MEETING OF SENATE
MINUTES
Thursday, 22 March 2018

1400, Reception Room, Wills Memorial Building

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chair), Professors Annett, Banting, Barnes, Benton, Birdi, Canagarajah, Dymock, Gallagher, Harrow, Harlow, Ireland, Jarrold, Ladyman, Linthorst, Macfarlane, Mellor, Nobes, Norman, Orpen, Orr-Ewing, Payne, Purdy, Robinson, Smith, Squires, Szczelkun, Williams, Wilson; Dr J Agarwal, Dr M Azarpeyvand, Dr N Farwell, Dr C Fuller, Ms R Geller, Dr H Heath, Dr I Hers, Dr A James, Mr P Kent, Dr K Lampe, Dr P Langton, Dr E Lithander, Dr S McGuiness, Dr T O’Toole, Dr R Oulton, Dr S Proud, Dr A Pullen, Dr J Rose, Dr V Zajko.

In attendance: Ms L Barling (Clerk), Ms Claire Buchanan, Ms P Coonerty, Dr Arne Kovac (on behalf of Professor Jens Marklof), Ms L Robinson, Mr Ricky Tutin (UCU), Professor Philip Sypris (on behalf of Professor Joanne Conaghan).

1. Welcome
1.1 The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting, and reminded them of the following:
   - The meeting had been convened in order to allow members of Senate to urgently debate how best to deliver the University’s 2018/19 and 2019/20 timetables.
   - The Vice-Chancellor and members of Senate would also be given the opportunity at the beginning of the meeting to reflect on the current industrial relations dispute.
   - In accordance with the University’s Statutes and the Standing Orders of Senate, the meeting had therefore been convened at the earliest convenient date.

2. Declaration of interests
2.1 Each member of Senate who was also a member of USS would clearly have an interest in the discussions taking place during the meeting, and that would be formally noted. Each member of Senate who was also a member of UCU would also have an interest in the discussions, although it was noted that they did not have to legally declare it. In order to allow the University’s senior management team to hear the views of Senators, the Vice-Chancellor (as Chair of Senate) had taken the view that those interests did not amount to a conflict of interests.

3. Chair’s business
3.1 The Vice-Chancellor summarised the current situation with the USS pensions dispute by highlighting the following:
   - The University’s senior management team welcomed the joint statement with Bristol UCU issued the previous week.
   - The Vice-Chancellor emphasised that there was likely to be a range of opinions within UUK institutions regarding an acceptable solution, but that he supported the creation of a jointly agreed expert panel to agree key principles to underpin the future joint approach of UUK and UCU to the valuation of the USS fund. Members noted that the University had requested that an academic should act as the Chair of the expert panel. It was noted that the University’s Board of Trustees had agreed at its meeting on 16 March that it would be helpful to have academic and professional services staff representation on the Board’s Pensions group.
The Vice-Chancellor highlighted that in order to secure the long term strength of USS and the member benefits it provides, he felt that government backing would be required and that he would continue to push this in discussions with UUK. Members were pleased to hear that this had gained some traction in the media and it had also been discussed at the House of Commons Work & Pensions Committee.

Members noted that the Chief Financial Officer was also representing the University at the Employers’ Pension Forum meeting today and the UUK Board would meet on 23 March to agree a proposal aimed at resolving the dispute.

The University’s senior management team acknowledged that communication about the implementation of the Strategic Plan had been less visible in recent times and emphasised that they would also reflect on the appropriateness of the Plan at different stages of its implementation, with a view to either moving forward more slowly with certain elements or pausing others. As soon as the pensions dispute was resolved, the Vice-Chancellor was committed to re-launching the conversation with staff about the delivery of the Strategic Plan in order to harness the energy and ideas of staff that had arisen during the wider debates that the pension dispute had catalysed.

3.2 The ensuing discussion highlighted the following points:

- A member of Senate queried the remit and role of UUK, whether it was fit for purpose, and particularly under what authority UUK spoke for university members in the negotiations given the divergence of opinion between universities within the organisation. The Vice-Chancellor noted that this was an appropriate challenge, and the University Secretary would report back on the constitution of UUK, however members accepted that a similar question could be asked as to what extent UCU spoke for employees.
- Members commented that pensions were part of a pay package and that the proposal to cut pensions had come years after below inflation pay increases. This was acknowledged by the University’s senior management team.
- There was a broad consensus in the meeting that ensuring the long-term health of the pension scheme for all employee members of USS was the key collective institutional need in the current debate.

4. Delivering the 2018/19 and 2019/20 timetable
4.1 RECEIVED: a paper on delivering the 2018/19 and 2019/20 timetable (paper ref SN/17-18/032) and a supporting presentation (on file).

4.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor gave a presentation about the timetabling challenges as outlined in the paper.

4.3 Members noted that the deadline by which the University could efficiently and effectively produce a timetable for 2018/19 was 15 May 2018.

4.4 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor highlighted the key risks:
- Inability to schedule all teaching activities in 2018/19 and 2019/20;
- A poorer quality timetable i.e.:
  - Teaching events changing rooms week-to-week
  - Teaching bunched or too spread out/too widely across buildings
  - Reduced choice for students in practice (owing to clashes)
  - Use of less suitable/less well-equipped rooms
  - Less able to accommodate new staff/late changes
  - Less able to manage changes between timetabling drafts
4.5 The presentation highlighted some of the options that had been considered by the University Management Team (UMT), some of which were being taken forward, and others which had been discounted by UMT:

- In the short term, pausing the expansion of the Innovation Programmes into new Schools.
- The use of external venues (non-University).
- Reducing unit choices offered to students.
- Deferring the start of additional (new) Bristol Futures Options units
- Overbooking of larger rooms/lecture theatres on the basis that attendance was almost never 100% (discounted by UMT due to health and safety considerations).
- Use of Wednesday afternoons for PGT teaching (between the hours of 1300 and 1800).
- Use of Wednesday afternoons for UG teaching (discounted by UMT due to recruitment considerations and the Competition and Markets Authority regulatory requirements).

4.6 The presentation also highlighted some of the possible short term and longer-term mitigations which were noted to be:

- Investment in new teaching spaces for 2017-2022 (currently underway).
- Re-allocation of teaching between staff to facilitate timetable.
- Staff appointed late in the cycle accept allocated teaching times in year 1 to avoid late changes to the timetable affecting many others.
- Splitting of activities greater than two hours, where necessary to allow scheduling.
- Accepting a lower quality timetable.
- Extending the teaching week as a temporary measure for 2018/19 and 2019/20, subject to consultation (an addition of 3-4 hours to the existing week by teaching 8am-9am and/or 6pm-7pm, for all rooms or to 100+ spaces only).
- In the longer term, a ‘good timetable’ would be based on criteria established from professional practice, staff and student feedback, educational/programme requirements, and a revised structure of the academic year.

4.7 Senate NOTED the urgency of the current timetabling situation, the steps that had thus far been taken to address the challenges, and the possible mitigations.

4.8 Senate CONSIDERED the various mitigations/options and a discussion ensued, the highlights of which were as follows:

4.8.1 Whilst some members of Senate suggested that the practice of earlier starts and later finishes had already been successfully implemented in parts of the University (Medicine, Dentistry), other Senators emphasised that staff did not want to see the teaching week being extended. The weight of opinion amongst Senate members was that for reasons of staff and student work-life balance, it would be preferable to avoid earlier starts or later finishes.

4.8.2 In response to the above point:

i) It was emphasised to Senate that setting an early timetable allowed staff to plan in advance, which supported work/life balance arrangements. Late changes to the timetable, which were likely to occur if substantive mitigations were not put in place, would also create problems for staff and students.

ii) The commitment to undertaking a full equality impact assessment of both last year’s approach to staff constraints and the proposed changes in policy was emphasised.
4.8.3 There were some members of Senate who were keen that more exploration be done on the extent to which there could be an opt-in system for staff who might be willing to teach longer hours. Others were minded to explore whether teaching hours could be extended at start 0830 and end 1830 instead of extension at start (0800) or end 1800 as proposed in the paper (choice 2). It was agreed that whilst this was a possibility, all rooms would need to be included, not a subset and given that Senate was not in support of a permanent extension of the teaching week, the major upheaval to University business implied by the change would not warrant the disruption.

4.8.4 There was a broad consensus on the need to review programme structures and explore pedagogical innovation, both as inherent goods and in order to help reduce the pressure on teaching space, and it was suggested that BILT could help to drive this forward in the longer term. Members commented that whilst this would not necessarily solve the immediate problem, it could be trialled relatively quickly in some programmes. Senate agreed to engage proactively in this process.

4.8.5 Specifically, members AGREED that as a matter of urgency Schools would be asked to carry out a ‘health-check’ of their programmes, to consider the volume of unit choice and teaching that they offered, and whether it would be pedagogically appropriate and in line with programme outcomes, contact hour commitments, and Competition and Markets Authority compliance to make changes to mitigate the current timetabling issues.

4.8.6 Senate SUPPORTED the proposal in the paper to deliver a pilot for 2018/19 in which pedagogy on one or more units would be radically re-designed to reduce reliance on teaching spaces under pressure.

4.8.7 There was a broad consensus that a technology supported solution such as live video streaming or webinars would be acceptable in principle and should be evaluated (subject to considerations around intellectual property law and the provision of better viewing facilities in lecture theatres), as this could enable teaching to be delivered in smaller venues than the student group size. Members noted that there was a tool on Blackboard called BBD which could be used to facilitate this kind of viewing\(^1\) although it was noted that this should only be pursued if the Timetabling team were content that it would ease the pressure on the timetable (rather than have perverse effects).

4.8.8 A number of Senators argued that delivering some PGT teaching on Wednesday (1300-1800) would be appropriate (choice 3 as referenced in the paper). Others felt that PG as well as UG students should be able to access the alternative activities, including sport and student societies, that were offered on Wednesday afternoons. It was noted that any such change for 2018/19 would be extremely risky in terms of CMA compliance. On balance therefore it was concluded that this option should not be pursued.

4.8.9 Members of Senate queried whether further enquiries could be made into alternative external venues for the University to use as teaching space, although they understood that many external venues were not viable or even available. As such, some members responded with the suggestion that residential dining rooms could be further explored, and it was AGREED that the University would undertake further enquiries as to whether the use of residences would be appropriate.

4.9 Members of Senate also expressed the following concerns:

\(^1\) Streaming elsewhere as distinct from pedagogic changes
• The proposal to extend the length of the teaching week had come at a time of changed mood amongst staff, with limited trust in management decision-making. This may therefore have a negative impact on the ability to deliver the proposal.
• There was concern expressed about the lack of modelling software in the University (and indeed nationally across the sector). The Academic Registrar noted that the University had invested in specialist software to that end and that the Academic Registry was currently working with the supplier to develop it to allow responsive modelling and therefore support planning and optimisation.

4.10 In closing, the Vice-Chancellor thanked members of Senate for the frankness of their discussion and questions. It had been both helpful and informative to hear the views of Senate directly. Members of Senate were also thanked for recognising the complexity of the issues at play. Members noted that a process of consultation would now begin with Schools, UCU, other staff unions, Bristol SU, and professional services staff to identify whether a temporary extension of the teaching week was appropriate, or whether alternative options (including those discussed at the meeting today) could be explored.

4.11 Senate would discuss the outcome of the timetabling consultation at the meeting on 23 April and will be asked to decide on the way forward. Members were again reminded that the absolute deadline for the purposes of delivering a good timetable for 2018/19 was 15 May 2018.

5. Date of next meeting
5.1 The next meeting was due to take place on Monday 23 April 2018, 1400, in the Reception Room, Wills Memorial Building.