



An update from John Vinney



Dear colleague

It seems incredible that 12 weeks ago we were getting used to the strange conditions of lockdown, working out how to manage our personal and working lives and starting to understand the implications of the pandemic for our family and friends. Since then many of us have been through periods of great anxiety and we have worked hard to make the best of the difficult circumstances at home and at work.

Many of you have caring responsibilities and many of you have been supporting your families with school work. Some of you have struggled with loneliness and isolation. I am proud of the way that our staff have supported others, at home, within the BU community or in our wider community, as well as looking after your own wellbeing.

I have been impressed by how staff and students across BU have demonstrated their adaptability, optimism and strength, as we have changed the way we do education, assessment, research and provide support to staff and students.

As an organisation, we have adapted our technology, our processes and the way we work. It has not been easy, and many of us have struggled at times. As a BU community, we have shown resilience, humour, positivity, creativity and kindness. Thank you.

With this in mind, we will launch our 2020 VC staff awards nominations process soon, giving all staff an opportunity to recognise the contribution of colleagues during the whole of the academic year, and in particular during the pandemic. More details will follow soon, but we have added some new awards this year.

We must acknowledge, though, that there is more to do if we are to truly live our BU2025 values. The terrible death of George Floyd in the US has highlighted, once again, the inequality in our society. The outpouring of grief and anger across the world reflects huge disappointment with the pace of change, and the serious impact of inequality in many aspects of our society – from the daily discrimination experienced in our communities, to issues of representation and voice, the variation in risk and outcomes from Covid-19 and awful incidents of serious violence. I understand that staff and students are frustrated and I am sorry that we are not making progress fast enough. We are committed to removing inequalities and ensuring inclusivity at BU. The experiences and outcomes of all our staff and students are important priorities for us.

- We will take action if inappropriate behaviour is reported to us. We do not publicise the outcomes of our investigations, but that does not mean that we are not taking action. We will not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the grounds of race or any other protected characteristic.
- We signed up to the Race Equality Charter in 2016 and we are preparing our application for submission in early 2021. The process of preparing a submission requires us to examine our own performance and behaviours and make a commitment to change, and we will do that and share our progress.
- We have made commitments to the regulator, the Office for Students, about improving access, participation and outcomes for groups of students and we are committed to delivering those, including in current circumstances and in the changed learning environment in the future, and we will share our progress on these too.

In the meantime I express my solidarity with all those in our local communities, our country and overseas who have been, and continue to be, subject to prejudice.

Although the last 12 weeks may have passed quickly or slowly for you, depending on your circumstances, we have all got used over this time to the “new normal” and the restrictions on our lives and movements. Now, with the easing of restrictions and further easing promised in the months ahead, we need to adjust again, planning for a return to campus for many, and a new academic year. Planning and preparing for this requires a different approach from the immediate reaction to the certainties of lockdown in March. This time, we have less certainty. We need to plan for flexibility and be ready to adjust to changing circumstances.

The news is full of stories about what university campuses will be like in the autumn and what staff and students can expect. At BU we developed [our principles for this phase](#) some time ago and I recommend you read them if you have not been able to so far. People are our primary concern. I know many of you have concerns about the risk and impact for you and your families of a return to campus, and we will ensure not only that we follow national guidance, but that we work in partnership with staff and students and with the recognised trades unions to support staff through this transition. I was on campus last week and you can watch my latest video [here](#).

We have all, of necessity, been focussing on the immediate adjustments we have needed to make. It is fantastic that we have seen an increase across BU in research bidding activity and engagement with policy makers during this time, although that has not been possible for all. For many of us, we can now start to look forward to the longer-term future, to reconsider our implementation of BU2025 and how we will achieve the BU2025 outcomes. I realise that not everyone is able to look that far ahead at the moment, but BU2025 will provide a useful framework as we reprioritise again over the next few months.

With this in mind we have relaunched our staff engagement sessions as virtual meetings. You can sign up to the new series of meetings [here](#). I look forward to meeting many of you over the coming months to discuss the future and what it will look like at BU.

Best wishes

John Vinney
Vice-Chancellor

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