University of St Andrews
Research and Teaching Staff Forum

Report on the meeting of the Research and Teaching Staff Forum held on Wednesday 9 November 2016

Attendance: Professor Derek Woollins; Ms Louise Milne; Mr Sukhi Bains; Ms Michelle Paterson; Dr Han Xiao; Dr Catherine Barbour; Dr Duncan Robertson; Dr Michael Morrissey; Professor Nigel Rapport; Dr Lisa Jones; Dr Iain Smellie; Dr Fiona Cox; Dr Tracey Gloster; Dr Jonathan Issberner; Dr Bela Bode; Mr Tom Jones; Dr Len Thomas.

Apologies: Professor Ian Taylor; Dr Charles Lovatt

1. Approval of previous minutes.

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2016 were approved with no amendments.


It was noted that the October 2016 Fife school holidays and Semester 1 of Independent Learning week coincided this year. This was a positive action taken by the University.

Professor Woollins requested feedback on the suggestion that the next REF may include Research Fellow staff submitting work published on short term contracts under 2 years.

There was a general belief that this was designed to avoid a scramble to recruit for REF. However, this would double the work load as the University would have to re-assess what can be used. It was felt it would not be appropriate and would put the researcher under more pressure. The work completed by the REF employee during the 2 year submission period would be kept by the institute they were employed by at the time. Therefore if applying for new positions they would not be able to sell themselves on research previously produced.

The Forum requested that Professor Woollins send out the information directly to Research Fellows or ask the Head of School’s to ensure they get feedback from researchers.

3. Update on contractual profile for Research Fellows and Teaching Fellows.

Current numbers for Research Fellows within the University are –

331 Sciences
33 Arts (this number is rising)

92 standard contracts (27.8%)
272 fixed term contracts (82.2%)

Numbers for Teaching Fellows are –
60 standard contracts (41.2%)
42 fixed term contracts (58.8%)

The last review of these numbers did not show any of the Research Fellows or Teaching Fellows on fixed term contracts were required to be moved on to standard contracts.
4. Information from other Scottish Universities on contractual profile of Research Fellows.

Louise Milne had contacted Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee Universities to request information on how the standard and fixed term contracts are handled within the institutes.

Edinburgh University did not return any information, Louise will contact them again.

Glasgow University put all Research Fellows on standard contracts, unless funding is for a year or less. They also have less zero hours contracts and instead use minimum hours contracts.

Aberdeen University put all Research Fellows on standard contracts, unless funding is for 9 months or less.

Neither Glasgow or Aberdeen had experienced any negative issues relating to the standard contracts offered.

Louise agreed to investigate further and contact more Universities for a wider response.

It was agreed that the method used by Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities would be more positive and warranted more investigation. There would be changes to the way the University administers these contracts as quarterly collective consultations would have to be submitted.

The Forum requested that they have more discussion at the next meeting as to whether the University could consider moving towards this and whether it would merit discussion at Principal’s Office level.

5. Update on Equality and Diversity.

The University had applied for the Athena Swan renewal but was unsuccessful. Another application will be made in November 2017. This was expected as the University is considered to be low on gender profile of Head of Schools (at the moment no female Heads of Schools in the Sciences) and female role progression and recruitment.

The Principal is currently working on the issue of a lack of female Professors in the Schools (18% female professors which is low for the sector) and addressing the lower numbers of women in science. This will be a challenge but the Office of the Principal are discussing mentoring/leadership training, making sure that people are aware they will get support if they make applications for promotion, etc., and the new nursery is seen as a positive step. The Principal is looking at getting continuous good practice in place generally.

The University did gain a Carer Positive Award which is an organisation funded by the Scottish Government.

Sukhi Bains has been producing figures for LGBT, and has tried to encourage members of staff to come forward as role models for the University. The University now has some role models within the academics but is finding people may be reluctant to come forward due to concerns of the impact on how people may view you. One anonymous staff member was happy to be considered for a role model initially, but after discussion with his partner decided not to go ahead as his partner is in the private sector which is not as open.

Sukhi has provided a map of Europe (Appendix 1) which has graphical illustrations as to how LGBT rights differ. Also an Inclusion Guide (Appendix 2) which Sukhi and the Principal have
recently reviewed. It includes guidance and considerations if you are holding events/meetings abroad.

6. HR Excellence – successful retention of award and key strategic themes.

Please see Appendix 3.

7. Ideas on how to increase awareness of RTSF.

Louise stated that one of the outcomes of the recent CROS survey was that many Research Fellows did not realise that the Research and Teaching Staff Forum existed and the Forum was asked for ideas on how they could communicate better. It was thought that this was due to the high turnover of Research Fellow and Teaching Fellow staff. Ideas put forward were –

- A social event (wine reception)
- Lower level school events organised by school reps
- Give out hard copy copies of the concordant at induction
- Online training
- PIs need to identify the forum to new members of staff
- Professor Woollins will raise the issue at the Director of Research lunches to find out if they have any ideas.

8. Update on teaching career track.

Louise gave an update on the education focused teaching track as there are currently many changes being discussed, such as the Teaching Fellow route which is being taken to the Academic Council for approval. Senior Teaching Fellows will potentially be called Lecturer (Education Focussed) for example.

This would be more flexible and easier to be able to move between Teaching and Research.

The promotion criteria for applications will be considered for all education grades 7, 8 and 9. It is likely that applicants will only have to fill in boxes which are relevant to themselves, so the research box would not need to be completed if this is not relevant to their field.

Regradings for Grade 6 to 7 Research/Teaching Fellows which currently go via HERA might also move to promotions, although it would be lighter weight. This would be considered more transparent as it can be difficult for HR staff to look at scientific applications to assess a regrading.

The Academic Council will be discussing these changes in early December. The Principal is in support. New specifications will be look at for the 2017 promotions round, although the timescale will be tight.


BREXIT was discussed, Professor Woollins requested that if anybody has news or if anything has been affected to email him directly.
10. General update from Vice Principal (Research).

Professor Woollins confirmed that Younger Hall will be redeveloped. The Music Centre is also progressing via external funding and there will be a design competition run.

It is planned that the Guardbridge site will pump hot water within 2 weeks.

Professor Woollins also asked for discussion on a potential new ruling by STERN for REF that HESA returns would be 100% research only. If staff are primarily teaching can we keep option open to include in REF. The University should know for sure in May 2017. Professor Woollins thinks that this will not happen due to the review, it would exclude weaker University’s, Science schools would have to produce far more papers and it would be difficult to manage.

- Emotional response could be hard to deal with.
- HESA return would be important

11. AOCB

There was no further business.