



Convocation Meeting

Monday 20 June 2022 at 1.00pm

Virtual meeting via Zoom

1 – Welcome and Opening Remarks

Ruth Foreman opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. She introduced herself as a Pro-Chancellor at the University, following nine years of service on Council, making her well embedded into the life of the University. She noted that she had recently had the pleasure of presenting both undergraduate and post-doctoral degrees at Bath Abbey.

2 – Minutes of the previous meeting – CN21/22 - 01

The minutes of the meeting of Convocation on 16 June 2021 were approved.

3 –Matters Arising

The Deputy Director of the Department of Development and Alumni Relations (DDAR) read an update on the disbanding of Convocation on behalf of the Governance team. The report outlined the intentions to disband Convocation as a statutory body, making way for an annual meeting for alumni to engage with the University at an institutional level. The update reported that the formal process is still ongoing, with a proposed end date of 2023. The Deputy Director then opened the matter to questions but urged members to contact the Governance team directly if they had any more questions about the disbanding of Convocation which had not been covered.

A member of Convocation raised a question as to why Convocation was being disbanded. It was explained that purpose of Convocation that had been envisaged when the University was founded had since been overtaken by the work of DDAR, and that while the proposed change would remove Convocation as a statutory body, an annual meeting would continue to take place with a similar agenda.

4 – Report from the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor expressed his pleasure at attending Convocation and noted the intention to continue with annual meetings, notwithstanding the disbanding of formal Convocation.

The Vice-Chancellor noted the move back to more in-person events after the past years online and paid tribute to all those in attendance for their forbearance with the University while it moved to online activities and operations during the pandemic.

The focus for the past academic year had been a move back to normal after the pandemic, which had resulted in applications to the University remaining very strong. For the coming academic year there was a historic high for home applicants, with the University continuing to see a growth in diversity in the student body and an increase in students from widening participation backgrounds. Many initiatives supported by members of Convocation, such as the Gold Scholarship Programme, had continued to enjoy success over the past year, with the Gold Scholarship Programme winning the Highest Impact University Initiative Award at the 2021 upReach Student Social Mobility Awards. While

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the University had continued to offer a flexible approach to teaching, around 93% of the University's teaching this year had been face to face. This was similarly reflected in the levels of social and extra-curricular activities taking place, returning largely back to pre-pandemic levels. The Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to both the staff and the Students' Union for the work they had done over the past year to achieve this.

The University's rankings continued to be strong; Bath had remained in the top 10 in all national rankings and had also moved into the top 100 of the QS Graduate Employability Rankings for the first time.

Over the past year a number of senior appointments have been made in line with the University strategy. This included the appointment of Professor Cassie Wilson as the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), Professor Sarah Hainsworth as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Julian Chaudhuri as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Professor Phil Allmendinger as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Professor Rajani Naidoo and Professor Jonathan Knight were also appointed as Vice-President (Community and Inclusion) and Vice-President (Enterprise), respectively.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) results had been published recently and the University had performed positively overall, with five departments placed in the top 10 of their respective categories.

The University had continued to see strong student success, of which the Vice-Chancellor highlighted a number of examples. A number of staff members also achieved considerable success this year, including an MBE to Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh and awards to Dr Ruth Webster, Dr Anna Young, Dr Asel Sartbaeva and Professor Yvonne Jewkes.

While this year still saw the University handling issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, this did not prevent other initiatives outside of core education activities going ahead. These included:

- Driving student inclusion through the Living Ambassador scheme.
- Supporting members of the University community who were affected by the war in Ukraine.
- Launching a new Institute in sustainable technologies.
- The Climate Action Framework remained important, with a climate module rolled out to all new students and staff.
- An enhanced sports facility and arts offering.
- The successful attainment of an Athena Swan Silver Award.
- The completion of major building projects, including the new School of Management and IAAPs building.

The Bath Beacons scheme had been launched as part of the drive to build up the University's research power. To date, five major Bath Beacons had been formed and a further two were in development. These were aligned with the strategic research themes at the University. Three major enterprises had also been launched this year; IAAPS, CAMERA and iCAST. These three projects accounted for £150 million of investment distributed across the region.

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the success of the sports people who trained or studied at Bath, noting that they had achieved 21 medals at the Tokyo Olympics, 11 of which were gold. He expressed how pleased the University community was for them, and how they had continued to enjoy great success this summer.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked all those who attended the meeting and for their continued interest and support for the University.

There was a question-and-answer session as follows:

- *Question from Benjamin Metcalfe: Our REF results showed an improvement on 2014, but many of our competitors improved more than we did. As a diverse research community how will our*

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strategy ensure that we cohesively build expertise and experience in key strategic areas to support future success?

The Vice-Chancellor stated that the REF 2014 and 2022 competitions had been very different and therefore advised caution in drawing direct comparisons. There was typically a focus on GPA but that was only one way of measuring the University. Taking account of the number of staff who participated, in practice, Bath had started in a lower position in 2014. The University strategy recognised the need to grow the institution's research power and to establish a stronger international profile in key areas. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the scale of impact was an area in which the University could improve. The REF results showed that the University was very strong in internationally recognised research, but the focus going forward needed to be on turning this into internationally leading research. The strategy recognised this.

- *Question from Keith Melford: How does the Vice-Chancellor believe the [public information] meeting last Wednesday went? Could the Vice-Chancellor provide some information for the AGM?*

The Vice-Chancellor noted that he found the public information meeting helpful and interesting. He explained that the meeting was a relatively small in-person pilot event and that there was quite a lot of learning going forward around how to improve. The Vice-Chancellor stated that he had appreciated the opportunity to answer questions and share views within the local community. He noted that the public information event was a different type of meeting from the AGM, but that the need for both was clear.

The Chair, who had attended the meeting, stated that she thought the pilot had been extremely successful. The panel dealt with a variety of questions and comments from the audience, ranging from concerns about the potential environmental impact of students in the city, to opportunities to engage more with partner schools. She noted that there were some very positive comments surrounding the depth and breadth of the University's research and activities, and that members of the community felt proud to have the University as part of the city. The Chair noted that the meeting was very varied and, on occasions, challenging but that it had been a very successful opportunity to engage face-to-face with the local community.

5 – Report from the Department of Development and Alumni Relations

The Deputy Director for DDAR presented an update on the work of the department. She noted that there had been a lot of change in the department since last year, and that the team had begun to return to working in person in the office. Last autumn the focus had remained largely on virtual events, which allowed the University to engage with its global alumni network.

The alumni e-news communications were sent out to 80,000 individuals bi-monthly. This year the department launched "Parade Profiles", which was a weekly case study of graduates. These were also being used more widely within the University to aid recruitment. The mentoring scheme, Bath Connection, now had over 6000 users, both alumni and students, and DDAR was looking forward to working further with colleagues on this project. The department was also very involved with the Gold Scholarship programme, which offered 50 scholarships to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the majority of the fundraising for the department focused on the programme.

The department itself has undergone significant changes in the past year; Gordon Cox joined the team in January as the new Director of Development and Alumni Relations and was working to align the strategic direction of the department with the wider University strategy. The Deputy Director informed Convocation that she would be leaving the University next month and thanked all the alumni for their support during her time in the role. She shared that her successor would be an alumna of the University and was very excited to be returning to Bath.

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The Chair thanked the Deputy Director and her team for their work throughout the year.

6 – Any other business

There was no other business.

7 – Date of next meeting

The team will be in contact with alumni in the spring regarding the date for the next AGM meeting,

The formal meeting of Convocation was drawn to a close and was followed by two speakers, Ciara Sherlock and Dr Jennifer Maher, both of whom had been supported by alumni donations.

Attendees were encouraged to send any further questions to governance@bath.ac.uk. A list of the questions received, and the responses provided, are attached to these minutes at appendix 1.

Questions received after Convocation

Question from Joy M Rooney: How is funding for convocation from Bath statutory committee structure being transferred to Alumni relations please?

There is no funding associated with Convocation so there will not be any financial implications associated with the changes.

Question from Derek Brewer: Will Convocation be surveyed on the matter of whether to scrap Convocation?

When the proposal to formally disband Convocation in lieu of an annual general meeting was discussed at Convocation last year, alumni were encouraged to send any views to the Governance team ([the minutes can be found here](#)). Following the 2021 AGM, alumni were also asked to share their views via the alumni newsletter, which has a circulation of approximately 75,000. We therefore have no further plans to survey alumni.

It is worth noting that while it is our intention to disband Convocation as a formal statutory body, the Department of Development and Alumni Relations will still hold an Annual General Meeting, as part of its wider programme of engagement events. This will share news and updates from the University and offer alumni the chance to put questions directly to the University's senior leadership team.

Question from Derek Brewer: Can you tell me whatever happened to Founders' Day which was held for several years and then stopped?

Founders' Day dinners and lectures were held until 2018. Following the departure of the previous Vice-Chancellor, the University decided to review its approach to local engagement and focus on other activities, such as the Chancellor's Dinner.