MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FRIDAY 30 JANUARY 2026

BURGES SALMON, 0900 - 1605

MINUTES

Present: Ms Héloïse Aboulker (Governance Apprentice), Ms Ololade Adesanya, Mr Mark Allan, Mr Steven Boyd, Professor Andrew Carr (Chair), Ms Jessica Cecil, Ms Lucy Collins, Professor Ian Craddock, Professor Natalie Edwards, Ms Jilly Huggins, Mr Nick Keveth, Ms Arta Kurti, Ms Lucie Lambert from 9:30am, Mr Freddie Quek, Professor Judith Squires, Professor Evelyn Welch, Professor Dame Melanie Welham

In attendance for entire meeting: Helen Cole (Senior Governance Officer and minutes) Mr Michael Flay (University Secretary and Director of Governance), Liam O'Shea (Deputy Chief of Staff), Mrs Lucinda Parr (Chief Operating Officer and Registrar), Hannah Quinn (Chief of Staff), Mr Peter Vermeulen (Chief Financial Officer)

In attendance for specific items as detailed below: Graham Baker (General Counsel and Director of Legal Services) for item 6, Mrs Victoria Jones Parry (Executive Director of Strategic Planning & Transformation) for item 8, Miss Sharan Khemlani (Postgraduate Education Officer), Miss Ella Lovibond (Sports and Student Development Officer), Miss Lucy Pears (Student Living Officer), Miss Katie Poyner (Union Affairs Officer), Miss Mia Stevens (Undergraduate Education Officer), Miss Linlu Ye (Equality, Liberation and Access Officer), Miss Jessie Yeung (International Students Officer) all for item 9, Mr James Bigwood (Chief People Officer) for item 12, Professor Guy Poppy (Pro Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation), Professor Jeremy Tavare (Pro Vice Chancellor Health and Life Sciences) and Harry Destecroix (Founder of Science Creates and Managing Partner of SCVC) all for item 13

Apologies: Mr Jack Boyer, Mr Stephen Robertson, Ms Sophera Whiu

1. WELCOMES, APOLOGIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1 The Chair welcomed the members and attendees, in particular Héloïse Aboulker who was attending her first meeting as a governance Apprentice on the Board of Trustees.

1.2 The Chair noted that an additional paper had been shared with the members via email on 28 January. The Chair advised the members that this paper entitled Preparing for a Unique Land Acquisition would be dealt with under the item 7 (Report of the CFO). It was noted the opportunity covered by the paper had emerged since the circulation of the main Board paper pack on 21 January.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were none.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 RECEIVED and **APPROVED**: the minutes from the 21 November 2025 meeting of the Board of Trustees as a true and accurate record (*on file*).

4. ACTIONS & MATTERS ARISING

4.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED:** the Board action register *(on file).*

4.2 AGREED that both action 6.3 and action 8.3 as listed on the Register be closed and removed from the Register.

4.3 In terms of action 6.5.3, as listed on the Register, the Board AGREED that this action be closed and removed from the Register. The Board were content that recent admissions updates to Board, had included more detail regarding student origin data thereby showing diversity by country or region, rather than grouping under 'rest of the world'. Additionally, it was noted that this was an area where reporting would progress and evolve overtime to provide further and more detailed disaggregation when/ where beneficial and as the International Education Plan 2025-2030 was implemented.

5. CHAIR'S REPORT

5.1 RECEIVED and **NOTED**: the Chair's Report ref **BT/25-26/024** (*on file*),

5.2 The Board noted the appointment of Peaches Golding OBE CStJ as a Pro-Chancellor from 1 January 2026 for an initial three-year term ending on 31 December 2028 at the meeting of University Court on 12 December 2025.

5.3 APPROVED the appointment of Khaled Mamour as a Board Apprentice for a one-year term from 1 May 2026 to 31 May 2027.

5.4 APPROVED the appointment of Melissa Scaramellini as a Co-opted Member of Finance and Investments Committee for an initial three-year term from 1 February 2026 to 28 February 2029.

5.5 APPROVED the appointment of Iwan Smith as a Co-opted Member of Finance and Investments Committee for an initial three-year term from 1 February 2026 to 28 February 2029.

General Counsel and Director of Legal Services joined the meeting

6. EXECUTIVE REPORT

6.1 The Vice-Chancellor presented paper reference **BT/25-26/025** (*on file*), which the Board RECEIVED and **DISCUSSED**.

6.2 The Board discussed the latest admissions data that was shared in advance via the paper and the further analysis presented on the day. In response to a question, the Executive noted that in the broadest sense the trends seen previously were continuing and that there remained a disparity between different programme portfolios i.e. applications to arts continued to decline, social sciences remained static, whilst science and engineering continuing to increase. It was noted that an exception was growth in programmes where courses were perceived to have a strong link with professional qualifications and/ or outcomes, examples were economics, data science, law. Another difference referred to was that those programmes with joint honours seemed to have greater appeal than those with single honours.

6.3 The Board queried how the University defined its competitors in terms of admissions and whether there was a particular emphasis on the Russell Group or whether other definitions/ measures were used. In response the Executive advised that those universities where the University of Bristol shared the most applications with were defined as competitor institutions. The University had sight of this of information via an applicant's insurance offer when applications were received, the University also had sight when Bristol was an insurance offer against a competitor listed as the first choice.

6.4 In terms of PGT home, it was noted that applications in this area had increased strongly year on year. The Executive noted that the reasons for this more buoyant situation were not completely clear and that volatility was often observed in this area. A counter cyclical explanation where wider economic changes were impacting on employment prospects was a possible cause.

6.5 The Board sought assurances on the risk reported in PGT Overseas admissions that the increase in RoW (Rest of World) did not balance the decline in applications from China. It was also noted that the conversion rate for applications from China had also declined and was now lower than RoW, whereas in previous years it had tended to be higher. The Executive noted that an increased delay in making applications was also observable within the China market when compared to previous years, the explanation was that applicants perceived a reduced level of competition for places. The Executive noted that downward forecasts in these areas had been built into the projections being seen in this cycle but that arguably the University should have gone further and that numbers were expected to continue to decline for the next cycle.

6.6 The Executive noted that both programme choice and access to new courses were important mechanisms for tackling the potential risk of shortfall in the PGT Overseas market. For example engagement and applications for new Master's programmes at TQEC from September 2026 were very high, thereby proving market strength in certain areas and the benefits of the new campus. On a related point, the Board noted that the opening of the Mumbai Enterprise Campus from August 2026 was well timed and aligned with the Government's recent announcement of its UK International Education Strategy 2026. This strategy placed a strong emphasis on Transnational Education (TNE) and its role in the recruitment of high-quality international students from a diverse range of countries.

6.7 In response to a query it was noted that changes in applicant behaviour in the China market also accounted for part of the decline. The Chinese HE sector continued to evolve and typically delivered courses better suited to Chinese students wishing to enter public sector employment as opposed to the private sector within China whilst its public sector expanded. This meant that Chinese students were more likely to remain in country, but for those seeking overseas options, the market had expanded and diversified significantly in recent years meaning that the UK HE sector was now competing globally for access to these overseas students.

6.8 The Board queried how the University used data from deposits paid prior to acceptance of an offer and what changes were emerging in this area. In response it was noted that the phenomenon of applicants paying several deposits to multiple UK institutions to reserve a place appeared to have peaked, previously this had been used this as a measure of competition and competitors. The explanation for this activity now plateauing was that the market was viewed by overseas applicants as being less competitive. In the next cycle the team would add accommodation deposit paid data to provide a clearer picture, it was emphasised that tracking actual offer acceptance remained the priority.

6.9 The Board noted the relationships between admissions and the IPP (Integrated Planning Process) to ensure strong control over the Faculty and Schools operating model. The Executive were continuing to interrogate and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the CFO would be reviewing Faculty plans in the first half of February to ensure that they remained realistic, aligned, coherent and deliverable; and with particular attention to the achievement of Faculty Operating Surplus and School Operating Margin targets, and Academic Performance Objectives. The Board were reminded that the minimum 50% operating surplus model per School remained and that this activity alongside the PSTP (Professional Services Transformation Programme) would seek to take out cost. These initiatives all needed to work together with the aim of presenting budget to UEB in February and the Board of Trustees in May.

6.10 The Board discussed how the above activity would impact the work force in particular where a School did not meet the 50% target, and that in certain cases staff headcount would need to be reviewed as part of setting specific targets for these Schools. In discussion the Board noted that targeted voluntary severance would be explored in certain circumstances. In these situations, activity needed to take place in a timely way so that courses were not offered to incoming students where the academic staff who would deliver the required content were no longer employed by the University.

6.11 The Executive advised that the aim was take actions in a targeted way with continuous and incremental changes and thereby mitigate risk of industrial action on a large scale, planning would be at the School level with a strategic, nuanced approach to be taken and to balance the goals of operating targets against academic reputational risk.

6.12 In discussion the Board noted the communication and reputational risks going forward both in terms of impact on staff and the student experience. It was noted that voluntary redundancies typically had lower reputational risk than compulsory redundancies and that for this reason the voluntary routes would be pursued as the priority route, compulsory redundancy would only be sought in small, isolated situations.

6.13 The Board noted that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost would be stepping down on 31 December 2026. The Vice-Chancellor provided a verbal update on the recruitment timeline noting that as per Ordinance 7, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was appointed by the Board of Trustees.

6.14 In terms of the Digital Strategy and Modern Network Programme, the Board noted progress and developments as detailed in the paper. A question was raised regarding whether conclusions could now be drawn on the University's success in these two areas in particular Modern Network. The Executive responded that work to re-baseline the Modern Network Programme remained ongoing, and that arguably an examination of results and outcomes would be better delayed until further updates had been provided to the Audit and Risk Committee.

6.15 The General Counsel and Director of Legal Services provided a verbal update on legal cases.

General Counsel and Director of Legal Services left the meeting

7. UNIVERSITY FINANCES:

7.1 RECEIVED and **DISCUSSED**: the **BT/25-26/026a, BT/25-26/026b, BT/25-26/026c** (*on file*).

7.2 NOTED the summary of the most important financial matters as of January 2026, the CFO presented to the Board.

Preparing for a Unique Land Acquisition (BT/25-26/026c)

7.3 APPROVED delegated authority to a subgroup of Trustees (no fewer than four) to review a proposal to acquire *REDACTED [Section 43 – trade secrets and prejudicial to commercial interests]*

7.4 AGREED that the membership of the subgroup of Trustees would be determined after the meeting and should aim to have the skills and expertise needed to robustly evaluate such a proposal. NOTED that the inclusion of a member of Audit and Risk Committee to the group should be considered by the Chair of the Board. *REDACTED [Section 43 – trade secrets and prejudicial to commercial interests]* However, alongside this the Board was mindful that the University needed to respond promptly when opportunities emerged in short order and required quick decision making, this case being such an example. In discussion the Board members were content that an existing sub-Committee of the Board would not be suited to review information on behalf of the Board on this occasion due to the differing and varied skill sets required.

7.5 NOTED the annual report and financial statements for the University of Bristol Students' Union for the year ended 30 June 2025 to ensure that the financial affairs of the Union have been properly conducted.

7.6 The Board discussed the section in the Report entitled Student Loans noting that changes to affordability as a result of recent Budget announcements were raising the media profile of this subject.

7.7 In relation to research funding and its role within the overall funding of the University, the Board noted and was mindful that although "research did not cover costs" it was the driver of rankings and this in turn delivered student enrolment, research was also the driver for philanthropy and wider investment. The Board acknowledge this linking and interdependency between different elements of university endeavour.

7.8 The Board noted the chart in the pack that showed the University was in the top 10 of HE sector institutions that had published accounts where a surplus was recorded. It was noted that this positive news was perhaps to a certain extent a difficult message to land in context of previous conversations regarding to reducing costs. The Executive noted that the aim was to engage with staff and senior leaders in a positive, proactive and meaningful way whilst being cognisant of how messages were being received and understood by different groups. The intention was to provide continuous and ongoing sharing of information so that communication would evolve over time.

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning & Transformation joined the meeting

8. KEY UNIVERSITY RISK REGISTER

8.1 RECEIVED and DISCUSSED: the Report **BT/25-26/027** (*on file*).

8.2 **NOTED** the January 2026 Key University Risks and Risk Management report as presented to the Board of Trustees (BoT) to allow assurance of the effectiveness of the University's risk management, as recommended by the Audit and Risk Committee for final approval by the Board of Trustees at its next meeting in March 2026.

8.3 In discussion, the Board congratulated the team on the more sophisticated and nuanced presentation and analysis provided by the revised format. In response to a question, it was noted that the subject of *AI governance* was picked up in the risks covering information security and education and students. It was noted that AI impacted both academia and operations/ professional services.

8.4 A query was raised as to how and where within the organisation emerging risks were considered and the mechanism for reviewing whether “new” risk should be added. In response the Executive noted that in the immediate term the upcoming mid-point review of the University Strategy might serve this purpose. In the longer term, embedding the examination of emerging risks via horizon scanning/ top level perspective into the cycle would be explored. On a related point, it was noted that risks also entered the KURR from the “bottom up”. i.e. risks held at lower consideration within the organisation could be brought up to the top level and this served as another route for emerging risks.

8.5 The Board discussed the overlap and differences between risk target and risk appetite, noting that it was important to avoid overinterpreting distinctions and instead focus on the trajectory of evolution and improvement in key areas. For example, risks relating to cyber would arguably remain as an ongoing and live issue, but that progress was still sought even if risks could never be fully reconciled.

8.6 The Board discussed other methodologies that organisations used to monitor and engage with risk profiling including risk waterfalls, risk appetite ranges, linkage of risks to create cumulative or subtractive effects. Whilst noting that improvements would be ongoing, the Board concluded that it was content to engage with and use the revised KURR format as presented to this meeting for the immediate future.

8.7 The Board queried which areas the OfS was likely to raise concerns in relation to University of Bristol specifically. The Executive responded that Transnational Educations (TNE) and any structural changes were of particular interest. It was noted that these were both managed by senior staff across a variety of operational decision-making forums and arguably took up a significant amount of management time that was not visible to the Board via the KURR.

8.8 A question was raised as to whether the OfS Conditions of registration were covered by the new risk Compliance KUR010. The Executive confirmed that this was the case, noting that separate risk assessment was being drafted to highlight risks and actions in relation to areas relating to the physical estate and that compliance data was also being gathered from across the institution.

8.9 A question was raised as to whether student outcomes specifically value for money should be visible in the KURR. In response it was noted that *Strategic Goal 5: Ensuring students gain future skills*, referred to this area and included student outcomes. It was noted that the KURR did not seek to examine every risk or show every area of activity, its remit was only those risks escalated to the most senior level. AGREED that student outcomes be reviewed and tested via the usual processes to decide if the KURR needed to be amended.

Action: COO and Executive Director of Strategic Planning & Transformation

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning & Transformation left the meeting
The SU Sabbatical Officers joined the meeting for this item

9. SU FULL-TIME OFFICERS MIDTERM PROGRESS REPORT

9.1 The Board congratulated the Officers on their achievements to date at this the mid-point in the academic year.

9.2 In discussion the Board noted the work undertaken by the Officers within the area of rent setting in particular teasing apart the cost of accommodation versus food costs and interpretating what students rated more highly. It was noted that distance of accommodation from the precinct was also a factor and that this could be used to apply the student perspective into how the rents were set.

9.3 The Board queried whether particular groups were over-represented in those that accessed services provided in relation to cost of living and whether students had clear and realistic expectations in this area in advance of coming to university in Bristol. In response, the Officers noted that all types of student accessed these services although a higher proportion were home students as opposed to overseas. When considering bursaries, it was notable that these now only placed students at the same level as their wider cohort, i.e. it no longer provided a notable financial advantage. In terms of expectation in advance of arrival, information provided on avoiding scams/ fraud and outreach in terms deposit and regular payments were valuable to incoming students. The collaboration between Bristol SU and the University's finance and communication teams was noted.

9.4 In response to a question, the Officers outlined ways that students were made aware that the SU was a source of help and information. It was noted that wider student representation (i.e. beyond the full-time officers) was provided via course, School and Faculty representatives, this created a thread by which issues/ queries/ feedback could be escalated and then responded to.

9.5 The Board discussed "commuter students", noting that by some measures and at a national level, up to one quarter could be categorised in this way. Arguably accessing higher education in this way was likely to increase and the Board queried what types of support the data showed these students as needing. In response it was noted that the main issues were timetabling, for example if lectures took place at either end of the day it was more difficult to attend (especially when travel time exceeded one hour). A lack of low/ no cost locations to wait in between lecturers were also cited and also lack of opportunities to socialise with other students as this often took place late in the evenings or at weekends.

The SU Sabbatical Officers left the meeting

10. UNIVERSITY SECRETARY'S REPORT

10.1 RECEIVED and APPROVED paper ref: BT/25-26/030a and BT/25-26/030b (*on file*).

10.2 APPROVED the proposed two new school names within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Schools:
School of Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences
School of Psychology and Neuroscience

10.3 NOTED the amendment to the Bristol SU Byelaws.

11. REPORT FROM INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

11.1 RECEIVED and NOTED: the paper ref: **BT/25-26/029** (on file).

11.2 NOTED that at present the work of the Infrastructure and Planning Committee (IPC) was dominated by the development of the Estates Strategy. The benefit of clarity in relation to the place-based manifestos prior to the finalisation of the Estates Strategy was noted. The planned timeline was as follows: IPC 23 April 2026 Clifton and Langford place-based manifestos, IPC 18 June draft of final Estate Strategy, Board of Trustees 3 July final Estate Strategy for approval

Chief People Officer joined the meeting for this item

12. STATUTORY ANNUAL REPORT ON GENDER & ETHNICITY PAY GAP

12.1 RECEIVED and **APPROVE**: paper reference **BT/25-26/028** (*on file*).

12.2 APPROVED the data to be published as part of the statutory Gender & Ethnicity Pay Gap report, and voluntary reporting of EPG and DPG.

12.3 In discussion the Board noted the impact on the data sets of the decline in both overall headcount and turnover rate at the University. A fall in these figures impacted on pay gap(s) because it meant that vacancies were not created and recruited to and the associated pipelines at lower pay grades in the organisations were not created either. Over the next 2-3 years, it was reasonable to expect this stagnation effect to persist. In the context of the earlier discussion on workforce planning, the Board were mindful that a small number of appointments or exits would affect data in this area significantly. It was noted that in the future the Culture and Inclusion Committee would have a larger role in interrogating and engaging on these types of report on behalf of the Board.

Chief People Officer left the meeting

PVC for Health & Life Sciences, PVC for Research & Innovation and the Founder of Science Creates and Managing Partner of SCVC joined the meeting

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13. RESEARCH SENSITISATION (PROJECT COLOSSUS)

13.1 RECEIVED and **DISCUSSED:** the paper ref: **BT/25-26/031** (*on file*).

13.2 *REDACTED [Section 43 – trade secrets and prejudicial to commercial interests]*

13.3 *REDACTED [Section 43 – trade secrets and prejudicial to commercial interests]*

A Board development day was scheduled for Thursday 26 March and the date of the next meeting was confirmed as Friday 27 March 2026