



SENATE

Open Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 06 December 2023 on MS Teams.

Present:

- Professor Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor [Chair])
- Professor Damien Page (Deputy Vice-Chancellor) [Chair of Academic Planning and Research and Enterprise Committees]
- Professor Paul Morgan (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) [Chair of Education Committee])
- Professor Karen Buckwell-Nutt (Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) / Director of Institute of Health and Social Care) [Chair of the Student Experience Forum and Institute of Health and Social Care Board]
- Ellie Smith (University Secretary and Clerk to Council)
- Dr Sarah Williams (Head of School: Business and Law)
- Professor Sri-Kartini Leet (Head of School: Art, Design and Performance)
- Dr Russel Stone (Head of School: Creative and Digital Industries)
- Thomas Toscano (Acting Head of School: Health and Social Care Professions)
- Dr Ciaran O'Keeffe (Head of School: Human and Social Sciences)
- Lisa Wyld (Head of School: Missenden Abbey International Hotel and Hospitality School)
- Gail Rowntree (Interim Head of School: Aviation and Security)
- Ashley Church (Acting Head of School: Engineering and the Built Environment)
- Jon Lees (Academic Registrar)
- Professor Florin Ioras (Director of Enterprise and Research)
- Anahita Malek (Teaching Representative: School of Creative and Digital Industries)
- Dr Kevin Campbell-Karn (Teaching Representative: School of Human and Social Sciences)
- Ian Chisholm-Bunting (Teaching Representative: School of Nursing and Midwifery)
- Dr Marcus Wood (Education Committee Representative / Head of Quality and Standards)
- Professor David Warnock-Smith (Research and Enterprise Committee Representative)
- Dr Ben Clayton (Professoriate Representative) [Chair of the University Research Ethics Panel]
- Brandon Tester (Students' Union President)
- Sruthi Subhash (Students' Union Vice-President Education and Welfare (High Wycombe))
- Dr Alison Maton (University Partnerships Board Representative)
- Michela Falcone (Teaching Representative: School of Art, Design and Performance)

In attendance:

- Dr Emma Tomsett (Secretary)
- Matt Hiely-Rayner (Director of Strategic Planning and Change) – Thrive28 KPI Update only
- Steve Edge (Head of Sustainability) – Annual Sustainability Report item only
- Priti Kharbanda (Head of Apprenticeships) – Apprenticeship Update item only

Apologies:

- Emma Binnie (Dean of Students)
- Paul Maloret (Head of School: Nursing and Midwifery)
- Amy Pile (Students' Union Vice-President Education and Welfare (Uxbridge and Aylesbury))
- Brenda Brown (Teaching Representative: School of Health and Social Care Professions)

Welcome / Apologies for Absence

23.190 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted four apologies. A warm welcome was extended to the Academic Registrar who was attending his first meeting.

Declaration of conflicts of interest

23.191 There were no declarations of conflicts of interest.

Minutes of the previous meeting

23.192 The minutes of the previous meeting on 20 September 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting without amendment.

Matters Arising / Status of actions

23.193 Senate noted the status of the actions as outlined on the action sheet. Senate received a verbal update on action 23.160: the University Secretary and Clerk to Council had met with the Head of Policy and Strategy to discuss the governance structure for the Access and Participation Plan (APP). One proposal was that the Quality Enhancement Committee could be repurposed as the Student Outcomes Task Group focused around the APP, although this had not been finalised. The Chair noted that the APP and governance around the APP was becoming increasingly important for all providers, and that Senate would need a higher level of engagement with the APP going forward. It would also be important to consider how Council received assurance that BNU was meeting its APP obligations.

23.194 Senate noted the election of the Head of School (Creative and Digital Industries) as Senate's Representative on Council until 31 July 2025, alongside the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) whose term would end on 31 July 2024.

23.195 In response to a query, it was confirmed that the Turnitin Artificial Intelligence detection plug-in had been deactivated and a story for all staff confirming this had been published on BEN on 17 October 2023.

Chair's Action

23.196 There were no chair's actions to note.

Chair's Report

23.197 Senate received a verbal report from the Vice-Chancellor drawing Senate's attention to the following developments at BNU and across the sector:

- a) the excellent outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of the University's apprenticeship provision
- b) the Office for Students (OfS) was reviewing its strategic plan and had responded to the recent critical report from the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee; there were some signs that it might now be more willing to engage with the sector at individual provider level. It would continue to focus on quality as well as foundation year and franchised

- provision, and where these intersected. Consultations on process for complaints relating to, and regulation of Students' Unions around, freedom of speech were expected in early 2024. Regulation on Students' Unions would come into force from 1 August 2025
- c) the OfS was also focusing on equality of opportunity (EOO) and APPs were expected to become the action plans that mitigated against risks to EOO identified by providers
 - d) the Department for Education remained concerned about franchised provision. The Chair, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Commercial and Business Development Director would shortly be publishing a paper on the benefits of this provision in an effort to mitigate these concerns
 - e) changes to the Foundation Year fee categories were confirmed; these would impact BNU but the impact was expected to be mitigated
 - f) BNU had performed well through the 2022-23 financial year, allowing it to issue a bonus to staff, and it expected to meet its budget level of surplus for the current financial year. However, there had been a significant shortfall against budget in international recruitment. A review of international recruitment and a review of how the University built its financial forecast from its student numbers forecast had been commissioned to identify any lessons that could be learned
 - g) consultants Tribal would be reviewing the University's operating costs to identify if resources were being used effectively. Student number growth remained essential if the University was to reach a point where it could benefit from economies of scale
 - h) feedback from the Students' Union (SU) indicated that students were still experiencing challenges with Personal Tutoring. Senate members were asked to ensure their School was informing students who their Personal Tutors were as there appeared to be inconsistency with this
 - i) student feedback to the SU also indicated that there were some inconsistencies on additional course costs. Senate members were asked to reflect if any course costs they were aware of being passed to students should be covered by BNU
 - j) BNU had taken partial possession of the spaces in the new High Wycombe campus apart from the Roof Garden and the portal. Feedback on the spaces had been overwhelmingly positive from both internal and external users. The Chair thanked all those involved in delivering the project on budget and within 12 months.

23.198 In response to a query, the Chair confirmed that plans were ongoing to make the stage area in the Atrium accessible.

Strategic Matters

Thrive 28 KPI Update

- 23.199 Senate received an update on the University's performance against the Thrive 28 Strategy Key Performance Indicators (KPI) from the Director of Strategic Planning and Change. There had been positive movement on some KPIs, such as that relating to Student Satisfaction where BNU was almost at its target, but other areas still required work, such as graduate employment as reported through the Graduate Outcomes (GO) survey.
- 23.200 In response to queries, the Director confirmed that internal transfers were not included in the Continuation KPI and that the definition was a student who was fully enrolled and was still fully engaged with BNU on the anniversary of that enrolment date; discussions were ongoing about how to remove students from BNU's denominator if they were not going to engage with BNU; it was challenging to get insights from alumni to establish what had happened to graduate employment levels for BNU graduates since the GO survey of the 2021-22 cohort; BNU would benefit from more interaction with alumni beyond fundraising.

23.201 The Chair noted that some of the academic indicators required further work, particularly on Continuation and Employment.

Academic Staff Charter and Career Pathways

23.202 Senate considered the proposed Academic Staff Charter and Career Pathways which were intended to replace the Bucks Academic Framework (BAF). The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) informed Senate that the aim was to simplify the Academic Pathways and to ensure the University focused on core business. Both the BAF and the new Career Pathways schemes would be run through 2023-24. Workshops about the new Pathways application process would begin in January 2024.

23.203 In response to comments from Senate, the DVC confirmed:

- a) the Academic Workload Project would be ensuring there was parity in academics' workload, and all workloads would be transparent
- b) further work was required regarding Graduate Teaching Assistants as there was inconsistency in their job descriptions
- c) careful consideration had been given to the categories of fellowship in AdvanceHE required for different academic positions
- d) a reference to the Knowledge Exchange Framework could be added
- e) definitions of levels of Professor (A – C) could be added to make the distinction between them clearer.

23.204 In response to a query about customer service, the Chair advised that consideration was being given to BNU joining an external customer service scheme that would give BNU benchmarks to measure its customer service against. Further details would be forthcoming over the next few months.

23.205 Senate approved the document subject to the addition of a reference to the KEF and further definition of 'Professor C'.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Inclusive Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy

23.206 Senate considered the new Inclusive Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, which had been co-created following consultation with staff via workshops and a green paper. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor informed Senate that the strategy aimed to align BNU research and knowledge exchange to BNU's values and reflect that BNU was inclusive in all its activities. If it was approved, it would supersede the Research Strategy previously approved by Senate and would be launched in January 2024 for implementation over the next five years.

23.207 In response to comments, the DVC

- a) agreed that the University could hold a series of smaller conferences focused on particular topics in addition to one main annual research conference
- b) clarified that PhD by publication was not intended to be the only route to achieving a doctorate, but an alternative; the DVC believed it was a beneficial route as it could be done in a quicker timeframe and achieved more publications
- c) confirmed that no contractual changes to require Professional Service Employees (PSEs) to undertake research would be made.

23.208 The Chair and DVC agreed that PSE staff should be able to have website profiles.

23.209 Senate approved the Strategy and the rescinding of the previous Research Strategy approved in June 2023. The Chair requested that the DVC worked with the Communications Team to launch the new strategy.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Sustainability Activities – Annual Monitoring Report

23.210 Senate considered the Annual Summary Report on Sustainability for 2022-23, which summarised the activities of the Sustainability Committee in the previous academic year.

23.211 In response to queries, the Head of Sustainability confirmed that

- a) there would be no reduction in the number of parking spaces in Car Park D; it was only the green space around Owen Harris and the car park that was being revamped
- b) further consideration would be given to the energy usage from Artificial Intelligence through the Central Processing Units that powered them and how it could be offset
- c) point 14 of the action plan for 2023-24 could be expanded to include “and increase the number of sustainable alternatives” to make it more explicit that sustainable alternatives were the main focus
- d) the planting recently done around the campus used a supplier who did not use peat, but clarification would be sought on the carbon footprint of the plants bought
- e) 75 students had signed up to the Introduction to Sustainability Opportunity Module.

23.212 It was suggested that BNU’s work on sustainability should be promoted at Open Days.

23.213 The Chair asked if, in the Head of Sustainability’s view, BNU was doing enough quickly enough. The Head of Sustainability commented that BNU was on some aspects, and on some aspects action should not be rushed. More could be done on engagement of the student body through embedding sustainability as much as possible in academic provision and making it ‘business as usual’.

23.214 The Chair suggested that he and the Head of Sustainability discuss how the new spaces in Dove / Beeches on the High Wycombe campus and Gather&Gather could be used to raise awareness of the sustainability actions BNU was taking.

Action: Vice-Chancellor and Head of Sustainability

23.215 The report was approved.

Student Matters

Students’ Union Report

23.216 Senate received a report updating Senate on levels of student engagement with SU activities and events in the current academic year to date; support with cost of living provided to students through the provision of 2,800 free meals; and the SU’s recommendations to support International Students in understanding BNU’s expectations on academic integrity, strengthen personal tutoring and to address issues relating to additional and hidden course costs.

23.217 The Chair commented that the engagement data was very encouraging, and that Senate expected the Student Experience Forum to resolve the issues raised regarding academic integrity, personal tutoring and course costs.

- 23.218 The Education Committee Representative / Head of Quality and Standards and the Teaching Representative: School of Human and Social Sciences, who was Chair of the University's Academic Integrity Panel, informed Senate that progress was being made on academic integrity. The number of cases from BNU-taught students was falling although the number of cases from partner students had risen, but the numbers were in proportion to the composition of BNU's student community. Work was ongoing with Schools to enhance students' understanding of academic integrity with a particular focus on ensuring that new assignment briefs were set each year and opportunities to commit academic misconduct (AM) were designed out of assessments.
- 23.219 The Chair of the Student Experience Forum confirmed that the most recent meeting had been productive and that it was addressing issues raised in the report, including hidden or additional course costs.
- 23.220 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) agreed that the issues raised should be resolved through the SEF and that it was being considered whether the SEF should meet more frequently. The Pro Vice-Chancellor stated that there should be no additional costs for students apart from exceptional reasons.
- 23.221 The Chair commented that Senate needed assurance that the SEF was addressing these issues; further consideration appeared to be needed regarding the frequency of meetings and how actions agreed at the SEF were translated into operational plans.

Action: Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)

Reserved Business: Annual Quality and Standards Report 2022-23

- 23.222 Senate considered the Annual Quality and Standards Report for the academic year 2022-23 as Reserved Business. See Reserved Minutes.

Quality Assurance Matters

Research Degrees Annual Monitoring

- 23.223 Senate received summary reports on the recent Annual Monitoring of Research Degrees undertaken by the Research and Enterprise Committee and of the University Research Ethics Panel's (UREP) Annual Report. The recent partnership review with Staffordshire University had been successful and a new five-year contract would be signed with them in January 2024. The number of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) recruited in 2022-23 had risen and the Research Development Unit was trying to expand the supervisor base as BNU was receiving increasing numbers of applications for its doctoral programmes. The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2023 results had been very good, with BNU remaining in the top 10 in the UK. An action plan was in place to increase the number of PGRs and quality of supervision.
- 23.224 In response to a query, the Director confirmed BNU currently had a bridging contract with Staffordshire University.
- 23.225 The Chair noted that the Research Degrees Annual Monitoring report had been considered by the Research and Enterprise Committee and commented that it was pleasing that students who had been awarded Vice-Chancellor Studentships were progressing well.
- 23.226 The Chair of the UREP drew Senate's attention to the significant increase in the number of applications from staff, which was a strong indicator that staff were becoming more research active. Most applications were approved on the first submission with only minor

amendments so obtaining ethics approval was not proving a barrier to research. The UREP had performed its annual audit of School Ethics Sub-Committees (ESC); a high number appeared to be failing to meet the ESC Terms of Reference, but this was only on minor points and there was no evidence of a major issue with ethics processes in the Schools.

- 23.227 The Chair of Senate commended the report and noted that resources to support the UREP might need reviewing as its workload was increasing.

Quality Assurance of Franchised Provision

- 23.228 Senate considered a report outlining the new approach to enhance quality assurance of BNU's franchised provision. The DVC noted that processes on quality control / assurance were already in place, but BNU would be strengthening its collaboration with other franchisers in relationships with BNU's franchisee partners and applying the principles of Ofsted and the Education Inspection Framework to implement an inspection regime.
- 23.229 The Chair commented that some of the actions outlined in the report could be integrated into the Annual Quality and Standards report.

Action: Head of Quality and Standards

- 23.230 In response to a comment, the DVC confirmed that the Academic Workload Project would address staffing levels and workloads for staff who supported partners.
- 23.231 Senate endorsed the new approach.

External Examiner Approval Panel Report

- 23.232 Senate endorsed the External Examiner Approval Panel report. Senate was advised of some gaps in External Examiner (EE) coverage, but Academic Registry was working with staff and Human Resources to fill them as quickly as possible. The Panel had discussed how the appointment process could be simplified. The Academic Registrar also noted that it appeared anecdotally that for some niche subjects there were a limited number of academics at a sufficiently senior level who could act as EEs.
- 23.233 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) encouraged staff to contact potential EEs directly rather than just relying on advertising vacancies on JISC.

Validation Report

- 23.234 Senate endorsed the recommendations from approval events for new programmes (validation) and re-approval events for existing programmes (revalidation) outside the scope of the Curriculum 23 programme.
- 23.235 It was confirmed that the seven recently validated Foundation Degrees would be badged as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) from September 2025 in line with HTQ rules, but could be offered as Foundation Degrees from September 2024. The Chair requested that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) consider whether the programmes should be offered as Foundation Degrees from September 2024.

Action: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)

- 23.236 It was noted that the Foundation Degrees Cyber Security Engineer, Data Science and Software Developer were full-time not part-time as stated in the report.

Regulatory Matters

Apprenticeships: Ofsted Report and Action Plan

- 23.237 Senate received the Ofsted Report from the recent inspection of apprenticeship provision which had rated all aspects of BNU's provision Good and BNU's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
- 23.238 The Head of Apprenticeships was congratulated on an extremely successful inspection and outcome. It was noted that a particular key to success had been the preparation, with each School given a 'deep dive' on what to expect from the inspection in advance. All University Executive Team members had observed apprenticeship teaching and tri-partite reviews before the inspection so they could discuss them authoritatively with the inspectors.
- 23.239 The Chair commented that many of the actions in the QIP could benefit all BNU provision and asked that members gave them further consideration outside Senate.

University Matters

Policy Oversight Group Annual Report 2022-23

- 23.240 Senate approved the Policy Oversight Group (POG) Annual Report 2022-23 outlining the work of the POG between its inception in December 2022 and July 2023. The POG aimed to ensure policy owners took responsibility for amending policies by sending policies back to owners with feedback for further development.
- 23.241 Senate welcomed the work to bring policy development review and approval back on schedule and was assured that focused work was ongoing to update the 69 policies overdue for review. It was agreed that further work was needed to ensure BNU's policies were driving BNU processes and that all staff had a responsibility to adhere to them.

University Committee Constitutions and Terms of Reference

- 23.242 Senate approved amendments to the constitutions and terms of reference (ToR) of some deliberative committees as outlined below. Senate noted that the Civic Engagement Committee constitution and ToR had been added to the *University Committees* document.
- a) Senate: the Student Experience Forum and Civic Engagement Committees had been added as Standing Committees, and the Standing Committees changed to an alphabetical list.
 - b) Education Committee: the Institute of Health and Social Care Representative to become an ex-officio member of the Committee.
 - c) Quality Enhancement Committee: change to the Chair, now the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education)
 - d) University Partnership Board: change to the Chair, now the Commercial and Business Development Director
 - e) Sustainability Committee: changes to membership and minor changes to terms of reference a, d and k, plus an additional ToR c.

Council Minutes

- 23.243 Senate received the Open Minutes of the Strategic meeting of Council on 10 October 2023. The University Secretary and Clerk to Council advised Senate that Council had welcomed new Independent, staff and student members at the meeting; had been pleased and content with the National Student Survey 2023 results; had held a productive discussion on Artificial

Intelligence in Higher Education; and had been pleased with the progress, delivery and receipt of the High Wycombe development.

Education Committee Minutes

- 23.244 Senate received the minutes of the meetings of Education Committee on 4 October and 9 November 2023. The Chair of the Committee advised that its discussions in October had focused on updates on the Curriculum 23 programme, quality matters and the sector; Artificial Intelligence; the revised Safeguarding Policy; and accreditation of prior learning where more work was to be done to raise staff understanding of the processes. November's meeting had focused on quality reports, which underpinned the Annual Quality and Standards report. The main observation had been that the reports needed to outline what action was being taken on an area of concern rather than just describing the issue.
- 23.245 In response to a comment from the Chair of Senate, the Secretary assured Senate that the language in the minutes from the Annual Monitoring meeting would be updated in future to align with the re-focusing of Annual Monitoring around the Office for Students B Conditions.

Student Experience Forum Minutes

- 23.246 The Committee received the minutes of the meetings of SEF on 26 June and 18 September 2023. The Chair of the Forum advised Senate that discussions had focused around multiple operational areas, including the NSS Action Plans and how the actions would be taken forward.
- 23.247 The SU President commented that the Forum was working well, and it was welcome to see the actions coming through from it.
- 23.248 It was noted that the Academic Registrar needed to be added to the list of attendees at the meeting on 18 September.

Action: Secretary of the Student Experience Forum

- 23.249 The Chair noted that the minutes of the Education Committee and SEF had been unstarred as part of a rotation to ensure that Senate actively considered the business of each of its standing committees at at least one meeting in the academic year.

* Starred Items: Committee Minutes

- 23.250 Senate received the starred minutes of the following committee meetings without comment:
- a) Academic Planning Committee: the Reserved Minutes of the meetings held on 21 September and 19 October 2023
 - b) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee: minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 2023
 - c) Board of the Institute of Health and Social Care: minutes of the meetings held on 20 October and 20 November 2023.
- 23.251 Senate was assured that the minutes of Sustainability Committee would be presented at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting

- 23.252 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 22 March 2023.