CHURCHILL COLLEGE

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE STAFF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE held on Wednesday 3 July 2019 at 14:30 in Seminar Room 1.

Present:
Professor Dame Athene Donald Chair
Dr Paul Russell
Mr David Spaxman
Mrs Stephanie Cook
Ms Teresa Harris
Mr Phil Dillon

In Attendance:
Mrs Katherine Shirley, HR Manager Minuting Secretary
Tamsin James, Bursar

Apologies:
Mr Kevin Hill
Professor Alison Finch
Ms Roxana Brancus
Dr Sally Boss

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Boss, Professor Finch, Mr Hill and Ms Brancus.

2 The Master thanked the Committee members for attending the special meeting, which had been arranged at short notice. She explained the meeting had been called to discuss an issue arising from proposals on changes to long service awards that had been discussed in the April meeting.

The HR Manager explained that at its last meeting the Committee had agreed a proposal to remove retirement payments, to increase the amount paid for the long service award at 25 years, and to introduce a new award to mark 15 years of service. At that meeting there had been some discussion regarding whether the new 15 year award should be applied retrospectively. It had been minuted that the Committee had felt some transitional arrangements were appropriate so that those who achieved the milestone “within a certain period” before the implementation would still be recognised. It had subsequently become apparent that what the College felt was an appropriate transition period did not match the views of some Committee members, who felt that their strong views had not been sufficiently captured in the minutes. The HR Manager stated that it had not been her intention to misrepresent the views of the Committee and her understanding had been that the Committee wished to ensure those who had recently achieved the milestone received the award. Given that it now appeared that there was significant concern over this from some members, it was appropriate for the matter to come back to the Committee for further discussion.

The Bursar outlined that the proposal had been developed and brought to the Committee during her period of absence and therefore, understandably, she had not had the opportunity to give her input into this. As the proposal appeared to have the support of the SCC she had been content to accept it, although in fact she had reservations about the use of financial payments to recognise long service. Given that it now transpired that the matter had not been fully agreed she would welcome the opportunity to revisit the issue more widely. She felt that the payments were
not consistent with the aims the College had wanted to achieve through the strategic staffing review, which had introduced a mechanism that rewarded longer serving members of staff much more substantially on the basis of sustained good performance, rather than just still being in post, through the use of discretionary points within grades. She expressed concern that the payments risked undermining morale if staff were observed to receive them even when they had exhibited poor performance. Giving a financial reward also raised a potential concern of indirect age discrimination, with older staff being more likely to benefit. Making a financial payment, based purely on longevity, for work already remunerated and the related tax liability to the College, was not an appropriately efficient and effective given the College’s charitable status. Being necessarily a small reward, the positive effect might not be achieved while a significant amount of resource was required to administer it. In her view the important part of recognising long service was the opportunity to celebrate as a community and thank the staff member publically, and a public ceremony with a presentation of flowers and a certificate would be appropriate.

The Committee then discussed their specific concerns regarding the planned implementation of the 15 year award, with awards being made to those who had achieved 15 years within the last 12 months, but with no award made retrospectively to those with 16 or more years of service. The issues discussed were as follows:

- Concerns were expressed that it was unfair that those who had achieved 15 years’ service this year and in future would receive a payment when individuals who had been in the College’s employ for longer had not received an award (i.e. those with more than 15 but fewer than 25 years of service).

  A variety of views was expressed on this subject. It was reported that one representative had consulted in their department and a view had been expressed that it was reasonable to introduce the award for those achieving 15 years in the future and that those who had already passed this point would not expect the ward to be given out retrospectively. On the other hand the majority of members of the committee expressed the view that affected staff in their constituencies would be upset if they did not receive the award. However, views were also expressed that a reward at the level proposed might be counter-productive, and that preserving some element of bonus payment more regularly for the lowest paid staff was viewed with much greater value.

- That non-payment of the 15 year award retrospectively was particularly unfair in the light of the removal of retirement payments, as it meant that an employee could leave, for example, with 20 years service not having received financial recognition from the College. The HR Manager clarified that although it had been anticipated that the cost of introducing 15 year awards would be offset by discontinuing retirement payments, no implication had been intended that the introduction of one was necessary to in effect “buy-out” the removal of the other. The HR Manager emphasised that the concept of “retirement” no longer fitted easily with the reality of the working world as it currently stood, with employees often moving on to other roles rather than stopping work entirely. Also it was less common for employees to remain for very long periods of time with one employer. The removal of retirement payments and introduction of an earlier recognition point had been intended to reflect this.

- Concerns were raised at the lack of communication to staff regarding decisions on the changes to payments including upon retirement. The specific concerns regarding the plans for implementation had come to light as the changes personally affected one of the representatives and there had been a lack of
clarity as to what should more appropriately have happened in terms of feedback to the Committee regarding the planned implementation. It was noted that the changes were on the agenda for a Head of Department meeting next week, with a view to wider communication taking place thereafter, but the desire to use the Family Fun Day as an opportunity to present the awards had added an element of time pressure to the implementation which had clearly been unhelpful in the circumstances.

- Wider concerns were raised about the lack of clarity about what matters the Committee Members should be treating as confidential and what they were supposed to be consulting on more widely within their constituencies.

In light of the disparity of views and concerns raised it was concluded that the introduction of the 15 year award and removal of retirement payments should not be implemented until there had been the opportunity for further discussion and this would appropriately take place at a scheduled SCC meeting in Michaelmas term. It was noted that the increase in the amount paid at the 25 year award had already been put into effect and that these would be presented, as planned at the Family Fun Day.

It was further agreed that a review of the operation of the Committee and its terms of reference would form an agenda item for the next meeting.

3 Date of next meeting

Michaelmas Term 2019 – date to be circulated.