

Notes of the Emergency Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) between management and UCU held on Thursday 18 July 2019

Present: Stephen Shute, Pro Vice Chancellor (Planning and Resources) – chair; Kelly Coate, Pro Vice Chancellor (Education and Students); Philip Harris, Head of School (Mathematical and Physical Sciences); Bridget Edminson, General Counsel and Director of Governance; Sheila Gupta, Director of Human Resources; John Hallam, Interim Assistant Director of Human Resources (Employee Relations); Chris Chatwin, Professor of Engineering (UCU); Andrew Chitty, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, UCU; Gerhard Wolf, Senior Lecturer in History (UCU); Michael Moran, Regional Officer, UCU.

1. The meeting was called at the request of UCU to discuss recent communications about extending the academic timetable between 18.00 and 20.00.
2. Prof Shute invited attendees to introduce themselves to each other.
3. Management comments:

The management side noted that:

1. Evening teaching between 18.00 and 20.00 was not new. Evening teaching had been in place for some time in parts of the University.
2. It was normal in many other HE institutions for teaching to take place in the evening.
3. The University’s Council had committed to recruit the same number of students as in the immediately preceding year – these numbers needed to be achieved to secure income and enable investment.
4. It was not viable to build additional teaching capacity and there was a need to make better use of existing physical assets.
5. There was a demand from academics for changes to the timetabling arrangements. A Timetabling Working Group had been established and there was an intention to move away from the twice a year publication of a timetable to a single, full year timetable from 2020 / 2021, which would enable better forward planning.
6. There were 18,000 students and some 1500 teaching staff – so timetabling was a significant logistical challenge each year.
7. An objective was also to achieve a reduction or elimination of the number of occasions in which students would be required to undertake back-to-back teaching lectures.
8. Proposals on the way forward had been discussed in Senate and Council – see minutes for further details.
9. The impact of evening teaching on academic staff for 2019 / 2020 would be minimal – there were currently just 112 modules to be taught between 18.00 and 20.00.
10. University management was prepared to work with UCU to reach an understanding on the best practical arrangements that could be put in place. This could include:
11. a joint communication to be issued to affirm a commitment to work jointly to reach a practical solution;
12. a focused response on those directly impacted by the new arrangements;
13. an agreement about the next steps and actions
14. Prof Kelly Coate said that as chair of the Timetabling Review Group, she accepted and recognised that communications around the changes could have been handled better than they had been.
15. There were some poor practices (e.g. over-booking) which needed to be addressed also.
16. UCU comments:
17. UCU members understood the financial and timetabling challenges facing the University and would work constructively with management.
18. These proposals were ‘significant’ in terms of what UCU regarded as established ‘custom and practice’ and had caused widespread concern and anger – 471 members had responded to the survey.
19. UCU expressed concern at the management view that changes such as this were in line with established custom and practice – they regarded the proposed change as ‘significant’ and had ongoing concerns about where the line would be drawn given the open ended nature of the current terms and conditions.
20. UCU considered there had been a breach of the University’s Procedure Agreement with UCU (i.e. a failure to consult in advance on the proposed changes).
21. UCU requested a delay in implementation.
22. UCU proposed that management should apologise over the lack of prior consultation.
23. UCU proposed that if the proposals went forward that any teaching between 18.00 and 20.00 would be on a voluntary basis.
24. A proposal around a form of words as to how timetabling arrangements would be handled going forward would need to be agreed as soon as possible.
25. UCU recognised that evening work would be suitable for some people.
26. UCU requested that management consider i) an apology; ii) a review of the proposal; iii) if the change could not now be avoided, a commitment to teaching between 18.00 and 20.00 being voluntary.

Kelly Coate, Pro Vice Chancellor made it clear that it was necessary to proceed with the new timetabling arrangements. The new timetable was due to be published on 31 July. A final version would be published on 14 August and opened to students from 15 August. The scale and complexity of the work involved meant it was not practical to delay implementation. Management would commit however, to discussing operational principles with UCU urgently and looking at ways in which Flexible Sussex / flexible working and work-life balance principles could be applied in that document.

Following further discussion, the following actions were agreed:

1. Management to prepare a draft joint statement for agreement with UCU for publication within the University; this would summarise the discussions held at the EJNC and set out next steps;
2. Urgent joint discussions to be held to agree the principles / conditions of operations in respect of teaching scheduled between 18.00 and 20.00;
3. Management and UCU to discuss the University’s flexible working arrangements to reflect the need for an extended day (i.e. 9.00 – 20.00) alongside conditions to protect work-life balance.

Other Business

UCU took the opportunity to raise two other items of business:

1. Chris Chatwin asked that temporary alternative office facilities and security of files be addressed in respect of the building currently impacting on the UCU office at Norwich House. Sheila Gupta suggested a meeting between Mark Elmore, SEF and Chris Chatwin to identify what was required.
2. UCU raised the issue of increasing facilities time. It was noted a proposal had been made to UCU but that this had been rejected. (Minutes of the JNC of 6 February and 8 May 2019 note that UCU were to submit a written case for additional resources).

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Approved at the EJNC 020919