![University of Bristol logo]

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF SENATE
MINUTES
Thursday 12 November 2020
15.30, virtual Zoom meeting

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (**Chair**), Professors Allen, Bickers, Birdi, Bond, Carrington, Cater, Cini, Dermott, Faul, Flecker, George, Gilchrist, Grierson, Gayle Hanbury for Jane Norman, Hickman, Iredale, Ireland, Jessop, Jordan, Lithander, Linthorst, Luckhurst, Marklof, Nabney, Neild, Nobes, Oliphant, Orpen, Parkin, Pancost, Pantazis, Payne, Peters, Piggins, Powell, Pollman, Pleydell-Pearce, Purdy, Raven, Ridley, Robbins, Schonle, Smart, B Smith, S Smith, Spear, Squires, Schwarzacher, Tavare, Taylor, Timpson, Tonks, Tormey, Wilding, E Wilson, D Wilson;

Dr M Allinson, Dr K Austin, Dr M Barbour, Prof A Blom, Dr N Dahnoun, Dr L Dickinson, Dr M Dudley, Mr E Fay, Dr S Fitzjohn, Dr A Flack, Dr S Fox, Mrs M Gillway, Dr J Howarth, Dr AJ Howkins, Ms F Ingram, Mr D Ion, Mr D Jones, Mr R Kerse, Dr P Langton, Dr I Lazar, Dr E Love, Ms I Marshall, Ms Leah Martndale, Dr S McGuinness, Mr Thomas Metcalfe, Dr D Morgan, Dr R Murray, Mr Andrew Pearce, Dr MT O'Toole, Dr K Opie, Mrs L Parr, Dr D Poole, Dr S Proud, Miss Rebecca Pullin, Mr R Rossi, Mr S Sreekanth, Dr L Walling, Ms Z Wang, Dr K Whittington.

Apologies: Professor Mark Szczelkun

In attendance: Claire Buchanan (Chief People Officer), Tracy Brunnock(Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager), Paula Coonerty (Executive Director for Education and Student Experience and Academic Registrar), Shana Johnson (Clerk), Robert Kerse (Chief Operating Officer), Kathryn Maycock (Education Strategy Co-ordinator), Hannah Quinn (Head of Governance and Executive Support), Asha Sahni (Assistant Governance Officer), Professor Caroline Relton

1.   INTRODUCTION
1.1   The Vice Chancellor welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the procedure to be followed.

2.   MOTION TO BE DEBATED: *'THIS UNIVERSITY RESOLVES ONLINE TEACHING SHOULD BE THE INSTITUTIONAL DEFAULT FOR TEACHING BLOCK 1'.*

2.1.   **ARGUMENTS FOR THE MOTION** (presented by Senate Members, Dr Laura Dickinson, and Dr Kit Opie).

2.2   The following key issues were presented in support of the motion:
2.2.1   The motion was not about moving everything online but giving teachers and students the agency to decide how to best teach and learn together effectively. It was acknowledged that there were subjects where in-person teaching was essential, and where students clearly remained very keen to attend. Moving teaching online would:
  • Allow teaching staff of all kinds to offer the best possible teaching in the current environment ensuring that no colleagues were unnecessarily forced to attend in-person activities and an opportunity to focus on what was working well, rather than the forms of teaching which were causing distress, additional workload, and spreading an infectious disease.
  • Reduce the disadvantages that students unable to attend in person were currently suffering from.

- Allow Faculties, Schools and Departments to focus on the in-person teaching that really is essential.
- Free up space in the university estate which can be used for the safer delivery of programmes which do require on-campus teaching. This space might also be made available as safer study spaces for students, many of whom are struggling to participate online because they do not have the technology, bandwidth, or physical space to work from home.
- Minimise the number of staff and students moving across the city and the country.
- Recognise the changing student views on face-to-face teaching.
- Safeguard the University's reputation with students and within the city.
- Taking all non-essential teaching online now would be a recognition that this was a very specific situation: a global pandemic.
- Students' mental health was not necessarily improved by on-campus teaching.
- Online teaching would not necessarily lead to demands for fee refunds.
- Moving teaching online would not *necessitate* that students leave university accommodation, though it may make it likely that more would want to.
- Online teaching as the default now across the institution would give more time to develop strategies for a staggered, safer return.
- There were variations of practice across the university in terms of individual risk assessments and standing in for colleagues.
- Face to Face teaching was not the same as pre-pandemic, for example room layout, the need to wear masks and visors and in some situations less and less students were attending face to face sessions.

2.3 **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE MOTION** (presented by Professor Tansy Jessop - PVC Education, Professor Caroline Relton – Chair of Scientific Advisory Group, Ms Lucinda Parr - Registrar and University Secretary, Robert Kerse, Chief Operating Officer).

2.4 The arguments against covered educational/student experience, the institutional risk assessment process, the evidence in relation to cases of COVID 19 in the student and staff communities, financial sustainability:

2.4.1 The Results of a student survey undertaken in the last 2 weeks showed:
- Blended learning was working well although there were some issues with both online and face to face provision.
- In person teaching offered a sense of normality and the opportunity to connect with individual teachers and other students.
- Blended learning enabled students to build connections and community, allowing peer relationships to form, decreasing isolation and feelings of disconnection.
- Blended learning could contribute positively to the student experience in relation to social isolation, mental health and well-being, low motivation, dropping out.

2.4.2 The University had established a Scientific Advisory Group and there was daily monitoring of staff and student infection levels.
2.4.3 There was a multi-stakeholder Outbreak Control Group with key local agencies and an agreed risk assessment process looking at Severity, Uncertainty, Spread, Intervention, Context.
2.4.4 There was a peak of 900 active student cases of coronavirus in October and now there were 126 active cases which was less than 0.5 % of the student population.
2.4.5 Staff cases currently stood at 0.15% of the staff population and were declining.
2.4.6 The University had to balance financial and academic sustainability whilst focussing on the education, well-being and future of young people and managing the institutional risk tolerance within the national context and government guidance.

2.4.7 Expert advice from Public Health was that the risk level was very low and much lower than the rest of the city as evidenced in the metrics provided.

2.4.8 Moving teaching online now would be against the wishes of most students, would be breaking the University contract with them, and would risk triggering migrations in direct contravention of government advice. There was also a potential risk in terms of income loss and threat to jobs, which the University was trying to protect.

3. DEBATE AND QUESTIONS

3.1 During debate the following key issues were noted:

3.1.1 Some concerns were expressed about the relative value of the student survey, the methodology and the analysis, and some members commented that observational analysis and active listening to student experience might be more appropriate. It was noted that engagement had been ongoing with Student Union Sabbatical Officers and discussions were continuing about how to improve the blended learning approach. It was confirmed that data from the survey had been sent to individual Faculties and that analysts had looked at the raw data.

3.1.2 There was scope for improvement to the online offer to ensure consistency across the institution and share innovation but the survey results across all Schools and Faculties showed that students wanted a blended learning offer with some face to face interaction.

3.1.3 There was a potential for some students to be disadvantaged if they were unable to take up face to face learning opportunities and efforts might be better placed improving the online offer for all rather than face to face which might not be able to accessed equitably. There might also be a situation where less and less students are attending face to face – particularly if there are more self-isolating during the winter months with COVID-19-like symptoms.

3.1.4 There was potential advantage in moving now to online as an institutional default and being prepared should everything have to move online in the new year.

3.1.5 The wording of the motion was important as it did not exclude face to face teaching but rather left more scope for individual educators to make ground level decisions about what was most suitable for them and their students. A default position of online across the institution would still enable autonomy within schools to have flexibility to organise teaching in the best way to support students and teachers.

3.1.6 Whilst students wanted face to face learning opportunities it was acknowledged these would not be the same as pre-pandemic and there were variances of demand across different schools and faculties and a range of different student experience.

3.1.7 Concerns were expressed about the impact on student migration if all teaching was now moved online.

4. CONCLUSION, VOTING AND NEXT STEPS

4.1 Following debate, members of Senate voted on the motion **with 56 members voting against** moving to online teaching as the institutional default for Teaching Block 1, **28 members voting for the motion and 6 abstentions**.

4.2 The Vice Chancellor thanked all members of Senate for their very constructive contributions, both for and against the motion and re-iterated the value of on-going collegiate debate, informed by evidence, in very challenging and changing circumstances. The outcome of the meeting and issues raised would be considered by the University Executive Board on Monday 16 November and reported to the Board of Trustees on the 20 November. Whilst the University was firm in its commitment to continue with blended learning, as long as the institutional risk process and national guidance indicated that it was safe to do so, it would continue to listen to concerns expressed about pedagogy and staff and student experience, and would endeavour to take these into account in TB2 practices.