
Meeting: COUNCIL

Date and Time: Wednesday 23 September 2020 at 2.00pm

Venue: Virtual meeting via Zoom

Present:

Pamela Chesters	Chair
Maria Bond	Appointed member
Tim Ford	Appointed member
Christine Gibbons	Appointed member
Professor Dot Griffiths	Appointed member
Mesar Hameed	Elected by professional service staff
David Hardy	Appointed member
Dr Marion Harney	Elected by Senate
Malcolm Holley	Elected by professional service staff
Professor Tim Ibell	Elected by Senate
Francesco Masala	Student governor
Don McLaverty	Appointed member
Catherine Mealing-Jones	Appointed member
Charlotte Moar	Appointed member
Dr David Moon	Elected from Senate by Academic Assembly
John Preston	Treasurer
Professor Ian White	Vice-Chancellor and President
Dr Jane White	Chair of Academic Assembly
Annie Willingham	Student governor

In attendance:

Professor Jeremy Bradshaw	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International and Doctoral)
Professor Peter Lambert	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)
Professor Jonathan Knight	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Professor Bernie Morley	Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost
Martin Williams	Director of Finance
Dr Cassie Wilson	Vice-President (Student Experience)
Keith Zimmerman	Chief Operating Officer

Apologies

Tim Hollingsworth	Appointed member
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Secretariat:

Emily Commander	Secretary
Karen Gleave	Member of Secretariat

7207 WELCOME AND QUORUM

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the attendance.

She welcomed David Hardy and Don McLaverty to their first meeting. They were two of three new lay members of Council: the third, Sujata McNab, would take up post in October. She also welcomed Professor Tim Ibell and Dr Marion Harney, the new Senate members of Council, to their first formal meeting in post.

7208 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

7209 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Council meeting of 23 July 2020 (Paper C20/21 – 01) were **approved** as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

7210 ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING

- 1) 7189 (Student IT accessibility: Provide updated information on the accessibility of the software being rolled out to students for the 2020/21 academic year). The additional information was available on Convene ***The action was marked as complete.***
- 2) 7193 (EDI: Provide regular updates to Council on EDI matters). Regular updates, once the new Executive Chair is in post, had been added to Council's annual programme of work, which would be discussed at the October meeting. ***The action was marked as complete.***
- 3) 7195 (Degree outcomes: Data on black students as a subset of BAME students or a note on the statistical difficulties of presenting disaggregated data for black students to be included as a footnote in the Degree Outcomes Statement in 2020/21). This data would be included in the report that went to Council in July. ***The action was marked as ongoing.***
- 4) 7196 (Fire safety: Update Chair of ARAC on whether oversight of fire safety via internal audit is sufficient and sufficiently frequent to meet current needs). An update was provided to the Chair of ARAC and was available for consultation on Convene, in the Updates folder in the Council Reading Room. ***The action was marked as complete.***
- 5) 7198 (Governing documents: Privy Council approval of amendments). Privy Council approval was expected by the end of the month. ***The action was marked as ongoing.***

7211 FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Director of Finance presented paper C20/21 – 02, providing an update on the information contained within it.

The external auditors were on site and the audit was progressing as expected, with no significant issues raised as yet.

Registration was underway, which meant that student numbers were subject to considerable change. Current numbers suggested that the number of suspensions would not be significant. Overall, although the numbers were lower than usual, they were significantly better than had been predicted and budgeted for.

Revisions to the budget would be brought to Finance Committee and Council throughout the year. They were not likely to be large given the risks still faced relating to Covid-19, Brexit and the USS revaluation.

Members of Council asked questions and were answered as follows:

- The pension deficit was a significant area of concern. The USS consultation currently underway did not contain any element on affordability, which was a matter of some regret, and did not fully reflect progress previously made by the Joint Expert Panel.
- An informal seminar on pensions in higher education could be arranged for all Council members interested in acquiring a more in-depth understanding of the subject.
- Once the current round of future forecasts had been completed, the University would move to considering future plans and its financial strategy.

7212 UPDATE FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

The Vice-Chancellor presented paper C20/21 – 03.

He thanked colleagues for their hard work, particularly those working on the planning and delivery of teaching, accommodation and hospitality, student experience, and buildings.

Bath had performed well in relation to other universities in terms of home admissions: the picture was less clear in relation to overseas admissions and more understanding would be required in this area. The new planning process for 2020/21 would help to address some of these issues.

Delivery of a quality student experience was central to everything that the University was doing, with much innovation to support this work. The Vice-Chancellor thanked the Students' Union in particular for their hard work in this area.

A large number of IT innovations were either in operation or in the course of being launched. Many new teams had been created and projects completed to support this.

The University continued to work with the local authorities on health and was hoping to have testing available in Carpenter house for members of the University and local community. It was investigating the possibility of procuring covid-19 tests and flu vaccines privately.

The arrival of freshers had gone very smoothly, with 88% of first-year students already arrived, and 150 delayed for various reasons. A major project called the East Village provided new arrivals with a series of marquees and many opportunities for students to engage in campus life in the evenings.

At its last meeting, Council had raised the issue of the impact of students on the City, and the University had taken this very seriously. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor was heavily engaged with the city and local residents, offering assurance and information, and was working closely with Bath Spa University. Students in the same household, which could comprise up to 20 students, had been issued with a coloured band to help identify them as a group. Some aspects of the disciplinary policy had been revised to cope with the conditions currently imposed on students, but early indications were that most students had been behaving very well. The University was equally concerned about loneliness and wellbeing and was working hard to support students and their families, including the families of two students currently reported to the police as missing.

There had been some changes to the government's position and the University was considering how best to respond, pending more detailed guidance from Universities UK. The University recognised that some staff and students were anxious about their health and wellbeing and that it would be important to communicate the comprehensive steps which were being taken to address these concerns and to provide assurance that these measures were kept under active review.

The Vice-Chancellor anticipated that the University would respond with a continuance of its blended approach, with staff continuing to travel to work as essential workers. Most teaching would go online, but the University would continue with its planned four-hour blocks of in-person teaching time, capable of being delivered with two-metre distancing in place. The capacity of lecture theatres had been drastically reduced and ventilation checks carried out. Sanitisation liquid had been provided at every stage a student's journey. The Operations Board had just decided on a number of additional measures, including:

- making the wearing of face-coverings mandatory indoors for all except those exempt and participating in the sunflower lanyard scheme; and
- two-metre distancing in self-study spaces.

The Vice-Chancellor believed that the provisions met all relevant safety guidelines and exceeded those issued by the World Health Organisation. However, the University would maintain a watching brief in the event of any further changes to government guidelines. He invited members of Council to raise any issues or questions they may have about the approach before any announcements were made.

The Chair of Council put on record the thanks of all Council members for all the work done by the Vice-Chancellor, the University Executive Board and staff at all levels plus the Students' Union, particularly in light of changing advice at a national level.

Members of Council asked questions and were answered as follows:

- There had been a significant increase in hostile and hacking attacks across the entire higher education sector, particularly attacks on remote desktop services. The University had been notified by Jisc (the advisory Group on digital issues for the higher education sector) of particular risks in this regard and rapidly took the advice offered.
- The student governors noted that the success of the Covid-secure provision relied upon the good behaviour of students, but early indications were that students were taking this seriously. Collaboration between the Students' Union and staff had been excellent.
- Staff members of Council noted that staff on campus had responded positively, although there was concern amongst some teaching staff about the safety of face-to-face teaching and the need to master new technological solutions. The workload required to prepare for restart had been almost overwhelming in some areas, but there had been many positive developments. The University was seeking to understand and mitigate the concerns of frontline staff. Those staff who could continue to work from home were being asked to do so when not delivering in-person teaching, but restrictions on face-to-face meetings had been relaxed where safe and appropriate. Line managers were being encouraged to reach out to members of their team and the employee assistance programme had been reinforced. Significant resource had been deployed to prepare staff to work more sustainably from home.

7213 REDUNDANCY COMMITTEE

The Treasurer, who had been nominated by the Redundancy Committee as Chair for the relevant meeting, presented paper C20/21 – 04.

Members of Council asked a number of questions in relation to the remit of the Redundancy Committee, on which a written briefing would be made available after the meeting.

Council:

- Noted the report of the meeting of the Redundancy Committee held on 4 September 2020;
- In accordance with Part II of Statute 25.11(2), approved each of the cases presented for redundancy set out in the paper; and
- Authorised the Director of Human Resources to dismiss the academic staff concerned in accordance with the provisions of Part II of Statute 25.12.

7214 DECISION TAKEN BY CORRESPONDENCE

Council noted paper C20/21 – 05, which was a record of the decision to appoint three new lay members of Council, taken by correspondence in August 2020.

7215 PROGRAMME OF FORTHCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council noted the programme of Council meetings for the 2020/21 academic year:

Thursday 15 October 2020 (strategy day): 9.30am – 5.00pm
Thursday 26 November 2020: 9.30am – 12.30pm
Thursday 25 February 2021: 9.30am – 12.30pm
Wednesday 24 March 2021 (strategy day): 9.30am – 5.00pm
Thursday 13 May 2021: 9.30am – 12.30pm
Thursday 22 July 2021: 9.30am – 12.30pm

All meetings would be preceded by a working dinner and development session the evening beforehand.

7216 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting concluded at 3.02 pm

NOTE *Sections of two of the agenda items have been redacted either because they pertain to information relating to individual staff or students, or because they are still commercially confidential.*