



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES TELECONFERENCE BRIEFING

6 March 2020

*4<sup>th</sup> Floor Boardroom, Beacon House*

### NOTE OF THE TELECONFERENCE

**Present:** Present: Ms K Ashley, Mr J Boyer (Chair), Professor H Brady (Vice-Chancellor – in the room), Ms J Cecil, Professor S Ellwood, Ms L Fletcher, Dr M Hamlin, Dr J Khawaja (in the room), Mr J Palmer, Mr A Poolman (Treasurer), Dr A Raffel (in the room), Professor G Macdonald, Professor J Squires (Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) and Provost - in the room), Professor K Syrett.

**In Attendance:** Robert Kerse (Chief Operating Officer), Shana Johnson (Deputy Head of Governance & Executive Support), Alicia O'Grady (Director of External Relations), Lucinda Parr (Registrar and Secretary), Tim Peters (Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor Research & Enterprise via conference call), Erik Lithander (Pro Vice-Chancellor Global Engagement), Professor Sarah Purdy (Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience).

#### Apologies:

#### 1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting which had been convened in order to ensure that members of the Board of Trustees were updated on the University response to Covid-19 and Industrial Action and that the Board had assurance that appropriate academic and operational scenario planning was taking place alongside financial stress testing and mitigation measures. The Chair thanked the senior team and other officers for the comprehensive presentation and all the work which was going into ensuring a robust university response to the Covid-19 situation.

#### 2. Presentation Covid-19 – Confidential and Commercially Sensitive

2.1 NOTED the presentation which covered:

- The Status of the Covid-19 Outbreak, national guidance, including Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel guidance and human coronavirus research at the University
- UoB Incident Response Structure, priorities, academic and operational scenario planning and mitigation
- Financial stress testing
- University of Sydney Case Study

2.2 The following key issues were raised/noted:

##### **Status of the Outbreak/guidance**

- The University was liaising closely with Public Health England, Bristol City Council, University of the West of England, Universities UK, the Russell Group and international partners.
- New advice suggested that asymptomatic people were not contagious, as had previously been thought
- The national focus had now moved to the 'delay phase' in order to slow the spread, thus avoiding overlap with winter flu and to ease the load on NHS before the weather

improves and potentially impacts on the spread of the virus – although there was no guarantee of that given that the virus is of the same family as MERS, which prospered in the heat.

- There was ongoing monitoring of public health and travel guidance to ensure up to date information and necessary action.

### **UoB Incident Response and Scenario Planning**

The Board of Trustees raised questions in particular in relation to student and staff morale/health and well-being, harassment cases, robustness of scenario planning, communications and the protocol should a case of COVID – 19 be found in residences. The following key issues were noted:

- The management response structure was in operation with Gold Team meeting daily.
- Silver Group immediate priority was prevention, containment and support.
- Scenario planning was taking place in relation to current students and also students in the 20/21 recruitment cycle
- Scenarios included students not returning after Easter 2020 vacation, students unable to complete the academic year, travel bans, inability to deliver pre-sessional courses, disruption to UK A-Level exam process, reduced number of existing students returning for the next academic year and a decline in home and overseas student recruitment
- There had been two harassment incidents and students involved had been fully supported. The reports had come through normal channels and there was also information on how to report anonymously.
- It was confirmed that there was a single point of contact for staff and students with concerns or seeking information. There was also liaison with the Student Union and Trades Unions although there would not be a JCNC meeting until after industrial action had ceased on the request of all Trades Unions.
- Business continuity planning was taking place in respect of substantially increased staff sickness and/or a potential 'campus closure'. Workforce and Infrastructure planning would identify critical services and an agreed minimum level of service. The Campus will never fully close and there would need to be a skeleton workforce to look after particular services.
- The University was considering staggered entry to programmes of study or delaying the start of the academic year to meet the Covid-19 challenge.
- The general mood of staff and students was calm, with some small pockets of concern/anxiety. To date there had not been an increased demand on mental health and well-being services, but this would be monitored very carefully.
- Advice to students about whether to return home at Easter was being worked up in consultation with Public Health England and involved detailed modelling of different student groups.
- It was confirmed that the University had a good level of supplies of masks and gloves and these would be made available to staff if necessary.
- There was guidance from public health around what to do if students needed to self-isolate. The University had identified spaces where students could self-isolate and had protocols in place for example in relation to provision of meals. If there were a positive Covid-19 case in a residence it would not automatically close. Public Health made assessments on a case by case and location by location basis.

### **Financial Stress Testing**

The Board of Trustees sought reassurances in relation to financial stress testing and asked questions in particular relating to payment processes, potential savings and priorities for on-going activities. The following key issues were noted.

- The Long-Term Financial Plan had been stress tested to reflect two potential core planning scenarios with a significant adverse impact – [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- The two things which needed to be very carefully monitored were bank covenants and cash.
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- Continued investment in mission critical activities to ensure the medium-term success unless material adverse change in financial outlook beyond next 18 months e.g. global recession.
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- It was confirmed that the financial forecast included the impact of mitigations.
- Mitigations would need to be worked through with colleagues and presentations would be made to the University Executive Board and UMT Plenary following this meeting.
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].
- The success of the university and its reputation was enhanced by academics travelling to other countries and presenting papers at conferences. A travel ban was not being considered at the moment and Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidance was being followed in relation to travel. [REDACTED: likely to prejudice commercial interests].

### 3. Presentation Industrial Action

#### 3.1 NOTED the presentation and the following key points:

- The University was still in a period of industrial action and protocols were still in place. Indications were that there were less people involved than in December.
- The education mitigation group was looking at teaching impacts and was now tying in with Covid-19 planning
- There would be modelling of the impact of action at end of this industrial action phase
- There had not been significant risk carried forward from December.
- Stock market and gilt rate falls could impact on USS and the valuation.