Academic Assembly

10 December 2025 / Teams

MEETING MINUTES

839 Welcome and Quorum

REPORTED

The Chair welcomed members and attendees to the meeting and confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

840 Declarations of Interest

REPORTED

No conflicts of interest were declared at the meeting.

841 Actions and Matters Arising

REPORTED

There were no actions or matters arising from the previous meeting of Academic Assembly held on 22 October 2025. Any ongoing actions from the Action Log would be picked up at the April 2026 meeting.

842 University of Bath Research Facilities Motion - Paper AA25/26-04

REPORTED

The Chair opened the discussion by reading out the statement from the organisers of the motion. The motion text and the opening statement are included in Appendices 1 and 2. Senior Management responded as follows:

The Vice-Chancellor thanked members for raising their concerns and acknowledged that it was important to have these conversations. He reassured members that research was important and that long term strategies were in place to continue investing in research. Finances in the university sector were tough and needed to be taken seriously. If the international student recruitment outturn this year continued and the University recruited in the same way by 2029/30, the University would have a financial hole of £38m. The University currently invested £70m in research every year. When looking at the closure of the Biosciences Services Unit

(BSU) and Nanofabrication Facility (Nanofab), there was evidence that it wasn't financially viable to keep the facilities open (looking at costs vs returns). A consultation took place with staff, with open communications and full transparency, including sharing the results of the external review of the BSU. Support was available to members of staff, to help manage the transition, including negotiating access to the animal research facility in Bristol.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor addressed concerns about the increased costs under the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC). The University was awaiting guidance from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which would affect how all institutions approached TRAC. Work on how the University costed facilities would commence in the new year.

The Dean of the Faculty of Science confirmed that there was now a BSU working group looking to address various issues and that minutes from these meetings were shared with the University community. Arrangements were in place to enable research to continue in a realistic and sustainable manner. The Nanofab community had come to a series of practical solutions for how essential equipment could be relocated and maintained on campus. It was acknowledged that many of those affected by the Nanofab closure were early career researchers who would need support.

DISCUSSION

The main concerns raised from members during the discussion were as follows:

1. **The University's stance on key priority areas in research**

A question was raised about whether the closure of research facilities represented a change in the way the University undertakes research or a strategic shift in research priority areas i.e. shutting off areas of research that the University didn't wish to continue to support. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the closure of animal facilities was a national issue, with too many in existence and with many universities needing to subsidise them. Regarding priority areas, the Vice-Chancellor clarified that, whilst the University was looking to focus on a smaller number of research areas to invest in for impact, it wouldn't mean that other research couldn't happen, just that the University couldn't afford to invest in those areas and that they would require more external funding. It was confirmed that the focal areas for research had not yet been decided.

2. **The steep increase in the cost of facilities under TRAC**

It was highlighted that there were huge discrepancies with other universities, with some not costing their facilities at all, or with much lower costings. An example given was the cost of microscopy per hour which was tenfold that of other universities, despite Bath not offering the full service of other universities, meaning we weren't competitive. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor recognised that a significant piece of work was needed on this and that the guidance from UKRI would affect how all institutions approached TRAC and provide a level playing field to work from. Members requested full transparency about how the costs were calculated and also how the income was being used. For example, whether the costs charged for depreciation of equipment would go towards purchasing a new piece of equipment at the end of its life. A request was also made for the costings to be reverted back to the previous level, until such time that the new costings were available, due to concerns that people were having currently on the impact to grant applications and the cost of moving facilities.

3. **Closure of the BSU and Nanofab facilities**

Some members felt that there was a lack of full transparency in the closure of the BSU facility and the reasons for this. The Dean of Science reiterated that this was a national issue with institutions closing their facilities because they weren't financially viable and that there weren't enough PI users to make it sustainable.

Members were also assured that, despite the closure of the animal facilities, there was still investment in the Life Sciences department, including in drug discovery and evolution.

The funding and staff usage issues which led to the closure of the Nanofab facility was discussed as well as the impact of the closure on early career researchers. It was confirmed that the alternative arrangements in place were currently working well.

4. **The impact of facility closures and TRAC costings on grant funding and University-wide**

Concern was raised about the loss of infrastructure and the potential for grants to be rejected because of a lack of infrastructure. There was also concern that, when looking at priority research areas, the University would look at the areas that had brought in the most funding rather than areas that had put in the best grant applications and would have been accepted had the infrastructure been in place. Concern was also raised about the University of Bath coming under the shadow of the University of Bristol, as well as Bath focusing solely on international students for funding. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that research and undergraduate student courses often made a loss and that, whilst the University was trying to develop new revenue streams (working with industry, commercialisation, short courses), international students were still a main source of income.

A question was also raised about what modelling had been carried out to assess the long-term impact of the decisions to close facilities and increase charges on the research landscape at Bath with grant income, rankings and the recruitment of staff and students. It was not verified that previous modelling had taken place. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that a piece of work would take place to ensure alignment with the wider sector. The Vice-Chancellor also confirmed that the University was planning to undertake an analysis of how to focus investments to stop decline.

It was recognised that the University was a complex system of interconnecting aspects which impacted each other in a continuous cycle e.g. international students were dropping but students also chose the university they attend based on research impact and reputation. A question was raised about the steps the University was taking to improve research standing, involve external partners and attract more investment. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor stated that UKRI guidance would give clarity about how Bath would approach this, in context with what other universities were doing. The Vice-Chancellor also confirmed that an Executive Director of Innovation had been appointed to improve the University's offer in the innovation and enterprise space.

Post-meeting note: A copy of the follow-up email sent to Academic Assembly by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor post-meeting is included in Appendix 3.

DECISION

A vote was made, with 63 in favour and 2 against, to **approve** the following motion:

'Academic Assembly resolves that our concerns are reported to, and addressed by, Senate and Council. Specifically, the short- and long-term detrimental impact on the research careers of staff and students, the income from grants and industry partners, the reputation of the university, student recruitment and ultimately academic recruitment that will be precipitated by the recent closures of Research Facilities and the increases in charge-out rates/costs to use facilities.'

ACTION

TRAC costings review

Action Description - To consider the request from members to revert TRAC costings back to their previous level, until such time that the review of costings has taken place, following the issuing of the UKRI guidance.

Action Status - Not Started | Due by - 23 Dec 2025 | Assigned to - Marcus Munafo

843 Programme of Meetings for 2025/26

REPORTED

Academic Assembly noted the next scheduled ordinary meeting of the 2025/26 academic year: Wednesday 29 April 2026, 13:15 - 15:15, to include the Vice-Chancellor's Address.

844 Any Other Business

REPORTED

No other items of business were discussed.

The meeting closed at 3.25pm

Attendees

Attended

Duncan Craig

Sabina Gheduzzi, Chair

Marcus Munafò

Phil Taylor

And 146 others

In Attendance

Laura Andrews, Governance Partner

Jason Harper

John Lowe

Katrin Roberts

Christy Waterfall

Appendix 1 – Motion to Academic Assembly regarding University of Bath facilities

This academic assembly believes that:

- Charge-out rates for the use of University of Bath (UoB) Research Facilities increased in February 2025 by as much as 1500%;
- Rates for many Research Facilities are now unrealistic, at levels that will negatively impact grant funding and where it is now more cost-effective to use facilities in other institutions;
- Decreased grant funding will lead to decreased Research Facilities' income and have a detrimental impact on remaining Research Facilities but also researchers' careers, the potential recruitment of academic staff and students, and across the University as a whole;
- Recent closures of the nanofabrication facility and Biosciences Services Unit (rodent animal facility) raises concern that other facilities will soon be closed.

Academic assembly asks:

- For full clarity and transparency from Senior Management regarding the research strategy behind recent closures of facilities and the associated financial and reputational impact, including sharing of underpinning data e.g. financial forecasts, models;
- For full clarity and transparency from Senior Management on the financial modelling of the remaining research core facilities and research costs for grant applications, including sharing of underpinning data e.g. financial forecasts, models;
- What plans are in place to support staff to continue their research and teaching effectively?

Academic Assembly resolves that our concerns are reported to, and addressed by, Senate and Council. Specifically, the short- and long-term detrimental impact on the research careers of staff and students, the income from grants and industry partners, the reputation of the university, student recruitment and ultimately academic recruitment that will be precipitated by the recent closures of Research Facilities and the increases in charge-out rates/costs to use facilities.

Proposer: Sarah Bailey (Life Sciences)

Seconder: Toby Jenkins (Chemistry)

DATE: 2nd December 2025

Appendix 2 – Opening Statement

This meeting has been called to address changes in the running and future of Research Facilities at the University of Bath.

These facilities span the interests of the university and include the Advanced Fabrication Facility, the Biotechnology Facility, the Buildings Test facility, the Chemical Characterisation Facility, the David Bullett Nanofabrication Facility, the Dynamic Reaction Monitoring Facility, Imaging Facility, Physical Structure Characterisation Facility and the Biosciences Services Unit (Rodent Animal Facility).

Over the last 20 months the UoB have increased prices across some core facilities from 100s – 1000s of %. Prices that are well outside the range set by other Universities. In July, the proposed closure of the Biosciences Services Unit (Rodent Animal Facility) was announced without any plans in place to support researchers. In September, the closure of the Nanofabrication Facility was announced

It is not clear whether these closures and changes in pricing structure represent a significant shift in research key priority areas for the University or new models for ways of doing research – in effect outsourcing research facilities elsewhere – or how the long-term impacts of these changes have been considered, particularly given the impact on research environment and research income at this phase of the REF research assessment exercise.

This meeting represents an opportunity to address these recent changes including the short and long-term impact it will have on research at the UoB, and the future implications for reputational damage to the University and the academics therein.

This meeting also provides opportunity for members of senior management to explain the decisions that have been made and provide transparency about the long-term projections that have been considered when making these decisions.

Appendix 3 – Follow up email from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Sent: 17 December 2025

Following the Extraordinary Academic Assembly, I wanted to put together a brief summary of how we arrived at where we are, the next steps we plan to take, and interim measures to mitigate the impact of current facilities charges on grant applications.

Background

In August 2024 a sector-wide TRAC clarification was issued requiring new grant applications from 1 February 2025 to be costed and charged at full economic cost (fEC) for facilities.

At Bath, we were able to make the change as our facility TRAC costings had been prepared, and we therefore decided to be compliant with TRAC guidance immediately, given that UKRI requires us to follow this guidance. We published information on the changes on 23 January 2025 (including a link to a list of FAQs), and held an 'Ask Me Anything' session open to all interested parties.

The principal change resulting from this was that the University was required to include costs in some facilities that we had previously chosen to exclude. Our costs were originally based on maintenance and consumables only, but now must also include the categories of staff, space and depreciation. In all cases, the TRAC cost is based on the sum of these cost categories divided by usage. Our facility commercial rates were always fEC or above.

However, for some institutions this was too short notice to be able to implement, and a year's grace was permitted for those who were non-compliant. From 1 February 2026 everyone is expected to be compliant. This means that from 1st February 2026 all TRAC facilities across the HEI sector will be costed in the same way, and this should serve to reduce current disparities between those institutions that implemented the change immediately and those that did not.

An alternative to complying is to de-list a facility from TRAC. However, this is not without drawbacks as the 'de-TRACed' facility cost is added to the general estates cost pool, and the estates cost overhead is increased. Effectively this approach results in *all* grants picking up a share of the cost of facilities, rather than just those that use facilities, meaning that grants that do *not* use facilities effectively subsidise those that do.

We have chosen to include facilities in TRAC as we want to ensure that our research is financially sustainable. Modelling demonstrates that we will be closer to recovering the full economic cost of our facilities if we use the TRAC methodology to cost our facilities, compared with de-TRACing and including facilities costs as an estates cost overhead. If 40% or more of a facility's usage is from funded research, this results in a facility being a TRAC facility.

Next Steps

It will be important to see what changes occur across the sector from 1st February 2026, when all TRAC facilities will be costed in the same way. This will tell us whether or not – and, if so, to what extent – facilities at the University of Bath are more expensive than at comparable institutions. Without this information it is difficult to make well informed decisions.

We are in the process of establishing a Task and Finish Group to look at our approach to costing TRAC facilities, whether or not facilities should remain TRACed or be de-TRACed, and if so what criteria we should use to do so. This will also include looking at how we cost for space usage and depreciation, ideally benchmarking these against comparable institutions.

These decisions will inevitably require trade-offs – for example, between making all our grant applications more expensive via increased estate overhead costs, or only those that use facilities via a full economic costing of their use. If we make changes, these will need to be in place by September/October 2026 in order to take effect from February 2027.

We will endeavour to learn from the past and ensure a range of academic and non-academic voices are included in the Task and Finish Group's activities, including user representation and regular communication with the relevant members of the community. Ultimately, we need to follow the rules and make decisions that are sympathetic to competing demands and benefit the University as a whole.

It is worth noting that it may genuinely be the case that research – perhaps particularly that which uses facilities – is more expensive at Bath than at some other universities (e.g., that benefit from economies of scale and a higher volume of grant funding). This work of the Task and Finish Group will provide us with more information as to whether this is the case, which in turn may be something we decide to bring to the attention of funders

Interim Measures

We recognise that, currently, Bath facilities costs are more expensive than at many other institutions, for the reasons outlined above. We expect this to change from February 2026, but the extent to which this change will level the playing field will depend on whether other institutions choose to TRAC or deTRAC their facilities, and relies on parity across institutions on how space and depreciation are calculated, both of which we cannot control.

In order to mitigate this impact, while the next steps outlined above are undertaken, we will open a scheme whereby applicants for grants that include facilities costs, and where these are felt to render the grant non-competitive, will be able to apply for additional funding from the University to cover a proportion of facilities costs directly, thereby reducing the price of the grant while adhering to funders TRAC costing rules.

This scheme will launch in January 2026 and remain open until it is felt to no longer be necessary – for example, if the changes anticipated on 1 February 2026 adequately level the playing field. Applications will be reviewed by the DVC and Provost, the PVC-Research (or interim), and the Dean of the lead Faculty.

Marcus Munafò
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost