



GUIDELINES FOR CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ON COUNCIL AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Introduction

Only three student Sabbatical Officers are represented on Council.

Student representatives on Council are full members, i.e. they are eligible to attend and speak at meetings as well as to vote, although occasions where an item of business requires a vote are rare. It is not appropriate to send a Deputy to a Council meeting.

Students play an important role in the decision-making with the University. You will find your own role more rewarding if you understand the University's governance structure and the roles of individual committees within that structure.

Roles and powers of Council

Under the University Charter, Council is the governing body of the University. Members of Council are charity trustees and accept ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of the University by ensuring that it is solvent, well-run and delivering the charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public for which it was established.

Council approves policy and sets the strategy of the University (in consultation with Senate on academic matters), and ensures that the Vice-Chancellor and University officers further that policy. It also enters into contracts on behalf of the University, including contracts of employment. It reviews and promotes the teaching and research of the University in consultation with Senate. Council awards honorary degrees on the recommendation of Senate and recommends to Court the award of honorary fellowships.

Council also manages all the University's financial and other affairs, makes investments and is responsible for the buying, selling and leasing of property. These are reported to Court (see **Appendix A** for more information about Court) on a yearly basis.

The Delegation Schedule is a useful document which helps to identify the responsibilities and delegated authorities for making key decisions in the name of, or on behalf of, the University of Bristol. Particular emphasis is given to those decisions taken by, or delegated from, the University Council, but detail of the responsibilities for other key decisions, in accordance with University statutes, ordinances and regulations, is also provided, with cross-reference to other relevant documentation where appropriate. Although such a scheme cannot be exhaustive, the intention is to provide clarity on the decision-making process and final authorities in relation to key strategic and policy matters whilst also providing a frame of reference to inform decision-making in other areas. *You may find this helpful in understanding where and how decisions are made at the University and the various reporting structures. If you have any specific questions then please contact the Governance team.*

You can download a copy of the delegation schedule at the following link:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/constitutionaldocs/delegationschedule/>

Membership

There are 32 members of Council, with a lay (external) majority. The members are the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, Treasurer, 15 lay members elected by Court upon the nominations of Court's Nominations Committee, a member appointed by Bristol City Council, a member appointed by the Society of Merchant Venturers

and a member appointed by Convocation, 4 members of the academic staff, 2 members of the support staff and 3 students (Sabbatical Officers of the Students Union). Elected and appointed members serve for three renewable three-year terms.

Dates and venues

Typically, Council meets **between 5 and 7 times per year**, with each meeting lasting from a half to a full day, depending on the amount and nature of business to be covered. Meetings usually start no earlier than 9am and finish no later than 4pm.

Once (or on occasion, twice) per year, Council holds an 'away day'. These sessions usually take place off-site, are far more informal, and generally focus on a particular theme or issue upon which the senior management team would welcome Council's advice.

Council meetings are arranged for Fridays wherever possible but away days occasionally take place on Thursday (immediately preceding the March Council meeting day). Lunch and refreshments are provided.

Dates of current meetings can be found here:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/universitycommittees/council/>

The University committee schedule provides details of when Council, Senate and their committees meet. This is made available from the Spring/Summer term of the previous academic year and is published on the Governance website at this address: www.bristol.ac.uk/governance/universitycommittees.

The venue in which Council is to be held will be announced upon publication of the agenda and papers (one week before the meeting). In the event that you have not received these details ahead of the meeting please contact the Governance team as soon as possible, as they will be able to provide the information you require.

Meetings

As a student representative on Council it is important that you make every effort to attend all possible meetings. **Remember:** you are there to represent the student body. *Should you find yourself unable to attend a meeting, you should contact the Governance team in advance of the meeting date. It is not usually possible for someone else to attend in your place except where explicit permission is received. If in doubt please contact the Governance team, who will be able to offer advice.*

As student representatives are considered to be full members of Council, you are in a position to contribute to discussions and the decision-making process. It is therefore important that you thoroughly read all the papers for the meeting and form a clear idea of the purpose of each agenda item, as well as possible topics that may arise during subsequent discussions.

Most Council meetings start with one or two presentations on key themes or activities, for example: presentations from the Faculty Deans outlining their Faculty's key achievements, challenges and objectives; the construction of the University budget; updates on key strategies (Estates, Education, Research, People etc); health & safety; the University brand etc.

The formal meeting of Council usually takes about two hours. There is a formal structured agenda which is usually separated into¹:

- items for consideration and decision

¹ Please note that due to the Council Effectiveness Review in 2014, the Council agendas may be subject to some changes in structure and format over the coming months.

- items for report/information

Keeping these distinctions in mind will help to make your contributions at meetings relevant and focused, as well as having a clear picture of the role of Council.

There is plenty of opportunity for members to ask questions and/or raise any concerns. Members of Council should identify themselves by name and department when first speaking at any meeting of Council. If you catch the eye of the Chair to let him/her know you wish to speak then the Chair will make sure you get an opportunity.

Should members wish to debate any agenda items put forward, this must take place, one proposal at a time, before a decision has been reached on the original proposal. Should the amendment be carried, further debate and decision will relate to the amended proposal rather than the original.

The majority of voting that takes place will be a simple show of hands, with the Chair being able to cast the vote to break a deadlock, but it is also possible for a member to request a paper ballot if the situation requires it.

The agenda, and all relevant paperwork, for each meeting will usually be sent out one week before the meeting is scheduled to take place (papers are circulated electronically unless a member specifically requests otherwise). Any reports that members wish to submit for reference at the meeting, or wish to have circulated to other members, need to be submitted two weeks ahead of the date of the meeting, in order to allow for distribution to the Council membership. *Should you experience any problems at all receiving agendas, minutes or other papers, or if you have not received an expected agenda a few days before a scheduled meeting you should contact the Governance team immediately.*

Any written contributions in response to items already circulated ahead of meeting should be distributed to members through the Governance team. Such written contributions can be an effective way of putting across detailed information which would be difficult to present orally.

Items listed on the agenda may also have additional symbols attached to them, each of which denotes a specific course of action:

- # - denotes an item that is considered to be confidential, and as such will not be considered to be part of the 'open' agenda. These are often referred to as 'reserved' items.

Most items of business will be available in both an electronic and hard copy format (depending on individual requirements – see above), but reserved business items will only be available as a hard copy.

Meeting dates and times in academic year 2014/15 are:

- 3 October 2014, 0900
- 14 November 2014, 0900
- 6 February 2015, 0900
- 19 March 2015, 0900 (Away Day)
- 20 March 2015, 0900
- 22 May 2015, 0900
- 3 July 2015, 0900

Confidentiality

As a student representative on Council, you may have access to a great deal of privileged and confidential material. It is expected that you will maintain confidentiality where the committee is discussing named individuals and discretion may be required for other sensitive forms of business. As stated above, these items will usually be denoted by a '#', but this is not always the case. *The Governance team can offer further advice on this if required.*

Conflicts of interest

You are under an obligation to act in the interests of the University. In the event that you have a financial, personal or family interest which might appear to put this obligation at risk, you must make the conflict know as soon as reasonably possible to the Chair of Council or the Governance team.

In the event that this arises during an ongoing meeting the Chair must be informed. There is an opportunity to declare any interest(s) at the beginning of the meeting (there is a standing item on all Council agendas for this purpose – entitled 'Declaration of Interests'). Unless the chair rules that the interest is not material, you are expected to withdraw from this element of the meeting and may not vote upon it.

This does not apply to ongoing items within the University unless they relate to a specific individual. For ongoing items there is a process in place - each year, in accordance with HEFCE policy, the Governance team asks members of Council to complete and submit a Register of Interests form. The Clerk to Council, on behalf of the Registrar and University Secretary, maintains the overall Register of Interests. Members are asked to provide details of:

- Remunerated employment outside the University;
- Other relevant sources of income from outside the University;
- Relevant directorships, trusteeships or similar positions;
- Involvement with any organisation with which the University might do business;
- Positions of authority within any other organisation whose decisions may have an impact on the University;
- Other relevant interests.

Questions

1. What role/responsibilities do the elected student members on Council have?

First and foremost, members are expected to play an appropriate part in ensuring that the necessary business of Council is carried out efficiently, effectively, and in a manner appropriate for the proper conduct of public business. They are expected to make rational and constructive contributions to debate and to make their knowledge and expertise available to Council as opportunity arises.

An important point to note is that student members of Council are *representative of the constituency* from which they are drawn, but they *do not represent that constituency*. In practice this means that Council members have a **corporate responsibility** to Council and to the University which overrides any representational role that they may be perceived to have.

2. Why does the University feel that it is important for members of student members to be included on Council?

- Experience shows that student members bring direct **experience of university life** to Council. Their involvement helps Council to make better and more informed decisions and also helps to foster and maintain **a vital sense of collegiality**.
- Student Council members provide an excellent way of ensuring **effective two-way communication** across the University as a whole.

3. What are the benefits of becoming a student member of the University Council?

Current and previous student Council members tell us that being a member of Council is a really rewarding experience. Key opportunities/benefits include:

- A chance to contribute to and shape the University's decision-making and strategic planning.
- Personal and professional development, for example learning new skills and strengthening existing skills (such as: negotiation, communication, networking, working as a team to achieve consensus etc).
- A chance to develop an understanding of, and experience in, key business activities such as financial and strategic planning, risk management and performance monitoring.
- An opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the key issues facing the University of Bristol and the UK Higher Education sector.
- A chance to work with people from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds – all of whom have a genuine interest in the University and its staff and students.

4. Will I receive any remuneration or reimbursement?

Council members do not receive remuneration but the University pays travelling and other expenses incurred in connection with the exercise of their duties as members of Council (including reasonable costs associated with caring responsibilities).

5. How much time would I be expected to commit?

The total time commitment over the course of a year will be approximately **10 to 15 days** (this assumes that members join at least one Council sub-committee).

6. What additional responsibilities/entitlements do Council members have?

University Court

All members of Council automatically become members of the University Court. The responsibilities of Court members are minimal and you would be encouraged to attend the annual meeting of Court (a meeting of approx. 300 University stakeholders including, alumni, current staff and students, emeritus staff and representatives of local authorities, learned societies, educational institutions etc).

The meeting, which is chaired by the University Chancellor, includes addresses from the Vice-Chancellor, the Chair of Council and the Finance Director, a presentation from staff and/or students on topical University activities/initiatives, and other formal business. Court takes place on a Friday in early December each year. It usually starts at approx. 11am and finishes at about 5pm.

Graduation Ceremonies

All members of Council are encouraged to attend the University's graduation ceremonies. Council members are entitled to sit on the main stage wearing the appropriate robes (to be provided by the University). Whilst we recognise that it might not be feasible in terms of workload for you to attend a number of them, it is a highly enjoyable occasion and we encourage staff members of Council to attend at least one per year. Dates can be obtained from the Public and Ceremonial Events Office.

Other committees/panels/working groups

Depending upon your areas of expertise and interest, there may be opportunities for student members of Council to participate in ad hoc advisory or working groups (for example, in the past we have established ad hoc groups to consider and advise Council on: governance / effectiveness reviews; reviews of the University's pension schemes; succession planning for

senior officers). We also like to involve Council members on staff and student appeal or grievance panels. If you agreed to assist with any of these ad hoc groups, you would of course be briefed fully on your responsibilities and those of the group/panel. More information about anticipated time commitments can be obtained from the Head of Governance.

University Committees

Council's work is underpinned by a structure of sub-committees, which undertake much of the specific and detailed analysis of key University strategy before making recommendations to Council. Membership of committees presents opportunities for Council members to gain a deeper understanding of the key issues associated with that Committee. This knowledge and understanding will certainly help members to make more informed decisions and to ask more challenging questions at Council-level.

Typically, each committee meets once per term for approximately two hours. Again, there would be an expectation that you will have read the papers in advance of the meeting and you should allow up to half a day for preparation time. Appointments to Council committees are generally made for an initial term of three-years, or concurrent with your Council membership. However, we have previously agreed to co-opt new members for an initial trial year to allow them sufficient time to establish their suitability.

7. Invitations to University Events

Our Council members are regularly invited to all sorts of interesting University and community events. These informal gatherings provide a valuable opportunity for Council members to see the University 'in action' and to meet with staff and students. Whilst attending such events is of course optional, these events do provide insights and information which are integral to effective governance.

8. What support and training is available for new members of Council?

All new members will receive a full induction, including:

- A Resource Pack – a role description, Council Code of Practice, copies of the University's key strategies, the CUC Guide for members of UK HEI Governing Bodies, and other key corporate documents.
- An introductory session with the Clerk to outline Council protocols and procedures, meeting etiquette etc.
- Briefings from the Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor and other members of the executive team.
- A briefing from the Director of Legal Services outlining, amongst other things, your legal responsibilities as a Governor and Trustee.
- A handover discussion with outgoing student members.
- Mentoring opportunities with other Council members (staff and/or lay members)
- Meetings with the Chair or Vice-Chair of Council to discuss issues of particular relevance to student members of Council.
- Opportunities to attend governor development training with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Induction sessions

The Governance team holds two full day inductions per year for new lay members of Council and one induction a year for student members of Council:

1. One in the **Autumn term** (usually around September/October) to accommodate new academic staff members and new student members who are appointed during the summer;

2. A second in the **Spring term** (usually around January/February) to accommodate new lay members of Council/committees and newly appointed members such as those from Convocation or Bristol City Council for example.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/committeeservicing/newmembers/>

Lucy Barling
Governance Officer
Strategic Planning & Governance Office

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY COURT

Members of Court

There are some 585 Court members of Court. The members include officers of the University, members of Council and Senate, emeritus professors, benefactors, members of the Society of Merchant Venturers, representatives of local authorities, persons appointed by Privy Council, persons appointed by the Chancellor of the University, representatives of other Universities, local Members of Parliament, representatives of local and professional bodies, and 100 members elected by Convocation. Further information can be found in the University of Bristol Statutes:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/constitutionaldocs/charteractsstatutesordinances/>

Powers of Court

Court receives reports from Council and an annual audited statement of accounts. Court may comment on the affairs of the University, advise Council on any matter, and invite Council to review a decision.

Court has power, on the proposal of Council, to recommend to the Privy Council changes to the Charter and statutes. It appoints the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellors and Treasurer upon the nomination of Council, appoints annually the external auditors and elects fifteen lay members of Council.

Meetings of Court

Court normally meets once a year in December. The Chancellor presides. Court considers the annual accounts and the strategy and management of the University. Court may hold special meetings at the request of its members. Formal minutes, papers and presentations from the meetings of Court are made available to members of the public via the Governance website: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/governance/universitycommittees/court/>

Secretariat

Court is organised by:

The Governance team

Email: secretariat@bristol.ac.uk