



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
NEW UNIVERSITY  
EST. 1891

## MINUTES FOR COUNCIL (STRATEGIC MEETING)

Open Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2023 in the Arrouaisian Room, Missenden Abbey and on Microsoft Teams.

### Present:

- Maggie Galliers (Independent [Chair])
- Andy Cole (Independent [Deputy Chair and Chair of Governance Committee])
- Professor Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor)
- Anna Crabtree (Independent [Chair of Resources Committee])
- Karen Satterford (Co-opted [Chair of Student Experience Committee])
- Dr Susan Rosser (Independent [Chair of Audit Committee])
- Irene Kirkman (Independent)
- Dr Annet Gamell (Independent)
- Brian Lewis (Independent)
- Marek Pruszewicz (Independent)
- Sadie Groom (Independent)
- Jackie Westaway (Independent)
- Ze'ev Portner (Academic Representative)
- Emma Binnie (PSE Representative)
- Dr Russel Stone (Senate Representative / Head of School: Creative and Digital Industries)
- Professor Karen Buckwell-Nutt (Senate Representative / Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience))
- Brandon Tester (Students' Union President)
- Mikhail George (Co-opted Student Member)

### In attendance

- Professor Damien Page (Deputy Vice-Chancellor)
- Professor Paul Morgan (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education));
- Ellie Smith (University Secretary and Clerk to Council)
- Trevor Gabriele (Chief Finance Officer)
- Ian Harper (Commercial and Business Development Director)
- Dr Kevin Campbell-Karn (Deputy Head of Human and Social Sciences) – item on Artificial Intelligence only
- Nicola Shepherd (Senior Lecturer / Academic Developer in Curriculum Practice and CPD Lead) – item on Artificial Intelligence only
- Dr Emma Tomsett (Minute Secretary)

## Welcome / Apologies for Absence

- 23.221 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted the following apology: Justin Sullivan (Independent).
- 23.222 A warm welcome was extended to new members Brian Lewis, Marek Pruszewicz, Dr Russel Stone and Mikhail George who were attending their first meeting.

## Declaration of conflicts of interest

- 23.223 No conflicts of interest were declared.

## Deep Dive: School of Creative and Digital Industries

- 23.224 Council considered a presentation on the School of Creative and Digital Industries from the Head of School. Council's attention was drawn to the School's successful growth in recent years; its expanded Postgraduate and revitalised Undergraduate portfolios which included in-attendance and online programmes; its focus on meeting local and national skills gaps and industry needs while maintaining the School's inclusivity; the School's facilities at both High Wycombe and Pinewood Studios; and the School's strategic ambition to be recognised nationally in all subject areas.
- 23.225 In response to queries from Council members, the Head of School informed Council:
- a) the School's main competitors were post-92 universities, including Hertfordshire, Westminster, University of East London and Bournemouth. The School's open days were strong, with the School emphasising it was smaller, friendly with excellent pastoral care and focused on employability to compete with rivals. The School's facilities were also extremely appealing to applicants
  - b) to double the School from its current size would require more estate space and an expanded IT infrastructure
  - c) the School was aware it was male dominated, although the gender split was improving, and took care to ensure its imagery and teaching were inclusive
  - d) some of the School's programmes were above BNU's overall performance in the Graduate Outcomes survey, but Events and Film and TV Production would be a focus for improvement
  - e) the admission process for Animation was now moving towards being selective due to high levels of demand, while trying to remain inclusive. Applications for Film and TV Production were approaching levels where the School might have to become selective
  - f) the School was a tenant at Pinewood Studios but was trying to build relationships as it had led to some excellent opportunities for students. The School was clear with applicants and students that they would not be filming at Pinewood Studios as this was not permitted, but it had boosted recruitment and interest in the School. The School was in discussions about being a partner in the Marlow and Denham studio projects.

## Minutes of the previous meeting

- 23.226 The Open and Reserved Minutes of the meeting on 18 July 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting without amendment.

## Matters Arising / Status of Actions

- 23.227 Council noted the status of the actions as outlined on the action sheet. All actions were complete.
- 23.228 Council noted the election of Dr Russel Stone as Senate Representative to Council from 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2025 and the co-option of Mikhail George as Council's Student Member until 31 July 2024.

## Chair's Action

- 23.229 There were no formal chair's actions to note, but it was confirmed that recent uses of the University Seal would be reported at November's Business meeting.

## University Matters

### Vice-Chancellor's Report

- 23.230 Council received a report from the Vice-Chancellor which highlighted the following points:
- a) BNU continued to engage with the Department for Education and government ministers around the government's concerns about franchised provision. BNU had emphasised that increased regulation would not resolve government concerns but was also keen to demonstrate the positive aspects of this provision
  - b) the recent Conservative Party conference had seen renewed rhetoric about 'rip-off degrees' and other announcements such as the investigation into the use of gender and sex questions in scientific research that suggested the sector could become a 'political football'. The announcement of the Advanced British Standard, which would replace T Levels if it came to fruition, risked creating uncertainty
  - c) the Labour Party appeared to be offering no extra money for Higher Education; more coherence about the skills agenda and some reforms to the Office for Students (OfS)
  - d) the House of Lords had published a highly critical report on the OfS
  - e) BNU's National Student Survey (NSS) 2023 results had been exceptional, with BNU ranked number one in England for student satisfaction
  - f) BNU had secured a very good result in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) but, after careful reflection, the University had decided there were grounds to submit representations because it believed that the assessors might reasonably have awarded an even higher TEF outcome
  - g) BNU's 2023 League Table performance had been mixed, with falls in some, although this was partly due to the tables' methodologies, but more positive results were expected in 2024 when the full impact of the NSS 2023 results would be seen. The University had received excellent recognition from the Daily Mail in being named as its University of the Year for Student Support which would be highly beneficial reputationally
  - h) recruitment for 2023-24 had gone very well. The focus was now on converting applicants into enrolled students. If all applicants were converted, it could be the University's best recruitment in many years
  - i) accommodation was a key priority. BNU had now completed the purchase of the land originally intended for phase 2 of the Hughenden Village and was considering the options it offered. BNU was also exploring the Lane End Conference Centre, which had been purchased by a property

developer who was considering tenants or a resale as their plans for the site were unlikely to get planning permission.

- j) staff at BNU were to be congratulated on the successful recent Ofsted inspection. The Vice-Chancellor particularly thanked the Chair and Independent Member Irene Kirkman who, as Ofsted Leads, had impressed the inspectors with Council's engagement.

23.231 The Students' Union (SU) President welcomed the accommodation announcements and urged the University to continue this work. The SU was receiving unconfirmed reports of student homelessness.

23.232 In response to queries, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that

- a) if BNU did move forward with the Lane End site, it would consider on-site support services
- b) while applicants did not yet appear to place significant weighting on TEF rankings, obtaining a higher rating would be an accolade BNU would hold for four years. An old proposal that providers with the highest TEF rating should be allowed to charge higher fees had recently been suggested again by former minister Jo Johnson. The University Secretary and Clerk to Council commented that it would also help BNU recruit staff
- c) BNU's target on league tables was to have an aggregate position in the top 80. It might be challenging to achieve a higher rating in The Times until after the next Research Excellence Framework in 2028 given the emphasis it placed on research, but BNU could work on its awarding of 'Good Honours', degree completion and progression into graduate level employment to enhance its position in all the tables in the meantime. It could also address the staff: student ratio metric, which had hampered performance in 2023. BNU would redouble its efforts around league table position, but could not control their methodologies.

#### OfS Business and Management Investigation Report: update and BNU response

23.233 This item was discussed as Reserved Business. See Reserved Minutes.

#### Oxford Business College Update

23.234 This item was discussed as Reserved Business. See Reserved Minutes.

#### National Student Survey 2023 Results

23.235 Council received a report on the University's outstanding NSS 2023 results. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) thanked all those involved, and especially the Dean of Students, Students' Union and the Heads of School. The 2023 survey had been new, as the OfS had removed the overall satisfaction question amongst other changes, but the consistency in BNU's results over the past two years was very pleasing. BNU always used the survey as a diagnostic tool to improve its performance. Action planning and planning for the 2024 campaign was now underway.

23.236 The Dean of Students noted that the results were a consummate example of teamwork, with all areas of BNU contributing. The Dean would be working closely with the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) on the 2024 NSS.

23.237 The Chair of the Student Experience Committee informed Council that the Committee had focused on the NSS as a critical friend and had consistently encouraged the collaborative approach

taken. She hoped that through the Committee Council had made a valuable contribution to the results.

- 23.238 The Chair thanked the Pro Vice-Chancellor for his leadership on the NSS and commented that the University should be extremely proud of the results, which were an excellence response to any criticism of BNU. The Chair also congratulated the Students' Union for its result. The Chair observed other areas of BNU might benefit from the close focus given to the NSS and that the focus should now be on graduate outcomes.

#### Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

- 23.239 Council considered a paper on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Higher Education. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor informed Council that the sector was of the view that AI needed to be embraced as students would likely use AI regardless of providers' views on it. Employers would need graduates trained in using AI. AI's ability to complete some standard tasks would also remove these tasks from academic staff to allow them to focus on more important work. BNU accordingly needed to use AI to drive innovation and creativity. It also needed to reflect on what assessment was set to ensure it became more authentic, focused and involved experiential learning rather than just traditional assessment. BNU was currently recruiting five new professors, one of whom would be focused on inclusive AI as there was an inherent bias within AI to people from a white background.
- 23.240 The Deputy Head of School: Human and Social Sciences Senior Lecturer / Academic Developer in Curriculum Practice and CPD Lead reflected on the AI sessions at the recent Staff Summit:
- a) the summit keynote speaker on AI had helped staff undergo a change process: staff had moved from feeling concern about AI to considering how they could use it
  - b) BNU needed to train its staff on how to use AI and equalise the playing field for its learners
  - c) BNU was sector-leading on AI as it was one of the few providers to have already defined what the appropriate use of AI was. BNU was educating staff and students on how to use it appropriately as a tool or framework to support and enhance their work but not to produce work for them.
- 23.241 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) agreed that the staff summit had changed perceptions of AI: the attitude now was about understanding how staff could collaborate with AI and how learners could learn differently as BNU's guidance was excellent. Another consideration was how to potentially collaborate with other providers on this.
- 23.242 The new Senate Representative Dr Stone echoed that staff should be supported to use it as it was an opportunity to innovate and enhance learning.
- 23.243 The SU President confirmed the SU supported BNU's approach. The Student Member agreed that students were using AI as a tool, not in and of itself.
- 23.244 Council held a wide-ranging discussion about the paper, querying how BNU could ensure students would not submit assessments that had been produced for them entirely by an AI, how staff would detect this if they did and how BNU was developing its ethical approach to AI. One member expressed their view that there was still a role for traditional assessment.

23.245 In response to Council's queries, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Head of School and Senior Lecturer / Academic Developer in Curriculum Practice advised Council:

- a) Turnitin had an AI detection plug-in, but the University Executive Team (UET) had agreed it should be switched off as it was currently fundamentally biased as AI had been developed and programmed wholly by white, Western men. It also disadvantaged students whose first language was not English and who therefore used services such as Grammarly to proofread their work, falsely identifying plagiarism. BNU would now focus on training staff to detect inappropriate use of AI in assessments and would consider switching the plug-in back on once detection had improved. BNU would also focus on changing how students were assessed as AI was evolving so quickly that a piece of work written solely by AI would soon genuinely appear as if it had been written by a student, making guidance on detecting AI, while valuable, continuously out of date
- b) the Department for Education had not yet provided any clear guidance on the use of AI, but was discussing it
- c) BNU's policies had been updated and stated that students must reference their use of AI and use it as a guidance tool, but assessments had to be their own work
- d) BNU's guidance was on its website, and could be accessed by partners
- e) BNU was investigating procuring a ringfenced AI. It was currently advising staff not to put any information that was not already on a website into an AI. It had also made it clear to staff that they could not, for example, put anonymised research data in an AI
- f) BNU was developing videos to guide students and staff on how to use AI in an ethical way to maximise their potential
- g) an Opportunity Module had been validated to teach students about how to use AI in education and the workplace.

23.246 The Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) noted that AI was potentially an opportunity to enhance digital literacy, but BNU was aware of the impact of digital poverty.

23.247 In response to a query about student's views on AI, the SU President noted that the guidance must remain clear. The Student Representative noted that students' views depended on their educational background: those from a non-technological background might need more guidance on how to use it appropriately.

23.248 The Chair commented that Council might need to return to this subject in the future, perhaps through a 'deep dive'.

#### High Wycombe Estate Development

23.249 Council received an update on the High Wycombe Estate Development. The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) informed Council that the construction of the atrium, winter garden and roof garden was nearing completion. The portal entrance to the new reception area was not likely to be completed until early 2024 due to some unexpected challenges presented by how the East Wing wall had been constructed. The CFO thanked the High Wycombe Development Oversight Group for their oversight of the project.

23.250 The UET had considered carefully whether to take possession of the spaces as they were completed or to wait until all work was completed and take full possession. The impact on students had been at the forefront of the discussions. The UET felt students would not get the full benefit

of the development if possession was not taken until all work had been completed; BNU therefore hoped to start taking possession of some spaces from the week commencing 16 October.

- 23.251 The Chair remarked that this had been an ambitious project that would be transformational. Given the delays, the Chair and the Chair of Resources Committee had asked for a full assessment of the different options for taking possession out of concern that there could be a negative financial impact on the University. The Vice-Chancellor had provided an analysis of options and Independent Member Justin Sullivan had been asked to review this due to his construction expertise. Mr Sullivan had concluded that, weighing up the financial risk to BNU versus the risk to the student experience by waiting until all spaces were complete, taking possession of spaces as they were completed was a sensible approach.
- 23.252 The Vice-Chancellor assured Council that the University had closely reviewed the contract with the constructor. It contained penalty clauses that could be invoked by both the constructor if its work was impeded by factors beyond its control and by BNU if the original agreed handover date was missed. The review had found that overall BNU could claim more money from the constructor than the constructor could claim from BNU. The UET was of the view that it was therefore in neither party's interest to invoke the clauses and was currently focused on taking a collaborative approach to ensure the development was completed as soon as possible. The University remained in regular contact with its solicitors regarding the situation.
- 23.253 The Chair noted that it might be helpful for the SU to have a timeline of when areas would be opening.

### **Date of next meeting**

- 23.254 The Chair sought feedback from members on the effectiveness of the meeting. Council agreed it had been productive, collegiate and addressed important issues. The Chair noted there had been much good news and thanked UET and their teams for the impressive outcomes. Council now wanted them to do even better.
- 23.255 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 28 November 2023.