

Internationalisation and the University of Bristol

Being internationally driven is essential for the future success of the University of Bristol. We are already a well-internationalised organisation. This paper gives the intellectual and policy background to our future internationalisation activity as well as identifying some key areas for action.

1. Introduction

It could be argued that being international is such an intrinsic part of the University of Bristol's operation and ambition that there is no need for us to have an "international" strategy, any more than there is a need for a "national" strategy. International aims and activities feature throughout the University's new Vision & Strategy. Furthermore, events are changing at such a pace in the global realm, especially with international students, that such a strategy would become historical almost on publication. It would be much more rational for us to ensure that international (or global) thinking imbued every aspect of our strategic and tactical thinking and leave individual members of staff or departments to decide how best to prosecute international research, student recruitment and collaborations, with relatively light-touch central support.

Some colleagues find the absence of an international strategy difficult. They have said that, at the very least, they would like a document that set out the University's view of the purpose and ambitions of the University's global interactions, both inside and outside higher education. At one level, they would like to know what the philosophical rules of engagement are so that they know how to structure international partnerships and collaborations. It is also clear that our external partners are confused that we have not articulated the aims of our international operations. This document represents the conclusions of a discussion paper written initially by the Vice-Chancellor and shaped through substantial consultation with senior colleagues. It is not a strategy document but it does articulate our view of the important drivers for Bristol with regard to internationalisation and globalisation, and the actions being taken in response to these drivers through our existing strategies.

2. The Global Environment

The terms "internationalisation" and "globalisation" have become common currency in UK higher education in recent years, and the sector has come to understand the terms so completely now that it is almost unnecessary to define them again, any more than we have to define what we mean by an engine every time we describe a car. As defined by Merriam Webster, internationalisation simply denotes "the act of making international", while globalisation describes "the development of an increasingly global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital and the tapping of cheaper foreign labour markets". For higher education, globalisation means working in a borderless world with new knowledge being communicated almost instantaneously around virtual global academic communities. It means our academic staff are globally mobile. Their primary loyalty may be to their global academic community rather than to any single institution. It means that we must be aware of events and trends throughout the globe which could impact on our university or offer new opportunities. It is the very basis of the way we see

ourselves – are we a very good university in the West of England or are we a global player tuned into and impacting on the rhythms and information that shape the globe? We would contend that we are already the latter and that ensuring we develop further along this path is essential to our future success.

3. Characteristics of a Global University

Our sector uses the term “global university” all the time, yet there would not be a common view about what it means. The first definition everyone uses is that the university has multiple and diverse international collaborations between academic staff. However, there are thousands of universities worldwide that have substantial and diverse international collaborations and every one of those cannot be a “global university”. We consider that a global university should display seven key characteristics, described below. All of these are evident at the University of Bristol to some degree, although some are currently stronger than others. The actions listed in section 5 below have been developed with these characteristics in mind, capitalising upon the University’s many existing strengths and identifying areas for improvement.

i) Comprehensive excellence in research, teaching, academic staff, facilities, communications, leadership and governance

A global university must demonstrate these qualities as a minimum standard. It must be independent, have good governance and be well led.

ii) Global brand penetration

Only two universities in the UK – Oxford and Cambridge – have the kind of global brand penetration associated with widespread public recognition around the world. For other institutions, global brand penetration is about being acknowledged as “global” not by the general public but by international academic peers and by national policy makers.

iii) Innovative global research

The pursuit of innovative global research is the absolutely prime characteristic; without it, a university cannot claim to be global. What is clear is that global research is not just about more “connectivity” - i.e., putting people together in different ways, maximising effective use of logistics, video seminar series and summer institutes. All these are good in themselves and may lead to new ways of thinking and collaborating, but they are not “global” characteristics. The global dimension is in the marshalling of universities’ huge intellectual and logistical resources to address global problems and questions in new ways.

The size of the endeavour, the scope and centrality of the questions and the multiplicity of partners are the crucial factors here. This means asking academic staff to think in new ways - to look out of the rut and see different horizons. This is not intellectually easy; most of us are much more comfortable with reductionist science. It is fiercely difficult to identify, never mind pose, the central integrating questions. The connectivity described above is an essential condition for identifying and posing these questions, but it is important that

such connectivity is seen as a means to a greater end rather than as a good in its own right.

iv) *An international curriculum - global distribution of teaching and learning*

It is essential that the University's various curricula prepare students for the globalised world. A global university will be engaged in the global distribution of its educational material and programmes.

v) *Strong and diverse international student and staff demand*

The academic staff must include colleagues from other countries who have recognised the opportunities offered by a global institution. This has to be more than just returning expatriates who want to be nearer their family. It is also essential that there is a diverse, international student body.

vi) *Impacting on global issues and policy formulation*

Academic staff of a global university will be advising global institutions on policy formulation in global issues, for example advising the United Nations about solutions to global poverty or WHO about AIDS and its management in the developing world.

vii) *Close interactions with global business*

Chief executives and senior managers in global businesses will naturally interact and collaborate with organisations they consider to be punching at the same weight as they are.

4. The Benefits of Internationalisation

The University of Bristol is a thriving, dynamic, creative and attuned place. Internationalisation is a crucial part of that. Without it, the University would become inward-looking and passive, concentrating on parochial issues and comprising a much less diverse student and staff population. Our prime reasons for pursuing internationalisation are that:

- by being both hosts to international colleagues and ambassadors when working abroad, we ensure that the broadest possible knowledge base resides in our university and that we are sensitive to global issues;
- it focuses our mindset and ambitions on far horizons and on challenges that are important to the world – we are resolutely outward-facing;
- by being such a clear example of internationalisation, we drive that agenda within our city and region. We are major contributors to Bristol's status as a globalised city;
- it means we have a diverse student body from multiple cultures and societies, which enriches our intellectual environment;
- it means academic staff come to us from all over the world and their different intellectual approaches, as well as their different cultures, again enrich the University;
- it means our research knows no boundaries and addresses big problems;

- it enables us to prosecute some of our values altruistically by assisting countries less fortunate than ours to develop;
- it helps us create a network with influential people throughout the world. Many of these people will be alumni who will be great supporters for decades as they progress in their own countries;
- it ensures we sustain a global profile – a view worldwide that our university makes a difference.

If we wanted to encapsulate the reasons for internationalisation, we might repeat that the word education is derived from the Latin *e-duco*, to lead out. We are in a stronger position to “lead out”, to educate and to be educated if we are internationalised: in short, we are a better university.

In any international interaction, it is essential we are clear about the added value it brings to the international partner and the added value it brings to the University. If this cannot easily be articulated for both parties, it is sensible to exercise caution in developing the project further. With this in mind, there are a number of specific areas of potential benefit that warrant further exploration: altruism; international students and staff; research and other types of academic interaction; and engagement with particular countries and regions.

i) Altruism

It is entirely appropriate for staff to assist other countries and societies in their development. There are myriad ways this can be done, so there is no point in giving guidance for specific projects. It is important to be sure that the effort involved is really giving an appropriate return to that country and society and also to ensure that staff maintain a balance between this and their core work of teaching and research in Bristol. However, success in these projects can greatly enrich us as a University and a city – as does the Bristol-Kenya project, for example (see www.bristol.ac.uk/sport/news/2008/25.html).

ii) Individual countries and regions

Do we consider that some countries have priority over others? The answer is a qualified negative. There are obviously some countries whose size and centrality to present and future global events means that it is inevitable we will concentrate on them: Europe and the accession states, North America, the Far East, India, Russia, Brazil and Mexico are the main examples. There are others where the political situation or other considerations mean that doing business with them is very difficult. These are not necessarily developing countries. Japan, which offers rich possibilities, also requires sophisticated knowledge and sustained effort before successful interactions can occur.

Knowledge of an individual country is paramount here. Received wisdom in the UK about many countries is often simply wrong. In considering initiating a project with a specific country, it is essential that a visit takes place, that you draw your own conclusions about the state of development, the state of the physical and intellectual infrastructure, the cultural differences within the country, especially outside the capital, and the ease with which relationships could be prosecuted. Advice will be essential, but it is probably best coming from someone within the country rather than a *soi disant* British expert.

It bears repetition that the only higher education environment that objectively performs better than the UK is North America and it is important that we continue to concentrate on increasing both our activity and our profile there.

iii) Students

It is essential that we take our responsibilities as hosts very seriously. Firstly, we must not oversell ourselves. Some of the statements and advertisements other universities use abroad present a picture that is very far from the reality of studying and living at those institutions. Secondly, we must ensure that we are greeting and looking after these students in the best possible way both academically and socially. It is a very unsettling and challenging time when you sit in a foreign country, far from home, and realise that you have to make your way on your own resources for a sustained period. Our international students must feel properly supported, that their needs are recognised and fulfilled and that we are committed to them. It is testable whether we are currently fulfilling these responsibilities as well as we could.

We have planned strategically that international students should represent approximately 15% of all students and that we will aim to increase the post-graduate proportion of that, particularly research postgraduates.

iv) Staff

Attracting and keeping the very best staff from around the globe is essential for an international university. We must ensure our searches for new staff are truly global. We must also ensure that we welcome and support new international staff in the best way possible.

There is resentment in some countries over visiting groups whose main ambition is to attract the best local staff to their UK institution permanently. Of course, if we have a position to fill, we should do a global search. However, if we are negotiating staff and student mobility with an institution or a country, those negotiations should be based on the belief that it is our explicit ambition that the individuals involved will be returning to their native country. They will have given much to our University whilst here and our part of the bargain is that they will have extra to give back to their own country through their experiences at Bristol.

v) Research

We believe that it is in research that international collaborations have the most potential to benefit us. Research problems are now complex and multi-factorial. They are best addressed by pooling intellectual and infrastructural resources. There is a particular productivity that comes from combining different intellectual and disciplinary approaches. No university has the resources to address a globally significant research problem alone. International collaborations may also have the benefit of creating access to new and different funding streams. Whilst there should be no barrier to any academic pursuing any international research collaboration, there are some general considerations to be taken into account.

Most research is both expensive and time consuming. There is a small amount of room for research projects with developing countries that give most benefit to the other partner. Overall, however, we must be clear what added value an international project brings to us. The most successful research environment in the world is North America and it is here that there is a concentration of peer universities with which we can have productive collaborations. Clearly, Europe is also very fertile ground. In many other countries, there will be significant possibilities because they can enable field work which would be impossible in the UK.

There are some caveats. Much talk about the research environment in some countries is ill-informed. Often, high quality research is concentrated in only a few major universities and national institutes. There are still anxieties about the freedom of intellectual discourse in some countries. There is often a significant gap between the quality of their research infrastructure and what we would generally expect. There is much talk of creating “world-class” universities from scratch within ten years in various parts of the world. Most commentators would argue that a university can only be considered “world class” when it has demonstrated world-class output in its students and in its knowledge generation over a period of decades. These considerations should be taken into account when contemplating a new international partner.

vi) Other academic interactions

Many of our academics interact internationally, outside teaching and research, with governments, other policy bodies, charities and NGOs, global and local companies and the media. Such interactions are to be welcomed as long as the burden involved does not impact negatively on academics’ core work.

5. Priority Areas for Action

All our staff must feel free to prosecute the international collaborations that best suit them and their academic needs, guided by the considerations described above. In order to consolidate the University’s position as a global institution, there are also a number of specific areas that have been highlighted for further strategic action, generally building on objectives already identified in the University Vision & Strategy.

i) Leadership and support for international activities

PRIORITY 1: Leadership

While the Vice-Chancellor takes a lead on international developments and representation, there is still a need for further leadership in the international area, particularly in ensuring that projects are successful and processes effective. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research will take on this leadership role and thus carry a specific International portfolio. He will liaise with relevant senior colleagues to oversee the implementation of the other actions described below, the majority of which will be delivered via the Research and Enterprise, Education and People Strategies.

Lead: PVC Research & International

PRIORITY 2: The role of the International Office

The International Office is primarily tasked with attracting international students to Bristol and ensuring that they are appropriately welcomed and supported here. They also help Bristol students find international placements. We get high quality international students and feedback suggests that the majority have a very positive time here. This allows us to conclude that the International Office fulfils its current remit well. It could be argued that the Office could fulfil a broader role and especially could be informing strategic international positioning better. We will undertake a review of its current remit and consider whether to broaden its role.

Lead: PVC Research & International/PVC Education/Academic Registrar with International Office

ii) Education

PRIORITY 3: Internationalised curricula

A key aim in the University Vision & Strategy is that *“our curricula will be dynamic, flexible and internationally relevant”*, and further that *“we will embed within our programmes the skills and learning opportunities that enhance the future employability of our students and prepare them for a globalised environment”*. It is likely that the content of our undergraduate and post-graduate curricula are not as internationally based as they could be, and the PVC Education will work with Education Committee to review this and identify mechanisms for development through the new Education Strategy. One possible mechanism could be the delivery of curricula in partnership with international organisations, although such partnerships would have to be approached with caution and with a clear understanding of the benefits and risks involved.

Lead: PVC Education with ESU, International Office

PRIORITY 4: International students

The University Vision & Strategy notes that *“we will recruit high-quality overseas students from a range of countries, working where appropriate with international partners”*. We will aim to increase our numbers of international students such that they represent approximately 15% of all students, focusing particularly on research postgraduates. As part of our Education Strategy, we will continue to look at ways in which we can improve the international student experience.

Lead: PVC Education with International Office, Academic Director of Graduate Studies

iii) Research

PRIORITY 5: International partnerships

The University Vision & Strategy specifies that *“We are committed to seeking further collaborative and multidisciplinary opportunities...including partnerships with leading overseas institutions”*. As part of our Research and Enterprise Strategy, we will develop a comprehensive database of our current international research collaborations and think strategically about broader relationships with particular countries and sub-regions, focusing particularly on North America, Europe and the Far East. A purposeful exposition of why we

would wish to initiate strategic research initiatives with these countries in particular may be timely. Thematic initiatives that map to established themes are probably the best instrument for these international relationships.

Lead: PVC Research and International/RED

PRIORITY 6: The United States and Europe

Related to action 5 above, these two geographical areas have, and will develop more, specific initiatives with UK involvement especially in research, such as joint research grant programmes. It is vital that we are proactive about these and we therefore need to improve our intelligence gathering and our profile in these areas and to identify how we can operate most effectively within them.

Lead: PVC Research and International/RED with Professor Graeme Henderson, International Office

PRIORITY 7: The Worldwide Universities Network

Again related to action 5, a key focus of international collaboration will continue to be the Worldwide Universities Network, (WUN, see www.wun.ac.uk/). We have been members of WUN since 2001 and the Vice-Chancellor was Chair from 2003 to 2007. The network is primarily focused on research initiatives and has delivered over \$40 million additional funding to the partnership as well as over 600 staff and student visits under research mobility schemes, several well-established virtual seminar series and three distributed Masters. There are more than 50 distinct intellectual communities embracing over 3,000 academics worldwide. The reach is truly global, with partners in Europe, China, Australia, Canada and the USA as well as the UK partners. Madison-Wisconsin has just calculated that it gets a 5:1 return on its investment. Publications are now appearing that would not have seen the light of day without WUN. This is a successful, productive and well-established international network and we will continue to look for ways in which our continued membership can not only sustain the network but also maximise the benefits for us.

Lead: PVC Research and International/RED

PRIORITY 8: International visitors and the Institute of Advanced Studies

Many colleagues have stressed that receiving frequent international visitors is a crucial part of being a global university. Such visits will, of course, continue between collaborating academics. We must also ensure that we create international events on campus that are intellectually driven, align with our academic imperatives and attract the very best participants. The University Vision & Strategy highlights the importance of the Institute of Advanced Studies as “a vehicle to host and support a range of multidisciplinary activities”, and the forthcoming opportunity for renewal of leadership allows us to review and recommend how to develop this role further.

Lead: PVC Research & International

PRIORITY 9: International business

One of the research priorities in the University Vision & Strategy is “to seek, manage and provide professional support for strategic relationships and alliances with key national and international partners, including business and industry”. We are undertaking a review of our current relationships with business, and part of that will specifically focus on international businesses.

Lead: PVC Research & International/RED

iv) Staff

PRIORITY 10: International recruitment

A key aim in the University Vision & Strategy with regard to staff is that “in seeking the best people, we will look for applicants for academic and support roles from all sections of the community at home and...overseas”. Through our People Strategy, we will ensure that we make a full global search for staff positions whenever appropriate.

Lead: PVC Staff/Director of Personnel and Staff Development

v) Engagement and communications

PRIORITY 11: Website and database development

We will develop comprehensive web pages focusing on our international activity as an imperative, drawing on existing examples of these on other university websites. We will develop a database of all our current international collaborations, to be included as a map on the website.

Lead: PVC Research & International with Public Relations Office, RED, ILRT

PRIORITY 12: ‘The Bristol family abroad’

We have tens of thousands of alumni and friends overseas, many of whom are very keen to help us. This is a resource we do not use as effectively as possible, although clearly we can only work within our financial constraints. However, we will review how we can maximise these relationships.

Lead: PVC Research & International/Director of CARO