NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
C O U R T
10 OCTOBER 2017

Present: The Chancellor (in the Chair), Vice-Chancellor, Ms Parveen Akhtar, Professor David
Burn, Councillor Joe Carlebach, Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Mr Alan Clarke, Professor
Richard Davies, Mr Andrew Davison, Mr David Flory, Mrs Olivia Grant, Ms Sarah Green,
Rt Rev Christine Hardman, Mr Mick Henry, Mr Mark I'Anson, Mr Peter Johnson, Mr
Antony Jones, Lord Frank Judd, Professor Eileen Kaner, Ms Abi Kelly, Professor Patrick
Lavery, Mr Stephen Lightley, Mr Richard Maudslay, Ms Pummi Mattu, Dr David Moffatt,
Ms Claire Morgan, Mr Jonathan Parkinson, Ms Fiona O'Connor, Councillor Sue Pearson,
Baroness Joyce Quin, Mr Ronnie Reid, Professor Julie Sanders, Mr Mark Scrimshaw, Sir
Nigel Sherlock, Professor Mark Shucksmith, Mr Nitin Shukla, Mr Greg Smith, Mr Michael
Stephenson, Dr Robert Teoh, Ms Hannah Underwood, Dr Ruth Valentine, Mr Paul
Woolston, Professor Brian Walker, Mr Paul Walker, Professor Nick Wright and Professor
Phillip Wright.

In attendance: Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Dr Colin
Campbell (Director of Strategic Planning and Mrs Yvonne Lee (Executive Assistant).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document A]

2. MEMBERSHIP

The Chair welcomed Professor David Burn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Medical
Sciences), Mr David Flory (new lay member), Mr Ronnie Reid (President of NUSU), Dr Ruth
Valentine (new Academic Board appointed member), Professor Brian Walker (Pro-Vice-
Chancellor, Research Strategy and Resources) and Mr Paul Walker (new Chair of Council and
Pro-Chancellor) to their first meeting of Court.

Received:

(a) The membership of Court for 2016-17.

(b) A document detailing the profiles of members of Court.

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents B and C]
3. UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

Received a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor on the refresh of the University’s Strategy. (The slides from the Presentation have been published on the Court web pages at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/court/presentations.htm.)

Noted that:

Presentation:

1. Since taking office in January 2017, the Vice-Chancellor and Executive Board colleagues have embarked on a refresh of the University’s Strategy. This presentation to Court is part of a lengthy consultation process involving staff, students and key stakeholders from the University’s external partners.

2. The University’s defining characteristics include: a proud heritage; excellence in teaching; a strong regional focus; a key driver of the innovation culture and history of the region; campuses in Malaysia, Singapore and London; a long history of collaborative and partnership working and an increasing focus on interdisciplinarity.

3. The University’s research and innovation has developed since the establishment of the College of Physical Science later named after Lord Armstrong and notable highlights include: Victor Passmore’s and Richard Hamilton’s pioneering involvement in abstract and pop art; Computing research underpinning high-performance switches in the New York Stock Exchange; Professor Sugata Mitra’s award winning self-organised learning environments (SOLEs), Professor Kate Bushby’s expertise in the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) and the award to Newcastle University of the world’s first mitochondrial licence.

4. The University’s current position is good with a broad disciplinary base; some genuinely world leading researchers; highly rated learning and teaching; largely happy engaged staff together with satisfied students; financially sound; producing a significant economic impact and a Russell Group institution in the top 200 Universities in the world.

5. Two critical challenges and areas for improvement are our research performance, together with our external profile and reputation.

6. Key requisites for a refreshed Vision are how the University addresses external/internal challenges; articulating clearly “Why” we do what we do and the need to make our Strategy distinctive.

7. Vision 2021’s focus on the institution as a “civic” university is now not distinctive with it featuring as one of the three core functions of many universities along with research and education. We need therefore to broaden our vision statement, for example “To transform society in our places and in the world”.

8. Three elements in creating a distinctive vision are our disciplinary strengths in research and teaching alongside interdisciplinary working; the “Grand” Societal Challenges we focus on and the nature and extent of the societal engagement of our research and teaching.

9. The University needs to use our refreshed vision to enhance our reputation by developing a well-defined “brand” with an accompanying narrative; increasing our internal marketing
capacity and engaging with external HE brand consultants; and maximising the huge opportunities presented to the institution by Freedom City, the Great Exhibition of the North and our continuing development of Science Central.

10. The refreshed Vision will focus on research and innovation; education for life and engagement with society globally, nationally and locally to achieve societal transformation.

11. The University’s over-arching Strategy comprises strategies for research; education and engagement; Grand Societal Challenges; international; and place each with four pillars on which to develop the objectives that will deliver our overall mission and aims.

12. The Vice-Chancellor will be presenting principles of revised Strategy to Council and Senate later this month and working groups based on University committees will build on the “pillars” to develop SMART objectives. In addition the University will work to improve marketing capacity and continue work with the Knowledge Partnership to develop our “brand”. We will provide further opportunities for staff/student participation early in 2018 before launching the full Strategy in Spring 2018.

Discussion:

1. The recent Government audit which highlighted racial disparities in UK schools, courts and workplaces should be borne in mind when developing the University’s Strategy. The University’s focus on social justice as one of our main societal challenge themes ensures that this issue is taken into account in all aspects of our work with staff in the University motivated to address equality issues. In addition the University has appointed an Equality Co-ordinator to ensure join-up across Schools, Faculties and the Professional Services.

2. The University’s proposals for improving marketing and reputation will need to be underpinned by staff commitment to these two goals. People are the most important element of any strategy and staff buy-in to all elements of the Vision will be crucial. In response to this the Vice-Chancellor highlighted the consultation process, which has ensured that staff views are taken into account. This was confirmed by the fact that the Strategy presented to Court today had evolved during the consultation process.

3. The presentation had not included specific reference to the current political climate and the challenges faced post-Brexit. The University knows that it will have to adapt and respond to the challenges faced by the UK as a whole, but in developing the institution’s Strategy, we have to focus on what we do, why and how to get that message widely disseminated.

4. The University is well-placed in terms of research to actually engage with what is happening in our society now. The example of the piloting in our region of the roll-out of Universal Credit was raised as something the University should respond to, with research on the impact of the policy on local people.

5. Research work undertaken by academic colleagues in the Institute of Health and Society in collaboration with the City had focussed on the impact of the Bedroom Tax on people in our region. The findings had been quoted widely in the media and in Commons and Lords debates and had ultimately influenced a change to the Bedroom Tax Policy.

6. In addition, the University’s Policy Academy has been established by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Internationalisation, to support staff in informing policy which affects societal issues, through knowledge exchange and communication of our research.
7. Perceptions influence reputation and, for instance, the North-South divide and bias against the region were out of the University’s control but could impact nevertheless on our reputation. Lay members of Court in particular could have an ambassadorial role in this regard.

8. The development of the Strategy would need to identify key messages for staff, students and lay members of University committees to disseminate.

9. The University should not lose sight in the development of the new Vision, of the welcoming and friendly aspect of the Institution. Students should not be seen as clients or customers, but should work in partnership with the community of scholars. The University had a crucial role in encouraging originality and developing critical faculties among students who are also citizens and who, along with the alumni body, should partake in articulating and disseminating the University’s vision.

10. The phrase ‘Education for Life’ has been used for some years and it is important to articulate what it actually means. The phrase ‘Learning Community’ was more inclusive. It was confirmed that ‘Education for Life’ refers to educating in terms of knowledge, attitude, skills and behaviours and that this should be made more explicit in the Strategy.

11. The Strategy should be addressing and future proofing against the critical risk Brexit poses to our place in Europe and while the University has global campuses, should it be considering a campus in Europe? The establishment of the branch campuses was the right thing to do at the time but they present challenges in terms of retrofitting the Strategy on to them. The University needs to focus on whether they remain viable both financially and in terms of reputation.

12. The University had identified the need to establish a research presence in our branch campuses to complement and enhance the already excellent teaching students receive and to get real impact in the relevant region. It was confirmed that Newcastle Research and Innovation Institute Singapore (NewRiiS) will be opened in November.

13. The University’s branch campuses in Singapore and Malaysia are cash generating but the London campus, though still in its infancy is less so and the University is considering the future of Newcastle University London through a Strategy Development Group.

14. The ‘soft power’ of alumni from different areas of the world, with many maintaining a lifelong enthusiasm for, and predisposition to the University. It was questioned whether a student from Singapore, studying at Newcastle University in their own region would develop such a strong relationship as those who lived and studied in Newcastle.

15. The strapline ‘Transforming society’ was possibly too high an aspiration.

16. It was questioned whether interdisciplinary research provides the same impact as that derived from single discipline research. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University needs to do both well and maximise the opportunities single-discipline success affords to develop interdisciplinary research.
17. It was important that academic staff were positioned as world experts. China, with its air pollution and predicted rise in obesity and related ill-health in its population, provided a perfect opportunity to get our expertise in these areas more widely known internationally.

18. The University needs to find a way of breaking into relevant networks in terms of ensuring our academics are ‘called to the table’ and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) initiatives might present opportunities in this area.

19. The University should consider adopting Harvard’s approach to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), whereby courses are designed for early career politicians and civil servants from around the world, ensuring Harvard is remembered as they advance up the career ladder in their own countries.

Resolved that:

i. The Vice-Chancellor be thanked for his excellent presentation, coherently setting out the University’s refresh of its Strategy.

ii. Court members be thanked for their knowledgeable and constructive suggestions for the Strategy going forward.

4. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

Received:

A report from the Vice-Chancellor.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document D]

Noted that:

Report

1. The Selection Committee had selected a candidate for Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who will be recommended to a joint meeting of Senate and Council on 16th October.

2. Since this business report was circulated, Jo Johnson has issued a statement on student funding which confirms that there will be no inflationary rise for the foreseeable future for those institutions participating in TEF. In addition, the repayment threshold had been raised.

3. The Vice-Chancellor noted the prestigious nature and consequent reputational gain of the Forward Prize, which had been won by the Director of Newcastle University’s Centre for Literary Arts.

4. The NewBridge Project, a pioneering programme which will support the development of creative talent in the region, was highlighted as the start of broader work on creative hubs with external partners being developed as part of the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty strategy.

5. The University’s recruitment process had been successful; we had exceeded our Widening Participation target and there had been a 9% increase in postgraduate student numbers.
6. The University’s TEF Gold award will be valid for 2 more years and it was confirmed that the University has decided not to participate in the pilots of subject level TEF.

7. Court members, with their wide range of expertise and knowledge in their fields, were encouraged to put forward nominations for the David Goldman Visiting Professorship in the Business School.

8. The University was delighted that the School of Computing was now located in the prestigious Urban Sciences Building (USB), with the building itself being the focal point for the University’s role in the UK Collaboratorium for Research on Infrastructure and Cities (UKCRIC).

9. Despite natural concerns around Brexit, the University had been successful with funding from the EU’s research fund, Horizon 2020, together with the Erasmus+ student exchange scheme. In addition, intake of students from EU countries has increased.

10. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed with Jacqui Henderson that the information provided on the University’s measures to mitigate Cyber Attacks, was sufficient to allay her concerns over this issue.

11. The Vice-Chancellor drew members’ attention to Section 4.7 of his report, which did not clarify sufficiently the University’s commitment to engagement with Alumni and in particular, gratitude for the Chair of Convocation’s continuing close liaison with leading members of the alumni and the Advancement Team.

12. The Vice-Chancellor asked members to note the forthcoming events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the award of an honorary degree to Martin Luther King, Jr, to which they would be invited in due course.

5. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S QUESTIONS

Received from Mark Scrimshaw:

“Reading about your Changing the Culture staff seminar on sexual violence, harassment and hate crime, can you explain where you think the University sits now with regard to dealing with these issues - for instance do we have a proper process of taking and hearing complaints - and what aspects do you particularly want to improve?”

“I would be interested in knowing the University’s policy on free speech and “safe spaces” – and if the President of the Students’ Union is attending the meeting, the NUSU Policy on this topic.”

Received from Lord Judd:

“request for an update on the state of recruiting with its socially representative nature together with an indication of the impact of international dimensions of British policy on both overseas and domestic numbers.”

Received from Jacqui Henderson:

“As there have been a number of articles in the media about Cyber Attacks on a number of Universities particularly targeting research intensive areas including many of those that
Newcastle would regard as their most significant including science, medicine and engineering could the VC give us an update on the situation at Newcastle and the steps being taken to reduce any potential cyber-attack?”

Received from David Moffatt:

“I would like to know whether following the dissolution of the Alumni Consultative Group there has been any enhancement of the lines of communication between the alumni and the University and specifically with regard to alumni branches.”

Received:

An oral response from the Vice-Chancellor to Mark Scrimshaw’s questions.

Noted that responses to the questions received by Jacqui Henderson, Lord Judd and David Moffatt were included in the Vice-Chancellor’s Business Report (Document D above).

Noted that:

Briefing

1. In October 2016, UUK published a report called ‘Changing the Culture’ which asked the HE sector to consider how to prevent and respond to any incidents of sexual violence, harassment and hate crime on university campuses.

2. The University had set up a Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, to consider our response. This group had collected information through open forums for staff, students and key external partners.

3. It was recognised that some individuals may not feel comfortable speaking about these issues in an open forum and a confidential web form was created to ensure that all issues were reported and considered.

4. Processes are in place to address complaints relating to harassment in any form, e.g. staff/student, student/student, student/community.

5. The Task and Finish Group has identified a need to improve reporting mechanisms and have issued an information sheet to all academic staff taking them through all processes required for dealing with complaints appropriately. The Students’ Union have been involved in this process and last year’s Welfare Officer was employed temporarily to draft an initial strategy.

6. The University has also been successful in obtaining HEFCE Catalyst funding to employ a project manager for this area.

7. With regard to the question on the University’s Policy on free speech and ‘safe spaces’, it was confirmed that, despite the ‘Red Rating’ in the online publication ‘Spiked’, no speaker had ever been banned by the University or Students’ Union. In addition, no reference to speakers has been included in the University’s guidance for transitioning students.

8. Taking into account the difficulties represented by the University’s obligation to allow free speech on campus, while also fulfilling its obligations with regard to Prevent, the University’s Code of Practice in this area was revised and improved last year.
9. The President of NUSU noted that, while a university is a place for debate and challenging ideas, incitement of hate and violence cannot be tolerated. The University and Students' Union strive to maintain a balance so that the right to free speech is not violated.

10. The banning of initiation ceremonies was appropriate because such events frequently forced students to do something they may not want to do. The University and the Students' Union also have to ensure that the actions of students do not bring the institution into disrepute.

11. The Students’ Union has banned tabloids featuring a ‘Page 3’ section until they cease featuring exploitative photographs of young women.

12. While the Students’ Union has never banned a speaker, they reserve the right to do so as part of the campaign against extremism.

13. The Students’ Union offers positive democratic opportunities through the submission of motions by any student to the Student Council.

Discussion

1. Introducing a ban because of potential offence was not necessarily a good thing.

2. The provision of a prayer space should be inclusive so that people of all faiths or of no faith should feel included.

3. The University has a plan in place to appoint a multi-faith Co-ordinator and provide a multi-faith space, but this has been met with great opposition from the Muslim community.

4. A Task Group has been set up working with NUSU and including faith and non-faith representatives, to address this issue, but this is a difficult problem to resolve due to space constraints.

6. PAST COURT PRESENTATIONS: UPDATES FOR MEMBERS

Received a document updating Court on the presentation received in October 2015, delivered by Professor Tony Stevenson, on League Tables.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document E]

Noted that:

1. Since the presentation in 2015 rankings have become more common in the HE sector.

2. The report gives members the latest international and domestic rankings, which show that the University has improved its international position in a difficult competitive area.

3. The University’s position has remained static in domestic rankings.

4. With regard to reputational rankings, there is a gap between the University’s overall ranking and variable subject ratings.
5. New data sets have been introduced by various ranking organisations and overall, the University has made good progress.

6. One positive is that Newcastle has gone up in the THES rankings, in contrast to most other UK universities.

7. **MEMBERSHIP OF COURT STEERING COMMITTEE**

   Reported that:

   The membership of Court Steering Committee for 2017-18 is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Observers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Claire Morgan (Chair)</td>
<td>Professor Richard Davies</td>
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<td>Ms Fiona O’Connor</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
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<td>Mr Rob Williamson</td>
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<td>Professor Chris Day</td>
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<td>Mr Paul Walker</td>
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8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

   Nothing raised.

9. **MEETINGS 2017-18**

   Reported that:

   (a) The next meeting of Court will take place at 10.30am on Friday 11 May 2018; the venue will be the Urban Sciences Building on Science Central.

   (b) That Court Steering Committee has agreed that a presentation on the University’s Energy Research should be the main item on the agenda.