



COUNCIL (STRATEGIC MEETING)

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Tuesday, 23 May 2023 at Missenden Abbey and on Microsoft Teams.

Present:

- Maggie Galliers (Independent [Chair])
- Andy Cole (Independent [Deputy Chair])
- Professor Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor)
- Irene Kirkman (Independent)
- Dr Annet Gamell (Independent)
- Anthony Murphy (Independent)
- John Smith (Independent)
- Sadie Groom (Independent)
- Supriya Sobti (Independent [Chair of Audit Committee])
- Jackie Westaway (Independent)
- Dr Susan Rosser (Independent)
- Anna Crabtree (Independent)
- Justin Sullivan (Independent)
- Karen Satterford (Co-Opted Member)
- Ze'ev Portner (Academic Representative)
- Emma Binnie (PSE Representative)
- Hilary Mullen (Senate Representative)
- Professor Karen Buckwell-Nutt (Senate Representative)
- Charlotte Leighton-Woods (Students' Union President)

In attendance

- Professor Rachel Cragg (Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital))
- Ellie Smith (University Secretary and Clerk to Council)
- Professor Paul Morgan (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience))
- Brandon Tester (Students' Union President-Elect) - Observer
- David Dodds (Head of Procurement) – Deep Dive: new catering offer item only
- Priti Kharbanda (Head of Apprenticeships) – items on Safeguarding and Prevent training and Apprenticeships only
- Dr Emma Tomsett (Minute Secretary)

Welcome/Apologies

23.110 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. A warm welcome was extended to the Students' Union President-Elect who was observing the meeting.

23.111 The following two apologies were noted:

- Ian Harper (Commercial and Business Development Director)
- Trevor Gabriele (Chief Finance Officer)

Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

23.112 Independent Member Dr Annet Gamell declared a conflict of interest in relation to the University's plan to purchase Alexandra House in High Wycombe.

Deep dive: new catering offer

23.113 Council received a presentation on the procurement of BNU's new catering services. The Head of Procurement advised Council that the following principles had underpinned the University's approach to the procurement process:

- Providing a service that catered to all BNU students using food that was locally sourced, freshly cooked and sustainable
- Providing a democratic service whereby customers could give feedback at the individual level and through student representatives
- Solid transparent open book flexible fee-based Partnership in which the University is in control of the Catering and the related policies.

23.114 Council was advised that Gather & Gather (G&G) had been successful in their tender and BNU's catering services would be handed to them on 1 September 2023. The Head of Procurement would work closely operationally with them to ensure that every aspect of their tender was delivered. Senior management at G&G were local residents and seemed highly committed to BNU.

23.115 In response to queries from Council, the Head of Procurement confirmed:

- G&G would run all BNU campus catering except the SU's Venue; there was a commercial framework with G&G that would enable BNU to draw in commercial services on additional sites such as the Brunel Engine Shed
- he was confident that G&G would meet the needs of the diversity of BNU's student body, but this would be done sensitively without cultural appropriation
- monitoring and reporting back on satisfaction with the catering offer would be gathered at an individual student level through an app and through student representatives
- G&G would be permitted to work with local and charity groups such as local food charities to support sustainability and corporate social responsibility. G&G would also offer employment opportunities for BNU students through the Students' Union Job Shop and BNU was also considering other options for students at the moment, for example G&G had an apprenticeship programme
- the contract was for 5 years, after which another tender exercise would be undertaken

- G&G had an investment formula based on turnover; if turnover increased, their options for expansion at BNU would increase
 - G&G would be responsible for their standards, but the Head of Procurement would be closely monitoring them.
- 23.116 The Vice-Chancellor commented in response to a query about G&G's possible involvement with Missenden Abbey (MA) that the objective at MA was to achieve a high catering standard. Discussions had been held about G&G working with MA, and all options were currently being considered.
- 23.117 The Chair noted that the new offer was exciting although it would take some time to embed, and wished G&G success.

Minutes of the previous meeting

- 23.118 The minutes of the previous meeting on 18 April 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting subject to the addition of Karen Satterford as an attendee and the review of the wording in the second bullet point in minute 23.65 to clarify its meaning.

Action: Minute Secretary

Matters Arising / Status of Actions

- 23.119 Council noted the status of the actions as detailed on the action sheet.
- 23.120 The Chair informed Council that Independent Member Supriya Sobti had decided not to continue for a second term on Council after her first term ended on 31 July 2023 due to workload demands. The Chair was grateful that Ms Sobti had informed her in good time and had also agreed to remain working with the University formally or informally until the end of the current calendar year. Recruitment for new Council members was underway and consideration would now begin regarding who would become the new Chair of Audit Committee.
- 23.121 Council expressed its regret that Ms Sobti would be leaving.
- 23.122 In response to a query regarding action 23.84, the Chair advised Council that this would be addressed later in the meeting.
- 23.123 The following verbal updates were also received:
- Action 22.298: the review of the Scheme of Delegation had been undertaken as part of the review of BNU's Financial Regulations, which would be presented to Council at its next meeting
 - Action 23.65: the paper on Council assurance on quality and standards would come to the next Council meeting
 - Action 23.71: the report on recruitment for September 2023 was not yet completed
 - Action 23.80: the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that responsibility for United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) compliance at university level would remain with the University Secretary and Clerk to Council. Responsibility for International Recruitment would remain with the Chief Finance Officer. The new Deputy Vice-Chancellor would have an oversight role. The action was completed.

- 23.124 Council was advised that the University had completed the lease on the Brunel Engine Shed, which included a break clause if the application for change of use was rejected.
- 23.125 The purchase of Alexandra House was expected to be completed imminently.
- 23.126 The Chair requested that the action sheet format was reviewed with regards to readability.

Action: University Secretariat

Future Curriculum Development

- 23.127 Council considered a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) on potential future curriculum development at the University.
- 23.128 Council's attention was drawn to the following points:
- a) BNU's strategy, Thrive 28, committed BNU to growing to 10,000 students by 2028, which would be done by introducing new subjects; expanding existing provision; and by potentially entering the new market that the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE), which would be introduced in 2025, might create
 - b) data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) showed BNU's market share was increasing, but there was variability behind that market share: some areas were ahead in growth while others were behind and BNU wanted to address the subjects that were not performing as strongly as they might
 - c) If all existing subjects could expand to the BNU average market share, BNU would recruit approximately 2,000 extra students, but this alone would not achieve the 10,000 target. New markets offered greater opportunity, but this would be balanced with growing existing provision
 - d) BNU had commissioned data from DataHE, a sector-leading consultancy, who had looked at BNU's demographic reach, trends in changing demand and population growth at parliamentary constituency level, to identify potential expansion. DataHE had then generated projected demand pools for BNU, which were highly instructive though not decisive in determining which new subjects to develop
 - e) Top subject areas identified for potential growth were Engineering and Technology, Biosciences, English, History, Medicine, Physical Sciences, Architecture and Building and Mathematics
 - f) Several of the subjects identified did not challenge BNU's character and mission dramatically, but some aspects of Biosciences or Mathematics might as they could have much higher entry tariffs
 - g) BNU had made some initial enquiries to Health Education England, Bucks Healthcare Trust and the General Medical Council regarding Medicine and was considering reaching out to potential partner universities. While the subject was expensive, the University Executive Team (UET) felt it could fit BNU well as around 40% of current BNU students were studying Health and Social Care and it could bring significant reputational benefit, but it would again attract higher tariff applicants
 - h) Curriculum23 had prepared BNU to be more agile in changing its curriculum

- i) Other opportunities included micro-credentials, which could be taught in-person or online, were often cheaper for learners and paid for by employees, and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs); BNU had recently had its first two HTQs approved for delivery from September 2024 by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) and was applying for approval of six more
- j) BNU would continue to ensure its offer was attractive both to local residents and to people from outside Buckinghamshire.

23.129 In response to queries from Council, the Vice-Chancellor provided the following clarifications:

- a) the government did set a limit on how many new medical students could enrol each year, but BNU had received intelligence that the quota might rise significantly
- b) the Humanities could have a place at BNU; the challenge was whether the entry tariff could be set at a level that fitted BNU's character and mission
- c) it was not clear how much new provision would be needed to achieve 10,000 students but it would be prudent to plan on introducing two or three new subjects in the Thrive period.

23.130 A robust discussion of the presentation was held from which Council agreed that

- a) Council did not oppose any of the suggested subjects, but wanted employment to be the driver for everything that BNU did
- b) whatever subjects were taken forward, market research needed to be gathered both locally and from the wider diaspora
- c) Council supported building on existing provision and what BNU already did well alongside introducing new areas
- d) caution should be exercised on expansion into subject areas where there was competition, such as Mathematics, and high costs or both, such as Medicine, without knowing what BNU's market was. Council also noted that some universities were closing courses in areas such as History
- e) climate change and sustainability could be a cross-cutting theme in all new areas. The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) noted that sustainability was embedded in the new curriculum
- f) it was also important to improve BNU's continuation rates to help student number growth.

23.131 The Vice-Chancellor thanked Council for its extremely valuable input.

23.132 The Chair commented that it had been a very useful formative discussion, but it was now for UET to initiate and operationalise new curriculum development while Council monitored the impact and outcomes.

Training: Safeguarding and Prevent

23.133 Council received refresher training on their responsibilities as governors with regard to the Prevent Duty in Higher Education and Safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults. Eleven members of Council confirmed they had previously received training on Prevent and ten members had previously received training on Safeguarding.

- 23.134 Council understood it was responsible for approving BNU's Safeguarding Policy and monitoring its effectiveness by receiving the outcomes from any audit or risk reviews via Council's Audit Committee, and receiving and testing assurance that staff had completed all necessary training through updates given by Human Resources to Council's Resources Committee.
- 23.135 The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) and the Head of Apprenticeships also outlined that safeguarding was embedded at an operational level across BNU through staff training, programme documents, tri-partite reviews, reporting to the University's Apprenticeships Board, staff and student inductions and Safeguarding Leads in the Directorate for Student Success.
- 23.136 Council understood the requirements of the Prevent Duty to practically manage the risk of radicalisation and the development of extremist views among BNU employees and students and its responsibility to monitor risk and compliance through receipt of the Annual Prevent report, which was received by Council's Audit Committee and recommended to Council for submission to the Office for Students, and consideration of the Strategic Risk Register by Audit Committee.
- 23.137 The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) outlined to Council that compliance with the Prevent Duty was embedded through BNU's documentation; staff training requirements (with Prevent training mandatory every two years) and BNU's Prevent Lead.
- 23.138 The Chair confirmed that she and Independent Member Irene Kirkman had also undertaken more detailed e-training as Council's Ofsted Leads. Both she and Ms Kirkman had also observed some tri-partite reviews in which Prevent and Safeguarding were embedded as items for discussion. Subsequent to the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor also confirmed he had completed the e-training and had observed tripartite reviews.
- 23.139 In response to queries from Council, UET confirmed that
- a) work would be done to give greater assurance to Council on the completion of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks by staff where they were required
Action: University Secretary and Clerk to Council
 - b) further work would be undertaken regarding reporting to and giving Council assurance on safeguarding
Action: University Secretary and Clerk to Council
 - c) BNU monitored staff who did not complete Prevent training, contacted those who had not to remind them it was mandatory, and, if necessary, would take disciplinary action against staff who did not complete it. Staff needed to have completed the training in order to receive an annual performance rating of Good or higher.
- 23.140 Council agreed that the University took safeguarding extremely seriously, and looked forward to receiving the annual report.
- 23.141 It was suggested that a tailor-made video on Prevent and Safeguarding could become part of inductions for new Independent members.

Apprenticeships

- 23.142 Council considered the success rate targets for BNU's Apprenticeship provision. Council noted that the targets were by programme, with an overall success rate target of 85% for BNU provision, but Ofsted analysed success rates by age. The Head of Apprenticeships advised that the targets were at programme level due to the significant differences between each programme and were targets for 2025. The targets had been developed with an external consultancy. The Head of Apprenticeships also advised Council that Ofsted would assess whether the targets were realistic; it was felt that they were realistic because retention rates were good as learners were employed.
- 23.143 Council noted that the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship programme target was lower than other programmes. The Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor informed Council that this target was different due to the currently changing nature of police training requirements as the Home Office had announced it was no longer necessary to complete a degree apprenticeship to enter the police force.
- 23.144 Council approved the targets but requested that the University closely monitored the success rates for learners aged under twenty-three.
- 23.145 Council noted the Self-Assessment Report 2021-22, but highlighted it needed the following two corrections:
- a) The third sentence in the final paragraph on page 13 required clarifying as it included repetition of the phrase 'they build on this knowledge to plan, develop, deliver and manage increasingly complex'
 - b) The Organisational Reporting and Governance Structure on page 22 did not include Council.
- 23.146 The Chair commented that a more data-driven, reflective SAR was likely to be developed over the next year.
- 23.147 The Chair thanked the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) and the Head of Apprenticeships for presenting the items in the absence of the Commercial and Business Development Director.

Any Other Business

- 23.148 The Chair raised a query from the Deputy Chair of Council regarding the impact of the government's announcement that visas for dependents of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) International students would not be issued from January 2024.
- 23.149 The Vice-Chancellor commented that there might be a surge in applications for BNU's September 2023 intake. The greatest impact of the rules change might be on students from India and Nigeria who tended to bring dependents with them; it was not yet possible to know if students would come regardless of the change.
- 23.150 Council was informed that 60% of BNU's current International PGT students brought dependents with them.
- 23.151 Council noted that the Students' Union President was attending her final meeting. The Chair of Council warmly thanked the President for her extremely valuable contributions to Council during the year and wished her well in her next endeavours.

Date of the next meeting

23.152 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 18 July 2023.