
Meeting: ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

Date and time: Monday 8 June 2020 at 12.30pm

Venue: Via MS Teams Live

Present: Dr J White (Chair)
and around 110 members

Attending by invitation: Mr A Hutchinson, Ms L Humphreys, Ms H Rhodes,
Ms H South, Mrs E Stuart Edwards

In attendance: Dr C Harris, Secretary to Academic Assembly
Ms A Pater, Deputy Director of Academic Governance

ACTION

700 WELCOME

The meeting, postponed from the original date of 5 May 2020, was held during the Covid-19 pandemic via Microsoft Teams Live. This enabled members to take part by listening to the presenters and asking written questions before and during the meeting. The meeting started a little late as some members had trouble accessing the session.

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and explained how to ask questions.

701 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2019 (Paper AA19/20-006 refers) were approved and would be signed later by the Chair.

702 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 695, Climate Action Framework and Minute 696, Proposed Motion

The Chair advised that the motion declaring a climate emergency, agreed at the previous meeting, had been passed to Senate then Council for discussion. Some of the Academic Assembly working group members were on the Climate Action Framework working group. The University had recently adopted eleven Climate Action Framework principles and declared a climate emergency. The Chair was pleased with the Assembly input to the discussions.

<https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/university-of-bath-adopts-climate-action-framework-principles-and-declares-a-climate-emergency/>

Minute 698, AOB, Review of Academic Assembly

The Chair clarified that following the Council Effectiveness Review and Senate Effectiveness Review it was timely to initiate a review of Academic Assembly. She had been involved in discussions since the last meeting and would provide the proposed review terms of reference to members in due course.

CHAIR

703 ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY WORKING GROUP REPORTS

Academic Assembly received reports from the Accountability and Transparency Working Group (Paper AA19/20-007) and the Climate Emergency Response Working Group (Paper AA19/20-008). The Chair explained that the working groups would be considered as part of the Academic Assembly review. She looked forward to receiving ongoing reports from the working groups.

704 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S STATUTORY ADDRESS

The Chair welcomed the Vice-Chancellor to the meeting and invited him to give his statutory address to members in accordance with Statute 22.3. The Vice-Chancellor focused on the impact and challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Questions were put to the Vice-Chancellor from members of Academic Assembly.

The recent University announcement in support of the Black Lives Matter movement acknowledged that we still have much to do to address issues of racism, inequality and diversity in our own community and society. What plans does the University have to take action to address racism? The Vice-Chancellor regretted that in the previous months plans had slowed due to the response to the pandemic. He was aware that all members of staff and students could be affected and stated that workshops had been planned in response to examples of racism at the University over the past year. A range of initiatives were under consideration. The Vice-President (Student Experience) stated that the issue was taken very seriously in relation to students. A meeting was planned the following week to discuss proposed actions with the Students' Union and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team.

In an email on June 1st, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor wrote "it has been agreed that workloads will be adjusted accordingly, away from unfunded research towards teaching for this period". Like many colleagues, I fully appreciate the need for us to take unprecedented steps to ensure we can deliver an excellent blended learning experience for students next academic year. However, this shift in workload will affect all academic work undertaken at the University in important ways - what, therefore, is the role of Senate in overseeing any such shift? The Deputy Vice-Chancellor responded that Senate had agreed the academic workload model principles; it was a

management tool and the responsibility of Heads of Departments to implement it. The University's financial sustainability was dependent on the recruitment cycle and a good offer for students, hence there was a need to focus on teaching. Reducing own-funded research in University-managed time was to stop individuals being overloaded. Deans and Heads of departments had discussed the issue. His e-mail indicated the view of Senate; but Senate was not involved in individual workload allocation.

Why was Professor Lambert's message to returning students, which made various commitments about what would be available next year, not circulated either to the academic staff who have to deliver on them, nor to the professional services that have to support such delivery? The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) replied that the intention had been there, and co-ordination could have been better with the message sent to Directors of Studies and Directors of Teaching for oversight. A message the previous day from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor to students had covered most of the issues but his covered student choices, as students could not be forced to return to campus.

What is the process and expected timing of expanding the pilot research activities to labs? These activities are so vital to the research productivity of many groups, especially those whose research is dependent on wet-lab work. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) clarified that this was important for staff and postgraduate students, acknowledging that there were some with reservations about coming back to work. The pilots had developed processes and paperwork and allowed familiarisation with the guidelines. Learning from the Mason Laboratory and other universities' experience was allowing scaling up of opening laboratories. Deans had received the sign-off process and would have responsibility for identifying suitable laboratories. A prioritised timetable had been drafted.

Your slide indicated making savings of order £30m in 2020/21. Could you please say some more about where these savings might come from? The Director of Finance explained that there was a great deal of uncertainty but a reduction of around 15%, £50 million was anticipated, hence savings were needed. These would be from reduced pay costs, from a recruitment chill and the voluntary exit scheme, together with reduced non-pay costs, with a reduction across all departments and specific actions such as closing Pall Mall. There was a great deal of uncertainty over plans and income, but once student recruitment was known the plans would be revisited in later in the year.

We have been successful in attracting international students to Bath, based on the current challenging situations that international flights between UK and China have been significantly reduced, I'm aware of that direct flights for bringing Chinese students to the UK and campus have been arranged by another university, I'm wondering if we are considering this option here at Bath to make the life easier for our Chinese students to come to our campus, and help secure more Chinese students to come to Bath in the next academic year? The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International and Doctoral) was unaware that

other universities had done this and stated that it was too early to commit. He had been in discussion with a consortium of universities and no decision had been made yet. He pointed out that this did not solely affect China and that there were other issues such as transport from the airport and quarantine requirements.

Can you tell us more about the voluntary exit scheme, and specifically whether staff who leave will be replaced? The Director of Human Resources explained that it was hoped that full details would be released that afternoon; it was one scheme to reduce costs and any stipulation would restrict the scheme. People would not be released if it would cause damage to their department and understanding of how their work would be redistributed or partially covered would be needed.

What are the plans for the academic promotion process, which is currently suspended for understandable reasons? To avoid impeding career trajectories (to the disadvantage of individuals and the university), would it be possible to reopen the process, with success not immediately translating into monetary benefit? The Deputy Vice-Chancellor responded that possible options were to be discussed that afternoon with the aim to re-open the process as soon as possible.

If government lockdown rules for employees working from home remain the same, does the university intend for staff to continue generally working from home for the foreseeable future? The Vice-Chancellor stated that consideration was being given to opening research laboratories and other areas that felt strongly that they could work more efficiently on campus. The ongoing staff survey of people's experiences was important. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) added that the University would continue to comply with lockdown restrictions and that if staff could work from home they should. The Director of Human Resources explained that if working from home was extended then consideration would be given to costs, tax and insurance implications, and members of staff having a suitable location.

705 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The dates of meetings in 2020/21 were noted as:

Wednesday 28 October 2020 at 1.15pm

Tuesday 4 May 2021 at 12.30pm

The method of meeting delivery would be advised nearer the time.

The meeting concluded at 1.45pm
