NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

16 April 2018

Present: Mr Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Caroline Austin, Mr Neil Braithwaite, Professor Paul Christensen, Professor Nicola Curtin, Mr Mike Davison, Dr Jonathan Galloway, Mr Jonathan Glass, Ms Teresa Graham, Mr Jeff McIntosh, Dr Sara Maioli, Ms Claire Morgan, Ms Dianne Nelmes, Sir Michael Rawlins, Mr Ronnie Reid (President, Students’ Union), Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Mr Rowan South (Education Officer, Students’ Union), and Ms Vicky Wright.

In attendance: Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Ms Abi Kelly (Executive Director Corporate Affairs), Mrs Judith Whitaker (Executive Director of Human Resources), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Officer (Governance)).

Apologies: Mr Stephen Lightley, Ms Adrienne McFarland, and Mrs Heidi Mottram.

MINUTES

91. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Professor Nicola Curtin declared an interest in relation to Rubraca under Minute 102, and was not present during Council’s discussion of this matter.

92. MINUTES

Noted that:

1. Minute 71.1 should include the following additional sentence: “The Report endorsed the recommendations made by the investigation but made a number of further recommendations and suggested that these additional recommendations are reviewed to establish what is appropriate and practical and that agreed actions are then added to the actions set out in the Action Plan contained in the Investigation Report.”

2. Minute 75 should be amended to state that the Faculty of Medical Sciences “could generate more income by seeking to do more research supported by research councils, and a lower proportion of research on behalf of charities.”

3. The minutes of the meetings of Council held on 19 February and 19 March were approved as a correct record, subject to the amendments noted above, and signed. [Circulated with the agenda as Documents A and B. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

93. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising or outstanding actions from the previous minutes.

94. HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Executive Director of Human Resources gave an oral report on current health and safety issues affecting the University, including performance measures and actions taken.
Council, 16 April 2018

Received the Annual Health and Safety Report for 2016-17. [Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. There had been a low number of reportable incidents and accidents during 2016-17, and the University’s statistics were also low when benchmarked against other institutions. University management were confident that reporting systems were robust and clearly defined and understood, and that reporting mechanisms were user-friendly, and as such facilitated rather than hindered the reporting of incidents.

2. During 2016-17 six Health and Safety Management Audit Profile (HASMAP) audits were completed as part of the University’s robust Health and Safety audit programme. The outcomes of the HASMAP audit would be reported to the 11 June meeting of Council.

3. The University’s Health and Safety Strategic Five-Year Plan would be submitted to the 11 June meeting of Council.

4. An Assistant Director of Human Resources (Health and Safety) had been appointed since the 19 February meeting of Council.

5. Progress on the staff wellbeing strategy would be reported in future annual reports. It was suggested that future Health and Safety reporting could also encompass student wellbeing. This would be considered further by the Executive Director of Human Resources and Registrar.

6. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee should receive a report on the security of biological agents at a future meeting.

95. CHAIR’S BUSINESS

Reported that:

1. An extraordinary meeting of Remuneration Committee would take place on 17 April 2018, at which implementation of the Committee of University Chairs HE Remuneration Code would be discussed. The Committee would propose a suggested approach to implementation to a future meeting of Council.

2. A revised marketing campaign had been developed for the Newcastle Helix, the new name for the Science Central. The development plans for Newcastle Helix would feature as part of the Great Exhibition of the North, taking place in Newcastle and Gateshead later in 2018.

96. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report. Highlights of this report are discussed below. [Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Universities Superannuation Scheme – Industrial Action

   The Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) had voted in favour of a proposal relating to pensions reforms, meaning that industrial action was currently suspended. 64% of UCU
members had supported the proposal based on a 63% turnout. A joint UCU and Universities UK expert panel would be formed to review the USS pension valuation, processes and assumptions. The workings, considerations and conclusions of the joint panel would be fully transparent and a timescale for the review would be agreed shortly.

The impact of the industrial action on many of the University’s students to date had been significant, and much would need to be done to ensure that students could be supported and assessed appropriately in the coming weeks. At its meeting held on 20 March, Senate had voted to declare a University-wide emergency and to authorise the use of University guidance for alternative arrangements to be followed that would mitigate the effects of the industrial action.

2. Office for Students

The University was working to a deadline of 30 April for the submission of its application to join the Office for Students register as a provider of higher education. This would include confirmation of the University’s status, details of subcontractual and validation arrangements, and confirmation that members of Council were fit and proper, as well as an access and participation plan and resource statement, consumer law self-assessment, and student protection plan.

3. Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey

Newcastle University was ranked 7th in the UK for student experience in the latest THE Student Experience Survey, which had been published in March 2018. This was the fourth consecutive year in which the University had been in the top 10. Newcastle scored particularly well for good social life and good library and opening hours.

4. Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences

Professor Nigel Harkness, currently Head of the School of Modern Languages, had been appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences with effect from 1 September 2018, subject to approval by Council. His appointment had been endorsed by Senate on 20 March. As announced in February, Professor Helen Berry would serve as Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor from 1 April until 31 August.

5. HEFCE Catalyst Fund Success

The University had been successful in securing over £125,000 from HEFCE’s Catalyst Fund programme, and matching industry funding, providing a total of £251,000, for the project: “Closing the skills gap and supporting the Industrial Strategy through curriculum development”. The project was being led by Dr Matthew Forshaw, Lecturer in Data Science in the School of Computing, and aimed to address the national data analytics skills shortage.

Newcastle was one of 17 universities to have been awarded a share of £1.5 million by HEFCE to improve support for the mental health and wellbeing of postgraduate research students. The University had been awarded £55,000 for a project entitled “Wellbeing for All: An Equality and Inclusion Approach to Supporting PGR Mental Health”.

6. International Student Barometer 2017

The results of the latest International Student Barometer survey had once again demonstrated a high level of overall satisfaction amongst Newcastle University’s international students. 93% of respondents in the survey stated that they were satisfied with the University overall against a response rate of 26% (the same as in 2016),
representing 1,911 students. This placed Newcastle two percentage points above its benchmark groups. The University’s response to the results will focus on supporting international students in forming friendships with UK students, and with students of other nationalities.

7. Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) Outstanding Contribution to Education Award

The Marine Technology group at the Newcastle University International Singapore campus had been chosen by IMarEST as the winner of the Institute’s prestigious Outstanding Contribution to Marine Education Award for 2017.

8. Netexplo UNESCO Award

A bionic hand, developed by biomedical engineers at the University, that can ‘see’ objects and pick them up by itself, had won a prestigious 2018 Netexplo UNESCO Award in Paris. Selected from over 2,000 innovations from around the world, the hand has been given the award in recognition of its “potential to have a profound and lasting impact on society”. Funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the technology has been trialled with a small number of amputees and now a University team is working with experts at Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to offer the ‘hands with eyes’ to patients.

9. REF Panel Membership

HEFCE announced the initial membership of the REF Panels and Sub-Panels. The University is represented by 12 members of staff across eleven sub-panels. All members are confirmed for the criteria setting phase which begins imminently. Congratulations to all colleagues who were selected in what we are led to believe was a highly competitive process to date. We will be calling on their insights as the Sub-Panels develop their own interpretation of the rules, and as we work up our Newcastle REF Strategy.

10. Northern Accelerator

Together with Durham, Northumbria and Sunderland universities, Newcastle had been awarded £4.9m by the government to form the Northern Accelerator, which would build upon the success of university spin-out companies and encourage more start-ups. This would build on the University’s existing partnership with Durham which had built a network of entrepreneurs who are embedded at the earliest stages in the universities’ spin-out companies. The new project will focus on four key areas of regional strength: advanced manufacturing, the chemicals and process sector, life sciences and healthcare and digital.

11. Best Neighbour on Campus Campaign

The first awards had been made in the Best Neighbour on Campus campaign. The joint University and Students’ Union campaign was designed to celebrate the great work students do within their communities, and residents from across the city are being asked to nominate students or households who have had a positive impact on the area where they live, either through volunteering, supporting local residents or simply by being considerate, responsible neighbours.

Noted that:

1. It was felt to be necessary for both Universities UK and UCU to operate with greater transparency.
2. Changes to the governance of Universities UK were likely to be implemented in the future, partly as a result of the body evaluating its experience of the pensions dispute.

3. It had not been possible for the Russell Group to agree a consensus position on the future of the USS, which was a reflection of the diversity of the sector as a whole.

4. It was suggested that it would be advantageous for the Business School and University alumni to be actively involved in the Northern Accelerator.

97. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

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

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

Noted that:

1. The risk for SR5A Failure to maintain a financially robust pension provision was the joint highest together with the risk for information security (SR5C). The former reflected the current deficit position and recent industrial action. The new Chief Information Officer had recently taken up his appointment.

2. The risk score for failure to meet home student recruitment targets (SR5H) had increased as home student application numbers were currently lower than this time last year, although the general UCAS trend, and the position of competitors, was not the same.

Resolved that the Chief Information Officer be invited to attend a meeting of Council for a discussion about IT and information security.

98. **MARRIS HOUSE BUSINESS CASE**

Received a report from the Executive Director of Finance, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. Marris House provided well-located accommodation popular with prospective students, however, the property was approximately 30 years old and in need of redevelopment.

2. It was proposed that the building be redesigned and remodelled to include provision of group learning and study and social facilities, and energy saving heating systems.

3. The project aimed to provide high quality, value for money non ensuite student accommodation. Rents had been priced to the Newcastle market rate.

4. The proposal was part of Accommodation Services’ strategic plan endorsed by Council on 11 December 2017.

Resolved that Council approve capital expenditure of up to £4.346m for the redevelopment of Marris House.

99. **DEVONSHIRE BUILDING BUSINESS CASE**
Council, 16 April 2018

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Science, Agriculture and Engineering, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. The aim of the project was to create state of the art facilities for biosystems-related research across the University, with the main imperative the relocation of the Interdisciplinary Computing and Complex Biosystems Research Group (ICOS) wet lab activities from the Baddiley-Clark Building into the Devonshire Building.

2. The development would reinvigorate activities in the Devonshire Building, repurposing the building for research with the creation of critical central, shared services and a building management team to manage the services and space in the building.

Resolved that Council approve expenditure of £2.796m for the development of the Devonshire Building.

100. ANNUAL REPORT ON STUDENT CASEWORK

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. There had been a 23% increase in the number of formal Academic Appeals submitted (from 75 in 2015-16 to 92 in 2016-17). It was believed that this increase might be due, in part, to staff and students becoming more familiar with the new Academic Queries and Appeals Policy.

2. The number of formal complaints had decreased to 33 in 2016-17 from 41 in 2015-16. Although fewer in number, the majority of complaints submitted for investigation were complicated, taking longer to investigate than the OIA’s recommended timeframe.

3. There had been a noticeable increase in the number of major assessment irregularities involving plagiarism, along with a rise in allegations of students using ‘essay mills’ to purchase essays, which were difficult to investigate.

4. The number of disciplinary cases had also risen from 242 in 2015-16 to 319 in 2016-17. This included a wide variety of misconduct cases, from minor public order offences and anti-social behaviour, to more serious cases. There had been a noticeable rise in reports of sexual harassment and unwanted social media contact. The work of the Changing the Culture Group in raising the profile of sexual harassment and its reporting may in part explain this.

5. The information provided included details of the time taken to deal with complaints and appeals, as requested by Senate in 2017.

6. The total number of cases under the Fitness to Practise procedure was in line with previous levels. The new Pharmacy degree would fall within the scope of the procedure from 2017-18 onwards.

7. The number of Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) cases had increased over the last few years, and concern was expressed about the impact on academic staff workload.
of dealing with PEC cases. A further rise was expected in next year’s figures as a result of current industrial action and consideration should be given to how to disaggregate such cases when looking at the overall picture.

8. There had been a significant rise in PEC applications for Board of Examiners’ discretion, which may be explained in part due to the introduction of the online PEC system and enhanced reporting, but suggested a growing tendency for students to use PEC as an insurance against poor performance. It was suggested that reviewing the criteria clarifying the student-facing wording on the online system may make submissions less likely.

9. An increase in academic appeals as a consequence of the industrial action was expected. The emergency guidance, recently approved by Senate, would be applied in such cases.

10. There was no provision within the emergency guidance for lowering the borderline threshold of marks for use of discretion by a Board of Examiners. In keeping with the University’s standard Examination Conventions, Boards of Examiners already have ultimate discretion, notwithstanding any numerical or other conventions, to pass any student, in the whole (or any part) of the assessment, at any stage.

Resolved that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching report to a future meeting of Council on appeals, complaints and PEC cases arising as a consequence of industrial action.

101. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of Finance Committee held on 12 March 2018.

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

Noted that:

1. Operational performance at institutional level was good and ahead of budget, but research income levels would require careful monitoring over the coming months.

2. As a result of the annual review of investment performance, Finance Committee had agreed to make some investment adjustments to increase the non-UK element of the portfolio within the limits of the institution’s mandate.

3. Recent attendance at the annual JP Morgan Healthcare Convention in San Francisco had confirmed that there was significant interest in the monetisation of Rubraca, a drug developed by the University that could be used in the treatment of ovarian cancer.

4. Council would be asked to approve the substance and structure of a proposed transaction in June or July, with a request for Finance Committee (via a Monetisation sub-committee) to be given authority to execute on Council’s behalf.

5. Membership of the Monetisation sub-committee should be determined at a later date, and would be influenced by the availability of appropriate members of Council.

102. INTO ANNUAL REPORT

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Internationalisation, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:
1. The report provided an overview of 2016-17 performance and 2017-18 recruitment for both INTO joint ventures: INTO Newcastle University and Newcastle University London.

2. In 2017, 18.7% (475 of 2,537) of the University’s International fee paying new entrants progressed to Newcastle University from INTO academic pathway programmes, contributing £7.6m in tuition fees. Total fee income from both new and continuing students previously registered on INTO academic pathway programmes is estimated to be £16.1m in 2017/18, or 23.1% of international fee income.

3. Recruitment to INTO Newcastle University programmes was projected to increase by 13% for 2017-18.

4. A strategic review of the Newcastle University London centre was underway, as discussed at Council in February 2018. Despite strong growth in student volumes, in 2016-17 the centre’s financial results were disappointing, primarily due to a shortfall in pathway provision.

5. University academic achievement was poorer for former INTO Newcastle students than other international students. Former INTO academic pathway students were less likely than others to get a first or 2:1 at Newcastle University. The reasons for this were unclear, however, integration of students was an area for development, and there were examples of good practice within the institution from which learning points could be derived.

103. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY/STUDENTS’ UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of University/Students’ Union Partnership Committee held on 15 March 2018.

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

Noted that:

1. Good progress had been made against the Students’ Union Operational Plan.

2. Current campaigns included the implementation of traffic safety measures to Wellington Street. The University and Students’ Union were liaising with Newcastle City Council which was taking seriously the concerns about safety that had been expressed.

3. The Students’ Union had submitted their subvention proposal for 2018-19 and this would be considered as part of the annual budget-setting process.

4. A lower annual surplus was forecast, resulting from closure of Richardson Road, decreased alcohol and retail sales and a decrease in Freshers’ Week attendance.

5. The University and Students’ Union were in dialogue over how best to make use of staff salaries saved as a result of recent industrial action. It was recommended that the funds could potentially be used to support students’ mental health and/or subsidizing student food outlets.

104. ANNUAL REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of Ethics Committee.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document M. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
Noted that:

1. The report noted the Faculty Ethics Committees could do more to learn from each other.
2. Council wished to see either a more detailed report or the full minutes from the annual meeting of Ethics Committee in future.

105. **PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

*Resolved that Council approve the recommendation from the Joint Selection Committee on the Appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences, that Professor Nigel Harkness (currently Head of the School of Modern Languages) be appointed as Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences with effect from 1 September 2018.*

106. **SUMMARY REPORT FROM MEETING OF SENATE, 20 MARCH 2018**

Received a summary report from the meeting of Senate that took place on 20 March.

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

107. **HEFCE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RISK**

Received HEFCE’s Annual Assessment of Institutional Risk for Newcastle University.

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

108. **PREVENT DUTY ANNUAL REPORTING OUTCOME**

Received the monitoring outcome from HEFCE following its review of the University’s 2017 Prevent Annual Return.

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

109. **REPORTED BUSINESS**

Received a report of action taken in accordance with agreed procedures, approved where necessary by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate and/or the Chair of Council on behalf of Council, and by other University bodies and Chairs

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

Received a report on deaths recently announced by the University.

*Council recorded its deep regret and sympathy for the relatives concerned.*