

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
MEETING OF COURT
Friday 4th December 2020

Sir Paul Nurse FRS (Chancellor)
(Hannah Quinn – Clerk)

Members

Category 1 – Elected Members

M Austin, C Burns, A Carr, H Carter, M Evans, A Franks, A Ganapathy, S Gilbert, M Lee, M Liversidge, B Miles, T Mitchell, M Partington, J Phillips, C Scowen, V Smith, G Stirrat, J Thompson, L Wilson, M Young.

Category 2 – Nominated Members

T Aditya, A Bates, X Bell, J Cleeton, P Coles, H David, C Denyer, M Donelan, P Golding, J Holmes, P Hooper, S McGall, S Rolt, T Savage, T Smallwood, E Smith, P Smith, L Testani, S Wilson.

Category 3 – Ex Officio

M Berry, M Prior CVO MBE, M Woolley.

Category 4 – Additional Members

None _____

In Attendance

Executive Group

H Brady, E Fay, R Kerse, A O’Grady, L Parr, S Purdy, J Squires.

Board of Trustees

K Ashley, M Bhabuta, G Bowen (incoming), J Boyer, L Fletcher, N Joicey, J Palmer, J Khawaja, Stephen Robertson (incoming).

Deans

None

Sabbatical Officers

R Day, L Martindale.

Elected individuals from UoB staff

H Abulrub, M Baptist, M Costain, R Ellis-Haque, T Henderson, G Lively, R Logan, J McAllister, P Mutesva, T Mwarewangepo, A Rahman, R Salisu, P Walters

1. WELCOME BY THE CHANCELLOR

- 1.1 The Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting, noting the change in arrangements due to the pandemic.
- 1.2 NOTED that no new material declarations of interests had been received and that all questions would be taken together in item 7
- 1.3 NOTED that this would be the last meeting for Mary Prior and thanked Mary, on behalf of Court, for her service and support on the completion of her term as a University Pro Chancellor.

2. REPORT OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

- 2.1 The Vice-Chancellor presented a review of the year, focussing on the COVID-19 response, supported by a presentation.
- 2.2 The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the extraordinary effort and inspiring contribution of all at the University over this difficult year. The following points were NOTED:
 - 2.2.1 The early phases of the pandemic, gaining intelligence from Chinese partners and looking to learn from other countries. The swift pivot of research activity at this time, utilizing the existing containment facilities to study the virus within weeks. The importance of earlier key investments and appointments in teaching and learning capability to respond to the transition to online and blended learning
 - 2.2.2 The first lockdown and the decision to close early for Easter and allow additional time for transition. The remarkable response of staff and students to convert the curriculum into a globally available digital format. The challenges and opportunities of working from home, the financial impact of rent refunds and the significant disruption to research that could not be continued from home. The change in tone and nature of conversations with government and our regulator and the flexible responses in relation to furlough, language requirements, and immigration.
 - 2.2.3 The research responses between March and June. The establishment of the UNCOVER group to co-ordinate the Covid research response and the publication of seminal papers including a landmark paper in Science exploring the first druggable pocket in the spike protein. The contribution of Bristol research to government policy, clinical trials and vaccine development.
 - 2.2.4 The preparations for reopening the campus between July and September, ensuring that over 300 buildings were made Covid secure to enable the return of students. Engagement with students over the summer to understand their feedback on blended learning and significant effort by all to operationalize a new curriculum. The provision of charter flights from China to enable students to arrive in the UK.
 - 2.2.5 The staggered return of students in September and the outbreak in halls during October. The operational challenges of managing the numbers of students self-isolating and the impact on attendance at face to face teaching. The significant additional investment into student and staff mental health, the hardship fund, and staff and student communication.
 - 2.2.6 The role of the Scientific Advisory group and the significantly reduced seven day rolling average of cases. The positive engagement of students so far with lateral flow testing.
 - 2.2.7 Planning for the remainder of the academic year and the impact of student migration. The likely engagement of the University with vaccine deployment.
 - 2.2.8 The heightened sense of the civic role of the University. Highlights included the early graduation of 200 new Bristol doctors to join the NHS response, the unprecedented levels of student volunteering, and the mass production of hand sanitiser in the Chemistry department.
 - 2.2.9 The importance of the University in contributing to the local recovery through the Western Gateway powerhouse.
 - 2.2.10 The ongoing uncertainty in relation to Brexit and the ability to access the EU network and funding through Horizon Europe.
- 2.3 The Vice-Chancellor offered thanks to all members of the University and to Alumni, friends and partners for their support.

3. UPDATE ON THE 2019 MEETING OF COURT: THE GLOBAL CIVIC UNIVERSITY (CRT/20-21/001)

3.1 RECEIVED the paper

3.2 The DVC & Provost presented to Court on actions and developments further to the workshop last year, supported by a presentation. The following points were NOTED:

3.2.1 The useful feedback gathered at Court last year, which had been analysed and emerging themes addressed. A Covid Civic response group had been established to bring together the breadth of the University's activity and this group would be formalized to form a Civic Engagement Committee to co-ordinate activity.

3.2.2 The Medicine on the Walls project, where Dr John Lee worked with street artists and the People's Republic of Stokes Croft to create murals with key health messages. These were used digitally, seen by millions virtually on social media and nationally on billboards. A further collaboration with Kenya had seen designs from Nairobi painted on Bristol's walls, and vice-versa.

3.2.3 The opening of the Barton Hill Micro campus this academic year despite the pandemic. The settlement had been core to the civic mission of the University since its foundation in 1911. A series of container offices and flexible space for activities had been set up to support teaching, outreach and engagement and provided a venue for the development and delivery of new and existing outreach opportunities. Research projects had been hosted there, as had both curricular and extracurricular student engagement.

3.2.4 The importance of measuring our civic activity, and the presentation at last year's Court meeting around the UN Sustainable Development goals (SDG). The commissioning of Dr Sean Fox to review the University's civic plans, against these SDGs and to advise how these align with our ambitions and the One City Plan.

3.2.5 Plans to shape the next stages of the strategy and the request for the involvement of Court in shaping the new civic pillar. The establishment of the new Civic Engagement Committee which would co-ordinate work towards the Civic University Agreement (CUA). Plans for co-production of the CUA with city partners.

3.7 The DVC & Provost NOTED thanks to Professor Guy Orpen, Deputy Vice-Chancellor New Campus Development, who had been the institutional lead for this area and was retiring at the end of the year.

4. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES (CRT/20-21/002)

4.1 The Chair of the Board presented to Court about the work of the Board of Trustees during 19/20.

4.2 NOTED that the Annual Report & Financial Statements were presented to Court

4.3 NOTED the University borrowing limit which is £535m

4.4 The following points were NOTED:

4.4.1 That there had been no changes to the University Charter, Statutes and Ordinances in relation to Court, the Students' Union or the Alumni Association made during the preceding academic year.

4.4.2 The pivot of the Board to new ways of working during the pandemic, the introduction of Vice-Chancellor's briefings to the Board between formal meetings, regular email updates and enabling Trustees to join all-staff livestreams.

- 4.4.3 The joint focus of the Board on addressing the short-term impacts of the pandemic but also looking to the medium and long-term impacts of Covid and the post-pandemic role of the University
 - 4.4.4 The swift development and approval of a revised strategy for the 20/21 year, and plans for a full strategy refresh scheduled to come to the Board later this academic year.
 - 4.4.5 The intention to support the Executive in building a stronger and more resilient world-class University, poised to address the new challenges to our sector and community from the pandemic.
 - 4.4.6 The focus on wider regional partnerships and synergies and how the University can support a regional economic levelling up, an example through the Western Gateway.
 - 4.4.7 The raising of the EDI Oversight Working Group to a full Board committee in order to further strengthen the Board's role in equality and diversity engagement.
 - 4.4.8 Changes to membership including the retirement of Moira Hamlin, Geraldine MacDonald and Nicky McCabe, and the appointment of new Trustees Ore Odubiyi, Gillian Bowen and Stephen Robertson. The change in student trustees.
 - 4.4.9 The Board's commitment in working with the Executive to deliver the critical civic role required of Universities in a post-pandemic landscape
- 4.5 The Chair of the Board thanked the Vice-Chancellor and his entire team, as well as all staff and students, alumni, partners and members of Court for their commitment and hard work during this difficult time.
- 5. ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2019/20 (CRT/20-21/003)**
- 5.1 RECEIVED the paper
- 5.2 NOTED the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/20.
- 6. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING 2019 (CRT/20-21/004)**
- 6.1 RECEIVED the paper
- 6.2 APPROVED the minutes of the previous meeting (6th December 2019).
- 7. OPEN FORUM QUESTION TIME**
- 7.1 The Director of External Relations chaired the question and answer session.
- 7.2 Court members asked why student rent rebate was offered for the new year at 30% and not higher. The Executive noted that not all students were able to travel home, and would continue to be supported over the holiday period, furthermore, a minority of Bristol students live in halls and any investment needs to be fair. Students had been offered a 10-day full rebate in December, plus 30% of a 7 week period which was felt would fairly compensate them for the average time whilst balancing interests across the institution. In addition, additional bursaries were being provided to specific groups, e.g. care leavers and estranged students.
- 7.3 Court members asked for more information about how the University would address a potential spike of cases when students return. The Registrar confirmed that testing would be available across a period of staggered return. Advice from PHE had been that there was little evidence of transmission from students to the city population. Partnership working with PHE would continue to ensure there are good measures in place to control transmission into the City.

- 7.4 A question was received about the balance of online teaching after the Winter Break. The Executive noted that plans are in place to continue with the blended learning offer with a staggered return in line with guidance and support from government. That student feedback had also favoured blended learning.
- 7.5 Court asked about how the University could support local tourism. The Executive noted that although Bristol does not offer tourism studies or similar, the broader role in supporting the local economy was a key element of the civic mission. Economic regeneration was part of the Western Gateway initiative and the TQEC development would provide additional capacity to upskill in key areas of engineering and digital skills. Applications to applied post graduate courses had seen an increase and work continued with local employers
- 7.6 Court asked for more information about Bristol works with UWE and other regional partners, and with the University Partnership Programme (UPP). The Executive confirmed that Bristol worked closely with UWE on a range of civic engagement ideas, including the Covid response with a joint Vice-Chancellor's statement issued on behaviour, and co-ordination of testing protocols. The UPP Truly Civic report had helped to shape our civic endeavour and the University was keen to work with the City and wider region in order to realise our global civic ambitions.
- 7.8 A request was received for an update on accreditation as living wage employer. The COO confirmed that the University had been accredited for a few years now and would be awarding the recently announced increases in line with the instructions to be received from UCEA who operate the collective pay bargaining arrangement of which the University is a member.
- 7.9 In relation to the global nature of the civic agenda, Court members asked about the challenge of working globally in a pandemic, particularly in relation to student study abroad programmes. The Executive confirmed that students had been able to access provision of online programmes from partner unis, and many students overseas had been supported to return to the UK. This academic year there were more than 300 students currently overseas in Covid secure environments at partner Universities. Students from overseas had been supported to travel, or provided with online provision until the point they were able to travel.
- 7.10 The University was asked to work with Bristol City Council and city partners on approaches to climate change and to diversity and inclusion. The Executive confirmed that members are engaged with the Race Equality Strategic Leaders Group and keen to engage with other organisations to align strategies. In relation to climate change and sustainability issues one of the great benefits of University engagement is through research particularly in providing the scale and quality of research in key areas.
- 7.11 Court members asked whether the University would be engaging with the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow. The Executive confirmed that the University was a member of the COP 26 Universities and that the Cabot Institute was actively engaged in writing and sharing briefing papers and would continue to shape conversations.
- 7.12 An update on student accommodation was requested by Court. The COO confirmed that during 2019/20 the University had continued to make low level improvements in buildings but that the 10-year investment programme had been placed on pause at the start of the pandemic. The University expected a loss of £26m in residences

income by the end of the current academic year and had paused capital projects until they were affordable

- 7.13 Court enquired as to the University's likely engagement in vaccine delivery. The Executive confirmed that they were in early discussions in partnership with PHE, UWE and BCC and that it was likely that medical students would be involved in the distribution of vaccines and standing up preparations.
- 7.14 Further to a question about international student recruitment and subsequent impact on income, the Executive confirmed that thanks to significant work by colleagues, application numbers continue to track in line with pre-pandemic targets.
- 7.15 The Executive responded to a question from Court about support for staff during the pandemic. The whole team was very conscious that staff had taken on extra challenges, and new pressures, alongside different working arrangements. The University had worked hard to understand staff needs and had provided space on campus for staff who did not have suitable arrangements at home. Additional online counselling and wellbeing support was provided and widely used. A virtual wellbeing festival had over 1,000 sign-ups for events. Colleagues in Sport, Exercise & Health had offered online support and classes. However, it had been, and continued to be, a challenging time and staff were asked to work to their best endeavours, modifying work patterns and taking a flexible approach. A staff pulse survey had also assisted in understanding staff experiences.
- 7.16 Court also asked about additional support for students, particularly first years. The Executive noted efforts in residences to support students to connect to each other in living circles, provision of an online welcome week, food deliveries and additional wellbeing visits. Additional counselling and wellbeing support had also been made available, via Nilaari and a programme of activities was planned for students staying in Bristol over the winter break.
- 7.17 Court sought more information about the Western Gateway initiative. The Vice-Chancellor explained that the Western Gateway had been formally recognised by Government as a local "powerhouse". Its role was to support the development of the regional economy and contribute to the national economy. The Western Gateway was the third such powerhouse, after the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine and would span from Swindon to Swansea, with Bristol & Cardiff as the key axis.
- 7.18 A question was received about the role of non-HE adult education in Bristol's civic mission. The Executive confirmed that this was not the current focus, however, the University had developed foundation programmes and taster courses to support mature students into degree programmes. Feedback would be welcomed from Court on the demand for this provision.
- 7.19 Court asked about the distribution of annual report and how it was used to engage stakeholders. The Executive confirmed that the report was made widely available online but that the new Civic Engagement Committee would be asked to review how this could be improved.
- 7.20 A question was received in relation to the setting of the agenda for Court. The Registrar confirmed that this is defined in Statute 12 and that the Chancellor approves the agenda in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor and the Board of Trustees.

8. CLOSE

8.1 The Chancellor thanked Court for their engagement in the meeting and with the University. The Chancellor reminded Court of upcoming meeting dates (further details regarding these to follow in due course):

- 7 May 2021: Court Workshop – Anti-Racism
- 3 December 2021: Annual Meeting of Court 2021