

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Friday 24th September 2021

Meeting held at Burgess Salmon

MINUTES

Present: Mr J Boyer (Chair), Professor H Brady (Vice-Chancellor), Dr M Bhabuta, Ms G Bowen, Mrs K Bright, Professor A Carr, Ms J Cecil, Dr S Clarke, Ms L Fletcher, Mr N Joicey, Dr J Khawaja, Mr A Poolman (Treasurer), Dr A Raffel, Professor C Relton, Mr M Saddiq, Mr S Robertson, Professor J Squires (Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Provost), and Mr K Sithamparapillai

In attendance: Professor Tansy Jessop (PVC Education for item 8), Shana Johnson (Clerk and Deputy Head of Governance), Robert Kerse (Chief Operating Officer), Lucinda Parr (Registrar and University Secretary), Professor Simon Tormey (Dean Faculty of Social Sciences and Law for item 7 via Zoom)

Apologies: Professor I Craddock

1 WELCOMES, APOLOGIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1 The Chair welcomed members, noting apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 There were none.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Board of Trustees on 9 July 2021 were APPROVED as a fair and accurate record.

4 ACTIONS & MATTERS ARISING

4.1 Noted the action register and that in respect of Action 11.5 Ms Jessica Cecil and Mr Andy Carr would be part of the review panel.
The Forward Plan would be appended to Chair's report going Forward.

5 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT AND QUESTIONS

5.1 The following points were NOTED:

5.1.1 Despite some staff anxiety, there was also a sense of excitement at being back on campus, with activity in Royal Fort Gardens, Senate House open and the campus taking shape.

5.1.2 The summer had been very busy with the second year of teacher-led A level assessed grades, significant grade inflation and a legal requirement for the University to take students who met their offer requirements, resulting in acute pressure on student numbers in particular areas. Mitigations had been put in place, including offering student deferrals in targeted areas and an assessment of resources needed in terms of both staff and space to deliver a high-quality education and student experience.

5.1.3 The University Management Team (UMT) residential had focussed on the Strategy refresh, starting with the ambition to be a top 50 University worldwide and examining what this meant for the size and shape of the institution and the resources required to achieve that. There had been very granular engagement from participants looking not only at strengths but areas of under-performance.

- 5.1.4 There was likely to be a ballot on industrial action going forward in relation to pensions, pay, casualisation and equalities issues.
- 5.1.5 The Cabinet re-shuffle had happened in September, resulting in a new Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi), and a new Science Minister (George Freeman). Kwasi Kwarteng remained Secretary of State for BEIS, covering science and research at Cabinet level, and Michelle Donelan, former Universities Minister would be Minister of State for Higher and Further Education (including strategy for post 16 education). She would attend Cabinet meetings.
- 5.1.6 The Government had published the UK Innovation Strategy which sets out the government's vision to make the UK a global hub for innovation by 2035. It has 4 pillars:
- Unleashing Business – fuelling businesses who want to innovate
 - People - make the UK the most exciting place for innovation talent.
 - Institutions & Places – ensuring research, development and innovation institutions serve the needs of businesses and places across the UK.
 - Missions & Technologies – stimulate innovation to tackle major challenges faced by the UK and the world and drive capability in key technologies. This includes identification of seven technology families where the UK has globally competitive R&D and industrial strength, and which resonate very strongly with the University's own strengths.
- 5.1.7 The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announcement was expected next month and there had been a strong submission from Universities and the Western Gateway. It was hoped that the Temple Quarter submission would be re-visited by Government
- 5.2 The following points were DISCUSSED
- 5.2.1 The research landscape was complicated and with multiple funding sources the University needed to be in a position to maximise funding opportunities.
- 5.2.2 Whether the strategy refresh should be paused until the new VC was in place. Members of the Board were clear that momentum of the strategy refresh needed to be maintained and ambitions articulated.
- 5.2.3 It was important to be on the front foot in engaging with new Ministers and Special Advisors in Government and to maximise opportunities for engagement following the Cabinet re-shuffle. The University had a specific post dedicated to Government relations locally and nationally and the Russell Group (RG) also gave huge traction to the sector. The University aligned its plans with RG plans for engagement with Government
- 5.2.4 Campus space had been used in an innovative way and there had not been a need to extend the teaching day, but at the same time the University was having ongoing conversations about accessibility and equalities impact of any timetabling decisions.
- 5.2.5 Where there had been an over-shoot in undergraduate numbers there was close work on-going with the Schools to minimize potential adverse impacts and identify the resources required in terms of staff/space. There would be some capital investment where necessary and multiple delivery of some lessons. Different approaches were being taken to each discipline to ensure a bespoke solution to the situation.
- 5.2.6 Discussions had also taken place with the Sabbatical Officers who had expressed concerns about unplanned student growth and the impact on the student population and student facilities.
- 5.2.7 The number of students in residential accommodation in Bath was now relatively low (c100) and the University had put in a residential life team, given students travel passes and a high standard of accommodation.
- 5.2.8 The impact of extra student numbers on the city as a whole and a need to continue a strong relationship with the City Council to improve the narrative around students in the city and the role of the University in contributing to the attractiveness of the city and local economic growth.

- 5.2.9 Ensuring the University was able to respond to funding announcements and that the Strategy Refresh was pivoted to the external world, particularly around research excellence and the 7 technology families in the UK Innovation Strategy, drawing out the narrative around research and innovation, business opportunity and real benefits/economic impact.

6 STRATEGY REFRESH UPDATE (reference BT/21-22/001)

6.1 RECEIVED the paper. The DVC & Provost (Judith Squires) introduced the item.

6.2 The following points were NOTED

- 6.2.1 The Draft Strategy 2030, the Sub-strategy documents and the key points discussed at the UMT Residential Workshop. The Strategy refresh was on schedule, and it was important to keep momentum. The main Strategy would come to Board in November for approval and the Sub-Strategies in February 2022. Work was ongoing on implementation plans and KPIs/performance measures to ensure a golden thread throughout.
- 6.2.2 A social impact analysis had been commissioned ahead of sign-off of the sub-strategies and engagement with the City was key both in terms of positive impacts as well as challenges.
- 6.2.3 There would be case studies/vignettes which would bring life to the document in the final iteration.
- 6.2.4 The final version of the Strategy would be much more externally focussed and would resonate, with regional, national, and global agendas. There would also be a much stronger sense of priorities and the differentiators, to make the Strategy less 'generic'.
- 6.2.6 Research priorities had been a key discussion and there was a strong sense that in considering the size and shape of the institution going forward there should be investment in and support for early career and post graduate researchers which would help develop world class research leaders for the future. The final research priorities would be agreed by the wider University Management Team.
- 6.2.7 In terms of education and student experience it was important to carry through innovations in the education space and support student experience whilst maintaining research excellence. The University was aiming to be in the top 50 global rankings, which depended heavily on research rankings and in the top 10 UK rankings where indicators related in particular to education and student experience.
- 6.2.8 There was enthusiasm and excitement for the Civic thread of the Strategy emphasising a value driven institution. Further work needed to be done on the narrative around what global/civic meant and there was strong work ongoing with the City Council to support this.
- 6.2.9 Student housing was a big issue within the city, and it was important for the University to get the narrative right around this and to also emphasise the positive role and impact the University had in the City including the economic impact.
- 6.2.10 Within the People section of the Strategy it was important to acknowledge the impact of staff workloads and how the University could be more efficient and effective, identifying what things it should stop doing as well as those it should do more of – this would be developed further in the next iteration of the Strategy.
- 6.2.11 In terms of next steps the Strategy would go to Senate on the 11 October and to a University Plenary on the 12 October where there would be a focus on 3 questions: What should the research focus be? How can we reduce staff workload? How do we develop a lifelong learning offer which speaks to the skills pipeline agenda? This would inform the next iteration of the Strategy for November approval by the Board

6.3 The following points were DISCUSSED:

- 6.3.1 Being top 50 globally was a challenging ask but it was an achievable target, but to achieve this there would need to be appropriate investment and an operating model and a university culture to support this. Modelling of growth scenarios was taking place which would then identify the resource available to support the delivery of the Strategy. International students would be an important part of this.
- 6.3.2 The Strategy needed to be clear about the target to be in the top 10 UK rankings.
- 6.3.3 Being ambitious globally and nationally was the right strategy – a clear strategy and ambitious aspirations would also attract high calibre candidates for the next position of VC.
- 6.3.4 Framing and articulating the research strategy in relation to Government aspirations and objectives would be a strong narrative, illustrating the golden thread through research, innovation, business opportunity and economic and other benefits both locally and nationally. There was a real opportunity to frame our story and communicate that clearly to Government.
- 6.3.5 An Advisory Board of eminent businesspeople to support the research pillar could signal to Government how the University's research objectives translated into real benefits.
- 6.3.6 In terms of tuition fees the University had looked at the market and decided to take the steer from the Russell Group top quartile (excluding Oxbridge). There were however opportunities to vary specific programmes or use fee waivers, bursaries, and scholarships.
- 6.3.7 The University had done a lot of market research into why undergraduates picked the University; reputation was key, the attraction of specific degree programmes and the attraction of a vibrant city. There was less data about what attracted staff but for academics the quality of research was very high on the agenda. Creativity, entrepreneurship, exploration, innovation, were all part of the Bristol brand and could help articulate the City and University offer.

7. **BUSINESS SCHOOL BUSINESS CASE** (reference **BT/21-22/002**)

7.1 RECEIVED the paper. The DVC & Provost (Judith Squires) introduced the item. The Dean of Social Sciences (Simon Tormey) was also in attendance virtually.

7.2 APPROVED the merger of the School of Accounting and Finance and the School of Management to create a new Business School.

7.3 The following points were NOTED:

7.3.1 The proposal to merge the School of Accounting and Finance and the School of Management to create a new Business School had been discussed and endorsed by the Executive and the Finance and Infrastructure Committee.

7.3.2 The Business School proposal was in two parts. Phase 1 was the creation of the new Business school and Phase 2 the development of the vision and future offer of the school, creating the Bristol USP and brand. This would be an opportunity for the new Head of School and colleagues to co-create that vision and offer.

7.3.3 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

7.3.4 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].** r.

7.4 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

7.4.1 It would be helpful if there was a 'pithy' elevator pitch to summarize the key drivers for the school and its vision, values, and the Bristol 'brand'.

ACTION: Dean Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

8. **NSS RESULTS** (reference **BT/21-22/003**)

8.1 RECEIVED the paper. The DVC & Provost (Judith Squires) introduced the item. The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education (Tansy Jessop) gave a presentation to the Board.

- 8.2 APPROVED a risk-based approach to working with programmes.
- 8.3 NOTED the analysis of NSS results compared to the sector and Russell Group and new interventions to help improve NSS results (See Presentation appended to these minutes)

8.4 The following issues were DISCUSSED:

- 8.4.1 The Curriculum Enhancement Programme was a 5-year programme which had now been running for 2 years. It was disappointing to see declines and volatility in scores and in particular the lowest ranking scores in Learning Resources, Assessment and Feedback and Learning Community. The largest negative ranking movement was in the Assessment and Feedback set. This was particularly disappointing as this low ranking had not improved over a number of years. Whilst the challenges of the last year and the impacts of the pandemic were noted, this was the same for all institutions in the sector and Bristol was not in the top quartile for any of the question sets, with most sets being in the third quartile and Assessment and Feedback and Learning Resource in the bottom quartile.
- 8.4.2 There had been improvements and successes in some areas in the University and interventions had worked. This was, however, not consistent and it was acknowledged that it would be a real challenge over the next year to bring NSS scores up, particularly with issues of staff workload, morale, potential industrial action, delivery of hybrid courses, and some international students not being on campus.
- 8.4.3 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**
- 8.4.4 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**
- 8.4.5 The Board was keen to understand if the lack for improvement in assessment and feedback was something core across the university or was in 'pockets'. The Board wanted to gain more granularity of understanding as to where the key areas of underperformance were, and it was suggested that the Deans be invited to a Board meeting to discuss these issues in more detail. The DVC and Provost recommended that this be addressed as part of the wider work underway to monitor and report on progress in relation to all areas of the Strategy.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost

- 8.4.6 The barriers to engagement in the enhancement programme initiatives needed to be understood and the University also needed to assess if the resource dedicated to the Curriculum Enhancement Programme was sufficient.

9. MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING ANNUAL REPORT (STAFF & STUDENTS)
(reference **BT/21-22/004**)

- 9.1 DEFERRED to the November meeting of the Board.

Action: Head of Governance

10. TEMPLE QUARTER UPDATE (reference **BT/21-22/00**)

- 10.1 RECEIVED the paper. The Chief Operating Officer (Robert Kerse) introduced the item.
- 10.2 NOTED the programme update, particularly in relation to TQEC CM1, the TQEC Sheds and key decision gateways. **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

11. CHAIR'S REPORT (reference **BT/21-22/006**)

- 11.1 RECEIVED the paper. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (Jack Boyer) introduced the item.
- 11.2 NOTED the update from the Effectiveness Review Steering Group.

11.3 NOTED the decisions taken between meetings.

11.4 NOTED the content of the report.

12. REPORT FROM COO (reference BT/21-22/007)

12.1 RECEIVED the paper. The Chief Operating Officer (Robert Kerse) introduced the item.

12.2 NOTED a verbal report from the COO from the 17th September Pensions Task & Finish Group.

12.3 NOTED the financial performance for the year ended 31 July 2021.

12.4 NOTED the financial outlook for 2021/22

12.5 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

12.6 The following issues were DISCUSSED

12.6.1 In relation to the USS Pension scheme there were two key issues arising out of the recent consultation on the Schedule of Contributions, Recovery Plan and Statement of Funding Principles for the 2020 valuation. One related to the Debt Monitoring Framework and a change which could give the Trustee the power to utilise the accelerated contribution powers upon the breach of any one of the five debt monitoring metrics. This was at odds with the provisions of the Debt Monitoring framework, which required the breach of multiple metrics before there was potential intervention by the USS Trustee. The second issue related to concerns that the statutory 60-day consultation on the proposed benefit changes was going to start too late to enable a meaningful consideration of options with university staff. There was likely to be a ballot on industrial action and Bristol would be balloted on both pay/conditions and pensions.

12.6.2 The financial position at year end was very strong and the Trustees congratulated the University on this position.

12.6.3 The issue of recognising the significant staff efforts over the last year and ways in which this could be acknowledged.

13. REPORT FROM DVC & PROVOST (reference BT/21-22/008)

13.1 RECEIVED the paper. The DVC & Provost (Judith Squires) introduced the item.

13.2 NOTED the report of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost and the following key issues:

13.2.1 In terms of Widening Participation targets the 2021 intake was continuing on a positive trajectory and work was ongoing to attract more mature students. The University was in close conversation with the One City Office to ensure a joined-up approach in relation to the offer for local residents.

13.2.2 In terms of teaching the overall commitment was to in-person and the University was working through a range of issues to ensure the campus was safe, including individual risk assessments for staff. There was a hybrid model for some international students who had not been able or reluctant to travel to the city. The hybrid model offering face to face and online simultaneously did mean extra work for staff and workload issues needed to be carefully monitored and addressed.

13.2.3 The renaming timetable had slipped but the University wanted to make sure that this project was being done well rather than rushing it. There would be a report by the end of the year.

14. REPORT FROM REGISTRAR & UNIVERSITY SECRETARY (reference BT/21-22/009)

14.1 RECEIVED the paper. The Registrar & University Secretary (Lucinda Parr) introduced the item.

14.2 NOTED the Annual Report on Philanthropic Income

14.3 NOTED the content of the Registrar's report and in particular:

14.3.1 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

14.3.2 Arrangements in place for the start of term including COVID 19 measures and expectations and facilitating and encouraging COVID vaccine and Flu Jab take up.

15. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE (reference BT/21-22/010)

15.1 RECEIVED the paper. The Chair of the Board of Trustees (Jack Boyer) introduced the item.

15.2 The Executive recused themselves from the meeting with the exception of Lucinda Parr (Registrar and University Secretary). NOTED that Ms Parr would note the discussion of this item in her role as the University Secretary reporting to the Chair of the Board.

15.3 The following points were NOTED:

15.3.1 That Nominations Committee has a key role in the appointment of the next Vice-Chancellor as stipulated in the Constitution (Charter Article 15 and Ordinance 7) but that the Board of Trustees made the final decision as outlined in the paper.

15.3.2 That the procedure followed to date had been carried out with prior reference to:
1. the appointment guidelines provided by the Office for Students and the Committee of University Chairs; 2. the procedure followed by the University at the time of the appointment of the current Vice-Chancellor in 2014 and, 3. consultation with other Russell Group universities who have recently appointed Vice-Chancellors.

15.3.3 The degree of competition within the UK HE sector to recruit senior leaders and the potential impact on the UoB search.

15.3.4 The extensive consultation process that had already occurred with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board meeting with 95 people over 30 separate meetings, the groups (as listed in the paper) had been selected to assure broad engagement of the University's varied communities.

15.3.5 That as the search progressed consideration would need to be given to the appointment of an interim Vice-Chancellor.

15.3.6 That the preliminary timeline detailed in the paper would be subject to further development with the executive search partner.

15.4 The following points were DISCUSSED:

15.4.1 AGREED that the University Secretary was present in her role as the University Secretary reporting to the Chair of the Board and would not vote or be part of the decision-making process.

15.4.2 AGREED that the following key themes had emerged from the consultation process:

- A strong consensus about the importance of research excellence, the top 50 ambition was consistently important to people, this is seen as material to attracting funding and talent.
- In relation to the Strategy, there was good support across the institution. Participants showed a good level of understanding and engagement however people felt that the new VC, who may have views on elements of the strategy, should be able to have their input and that this was felt critical to attracting top level individuals.
- There was a consensus to retain the progress made so far on the Strategy but that the agility of the strategy was also critical to success.
- The new VC would be in position to pick up on a strongly placed institution and take it forward.

- For Student Experience, EDI and regarding Health and Wellbeing there was consensus that good progress was being made.

15.4.3 **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].**

15.4.4 APPROVED on the recommendation of Nominations Committee the appointment of Odgers Berndtson as executive search partner in the recruitment of the next Vice-Chancellor.

15.4.5 APPROVED on the recommendation of Nominations Committee the establishment of an Appointment Panel, convened by the Chair of the Board to approve the candidate brief, carry out shortlisting in conjunction with the executive search partner and form the interview panel to recruit the next Vice-Chancellor. NOTED that the membership of the Appointment Panel will be communicated to Trustees when finalised.

Action: Head of Governance

15.4.6 AGREED that the Appointment Panel should be comprised of eight to ten members and that it should include two members of Senate. AGREED that the Appointment Panel should not include any student representation.

15.4.7 **[REDACTED: Information for future publication].**

15.4.8 APPROVED on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee that the Chair in consultation with the Appointment Panel would determine further logistical arrangements relating to the recruitment process.

16. **REPORT FROM FINANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE** (reference **BT/21-22/011**)

16.1 RECEIVED the paper.

16.2 NOTED the report of the Finance & Infrastructure Committee meeting held on 16 September 2021, **[REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests]**. t.

17. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

17.1 None.

18. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING:** 19 November 2021.