



**MEETING OF SENATE
MINUTES
Monday 19 April 2021
14.00, virtual Zoom meeting**

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (**Chair**) – Professor Brady, Bickers, Birdi, Blom, Bond, Carrington, Cater, Cini, Clatworthy, Faul, Flecker, George, Gilchrist, Grierson, Hickman, Iredale, Jessop, Jordan, Lithander, Linthorst, Luckhurst, Marklof, Neild, Nobes, Norman, Oliphant, Pancost, Pantazis, Parkin, Payne, Powell, Pleydell-Pearce, Purdy, Raven, Relton, Ridley, Robbins, Schonle, Smart, B Smith, F Smith, Spear, Squires, Schwarzacher, Szczelkun, Tavare, Taylor, Timpson, Tonks, Tormey, Wilding, Wilson, Wilson;

Dr J Agarwal, Prof M Allen, Dr M Allinson, Dr K Austin, Dr M Barbour, Mr E Bempong-Manful, Mr S Brooke, Ms T Brunnock, Dr N Dahnoun, Dr L Dickinson, Dr M Dudley, Mr E Fay, Dr S Fitzjohn, Dr A Flack, Mr D Freda, Mrs M Gillway, Dr S Hannuna, Dr J Howarth, Dr AJ Howkins, Mr D Ion, Mr D Jones, Ms F Ingram, Dr C Kelly, Dr P Langton, Dr I Lazar, Dr E Love, Mr John Ms I Marshall, Ms L Martindale Mr T Metcalfe, Dr D Morgan, Dr R Murray, Ms A Noble-Denny, Mr L O'Shea, Dr K Opie, Mrs L Parr, Dr D Poole, Ms Rebecca Pullin, Dr S Proud, Mr R Rossi, Mr S Sreekanth, Dr L Walling, Dr K Whittington.

In attendance: Ms L Barling (Clerk), Ms J Bridgwater (for item 7), Ms T Brunnock, Ms C Buchanan, Ms P Coonerty, Mr Robert Kerse (for item 2), Ms Hannah Quinn.

Apologies: Dr Sarah Bain, Prof Tim Peters, Dr Therese O'Toole, Dr Sean Fox, Prof Esther Dermott

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 8 FEBRUARY 2021.

1.1 **CONFIRMED** and **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting of 8 February 2021.

2. CHAIR'S REPORT

2.1 **RECEIVED** and **NOTED:** Chair's Report: paper ref: (**SN/20-21/027**).

2.2 There were no written questions for the meeting.

2.3 The following was **NOTED**:

2.3.1 Condolences and offers of support were given to the University of Cape Town who had recently suffered a serious fire on their campus.

2.3.2 Disappointment was expressed about the recent Covid-related Government announcement and the impact on Universities. The last-minute nature of the guidance and the delay in bringing back students on to campus was felt to be fundamentally flawed particularly when Universities had worked incredibly hard to prove that they can deliver in person, face to face, teaching in a COVID secure way. The decision was detrimental to students' mental health as well as to their education.

2.3.3 There remained a backdrop of sectoral uncertainty around fee rebates, the rumour of the possible implementation of recommendations from the 'Augar' review in the next Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn, and funding uncertainties around Horizon Europe, what the Industrial Strategy might be replaced with and the future role of ARIA.

- 2.3.4 The University had received planning approval from the City Council for the new University Library on 17th March 2021, following extensive consultation. The new library would play an important civic and educational role for the University. A paper outlining next steps including a delivery timeline will be discussed at UEB in May, followed by the Board of Trustees at its meeting in July. The programme board associated with the project would also be re-established to oversee the process.
- 2.3.5 Colleagues were thanked for their recent contributions to the Integrated Planning Process (IPP) which, given the challenging year, had been difficult to undertake. The approach taken to budgeting had been a cautious one as there remained several uncertainties around the impact of the pandemic. The University had allocated a £34m contingency in the budget which it was advised was appropriate to ensure that it could withstand any future challenges in the next period. The final budget also allowed the University to teach the student numbers that had been previously agreed, to appoint staff required to support that, and to generate appropriate academic staff contributions. The Board of Trustees would be invited to approve the Budget at its next meeting. In the autumn, the budget would be further reviewed, acting as a 'checkpoint' to identify whether any of the contingency money could be further released.
- 2.3.6 With regards to TQEC, the University was taking its time to ensure that the first significant phase of development was something that would help to maximise the institution's future research and educational potential and offering, including collaboration with enterprise and community in order to enhance knowledge exchange and to provide a substantial premise for the proposed new business school. Given the challenging external environment, it was important for the University ensure the best possible value money at the lowest possible risk profile. A final decision on the build phase of the programme would therefore be delayed until early 2022. In the interim period, the University would bring forward some other elements of the programme such as the micro campus at Barton Hill and the reinstatement of two large industrial sheds into exciting new facilities for the Bristol Digital Futures Institute.
- 2.3.7 Members were reminded of the two scheduled 45-minute USS staff consultation sessions this week, which were important for staff to attend as the ultimate decision would impact on the price of pensions going forward, on maintaining the existing benefit structure and also on how much Universities would have to fund of any suggested shortfall in the scheme. We need your input to respond on our institutions behalf to make sure we put forward what staff want through that consultation exercise.

3. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S Q&A

- 3.1 Members noted that the comments previously captured as a result of the last Strategy discussion were being held centrally and would be used to draft the Strategy White Paper. Any Senator wishing to view the comments should contact the Clerk to Senate.
- 3.2 Members noted that the University was closely monitoring, as part of UEB's regular risk review, those situations which were arising in other institutions where academic colleagues had found themselves being targeted by overseas governments e.g. China. There had been no instances at this University, to date.

4. CAMPUS SAFETY: LATEST GUIDANCE AND PLANNING UPDATE

- 4.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: a PowerPoint presentation from the Registrar and University Secretary, and Professor Caroline Relton, member of the University's Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) (*presentation on file*)).

5. EDUCATION PLANNING 2021/22: PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS

- 5.1 RECEIVED and **ENDORSED**: a paper sponsored by the PVC Education; ref: (**SN/20-21/028**) and a PowerPoint presentation (*presentation on file*)).

- 5.2 Senate discussed the key principles and proposals as outlined in the paper and in the presentation, and the following comments were made:
- 5.2.1 It was emphasised that the combination of structured learning hours and taught hours should not normally fall below nine hours per week on a programme, recognising that there were different patterns of teaching across UG levels, and on PGT programmes. The same applied for online assessment i.e. Schools/Faculties had some flexibility around setting timelines for open book assessment.
- 5.2.2 Communication with students in the coming period was important and needed to be coordinated well and in a nuanced way.
- 5.2.3 With regards to assessment methods for next year, this was currently being consulted on with students and staff, alongside an analysis of the results of previous surveys and the outcome would be communicated in due course.

5.3 Senate **ENDORSED** the approach to education planning for academic year 2021/22.

6. RESEARCH FUNDING UPDATE

6.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: a paper sponsored by the PVC Research and the Provost, paper ref: (SN/20-21/029).

6.2 The following comments were made:

- 6.2.1 Due to the shift in the way the UK Government was funding research, it was important that the University used its disciplinary strengths to put it in a better position to react quickly and nimbly to changing concerns. At the same time, it was important to also strike a balance between those core disciplinary research strengths and focussing on key thematic research areas which were well aligned with the University Strategy and which supported the Government's plans for the economic development of the country post-pandemic.
- 6.2.2 It was important for the key research focus areas to be quite broad and interdisciplinary to allow for academics to contribute in as many cases as possible, whilst also keeping an eye out for emerging new areas. The University should ensure that academic staff continued to feel that they were part of the Bristol community.
- 6.2.3 The key was for the University of Bristol to retain its already evidenced reputation that it was able to tackle diverse problems quickly and effectively, that it could be trusted with money and that it was full of efficient, creative and rigorous scientists who were innovative and worked collaboratively in new teams as and when needed.
- 6.2.4 The University's Enterprise strategy was currently under development and members noted that as part and parcel of this, there would be a closer working relationship with Catapults as well as the setting up of translational research vehicles which could operate in the space between Universities and businesses. Further, a 'starter for ten' discussion was due to be had at UEB on 17 May and the Board of Trustees on 27 May around the creation of a focussed and business-driven commercialisation and support service. Senate would discuss this in more detail at its meeting in June, after which final approval will be sought by the Board of Trustees in September.
- 6.2.5 It would be important for the University to continue to stress to UKRI that the creation of the new ARIA and the trend to becoming more agile was problematic from an EDI perspective and any solution that the University adopted should recognise this.
- 6.2.6 Members recognised that some direction of limited core University budget to critical strategic areas could make a real difference and crucially, if FRDs and URIs worked closely together then this investment (Fellows, PGRs) could support both core disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas in a synergistic way.
- 6.3 Members noted that all of these issues would be further discussed during the Strategy White paper discussion in June.

- 7. ACADEMIC FREE SPEECH AND NEW APPROACH TO COMPLAINTS PROPOSAL**
- 7.1 RECEIVED: a paper sponsored by the Provost and the PVC Student Experience; paper ref: (SN/20-21/030).
- 7.2 Senate noted that on 16 February 2021, the government issued a new policy paper entitled *Higher education: free speech and academic freedom*. As part of our ongoing commitment to promoting free speech, whilst recognising the limits of free speech and academic freedom, the University had prepared some preliminary proposals in order to resolve student complaints which related to freedom of speech and/or academic freedom. The proposals had been drafted following initial consultations with UCU, Bristol SU, Sabbatical Officers of Bristol SU, with Chairs of the Multifaith Network, and the BAME Student Network. The proposals were considered by the Board of Trustees' EDI Oversight Committee on 30 March, which welcomed the consultation that had taken place to date and considered the concerns raised with respect to the current processes. The EDI Committee was in principle supportive of the proposed new process, though it was agreed that it would be better not to include a Sabbatical Officer on panels.
- 7.3 Senate **NOTED** the key proposals to strengthen freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education in England as highlighted in the paper and reflected on current University policies and practices on free speech and the complaints procedure.
- 7.4 Senate noted that the legal and constitutional framework that sat behind issues relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom was complex and was intertwined with the obligations owed by the University to both staff and students. Members were encouraged to put their names forward if they were interested in joining a newly established informal Academic Advisory Group, chaired by the Provost. It was anticipated that the new Group would help to provide consistency of advice and guidance that could be included in the training of panel members and assessors and disseminated more widely across the wider university.
- 7.5 Senate broadly supported the approach to student complaints outlined in the paper, emphasising that this would provide much more transparency and inspire confidence in the process. The following comments were made:
- 7.5.1 An emphasis on the training and selection of the assessor as well as the Panel members was essential, because those roles were critical to the strength of the approach. Members noted that the aim was to identify a pool of assessors and Panel members, and offer training in this area so that they understood both the legal and university context. Such a pool of individuals to select from would ensure consistency of understanding and approach across the different cases.
- 7.5.2 It would be important to provide the assessors with opportunities to seek advice if some questions could not be resolved in the current process.
- 7.5.3 Senate was supportive of the idea of removing the line manager of the member of staff from the process and felt it was a positive step forward.
- 7.5.4 It might be useful to take an academic-led approach to identifying a pool of appropriate assessors and Panel members, by making use of academics in the University who currently specialised in ethics.
- 7.5.5 Investigators should have access to pastoral support in the same way that mediators are currently supported. This is particularly important because in the past Investigators have found the process very isolating and confidentiality rules prevented them from coming forward.
- 7.5.6 It would be important to ensure that there was clarity as to what the University expected from staff when they were devising curriculum content and teaching it so that they could internalise those norms as individual academics and also reinforce them in Schools.

- 7.6 In terms of next steps, a process of consultation would now be undertaken both with UCU and the wider JCNC. Once this consultation was concluded, a final proposal would be brought back to the Board's EDI Oversight Committee for comment and then on to the Board of Trustees for approval.

8. EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

- 8.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/031).

9. CONSTITUTION MODERNISATION UPDATE

- 9.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/032).

10. RENAMING OF UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS

- 10.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: paper ref: (SN/20-21/033).