People, Culture and Engagement Committee

TIME /DATE / VENUE	1300, Thursday 29 February 2024 in Room 0.32, Unit 1, St Andrew's Court
PRESENT	Claudia Iton (Chair) (from Minute 22) David Willan (Chair to Minute 21) Chris Williams (via video conference) (To Minute 26) Stacey Parrinder-Johnson
IN ATTENDANCE	Fiona Hnatow, Chief People Officer Becky Miles, Professional Services Staff Governor Nikki Sowerby, Staff Representative Sarah Duckering, Director of Research and Innovation Services (Minute 18 only) Maria Wall, Interim People and Organisational Development Team Manager (Minute 21 only) Ebi Sosseh, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Minute 21 only) Stephanie Clark, Employment Lawyer (Minutes 22 to 24 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.

14 Welcome, Quoracy, Conflict of Interest and Apologies

14.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

14.2 Apologies were received from: Mark Readman and David Wilding, External Governors; Professor Graham Galbraith, Vice-Chancellor; and Wayne Bowen, Head of HR Strategic Planning.

14.3 The Executive Director of Corporate Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate and could proceed to business.

14.4 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record subject to correcting the name of the Staff Representative.

16 Matters Actioned and Matters Arising

16.1 Action was reported within the agenda papers on two items; one for note and one to be received on the agenda.

16.2 There were no other matters arising.

17 People, Culture and Engagement: Student Wellbeing

Kevin Child, Director of Student Support Services was unable to attend the meeting and extended his apologies to the Committee. The item would be carried forward to a future meeting.

Action: Senior Governance Officer

18 Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers – Annual Report

Sarah Duckering, Director of Research and Innovation Services presented the annual report on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

18.1 The key points noted were:

   i. The strategic purpose of being a signatory to the Researcher Development Concordat is to facilitate access to funding from funding bodies including UKRI, the EU and the Wellcome Trust. It is also aligned to the University's Research Strategy and People Strategy.

   ii. The Concordat covered 100 staff within the University and is important to building a culture of research and innovation.

   iii. Having successfully completed its 2021-2023 action plan and developed a proposed action plan for 2024-2026, both documents were presented for inclusion in the submission to retain the HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR).

   iv. The HREiR Award was retained for a further three years.

18.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

   i. It was important to review the appropriate use of fixed term and open-ended contracts for research staff.

   ii. The action plan for 2024-2026 incorporated analysis of training provision and delivery for researchers at all career stages.

18.3 Following discussion, the Committee noted the update and the successful retention of the HREiR Award.

19 Annual Payroll Movements

Committee received and noted the annual report on payroll movements for 2022/2023 provided by Finance. The report analysed the payroll costs of the University over that period.

19.1 In discussion, it was noted that:

   i. The costs associated with employing permanent and temporary staff were similar and other types of contract were also used.

   ii. Confidential.

19.2 The Committee noted the annual payroll movements.

20 Staff Survey Update - confidential

21 Staff Mental Health Training Report

Ebi Sosseh, Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion and Maria Wall, Interim People & Organisational Development (POD) Team Manager presented a report staff mental health and wellbeing training. This was the first year that the report had been received by the Committee following an audit recommendation.

21.1 Key points noted were:

  i. The University was recruiting a Wellbeing Manager and had an established network of mental health first-aiders and wellbeing champions.

  ii. There were six in-person wellbeing learning events available for staff to attend and other events were offered online to facilitate managing the different learning styles of staff.

  iii. Wellbeing platforms provided information and signposting to emergency and other types of support. Provision included: and Employee Assistance Programme; access to an online GP; and advice on managing personal wellbeing.

  iv. A summary of attendance and engagement with all mental health learning events helped to identify issues and hotspots. Attendance did not appear to be high but of those that did attend, drop-out rates were low.

  v. From the occupational health reports, it was identified that there tended to be an increase in mental health issues during the winter months and were lower in the summer months.

21.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

  i. The report should provide the pool of attendees as a percentage of all staff to be able to identify the use of the tools available. It was important to see usage data to understand where improvements in communication and attendance could be made and to reduce duplication of effort.

  Action: Chief People Officer

  ii. Attendees were asked to complete evaluation forms at learning events to identify any gaps in the provision to build into future events.

  iii. Mental health first-aiders were an important part of mental health support and 175 staff had been trained to be the first port of call or to signpost colleagues to the digital Wellness Hub to access counselling and GP advice. The term 'champion' was not used as it was not universally liked.

  iv. More wellbeing support would be developed and offered to staff and a wellbeing plan would be developed by May 2024.

  v. Students had separate support systems to be able to access their specific and different needs.

21.3 The Committee noted the update.

22 Trades Union Recognition Agreement – confidential

23 Policy Review and Approvals Update

Fiona Hnatow, Chief People Officer and Stephanie Clark, Employment Lawyer provided an update on the progress of the HR policies under review and to be approved by the Committee.

23.1 Key points noted were:

i. Three policies for approval by the Committee were in the final stages of consultation. The University and Colleges Union were holding a ballot on the proposed policies and following UEB approval, final approval would be sought from the Committee at its next meeting.

Action: Chief People Officer and Senior Governance Officer

ii. Feedback had been sought from a number of stakeholders across the University and from external benchmarks since the start of the review in November 2023.

iii. Following approval, the implementation would include a communications plan and training events.

iv. The policies were high profile and important and had been prioritised for review.

23.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

i. The HR policies and procedures displayed on the webpages should be reviewed and updated to ensure they were extant and easily accessible.

Action: Chief People Officer

23.3 The Committee noted the update.

24 Employment Tribunal - confidential

25 Managing the Impact of Change - confidential

26 Committee Evaluation and Self-Assessment

Claire Dunning, Executive Director of Corporate Governance presented a report on the outcomes of the self-assessment questionnaire that had been sent to Committee members on 24 October 2023 for completion by 15 November 2023.

26.1 Key points noted were:

i. The survey results would be shared with ValueAlpha Limited, the consultant carrying out the Board Effectiveness Review.

26.2 In discussion, it was noted that:

i. It was important to ensure that the timing of Committee meetings aligned to the dates arranged for Board meetings.

ii. Feedback indicated that some Committee meetings might be virtual in the future.

iii. The visibility of the Committee agenda at the Board was low, which might be due to people and culture being less tangible, and should be made higher especially during the current period of challenge and change.

iv. Committee discussed ways to be proactive in understanding staff concerns.

v.   The Committee should review its Terms of Reference and map them to the agenda items.

Post-meeting note: The Terms of Reference are reviewed annually against the business discussed during the previous year and is reported at the Committee meeting each September.

vi.   It was important to support the People Strategy and the nine themes, which were underpinned by the HR Operating Plan. Seven staff related risks were included on the Corporate Risk Register.

vii. The Board might consider a deep-dive or hold a strategy day into the people and culture issues, risks and constraints.

26.3   Following discussion, the Committee:

i.   Noted that the self-assessment questionnaire and answers would be shared for the purpose of the Board effectiveness review.

ii.   Agreed to review the Terms of Reference and its members since the recent retirement of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors who had sat on the Committee.

iii. Agreed to review how Committee members could engage with staff outside of the Committee.

iv.   Agreed to plan future agendas in accordance with business need and raise the visibility of issues at the Board.

v.   Agreed to recommend to the Board that leadership should be discussed in detail at future meetings to address any concerns.

Action: Chief People Officer and Executive Director of Corporate Governance

27 Indicative Committee Business

Committee discussed and noted the indicative programme of work for 2024.

28 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Thursday 16 May 2024.

Confirmed committee dates for 2024:

- Thursday 19 September 2024 – 13:30 to 16:30
- Thursday 5 December 2024 – 13:30 to 16:30.

Dates for 2025 would be confirmed shortly.