



COURT 2024

Friday 13 December 2024

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM COURT MEMBERS RECEIVED BY DEADLINE OF 3 DECEMBER

Question 1

International students (33 % of the whole) contribute 58% of full-time student fees (up from 54% previous year) (see note 1 of financial statements) . Under this model, is there any good financial reason for the University to recruit a greater proportion of UK students, or is the greater financial incentive to recruit even more international students?

University response

The University of Bristol prides itself on being a global civic university (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/strategy/pillars/civic/>) that has impact locally, nationally and internationally (<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/university/strategy/mission/>). For that reason, we always ensure our student population, and recruitment targets, reflect that local, national, and global ambition. That said, it is true that the University is only able to financially break even on UK students, and needs to generate additional funds for other sources, such as overseas tuition fees, in order to subsidise its research and fund its longer-term maintenance programmes. If the University's finances were the only driver, then the risk you highlight is present – that universities could prioritise overseas student recruitment. At Bristol we ensure that the University's financial strategy stays aligned with the mission, ambition, and values of the University. We do not act on financial incentive alone.

We're pleased to see the new government putting an end to the freeze on UK tuition fees, which will stop increasing the gap between UK and international fees. “

Question 2

I note that the percentage of new entrant UK undergraduates is close to the 75% target from state schools. What are the reasons for this target not being closer to 94% , being the percentage of all schoolchildren attending state schools?

University response

We can update that our home undergraduate 2023 cohort had 72.3% state school percentage, a large increase from 2015 where the proportion of new student intake from state schools was 61%. We anticipate this state school figure to increase again in the 2024 data. We acknowledge that the target of 75% is lower than the percentage of students attending state school nationally, however this target was set with our lower starting point in mind and in the coming years we are due to review this as we surpass 75%.

We continue to prioritise state-educated students across our portfolio of outreach provision, including our local flagship programme *Access to Bristol* which supports 800 state-educated students from the local area each year. Participants on this programme are eligible for a guaranteed offer at the University. We also want to acknowledge that within the category of 'state school' there is great variation in school performance and therefore we developed our [aspiring state school list](#) to ensure we are targeting the state schools that would benefit the most from our outreach provision.

Question 3

What proportion of non-UK undergraduate entrants are from state schools?

University response

The University does not collect this data.

Question 4

What steps are the university taking to improve student intake from the white, working class population (particularly boys), that is often cited as being the demographic sub-group that is most unrepresented at higher education levels?

University response

Each of our Widening Participation Officers takes the lead on a particular area of access, with one member of the officer team focusing specifically on strategically increasing access for students from lower socio-economic groups. Our [new Access and Participation Plan \(APP\)](#) outlines our strategic ambitions from 2025-2029 in the access space, with new activity being developed such as a Y13 virtual programme targeting this cohort to complement existing strategy such as contextual offers for students in receipt of Free School Meals.

The work we do is targeted around the data we have on the most underrepresented groups at the University of Bristol, this informs our APP targets in agreement with the Office for Students.

As part of the development of our new APP, our Insight and Evaluation team analysed offer rates over the last few years for students from different applicant groups and found that while white working-class males do have a lower offer rate (49.5%) than average (57%) at the University, however the group facing the lowest offer rate consistently are applicants from Black male working-class backgrounds (41.8%). The percentages here are from the 2023/24 application data, but each year the same trends have persisted prior to this. This has contributed to the development of our access strategy moving forward, having both lower socioeconomic groups as a target focus and students from Black backgrounds in addition to this.

Question 5

Since 2008 your university has been involved in the governance of state schools with the Merchant Venturers that recently were removed by the DfE following years of failure across a number of schools and communities. Young People in south Bristol had their A Level courses cancelled with 24 hours notice by Merchants Academy and left without a KS5 pathway. Your Vice-Chancellor recently stated in the local press that the University 'was proud' if the record despite the failure being at the point of national intervention to remove these people and institutions from having anything more to do with state funded education. Why would communities, young people or their elected representatives have any confidence in the actions of people representing an institution that has shown itself incapable of understanding Bristol's communities or having an ability to reflect on its own actions which have consistently shown to be inadequate failures?

University response

As co-sponsors of the Venturers Trust, we supported the handover to E-ACT, which was announced last year. We believe being part of a much larger national multi-academy trust will provide all the schools with a positive future and help to ensure the very best outcomes for their pupils.

We were disappointed with the results of the Ofsted report for Merchant's Academy and acknowledge how difficult this has been for parents, students and staff at the school.

Despite challenges, there here have been many positive elements of our work with the Venturers Trust which we remain proud of, including the development of bespoke outreach schemes and creating guaranteed offers for pupils from the schools.

Our staff and students have supported as governors by providing professional development for teachers and working as mentors and learning support assistants.

We look forward to working with E-ACT, along with other organisations in the city, to deliver on ongoing commitments to improve educational outcomes for learners in our local communities.

Question 6

I'd like to welcome the contribution the University of making to support management of the pressures of student numbers on the city of Bristol. We have seen the benefits of the Student Community Liaison officer, and you will know there's been concern about the continuation of this service. We also see the impact of student housing on recycling and waste management, fly tipping and at the student move out time. Please can you update us on the future plans for Student Community Liaison and for supporting the extra costs on the community and local authority of waste management in areas with student housing?

University response

The Community Liaison Office works to support students with the transition from living in halls of residence to independent living, and throughout their time in the local community. It educates students about the University's behavioural expectations in the local community. It also acts as the primary point of contact for allegations of student behavioural misconduct in the community, investigating all allegations and progressing the University's disciplinary procedure where appropriate.

There is no suggestion the Community Liaison Office will be discontinued. The University recently appointed a new Community Liaison Officer who previously served as a Police Inspector for many years. The Office has also recently recruited a team of five student ambassadors to support student engagement and education activities, and we are collaborating and co-creating novel approaches to student community education and engagement in partnership with community representatives.

The University continues to fund Operation Beech – a dedicated Police service available to residents in areas with high student populations, providing a swift response to household gatherings causing disturbance.

The Community Liaison Office also continues to act as secretariat for the Bristol Student Community Partnership (BSCP) and works closely with Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement Team, Private Housing Service, private landlords and lettings agents, and Bristol Waste.

On the latter, we partner on the annual Students on the Move campaign, which has seen a significant decrease in instances of fly-tipping when students depart a property. We also collaborate on joint household engagement efforts and wider education activities.

Question 7

Does the university have a policy on the level of administrative and support staff either in relation to university income or the make-up of the university workforce? Recent Annual Reports show an increase in Administrative and support staff of 32% from 2021 to 2024, by comparison Academic staff increased by 8%. During this period income from tuition fees increased by 32%. This year's annual report shows the student staff ratio to be at the benchmark of 14 but higher than the target of 12.8.

University response

The University does not have a target ratio between academic, administrative, and technical staff, as there is no objective ratio to measure that against. Instead, the University undertakes regular cost benchmarks for its support services to ensure they provide value for money. It is using a recent benchmarking exercise to right-size its support functions.

Some of the recent increases will have been due to a number of factors, including the fact that there will have been growth post the Covid cost constraints that were imposed, the insourcing of a lot of IT work that was previously performed through more expensive consultancy resource, and the additional investment in student support (which frees up academic capacity by shifting existing work away from academic colleagues, but optically show as additional support staff.).