



**MEETING OF SENATE
MINUTES
Monday 12 October 2020
1400, virtual Zoom meeting**

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (**Chair**), Allen, Bickers, Birdi, Bond, Carrington, Cater, Cini, Cristianini, Dermott, Faul, Flecker, George, Gilchrist, Grierson, Hammond, Hickman, Iredale, Jessop, Jordan, Lithander, Linthorst, Luckhurst, Marklof, Nabney, Neild, Nobes, Norman, Oliphant, Orpen, Pancost, Payne, Peters, Piggins, Powell, Purdy, Raven, Ridley, Robbins, Schonle, Smart, S Smith, Spear, Squires, Schwarzacher, Szczelkun, Tavare, Taylor, Timpson, Tonks, Tormey, Wilding, Wilson;

Dr J Agarwal, Dr M Allinson, Dr K Austin, Dr M Barbour, Mr E Bempong-Manful, Prof A Blom, Ms T Brunnock, Dr N Dahnoun, Dr L Dickinson, Dr M Dudley, Mr E Fay, Dr S Fitzjohn, Dr A Flack, Dr S Fox, Mr D Freda, Mrs M Gillway, Dr J Howarth, Dr AJ Howkins, Ms F Ingram, Mr D Ion, Mr D Jones, Mr P Kent, Mr R Kerse, Miss Y Li, Dr P Langton, Dr I Lazar, Dr E Love, Mr B Mac Ruairi, Ms I Marshall, Dr S McGuinness, Dr D Morgan, Dr R Murray, Dr MT O'Toole, Dr K Opie, Mrs L Parr, Dr D Poole, Dr S Proud, Mr R Rossi, Mr S Sreekanth, Dr L Walling, Ms Z Wang, Dr K Whittington.

Apologies: Professor E Wilson, Miss SE Bain, Mr S Bullock, Prof P Ireland, Mr T Metcalfe, Dr N Millner, Professor K Pleydell-Pearce, Professor K Pollman, B Smith, FCT Smith.

In attendance: Ms L Barling (**Clerk**), Ms T Brunnock, Ms C Buchanan, Ms P Coonerty, Mr D Jennings, Mrs S Johnson (**r**), Ms Z Pither, Ms H Quinn, Ms R Shimeld, Dr S Swales, Prof A Mullholland (stand in for Prof E Wilson, Engineering).

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 29 JUNE 2020.

1.1 **CONFIRMED** and **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting of 29 June 2020.

2. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

2.1 **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**: Chair's Report: paper ref: (**SN/20-21/001**).

2.2 **NOTED**: the following obituaries: Dr Janine Sargoni, Mr Martin John West, Emeritus Professor, Professor Michael Furmston, and Mr Alistair Williams.

2.3 **NOTED**: that the [membership of Senate](#) for the 2020/21 session was now available online.

2.4 **NOTED**: There were no written questions for today's meeting.

2.5 In addition to the contents of the Chair's Report, the Vice-Chancellor highlighted some brief sector updates:

- The University alongside UUK and the Russell Group continued to lobby for various types of government support, although the emphasis was currently on test and trace which was an urgent priority across the sector.
- The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was important to the sector in terms of research funding. The language from the government was currently very positive, but

Universities were still uncertain about the amount of funding available and whether that funding would funnel through normal UKRI Research Councils routes or via other routes e.g. the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA).

- There remained no news regarding the sector's full association with Horizon Europe and negotiations were continuing.
- The Universities Minister had emphasised her seriousness about reducing bureaucracy in the HE sector and the University welcomed the opportunity, when it materialised.

2.6 Senate congratulated Professor Lucy Yardley who was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in recognition of her contribution to the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.7 On 10 October 2020, the Bristol Post published the [Bristol Cool List 2020](#) – there were 41 winners, two of whom were from the Bristol University community. They were: Dr Joseph Hartland, from the Bristol Medical School, who won widespread praise for reassessing the things in medical training that indirectly or inadvertently discriminates against people, and; Professor Christiane Schaffitzel, who was leading a team at the School of Biochemistry, and had found a possible weakness in Covid-19 that could be druggable.

3. ANNUAL PRESENTATION FROM SU SABBATICAL OFFICERS

3.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: an annual presentation from the Bristol SU Sabbatical Officers, led by Mr D Ion (UG Education Officer) (*presentation on file*).

3.2 The presentation highlighted the Bristol SU Officer team priorities for academic year 2020/21. Following the presentation, the following comments were made:

3.2.1 Senate members were impressed with the ambitious and far-reaching agenda of the Sabbatical Officers for the upcoming year and were pleased that many of their goals aligned well with the wider University strategy which was currently being refreshed.

3.2.2 The Anti-Racism Steering Group, as part of its core workstreams, was working to decolonise the University, led by Professor Alvin Birdi, and was working collaboratively with Bristol SU to ensure there was a process in place for students to report any concerns they had about something they had been taught.

3.2.3 Student feedback to the Sabbatical Officers about the COVID secure measures in place across the campus had been relatively positive with students appreciating the importance of keeping everyone safe. Students had also fed back that they were pleased that the University was proceeding with some face-to-face teaching (blended learning).

4. COVID-19 PLANNING: UPDATES FROM ACADEMIC PLANNING GROUP AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOVERY GROUP

4.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/002).

4.2 The Registrar & University Secretary introduced the paper, and the highlights were as follows:

4.2.1 There were now 393 positive COVID cases in the UoB student body, which was an increase of 47 compared with yesterday (11 October). There remained 3 positive staff cases, but those staff members had been working from home and were not previously on campus.

4.2.2 Case numbers were reviewed daily at midday and reported to the Silver Group and Public Health England.

- 4.2.3 A risk assessment, provided by Public Health England (PHE) that looks at the University's overall situation within the city, would be updated weekly (and more often if needed) with Bristol City Council and PHE to reflect the overall risk status. This would enable PHE to provide a clinical assessment of risk, and relevant advice which would be presented to the University Executive Board for decision as to whether operational change was required. There was a planned release of additional guidance by the Government this afternoon.
- 4.2.4 An interim call centre had been stood up over the weekend to manage incoming communications, particularly from parents. The majority of concerns raised by parents were not in relation to the support students were receiving, about which the University had received positive feedback, but the legality of the decisions made to impose further restrictions.
- 4.2.5 The University was extremely grateful to colleagues from across the University for such a significant team effort over the recent weekend and the positive responses from students online in relation to support and provisions.
- 4.2.6 The Senior team acknowledged the challenging workload in School & Faculty offices as they managed students self-isolating and moving to online provision and were mindful of the importance of streamlining this process - work was currently underway.
- 4.2.7 Two additional testing centres had recently been established – one in North Bristol and one by the Court Rooms, plus the local testing unit at the Victoria Rooms. As a second line of defence, a Commercial provider had also been lined up to assist with triaging people if required.
- 4.3 The Registrar agreed to circulate to Senate the number of students in rented accommodation (2nd and 3rd year students) who were currently self-isolating.
Action: Registrar/Clerk to Senate
- 4.4 The following comments/points were made during discussions:
- 4.4.1 During discussions about the safety of teaching spaces, some staff had concerns around the individual risk assessment process, which was more clinical based and therefore did not adequately capture non-clinical issues. The Senior team acknowledged this and informed Senate that they had undertaken to provide additional guidance to managers about how best to interpret non-clinical issues and how to have conversations with individuals about non-clinical issues e.g. travel, mental health, family arrangements etc. Training sessions could also be provided.
- 4.4.2 Another key issue of concern raised was around the risk assessments of particular teaching spaces, and it was noted that the Director of Health & Safety was currently reviewing this in order to provide additional reassurance. Senators were asked to encourage their colleagues to raise any specific issues or concerns with Faculty Managers and/or Facilities Managers as a first point of contact.
- 4.4.3 It was noted that furniture in the teaching spaces should not be re-arranged even if it was felt that pedagogically the layout was not ideal – this was because rooms had been specifically laid out in a way that ensured they were COVID compliant.
- 4.4.4 It would be important to continue with the assessment of communal spaces on the campus on an ongoing basis, to ensure that SD procedures were being followed in all areas, at all times.

- 4.4.5 Members agreed that it would be important to continue to ensure students were engaged in all discussions about the risks of face-to-face teaching. The University had been working closely with Bristol SU on this since the early summer months, including running tours of the campus, and liaising with staff union members.
- 4.4.6 The number of cases in northern Universities appeared to be plateauing and, in some cases were falling, and it was anticipated that due to the time lag, this could indeed also be the case in the South West in the coming weeks.
- 4.4.7 Senate was encouraged by the University's helpful and regular communications with students and was pleased to see that support for our students was at the top of the Senior Team's agenda.
- 4.4.8 Senate members congratulated the University on the good quality food parcels that had been delivered to students who were self-isolating and agreed that this process had been managed very well in extremely challenging circumstances.

5. VISION AND STRATEGY

- 5.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/003).
- 5.2 The DVC & Provost introduced the paper.
- 5.3 **NOTED**: Following feedback from Senate and the Board on a draft version of the refreshed University Strategy, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the DVC & Provost agreed a two-phased approach to refreshing the University Strategy in order to allow the Board, Senate and other stakeholders sufficient time for proper engagement with the key issues facing the University beyond 2020/21. Phase 1 of the Strategy was the subject of significant discussion at a University Management Team (UMT) 'residential' workshop in September, at which UMT assured itself that the document (subject to minor revisions) provided a sound framework for the University's activities in the coming year. This Phase 1 Strategy was recommended to the Board at its meeting on 25 September and was approved for 2020/21.
- 5.4 **NOTED**: Consultation around the Phase 2 Strategy would begin imminently, and iterations would be brought for Senate's consideration in January, April, and then in June 2021 prior to Board sign-off in July 2021. Members were made aware that the timeline could change because of the need to be reactive in terms of the amount of time the University was asking people to engage in consultation, given the current workload challenges, but noted that any changes to the timeline would of course be reported to Senate.
- 5.5 The following comments/points were made during discussions:
 - 5.5.1 The importance of research excellence was paramount, and the University Research Committee (URC) had recently discussed research measures and league tables and how the University could best evaluate its research performance. Members noted that the discussion paper put forward to the Committee had suggested that it would be important to evaluate the University's performance by looking at several different quantitative measures, but in context-specific ways (because each discipline and career stage was very different). The Committee had agreed that it would be important to then benchmark those numbers, and that that basket of measures could then be used not to make decisions in isolation but possibly to trigger a deep dive investigation, involving both qualitative and quantitative measures.

5.5.2 University Executive Board (UEB) had been discussing in great detail how to budget in the coming year in order to invest in the strategic aims of the University. The University was committed to moving back to business as usual (and therefore delegating the budgets back to the Faculties and Professional Services Divisions), and as soon as a revised budget had been signed off by the Board of Trustees in November, progress would begin to be made in this area. It was noted that the tactical refresh of the Strategy had helped the University to better understand where to put its resource and that this would be fed through into the Integrated Planning Process (IPP).

5.5.3 Senate broadly agreed that it would be important to review leading metrics to help with identifying what was coming in the future, and not what had already been.

6. FLEXIBLE AND BLENDED EDUCATION AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

6.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED:** a PowerPoint presentation from the PVC Education and PVC Student Experience (*presentation on file*).

6.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the report, and the following comments/points were made during discussions:

6.2.1 The PVC Student Experience would be sharing the MHWB survey responses in detail with academic colleagues, in due course.

6.2.2 The process for COVID reporting was bedding in well, and the reporting form was currently being streamlined to ensure that whatever alternative educational provision was being put on for students, those students were aware of it, and were able to attend.

6.2.3 From a wellbeing perspective, students seemed aware of the process for COVID reporting and the University continued to remind students of that process.

6.2.4 Whilst the data showed little change in the way in which students rated their own mental health, there had been evidential change in the satisfaction of the support/service that students had received.

6.2.5 After a successful series of events and stories last year, the University would be running another 'You Said, We Did' campaign in the autumn term this year.

6.2.6 The Senior team were aware of difficulties relating to high numbers of students self-isolating and moving between face to face and online status, and the PVC Education was working hard to ensure that the process was as smooth as possible.

6.2.7 The University was actively working with the central communications team and with Schools and Faculties on a strategy for improving communications with students so that they would be as quick as possible given the constant changing circumstances. Schools were working very hard to support students and communicate with them on key information. Where there were student communication issues, members were encouraged to inform the Senior team.

7. RESEARCH UPDATE: INCLUDING REF PREPARATIONS

7.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED:** a PowerPoint presentation from the PVC Research & Enterprise, and the Associate PVCs (REF) (*on file*).

7.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) led the presentation, and the following comments/points were made during discussions:

7.2.1 Some of the University's ability to respond to COVID research challenges was down to large previous investments in major equipment and facilities, and more importantly, in the technical staff that were hired to support those equipment facilities.

7.2.2 Any refresh of the Research Strategy should recognise the strengths in Social Sciences and the Arts.

7.2.3 The main topic at the upcoming University Research Committee Away day was how the University could learn from the way it responded with UNCOVER, across all of the disciplines in such an agile way – i.e. what could be learnt about the people, culture and processes, and then embed this learning in what we do going forward. UNCOVER as well as RECOVER would also feature very heavily in the additional 500 words to be included in the Institutional Research Statement regarding the effects of the pandemic on the University's research environment, as well as our response to it.

8. ADOPTION OF DEFINITIONS RELATING TO FAITH GROUPS

8.1 RECEIVED and **AGREED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/004).

8.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) introduced the report.

8.3 Senate discussed the adoption of the APPG definition of Islamophobia, and the suggested adoption of a statement acknowledging different faiths and mutual respect and **AGREED** with the recommended approaches contained in the report. Senate considered that the aim of adopting and using definitions should be to encourage learning and understanding between members of our community including students and staff and to promote tolerance and mutual respect. We should endeavour to use the adoption of definitions to give us an opportunity to be pro-active in building bridges when that opportunity may not have been there beforehand.

8.4 Senate also discussed the five tests suggested by Professor Tariq Modood and **AGREED** that they could be used as a helpful tool for evaluation whether potentially offensive speech may be discriminatory.

9. EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

9.1 RECEIVED and **APPROVED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/005)

9.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) introduced the report.

9.3 Senate **APPROVED** the revised terms of reference for the Education Committee for academic year 2020/21 and **NOTED** the rest of the report.

10. ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS FRAMEWORK & UPDATE ON PLANS FOR 20/21

10.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/006).

10.2 The DVC & Provost introduced the paper.

10.3 Senate **NOTED**:

- Plans for launching this year's promotion round;
- The changes to progression and plans to include the Academic Promotion Framework;
- The introduction of a new process for Movement for Associate Professors and;
- The changes to Grade M Movement using the Academic Promotion Framework.

11. NSS SECTOR UPDATE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BRISTOL

11.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/007).

- 11.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) introduced the paper. Drs Allinson and Whittington contributed.
- 11.3 There were some broad concerns about the notion of discarding the NSS, because however flawed or limited, it was a helpful place to get benchmark data on student views. There were also implications for the Widening Participation agenda.
- 11.4 UEB and the University Education Committee had previously considered how proactive the University ought to be about promoting the NSS for this year and agreed that given staff workload at the present time, this matter should be kept under review until slightly closer to the time, to give time for the digital learning to 'bed in'. However, should specific disciplines wish to promote the NSS then the PVC Education would be happy to support them in doing so.
- 11.5 Members noted that now was not the time for the University to set aside its normal quality assurance and specific NSS remediation actions, because these were critical to assuring the University and its stakeholders that the quality and standards remained high.
- 11.6 The University was looking to influence the review of the NSS where it possibly could, and to ensure that whatever replaced it was meaningful for student education. It would be important to ensure that the student voice was not lost, and the University needed to focus on process measures rather than outcomes alone, because they were often a measure of demography and background rather than of teaching excellence.
- 12. Access and Participation update**
- 12.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/008).
- 13. CONSTITUTION MODERNISATION UPDATE**
- 13.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref (SN/20-21/009).
- 13.2 Members were encouraged to raise any concerns with the Head of Governance outside of today's meeting.
- 14. SLSP UPDATE**
- 14.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: electronically in advance of the meeting: paper ref: (SN/20-21/010).
- 15. RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT**
- 15.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: electronically in advance of the meeting: paper ref: (SN/20-21/011).