MEETING OF SENATE
MINUTES
Monday, 11 December 2017

1400, 4.10 Helen Wodehouse Building, Berkeley Square

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair), Professors Banting, Barnes, Basker, Benton, Birdi, Bond, Canagarajah, Cini, Cousins, Dermott, Dymock, Elliott, Gallagher, George, Heslop, Hutton, Jordan, Ladyman, Linthorst, Macfarlane, Marklof, Mellor, Nix, Nobes, Norman, Orpen, Orr-Ewing, Payne, Potter, Purdy, Robinson, Sandy, Squires, Szczelkun, Walter, Wilson; Dr J Agarwal, Mr M Ammar, Mr S Bullock, Dr D Damen, Dr N Farwell, Dr A Fraser, Ms C Fraser, Ms R Geller, Mrs M Gillway, Dr H Heath, Dr A James, Mr P Kyriazis, Dr E Lithander, Dr E Love, Mr J Mcalinden, Dr S McGuiness, Mr J Mudie, Dr R Oulton, Dr S Proud, Ms L Robinson, Dr JR Rose, Mr S Singh, Dr N Timpson, Dr A Williams, Dr K Whittington, Ms E Wright.

In attendance: Ms L Barling (Clerk), Mr M Ames, Ms C Baylon, Mr S Bray, Ms C Buchanan, Dr S Collet, Mr Philip Kent, Ms A O’Grady

1. Minutes of the previous meeting 16 October 2017
1.1 APPROVED: the minutes of the meeting of 16 October 2017

2. Chair’s Report
2.1 RECEIVED and NOTED (SN/17-18/016).

2.2 The Chair welcomed Mr Philip Kent to his first meeting of Senate. He was the newly appointed Director of Library Services. Mr Kent briefly informed Senate of the names of the successful architects for the new library project.

Sector update
2.3 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) provided Senate with an oral update in respect of the current political situation regarding Brexit.

2.4 The UK Government and EU negotiators had recently published a joint report on progress during phase one of negotiations regarding the UK’s exit from the European Union. The report provided welcome progress on some important issues for universities:
- securing the residency rights of other EU citizens living in the UK
- the UK’s continuation in existing EU programmes that form part of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, including Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, and the European Investment Bank.

2.5 EU nationals living in the UK would be able to apply for ‘settled status’ when the applications portal opens, likely towards the end of 2018. That portal would remain open for at least two years. Two further positive developments included:
- Those with permanent residence (PR) will be able to ‘convert’ their PR to a new settled status free of charge subject only to verification of identity, a criminality and security check and proof of ongoing residence;
- Those with settled status would be able to leave the UK for up to 5 years without losing their status, a shift from the two years indicated previously.
2.6 Members of Senate were encouraged to feed back any particular concerns from their colleagues about UK citizen rights to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International).

Other updates

2.7 The Deputy Registrar (Academic Services) provided an oral update on the University Residences Review, highlighting the following in particular:

- The Residences Review should not be taken as a reflection of the excellent work that the current wardens were doing across the University, nor was it a cost-cutting exercise. The Review had been prompted by input from the student body and the University was taking a ‘whole institution’ approach to it. Students had highlighted a need for additional support, and also to ensure that rents continued to represent value for money.
- That is, this was one aspect of a range of initiatives being put in place for students to support their experience at the University. Other initiatives included additional investment in counselling services and the strengthening of the University’s partnerships with Public Health England, the NHS and Samaritans.
- The University had to be mindful of changing student expectations, particularly in view of the increasing size and diversity of the student body. It was also clear that student mental health and wellbeing represented a far greater challenge, across the HE sector and beyond, than ever before.
- As such, the University must provide its students with enhanced professional 24/7 support whilst also ensuring value for money and consistency across the different residences.
- A proposal for a new model of support in student residences would first be shared with staff working in the residences, and until that time, it could and would not be shared with the wider University.

2.8 The Annual Meeting of Court had taken place on Friday 8 December 2017 and considered two important proposals, put forward by the Board of Trustees:

- The first had been to reframe the constitutional body of ‘Convocation’ as an Alumni Association (including a modification of its powers, in order to better support the development of the Alumni Association and better engage the alumni community). Court had consented to the proposals, and they would now be taken forward by the Board of Trustees.
- Secondly, a proposal had been submitted to reimagine Court as a forum for meaningful dialogue and engagement with the University’s key stakeholders – with a reduction in its formal powers (except for the appointment and re-appointment of the Chancellor and Pro Chancellors to the University) and a size of no more than 60 members. Court had declined to consent to the proposals to reimagine Court as presented, but had signalled a definite appetite for change. The University would continue to work with members of Court to make Court more appropriate to a modern university.

3. Vice-Chancellor’s question time

3.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: a tabled University position statement on the 2017 USS valuation (tabled, SN/17-18/024 (on file)).

3.2 Members of Senate raised questions relating to the position taken by the University in relation to the 2017 USS valuation. In discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The University did not believe that a defined benefit scheme without Government backing remained affordable to universities. Current levels of employer contribution at 18% reflected a very competitive level of employer funding: the national average was 16.2% for defined benefit schemes and 4% for defined contribution schemes. The University therefore considered that the overall interests of the institution, for existing
and future students and staff, were best served by maintaining contribution levels at around 18%.

- The University had considered the impact of its pensions provision on staff recruitment and retention. However, on balance it considered that to continue with the scheme in its current form was likely to have a greater detrimental impact on the institution.
- The USS has to operate within the constraints of what was acceptable to the Pensions Regulator and affordable to the sector. The University did not USS want to reach a position where the Pension Regulator was unsatisfied and imposed its position upon the Scheme. It was the University’s understanding that flexibility had already been afforded by all sides through early dialogue and deadline extensions and the University urged all sides to find a solution this month that can be shared with staff for their views in the New Year.
- It would be helpful to include an additional FAQ in the position statement to outline the reasons why the pensions deficit was calculated as it had been, and a rebuttal to those who claim that the situation was not as serious as it might appear.

3.3 Members of Senate were invited to suggest further FAQs that would be of value to the academic community, should they have them, to the University’s Finance Director outside of the meeting.

3.4 Members of Senate also raised questions about the University Residences Review, and in particular voiced concerns about the way in which it was being conducted. In response, the following was highlighted:
- The consultation in relation to student support in the residences was different from the recent review of student support in Schools. As this review was an employment-related process, a formal HR consultation format had to be followed, and the University could not consult as broadly as it had on student support in Schools.
- Whilst the timing of the review has changed slightly, the way in which the consultation was being delivered had not changed from that previously outlined to Senate.
- The principles of what the University was trying to deliver had already been communicated, but the Deputy Registrar undertook to share this again with Senate, the Board of Trustees, the Senior Tutors Network, and other key colleagues.
- The University had undertaken comprehensive benchmarking across the sector, and the driving force behind developing the new models had been feedback from staff and students.

4. Written questions
4.1 None had been received. Members of Senate were reminded that they are able to submit written questions in advance of each meeting, for discussion.

5. Faculty Board recommendations
5.1 None had been received.

6. Research Strategy Delivery Plan*
6.1 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) on the delivery plan for the University Research Strategy 2017-2023 (on file).

6.2 Members of Senate thanked the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) for an excellent presentation and made the following comments:
- Some faculties had been considering the provision of workload credits for impact, together with increased administrative support for academic staff who oversaw Impact Case Studies, and the extent of the administrative provision for such activity should continue to be monitored.
• The newly created Impact Manager posts would play an important role in working with academic staff across the Faculties and Schools to support academics in collecting the evidence for their impact case studies. The University should continue to monitor this provision regularly to ensure it meets the demand.

7. **International Strategy Delivery Plan**

7.1 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International and Student Recruitment) and the International Director on the delivery plan for internationalisation (on file).

7.2. Members of Senate congratulated the International Director on an interesting and helpful presentation on the key priorities for delivering the University’s long-term international objectives. Members commented that the review of the International Office website to reflect the broad spectrum of work now in train was very much welcomed.

8. **UK Student Recruitment strategy**

8.1 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) and the Head of UK Student Recruitment on the University’s UK student attraction strategy (on file).

8.2 Senate noted the ‘call to action’ for academic colleagues to support the Student Recruitment team by engaging with recruitment events, helping them to identify the very best speakers, and in the provision of general support in the communication of consistent messages both internally and externally.

8.3 Members of Senate provided the following comments:

- It was essential to ensure a consistent message around Bristol Futures at University Open Days and Post Offer Visit days.
- A University travel bursary fund was available to cover the travel costs of students wishing to attend an **undergraduate interview, departmental open day** or a **post-offer visit day** (see: [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/fees-funding/awards/travel-bursary/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/fees-funding/awards/travel-bursary/)), and this was being under-utilised. The Student Recruitment team were keen to promote this as much as possible.
- A paper on unconditional offers was due to be considered by the Education Committee – it had been prepared as a ‘starter for ten’, reflecting on practice at other institutions and proposing a potential way forward for Bristol.
- Whilst there was a slight risk to the University’s reputation in seeking to diversify the student body, unless the University attempted to attract individuals from different parts of the country and BME backgrounds then it would never move forward. The University would need to build a critical mass of students from non-traditional (for it) backgrounds, in order for it to become second nature for such students to want to apply to Bristol. It would also be essential to ensure that when students do come to Bristol, they were very well supported and integrated.
- The heat map presented was helpful - it would be useful to have a similar heat map analysis at subject level.

8.4 Members of Senate were thanked for their continued support for, and collaborative working with, the UK student recruitment team.

9. **Developing an institutional strategic framework for mental health and wellbeing**

9.1 RECEIVED: a presentation from the Director of Student Services on developing an institutional strategic framework for mental health and wellbeing (on file). This was informed by the outcomes of the UUK report, and aimed to build upon the current student support plan.
9.2 Members of Senate provided the following comments:

- The opportunity to comment on plans at the early stage of their development was very much welcomed.
- Clarification of the University’s duty of care to its students would be welcomed, particularly as it can be difficult in the residences to help teams to understand the parameters of their responsibilities. It would be helpful to have some key principles that all staff can work to, against which professional judgements can be made.
- It would be important to have a clearer framework around how to manage student expectations of the institution pre-arrival, and to help staff understand which expectations were reasonable.
- It was not the role of academic staff to manage student health and wellbeing, and indeed a key driver behind the Student Wellbeing Service was to free up academic staff time to focus on academic matters, whilst also ensuring that staff were consciously mindful of the mental health and wellbeing of their students.

9.3 Senate would receive information on the plans for improving staff mental health and wellbeing at a future meeting.

10. Review of Academic Staff Promotion & Progression*

10.1 RECEIVED: (SN/17-18/017).

10.2 Members of Senate provided the following comments and observations:

- Certain members felt that the consultation conducted had not been sufficiently broad. Whilst it was acknowledged that each of the working groups had taken soundings from across the institution, including from Heads of School, Faculty Boards, Research Staff Working Party, Teaching Staff Working Party, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board, Academic staff (on each of Pathways 1, 2 and 3) and the Trade Unions, there was a sense that more junior staff had not been engaged with as deeply.
- Concerns were expressed as to the extent to which the title ‘Reader’ was understood and whether Associate Professor was understood to be of equivalent status. Recommendation 5.1 (that the title ‘Reader’ is replaced by ‘Associate Professor’ on all Pathways) should therefore be considered further. External recognition of any title bestowed by the University was acknowledged to be important.
- A focus on a structural approach to sustainable impact on reduction of the gender pay gap at Professorial level was very much welcomed. However, for some members the paper highlighted a need to ensure that the Pathway criteria were sufficiently robust. An equality impact assessment would be welcomed in that regard.

10.3 Senate ENDORSED the establishment of a small task and finish group to explore the issues identified in the accompanying paper as being for further consideration. Senate also REQUESTED that Recommendation 5.1 (as set out in the accompanying paper) receive further consideration.

10.4 Senate ENDORSED (with one recorded objection) all of the recommendations identified in the accompanying paper as being for immediate implementation in the paper, with the exception of Recommendation 5.1.

11. Bristol Futures Open Courses*

11.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: a presentation from the Bristol Futures Academic Workstream Lead on Bristol Futures (on file).

12. Annual Report of the Honorary Degrees Committee

12.1 RECEIVED and APPROVED: (SN/17-18/018).
12.2 Senate RECOMMENDED the award of honorary degrees to the Board of Trustees.

13. The Education Committee Report
13.1 RECEIVED: (SN/17-18/019).

13.2 APPROVED: a new programme – MSc Mathematics of Cybersecurity. This programme is offered by the Faculty of Science, but would include 30 credit points of optional Computer Science (Engineering) units. This was the first of a suite of new programmes about cybersecurity.

13.3 NOTED: the rest of the report.

14. The Research Committee report
14.1 RECEIVED: (SN/17-18/020).

14.2 APPROVED: the changes to the Committee's terms of reference and membership document.

14.3 NOTED: the rest of the report.

15. Report of the IT Committee
15.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: (SN/17-18/021) (on website).

16. Annual Report of the Ethics of Research Committee
16.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: (SN/17-18/022) (on website).

17. Report of the Board of Trustees
17.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: (SN/17-18/023) (on website).

18. Future agenda items
18.1 Members noted that any future agenda items should be sent to the Clerk by emailing governance@bristol.ac.uk

19. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
19.1 Members of Senate had discussed relevant issues of equality and diversity in the meeting specifically in relation to USS pensions 2017 valuation, student support in residences, the review of academic staff promotion and progression, and development for an institutional framework for mental health & wellbeing. On reflection, members of Senate considered that matters submitted to it for consideration had taken due account of equality and diversity.

20. Communication and Consultation
20.1 Members of Senate discussed relevant issues of communication and consultation during the meeting, particularly with reference to the review of academic staff promotion and progression, the UK student attraction strategy, the development of an institutional framework for mental health & wellbeing, Bristol Futures Open Courses, and the delivery plans for both research and internationalisation. Members considered that matters submitted to it for consideration had taken due account of communication and consultation.

20.2 Senate members were encouraged to disseminate information from the Meeting to academic colleagues, except where items were marked as confidential or strictly confidential.

21. Quality Assurance
21.1 Members of Senate discussed issues of Quality Assurance during the meeting, particularly with reference to items within the Education Committee Report, the Review of Academic staff promotion and progression, the UK Student attraction strategy, and Bristol Futures open courses.

22. Date of next meeting
22.1 The date of the next meeting of Senate would be Monday 26 February 2018, 1400, in the Reception Room, Wills Memorial Building.