

Introduction



MARTIN CHAINNEY

University Council focused much of its attention in 2003/04 on striking the right balance between the bold and the prudent.

On the one hand, Council was determined to make sure that the University's relative financial stability was maintained. In particular, this meant continuing to grow the operating surplus so that the fabric of the University estate would be sustainable in the long term.

On the other hand, Council was anxious not to be over-cautious or to prompt any lowering of sights or dilution of ambition. All of us who serve on Council are acutely aware that for an institution such as this, standing still means moving backwards.

To illustrate this balanced approach, in 2003/04 the University both retained its 'AA' credit rating and saw the completion of the Dorothy Hodgkin Building for neuroscience; it both grew its operating surplus to £6.5 million and laid the foundation stone for the Bristol Laboratory for Advanced Dynamics Engineering. Both capital developments were made possible by substantial external support, but there were significant financial implications for the University too. A sound financial base enabling investment with confidence was and will continue to be the key.

The comparative strength of the University's financial position is a product of several factors: careful and highly skilled management over many years; improved levels of government support for infrastructure developments; and a certain amount of good fortune in terms of asset disposals. As a result of such factors, the University is ready to take the next step – to make the transition from 'very good with many patches of excellence' to 'comprehensively first rate'. This applies not only to research and teaching but also to the staffing, facilities, administration and leadership on which they depend.

It is now feasible for us to make major, sustainable increases in capital and recurrent spending without incurring undue risks. In doing so we shall be creating the conditions in which the academic output and the student experience at Bristol – already among the best in the UK – can attain new levels. With its centenary approaching in 2009, the University is poised to take its place among the great universities of the world and to play an even bigger role in the social, economic and cultural success of the city of which it is an integral part.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moger Woolley'.

Moger Woolley

Chairman, University Council

Foreword



MARTIN CHANEY

‘One of the key tasks of 2003/04 was to devise a package of measures designed to ensure that higher fees would not act as a serious deterrent to students from poor backgrounds.’

Many of the challenges of 2003/04 affected universities in general rather than Bristol in particular. Some were associated with the choppy passage through Parliament of the Higher Education Bill. It came as something of a relief when, after months of intense debate, universities were given the right to charge higher fees from 2006. In the absence of more money for higher education from general taxation, this will be an important source of the extra cash we will require if we are to enhance the undergraduate experience in line with our new Education Strategy.

One of the key tasks of 2003/04 was to devise a package of measures designed to ensure that higher fees would not act as a serious deterrent to students from poor backgrounds. Easing any tension between our need to raise more money to invest in education and our commitment to widening participation will continue to be a priority.

Philanthropic giving is likely to assume a growing importance in enabling us to improve access to the high quality teaching and learning which, according to the recent Institutional Audit by the Quality Assurance Agency, Bristol offers. The adoption in 2003/04 of a new strategy for fundraising and alumni relations means we are better placed than ever to maximise income from this source.

Voluntary giving can also be a significant element in the funding mix that supports research and innovation, which remain at the heart of what the University is about. In 2003/04, Bristol’s academic community again excelled itself in this regard. The Annual Report that follows gives some insight into the depth and breadth of their work and I place on record my deep admiration for their achievements.

The year was also distinguished by the installation of the University’s new Chancellor, the Right Honourable The Baroness Hale of Richmond. It has been a privilege to work with someone whose intellectual and personal qualities provide such inspiration for students and staff.

Finally, my thanks to everyone – academics, support staff at every level, students, lay members, alumni, trades unions and partner organisations – who made 2003/04 such a good year for Bristol. If the wide-ranging ambitions outlined in the University Plan for 2004–2009 are to be realised, the continuing commitment of them all will be vital.

Professor Eric Thomas

Vice-Chancellor

'I believe the purpose of a university is to transform. At Bristol we transform people through their academic and social experiences here; we transform knowledge through our research and scholarship; and finally we transform society by our published outputs and by the activities of the staff, the students and the institution as a whole locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.'

Professor Eric Thomas
Vice-Chancellor

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