) Karen Tiller, Interim Head of HR Services (Minute 14 only) James Morris, Head of Reward and Recognition (Minute 16 only)
SECRETARIAT	Claire Dunning, Executive Director of Corporate Governance Jacqui Bryden, Senior Governance Officer

To facilitate the attendance of staff for specific items, some items were taken out of the order designated in the agenda.

### 10 Welcome, Quoracy, Conflict of Interest and Apologies

- 10.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.
- 10.2 Apologies were received from: External Governor, David Willan; Professor Richard Thelwell, Academic Staff Governor; Kim John-Williams, Staff Representative; Professor Graham Galbraith; Bernie Topham, Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Vice-Chancellor; and Dr Andy Dixon, Deputy Director (Environment and Strategy) Research and Innovation (Minute 19 only)
- 10.3 The Executive Director of Corporate Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate and could proceed to business.
- 10.4 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

### 11 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

### 12 Matters Actioned and Matters Arising

- 3.1. Action was reported within the agenda papers on two items; one action for note and one item which would be received later in the agenda.
- 3.2. There were no other matters arising.

## 13 People, Culture and Engagement: Student Finance Team

Rachael Lyons, Head of Student Finance provided a presentation on the work of the Student Finance team and their contribution to the delivery of the University Strategy.

13.1 The key points raised in the presentation were:

- i. Student Finance had recently moved offices and were now co-located with the Income Team in University House which offered synergies to support students at the point of need. The new location was more accessible as it was on the ground floor and was a more formal setting than students had experienced previously.
- ii. The work of the team supported the strategic imperatives and in particular, recruitment and student experience. It was important to break down the barriers to access to higher education and remove financial problems as far as practicable to allow students to concentrate on studying.
- iii. The team had dealt with more than 11,000 enquiries in the last year, although face to face enquiries had dropped significantly. There were two sets of student customer: prospective and current students.
- iv. In 2021/2022, there were 1,439 applications for support funding from current students. For prospective students, the focus was to work with the outreach teams to open up possibilities and remove the perception that access to funding is difficult.
- v. Under-represented groups were targeted to increase widening participation and in particular support for vulnerable students leaving care or estranged from their parents, as well as carers and asylum seekers.
- vi. The team attended a number of recruitment events and arranged drop-in events both externally and across campus to provide financial advice, highlight scams and fraud prevention.
- vii. The cost of living crisis had affected students and Student Finance supported those in financial crisis or dealing with hardship. The guidelines for payments had been reviewed and lowered to respond to the crisis.
- viii. The University held a Support Fund to address immediate financial need which were paid the same day and did not need to be repaid. At least one emergency payment was made per week. In addition, the team provided budgeting advice, financial planning and food vouchers, where necessary.
- ix. The University had approximately 160 estranged students who had a bursary provided by Student Finance England and other financial support. There were 47 students who had left care. Both groups were expected to increase in number.
- x. Disabled students qualified for additional non means-tested payments including £200 for equipment. Approximately half of the Support Fund was spent on hardship payments and the rest on bursaries and support for vulnerable students. During the Covid pandemic, the support fund had been increased by £700k mainly to help students to pay rents.
- xi. The busiest times of the year were in Teaching Block One and the end of Teaching Block Two when utility prices and rents for the following year increased.
- xii. Feedback from students was very positive and it was of particular note that 81% of students stated that they would definitely or likely have withdrawn without the funds.

13.2 In discussion, Committee noted:

- i. The cost of living crisis had had less of an impact than anticipated as students had adjusted to budgeting and socialising especially post-Covid, as had students with children. There were also fewer home undergraduate students. International students had less need to access funds as the ability to self-fund was part of obtaining a study visa.
- ii. The University Support Fund provided £1.1m per year supplemented by an additional £200k from the Office for Students, which met the current demand. If the student profile changed, and there was an increased demand, the funding would have to be reviewed. Payments ranged from £100 to £4k and were not able to be used to pay for tuition. The support funds were allocated to students in their entirety each year.
- iii. There was a core of approximately 10-20 students who accessed funding more than once and these tended to be linked to mental health needs and those that required more support. Students with caring responsibilities also tended to need additional support.
- iv. Not all requests for financial support qualified for funding because the guidelines were set nationally and were based on income and essential expenditure. There was some flexibility to apply discretion especially if payment was the difference between continuing or leaving the University. It was easier to qualify for the summer hardship fund because student loans did not cover this period.
- v. Equality impact assessments had been considered in setting the national guidelines.
- vi. The team provided a bespoke service because they were trained to build empathy and express compassion and to be non-judgmental. It was important to reduce stigma and encourage engagement.

13.3 The Committee noted the presentation and the work of the Student Finance team in delivering the University Strategy.

## **14 People, Culture and Engagement: People Hub and HR Digital Plan**

Karen Tiller, Interim Head of HR Services, delivered a presentation on the recent introduction of the People Hub and the HR Digital Plan and how it supports the delivery of the University Strategy.

14.1 Key points noted in the presentation were:

- i. It was important to change the service delivery approach in order to align with the People Strategy. The aim was to develop an attractive employee value proposition for which HR would become change champions and implement modern and innovative practice.
- ii. The system configuration had been a barrier and had had to be reorganised.
- iii. The implementation of the People Hub represented transformational change across the University and was not just a change in HR processes. It was important to reduce the administrative burden for academic staff and managers and return a number of people management tasks to where HR could provide support and rebalance the workload.



- iv. The People Hub had been launched on 1 February 2023 using the Hornbill ticketing system which was used by other departments and was well known by users. The system provided meaningful and accurate management information. Users had reported good initial feedback.
- v. There were three phases to be rolled out and the next phase would roll out on 1 April 2023 to provide a digital platform for recruitment, onboarding and offboarding.
- vi. Further transactional processes would be provided online as new workflows were developed to support them. Some HR work would remain face to face, as was necessary.
- vii. Recruitment processes would be centralised to HR from individual recruiting managers to create efficiencies at all stages.
- viii. The number of HR telephone lines had been reduced to one automated contact number so that callers could reach the appropriate functional team quickly. The HR team were allocated to four main functions.
- ix. The aim was to provide online workflows from 'hire to retire'. Managers would have access to toolkits for HR processes.

14.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

- i. The current system, ITrent, had not been used or configured to its capacity and savings would be made when the contract was renegotiated.
- ii. There would be a move to further automation and digital platforms such as chatbots. Turnaround times would be monitored for service level agreements to be put in place. The project would take approximately two years to complete.
- iii. By the centralisation of recruitment, the budget would be consolidated and savings made on consultancy and agency fees.

14.3 The Committee noted the update and welcomed the introduction of the People Hub to enhance HR service delivery.

## 15 Update on UCEA national pay negotiations - confidential

## 16 Reward and Recognition Update

James Morris, Head of Reward and Recognition presented an overview of the key headline messages from the recent Reward and Benefits Survey and an update on the recent reward and recognition initiatives to create an employee value proposition.

### Reward and Recognition Initiatives

16.1 Key points noted were:

- i. There had been a tendency for information about offers and benefits to be hard to find.
- ii. The Rewards and Benefits Survey had been sent to all staff in October 2022 and had received 600 responses that provided more than 700 ideas and suggestions. A summary of the responses would be published shortly so that staff could be reassured that what had been submitted had been listened to.

- iii. The purpose of the survey was to understand what staff valued so that attractive offers to underpin attraction and retention could be developed.
- iv. Some benefits, particularly for train travellers had been renegotiated to make them more attractive.
- v. It had been identified that a relatively high proportion of staff felt they had particular knowledge gaps in understanding national insurance, income tax and pensions. A series of workshops and webinars would be arranged to address this concern.
- vi. A Reward and Benefits Hub would be launched shortly which would be available on various platforms, including mobile phones. The Reward team had plans to improve current communication effectiveness by arranging University events such as a Travel Benefits Fair and attending University Induction days.
- vii. Reward processes to manage market supplements and unsocial hours had been updated and a number of new policies and salary sacrifice schemes were in progress. The salary sacrifice schemes would apply to Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) members and pre-approval would be sought from the other pension schemes to be ready for salary sacrifice options when legislation permitted.
- viii. The new policies to manage Premature Birth Leave and Pay and Neonatal Care Leave and Pay improved upon the proposed government legislation.
- ix. Other benefits and initiatives supported by workshops and advice were planned for implementation and a number of future initiatives were under consideration.

16.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

- i. The benefits offered by other universities had been reviewed to benchmark where the University of Portsmouth sat comparatively. The aim was to be the best in class in the sector taking the age range and demography of the staff into consideration.
- ii. Interest had been expressed in localised offers in the survey which would be made available in the Reward and Benefits Hub.
- iii. It was important to demonstrate that the University had responded to what staff stated was most valued and wanted. There were many initiatives in consideration that to some extent were limited by procurement resource. Launches of new or improved offers would be carefully managed to maintain staff engagement.

16.3 The Committee noted the update and looked forward to hearing about progress.

## **17 Occupational Health Outsourcing Update – confidential**

## **18 Update on negotiations about the Trades Union Recognition Agreement – confidential**

## **19 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers – Annual Report**

Dr Andy Dixon, Deputy Director (Environment and Strategy) Research and Innovation was unable to attend the meeting and extended his apologies to the Committee.

The Committee noted the report and resolved to include the item on the agenda for the next

meeting in May 2023.

## **20 Annual Payroll Movements**

Committee received and noted the annual report on payroll movements for 2021/2022 provided by Emma Woollard, Executive Director of Finance. The report analysed the payroll costs of the University over that period.

## **21 Indicative Committee Business**

21.1 Committee noted the 2023 indicative programme of work.

21.2 There were eight items to be scheduled for the next meeting, which may be extended by one hour to accommodate the agenda.

## **22 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 24 May 2023.

Confirmed Committee Dates for 2023:

- 27 September 2023
- 30 November 2023

## **23 Record of Thanks**

It was noted that Kim John-Williams, Staff Representative would leave the University at the end of February 2023. A formal record of thanks was noted and the Committee wished her well for the future.