

## Update from the Vice-Chancellor

Mon 14/09/2020



Dear colleague

At this time of year I usually welcome you back from summer breaks or periods of relative quiet, perhaps focussing on research or preparations for the next academic year. This year is different in so many ways. For many of us there has not really been a quiet period since March as we have worked hard to support students and colleagues, and prepare for the new term. I hope you have all managed to take a break, and perhaps explored parts of the local area that you have not visited before.

The new term is going to be different for the whole BU community. I am sure there will be a mixture of the normal excitement, welcoming our new and returning students, and some concerns about what the year will bring, and how we will all be working and studying differently. Your safety remains a priority for us and we will continue to monitor the local and national position, update you regularly and act quickly as the situation dictates.

Although things are different, I am excited by the start of the new academic year. We have all come through so much, adapted so quickly and learned new skills. As a result we are in a stronger and better position to work together to make the most of the opportunities we have to interact with each other and our students, and to do the best we can despite the challenges. I hope that like me, you are energised by the possibilities of what we can achieve this year.

### **Return to campus**

It has been great to be back on campus over the last few weeks. I am looking forward to the opportunity to meet colleagues informally (in an appropriately distanced way), especially those I don't see in scheduled meetings.

I am also looking forward to seeing our new and returning students on campus as some face-to-face learning starts again and the library and other services open. Thank you to all the staff who have been involved in preparing for colleagues and students to return to campus.

### **External matters**

Brexit is back in the news as the original deadline for a trade deal with the EU to come into force at the end of the year has now passed, but negotiations continue. We remain hopeful for a positive outcome on research collaboration and funding and staff and student mobility, but it is likely that these things will not be finalised until the rest of the deal is done. Immigration rules were announced some time ago and it was also announced that EU students will no longer be treated as home students for fees and loans from 2021/22. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations and the impact of the changes, at BU we continue to welcome and value our EU and

international colleagues and students, and to value the collaboration with European and international partners.

This Autumn, we are expecting some important developments from the government, as they have confirmed that we should see the outcome of the Review of Post-Education and Funding, and the response to the Augar report, and we also expect a response to the Pearce review of the TEF. The Office for Students will be looking at their regulation of quality and standards. The government continues to focus on student outcomes and also continuation. There is likely to be more discussion about admissions after the challenges this year - the OfS review of admissions was put on hold in March, and most unconditional offers are now prohibited by a temporary licence condition. There were rumours before August of a government preference for post-qualification offer making that may have been boosted by what happened this summer.

We will be submitting to the Knowledge Exchange Framework this Autumn and continuing to work on our submissions to the delayed REF 2021 (results are now expected in Spring 2022). We are also preparing a submission to the Race Equality Charter for Spring 2021, and we will be sharing the outcomes and actions from the review process.

I am pleased to say that, despite concerns across the sector about the impact of the changes in admissions arrangements, undergraduate numbers appear to be reasonably steady, although the position may still change. There is continued uncertainty about international recruitment and enrolments given the changing situation in many countries. Thank you to everyone involved in supporting admissions, and preparing for students to arrive – it has been a very different process and experience this year.

### **Looking forward**

The pandemic has demonstrated that Fusion is as important as ever. Although circumstances have been challenging for staff in different ways, we have made good progress across BU on research including increasing the number and value of our bids. Our engagement with practice has been prioritised, most obviously in health and social sciences and also across areas of BU as staff have supported industry and practice to adapt and address challenges. Inevitably we have focussed on learning and we will retain that focus this year. Given the uncertainties that we face, it is also important that we deliver the cost savings we have identified and take a responsible approach to all our expenditure this year.

Bringing research, practice and education together continue to be vital for student experience and student outcomes, and for staff experience too. It has been sad to see the move towards teaching only contracts in the sector has been exacerbated by the financial impact of the pandemic. At BU, we want to ensure that academic staff have a rounded academic experience. Professional services and support staff are encouraged and supported to engage with Fusion in their areas, and students should benefit from the learning and experience that Fusion brings. This will have a real impact on student outcomes, which are a key part of our BU2025 objectives. I was pleased to see that this is reflected in our strong performance in the new Graduate Outcomes survey data released over the summer. We must also maintain our focus on student experience and on aiming for consistent satisfaction scores of 90%+. Both the outcomes data and our improvement on the NSS were reflected in our improved ranking in this weekend's Guardian league table.

It has been good to hear from staff about their experiences and also how there have been opportunities to do things better, faster and with more engagement during this period. We want

to hear your stories and are continuing with our informal staff engagement sessions: please sign up for the [staff engagement sessions here](#).

### **VC staff awards**

I am excited that we have included two new categories in the VC staff awards this year. I hope that we will have a bumper set of nominations to reflect the extraordinary contribution of colleagues across BU throughout 2019/20. You can nominate in [all the categories](#) for contributions during the pandemic or that have nothing to do with it. I look forward to reading them!

### **Conclusion**

Looking back over the last year, and the last 6 months in particular, I feel a great sense of pride and gratitude. It has been hard, but we have worked together, been creative, adapted, taken responsibility, prioritised and focussed, and most importantly, we have made time to support each other and our students. Kindness and caring are two of our greatest strengths at BU, and this year has really shown how important these are.

As we look forward to the new year, I want to thank, again, each and every one of you for the difference that you have made to BU, to each other and to our students and our community. We will be building on these strong foundations as we tackle whatever the new academic year offers us.

Best wishes

John Vinney  
Vice-Chancellor

Follow me on Twitter [@VCJohnVinney](#)

