



**COURT 2023**  
Friday 1 December 2023

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM COURT MEMBERS RECEIVED BY DEADLINE OF  
21 NOVEMBER**

*The following questions have similar themes so have combined responses.*

**Question 1**

What is the university doing to take responsibility for the renting crisis in Bristol, and how are they helping their students through this?

**Question 2**

University expansion in both home and international students has put further strain on Bristol's housing crisis. What actions will the university take to support both accommodation of its own staff and students as well as supporting a fair and sustainable housing sector in Bristol?

**University's response**

We are very conscious of the importance of a sustainable relationship between the city and the University and have worked actively with Bristol City Council to identify beneficial locations for new purpose-built student accommodation and to bring those schemes forward. The current funding mechanisms for higher education make it extremely challenging for any University to stand still without going backward. Our research activity has grown in line with the expansion of the educational opportunities we provide. We are the second largest employer in the City of Bristol and want to be able to preserve jobs in the current environment. The academic success of the University is key to attracting and retaining many employers in the city region.

We have been working hard with the City Council to implement a plan of new purpose-built student housing to increase supply in parts of the city where student housing investment is beneficial to the local community to relieve pressure on other parts of the housing market. For example, we have new developments planned with partners in the Temple Quarter and Central Bedminster. Student housing can form an important anchor in key regeneration areas. We are investing in accommodation across the City, and with the opening of the Dental School, and Temple Quarter coming online, the University will be based across the City and transport links will be key to our staff. We are working closely with the City Council on this issue. Launch Pad was an important development to enable us to learn about how to best integrate student housing with other housing needs in the city. We are looking at opportunities to develop this approach further, including inter-generational housing and would very much welcome approaches from organisations who would be keen to partner with us. Bristol is increasingly popular to all sorts of people, and new solutions are needed which may require us to do things differently or think more creatively.

The University is also a member of the Bristol One City Homes and Communities Board, <https://www.bristolonecity.com/homes-and-communities/> and the One City Plan commissioned the Bristol Living Rent.

We are acutely aware of the financial challenges facing our students. Last year we ensured our funded PGRs received the same increase as the UKRI stipends and made one off cost of living payments to the majority of our PGR population who did not receive a stipend

increase. We are also supplementing our hardship funds and dramatically improved the turnaround time for applications to ensure a swift response to students. The university continues to support several measures across all student groups. · While we cannot repeat the bulk payment each year, we have some funding allocated for PGR support this year which will be spent based on the results of two recent projects considering PGR cost of living (SU Survey and Enhancing Research Culture funded project). Once we have these, we will be working with colleagues and SU Officers to agree a way forward. · More broadly, we have agreed a priority area with the SU Officers this year to focus on what we can provide to support students in relation to Cost of Living. We have continued to make funds available for cheap food options at Senate House and the Balloon bar. Community cafes will also be running at Hiatt Baker café and at Langford. We are also introducing a hot food offer at the Hawthorne's study space. · We have also committed to work together to review and increase the availability of warm spaces and study spaces across Campus, based on data and insight from student usage and demand.

### **Question 3**

University undergraduate experience is more than just formal learning - what efforts are made to ensure students accommodated in Newport have a high standard of student experience?

### **University's response**

This year, the University offered a small number of beds in Newport Student Village, a purpose built student accommodation in Newport. This was not about our ability to meet the Accommodation Guarantee, which we were able to meet comfortably without these additional beds, but about offering another budget option for students. Students were only allocated to Newport Student Village where they had explicitly expressed an interest.

Students living in Newport can take advantage of a free bus service and a travel bursary to ensure that they are able to participate in the full student experience in Bristol. In addition, there are a range of social spaces and activities available in Newport Student Village itself. Students also have access to the usual range of support services, including 24/7 wellbeing support and community building activities from Residential Life.

### **Question 4**

What actions are the University of Bristol taking to ensure the wellbeing of staff and of students? What monitoring of both outcome and impact of the actions has taken place to review effectiveness of measures?

### **University's response**

The University has published student- and staff-focused strategies setting out how we promote positive mental health and wellbeing across our community. These are overseen by a senior-level Mental Health & Wellbeing Steering Group with regular reporting to the Board of Trustees. The university received the Student Minds Mental Health Charter award in December 2022, one of only seven universities to successfully achieve the award so far. The award recognises the university's commitment to a whole institution approach and investment in support and services.

### **Students**

We have invested significantly in services for students over recent years, with the creation of the Student Wellbeing Service and Residential Life, alongside the Student Health Service and Student Counselling Service which offer a variety of therapeutic support. Over the last year we have:

- Created the new Education & Student Success division which will support our whole institutional approach by bringing together leadership for education, student experience and outcomes.
- Introduced a more consistent approach to risk management across services.
- Made changes to Residential Life and Student Wellbeing to increase capacity and introduce a dedicated Inclusive Communities team to support proactive community building activities.
- Continued to build effective partnerships with other local services, including beginning to implement an externally-funded NHS-led service to support students at Bristol and UWE.
- Improved guidance and information for staff supporting students across the university.
- Made improvements to data and reporting which will better enable us to target support and monitor the performance of services.

#### Support for staff mental health and wellbeing:

Training for staff on wellbeing issues continues to be requested by our Leaders and Managers and demonstrates that our Leaders recognise and want to embrace the role they play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their staff. Workplace Adjustment plans have been introduced and complement the Wellness Action Plans introduced in 2019. Both are designed to help individuals take a proactive approach to supporting their own mental health and wellbeing at work and to initiate discussions with line managers.

Our Staff Counselling and Occupational Health teams continue to deliver high class services against a backdrop of ever growing demand and complexity of health issues post COVID. Support for our Senior Tutors has been provided throughout the year by the Staff Counselling team to help them process and cope with distressing student circumstances. New training materials are available to the wider Tutor Network to ensure all academic staff are equipped to fulfil this important role without detriment to their own wellbeing

We now have nearly 50 Staff Mental Health Champions across the University who promote health and wellbeing initiatives on a local level.

Our Staff Wellbeing Festival took place from the 6th to 8th November. It comprised of a number of in-person and virtual events which reflected the staff feedback from previous wellbeing initiatives. Events were open to all staff and took place across multiple sites and included workshops, taster sessions, free massages, health screening and much much more. In fact, due to demand further events and sessions were added to the schedule.

Over the last few years, as a good employer, the University has reimbursed staff who were ineligible for a free flu vaccination. This year we have made it easier and more accessible by making flu vouchers available to all staff. By using an activation code staff could request a flu voucher through an external supplier and redeem the voucher via a number of local pharmacies. The University initially purchased 500 vouchers. There was an overwhelming response and these went in a matter of days. A further 1000 have been purchased. We have also made great efforts in ensuring that operational staff who would normally not have access to a University PC have been made aware of the offer and the process to follow.

#### Question 5

Please note that I have carried a small survey among students (circa 10) regarding Enterprise and Innovation and the following questions are based on the feedback I received:

- Where can students find more information regarding University's Enterprise and Innovation strategy and activities?
- Is it possible to make the University's Enterprise and Innovation strategy and activities accessible both through a dedicated page and email communication?

- What can the University do to help students achieve their full potential in terms of extra-curricular matters and how can students make use of the available resources offered by the University?
- Would the University consider investing in a Food enterprise or related initiatives to make it more affordable to students struggling to eat due to the high cost of living?
- Does or would the University collaborate with local start-ups that offer training and internship opportunities to students?

(It appears through the survey that students are unaware of the University's Enterprise and Innovation strategy and activities and they would like to be more informed as well as be able to be involved in extra-curricular and internship opportunities.)

**University's response**

This area is the subject of a 90 minute session at the meeting of Court on 1 December. These questions have been shared in advance with the Keynote Speakers.