UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
PARTNERSHIP NEGOTIATING AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE OF MEETING HELD ON 24 FEBRUARY 2016

Present: Dr R Shanks (Convenor), Professor J Kilburn, Mrs D Dyker, Mr B Paterson, Mrs C Inglis, Dr A MacKillop, Professor P Hannaford, Mr M McConnell, Mrs P Burnett, Mrs V Buchan, Mrs E Argo, Professor M Ross, Professor B MacGregor, Mrs T White, C Cook (Clerk)

Apologies: Professor P McGeorge

1. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2015 were approved.

2. MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Living Wage

Dr MacKillop was still waiting for feedback regarding temporary services work and preparation time and would follow up.

ACTION: UCU

3. VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE

Mrs Inglis said the situation was unchanged. The finance team were currently working through the potential impact of the Scottish Funding Council cuts and what the issues for next year would be. This would be communicated once known, but this would not be until April.

4. PROFESSIONAL SERVICES REVIEW

The Committee noted the oral update on the Professional Services Review. Mrs Dyker said that information on the progress of the review had been circulated to staff via the e-zine in the previous week. There was still one work stream to report and further information would be communicated once the final report was completed.

Professor Hannaford said that the Digital Transformation stream had identified areas with potential savings, for example through decreasing the need for business travel through the increased use of video conferencing. The group was now tasked with identifying what recommendations to take forward.

Mr Paterson said that staff still felt very concerned about the review, despite reassurances. Mrs Inglis responded that management were aware of the concerns and the review did signify a significant change. In the next few years there would be a move to more devolved budgets and the Professional Services Review was part of the whole picture of change. There was discussion concerning some areas where potential savings could be made, such as removing the use of personal printers. Professor MacGregor commented there may be a need for investment in some areas to realise savings. Rachel Shanks reiterated the benefit of giving full explanations to staff and highlighted as an example the fact that staff were not using Key Travel as they could buy train tickets cheaper on line.
Mrs Inglis responded that it was important to look at the whole picture as there would be hidden costs in not using Key Travel due to the additional staff time for booking tickets and completing an expenses form or credit card statement.

5. 9 DAY FORTNIGHT UPDATE

The Committee received an interim update on the trial of 9 Day Fortnight for Support and Academic Related staff. This was being piloted initially in the Library, CASS College Office, IT Services and External Relations. The pilot had been in place for 6 weeks and would be reviewed after three months. IT Services had the biggest uptake in terms of staff numbers but only had 30% of staff opting in, External Relations 51% opting in, CASS College Office 40% and Library 6%. The protocol had been tweaked further following feedback from the pilot. Mr McConnell said UCU could provide input from UCU members. Mrs Dyker asked for the feedback to be given now to feed into the pilot.

ACTION: UCU

6. PROTOCOL FOR CONTRACT TERMINATION

At UCU’s request, there was discussion around the management of termination of staff contracts following a redundancy process. Dr MacKillop asked the University to revisit some of the practical ways contract termination was handled for staff made redundant through JCCRA where the post no longer existed. Specifically the concerns related to the possibility of retaining email access following the termination of employment. There was discussion around the sensitivities of the situation but recognition that some individuals might still be dealing with publications and grant applications. The possibility of a new ‘waiver clause’ for contract termination was being considered for use in this situation.

ACTION: HR

7. POLICIES – SICKNESS ABSENCE

The Sickness Absence Management Procedure had been reviewed by the Policy Review Group as part of the ongoing review of policies and procedures.

There were some minor amendments primarily to provide further clarification to the existing procedure.

There was discussion around the automatic referral to Occupational Health (OH) once certain triggers were reached and whether this was resulting in unnecessary referrals. There was concern expressed that this was expensive and seen as unnecessarily punitive by staff and might result in illness not being reported if staff knew they would be referred to OH. Mrs Dyker highlighted that neither line managers nor HR staff were medical professionals and therefore not in a position to make a judgement about whether a referral was required or not. The process was meant to be supportive and there had been cases where 3 absences appeared unrelated but there was actually and underlying cause which the OH Review had identified. Professor McGregor said it was about duty of care and that we should err on the side of caution. There was concern about the delay in referrals. Mrs Dyker said there had been a recent meeting with OH that had not demonstrated that. It was agreed to add a footnote to the policy, highlighting that the triggers were based on the recommendation of health professionals.

ACTION: HR

The Committee approved the amended Sickness Absence Management Procedure following the work of the Policy Review Group
8. POLICIES – MOBILE PHONES AND DRIVING

The University’s current policy on the use of mobile phones prohibits the use of hand held mobile phones and texting when driving on University business. The new policy proposes that all use of mobile phones, including ‘hands free’ while driving on University business is prohibited. There was discussion around the practicality of the policy. Professor MacGregor quoted from the ROSPA website which indicated that an employer could be liable in law even if an employee was using a hands-free kit. Mrs Inglis said that for the health and safety of, and to fulfil the duty of care to staff, the University policy had to be no use of a mobile phone whilst driving.

The Committee approved the amended Mobile Phones and Driving Policy.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Pensions Statement

Mrs Inglis had reviewed the draft statement, discussed this with the Principal and would report back to David Watt, UCU.

ACTION: CI

Capability figures

UCU requested an update on numbers of those in the capability procedure for the next PNCC meeting.

ACTION: HR

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Partnership Negotiating and Consultative Committee is 12 May 2016 at 10.30 am.