People and Culture Committee

Friday 8 December 2023, 10am-11.50am

Minutes

Present Members:
Kate Brooks; Georgina Cade; Aimie Chapple; Sara Collins; Donna Dalrymple (Chair); Professor Peter Fonagy; Felipe Fouto; Megan Gerrie; Professor Alison Koslowski; Professor Martin Oliver; Professor Anthony Smith; Alison Saunders; Professor Kimberley Trapp; Tania Trosini; Michael Walls; Martin Wedlake; Joanne Wilkes; Professor Steve Wilson.

Apologies:
Professor Kathleen Armour; Dr Tim Beasley- Murray; Paul Clark; Helen Fisher; Marie Gallagher; Lesley Houfe; Professor Paola Lettieri; Fiona Naughton; Professor Geraint Rees; Professor Jolene Skordis; Emma Todd; Donna Williamson

In attendance:
Sharron Alexander; Michael Brown; Angela Clark; Adwoa Darko; Isabel Goncalves Cattuzzo; Eve Matthews; Stuart McLellan; Shelley McPherson; Vincent Preece; Mark Rice; Lorren Rea; Barbara Robertson; Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker; Dr Kathryn Walsh; Senay Yaman Zucker

Officer(s):
Ms Hannah Swallow (Secretary)

Part I: Preliminary Business

1.   Minutes (5-01)
1.1.   People and Culture Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held by the People and Culture Committee on 22 November 2023. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting.

Part II: Strategic Items for Discussion

2.   Flexible Working Policy (replacing the Work Life Balance Policy) (5-02)
2.1.   Shelley McPherson, Employment Policy Manager presented the new policy. The following points were made during the presentation:

a. The changes have been made to the former work life balance policy. It was last reviewed in full in November 2018. This new review has been undertaken as there is due to be new working legislation coming into force in 2024. It was deemed appropriate to update policies in line with this legislation ahead of the changes.
b. The policy has been renamed to reflect the correct legal terminology and make easier for staff to search for.
c. It is no longer required for staff to explain the impact of their request in the application. This is for managers to assess when they receive the request.
d. It is now necessary for all managers to have a consultation with the employee making the request before rejecting the request. This should be a chance to share concerns and suggest alternative approaches.
e. The types of flexible working have now been moved into the appendix of the policy.
f. The new policy includes clarification of the process for temporary changes to working patterns.
g. All employees must now complete the form to ensure that requests are captured (even when managers have agreed informally) and reporting can occur.
h. The appeals procedure has been set out in the policy. There is no statutory right to an appeal, however it is recommended that this entitlement is retained in the new policy, in line with the ACAS code of Practice. The timeframe for employees to make an appeal is reduced to 5 working days rather than 14 calendar days, in line with the appeal procedures of other UCL policies. The outcome of an appeal will be provided "as soon as possible" rather than within 14 days.

The following points were raised in discussion:
a. It was agreed that renaming the policy would make it easier for staff to find.
b. It was raised that it is very difficult when the reason to reject a request is that UCL would not be able to recruit other staff as it is often argues how can this be known without starting the recruitment process. It was agreed that this is difficult but can be explained and evidence should be provided.
c. It was asked what the timescales were for publishing the new policy document. It was advised that the effective date will be next summer, but the policy would be implemented as soon as possible once approved.
d. It was raised that there is sometimes confusion between the flexible working and hybrid working policies. It was advised that there is a section in the policy which explains the difference. However, the wording could be made stronger to make this clearer.

People and Culture Committee approved the new policy.

3.   Extended Annual Leave (Replacing Time Off to Visit Relatives Abroad) (5-03)

3.1.   Vince Preece, HR Employment Policy Manager presented the new policy. The following points were made during the presentation:

   a. The policy has been renamed "Extended Annual Leave" policy to broaden scope and account for other reasons why someone may need an extended period of annual leave.

   b. The policy has been moved from the Special leave policy to the Annual Leave Policy, making it easier to find.

   c. The policy has retained a lot of what was in the original policy after the review.

The following points were raised in discussion:

   a. It was asked how the request for additional leave would be processed. It was advised that this can be done through Inside UCL or myHR as with usual leave requests.

People and Culture committee approved the new policy.

4.   Confidential: Internal Recruitment Approach – Formalisation of Policy (5-04)

4.1.   Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

4.2.   Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

5.   Confidential: Contract and Temporary Worker Furloughs 2024 (5-05)

5.1.   Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

5.2.   Exempt from publication, please see confidential minutes.

6.   Changes to senior pay review process as part of implementation of new reward strategy (5-06)

6.1.   Mark Rice, Head of Reward and Pensions, presented the changes to the review process and reward strategy. The following points were made during the presentation:

   a. The Pay review process for grade 10 staff and associate staff was outlined, following UMC agreement to make changes to the process as part of the wider reward strategy review this year. This includes professional services and professorial staff.

   b. The review provides a more appropriate method to move people within the grade and offers relevant rewards.

   c. There are very few staff at the top quarter of the bands.

   d. This approach would raise the number of staff who receive a reward every year, as well as standardising the approach and timescales.

   e. The policy applies to teaching fellows and researchers alike.

   f. An all staff reward scheme will be launched in April 2024.

   g. The review improves EDI outcomes during pay review process. It ensures consistency across faculties.

h. There are plans to review the "ABC" rating and whether that is the most appropriate way.

6.2. The following points were raised in discussion:
a. The changes were given support by the committee.
b. There were concerns raised over how this would be accounted for within budgets. Budgets are already set for future years and can be difficult to amend to account for these types of rewards. It was advised that this should already have been taken into account when budgets have been set. However, there were concerns that this is not the case.
c. It was advised that the proposals were costed. It needs to be ensured that this has been worked through with budgets and finance. This will be taken away and reviewed with Finance to ensure this has happened.
d. The removal of the "ABC rating" was welcomed. It was asked that appendix 2 be amended to ensure it is explicit for the current band and reflects the language used in the systems. It was agreed that this would be looked at.
e. It was noted that the ratings within the system will need to be updated and built in.
f. It was noted that it should be captured in the paperwork the justification for different arrangements across faculties. It was agreed that more work needs to be done to ensure consistency across faculties and how roles are rated. The appraisal policy can be improved to reflect this but there will be an element of local interpretation.

People and Culture Committee approved further consultation on the guidance and endorsed further work on the ratings.

7. Transforming Technical Careers at UCL (5-07)
7.1. Mike Brown, Director of Biological Services presented an outline of the progress against the UCL Technician Commitment Action Plan Phase 2. The following points were made during the presentation:

a. It was noted that there has been insufficient investment in UCL's technical workforce. In 2018, a commitment was made to improve this. The paper outlines the progress against the UCL Technician Commitment Action Plan Phase 2 (36-months), proposing the approach and strategic direction for the transition to a sustainable future model. This paper is preceded by a briefing paper to People & Culture Committee (10 Nov 2021) and a business case to UMC (April 2022) who both endorsed the overall direction for Phase 2. There is now an action plan for phase 3 and plans to work with the technical managers as a key stakeholder group.
b. A technical skills development hub has been established.
c. The technical staffs survey report has been published.
d. The committee was asked for support and endorsement of the approach outlined in the paper. This is a culmination of work across the institution.

7.2.   The following points were made in discussion:
   a. The committee were supportive of the work. It was agreed that technical staff should be a distinct category.
   b. It was noted that it needs to be added into the system, so we have the data. This is important for HESA return and REF. This was agreed and will be discussed further.
   c. It was raised that clinical trials staff should also be included in the category. This was noted and agreed that clinical trial staff and research nurses should be part of the technical category.

7.3.   People and Culture committee endorsed the approach.

8.   Overview of HR Strategic Plan 2023-27 Development (5-08)

8.1.   Donna Dalrymple, Chief People Officer presented a high level overview of the work in place to develop an HR Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The following points were made during the presentation:
   a. The strategic plan outlines the priorities and what HR are working on, as well as the wider university over the next few years.
   b. It was noted that it highlights the institutional priorities and who is working on these across UCL.
   c. The strategy is still in the development stage and work involves different stakeholders across UCL. The committee was asked whether anyone would like to be included in the work in stakeholder groups.
   d. HR are working with a company called Strive Higher to produce the plan.

8.2.   The following points were raised in discussion:
   a. There was support for stakeholder involvement in the plan.
   b. It was raised that it needs to fit with operational approach in each faculty, connection points should be found and worked on together.
   c. It was noted that stakeholders' meetings will continue, and a draft plan will be brought back to the committee next term.

8.3.   People and Culture committee noted the update.

9.   AOB

9.1. It was flagged that there was a summary of PCC meetings and minutes were included for note for the committee. This was noted by the committee.

   Hannah Swallow
   8 December 2023