

Formal Report of the Vice-Chancellor to Senate on 17 June 2020

1. Coronavirus/COVID-19

Since the last report, preparations have begun on opening up the campus in a manner which closely follows best health and safety advice. This is occurring in phases with sports and research activities being in the first phase, other academic-related and then professional service functions which need to be on campus being in the next phase. A major focus is now on the planning of the delivery of the next academic year, recognising the uncertainties that will exist.

Regular meetings have been taking place with Heads of Departments in order to facilitate a two-way conversation about the University's response to the virus and how future challenges can be addressed. All staff are invited to attend virtual town hall meetings which will give further opportunities to provide updates and receive information. A survey will also be sent to staff to identify wellbeing and related issues, particularly for those who are homeworking or have been furloughed.

Moving from a transition phase to one of reduced campus operations has allowed the University to make good use of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Over 900 employees have been furloughed. In comparison with other Universities, this makes us one of the larger, and quicker users of the scheme, but well aligned with others on the types of roles we are furloughing. Health, safety and wellbeing of our staff remains the highest priority, and piloting a small number of activities (two research groups, elite sports) on campus is giving us confidence in our ability to operate with enhanced risk assessments and infection control measures. We have launched a survey to understand how staff are coping, particularly to understand the impacts of homeworking and furlough.

There has been a wide-spread response across the University to the challenges posed by the pandemic, with colleagues providing support to local hospitals and advice at national level. Our students have donated supplies to the foodbank, individuals have fundraised for the NHS, and volunteers have supported some of the most vulnerable families. Our alumni community, including its US Foundation, raised over £45K in just three weeks to help students facing financial difficulties due to COVID-19.

Although substantial technical and experimental activities such as the production of PPE and COVID-related Photonics research have been ongoing throughout the lockdown, we have now in addition run a programme of pilots to develop our processes and paperwork, and to explore how specific types of research activity can be best re-started safely, within guidelines. Activity has restarted in 6WS which houses the Physiology Research Group from the Centre for Nutrition, Exercise and Metabolism (CNEM) based in the Department for Health. The Mason Lab in Biology and Biochemistry is also underway, with three researchers at present scaling up to six on a rota basis. Progressing the pilot activities has enabled us to gain greater understanding into the range of issues that need to be addressed. When taken alongside the government guidance concerning laboratory work, this means that we are in a position to proceed with a phased restart of more laboratories across the discipline base, on a prioritized basis within faculties. Our processes are being kept under continuous review as we learn more, as guidelines evolve, and as we come up against capacity constraints.

2. Pay and People Matters

2.1 Employee Relations: Following the ending of the UCU mandate for industrial action on 30 April, the national position is that any proposed re-balloting has been suspended during the pandemic. Local branches have been informally consulted on the way forward and the national picture reflects a lack of support for the employers' most recent offer. Considerable efforts are being made by the University and the TU officials to engage in temporary HR changes required in the current situation including working patterns and restarting activity on campus; the financial situation in 2020/21; changes to the delivery of academic programmes next year. The Voluntary Exit Scheme was launched on 8 June.

2.2 Pay and Pensions: National negotiations regarding the national pay award would usually start in March. However these have been suspended due to the pandemic. UCEA have undertaken informal consultation of HEIs regarding the current situation. Activity on revaluation of the USS pension scheme continues at national level; formal consultation of individual HEIs has not yet started.

3. Climate Action Framework

3.1 The [University's Climate Action Framework](#) principles and climate emergency declaration were agreed by University Council at a meeting on 14 May. Set out within the eleven Climate Action Framework principles are a commitment to carbon neutrality in company vehicle emissions, heating, and electricity by 2030 as well as halving emissions from purchased goods and services, waste and employee commuting by the same date.

3.2 Developed with input from staff across the University, campus trade unions and the Students' Union (SU), the principles will now guide how the University conducts business and will inform the development of our next steps to meet the challenging objectives the University has set itself. In declaring a climate emergency on the same day, the University and the SU demonstrated their commitment to responding to climate change.

4. League Tables - Complete University Guide

The University has again been ranked 9th in the Complete University Guide, published on 9 June. It remains the highest-ranked institution in the South-West.

5. International Engagements

5.1 We have now received a response from all 265 students who were on an Erasmus+ placement at the time that Covid-19 hit and are confident of all students' current status. A paper that was presented at the Student Experience Response Board on the 28th May outlined that 229 students have had their mobility impacted and the IRO are currently supporting 49 students with force majeure.

5.2 On 20 March, Lily Rumsey represented the institution at the Bristol and Bath Office (B&BBO) Steering Committee which included representation from Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Business West, University of Bristol and the University of the West of England. The meeting provided the opportunity for partners to discuss the next phase of the B&BBO and hear from the Institute of Government on influencing the EU after Brexit.

5.3 Letters have been sent to 39 global strategic partners and 139 international mobility stakeholders to reaffirm the University's commitment to internationalisation and collaboration.

5.4 The following have been appointed as 2020/21 Global Chairs:

- Professor John Warner, President and Chief Technology Officer, Warner Babcock Institute for Green Chemistry, USA (PI Nomination from Professor Matthew Davidson, Department of Chemistry)
- Professor Penny Jane Burke, Global Innovation Chair of Equity and Co-Director, Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, The University of Newcastle, Australia (PI Nomination from Professor Andrea Abbas, Department of Education)
- Professor Dr Heike Solga, Director of the Research Unit “Skill Formation and Labor Markets” WZB – Berlin Social Science Center, Germany (PI Nomination from Professor Hugh Lauder and Professor Lynn Prince Cooke, Department of Education and Department of Social and Policy Sciences)
- Professor Alberto Minetti, Department of Pathophysiology and Transplants, University of Milan, Italy (PI Nomination from Dr Dario Cazzola, Department for Health)

6. Research Excellence Framework 2021

6.1 In March, Research England announced that the REF 2021 submission deadline would be delayed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have now begun to consult the sector on how this extension should be implemented. We have submitted an institutional response, supporting a short uniform delay to the submission deadline and the window for achieving impact. Research England has stated that, once there is greater clarity about the period of serious disruption to universities, they will consult on the adapted details of the framework. There will be at least eight months’ notice given of the new submission deadline.

6.2 The University has organised a series of REF review meetings, one for each of the 14 Units of Assessment (UoAs) to be submitted. Each meeting is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and includes representatives from the UoA being scrutinised, the relevant Dean and Associate Dean (Research), an academic member of the University Research Committee and another external (to the UoA) informed assessor. The meetings include review of all of the paperwork to be submitted to REF, in draft form, for assurance about the status of preparations, for preliminary assessment of the quality of the submissions, and for feedback on the processes and on the textual submissions. These ‘dress rehearsals’ are continuing as planned and the outcomes will be presented to University Executive Board at the end of June.

7. Other University News

I particularly wish to draw the attention of Senate to the following appointments and developments since our previous meeting:

7.1 We have recently approved a proposal from the School of Management to provide 10 additional scholarships on the full-time MBA. The scholarships provide a concrete step to support the local community during this unprecedented time of social and economic uncertainty. Candidates are likely to be those who have been made redundant, on unpaid furlough or who have closed their own companies as a result of the pandemic.

7.2 The Department of Economics was awarded a bronze Athena SWAN award in April 2020. The outcome of the Department for Health’s submission has been delayed due to COVID-19 but should be announced shortly. Biology and Biochemistry submitted for a silver awarded in the April 2020 round. Overall, we currently hold 15

awards: five silver and 10 bronze.

7.3 The Public Engagement Unit, together with colleagues at Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth, has been awarded a Futures 2020 grant of €218,604 from the EC in support of a European Researchers' Night, to be held in November.

7.4 The University has launched a [workshop series](#) for Early Career Researchers to enhance their understanding of the process by which technologies are translated from academic research into the commercial realm, equipping them with skills and tools to assess opportunities as well as negotiate the path from idea to market.

7.5 The Students' Union and University held a joint Education Awards Online Celebration on 15 May 2020 to celebrate excellence in learning and teaching (see separate report with details of the winners).

7.6 Researchers from the School of Management have helped to develop a [new online platform](#) that connects charities with would-be investors.

7.7 IPR Honorary [Professor Sue Maguire](#) has joined the Youth Employment Group (YEG), a new initiative formed by Impetus, Youth Futures Foundation, Youth Employment UK, the Institute for Employment Studies and The Prince's Trust to help drive the UK's response to the impact of COVID-19 on young people's prospects in the labour market.

7.8 Alumna and Hon Grad, [Professor Molly Stevens](#), has been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

7.9 The University was saddened to learn of the death of Deborah Lewis, Senior Lecturer in the Accounting, Finance and Law division of the School of Management and Director of Studies for the full-time MBA programme, and also of Professor Peter Johnson FBCS, founding Head of the Department of Computer Science, who passed away on 18 May.

7.10 Throughout the coronavirus outbreak there continues to be an encouraging volume of research grant submissions for external funding; April alone totalled over £10 million with many submissions responding to recent COVID-19 related calls.

7.11 Recent significant grant awards include:

Description	Funder	Principal Investigator	Department	Amount £
Centre for the Analysis of Motion, Entertainment Research and Applications (CAMERA) - 2.0	EPSRC	Prof Darren Cosker	Computer Science	£2,221,836
Centre for the Analysis of Motion, Entertainment Research and Applications (CAMERA) - 2.0	EPSRC	Prof James Bilzon	Health	£1,122,607
Tackling the Root Causes of Unhealthy Planning, Economics and Decision-making: An Urban Systems Approach	MRC	Dr Alistair Hunt	Economics	£554,837

Tackling the Root Causes of Unhealthy Planning, Economics and Decision-making: An Urban Systems Approach	MRC	Dr Krista Bondy	School of Management	£466,374
Conflict and peace-building in the MENA region: is social protection the missing link?	AHRC	Dr Rana Jawad	Social & Policy Sciences	£698,102
Identification and Characterisation of Library Derived PPI Inhibitors	Sapience Therapeutics Inc	Prof Jody Mason	Biology & Biochemistry	£741,685
The transcriptional control of human epidermal stemness	BBSRC	Dr Gernot Walko	Biology & Biochemistry	£536,240
Predicting evolution: using comparative experimental evolution to test the role of mutation, selection and genetic background on repeatable evolution	BBSRC	Dr Tiffany Taylor	Biology & Biochemistry	£472,056

Professor Ian White DL FREng
Vice-Chancellor and President
June 2020