

Joint Benefits Committee

ANNUAL REPORT

CO-CHAIRS

RUMI GRAHAM & HEATHER TAKAHASHI

Background

The JBC was established as of December 1, 2022 through an [MOU](#) signed in November 2022. The MOU was based on the recommendations of the [Joint Academic Benefits Working Group](#), which met from May to September 2022 to investigate the feasibility and desirability of creating a committee of ULFA and Board representatives to oversee the benefits plans for academic staff.

This report of the Joint Benefits Committee (JBC) covers the period January 2023 through to December 2023. During this period, the JBC met a total of six times. In addition, JBC met with benefits specialists from Alberta Blue Cross (ABC) in December 2023 for an in-depth overview and analysis of the benefits usage for members of the ULFA benefits plans.

JBC Membership

The Terms of Reference of JBC provide that the committee comprises three ULFA representatives and three Board representatives. Three membership changes occurred over 2023. In March, Board representative Ariane Tennant was replaced by Heather Takahashi and in July, ULFA representative Rob Sutherland was replaced by Paul Hayes. A further change took place after December 2023 when ULFA representative Josh Davies was replaced by Rick Mueller.

Current JBC members:

Board members: Heather Takahashi (Associate VP, Human Resources), Helen Wolfe (Director, Payroll, Pension & Benefits), Nicole Eva (Associate University Librarian). Support provided by Asma Abbott (HR Services Coordinator)

ULFA members: Rumi Graham (University Copyright Advisor & Graduate Studies Librarian), Paul Hayes (Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry), Rick Mueller (Professor, Economics). Support provided by Aaron Chubb (Executive Director, ULFA)

JBC Mandate and Scope

As indicated in the [MOU](#), the mandate of the JBC is to engage in constructive dialogue on matters regarding benefits provided to academic staff, such as dental, vision, and mental health care; extended health coverage; life and disability insurance; and flexible spending accounts. The scope of JBC includes receiving costing and usage information and recommending benefits plan changes to ULFA and the Board for possible consideration in collective bargaining, but JBC does not participate in decision-making concerning benefits.

JBC Activities

1. Change in Insurance Carrier for Long-Term Disability & Life Insurance

In January 2023, the JBC was informed that the life insurance and long-term disability insurance carrier for all U of L employees was going to change from Canada Life to ABC effective April 1, 2023. Significant discussion occurred at subsequent meetings regarding the reasons for the change, the impacts of the change, the communications plan to notify ULFA members, and details on the addition of Telus Virtual Care as a three-year pilot program. Through the JBC, the Board also shared documentation regarding the parity in the provisions of the plan, and the final insurance contract.

2. Benefits Concerns Raised by Members

Although the JBC does not have decision-making authority, its scope includes consideration and attempts to resolve benefits concerns raised by members. Specifically, the following concerns were discussed:

- access to the benefits contracts for members, and ensuring that members could request a copy of the full contract from HR – addressed and resolved
- the possibility of extending the drug plan to include coverage for IUDs (EDI considerations; IUDs are excluded because the ABC contract excludes drugs or medication supplied for a period of more than 100 days; the Board supports IUD coverage and is investigating providing this for all employee groups as a change that is not considered to be a major change to the benefits plans) – in progress
- the possibility of extending the benefits plan to include coverage for glucose monitoring sensors (glucose monitoring receivers and transmitters are covered, but sensors, the third element needed for a functional glucose monitoring system, are not covered) – in progress.

3. Group Benefits Usage & Costing Information

The JBC agreed that to better inform possible recommendations around plan design, it was important to review detailed information on members historical and current plan usage and costing. At the December 2023 plan review session prepared for JBC, ABC benefits specialists presented a wealth of information on ULFA benefits usage and relevant contextual data for the period 2020 to 2023. Following the December presentation, ABC provided a spreadsheet containing ULFA usage and costing data covering 2019 to 2023 for all benefits covered in the ABC health and dental plan. As well, the Board provided a utilization report for the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) covering January 2020 to June 2023.

4. Existing Benefits Plans

Discussion occurred on the structure of the University's health and dental plan. Specifically, it was shared that the University operates an "Administrative Services Only" plan, where ABC reimburses ULFA members for eligible submitted claims and issues monthly invoices to the Board for processed claim amounts and stop-loss insurance, administrative fees, etc. Discussion also included how benefit rates are determined.

JBC Goals for 2024

Topics identified by JBC for further discussion this year include the following:

- review outdated paramedical coverage model and mental health supports as key areas for possible enhancements
- review dental plan design and vision care benefit
- review feasibility of adding a managed drug formulary, generic pricing, and other drug management considerations as suggested by ABC to offset costs for other plan enhancements
- prepare recommendations to the parties at collective bargaining on possible adjustments to the current plan design that may improve the extent to which it meets ULFA members' needs
- explore the idea of a benefits philosophy, which, if established, could usefully guide the future work of JBC
- consider flexible benefit plans to meet an increasingly diverse group of members
- consider future training and workshops for ULFA members on the benefits plans.

Submitted by:

Rumi Graham Co-Chair
Heather Takahashi, Co-Chair

April 23, 2024