

Minutes of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee  
University of Kentucky Board of Trustees  
Thursday, April 25, 2024

The Human Resources and University Relations (HRUR) Committee of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees met on Thursday, April 25, 2024, in the Gatton Student Center, Harris Ballroom.

A. Call to Order

Cathy Black, chair of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and asked Paige Noland to report the attendance.

B. Roll Call

The following members of the Human Resources and University Relations Committee were in attendance: Cathy Black, Hubie Ballard, Brenda Gosney, Lizzie Hornung, David Melanson, Paula Pope, Holly Swanson and Rachel Webb.

C. Approval of Minutes

Chair Black reported that the minutes of the February 23, 2024, HRUR Committee meeting had been distributed and called for a motion to approve. Trustee Ballard moved approval of the minutes and Trustee Pope seconded the motion. Hearing no discussion, Chair Black called for a vote and the motion passed without dissent.

D. Project Accelerate: Work Group 4

Chair Black introduced Vice President for Human Resources and Chief Human Resources Officer Melissa Frederick and Vice President for Institutional Diversity Katrice Albert.

Dr. Albert explained that the focus of Work Group 4 is on the continuous investment in the University's people and the work culture at UK. She acknowledged the partnership with Fidelity whose representatives would be sharing an update on data about the current benefits package. "Our current benefits package is very competitive in the marketplace for both health insurance and retirement options."

Dr. Albert highlighted the significance of continually investing in the workforce's well-being and adapting to the evolving needs. She acknowledged the competitive nature of the benefits landscape and the necessity to provide flexible options that resonate with the diverse preferences of the five generations comprising the current UK workforce.

Dr. Albert outlined the progress made since the last meeting in February, detailing the extensive feedback collection process involving key campus leaders and thousands of faculty and staff members. She emphasized the importance of adapting and refining approaches based

on feedback, citing concerns raised during virtual focus groups regarding the user experience of the feedback collection tool.

Dr. Albert stated, "While UK's thrust is to be innovative and on the cutting edge of new technologies, techniques and tools, we do understand that with the newness of innovation, it can be a bit clunky and awkward." She acknowledged the need to address technical issues raised by some employees and highlighted the proactive steps taken to ensure all voices were heard, including additional focus groups conducted in collaboration with the Staff Senate.

Dr. Albert explained, "We have also designed the future of the benefits feedback exercise, so again more understanding and more voices during this continual and additional feedback cycle. This is our next opportunity for employees to give us direction on what is important to them." She explained the exercise would kick off in May and by July a strategic value analysis specific to UK will be shared.

Dr. Albert expressed gratitude to the work group for their dedication and emphasized the significance of benchmarking against both academic and healthcare institutions to ensure competitiveness. She explained, "We are often competing with healthcare organizations all across the nation, but especially in the local healthcare market like Baptist Health and Cincinnati Children's Hospital, and with remarkable local firms like Lexmark and the Veterans Affairs."

Dr. Albert introduced UK's Fidelity partners, Senior Vice President Ranjan Dutta and Senior Vice President and Managing Director Bruce White.

Dr. Dutta explained, "The objective of the market scan was to get a perception of what prospective employees think about the University as well as other organizations that work with the University to hire talent." He highlighted that employees outside of the University perceive UK's benefits to be transparent and easily accessible to everyone and that they are very well explained and easily understood.

Dr. Dutta transitioned to areas for improvement. He explained, "While it was genuine and transparent, there are a couple of areas where the narrative can be better," emphasizing the need for a stronger overall employee experience narrative and improved benefit communication.

Dr. Dutta shifted to the results of the virtual focus groups, sharing that over 4,000 employees participated. "When we started this exercise, our goal was around 10% of all employees in the organization, which is around 2,000 employees. We exceeded that by 2,000 more." He shared, "We had 4,200 employees participate: 51% in the healthcare side, 49% in the campus side, and around 24% clinical faculty."

Dr. Dutta explained, "We had three main focus groups: one focused on financial benefits, one on health benefits, and the third on work-life benefits." Additionally, there were two special groups: one for clinical faculty, covering financial, health, and work-life benefits tailored to them, and another for employees in the facilities department.

Dr. Dutta yielded the floor to Mr. White.

Mr. White shared, "When we held the senior leader interviews, we heard two things loud and clear. One is that they wanted to hear the voice of all employees, meet people where they are and get their feedback." He shared a concern that some non-exempt staff, like those in facilities, might be less versed in benefits and struggle with the concept.

Mr. White explained, "For facilities and the warehouse side in healthcare, we held monitored groups. We brought in support people and did a live virtual focus group where we had support to make sure the individuals understood what the actions were, and we had folks there to answer any questions." The surveys indicated some still struggled with the process and therefore additional support was provided through the Staff Senate to ensure all employees' voices were heard.

Mr. White yielded the floor to Dr. Dutta.

Dr. Dutta explained that Fidelity has invested in and begun using a new technology, employee focus groups. "We have done this now across 25 different organizations and we feel that the results are much better than a pure sample survey." He stated that there was a mix of both quantitative and qualitative questions and that the focus groups were anonymous and confidential. The data quality was very good with only 4.5% of responses being removed and labeled as unusable. A virtual focus group was performed with select members of the Staff Senate and the results were very similar to the other virtual focus groups.

Dr. Dutta shared that for each topic, financial, health and work-life, the respondents were asked how aware they were about the benefits, how comfortable they felt about using the benefits offered and if their employer understood their needs. He pointed out there was no difference from other organizations they had worked with concerning employers understanding the individual needs, "It is always a gap across the organization."

Dr. Dutta stated, "We asked them how important are benefits in their decision to stay at UK, and 79% of the population say it is very critical or extremely critical."

Dr. Dutta explained that the same questions were asked for financial benefits and work-life and the results were similar. "The good news is awareness and comfort were always scored high, but understanding the need was scored lower." The question pertaining to how employees are feeling about working at UK scored lower and could use some work.

Dr. Dutta concluded his presentation and re-introduced Dr. Albert.

Dr. Albert explained that the future benefits exercise would be deployed on May 6. "This is to hear more voices from the data that our virtual focus groups gave us. It will give us the knowledge that we need to gain the insights necessary to make the most appropriate choices and understand what our employees need to inform that design."

Dr. Albert concluded by sharing that the next steps are to focus on UK Invests in order to replicate what has already been put in place for students. "Phase one is to identify the population with whom we would use as a starting point." She stated, "We also want to be able to create a

prototype of the foundation and the guard rails of what the program would look like. Our team will consider, ideate and then offer their brilliance.”

Chair Black opened the floor for questions.

Trustee Swanson asked about the education benefit and why employees are frustrated. Dr. Dutta explained they are going to provide choices to employees and try to understand the preference curve and that the educational benefit would be included in that. Ms. Frederick answered the second part and explained that they are looking further into stress and frustration and that the engagement survey will hopefully answer some of those questions.

Trustee Melanson asked how stress and frustration compare nationally. Mr. White stated that this is very much front of mind and that UK’s numbers are not outliers. Dr. Dutta added that pay was a recurring theme and that although there are other ways the employer is supporting the employee, that support sometimes gets lost.

Chair Black thanked the presenters. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Paige Noland