NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
COUNCIL
10 February 2020

Present: Mr Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Caroline Austin, Professor Catherine Biggs, Mr David Bird, Mr Tom Caulker, Mr Pablo Charro de la Fuente (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Mrs Linda Conlon, Professor Nicola Curtin, Dr Stacy Gillis, Mr Jonathan Glass, Dame Teresa Graham, Mr Stephen Lightley, Mr Jeff McIntosh, Dr Sara Maioli, Ms Claire Morgan, Mrs Heidi Mottram (Vice-Chair of Council), Ms Dianne Nelmes, Professor Sir Mike Rawlins, Mrs Angela Russell, Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Mr Nitin Shukla, Miss Katie Smyth (President, Students’ Union), and Ms Vicky Wright.

In attendance: Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Ms Abi Kelly (Executive Director of Corporate Affairs), Mrs Adrienne McFarland (Executive Director of People Services), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office & Governance Manager).

Apologies: Ms Angela Woodburn.

Professor David Burn, Professor Nigel Harkness, and Professor Phillip Wright (Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors) attended for Minute 47.
Dr Mark Ferrar (Chief Information Officer) and Mr Jason Bain (Assistant Director, NUIT) attended for Minute 48.
Professor Suzanne Cholerton (PVC Education) attended for Minute 50.

M I N U T E S

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

42. MINUTES

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 16 December 2019.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document A. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Following Council’s consideration of the Innovation and Business Strategic Plan at its meeting on 14 October 2019, Mr Nitin Shukla had met with the Dean of Innovation and Business, Dean of Engagement and Place, and the Director of Business Development and Enterprise, to discuss ways in which the University could engage with businesses from diverse backgrounds.

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 16 December 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

43. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Noted that:

1. The University had convened its Emergency Management Team, chaired by the Registrar, to closely monitor the developing situation relating to the Coronavirus, and was following
advice from Public Health England, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the authorities in Malaysia and Singapore in relation to NUIS and NUMed. In addition to the Emergency Management Team meetings, smaller sub-groups had been established to consider subjects in fine detail, for example, insurance implications, scenario planning, and business continuity planning.

2. Council appreciated the efforts being made by the University to communicate with all members of the University community about the Coronavirus situation to emphasise the institution’s inclusive ethos noted the University’s effective and sensitive approach to its relationship with the Chinese community in particular.

44. **CHAIR’S BUSINESS**

Noted that:

1. The Chair congratulated Council member Teresa Graham on being awarded a Damehood in the New Year’s Honours.

2. The Chair invited all members of Council to attend the inauguration ceremony for the University’s new Chancellor on Monday 13 July. The meeting of Council scheduled to take place that day would now begin at noon.

3. The Chair informed Council that Ms Abi Kelly Executive Director of Corporate Affairs would be leaving the University in March to take up a role with the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked Ms Kelly for her huge efforts and contribution to the University.

45. **VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS**

Received the Vice-Chancellor and President’s report. Highlights of this report are discussed below.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document B. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

**Capital Projects**

Further to Council being informed at its meeting on 16 December 2019 that the main contractors for the Dame Margaret Barbour building, Clugston Construction Ltd, had gone into administration, the building had not been available for teaching during Semester 2 as originally planned. Teaching had been transferred to the Henry Daysh Building using rooms which had not been allocated for Semester 2 teaching. New contractors to complete the outstanding work on the Dame Margaret Barbour Building had been appointed and were on site. The University was now confident that the building would be available for 2020/21 teaching.

**Research Funding**

On 24 January, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) had published data providing a single overview of all competitive funding decisions made by UKRI’s nine councils for the first time. The breakdown brought together data from across the nine councils on competitive funding awards where decisions had been made between 1 April 2018 and 30 March 2019. Council noted that the data was very encouraging for the University, which had a ranking of 9th in the Russell Group for overall UKRI awards. The University was also in a strong position for awards made by the Natural Environment Research Council (2nd), Economic and Social Research Council (3rd) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (7th).
Admissions

Council was provided with the latest summary of undergraduate and postgraduate applications data for 2020 entry. As of 19 January, overall undergraduate applications to the University were up 8.2% on 2019 figures, against a UCAS average of 1.1% and also ahead of the competitor average. Applications from the UK and EU were also ahead of the UCAS and competitor average. International undergraduate applications were at a higher rate than 2019 and significant growth in international taught postgraduate numbers was also expected.

Industrial Action

On 23 January, Universities UK had issued a consultation with USS employers on the second report from the Joint Expert Panel (JEP), marking the first part of a series of three planned consultations intended to gather the views of employers on the JEP’s recommendations, and to understand how these might be implemented in the context of the 2020 valuation and in supporting the longer-term sustainability of Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). The consultation also aimed to seek initial views to inform the development of options for the 2020 and future valuations. Executive Board would be considering a detailed paper concerning the implications of the JEP recommendations at its meeting on 11 February.

The ongoing dispute between the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) and employers relating to the USS, pay, and conditions remained unresolved, and a new period of industrial action was planned to begin on Thursday 20 February and escalate each week, culminating with a week-long walkout from Monday 9 to Friday 13 March.

New Year’s Honours

The following individuals associated with the University had been recognised in the New Year’s Honours list:

- **Dame Teresa Graham CBE.** For services to Small Businesses (Graduate, Honorary Fellow and Member of Council, Newcastle University).
- **CBE** Professor Jackie Kay, MBE. For services to Literature (Professor of Creative Writing).

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources

Professor Brian Walker (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources) had been appointed to the prestigious role of Chair of the Medical Research Council’s Population and Systems Medicine Board. In light of this appointment, Executive Board had approved the establishment of a part-time Dean of Research Culture and Strategy post to whom some of Professor Walker’s leadership responsibilities would be delegated.

Student Policies

In light of recent high-profile student cases, Executive Board had agreed that it was timely to undertake a review of student policies. A Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and President would submit recommendations to University Education Committee and Senate in the summer term.

NU London

Council were provided with an update on negotiations between the University and INTO University Partnerships regarding the future of Newcastle University London. The Executive Director of Finance tabled a paper setting out revised proposals and introduced a discussion.
Resolved that Council endorse the approach being taken by the University and approve the recommendations as set out in the paper.

46. RISK MANAGEMENT

Received the strategic risk register summary report from Dr John Hogan, Registrar, on behalf of Executive Board.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The strategic risks relating to research power and intensity, teaching quality and standards, and pensions all continued to carry high net risk scores. The risk score for cybersecurity had been increased to reflect issues identified by an external audit of the University’s cyber security posture.

Council confirmed that it had received sufficient assurance that the risks facing the University were being managed appropriately.

47. FACULTY STRATEGIC PROGRESS REPORTS

Received reports and presentations from Professor Nigel Harkness (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences), Professor David Burn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences) and Professor Phillip Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Science, Agriculture and Engineering).

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents D-F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Noted that:

1. The Faculty had continued its strong upward trajectory in 2018-19 and had refreshed its senior leadership team with a number of successful appointments to Head of School and Dean posts. The past year had also seen sustained work on the Estate to develop Education and Research facilities, with significant progress on the Henry Daysh Building, and investment in a new conference interpreting suite in the Old Library Building, for example. The Faculty’s continued focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion had been recognised with an Athena SWAN bronze award for Law, and the Faculty had seen significant growth in both research and student fee income.

2. The Faculty continued to face challenges in a number of areas, including student experience, enhancing the diversity of the student body, improving its global research and education profile, addressing high staff-student ratios, and ensuring physical learning and working environments meet the needs and expectations of colleagues and students.

3. Faculty priorities in the short-term included the monitoring of National Student Survey action plans and partnership-working projects around assessment and feedback and learning community; closing attainment gaps; creating opportunities for early and mid-career academics; the development of a Faculty Engagement and Place Strategy; developing CPD and degree apprenticeship opportunities; and the launch of a new Liberal Arts and Sciences degree programme in 2021.

4. Council expressed a particular interest in the topic of cross-faculty working. A discussion about University activities on this subject would be scheduled for a future meeting.
Faculty of Medical Sciences

Noted that:

1. The Faculty’s new academic and professional services structure had been introduced on 1 November 2019. Work was now in progress to implement, evaluate and fine-tune the structure, whilst harnessing creative energy in the Faculty to initiate a positive and long-lasting culture change.

2. The Faculty had just exceeded its home undergraduate recruitment target, whilst postgraduate taught recruitment surpassed expectations. In the face of significant costs to support the student headcount, more efficient ways to administer programmes were being sought whilst maintaining and improving flexibility and quality. Research award and application rate data for 2018-19 had been disappointing and further justified the need for the Faculty restructure. The focus and titles of the faculty’s new research institutes and research themes had been agreed, and it was hoped that these would galvanise performance.

3. In terms of Engagement and Place, the Faculty’s relationship with its major research partner, the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust, had never been stronger. The University’s purchase of the Campus for Ageing and Vitality site had opened up considerable opportunities for cross-faculty and multi-stakeholder working. On Global, the faculty had seen improved rankings for some of its subject areas, and was taking forward a distributed model of embedding global awareness within institutes, schools and research themes.

4. Significant short-term priorities included the opening of the Dame Margaret Barbour building; reducing the reliance on internal funding for research active staff and the development of a five-year strategic research plan; the expansion of city partner engagement; and increasing international student numbers.

Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering

Noted that:

1. Recognising the need for continued improvement following its reorganisation in 2017, the faculty had held a period of consultation in December 2018 and identified a number of actions for improvement, addressing these through five work-streams (Service Delivery, Leadership and Strategy, Management Structures, Developing Effective Communications, and Developing an Inclusive Structure). The reorganisation had also provided the faculty with the opportunity to review its curriculum with goals of enhancing the student experience, increasing the attractiveness of its programme portfolio, and improving teaching efficiencies.

2. Notable research successes had included the award of two Global Challenge Research Fund hubs worth a total of £6.8m to the faculty, and the appointment of five Newcastle University Academic Track fellows, and establishment of Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence in Energy and Data.

3. The Faculty continued to face significant challenges in relation to embedding cultural change as key actions for improvement are enacted; increasing research and teaching income; and increasing income from Singapore.

4. Important short-term priorities included a focus on improving assessment and feedback, student voice and learning community issues raised in the National Student Survey; the launch of a new General Engineering programme; early career researcher support and
consolidating research structures via NUCoREs; apprenticeship opportunities and mapping the potential for international strategic partnerships.

48. CYBERSECURITY

Received a paper and presentation from Dr Mark Ferrar (Chief Information Officer) and Mr Jason Bain (Assistant Director, NUIT).

[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The University had engaged JISC to audit its cyber security posture in October 2019. JISC had categorised the University’s overall external security posture (compared to peer institutions) as good, evidenced by remarkably few critical or high vulnerabilities. However, once inside the University’s network (be that through successful external penetration or initiation from inside the University), JISC observed a greater number of significant vulnerabilities. Jisc described cyber-security as a business risk, not just an IT risk. This distinction was important given that the compromise of one component/system connected to the University network meant that the risk of a lateral movement across a relatively open internal network could be high. A ‘One University’ approach to risk mitigation was required, with the impact of exceptions/mitigation considered through an institution-wide as well as local perspective.

2. It was clear from the audit report that the University needed to find ways to increase cyber-skills and cyber-awareness across the institution, for both colleagues and students. The prompt appointment of a new Chief Information Security Officer was essential.

3. The report from the audit had been considered at length by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee at its meeting on 16 January 2020, and a draft action plan endorsed by Executive Board on 28 January 2020. Implementation with progress against the action plan would be reported through standing items at Digital Campus Strategy Group and Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee. Council would consider a review of progress in the Autumn term.

49. GENDER PAY GAP

Received a paper from Mrs Adrienne McFarland (Executive Director of People Services).

[Circulated with the agenda as Document H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The report covered the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The University's mean gender pay gap (the percentage difference in the average hourly pay for women compared to men) stood at 18.5%, down from 20% the previous year, compared with a UK mean of 16.2% (based on estimates from the National Office of Statistics).

2. This year the University had included the awards made through its Spotlight Recognition Scheme when calculating its Bonus Pay Gap. Research undertaken had revealed that other comparable institutions within the sector were including such payments in their overall figures. As a result, the median bonus pay gap (the difference between the hourly pay rates for the middle woman compared to the middle man) was 46%, down from 86% the previous year. This reflected the higher number of women receiving spotlight awards.

3. Since the publication of the institution’s previous Gender Pay Gap report, the University had established a Pay Equality Task and Finish Group to make recommendations on pay
equality, recruitment, promotion and career development. As a result of the work of this group, positive action had been taken to address band differentials between male and female professors, leading to a reduction in the mean gender pay gap for professors from 4.5% in 2017 to 1.3% in 2019. The University had also introduced the Real Living Wage across the organisation, which had had the greatest impact on female colleagues in directly employed operational support roles.

4. It was suggested that the report could give greater prominence to the University’s Women in Leadership initiative, and highlight the proportion of women in Head of School roles.

5. A discussion will be scheduled at a future meeting to allow Council opportunity to consider the background to the report findings in detail.

50. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS ASSURANCE

Received a report from Professor Suzanne Cholerton (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education).

[Circulated with the agenda as Document J. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The paper provided a summary of the operation in 2018-19 of the University’s framework for assuring academic quality and standards, to provide a basis for Council as the governing body of the University, to confirm that the framework is effective. Senate had endorsed the paper at its meeting held on 22 January 2020.

2. Following the publication of a sector-wide Statement of Intent by Universities UK in 2019, all UK higher education institutions had been committed to developing a Degree Outcomes Statement setting out how they ensured that degree classifications were appropriate and held their value over time. The University was developing such a Statement to be considered by Senate and Council in 2020.

Resolved that Council confirm the appropriate management of academic quality and standards by the University during 2018-19.

51. UNIVERSITY STATUTES

Received a paper from Dr John Hogan (Registrar).

[Circulated with the agenda as Document K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The last major set of changes to the University Statutes had been approved by the Privy Council in 2011. Since then a number of issues had been identified that merited review. It was proposed that the University move in the direction recommended in the independent review of governance conducted by Advance HE in 2018-19. Furthermore, an important underlying drive behind the proposed alterations was to update the language on equality, diversity and inclusion.

2. A modest reduction in the size of Council had been proposed by the independent governance review conducted by Advance HE and presented in January 2019. It noted that the size of Council was 25 compared to a Russell Group average of 22 and specifically proposed to reduce the elected academic members from five to three. There was already some flexibility in the number of lay members which could be reduced without changing statutes. Under the proposed changes Senate would reduce the members it elected from the current three to two, one professorial and one non-professorial, and one of the two
members staff elected directly onto Council would be a Professional Services member of staff.

3. It was proposed to extend the duration of membership on Senate for the two academic members of Senate elected onto Council. This would increase the total academic membership of Senate by two but would address the current anomaly whereby the members of Senate elected onto Council ceased to be members of Senate during their period on Council which was felt to weaken the lines of communication and representation.

4. Senate had expressed grave concern about the proposed reduction to academic representation on Council. Council noted, however, that the University was unusual among the Russell Group in not having already moved to having professional services representation on its governing body.

5. Following consideration by Council the proposed changes to the Statutes would be submitted to Court and then the Privy Council for final approval.

Resolved that Council endorse the proposed changes to the Statutes.

52. REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee held on 16 January 2020.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document L. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered an update on the outcomes of an external cyber audit conducted by JISC, as well as internal audit reports on degree apprenticeships, governance arrangements, student placements, and student recruitment.

2. The objective of the governance arrangements audit was to determine whether any elements of the action plan implemented by De Montfort University in response to the Office for Students investigation also applied to Newcastle University. The audit identified that the majority of the remedial actions by De Montfort did not appear to be needed at Newcastle which had a well-established governance framework. A small number of enhancements had been identified.

3. The Committee received an update on reportable events reported to the Office for Students by the University.

53. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY/STUDENTS’ UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of University/Students’ Union Partnership Committee held on 9 January 2020.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document P. Copy filed in Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had noted that the installation of operational dispensing machines for the distribution of free sanitary products had taken longer than expected, as well as efforts being undertaken by the Newcastle University Students’ Union to ensure that the right information is available to help inform student responses to question 26 of the National Student Survey which asks about students’ unions’ roles in academic representation.
54. **SUMMARY REPORT FROM SENATE, 22 JANUARY 2020**

Received a report from the meeting of Senate held on 22 January 2020.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document N. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

55. **CHAIR’S CIRCULAR**

Chair’s circulars of routine business were sent to members on 3 February 2020. No issues on the circulars were raised by members and the business was, therefore, deemed to have been approved by Council.