

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL COURT

Friday 13 December 2024

DRAFT MINUTES

Sir Paul Nurse FRS (Chancellor)
(Michael Flay – Clerk)

Members

Category 1 – Elected Members

C Burns, A Carr, S Ellwood, A Franks, A Ganapathy, S Gilbert, A Glykis (online), H Phillips, J Phillips, V Smith, S Sparks, B Toll (online), K Walton, A Waterman-Pearson (online), L Wilson

Category 2 – Nominated Members

Z Banks Gross, A Bates, X Bell, S Crew, H David (online), G Ferguson, P Hassan, S Jirde, Joe McGeehan, A Parekh, P Pipim Osei, A Raikes, G Richardson (online), S Savant, P Smith, L Testani, M Tudor, B Wilson

Category 3 – Ex Officio

D Burn, P Nurse

Category 4 – Additional Members

G Bevan, A Brown, J Cameron, C Chandler-Mant, A Cousins, S Elliot, A Fletcher, M Fodor, J Gray, N Logan, H Mack, E Magrath, V Matthews, A Richards, E Rowberry, A Street, J Taylor

Attendees

Senior Team

M Flay, L Parr, J Squires, P Vermeulen, E Welch,

Board of Trustees

J Boyer, A Carr, I Craddock, N Edwards, N Keveth, X Levantis

Pro Vice-Chancellor and Executive Deans

E Dermott, J Taverne

Sabbatical Officers

G Chopra, L Pears, K Poyner, M Stevens

Elected individuals from UoB staff

G Brockington, J Church, C Cowley, D Exon-Barlett, R Harbour, T Henderson, R Logan, A Nansera, A Paterson, E Poletto-Lawson, B Williamson

Observers

M Booker, B Brown, D Brown (online), J Darley, C Duckworth, K Christopher-Grant, K Idarousse, J Leaver, L Minhas, A Shah, P Smart, R Taffinder

1. WELCOME

1.1 The Chancellor (Sir Paul Nurse) welcomed members of Court to the Annual Meeting. It was **NOTED** that there were no new conflicts of interest.

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING – 2023 (CRT/24-25/001)

2.1 **APPROVED**: the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2023, as a true and accurate record (*on file*).

3. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2023/24 (CRT/24-25/002)

3.1 RECEIVED and **APPROVED**: the Report of the Board of Trustees (*on file*).

- 3.2 **CONSENTED TO: on the recommendation of the Board of Trustees**, the amendment of the Statutes of the University by amending Statute 6.3.1 (Attendees of Court) as set out in the draft Statutes attached hereto, subject to (i) an Order of Council; and (ii) any amendments which the Chair of the Board considers to be necessary or expedient to secure the required Order of Council, the amendment of the Statutes to take effect from the date of the Order of Council.
- 3.3 **APPROVED:** resultant amendments to the Court Standing Orders.
4. **ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023/24 (CRT/23-24/003 and PowerPoint presentation (on file)**
- 4.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED:** the 2023/24 University of Bristol Annual Report and Financial Statements (on file).
5. **OPEN FORUM QUESTION TIME**
- 5.1 Members of Court asked questions of the Vice-Chancellor and other members of the top table. The discussions highlighted the following:
- 5.1.1 In relation to key challenges facing the University: the importance of avoiding complacency and considering both cost and value in its decision-making. There were ongoing financial and reputational challenges, but there was an optimistic outlook for the future. It was noted, however, that the unpredictable nature of certain events remained a concern, and that the University must be prepared with resilience to address unforeseen challenges.
- 5.1.2 In relation to the broader opportunities ahead: the importance of taking advantage of upcoming opportunities, particularly in research. There was a strong potential aligned with the industrial strategy, where the university held considerable strength. The importance of staying proactive and ready to seize opportunities as they arose was emphasised.
- 5.1.3 In relation to addressing environmental risks: it was noted that while the university's immediate risks are not environmental in nature, detailed risk planning was in place for extreme weather events. The Chief Property Officer and their team are responsible for managing these practical risks. On the broader environmental issue, the university focuses on contributing to solutions, not just mitigation. This was done through research on sustainability, integrating sustainability into education, and working towards meeting net zero commitments. The university was also collaborating closely with the City on a district heat network, ensuring it is decarbonised and was part of the Bristol Climate Change Partnership. Additionally, there was strong engagement from sustainability champions within the university, promoting individual and collective action across the 9,000 staff members. The university was very passionate about sustainability and was currently ranked 5th in the UK for its sustainability efforts.
- 5.1.4 In relation to investment in hydrogen and net zero solutions for aviation: Hydrogen was seen as a key energy source for the future, with the government and corporate sector aiming to collaborate closely with universities to develop capabilities in hydrogen production, transportation, storage, and usage. The university was committed to advancing green technologies, including hydrogen, and was playing a leadership role in the region's efforts to redevelop and innovate in green technologies, particularly hydrogen, in collaboration with other higher education institutions.
- 5.1.5 In relation to green challenges more broadly: the University emphasised that it was addressing green challenges through impactful research, such as studies on migration, and by partnering with local communities for volunteer work that brought research into action e.g. University Sanctuary Scholarships. The connection between forced migration and climate change was a key focus, with efforts being made to understand and address its impacts.
- 5.1.6 In relation to a question that was asked about wider City engagement: it was noted that the university was addressing social inequality through its Access and Participation Plan,

which allocated a percentage of tuition fee income to tackle educational inequalities both locally and nationally. Additionally, the Dental School contributed to the community by offering 1,000 free appointments per week.

- 5.1.7 In relation to a question about reforming access and participation within the parameters of the Equalities Act: the University was working closely with African and Caribbean diaspora communities, focusing on creating educational and employment opportunities and addressing health inequalities. Accountability partners played a key role in maintaining this focus. Despite financial challenges, the University emphasised that it was committed to prioritising these issues, driven by a moral responsibility to address long-standing racial inequalities and improve outcomes in education, employment, and health.
- 5.1.8 In relation to a question about the impact of students in the City: the university valued feedback on how to change the narrative around students and build on the civic university agreement. With 30,000 students across the city, the university was focused on helping students transition from their first to second year, teaching them to understand their role in the local community. Efforts included significant investment in support and education, as well as penalties, when necessary. While some residents perceived students as taking money out of the city, the university aimed to highlight the positive economic contributions students make to the local economy. The goal was to shift the perspective from an "us and them" mentality to a more inclusive view of the benefits that students bring.
- 5.1.9 In relation to a question asked about Chinese student's language barriers and broader integration into the University community: The university had high entry requirements for international students, including specific speaking, writing, and reading criteria. A foundation course was offered to ensure students meet these standards. Chinese students tended to concentrate in certain programmes, such as accounting and finance, where they may have made up 75% of the cohort. While this concentration was not seen as an acute problem, the university was working to diversify its offerings to better distribute international students across the curriculum. The university would continue to monitor this to ensure effective integration and support for all students.
- 5.1.20 In response to a question about Value for Money for students: the university had signed a charter with students to ensure value for money (VfM) from both the university's and students' perspectives. Last year, a key focus was the level of investment in student activities, such as co-creating student housing advice with the Student Union. A student trustee highlighted the support from the university around food costs on campus and ensuring affordable student accommodation. However, students were clearly facing significant challenges, particularly with the high cost of living in the city, leading many to take on jobs to support their education. The university recognised these difficulties, especially for postgraduate students on stipends, and acknowledged the shifting landscape of higher education in this regard.
- 5.1.21 In relation to a question about research grant income and how the University compared with other Russell Group Institutions: it was noted that there was not ratio league table position. Research was central to the university's mission and played a key role in its teaching and education. Commercialising research, including spinouts, was also important, as it led to more patents and business opportunities within the City. However, research does come with challenges, particularly as not all costs are fully recovered. Helpfully, the way in which the University had grown its research this year was that it had been fully funded e.g. Isambard AI. It was also noted that growth in student numbers was essential to support growth in the research agenda.

6. INTRODUCTION FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: BRISTOL LEARNING CITY – FUTURE SKILLS (PowerPoint presentation (on file)).

6.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: a verbal introduction from the VC for the workshop on future skills.

7. WORKSHOP: BRISTOL LEARNING CITY – FUTURE SKILLS (CRT/24-25/004 and PowerPoint presentation (on file)).

- 7.1 The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor Global Civic Engagement (Palie Smart) introduced herself, her colleagues, and the workshop. Court members engaged in the Bristol Learning City – Future skills workshop.
8. **The Chancellor closed the meeting.**
9. The date of the next meeting would be Friday 12 December 2025.