



MEETING OF SENATE

[DRAFT] MINUTES

Monday 17 June 2024

14.00, virtual Microsoft Teams meeting

Present:

Professors: Allen, Barbour, Barrie Birdi, Bond, Browne, Butts, Craddock, Clark, Dermott, Edwards, Ellson, Faul, Glynn, George, Hemani, Jessop, Juncos, Kelly, Linthorst, Manly, McGirr, McManus, Malik, Munafo, Mundell, Munafo, Nassehi, O'Toole, Piggins, Pamunuwa, Pantazis, Parkin, Powell, Raven, Robbins, Roberts, Rust, Sandvoss, Savery, Smart, Spear, Squires, Tahko, Tavare, Taylor, Tether, Thirlwell, Timpson, West, Welch, Whittington, Williamson, Wylie

Dr M Allison, Miss N Antoine, Mr M Banissy, Mr J Beaverstock Mr M Byakatonda, Dr R Chitchyan, Dr A Clayton, Dr T Cogan, Dr J Collins, Dr P Coonerty, Mr E Fay, Dr C Fricker, Dr F Ginn, Dr M Gillway, Dr L Goodhead, Dr D Hill, Ms T Hill, Dr J Howarth, Dr C Kent, Dr Z Leinhardt, Mrs A Lythgoe, Dr B Main, Dr S Montgomery, Ms L Parr, Dr A Papadaki, Mr A Pearce, Dr B Pohl, Dr S Proud, Dr M Werner, Dr M Wang, Dr L-F Wong

Apologies:

Professor V Hope-Hailey, Mr B Mac Ruairi, Professor A Voigt, Professor T Parkins, Professor M Werner, Professor M Allinson, Professor A Linthorst, Professor R Martin, Professor A Mullholland, Professor AE Juncos Garcia, Professor A Donnell, Professor E Clark, L Goodhead, Professor P Manzini, Professor D Pamunuwa, Ms H Quinn

In attendance: J Bigwood (Interim Chief People Officer), L Parr (Chief Operating Officer, Registrar and University Secretary), H Cole (Senior Governance Officer **and minutes**), P Vermeulen (Chief Financial Officer for the entire meeting)

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 22 APRIL 2024 (*on file*)

1.1 APPROVED

2. CHAIR'S REPORT

2.1 RECEIVED and **CONSIDERED**: paper ref: (SN/23-24/031) (*on file*).

2.2 On behalf of Senate, the Chair thanked Professor Phil Taylor's (Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise) for his contributions noting that this was his last meeting of Senate

2.3 The Chair noted that this was Professor Michele Acuto's (Pro Vice-Chancellor Global Engagement) first meeting of Senate since joining the University. Professor Acuto thanked the Vice-Chancellor and introduced himself to the members of Senate.

2.4 The Chair noted that a written question had been received and circulated with a response to the members ahead of the meeting. This would be discussed under item 5.

2.5 The Chief Operating Officer provided a verbal update on the University Open Days held on 14 and 15 June. NOTED activity from protestors had negatively impacted some staff who were delivering talks/ presentation during the open days, affected staff

were being supported. Members of Senate were asked to contact the Chief Operating Officer directly if they had concerns or questions.

- 2.6 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost provided a verbal update on current admission data and confirmation and clearing plans for the academic year 2024/25. NOTED that postgraduate taught both home and international remained the area of challenge, with the greatest risks in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences.
- 2.7 The Chief Financial Officer provide a verbal update on the University's financial outlook both in the immediate and longer term. NOTED that at present there was more uncertainty with cost mitigations required across all budget spends, the revenue mitigations outlined above for the academic year 2024/25 were more important than in previous years because overall contingency was insufficient.
- 2.8 In response to a question on definitions, it was noted that *revenue mitigations* were the activities undertaken to increase student numbers for 2024/25, *cost mitigations* were defined as costs yet to be spent with staff recruitment cited as an example.
- 2.9 A question was raised on the forthcoming, planned Wellbeing Service changes and the impact on local managers and wider staff working in this area noting the short consultation period . The Executive Director for Education and Students, Education and Student Success Management outlined the rationale behind the proposed changes, noting that adjustments had been made in the light of the consultation and that these would be shared with the affected staff very shortly. The Interim Chief People Officer noted that the principles behind the meaning of full consultation were being applied in this circumstance, the University was aware of staff concerns, contact with Trade Unions had been established, with all proper procedures being adhered to.

3. REPORT FROM THE ACADEMIC TRUSTEES ON BOARD-RELATED BUSINESS

- 3.1 Professor Ian Craddock provided a verbal update on the business undertaken by the Board of Trustees at its meeting on 24 May 2024.
- 3.2 At this meeting the Board considered the following:
- Proposed Budget 2024/25 and IPP to 2028/29
 - Deep Dive: Strategic Brand and Marketing
 - UoB Research presentation
 - Update from Bristol SU Sabbatical Officers
 - Strategic Performance Indicators progress update
 - Update on Carbon Net Zero
 - University Secretary's Report: Ordinance 11 – Alumni Association, SU Code of Practice- Elections Report
 - Annual Report on Academic Quality & Standards
 - Report from Nominations Committee, including re-appointment of the Chair of the Board of Trustees
 - Report from Finance & Infrastructure Committee
 - Report from Audit & Risk Committee
 - Report from Honorary Degrees Committee
 - Report from Pensions Task and Finish Group

4. UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST UNIVERSITY STRATEGY (EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SPIS)

- 4.1 RECEIVED and **APPROVED**: paper ref (**SN/23-24/032**) (*on file*).

- 4.2 NOTED the goal performance reports and critical path SPIs that relate to the education and student experience portfolio.
- 4.3 NOTED the critical path SPIs that relate to the Research and Enterprise portfolio.
- 4.4 The Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise expanded and commented on the data presented in the paper within their areas of responsibility.
- 4.5 In response to a question on where students seeking advice on professional development could be directed it was noted that the Bristol Skills Profile was the initiative referred to [Track your skills | Current students | University of Bristol](#). NOTED that a workshop would be run in Autumn on embedding the skills profile into curricula & assessment which would help with the question raised. Stuart Johnson (Director of Careers and Skills) was the key contact.
- 5. ASSESSMENT OF THIRD-PARTY SUITABILITY (DEFENCE INDUSTRIES)**
- 5.1 RECEIVED and **CONSIDERED**: paper ref: (SN/23-24/033) (*on file*).
- 5.2 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper noting that the University's work in these areas was subject to control both by the University's own constitution and a wider and highly regulated external national and international legal framework. NOTED that some engagement in these types of areas had been part of the University core business in the past and would continue to be a requirement going forward.
- 5.3 The Vice-Chancellor outlined an order of discussion over the forthcoming hour advising that it would start with an introduction from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost and the Pro Vice-Chancellor Science & Engineering, a summary of student views from the Postgraduate Education Officer, and the reflections of the additional guests. The discussion would then move to questions starting with a follow up question from the Senate member whose prior written question (on a proposed academic boycott) with a response had already been circulated to Senate members in advance of the meeting.
- 5.4 The Vice-Chancellor noted the four questions posed by the paper (set out in section 4) and replicated below:
1. Where there is controversy, how do we balance the core principle of Academic Freedom which allows individual academics and academic groups to undertake the research, methodologies and partnerships of their choice, with the concerns of members of our community and others who are opposed to such work?
 2. Can we take an institutional approach to partnerships either on a sector-by-sector basis, an individual company basis, or, does it need to be on a case-by-case, project-by-project basis, acknowledging the potential workload and bureaucracy?
 3. What questions would we ask our ethics committee to review if we expanded their remit?
 4. As an academic institution which does work of national and international importance, how do we balance transparency and openness with the need for commercial confidentiality and national security?
- 5.5 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost summarised the paper noting requirement to balance workload and bureaucracy where process changes were made with appropriate scrutiny, this was of particular relevance if increased due diligence was applied on a project by project basis. NOTED the new legislation and new requirements to report on partnerships, particularly on those with non-UK based companies. NOTED that there have also been long-standing requests from staff and student groups to see the

University move away from working with external organisations who have links, major and minor, to defence industries and the production of armaments.

- 5.6 The Postgraduate Education Officer noted that Bristol SU had contributed to the production of the paper and raised the following further reflections on the wider student view on this subject. 1- That the University had taken a stance on tobacco but not arms and that this apparent discrepancy should be explained to students. 2- At present the University wasn't able to demonstrate true transparency in these areas either because the information wasn't there or it could not be found (in either case, the impact was the same). 3- The next steps outline in the paper only represented early stages of more advanced changes in University processes and practices that the student body would continue to see implemented. 4- Students had queried whether/ why University staff would want to do this type of work and that this could be addressed by improved transparency of the types of projects undertaken.
- 5.7 The Pro Vice-Chancellor Science & Engineering noted that University staff chose what to work on within the legal framework provided and that UK universities must support the UK economy. NOTED that there many technologies and products that had been developed for security and defence and had then crossed over to common use. Examples cited were advanced materials (e.g., composites, alloys) and GPS location tracking technologies.
- 5.8 As an academic working in these areas, one Professor outlined his career history to date and his reasons and rationale for types and range of projects he had and continued to work on. Three project areas were cited in particular: 1 - Government funding to train staff in Ukraine power stations to manage the risks of a nuclear incident/ disaster response since the Russian invasion. This was an example of world leading research where the University of Bristol was working in the defence space but not on offensive work. 2 – Working with the research arm of the MoD on clean up of biohazard agents, noting that these types of incidents had occurred in the UK in recent years. 3 – A longer term working relationship with AWE (Atomic Weapons Establishment), supporting this Ministry of Defence research facility in the safe maintenance of the UK's nuclear weapons. It was noted that it was enshrined in UK law that these weapons were for nuclear deterrent only and not to be used for offensive purposes. It was noted that top secret activity in relation to defence only took place at certain locations and that none of the University's sites were in this category.
- 5.9 On the research that was cited in the paper, another Professor commented as follows: 1- Context in these discussion was key just because the University collaborated with a company it didn't mean it was supporting their offensive endeavours. 2- The University did not research into weapons, but it did do research into the defence of/ from weapons and cyber attacks. For example in the cyber security area, the University's work helped to support activists and journalists and protected vulnerable users. 3- Transparency and responsible disclosure once cyber protections were in place was also part of the University's work.
- 5.10 The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise noted that the starting point was that the University worked in dual-use sectors, but with great care and consideration within legal constraints, the Trusted Research framework and wider compliance protocols. Noted that in recent years the University had declined to work in certain areas due to not meeting existing guidelines even though individuals PIs might have been enthusiastic.

Questions

- 5.11 The Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) whose prior written question had already been circulated to Senate members noted that while there was some overlap between the question of an academic boycott and the topics covered by the paper, an academic boycott arguably carried a larger moral imperative and that there was unease amongst some staff and students with the University’s apparent neutrality on the situation in Gaza. The follow up query was whether Senate would agree to a rigorous and transparent survey of staff and students on academic links with Israel, including the option for no view expressed. In response the Vice-Chancellor noted that this was an element that needed to be given further consideration, at present the current debate/ discussion was mostly done through representative groups such as the Students’ Union.
- 5.12 A Senate member (Class 5 Students: Postgraduate Representative) stated that: 1- speakers in the meeting so far had shared consequences of a boycott, 2 – activism was necessary and good for general public discourse but some voices are lost, so a survey might give voice to more people and that the option “not to say anything” should be included., 3– that the University should condemn Israel but also Hamas.
- 5.13 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) commented on the above noting that her personal experience was that it was difficult to summarise the views of a small sub set of the University staff and that it had proved impossible to agree a motion to bring to Senate.
- 5.14 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) commented that 1- The Students Union (written response) was very useful. 2- there was a need to separate/ clarify/ define the term *defence industry*. 3- Recent, personal use of the University’s compliance process and protocols had indicated that they were too complex and that teams working in this area required more resources.
- 5.15 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) commented that 1-Certain activities were ethically unjustifiable and some contracts were not acceptable and this should be articulated by the University. 2- assessment of suitability should focus on impact assessment in the future i.e. downstream of the initial activity. 3- The paper demonstrated disagreements in the use of the term *impartiality*, his personal perspective was that the University should start a values based position, not from a position of impartially.
- 5.16 A Senate member (Class 2 - Heads of Academic Schools) noted that 1- The process of authorisation was initiated by the Head of School entering the bid, not by the Principal Investigator’s (PI) actions. 2- Research led engineering was an important element of the University’s work with 700 students on the aerospace programme; it was an expectation of these students that the University work with industries relevant to their degree.
- 5.17 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) commented that the University need build trustworthiness, demonstrate a willingness to disclose where possible and generate accessible processes and protocol that every reader could understand.
- 5.18 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) agreed with the point above and 2- Commented that the institutional culture varied across the institution.
- 5.19 A Senate member (Class 2 - Heads of Academic Schools) noted the following ideas. – 1 The promotion of this debate through series of difficult conversations with key note speakers, this would demonstrate and celebrate the University community’s willingness to engage. 2 – Exploration of ways for the University to develop pedagogy

in this area eg a masters or course/ element entitled *having difficult conversations* or similar.

- 5.20 A Senate member (Class 1 - Ex officio) noted that the University's Ethics system was currently under review and students would be brought into this process, with the aim of making it more open and accessible.
- 5.21 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) commented that in recent years the University had arguably taken a principled action on the climate emergency, so why not on this area?

Summary and next steps

- 5.22 The Vice-Chancellor thanked members and contributors and invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost to summarise next steps. It was noted that the Senate discussion would be summarised in a paper to the Board of Trustees. Practical next steps would include improvements to protocols and processes to make them more transparent and accessible, continuing to develop trust and reporting in these areas with a focus on transparency where possible. It was noted that decisions in these areas would be made by University Executive Board.
- 5.23 Addressing the further question raised under paragraph 5.10, the Vice-Chancellor commented that a survey would not help the University make decisions in these areas but that she understood the principles behind the question. The Vice-Chancellor advised that the next Senate meeting would include an update on this item and a discussion on how the University navigated geopolitical issues and the impact on staff and students. The aim of this item would be to pick up the essential tenet of these queries and concerns.

6. RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT

- 6.1 RECEIVED and **CONSIDERED**: paper ref: **(SN/23-24/034)** (*on file*).
- 6.2 NOTED report on activity since the last report in April 2024, in particular,
- Restructuring of Research Ethics (Annex A).
 - Open Research Policies Update (Annex B).
 - Terms of Reference for the Research Institutes Governance Board (RIGB) (Annex C)
- 6.3 The Chair of Ethics of Research Committee (Professor Matthew Brown) joined Senate to expand on the Restructuring of Research Ethics project. NOTED that the model would include moving away from individual faculty systems for higher level decision making with School retaining autonomy for more minor, routine matters, to a more co-ordinated cross institutional approach. NOTED that the underlying intention was to improve institutional understanding in this area with improved training to researchers (including student researchers). Members of Senate to contact the workshop is first session, consulted with external members, contact the Chair of Ethics of Research Committee directly for further information, comments, questions.

7. EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

- 7.1 RECEIVED and **CONSIDERED**: paper ref **(SN/23-24/035)** (*on file*).
- 7.2 **ENDORSED** the 2024 Degree Outcomes Statement and recommend it to the Board of Trustees for approval.

- 7.3 APPROVED in PRINCIPLE a new Sexual Misconduct Policy for implementation from 2024/25, with the Vice-Chancellor to approve the final version via Chair's powers once the action referred to in paragraph 7.4 below was completed.
- 7.4 A Senate member (Class 4 – Academic Staff) raised concerns on the wording of paragraphs 2.2 and 3.1.1 with reference to online only students. AGREED that the Executive Director for Education and Students, Education and Student Success Management would discuss further with the Senate member (Dr Fricker) after the meeting and make amendments.
- 7.5 APPROVED an update to the academic regulations regarding academic dress, official costume and robes.
- 7.6 APPROVED in principle a new award type of Bachelor of Dental Therapy (BDT).
- 7.7 NOTED that the following two regulatory/ procedural items would receive Senate approval via Chair's action and then be reported to Senate in October 2024. They would be considered and endorsed by Student Experience Committee (SEC) on 11 June and University Education Committee on 19 June.
- Changes to the Student Disciplinary Regulations for 2024/25
 - Changes to the Student Complaints Procedure for 2024/25

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 8.1 There was none.

MEETING CLOSED. Next meeting 7 October 2024, 2pm.