



UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

CONSULTATION PAPER: CONVOCATION

Summary

The University is committed to deepening its relationship with its alumni, and to helping them to feel connected to the University after graduation. For many years, Convocation has acted as the vehicle for the University's relationship with its alumni.

Convocation is a formal body created by the University's constitution. For the reasons set out in this Paper, the University believes that, in the current environment, there are better ways for the University to engage with its alumni.

This Paper therefore sets out some proposals regarding Convocation and seeks the view of Convocation regarding those proposals. Feedback is requested by 21 October to Katy Gullon via email: alumni-volunteers@bristol.ac.uk

1. Background

The University of Bristol Convocation – what is it?

The University's Charter, Statutes and Ordinances provide for the establishment of a body called Convocation. Convocation is comprised of all graduates of the University as well as certain members of staff.¹

1.1 Convocation – What does it do?

Convocation has a number of roles and functions. It appoints 100 members to the University's Court, nominates a member of the Board of Trustees, and it can discuss and provide an opinion on any matter relating to the University.² It meets formally once per year.

1.2 The University's Statutes also provide for a 'Standing Committee of Convocation'.³

This role is filled by the Convocation and Alumni Association Committee (CAAC) whose mission is "...to consult with and to represent the views of all members of Convocation on matters raised by the University, and matters of particular interest to Convocation; and to comment on any matters as it sees fit" and to "contribute to building an engaged and supportive alumni community appropriate to a world class university".⁴

1.3 At the time Convocation was first established, the University had only limited resource available to support its relationship with its graduates and there was no equivalent to the current Development and Alumni Relations Office. Convocation

¹ For example, the Vice-Chancellor and other members of the senior team, as well as members of Senate and members of academic staff.

² Statute 25.

³ Statute 24.

⁴ Standing Orders of the Convocation and Alumni Association Committee.

represented the primary mechanism to allow graduates to remain in touch with their alma mater and it was largely self-supporting.

- 1.4 Whilst Convocation has a formal status in the University's constitution, in recent years the words 'alumni association' have also been used as part of the title of Convocation ("Convocation and the Alumni Association"), to address the lack of awareness of what 'Convocation' is. In 2014 it was agreed that 'Convocation and the alumni association' would be used interchangeably, however, this nomenclature has proved wordy and somewhat confusing.
- 1.5 Alongside the evolution of the words used to describe Convocation, the University's approach to alumni engagement has similarly evolved. At one time, the University did not engage directly with its alumni. During that period there was a particularly important role for Convocation, often via its Standing Committee,⁵ in building and maintaining the University's alumni community. This included establishing and supporting alumni branches and organising various events for alumni.
- 1.6 The University is deeply indebted to the sterling work undertaken by the Standing Committee, now known as the Convocation and Alumni Association Committee, over many years. Its members have contributed to building alumni outreach through a successful student awards programme and 2-3 events over a long period of time, and CAAC has recently aligned some of its new activities to the University's new strategy.
- 1.7 In recent years, the University has also embedded support for alumni engagement within its formal structures. Our Development and Alumni Relations Office (DARO) was established in 1990, and has, among other things, a mission to develop and deliver the University's alumni relations programme and priorities. It delivers an extensive and professional alumni communications, events and volunteer programme. This is an approach now used by most universities in the world.

The Governance Review

- 1.8 In 2015, the University undertook a major consultation process which led to the development and approval of the University Strategy 2016 – 2023. The consultation highlighted a strong view by staff that the University needs to streamline its approach to governance and decision-making, to reduce the burden on staff and improve institutional efficiency.
- 1.9 As a result, the University's Strategy includes commitments to:

"Empowering our staff to operate effectively, through a lean and agile approach to governance and management that enables staff to fulfil their roles and provides effective, transparent and accountable decision-making".

"Reviewing and refreshing the core statutory elements of our governance structure to ensure they are fit for purpose".
- 1.10 The University is taking a number of actions to deliver on this element of the Strategy. The University commissioned an external review (by KPMG) of the University's governance structures and decision-making processes, including seeking advice on ways in which the University can adopt a more lean and agile approach to governance and management (the Governance Review).

⁵ CAAC and its forebears.

- 1.11 As one of the statutory elements of the University's governance structure, Convocation was included within the scope of the Governance Review. A Governance Review Steering Group, chaired by the Registrar and COO, was established to oversee the Governance Review.
- 1.12 KPMG undertook extensive research into the University's governance structures and processes, and found that "*[t]here was common agreement that many of the University's decision-making processes are inefficient and that greater empowerment is required*". KPMG formulated a series of recommendations (the KPMG Recommendations) to improve University governance.
- 1.13 KPMG have recommended that Convocation and CAAC be removed in their current forms. KPMG considered that there were better ways to "*enable the recognition and engagement with... alumni... to be improved through increased focus on [the] primary objective of supporting the University through its alumni network*". KPMG also point to secondary benefits of such a change, such as removing duplication of activity and therefore freeing up staff time.
- 1.14 KPMG pointed to the fact that Bristol is one of only three Russell Group universities whose Convocation still has a constitutional basis (see **Annex 1**), suggesting a direction of travel away from that approach. Whilst the University does not consider this to be a reason, in and of itself, for changing our Convocation – we believe that it would be unwise to dismiss out of hand lessons that might be learnt from others in the sector. We have therefore considered models adopted at other institutions in formulating the options for consultation set out in section 4 below.

Governance Review Proposals

- 1.15 The University has now considered and consulted upon the KPMG Recommendations, and the Governance Review Steering Group has developed a series of proposals relating to the KPMG recommendations (the Governance Review Proposals). The Governance Review Steering Group recommends the implementation in full or in part of many but not all of the KPMG recommendations.
- 1.16 There are 34 Governance Review Proposals with considerable range in scope and complexity. The Governance Review Proposals that relate to Convocation are set out in detail in section 3 below.

2. The case for change

- 2.1 The University believes that there may be better ways for the University to engage with its alumni than the *status quo* in relation to Convocation. That view is shared by CAAC, to whom we are grateful for providing initial input to this document (although the proposals set out below should not be interpreted as having been yet approved or endorsed by members of CAAC)⁶. Specific issues, to which we consider that Convocation should have regard in this consultation, are set out below.

Constitutional basis and function

- 2.2 KPMG queried the value of Convocation as a constitutional entity and noted the absence of a formal link between Convocation/CAAC and DARO. They pointed out that this has led to "*a number of issues regarding role alignment, expectations, ownership of the alumni relations programme and accountability*".

⁶ Reference section 5.

- 2.3 The University values its relationship with its alumni and wishes to identify optimal mechanisms and structures to engage with an even larger number of alumni. We are very fortunate that an increasing number of alumni are eager to engage with and support their alma mater, in a variety of ways. We need to identify ways to facilitate and enable that engagement that are fit for purpose and are scalable.
- 2.4 The fundamental question therefore is whether Convocation and CAAC represent the best structures for allowing the University to engage with and support our alumni. Prompted by the KPMG review, this Paper explores this question.
- 2.5 The core function and power of Convocation as set out in the University's Statutes, is the power to "*discuss and pronounce an opinion on any matter relating to the University and may enter into communication directly with the Board of Trustees, Court, or Senate on any such issue.*" This role differs from the more common approach to alumni engagement as, to some extent, it suggests that Convocation is a body apart from the University. It envisages communication between the University and its alumni as one-way, in contrast to the continued two-way dialogue that the University (through DARO) seeks to build with its alumni. Finally, a statutory body with the power to '*pronounce an opinion*' seems unnecessary given the many other ways in which alumni can (and do) engage with the University. In fact, the University views its alumni very much as part of its community: by way of illustration, we were delighted that more than 2,000 alumni responded to our consultation on the University's new Vision and Strategy.
- 2.6 The name 'Convocation' has always been confusing and many people, including members of Convocation, are unclear as to its meaning.
- Methods of appointment to Convocation positions*
- 2.7 DARO manages the annual elections, which have a low record of participation (see **Annex 2**). The participation rate is consistent at only 0.40% of the alumni population; and if we include all members of Convocation this percentage would fall further. The lowest comparable participation rating for Bristol alumni activity is 12%, for an alumni survey. 0.40% is indicative to the University that the elections are not providing a good alumni engagement mechanism.
- 2.8 Significantly increased marketing efforts to engage alumni with the elections process through nominations and voting over the last three years has not resulted in increased involvement. A move away from elections may result in larger numbers of alumni being involved and enthused.
- 2.9 Nonetheless, members of CAAC have provided feedback that they prefer elections as a mechanism for appointing members of CAAC and the Convocation Representatives on Court, valuing in particular the transparency that an elections process might offer and the perceived mandate of elected members, and it is appropriate to record that in this paper.
- 2.10 Members of CAAC are each elected to serve a three year term, which on expiry can be renewed. According to the Standing Orders of Convocation, members are not "normally expected" to serve more than three consecutive terms of office i.e. a maximum consecutive term of nine years. However, the committee can endorse the service of its members beyond that period, and when the current standing orders were adopted, it was agreed that the maximum terms of office would not be applied to CAAC members' retrospectively. In the Governance Review, KPMG found that despite the Standing Order requirement of 'not normally' extending, one third of the

current CAAC membership had exceeded the three term maximum rule, with five members having remained consecutive members for at least 12 years (including three for 16 years). While KPMG considered that the ability to enable some continuity of membership is positive (and the historical context for the current situation is understood) it is good governance to ensure that membership of any committee can be refreshed over time, and that controls are in place to ensure this. See Annex 3 for reference.

Other issues

- 2.11 CAAC has long been supportive of a growth in local and international alumni branches and networks, and DARO has an established group of networks and individual volunteers which operate effectively in building alumni outreach both locally and internationally. However, the current structure of Convocation does not lend itself to international participation.
- 2.12 The University's support of Convocation and CAAC, including significant resource investment in the management of elections and provision of a Clerk to Convocation, is substantial. The majority of these resources comprise DARO staff time in managing elections, CAAC events, communications, data and administration.
- 2.13 The University is no longer in a position where it must rely on the kindness, generosity and commitment of elected representatives to own and direct its alumni engagement programme. However, the University will always require input from alumni, and we are keen to identify the most effective way of engaging with alumni that delivers the greatest benefit to the alumni community and to the University.

3. Governance Review Proposals

- 3.1 The University has considered the observations and recommendations made by KPMG in respect of Convocation and CAAC, as well as the other issues noted above, in formulating the following Governance Review Proposals:

Proposal 14

The constitutional basis for Convocation and the Alumni Association should be removed with a view to establishing an Alumni Association which is composed of all of the University's graduates.

The CAAC should be replaced by an Alumni Advisory Board, to provide advice and support for the work of DARO.

The Board of Trustees, working with CAAC, should identify the terms of reference of the Alumni Advisory Board including its composition.

Proposal 15

If CAAC is not reformed in the manner proposed in Proposal 14, the following changes should be implemented:

- Terms of reference of CAAC to be reviewed, with a view to better aligning them to supporting the University's Strategy and its engagement with alumni.
- The process of appointments to CAAC should be changed from elections, to an appointments process (KPMG propose nominations by CAAC, for appointment by the Board and cite Cambridge, Exeter and Sheffield as potential models to consider in this regard).

- A maximum term of office, of three terms of three years, should be established for members of CAAC – and adhered to.
- Auditing of the CAAC accounts should be performed by the University's auditors.

3.2 Proposals 14 and 15 have been considered by the University's senior management team and by its governing body, the Board of Trustees. The proposals have been endorsed as the basis for consultation with members of Convocation and CAAC.

4. Proposed model for consideration

4.1 The model set out below presupposes that Convocation and CAAC in their current form cease to exist, to be replaced with a refreshed committee structure under the Statutes, with a new alumni forum, which provides for continuing vibrant and active support of the University. Should the model (or a variation of it) be agreed, we will need to consider transitional arrangements for moving to it.

Key elements of this Option are:

4.2 Governance and nomenclature

- Convocation would be retained in the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances, but would be renamed as the 'Alumni Association'.⁷
- Convocation Representatives on Court would be replaced by Alumni Representatives on Court.
- The Standing Committee (CAAC) would be re-named 'Alumni Advisory Committee' (precise nomenclature to be determined).
- The Chancellor (who is currently President of Convocation) would become President of the Alumni Association and the Chair of Convocation would become the Chair of the Alumni Association
- There would continue to be a 'ring-fenced' position for an alumn(us/a) on the Board of Trustees. This would be separate and additional to the current rights of the Convocation Chair to sit in on Board of Trustees meetings.

4.3 Membership

- Convocation's (the Alumni Association's) membership would be reduced - to encompass only the graduates and honorary graduates of the University. See **Annex 4** for suggested definitions.
- An alumnus or alumna of the University would serve as chair of both the Alumni Association and the Alumni Advisory Committee. The current Chair of Convocation could serve as the inaugural Chair of a newly formed Alumni Association/Alumni Advisory Committee.
- Members of the Alumni Advisory Committee would be drawn from the Alumni Association, with candidates invited to apply for positions on the basis of the attributes desired by the Committee at that time. Candidates would be considered and appointed by a nominations committee of the Alumni Advisory Committee (see 4.6 below). The current members of CAAC could serve as the inaugural Chair of a newly formed Alumni Association/Alumni Advisory Committee.
- A maximum term of office, of three terms of three years, would be established for members of the Alumni Advisory Committee.

⁷ This is modified slightly from Proposal 14, which suggested that the constitutional basis for Convocation should be removed entirely.

4.4 Roles and functions

4.4.1 Alumni Association

- a) The core function and power of the Alumni Association, as set out in the University's Statutes, would change to "contribute to building an engaged and supportive alumni community appropriate to a world class university." This is in alignment with the current objectives of CAAC.

4.4.2 Alumni Advisory Committee

- a) Committee members would be responsible for participating in University activities as ambassadors of the Alumni Association eg at Graduation Ceremonies, on Award Selection Committees, Careers events etc. We are keen to retain the input of Committee members in this regard, valuing the richness and expertise that the voice of our alumni brings to University activities.
- b) Current operational activities of CAAC would move to DARO, freeing up members' time for Alumni Association ambassadorial outreach activities; and providing staff with management agility and decision making clarity.
- c) The Alumni Advisory Committee would continue (as CAAC has done) to provide advice to, and feedback on, DARO's alumni engagement work.

4.5 Draft terms of reference of the Alumni Advisory Committee

For the purposes of consultation, we suggest the following as indicative terms of reference for the Alumni Advisory Committee:

- a) To provide leadership within the Alumni Association, encouraging fellow alumni to engage with and support the University.
- b) To act as ambassadors for the University within individual members' spheres of influence, supporting the interests of the University and its alumni in the wider community.
- c) To support the University in an advisory capacity through the work of DARO in engaging the Alumni Association, including by offering feedback and advice on its planned initiatives.
- d) The Alumni Advisory Committee would have 14 members (including the Chair) and would meet twice per year.

4.6 Appointment process to the Alumni Advisory Committee

For the purposes of consultation, the following is suggested:

- a) Members of the Alumni Advisory Committee would serve three year terms. Those terms could be renewed (subject to a maximum of three such terms), if approved by its Nominations Committee.⁸
- b) In advance of a vacancy (or vacancies) arising on the Committee, the Committee would consider the attributes it wished to attract to the Committee, and the vacancy/ies would then be advertised accordingly. The Committee would have due regard to matters of equality and diversity, including the gender and ethnic background of its members.
- c) All members of the Alumni Association would be eligible to apply to join the Alumni Advisory Committee.

⁸ Recognising that Alumni enjoy a lifelong relationship with the University, and may wish to engage with the University in this way at multiple points in their life, we suggest that the Standing Orders of the Alumni Advisory Committee could include a provision whereby members could serve on the committee for longer than the maximum term – provided a minimum of nine years elapsed since their previous tenure on the committee.

- d) Applications to join the Alumni Advisory Committee would be considered and approved by a Nominations Committee, the suggested composition of which would be as follows:
 - o Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) (Chair)
 - o Chair of the Alumni Association/Committee
 - o Director or the Deputy Director of DARO
 - o Three members of the Alumni Committee
 - o One Sabbatical Officer of Bristol SU

4.7 It is suggested that the advantages of this approach include:

- a) The ability to create a Committee which represents the demographics of alumni and focuses on the attributes of Committee members, not currently provided for in the elections process
- b) The establishment of appropriate terms of appointment
- c) Opportunities for vibrant and active support of the University through a refreshed committee structure with clear participation opportunities
- d) Clarity regarding the role and ownership of the alumni relations programme
- e) Significant reduction in administration and resources

4.8 Introduction of an annual Alumni Forum (in addition to the two meetings per year of the Alumni Advisory Committee)

In addition to the structural changes above it is proposed that an Alumni Forum would be held once a year with the University's leadership team. The Forum would provide the opportunity for two-way dialogue between the University and its alumni, and further build global alumni network engagement opportunities. It would take the place of the current Convocation annual general meeting.

- a) The Alumni Forum would effectively provide alumni with an opportunity for feedback and debate on a range of relevant matters that are of interest to alumni. Participants would come together to learn more about the University, and facilitate their engagement as ambassadors for the University.
- b) The University would seek to use innovative digital technology to encourage international members of the alumni community to 'attend' and to create a lively and engaging Forum.

4.9 It is suggested that the advantages of the Alumni Forum include

- a) The opportunity to increase two-way dialogue between the University and its alumni
- b) Increased engagement of our local, regional and international chapters and networks
- c) Provides a refreshed approach to alumni feedback and debate

5. Members of the Convocation and Alumni Association Committee have developed a statement in response to this consultation, which is attached [here](#).

6. Timeline

6.1 The University is operating to the following schedule for the introduction of these changes:

- a) 14 September 2017 CAAC meeting
Possible models for the future were discussed
- b) 9 – 20 October 2017
Consultation with:
All member of all members Convocation
Convocation Representatives on Court

Chancellor

- c) 10 November Board of Trustees Meeting
Consider feedback from CAAC and Convocation
Consider potential proposals to be brought to Court in 2017 re Convocation
- d) Court 8 December
Potential approval of changes to Convocation

Annex 1 – Sectoral context: within and outside the UK

A: KPMG Report

This table sets out the Constitutional Review undertaken by KPMG of UK universities

| University | Context/powers | Structure of Sub-committee | Process | Term of office |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Manchester | Advisory: The General Assembly has more than 200 members. The Alumni Association Advisory Board provides advice, support and guidance for the operation of the Alumni Association. | 16: 3 ex-officio; student union rep; Association member who graduated within the previous five years; at least one internationally-based Association member; a member of the General Assembly; three elected members of the Alumni Association; Co-opted Association members | Election: run by DARO | 3 years with an option to extend to a maximum of another 3 years. Extension after 6 years allowable at the discretion of the University Board. (6 years) |
| Cambridge | Advisory: Alumni Board provides strategic framework to support DARO. | 15 | Appointed by the Board's Nominations Committee | |
| Glasgow | Advisory: Though set up through ordinances, its role is advisory. It has a Business Committee | 20 | Election: run by the clerk to General Council | |
| Newcastle | Statutory: Convocation required by statute. Offers opportunity for alumni to hear from and ask questions of the VC. Formal power to appoint the Chancellor. No alumni association or committee | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Warwick and Cardiff Universities do not have an Alumni Association or Convocation | | | | |

B: International Sectoral Review

This table sets out current practice where information is readily available, from the UK, Canada and Australia. US universities operate quite differently as many alumni committees have philanthropic responsibilities.

| University | Alumni Committee/role | No. of members | Method of appointment |
|-------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Birmingham | Advisory | 13 | Election |
| Cambridge | Advisory | 15 | Appointed by Alumni Board |
| Cardiff | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| Durham | Social | 8 | Election |
| Exeter | Advisory | 12 | Appointed by the University |
| Glasgow | Advisory | 20 | Election |
| Imperial | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| Leeds | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| Liverpool | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| Manchester | Advisory | 16 | Election |
| McGill | Advisory | 16 | Election |
| Melbourne | Advisory | 11 | Mix of election and appointment |
| Newcastle | Convocation/Annual meeting | n/a | n/a |
| Oxford | Advisory | 17 | Appointed by Alumni Board and DARO |
| Sheffield | Advisory | 20 | Appointed by VC and Alumni Chair |
| Sydney | Advisory | 15 | Appointed by University Board |
| Toronto | Advisory | 13 | Appointed by a Nominating Committee |
| Warwick | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| York | No structure | n/a | n/a |
| Summary | <i>11 advisory, 6 no structure, 1 social, 1 annual Convocation meeting</i> | <i>Average no of members: 14.6</i> | <i>6 appointed, 5 elected, 7 n/a</i> |

Annex 2: Participation in elections

The following table sets out the results of the Convocation elections for the last seven years.

| Year | Election: Officer of CAAC | Election: CAAC Members | Election: Council member/Trustee Candidates |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| 2012 | 1 for Chair. No election required. | 4 No election required. | n/a |
| 2013 | 1 Deputy Chair. No election required. | 6 Election required. | n/a |
| 2014 | 1 Treasurer No election required. | 4 No Election required. | n/a |
| 2015 | 3 for Chair. No election required due to 2 candidates withdrawing following the Nominations Committee process | 11 Election required. | 11 Election required. |
| 2016 | 3 Deputy Chair Election required | 12 Election required | n/a |
| 2017 | 1 Treasurer No election required. | 8 Election required | n/a |

Annex 3: Terms of Office

The following clause is taken from the current Constitution of the Convocation Committee. The issue noted under Section 2.7 above is highlighted in bold below.

Section C. Election procedures for Membership of the Convocation Committee

Each year, at the Annual General Meeting, five people will be elected to the Convocation Committee. They will be one Officer and four Members, selected as above. The Convocation Representative on Council will also be elected for a three-year term at the same time as the Chairman (but need not be the Chairman). Nominations for these positions may be made and seconded by any member of Convocation. Members, including Officers and the ex-officio Member, will serve for one term of three years to tie in with the three-year period for appointments to University committees. If a member wishes to extend their period of service, they may follow the standard University policy of seeking election for a maximum of three consecutive terms, so that, **normally**, no service in the same position exceeds nine years, **although there may be cases where the committee will choose to endorse the service of a member beyond this period, and a member could serve on a Sub-Committee or be elected an Officer for additional periods.**

Annex 4: Members of Convocation

a) The following clause is taken from the current Constitution of the Convocation Committee.

Members of Convocation

The members of Convocation are the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellors, Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, honorary fellows, members of Senate, academic staff, University officers, graduates, honorary graduates and such other former students as Convocation determines, currently those who have received academic awards requiring at least 9 months of full-time study or an equivalent period of part-time study. There are also associate members, including all the academic-related staff of the University.

b) The revised membership of Convocation/the Alumni Association could be reformed per the text below.

Members of Convocation

The members of Convocation are the graduates, honorary graduates and such other former students as Convocation determines: currently those who have received academic awards requiring at least 9 months of full-time study or an equivalent period of part-time study.