

University of St Andrews

Research and Teaching Staff Forum

Report on the meeting of the Research and Teaching Staff Forum held on Thursday 13 April 2017

Attendance: Professor Derek Woollins; Ms Louise Milne; Dr Diane Munday; Mr Martin Dowling; Dr Fiona Cox; Dr Tracey Gloster; Dr Jonathan Issberner; Dr Bela Bode; Mr Charles Lovatt.

Apologies: Mr Tom Jones; Mr Sukhi Bains; Dr Catherine Barbour; Dr Duncan Robertson; Dr Michael Morrissey; Dr Len Thomas; Dr Jason Bruck;

1. Approval of previous minutes.

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2016 were approved with no amendments.

2. Matters arising.

There were no matters arising.

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

Current numbers for **Research Fellows** within the University are –

91 standard contracts (25.6%)
265 fixed term contracts (74%)

Numbers for **Teaching Fellows** are –

66 standard contracts (61.1%)
42 fixed term contracts (38.9%)

There are a few Researchers still on fixed term contracts so these will need to be reviewed.

4. Information from other Scottish Universities on contractual profile of Research Fellows.

Louise Milne had previously contacted Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities.

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.

Glasgow and Aberdeen seem to be the only Universities that operate this way. Abertay, Edinburgh and Strathclyde University's basic policies appear to be the same as the University of St Andrews, offering standard contracts after 4 years continuous service.

As most of the Research contracts are dependent on external funding, is there a need to change this? Occasionally Human Resources are contacted by staff on fixed term contracts who are having problems getting a mortgage and it is felt that it could impact on researchers applying for grants.

Strathclyde University does have revised/updated documents, it was agreed that the University should review the policy and re-open discussion on how to make the policy clearer. It was last reviewed in 2006 so there should be a rethink on a better mechanism for reviewing contracts to improve the policy and making the details more transparent. LM agreed that she will speak to Mairi Stewart, Director of Human Resources, regarding reviewing the policy and possibly involving the UCU representative. Any draft would come back to the RTSF for discussion.

It is thought that many staff do not know about the bridge funding policy and it would be useful to make this more obvious/visual. LM was asked to send DW the links for the website.

DW requested that the figures should investigate the gender balance when looking at standard versus fixed term contracts for the next meeting.

5. Update on Equality and Diversity.

The University will be publishing figures annually on their equality reports until 2021 in compliance with set issues linked to the Equality Act. Sukhi Bains will be working with Alastair Merrill and will have regular meetings with the Principal.

Sukhi Bains has reported that the completion rates for online training with the University are high. Up until April 2017, 921 people have completed the Unconscious Bias training.

Brexit

Cameron Little is arranging 7 drop in sessions, 324 staff members have been invited, so that they can find out what their options are and discuss legal issues, advice available and costs.

The information published at present is that the University will pay for permanent residency, currently £65. The decision has been made recently that the University will also pay for dependants. The University will not pay for applications for British Citizenship. <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/press-office/documents/EEA-financial-support-policy.pdf>

The Forum thought it would be useful to make it clear to anybody applying for residency that they will have to submit their passport to the Home Office, often for several months. Although there is an alternative service to prevent the need to do this, further information is available from Cameron Little, Human Resources or at <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/brexit>

There was a discussion on how fixed term staff may be affected by EU regulations in the future. As this is the beginning of a long process, nobody knows for certain and the University is trying to position itself the best way possible under the circumstances.

This year EU grants such as Marie Curie have been more successful than the last 5 years, however they were perhaps submitted prior to Brexit.

DW is a member of a lobbyist group which is in contact with the Government trying to make sure that they are aware of the University's requirements and needs. They will also be asking where the shortfall from EU funds will be made up.

The Forum thought that it would be useful to applicants if there was a statement in the Further Particulars about the University's position with regards to recruiting European staff. DW confirmed that the priority would always be to recruit the best people and then deal with any visa issues. LM said that she would speak to the Director of Human Resources about this.

Core Times for Meetings

Bela Bode raised concerns from the School of Chemistry that they had received communication from the Head of School recommending that the meetings within the School be held between the times of 10.00 am – 3.00 pm. It was considered impractical due to working hours of staff and the capacity/number of rooms available.

DW confirmed that the document that went out was a proposal only and if this becomes standard it will not be for some time. In the meantime DW thought that it would be more productive for Schools/Units to pay more attention to when individuals are sending emails (after 5.30 pm etc.), and the expectation that people are to respond outwith working hours. There was a view that this is becoming part of electronic culture generally, spreading the day and that this is unhealthy and in breach of working time regulations.

6. Update from CAPOD

LM introduced Diane Munday as the new representative for CAPOD. Diane was appointed to the position of Staff Developer (Research Staff) in February, previously holding a Research Fellow position in the School of Biology.

Diane provided an update from CAPOD which is attached, Appendix 1.

7. CROS/PIRLS Surveys

CROS/PIRLS are online surveys which are run in HEIs throughout the UK every 2 years and they gauge the views and feelings of Researchers and Principal Investigators which in turn help drive the objectives in things like the HR Excellence Action Plan. They are also useful for benchmarking St Andrews against the Scottish/UK Universities and the Russell Group. The survey was held in 2013/2015 and will now be held in late May 2017, it will be emailed directly to all Researchers and Principal Investigators. We would really like to improve the completion rate this year as it hasn't been particularly high in the past.

The Forum was of the opinion that it would be more beneficial to offer a better incentive that just vouchers in order to get the researchers attention and show that the University valued the response. DW asked that LM approach him prior to the survey going out to discuss a reward of a higher value than previous years.

8. Update on teaching career track.

LM confirmed that the Academic Council did approve the new teaching career pathways. We are now in a transition period and Grades 7/8 have been informed of their new job titles – Lecturer (Education Focused) for Senior Teaching Fellows and Senior Lecturer (Education Focused) for Principal Teaching Fellows. There is still follow up work to be done on this – looking at terms and conditions etc. The Grade 6 category of Teaching Fellow is also the next group of staff to be looked at.

Promotion Procedure

This year 5, Grade 7/8, individuals have applied for Promotion using the new career pathway and will be applying under the new criteria.

Research/Teaching applying for Promotion from Grade 6 to 7 will continue to follow the Grading Review HERA process and will move to using the Promotion process in 2018.

LM confirmed that there will still be the opportunity for a feedback meeting, likely to be held with Professor Garry Taylor and Mairi Stewart.

The results will be published at the end of the process, the data is looked at carefully and Sukhi Bains will monitor the process for equality.

9. Funding Maternity and other leave for research staff.

LM raised the issue on behalf of Dr Len Thomas who had sent apologies.

There is a concern that the provision for Research staff for maternity/long term leave is not equal to that of other substantive posts within the University. For example, if a woman takes maternity leave she may have the period of her leave added to the end of her contract to extend her appointment. This is dependent on the funding provision of the grant and there appears to be no consistency as to whether the individuals PI contacts the research council to request an extension. There was a concern that this may deter interview panels from employing women of child bearing age, affecting equality and risking unconscious bias among the panel.

The concern has been raised with Sukhi Bains who has discussed the issues with an Athena Swan 'off-shoot' group and will be further raised with a wider Athena Swan group. DW will review guidelines to ensure that they are clear.

10. General teaching and research matters.

A recent document from the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) had raised discussion of a Teaching Space Survey which had suggested that there is a need for more interactive teaching styles. However, it is thought to be difficult to change teaching practice when staff have to work within the rooms that are available and this particular teaching style halves the number of the group.

More rooms for teaching may become available when office staff are moved out to Guardbridge. The new Maths building that is to be built may also house teaching rooms that can be designed for interactive teaching.

It was suggested that CAPOD could add courses that will look at the different theories of teaching and assisting change in teaching practice.

It was also brought to the Forum's attention that not a lot of the teaching spaces provided within the University are suitable for presenters that use a wheelchair.

11. General update from Vice Principal (Research).

DW confirmed that general University finances are positive. A new Marine Biology Laboratory at the Gatty Marine has been approved. The University is looking to raise much of the sum required through fundraising and investors.

DW also raised concerns about the rising numbers of integrity/misconduct cases that other Universities are currently dealing with, such as fabrication of research results and plagiarism. The Research Councils have changed the rules on reporting cases and as soon as a complaint is likely to go formal, it has to be reported to the Research Council. The Forum agreed that there is a requirement of a clear policy which provides a framework for that is acceptable and what the outcome for misconduct will be.

12. AOCB

There was no further business.