

This newsletter is to update you on some of the latest developments in Higher Education, and potential consequences for EIS-ULA members.



Newsletter / December 2016

EU Nationals

The EIS has a number of members that are non-UK EU nationals, especially in the HE sector. The EIS has written to all Scottish universities¹ to seek to ensure that they properly and effectively support these members of staff in these uncertain times. The EIS has asked universities to model their support on the assumption that there will be a 'hard Brexit', and to provide specialist employment law and immigration law advice for both staff and their families. Finally, the EIS has called on universities to consider contributing to the costs of them and their families seeking UK citizenship should it be needed in the future.

A generic copy of the letter sent to universities may be found here:

<http://www.eis.org.uk/public.asp?id=3469&parentid=286&dbase=2>

REF – Research Excellence Framework

The next REF is planned for 2021. The REF is carried out on behalf of the UK HE funding councils, including the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), who commissioned Lord Stern to review the REF. The Stern Review report made several recommendations that may change the next REF, and it may be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541338/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf

The UK HE funding councils have issued a joint consultation with the HE Sector to consider these recommendations. This may be found here: https://survey.hefce.ac.uk/s/REF_consultation/

The EIS will be submitting a response, but individual members are encouraged to make responses too.

Lord Stern's key recommendations include:

Recommendation 1: All research active staff should be returned in the REF.

Recommendation 3: Outputs should not be portable.

Recommendation 6: Impact must be based on research of demonstrable quality. However, case studies could be linked to a research activity and a body of work as well as to a broad range of research outputs.

Recommendation 7: Guidance on the REF should make it clear that impact case studies should not be narrowly interpreted...

¹Universities in this context refers to all HEIs

Some universities already appear to be planning workforce changes before the outcome of the funding councils' consultation, speculating that Lord Stern's recommendations are likely to be accepted. This is leading some universities to re-designating lecturing staff as teaching fellows – which has the effect of removing them from the research active cohort of staff. The recommendations have also led to some universities putting in more effort in developing their current staff's research output rather than relying on the appointing academics with a good list of publications late in the REF timeframe. In some cases, this is leading to universities placing pressure on staff to publish at 3*/4* with little additional time or resources.

TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

The TEF is technically an England only initiative (i.e. HEFCE), and runs on an annual cycle. The TEF's first round is this year and it seems that Scottish universities were included. The TEF second round is next year and it uses different metrics to measure teaching quality, including the NSS for the first time. Participation of Scottish universities is voluntary, and it is not clear at the time of writing how many (if any) will participate. Scottish universities must judge whether they wish to be included in league tables.

Whether or not TEF is adopted by your university, there is a consistent push to improve NSS scores.

HE Funding

HE funding in Scotland from the Scottish Government has been broadly flat in recent years. The Scottish draft budget was published on 15th December 2016, and may be found here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/6610/downloads>

Table 6.06 of the Draft Budget sets out the planned expenditure on universities and colleges for 2017-18. The Government plans to cut recurrent funding on Universities from £1,081.3m to £1,013.9m.

This planned reduction may have a significant effect on some universities. Several universities seem to have had operating deficits in 2015-16, and this planned funding cut will add to uncertainties around Brexit and overseas student numbers.

HE Governance

The Scottish Government passed the HE Governance Act in 2016, but has given universities up to four years to implement parts of it. It is therefore unlikely that Trade Union reps will be on university governing bodies before 2020. We will, however, be pushing for TU reps to have observer status before then.

Workload & Workplace

Workload and workplace stress continue to be significant issues in the HE sector. Anecdotal evidence suggests that workplace stress is causing increasing absence levels. Workplace stress is caused by several issues, including; overwork, short deadlines, poor work relationships, poor line-management and dealing with change/restructuring within the department or at university level.

- The EIS advises members to record in writing (email) their concerns regarding workload and workplace stress with their line managers.
- The EIS advises members to ask their line managers to prioritise their work if their workload is unreasonable.
- The EIS advises members who return to work after a period of 4 weeks or more ill health to obtain a written agreed return to work plan that includes a risk assessment.

Pay & New JNCHES

The EIS has written to you separately about the 2016-17 pay round and its on-going industrial action short of strike action.

The five recognised HE trade unions have joint meetings planned in early 2017 to agree the 2017-18 pay claim, which will be submitted in March 2017.

The EIS believes that the New JNCHES is being used by Employers to depress wage growth and to avoid any Scottish HE sector level collective bargaining. (For the avoidance of doubt the EIS and other trade unions have stated that they wish pay bargaining to continue at New JNCHES but for a Scottish Sub-Committee to be established to deal with non-pay matters.)

USS Pensions – A Hybrid Pension Scheme from October 2016

Members in primarily pre-1992 universities who are in the USS pension scheme will be aware that some changes occurred in October 2016.

On 1 April 2016 all USS members became part of the new career revalued benefits scheme; USS Retirement Income Builder. This is a defined benefit scheme. On 1 October 2016 a salary threshold, (initially of £55,000 a year) applied to the maximum salary that counts towards benefits in the USS Retirement Income Builder.

This threshold only affects USS members earning more than £55k per year; if you earn less than £55k per year then you will only be accruing service and benefits within the USS Retirement Income Builder. You will pay 8%, whilst your employer will pay 18%. It is a defined benefit - you will get 1/75 of each year's salary at the end - plus a lump sum.

USS members who earn more than £55k a year will have their first £55k put into the USS Retirement Income Builder (a defined benefit scheme) and the rest into a USS Investment Builder Scheme (a defined contribution scheme) – the USS is thus now a hybrid scheme.

USS Investment Builder - this will be for the balance of salaries above £55k. Affected USS members will pay 8%, whilst employers will pay 18%. It is a defined contribution - you will get what the fund pays out at the end. You can pay an extra 1% (of your total salary) into this scheme, which will be matched by the employer (i.e. 1%). In addition to this, you can pay in more into the scheme, subject to UK tax rules but it will not be matched or added to by your employer

I should add that your pre-April 2016 USS pensions will be separate from your post-April 2016 USS pensions. It will be revalued every year by a value linked to CPI inflation.

More information may be found here: <https://www.uss.co.uk/>

www.eis.org.uk

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