



**MEETING OF SENATE  
MINUTES  
Monday 11 October 2021  
14.00, virtual Zoom meeting**

**Present:**

Professors: Allen, Barbour, Bickers, Birdi, Blom, Bond, Brady, Butts, Cater, Clark, Clatworthy, Chapman, Dillingham, Dermott, Dudley, Faul, Foot, George, Gilchrist, Grierson, Hickman, Humphreys, Iredale, Jessop, Linthorst, Luckhurst, Malik, Manley, Marklof, Manzini, McGrirr, Munafo, Mundell, Nobes, Norman, Pancost, Parkin, Peters, Piggins, Pollman, Powell, Purdy, Raven, Ridley, Robbins, Schonle, Smart, Squires, Schwarzacher, Tahko, Taylor, Tavare, O'Toole, Tormey, Wilding, Wilson, Willis, West;

Dr M Allinson, Mr J Barrie, Mr R Burford, Dr N Carhart, Ms M Coupland, Dr N Davies, Dr V Erlandsson, Mr E Fay, Dr C Fricker, Dr S Hannuna, Dr T Hodos, Mr S Key, Mr D Klymenko, Ms Lu Macey, Dr J McManus, Dr D Morgan, Dr K Opie, Ms L Parr, Dr D Poole, Dr S Proud, Ms G Walter, Dr M Werner, Dr K Whittington, Dr J Yon, Dr L Zuccolo.

**In attendance:** Ms T Brunnock, Ms C Buchanan, Ms P Coonerty, Ms S Johnson (Clerk), R Kerse, Ms Hannah Quinn, Alicia O'Grady, Professor Caroline Relton.

**Apologies:** Dr Sarah Bain, Mr Jack Boyer, Mr Steve Chadwick, Professor Omar Madhloom, Professor Ken Oliphant, Professor Joel Ross, Professor Michelle Spear.

1. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 21 June 2021.**
  - 1.1 **CONFIRMED** and **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting of 21 June 2021.
2. **CHAIR'S REPORT INCLUDING USE OF CHAIR'S POWERS, STANDING ORDER AND SENATE FORWARD PLAN, USS VERBAL UPDATE**
  - 2.1 **RECEIVED:** Chair's Report: paper ref: **(SN/21-22/001)**.
  - 2.2 Written questions relating to the Universities Superannuation Scheme were circulated in advance of the meeting.
  - 2.3 **NOTED** the report of the Vice-Chancellor, and the use of Chair's Powers on behalf of Senate.
  - 2.4 **APPROVED** the Senate Standing Orders which had been updated to reflect changes to the Constitution made in 20/21.
  - 2.5 **NOTED** the Senate Forward Plan for 2021/22.
  - 2.6 **NOTED** that Graduations would move to September 2022 as a pilot.
  - 2.7 **NOTED** a statement from the DVC & Provost in relation to Professor David Miller and Professor Steven Greer. Full statements were available on the University website.
    - 2.7.1 In relation to Professor David Miller, after careful deliberation, a disciplinary hearing found Professor Miller did not meet the standards of behaviour expected from staff and the University had concluded that Professor Miller's employment should be terminated with immediate effect. The University regarded the principle of academic freedom as fundamental, and it was reiterated that the University took any risk to stifle that freedom seriously. The investigation included an independent report from a leading Queen's

Counsel who considered the important issue of academic freedom of expression and found that Professor Miller's comments did not constitute unlawful speech. The University could not provide an update on any further internal processes, in line with ACAS guidance. Professor Miller had a right of internal appeal and nothing in the statement made by the University should be taken to prejudge that prospective process.

2.7.2 The process of investigating a formal complaint made by the University of Bristol Islamic Society (BRISOC) against one of the University's Law academics, Professor Steven Greer, had concluded. After rigorous examination of the facts and considering the views of both parties, the complaint was not upheld. Although the complaint was not upheld, the University recognised BRISOC's concerns and the importance of airing differing views constructively. The University welcomed further discussions with the society to explain its decision and reaffirm the commitment to providing a positive and inclusive university experience for all our students.

2.8 NOTED a verbal update and presentation from the Chief Operating Officer on the University's position in relation to the Universities Superannuation Scheme. The following key issues were highlighted:

2.8.1 2020 Valuation Context

- The contribution rates of the 2018 valuation (no benefit reform) had never been fully implemented.
- Private defined benefit schemes were expensive to operate in the current regulatory economic environment, and the USS scheme was one of the largest private defined benefits schemes in the country.
- The employers in the scheme operated a collective bargaining position with Universities UK (UUK), and whilst Bristol's view was different from the consensus, the University was part of that collective bargaining position. The consensus view was to not pay more than the current contributions. If universities and staff would not pay more in contributions (including being unwilling to pay the long term contribution rate under the 2018 valuation to secure no benefit reform) then there would need to be a change to the nature of the benefits being earned going forward. UUK was recommending benefit change.

2.8.2 Actions to Date

- The University had provided strong consultation responses which were all available on the staff intranet. The University had challenged USS and colleagues across the sector and had argued against the 2020 valuation and for a 2021 valuation. Whilst the University had been prepared to pay higher contributions the way the scheme worked was that Universities in the scheme were in a collective covenant 'each standing behind the other'. The University could not afford to leave the scheme.

2.8.3 The University's Position

- The University continued to push for value for money.
- The September consultation response from the University argued for a longer deficit repayment period to put a greater proportion of future contributions to new benefits and longer consultation on benefit reform.
- The University did not think that the USS Trustees had reflected the strength of the HE Sector in the scheme in its valuation assumptions, including the costing of future defined benefits earned, and had continuously made this point.
- Concerns about potential constraints on institutional borrowing which could impact on the ability to make necessary future investment to secure the ongoing success of the university.

- The University was respectful of the UCU position and respectful of other colleagues in the Sector and UUK.
- In terms of costs employers should probably be paying a bit more but staff contributions were comparable to other schemes.

#### 2.8.4 Impact on Staff

- The risk of higher numbers of staff opting out of the scheme and the University's ability to deliver its own Pension Strategy including potential equalities impacts.
- There was a 10 – 18% reduction in new benefits earned to colleagues under the benefit reform proposals. **(Post meeting clarification: “the figures provided were based on a mid-range scenario provided by UUK. The subsequent issuance by USS of a modeller has highlighted that the range of impacts on employees is far greater for many colleagues. Individuals should check their own circumstances via the USS modeller”)**
- As part of the September consultation the University had argued that the proposed staff contribution increase was not necessary.
- USS remained a competitive scheme for attracting colleagues from overseas. Defined benefit schemes rarely exist abroad. However, in terms of Teachers and Local Government Schemes USS was becoming the poorer relation.
- USS savings in the budget would be invested back into people and research, and savings used to increase payments to UPGPP, discussion was had about potentially using these savings for studentships. DVC & Provost and Chief Operating Office, acting jointly, can invest any of the staff cost budget relating to USS that is no longer required as a consequence of the outcome of the 2020 USS valuation into people investment priorities

#### 2.8.5 USS Governance

- The USS Trustees had unilateral powers toward institutions and the University had highlighted concerns around accelerated contributions and the debt framework.
- The University had expressed concerns about USS Internal governance and suggested ways in which this could be improved. The USS Trustee was too removed from members and there needed to be stronger staff and employer voices on the Board. The University will continue to champion a review of USS governance.

#### 2.8.6 Communication and Engagement with Staff

- The University would continue to engage and inform staff through different communications channels. Consultation responses were drafted by the COO, with input from colleagues and sign off by the Pensions Task and Finish Group (Sub-Group of the Board of Trustees) Local UCU colleagues had also provided significant input to the responses.
- Despite its responses to UUK consultations, the University now supports the UUK proposal in full due to the collective nature of the employer position through the pensions negotiations and because the position of other employers means that this is likely to be the best deal available.

#### 2.8.7 DISCUSSED

- The timing of the 2020 valuation had impacted adversely; scheme assets had increased significantly since then but there was a real cut in benefits for members. The scheme did not appear to be working either for institutions or members.
- The Joint Expert Panel had made recommendations around the governance and valuation of the scheme, these have not been implemented, and these now needed urgent consideration.
- What actions the University could take going forward and how it could assert influence on the Trustee. The University's support for the 2021 valuation was appreciated as was the support that the University had provided in representing the

interests of its staff. The University needed to make sure that its position was communicated to all staff and there needed to be more finessing around this.

- The University was still attracting high calibre staff but there were concerns about the impact on younger staff and future members.
- There were constraints about what could be achieved in terms of value for money in a private regulated scheme and the impact what employers and employees were prepared to pay. The University would continue to look at benefits packages and to try and get the best value for money out of the scheme.
- A 2021 valuation was unlikely, but a future valuation would be impacted by factors such as a higher rate of gilt increases and asset growth which could give a stronger platform from which to move forward.

### **3. ANNUAL PRESENTATION FROM SU SABBATICAL OFFICERS**

3.1 NOTED that Overall SU priorities for the year would be Mental Health and Wellbeing, BAME, Representation and Inclusion, Sustainability, Review SU Democratic Structures, Fees and Funding and COVID Response.

3.1.2 NOTED the priorities for Undergraduate Education would be:

- Increase transparency of academic processes, such as personal tutoring and extenuating circumstances, to create an accessible and supportive learning environment.
- Continue to embed sustainability within our curriculum.
- Support decolonising the curriculum work and introduce more working groups in schools across the university.

3.1.3 NOTED the priorities for Postgraduate Education would be:

- Support PGRs who teach with access to opportunities and awareness of their rights.
- Redevelop the roles of Personal Tutors and Supervisors.
- Improve how Student Support services cater specifically for the needs of postgraduates

3.1.4 NOTED there was positive alignment of SU priorities with the overall University Strategy going forward.

### **5. STRATEGY REVIEW: UPDATE**

5.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/002).

5.2 The DVC & Provost introduced the paper.

5.3 NOTED the Draft Strategy 2030 and Sub-strategy documents.

5.4 NOTED key points discussed at the UMT Residential Workshop. Exec Board and Management Team review strategy. After consultation took to residential

5.5 NOTED

- A key message from the UMT Residential had been to make the Strategy more externally focussed and to position the University within the regional, national, and global context emphasising the public good and other differentiators but also being specific to Bristol. Re-affirmed global top 50 and UK top 10 ambitions which reflected the commitment to student experience whilst supporting research and innovation.

- It was a challenge to articulate the value of the University's discovery level research, whilst also focussing on the regional and national policy agenda and global challenges. Priority areas for research would be agreed and there would be an emphasis on supporting early career researchers.
- In terms of education the Strategy would articulate more clearly the importance of programmes which speak to the skills agenda and equipping students for future workplace needs.
- There needed to be a better articulation of what was meant by global civic and the University's contribution to the civic agenda and the City of Bristol. The current strategy refresh was aligned with the City Council Corporate Strategy refresh.
- As part of the enablers and cross cutting issues the following were highlighted:
  - How to address staff workload and stress.
  - A re-affirmed commitment to a 1/3 of the student community being international and diversification of that market, including the development of international research partnerships
  - Building on widening participations including more flexible programmes and a commitment to lifelong learning.
  - Sustainability and commitment to Carbon Zero.

#### 5.6 DISCUSSED

- The increase in PGR numbers was welcomed. There needed however to be adequate resourcing to acknowledge the need to gain teaching experience and the impact of increased supervision requirements. Investment in mid-career academics was also important
- The potential impact of increasing entry tariffs on widening participation and the need to be flexible within programmes rather than the top quartile tariff being a goal in itself. Research had been carried out in relation to WP impacts and entry tariffs. The use of clearing and near miss offers had much more impact on tariff than contextual offers. High tariff and a strong contextual offer would reduce near misses and clearing places.
- Tensions in resource allocation and what the University might stop doing/continue to do more of.
- The aim was for the strategy to be financially sustainable and to increase financial headroom so the University could invest in its priorities. The governance around strategy delivery was being developed including the sequencing of priorities to ensure realistic deliverability.

#### 4. COVID19 PLANNING: UPDATES FROM ACADEMIC PLANNING GROUP

##### 4.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/003).

The Registrar and University Secretary and Professor Caroline Relton introduced the presentation.

##### 4.2 NOTED the Institutional response to COVID 19, Situational Report, Testing and Vaccination update, Start of Term arrangements, Outbreak Plan and Events Guidance and in particular:

- The situation in comparison to last year and real-world data. Lower levels of transmission and cases had been reported. The modelling work of Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) showed the impact of different levels of student vaccine uptake. In a low vaccination and low testing scenario cases escalate. The likelihood of increased cases decreases with increased vaccine uptake. There was good uptake of asymptomatic testing, and it was anticipated that levels of infection would be low across the term and together with vaccine uptake a significant outbreak was not expected in TB1.

- The University was in a good position to continue activities on campus but there did need to be increased efforts in relation to mask wearing. Masks were available at the beginning of lectures and reminders given out at the beginning of lectures/seminars.
- The national free lateral flow test scheme was guaranteed until December and the University would be able to access the community scheme until March 2022.
- There had been some anecdotal concerns about positive lateral flow test results followed by negative PCR test results. This was being pursued with Public Health England.
- Teaching spaces were ventilated and on top of this there were layered individual staff risk assessments.

## **6/7 STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION UPDATE 21/22**

6/7.1 RECEIVED: presentation

6/7.2 The PVC Student Experience and the PVC Education introduced the presentation which covered the following key issues:

- Welcome week activities
- Academic transition including in person priority but retaining the best elements of blended learning
- Assessment Review and de-risking measures for January assessment
- Review of the Structure of the Academic Year (SAY) which was currently untenable and had impact on the student experience, research time and workload.
- Community building initiatives
- Student Support offer – wellbeing access 24/7

6/7.3 DISCUSSED

- The review of the structure of the academic year was welcomed.
- There would be no changes to the format of exams in January but there would in due course be clarification of the de-risking plan.

## **8. RESEARCH UPDATE**

8.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/004)

8.2 The PVC Research & Enterprise introduced the paper.

8.3 NOTED:

- It had been a great year for Enterprise & Innovation. The biggest single deal was £45m, with a number of high project deals with industry and investments in our spin outs.
- The bringing together of different aspects of support for Enterprise & Innovation together, where the dividend would be more large-scale research & innovation assets, such as BDFI, NCC and QTIC+.
- A group structure of a series of new and current UoB subsidiary businesses, some with a commercialisation focus, some with an experimental R&D / application focus (“Translational Research Entities”), under a banner and possible new brand, *Bristol Innovations*.
- The challenge remained to define an acceptable vision that brings consensus, uniting the different drivers, from academic colleagues’ desire to “do good” and deliver impact (in general as well as for REF case studies), a civic ambition, and the desire for reputation enhancement and possible new commercial income streams.

- Additional dedicated and strategic academic leadership had been introduced with the recruitment of an Associate PVC Enterprise and Innovation and an Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research Culture.
- 8.4 DISCUSSED the desirability of connexions to support the schools and assist in the bottom-up development of spinouts and other industry projects/partnerships and income streams. Bristol Innovations would be looking at models for this support and would be a more accessible 'one stop shop' both internally and externally.
- 9. EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT, INCLUDING TERMS OF REFERENCE**
- 9.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/005).
- 9.2 The PVC Education introduced the paper.
- 9.3 APPROVED the University Education Committee ToR for 2021/22.
- 10. RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT**
- 10.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/006).
- 10.2 The PVC Research & Enterprise introduced the paper.
- 10.3 NOTED the attached report following the URC meeting of 1st July 2021.
- 11. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)**
- 11.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (SN/21-22/007).
- 11.2 The PVC Education introduced the paper.
- 11.3 NOTED the context, results, analysis, and next steps
- Across the sector, NSS results were lower than last year for all question sets e.g., for Overall Satisfaction by 7% and Learning Resources by 12%. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had driven scores downwards and introduced more volatility in scores across the sector, across programmes and between different areas within programmes
  - The largest decline experienced by Bristol was in Learning Resources (15%) followed by Learning Community (8%), Student Voice (6%) and Assessment and Feedback (6%).
  - Some programmes' NSS scores had improved in response to the interventions outlined but others had declined. Some interventions required longer-term curriculum and assessment changes which took time to filter through to impact NSS. All the interventions required time, space, and an intentional approach to leading educational enhancement from within the school, department, and programme. The Curriculum Enhancement Programme had introduced a leadership training course for key influencers and participants in the programme in its second year of roll out.
  - There were uncertainties about NSS survey going forward, industrial action, etc.
  - The University was continuing with the curriculum enhancement programme, focussing on improving assessment and feedback, and the quality team was employing a more risk-based approach which complemented the approach of the regulator (Office for Students)
  - In the medium-term work was ongoing with Estates and Digital to maximise use of spaces for a blended learning environment with face to face prioritized

**12. WIDENING PARTICIPATION UPDATE**

- 12.1 RECEIVED: paper ref: (**SN/21-22/008**).
- 12.2 The DVC & Provost introduced the paper
- 12.3 NOTED the progress which has been made in relation to both internal widening participation targets and OfS Access and Participation Plan targets.
- 12.4 In recent years the University had made significant progress in the diversification of the student body. The 2021 intake was set to continue that trend except for mature students. There was good progress on other access measures including state school intake. The University was working closely with FE colleges to shift progress in relation to mature students.

### **13. ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING REPORT**

#### **a. STAFF**

#### **b. STUDENTS**

- 13.1 RECEIVED: papers ref: (**SN/21-22/009a**) and (**SN/21-22/009b**).
- 13.2 The DVC and Provost introduced the first paper.
- 13.3 DISCUSSED
- Support service wait times were challenging but it was expected to bring these down to 3 weeks
  - The impact of the blended working trial would be assessed in relation to well-being.
  - Staff initiatives had strong levels of engagement and participation.
- 13.4 The PVC Student Experience introduced the second paper in relation to student mental health and wellbeing.
- 13.5 NOTED
- There was an annual mental health survey and whilst mental health concerns were slightly higher than in previous years this was in line with the picture nationally and was in the context of the COVID pandemic.
  - Financial anxieties had not increased, and the gap had been closed slightly in relation to students from BME and WP backgrounds and work was ongoing with those students to make further improvements.
  - There was a huge demand for student support services and additional resource had been provided to support students from different backgrounds.
  - In terms of harm reduction and alcohol support work the University had been recognized nationally as a leader in this field.
  - Sense of belonging had decreased in the last year and the University was working to address this through an action plan co-created with students.
- 13.6 DISCUSSED
- The cornerstones of the strategy did not give adequate acknowledgment to the weight students placed on academic's roles in relation to health and well-being and this should be highlighted more in the strategy.

### **14. ACADEMIC CAREER DEVELOPMENT/PROGRESSION**

- 14.1 RECEIVED: papers ref: (**SN/21-22/010**).
- 14.2 The DVC & Provost introduced the paper.



14.3 NOTED the feedback and planned changes coming from last year's Promotion round using the Academic Promotions Framework (APF) and plans for including the APF in movement between the Grade M Ranges.

14.4 DISCUSSED the plans for implementing the changes to Progression, which included the APF and in particular:

- The first year of implementation had been very positive
- In terms of gender parity and full/part time impact on promotions this was carefully monitored and outcomes showed an equal percentage of male and female candidates being promoted, and a higher proportion for those making equality statements.
- Faculties would be permitted in future rounds to add to the core criteria and P3 cases will no longer need to be considered by UPC as standard.
- Work was ongoing to ensure greater transparency in movement between professorial ranges, including using refined criteria to show what distinguished a range 2 or 3 performance.
- Disparity in successful cases in certain pathways and ways in which this could be addressed e.g., opportunities for external recognition. PW3 individuals and their managers need to be able to clearly recognize what constitutes a 'good case' and enable people to plan for promotions by taking appropriate opportunities and being able to convey these in applications.

## **15. PROGRESS FOR APPOINTMENT OF VC AND PRESIDENT**

15.1 RECEIVED: papers ref: (SN/21-22/011).

15.2 The Registrar and University Secretary introduced the paper.

15.3 NOTED the Process for Appointment of VC and President and the role of Senate in that process.