

UCU strategy - working with Vision 2020

A guide for university staff







FOREWORD FROM THE UCU BRANCH CTTEE

The key aim of Vision 2020 is to support the Vice Chancellor's plan to increase income and investment opportunities for our university and to secure our position in a competitive market. Staff are very proud of the progress that the University has made in terms of recognition for our ground-breaking research and our top ten position in the National Students Survey and we are keen to continue this trend. However, academic staff have growing concerns about some of the measures being introduced as part of Vision 2020 and fear that, instead of supporting staff to build on this progress they are creating a climate of insecurity and shifting the focus of our work from achieving academic excellence to chasing league tables and fulfilling marketing strategies.

Under Vision 2020 we are seeing the roll out of a performance management strategy based on only two measures of academic work, which by far do not reflect the academic's working reality. The first measure is the module evaluation questionnaire scores, which academics see as reducing their teaching evaluation to little more than a popularity contest and discouraging academic rigour. The second measure is an assessment of the quality of research based upon an opaque internal process of ranking publications without considering other key research activity such as leading research groups, editor roles and project management.

The University and College Union (UCU) believes that these measures are deeply flawed and that the university's relentless focus on league tables is jeopardising real education standards in the drive to improve statistics.

This information booklet has been prepared to explain why UCU believes the Vision2020 performance management measures are counterproductive and to outline a strategy for mitigating the negative effects of the new corporate style of continuous performance management in order to maintain the strong position of our University that we have all worked so hard to achieve.



99%

**OF OUR RESEARCH
UNITS ARE RATED
WORLD-LEADING,
INTERNATIONALLY EXCELLENT, OR
RECOGNISED EITHER NATIONALLY
OR INTERNATIONALLY.**

Wonderful things
happen here.

Faculty of
Engineering &
Physical Sciences
Reception

+ 17%

**income from EU/UK
tuition fees**

2012/13

+ 5%

**research income
2012/13**

+ 2%

**staff salaries
2013/14**

**(would have been 1%
if not for strike action!)**

REVIEWING OUR RESEARCH AND TEACHING PERFORMANCE

The Vision 2020 summary, “University Strategy – moving towards 2020” recently published by management states (page 13) that ‘Academics, Teaching Fellows and Senior Teaching Fellows are expected to achieve a minimum average of MEQ scores of 3.8 in 2014 and that (page 15) ‘The University has set a minimum expectation from academic staff of 10 points based on scores for the best four research outputs’. On page 17 of the same booklet we are told that meetings will be held in 2014 with staff members who are not currently achieving this specified level of performance and that ‘This whole process follows that agreed with our Trade Unions in September 2012’. It is important to point out that the agreement made between the Trade Unions and management in September 2012 was on the capability procedure itself and no agreement was made on new requirements that would trigger the capability process. The union has never accepted MEQs as a valid performance measurement and previous agreements with the University have been to use MEQs only as one of many means of assessing teaching; not appraising staff. Similarly, scores obtained for the REF exercise were never presented as a potential performance measure. In fact the agreement between University and Union specifically included a ‘no detriment’ clause (clause 3.5 of University of Surrey Research Excellence Framework 2014 Code of Practice on the selection of Staff)

UCU is aware that people have been called to

meetings with Heads of Department. There are various approaches being taken – some Heads are calling all academic staff to these meetings as part of a “mid-term review” or similar, whereas in other departments only a few people are called and are being advised that the meeting is an informal meeting under Section 5.1 of the Capability Policy. In cases of the latter, it is important to realise that although the first meeting is called an “informal capability meeting” it is nevertheless part of a formal procedure that can lead to dismissal.

At a meeting to discuss our concerns about the current use of capability procedures we asked for information on the numbers of staff involved in the capability process and it was agreed that this information would be provided (with names anonymised). However we have since been told that ‘the University is not in a position to disclose this information’. However, even without firm statistics on the extent of the use of the capability the Union has seen such worrying levels of distress and demoralisation that we have felt it necessary to report our concerns to the University’s Health and Safety Consultative Committee. We have also drawn together some information to help you in negotiating review meetings – see page 5 ‘Managing Management’.





MANAGING MANAGEMENT

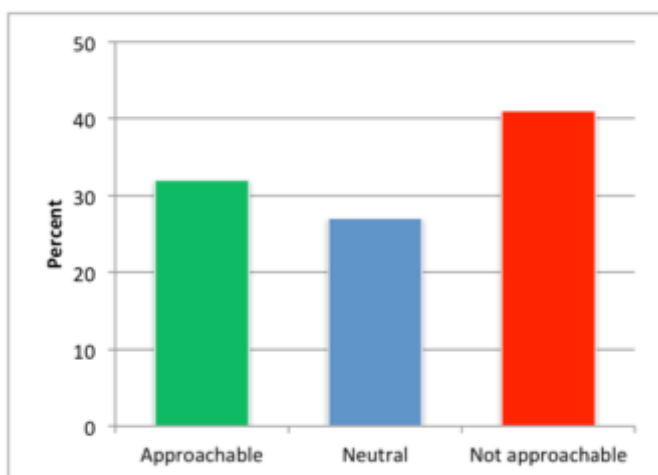
Management has stated that the appraisal process should be the initial mechanism to address identified performance issues. The union recommends that those called to an informal capability meeting should ask why performance is not being dealt with through the appraisal process. Staff should also note that the capability policy requires a manager to state evidence of lack of capability based on existing appraisal targets. If 3.8 or a research score of 10 or above was not one of your appraisal targets they should not be used in the capability procedure.

A meeting where it is claimed that you are falling short of your targets can constitute the first (informal) stage of the Capability Policy. Make sure before you go to any meeting that you are clear about whether you are being managed under this policy or not. If you are, then HR should attend subsequent formal meetings and you will also be allowed to take a colleague or union rep with you.

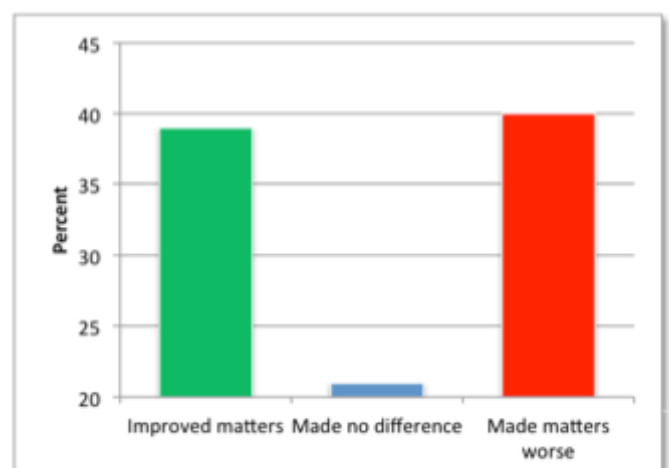
Although the Capability Policy does not stipulate that you can be accompanied to the initial informal stage meeting, there is nothing to stop you requesting that you take someone along. In itself, that does not turn the meeting into the formal stage of the Capability Policy. Similarly, you may want to request that you make a recording of any meeting you attend for your personal record – this is perfectly legal. The recent communication about Vision2020 from the VC and

STAFF SURVEY 2013/14

Management



Changes



Executive Board members stated that “an integral aspect of the Vision 2020 process is to ensure that there is adequate support for those individuals to improve”. If this is the case, line managers should not have an issue with meetings being recorded.

If you arrive at a meeting to find people you were not expecting to be there (e.g. HR staff or other managers) and you feel uncomfortable you may want to consider asking for the meeting to be adjourned or rescheduled. Similarly, you may also ask for adjournment if you feel that the Capability Policy is not being followed or that the agenda does not seem to be about ensuring that you have adequate support to improve.

The Capability Policy states that “no action under this procedure will be taken until the causes of the problem have been properly investigated”. You may wish to record a disagreement with the process or any individual targets or deadlines that you are set as it will be important that you have evidence of opposition to the process should you wish to protest a dismissal at a later stage. The union can provide templates for letters recording such opposition e-mail l.davis@surrey.ac.uk if you would like one.

You should also ask for all decisions and actions relating to the process to be confirmed in writing, including confirmation of any MEQ data; peer-reviews of REF research outputs (including the identity of internal and external reviewers and full disclosure of the review); grants, and any other information held about you that has influenced the decision to put you through the Capability procedure. Ask for written confirmation that all data are accurate, and are reliable measures of your performance. Remember that you are entitled to this personal information under the Freedom of Information and Data Protection laws.

Vision 2020 was presented as an opportunity to “discuss what support can be provided to help [staff not performing at the levels needed] contribute to the same level as other colleagues”. Therefore, please ask for written confirmation of what support you will receive, and how this will help you to meet targets and deadlines that you are set. Be specific about the link between the support offered and the target set and stress that the Capability Policy requires all reasonable assistance to be offered.







SUPPORTING STAFF TO PERFORM AT THEIR BEST

Because of concerns about the validity and fairness of performance measurements being introduced under Vision2020, setting appropriate targets in this year's appraisal round will be of critical importance.

Remember that appraisals are designed to help staff to perform at *their* best and that all targets set should be agreed by both the appraiser and the appraisee. If you are under pressure to set a target that you are not confident of being able to achieve then be sure to include reference to any factors, especially those that are beyond your control, which could prevent your from achieving the target.

All targets agreed should be SMART - that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound. Until now, targets for teaching have not been required to look at MEQ scores although they have been included as an example of a target that you might choose to agree. There are many reasons why the 3.8 or above MEQ score called for under Vision2020 is not a SMART target and it is inadvisable to set a teaching target based only on an MEQ score - other targets such as your own feedback, peer reviews and achievements based on other teaching duties can be included. If you feel uncomfortable about any inclusion of MEQ's you can write on the form '*I object to the inclusion of an MEQ measure in principle given the statistical, subjective and qualitative issues surrounding such a measure*'. If you have failed to achieve MEQ targets already set then the reasons why should be discussed with and taken into consideration by your appraiser. Examples may be because MEQs were completed by a small number of students or because there were problems with teaching resources and support.

A research target to secure specific amounts of funding during the year is also not a SMART target because it may not be attainable. If you are under pressure to include such a target you can write on the form as follows: '*The inclusion of a set amount is not helpful in a target as precarious as grant funding and is not a SMART target given the limited amount of funding available, lack of available funding, the economic climate and the amount of competition for limited funds. I have no difficulty in continuing to make high quality bids and am fully agreeable to continue to devote a considerable amount of time to working at this for the benefit of the University. But I do not accept the imposition of a specific targeted amount which is highly likely to be unachievable in circumstances where that may be used as a negative reflection on the excellence of my performance in general.*' In setting time-based targets on research work remember that research outputs are based on your best three over a rolling three-year period.

A meaningful appraisal should allow flexibility to set personal targets for non-standardised areas of activity yet under Vision2020 it appears that performance measures are set to be limited to MEQs and REF points. It is important to set appraisal targets based on the full range of work that you are obliged to carry out so that due recognition can be given to every area of activity that you are engaged in for the university.

Once appraiser and appraisee have signed targets, the moderator should not seek to amend them. If you are asked to do so you are advised to decline and seek advice from the union if further pressure is applied.



OUR
TOP 10
FOR
2020

University
of Surrey as
Employer
of the
Year

SALARIES INCREASED IN
LINE WITH INFLATION

90% POSITIVE
RESPONSES IN STAFF
SURVEY
ie. a score of 4.5/5

100%
TRANSPARENT
REF REVIEW

RECOGNITION
FOR ADMIN AND
'HOUSE'
KEEPING

UNIVERSITY OF
SURREY
IN TOP 10
FOR STAFF
SATISFACTION

SAFEGUARDS
FOR
ACADEMIC
FREEDOM

WORLD CLASS
STUDENTS
AS A PRIMARY
GOAL

AN END TO
THREAT LEAD
MANAGEMENT
STYLE

IMPROVED
VIRTUAL LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT

WHAT VISION 2020 LOOKS LIKE TO ACADEMIC STAFF

"Whilst my own MEQs are deemed very satisfactory, I, like many colleagues do NOT believe that the mean score across the university is 4.0. I would want to see public data to be convinced of this. MEQ scores >4.2 is exceptional within HE, and we sit at number 2 in the league tables. As for 4.5 as a standard, this is plainly foolish. This suggests that almost all students are scoring 5.0. Moreover, the natural variation on any such distribution suggests that a 4.5 average exhibits a standard deviation of <0.5, which, is clearly impossible, unless one has an exceptionally small class (10 students or less), and some luck. It would only take a few students to provide middling returns in a cohort of 20 to bring the score below such a threshold."

"Ironically for a 'research intensive' university, Vision 2020 ignores leading research on the flaws of MEQs as a measure of teaching quality"

"A point that I personally feel is not properly addressed is the impact that taking on significant administrative or managerial roles within the University has on the ability of an academic to pursue research."

"Maybe the union could find out the percentages of staff satisfaction with the senior executive board from the staff surveys of the last 3-5 years."

"People with perfectly good appraisals for many years will be dismissed on capability grounds, when in fact it is the job that has changed. This is redundancy, save that no compensation is payable."

"We should say that this should be made a university strategy for all staff and management should be evaluated by their constituency i.e. academics and admin staff. Therefore we should use the staff survey of management but with named managers and rate them each on their performance. They should have the same target means as us and if they are not reached they should be performance managed."

"The overwhelming majority of my immediate colleagues heard a very clear message - that senior management do not trust academic staff, and that they intend to micro-manage through threat and a wholly top-down, autocratic style. None failed to notice that some 90% of the '20/20' presentation was concerned with supposed 'underperformance', and virtually none with how staff are going to be enabled to achieve their potential; or be rewarded for their part in the university's success to date. "

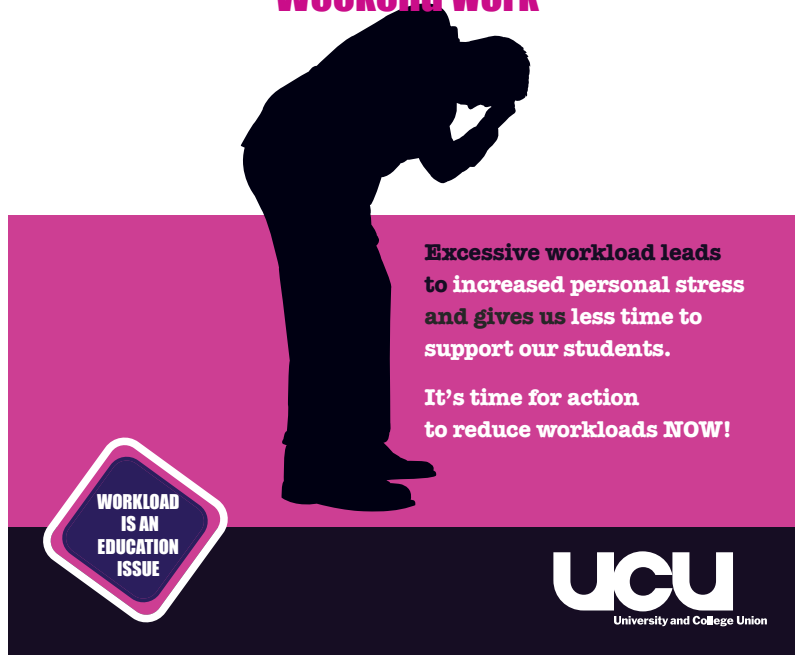
"Senior management seem to be unaware that the university would soon stop functioning if academic staff were to focus solely on REF publications and MEQs; the vast amount of essential administration and 'housekeeping' which many staff – often those who are not research 'stars' – carry out so conscientiously was trashed as worthless."

<http://blogs.surrey.ac.uk/stagging/>

<http://surreyucu.org>



Administration
Marking student essays
Contact time
Lecture preparation
Grant application
Next publication
Weekend work



UCU is the largest post-school union in the world: a force working for education that your employer and the government cannot ignore. It understands the work you do, and the problems you face. And, of course, the more members UCU has, the more effective the support and protection we offer will be. To join UCU go to <http://join.ucu.org.uk>