
Meeting: ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY
Date and time: Tuesday 2nd May 2017 at 12.30 pm
Venue: CB1.10

Present: Dr A Salo (Chair)
and 47 members
Attending by invitation: Ms L Humphreys and Ms H South
In attendance: Dr C Harris, Secretary to Academic Assembly

ACTION

630 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd November 2016 (Paper AA16/17-3) were approved and signed by the Chair.

631 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 627, Awards Committee

The Chair explained that the Assembly's representative on the Awards Committee, Dr Nigel Johnston, had to declare a conflict of interest at the spring meeting of the Committee as he had been nominated for an award. Dr Jeff Gavin had been co-opted in his place for that meeting.

632 RELEVANT DECISIONS OF SENATE

The Chair reminded members of Academic Assembly that reports of the meetings of Senate could be found at:

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/statutory-bodies-committees/bodies-and-committees-senate/Senate/minutes/index.html>

He drew attention to the following and recommended members to familiarise themselves with the issues:

- (1) Senate approved a revised Code of Ethics, to be found at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/code-of-ethics/>
- (2) Senate approved a Statement of Principles on the University's approach to Research Assessment and Management to be found at <http://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/principles-of-research-assessment-and-management/>

633 ELECTIONS TO SENATE

The Chair advised of the results of the recent elections to Senate. The turnout had increased to 22.3% this year and this represented a 182% increase over 3 years. The following members of Academic Assembly were elected to Senate for three years from 1 August 2017:

Dr Maria Garcia, Dept of Politics, Languages & International Studies

Dr Jane White, Department of Mathematics

Dr Alison Nightingale, Dept of Pharmacy and Pharmacology

Dr Frances Laughton, Dept of Physics

Dr Ana Dinerstein, Dept of Social and Policy Sciences

An election will be held in due course for three Academic Assembly representatives on Court, the statutory body representing the interests of the University's internal and external constituencies, which meets once a year.

634 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S STATUTORY ADDRESS

The Chair welcomed the Vice-Chancellor to the meeting and invited her to give her statutory address to members in accordance with Statute 22.3. The Vice-Chancellor's address is attached to the minutes as an appendix.

Questions from the floor

A number of questions were put to the Vice-Chancellor from members of Academic Assembly.

Doctoral Study

The Vice-Chancellor was asked how undergraduates can be made more aware of the opportunities and benefit of doctoral study. She explained that future provision would not be as simple as in the past, with innovation necessary.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) clarified that doctoral provision has not had high status at the University, which has been weighted towards undergraduates, and as a result not all PGR students have had a good experience. Over the past year he had been working to improve the provision with PGRs more high profile and more closely allied to research. The Government is looking to universities to deliver alongside industry to serve the national interest, with a fund explicitly for this purpose.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that following the creation of the Apprenticeship Levy and fund it was likely that there would be apprenticeships at doctoral level, as there were already at masters' level. The University needed to be ready to offer relevant PhDs as organisations were desperate to spend the fund. A greater digital presence would explain the benefits of doctoral study.

When asked whether part-time PhDs allied to industry would result in more mature students, the Vice-Chancellor advised that it was not clear at this stage and that the plan would evolve over time. It was not appropriate to assume particular companies or industrial sectors as, for example, social sciences would work with the public sector. Different and innovative strategies would be required by different areas.

Doctoral College

In response to a question on how the Doctoral College would fit with Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), which established themed networks and taught courses, the Vice-Chancellor clarified that CDTs would be part of the Doctoral College to benefit from marketing and the process. This would also ensure that students in CDTs did not feel isolated but would not lose the flavour of the special CDTs. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) added that there has been tremendous innovation in CDTs and it was helpful to spread this good practice and that it was important for CDT students to feel part of the University research community.

It was asked how the responsibility between central administration in the Doctoral College and supervisors would be managed. The Vice-Chancellor explained that responsibility lines needed to be clear but that the new College would remove inconsistencies and allow supervisors to learn how they should be carrying out their role. The Academic Director was expected to be a leader for supervisors and doctoral students and would define requirements and build a community for supervisors/students.

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chancellor for her address and for taking questions.

635 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair advised members that the University Ethics Committee had set up a Sub-Committee to look at ethical approval of teaching. He expressed his concerns that it could be so simplified as to lose meaning or that it could be overly-bureaucratic. Not enough information was currently available to formulate a motion on the subject.

636 DATES OF MEETINGS 2017/18

Wednesday 8th November 2017 at 1.15 pm
Tuesday 8th May 2018 at 12.30 pm

The meeting concluded at 1.20pm

Academic Assembly, 2 May 2017

Vice-Chancellor's Address

Introduction

It has been a busy year - a year during which we have not only forged ahead with the implementation of our new 5-year strategy, but have celebrated the 50th anniversary of the granting of our Royal Charter.

As we reach the end of our anniversary year, we can reflect on the host of events that has taken place such as:

- the impressive celebrations in the Abbey, on campus and at the Rec
- overseas alumni reunions
- prestigious lectures
- the award of over 60 honorary degrees

We look forward to the Festival this Saturday – an opportunity to showcase our strengths and – as with our other 50th events - highlight not only what we have achieved during our first half century, but also the tremendous sense of community and pride that is at the heart of this University.

Thank you to everyone who has played a part in the first 50 years of our University and in the celebrations associated with our landmark year. We have enjoyed significant success - but the challenge now is to ensure that this continues.

We cannot underestimate the rapidly-changing nature of the environment in which we are operating and it continues to be vital that we have clear aspirations and goals. There is still considerable uncertainty surrounding Brexit but there has already been an impact on EU applications across UK universities. Although Article 50 has now been triggered, the matter has been further complicated by the decision to hold a general election on 8 June. The Higher Education Act became law before parliament ceased for the election and the implications of this are still unclear. We need to ensure that we are agile and able to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise. By being clear about our priorities, we will be best placed to respond.

PGR

In my address last year I talked about how we had responded robustly to our external challenges and developed a clear strategy for the next five years – a

strategy that will support our vision to become an international leader in graduate education.

What I would like to do today, is focus on just one key aspect of the strategy – PGR – and provide an update on progress that we have made.

PGR recruitment this year has been good - on 1st December 2016 we had 1,375 students compared with 1,314 in 2015. We are keen to increase these numbers and see this as an essential part of our plan to increase our research power alongside other initiatives such as the 50th Anniversary Prize Fellows scheme.

So how will we attract more PGR students? We have several factors in our favour – our REF results, our international standing and our strong partnerships with industry. All of these factors make us an attractive University for PGR students. We need to ensure that we continue to enhance the quality of our research, the experience of our PGR students and the quality of our graduates. Several steps were put in place for autumn 2016 to enhance the doctoral student experience including improvements to PGR induction, information flows, the implementation of departmental action plans and the new space for PG students in 10 West.

Internationally, there is more that we can do. The report on the UK International Student Survey 2017, published last week by Hobsons, makes 5 key recommendations and we should look to learn from these. We need to ensure that, in the wake of the Brexit vote, we give a clear indication that we are open to, and welcoming of, international students. Hopefully, our position (76th) in the Times Higher International Student Table 2017 will be a good indicator that this is the case.

Doctoral College

At the Let's Talk meeting in April 2016, Professor Jonathan Knight outlined the intention to investigate how a Doctoral College - or similar entity - might improve our provision for doctoral students. Last week, Jonathan hosted a 'town hall' style event in Wessex Restaurant to share the current plans.

We have agreed that a Doctoral College is a sensible way forward. It would support the University's aim to become an international leader in graduate education by:

- promoting innovation in doctoral provision and facilitating the expansion of our doctoral student population;
- providing a single central point of access to a range of professional support services for doctoral students;
- offering doctoral students a consistent, high quality programme of career and personal development opportunities across our discipline base;
- offering opportunities for oversight and strategic direction of our doctoral programme as a whole, including identifying growth opportunities and areas for investment;
- providing an institutional focal point for engagement with prospective and current students, external partners and funding bodies;
- providing an institutional forum for sharing good practice across our discipline base;
- offering a more dynamic working environment and clearer opportunities for career progression and development to those working in the area of doctoral student support.

Several structural changes are required in order to implement a doctoral college and a consultation process is, therefore, currently underway and will end next Wednesday, 10th May.

The intention is to create a Doctoral College - led by an Academic Director – that will play a dedicated role in supporting and growing the University’s provision for doctoral students as well as improving the experience of doctoral students. The Academic Director post is currently being advertised on the University’s website and is open to internal applicants only. The post holder will report to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International and Doctoral).

Subject to agreement, the Doctoral College will be launched this August and will manage and co-ordinate all activities in support of doctoral recruitment, students and programme administration. We believe that this will give the University the best prospect of achieving a step change in the scale and quality of our provision, building on the best that Bath has to offer.