NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

C O U R T

11 OCTOBER 2019

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair), Mr Joe Carlebach, Mr Alan Clarke, Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Ms Hilary Florek, Mrs Olivia Grant, Professor Nigel Harkness, Mr Peter Johnson, Mr Antony Jones, Ms Abi Kelly, Mr Stephen Lightley, Mr Hector MacDonald, Mr Richard Maudslay, Ms Fiona O’Connor, Professor Jane Robinson, Sir George Russell, Professor Julie Sanders, Sir Nigel Sherlock, Professor Mark Shucksmith, Mr Greg Smith, Ms Katie Smyth, Dr Robert Teoh and Ms Hannah Underwood.

In attendance: Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Miss Sally Ingram (Director of Student Health and Wellbeing) for Item 3, and Mrs Yvonne Lee (Executive Assistant).

1. MEMBERSHIP

The Chair welcomed Professor Jane Robinson, Dean of Engagement and Place and Ms Katie Smyth, Student Union President 2019/20 to their first meeting of Court.

The Chair thanked Mr Antony Jones, who has been a member of Court Ex Officio as Chair of Convocation and who was stepping down from this position on 12 October, for his contribution both to the University and meetings of Court during his period of office.

2. THE CHANCELLORSHIP

Received:

An oral report from Mr Antony Jones, Chair of the Chancellorship Working Group, on the ongoing search for a new Chancellor.

Noted that:

1. The Working Group had identified a number of attributes potential candidates should possess, including sharing the values of the University, having a global outlook and having a profile which would appeal to current and prospective students and their families.

2. The Working Group drew up an initial longlist of over 100 candidates, which reflected a broad range of experience and diversity.

3. This was reduced to a shortlist but no successful candidate has been identified as, in addition to the attributes listed above, candidates needed to have availability for a specific level of commitment to the University.

4. An extraordinary meeting of Court and Senate, followed by Convocation, will be convened and a provisional date of 31 January has been identified. Further details will be confirmed to members of Court in due course.

Secretary’s note: Court members have been invited to a joint meeting with Senate on 20 November 2019 to consider a recommendation for a new Chancellor.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2019 were approved as a correct record.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document A)
4. **MEMBERSHIP**

Received:

(a) The membership of Court for 2019-20.

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

(Circulated with the Agenda as Documents B and C)

5. **STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH**

Received:

A document summarising the points to be covered in the presentation on Student Mental Health.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document D)

A Presentation from Miss Sally Ingram, Director of Student Health and Wellbeing on Student Mental Health.

Noted that:

**Presentation**

1. There has been a sector wide increase in concern for student mental wellbeing following the UUK Report on Suicide Safer Universities and the Step Change framework.

2. Newcastle University has convened a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of current provision, including a gap analysis and to make recommendations for an action plan to achieve any improvements required.

3. Across the sector, universities have seen an increase in the number of students seeking help due to stress, which could result from the reduction in the stigma associated with mental health, which has encouraged the sharing of problems.

4. Analysis shows that while there has been no increase in mental illness, reporting of mental health issues has been prevalent in the media, encouraging students who would formerly have coped with stress and anxiety on their own or with the help of friends and family, to seek professional help.

5. While the University has seen a 22% increase in the numbers of applicants seeking therapy (from 2,345-2,866), assessment has shown that not all require treatment, needing only encouragement to find alternatives to prevalent unhealthy coping strategies such as alcohol or drugs.

6. Mental wellbeing issues are partly driven by students transitioning from school pupils living at home to independent adults and reflect a more diverse cohort including young carers, trans and non-binary gendered individuals, together with students estranged from their parents.

7. Mental wellbeing issues are not only identified in first year students, with final year students also experiencing anxiety about life post-University. The latter may be at least in part, attributed to student debt, together with a highly competitive and over-crowded graduate market.
8. The Task and Finish Group has identified some good practice in the University, some practices with risks associated and some requiring a complete change.

9. Staff and Postgraduate students have 24-hour access to the EAP Service and this extends to an individual’s immediate family.

10. Increased numbers of students are asking GPs to provide medical reasons for their academic failure, which can lead to a high number of applications to the Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) process.

11. The academic year structure makes referral to the NHS difficult as many students have gone home for vacations by the time a hospital appointment arrives.

12. The University is the lead or host institution for a number of NHS mental health multi-agency groups, including the Suicide Prevention in Newcastle to improve the mental health prevention and treatment opportunities.

13. The role of the Personal Tutor is under review at the University and it is the intention to place a counsellor/mental health adviser into each School, with one already in place in the Business School.

14. Information sharing across the sector and with external partners such as the NHS, together with parents of the students concerned is important but without vital interest concern can only be shared with the students’ consent.

15. The University’s DClin Psychology students are seeing students as part of their training, greatly improving the support opportunities for a small but vulnerable student group.

Discussion

1. Informed consent under the GDPR was a difficult issue as the law does not take first consent as ongoing and some students deny access to their records or withdraw it during an intervention process. It was suggested that legal advice should be sought in terms of the intention of the GDPR, which is not there to obstruct the possibility of help to those struggling with issues.

2. It was queried whether the student disciplinary process was problematic in terms of adding to the stress levels of a student who may be missing lectures for a mental health related reason. It was confirmed that the Student Health and Wellbeing Team work collaboratively with Student Progress staff and can intervene to stop a disciplinary process if necessary.

3. The idea of a formal medical examination during the student recruitment process was suggested as a way to identify problems early, but this would be challenging when having to assess up to 6,000 individuals each year. It was confirmed that any applicant who declares an existing problem on application is contacted by the Student Health and Wellbeing Team with the offer of a support plan being put in place.

4. Students entering the University via the Widening Participation programme may have difficulties in this area, particularly if they were from the care system. It was confirmed that the University’s Widening Participation staff look at this issue in terms of transition vulnerability rather than just mental health disability.

5. It was queried whether the National Student Survey responses had identified any issues with the University’s student mental health provision and it was confirmed that, while there was general satisfaction with the provision, quick access to help was cited as important and more therapy sessions were strongly requested. Currently a 40% increase in staffing would be needed to meet the time focused 6 session counselling model offered at Newcastle.
6. The burden of student mental health on staff should not be overlooked and it was confirmed that Student Health and Wellbeing were liaising with Organisational Development and Occupational Health and Safety to devise mental health training for staff and Miss Ingram is already providing monthly training via the Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS).

7. A recent OfS survey has identified a need to lobby the government over the sharing of information on students transitioning to adulthood.

8. Recent analysis of suicide trends has shown that, while more women attempt suicide, more men complete suicide and universities are powerless to prevent these tragedies in those who have exhibited no visible signs to signal such potentially fatal levels of distress.

Resolved that:

Miss Ingram be thanked for her informative presentation.

6. HONORARY FELLOWSHIPS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Received and considered:

A report from Court Steering Committee recommending individuals for the award of Honorary Fellowships at a date to be determined when a new Chancellor is in place.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document E)

Resolved that:

The two individuals recommended were approved for the conferment of an Honorary Fellowship at a time to be confirmed when a new Chancellor is in place.

7. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS

Received a report from the Vice-Chancellor and President.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document F)

Noted that:

Report

1. The fall in the NSS performance in recent years was partly due to dissatisfaction within two large Schools, which have a disproportionate effect on the scores for the institution as a whole. The University is focussing on the development of an action plan to ensure improvements in the relevant subject areas.

2. The different methodologies of the various league table rankings are responsible for variable performance by the University. Metric based rankings see the University as more successful than those based on reputational perceptions. Work is ongoing to improve in those areas where the University’s position has fallen.

3. Newcastle University is proud to be taking forward its commitment as a signatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum and is one of the pilot Universities for the Magna Charta Living Values Project. The University will work with the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) to look at both the ways we are embedding values in our work and the successes and challenges of putting values into action.
4. The University has become a member of the Race Equality Charter to help to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education.

5. The Vice-Chancellor led a national working group with Universities UK to develop guidance and recommendations to raise awareness of the dangers of initiations and excessive alcohol consumption among students, following the tragic death of Ed Farmer in 2016. A report on the lessons learned was issued during Freshers' Week and the guidance has been widely shared across the institution and the sector as a whole. In addition to education on the dangers of such initiations, the University has been working in partnership with the City Council and Publicans in the City to ban practices where large numbers of shots of alcohol can be bought in one order. Undercover police were on duty throughout Freshers' Week to fine anyone breaking the ban.

6. The University’s sector-leading work on sustainability issues was highlighted with the University being only the second higher education institution to declare a Climate Emergency, committing to reduce our carbon emissions to Net Zero by 2040. We are involving students in terms of how we achieve this and our work has been recognised by the University being ranked top in Europe by the THE in the context of visibly leading on Climate Change in terms of research and actions.

7. The government’s re-introduction of a two-year post-study visa for international students starting courses from 2020 is a success for the sector and will facilitate the University's recruitment of international students in future.

8. The University has introduced Sanctuary Scholarships, available from 2020/21 onward, for asylum-seekers and refugees who wish to study at Newcastle. This is part of the University's work towards becoming a University of Sanctuary and our commitment to social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion.

9. The University has entered into a partnership with the Sutton Trust to become the first university in the North East to deliver the Trust’s Pathways to Law and Pathways to Medicine Programmes, which will support 65 high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds.

10. The first round of open recruitment for Newcastle University Academic Track (NUAcT) fellows is almost complete. In excess of 750 applications were received and, following a thorough shortlisting process, 40 candidates were invited to interview. The first cohort of fellows will arrive at the beginning of the 2019/20 academic year.

11. The belief that it is the talented individuals among our staff and students, who make the University what it is, was confirmed by a number of successes which were highlighted. These included Fellowships of the Royal Society for Professor Sir Doug Turnbull and Martin Embley from the Faculty of Medical Sciences, the award of the Royal Society of Chemistry’s prestigious Robert Robinson Award to Professor Bernard Golding and the achievements of Sam Tooley (BA Archaeology and Ancient History), who won four medals in the World Transplant Games.

Discussion

1. The poor NSS satisfaction rates in Schools with large cohorts of students were concerning and the University was working with other Russell Group universities to introduce a buddy system whereby students are supported by their peers in facing the challenges of studying in large cohorts.

2. The role of staff in ensuring that efforts to stamp out initiation ceremonies was felt to be crucial, particularly in terms of the intelligence which must be available within subject areas in terms of what societies are planning.
3. It was confirmed that the Students’ Union is also working with clubs and societies to change the culture in this area. Many activities are now organised within Freshers' Week which do not feature alcohol and support systems are in place to identify potential problem areas.

4. A number of bar staff in the City were fined £1,000 on the spot when serving alcohol to individuals who were already clearly drunk during Freshers’ Week and the University needs to be vigilant to ensure that this practice does not occur on campus as promoters of events on campus are not covered by the law relating to publicans.

8. CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONVOCATION

Reported that:

As agreed at the last meeting of Court, the election process for the Chair and Deputy Chair of Convocation will conclude at the meeting of Convocation on 12 October 2019.

9. PAST COURT PRESENTATIONS: UPDATES FOR MEMBERS

(a) Received a document updating Court on the presentation received in October 2017, delivered by the Vice-Chancellor and President, on the University Vision and Strategy.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document G)

(b) A short video which highlighted how the Vision and Strategy was being put into action was shown.

Noted that:

1. Following Court’s early sight of a developing draft, the University’s new Vision and Strategy was launched in October 2018 with events across the campus to encourage as much staff participation as possible.

2. On 1st October 2019 the University organised a day of events updating staff on progress during the year.

3. There are four sub-strategies in the areas of Education, Research, Engagement and Place and Global, overseen by Professor Cholerton, PVC Education, Professor Walker, PVC Research Strategy and Resources, Professor Sanders, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor Davies, PVC Global, respectively.

4. It would be useful for Court to receive a report using metrics to identify success in each sub-strategy area and it was confirmed that University Council scrutinises regular KPI reports.

5. In response to a question about the current demand for Erasmus funding, which was being underwritten by the University as a result of Brexit, it was confirmed that Modern Languages Stage 3 students have a compulsory element of study overseas and around 50-60 students take up this opportunity as part of the LLB programme. Application figures for relevant programmes are up and the University is one of a small number of Russell Group universities that are underwriting Erasmus fees.

6. It is hoped in future to offer all students opportunities to have some form of study abroad and 3 Schools are participating in a pilot this year.

7. Evidence shows that such experience leads to better jobs and salaries but some students find it difficult to fit back into a new cohort after a period abroad.

8. The University’s recruitment strategy has led to an increase in both home and international students. As with other universities a dependence on clearing for some subject areas means
entry tariffs are sometimes reduced and the University is working to ensure that we have a higher number of applicants in future so that we can be more selective.

9. The NUAcT Fellowships and new Centres for Research Excellence are attracting new partners globally which should lead to reputational gain.

10. The position of our London campus in the context of underpinning the strategies and results was queried and it was confirmed that we are in advanced negotiations with our INTO partners to change the nature of our operations in London.

Resolved that:

i. The most recent KPI report considered by Council should be presented to future Court meetings.

ii. A progress report on the changing nature of the University’s London operations be provided for the next meeting of Court.

10. **NU ADVANCEMENT**

Received:

A report updating Court on the work of NU Advancement following the item on alumni relations considered at the October 2018 meeting of Court.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document H)

Noted that:

**Report**

1. Since the Dean of Advancement’s presentation to Court in October 2018 the University has launched NCL Spark, an online platform for alumni engagement with 4,000 signed up so far.

2. The University has good contact with around 100k alumni but is mindful that there is a need to improve on this.

3. Some visible success in terms of promotion of the University’s alumni to current students is provided by the Inspirational Alumni banners around the City.

4. The University is grateful for the support and input of many alumni through their membership of and contribution to key committees such as Court and Council.

**Discussion**

1. While the Report received states that 106k alumni engaged with the University in 2018/19, the actual number who interact proactively is less than 10k.

2. This area of our work is very important to the University and, as we have a smaller team than many of our comparator institutions, we are currently looking at the potential to expand the team of staff working in this space.

3. There has been a high staff turnover in the Advancement Office in recent years and it is not simply the number of staff in the team that is important, but the level of experience and knowledge, which is crucial to effective alumni engagement.
4. Alumni engagement is important and the University needs to apply the Vision and Strategy objectives to this area of work.

5. Potential undergraduates and alumni will respond well to showcasing the exceptional individuals who were mentioned in the Vice-Chancellor and President’s Business Report and could potentially appeal to potential students and their families who may be part of the alumni community.

11. MEMBERSHIP OF COURT STEERING COMMITTEE

Reported that:

(a) The membership of Court Steering Committee for 2019-20 is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Observers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Rob Williamson (Chair)</td>
<td>Professor Jane Robinson</td>
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<td>Ms Fiona O’Connor</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
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<td>Ms Sarah Stewart</td>
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<td>Professor Chris Day</td>
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<td>Mr Paul Walker</td>
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12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members of Court asked for their thanks to be formally recorded once again for the contribution of Antony Jones during his time as Chair of Convocation.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Reported that:

(a) Court members have been invited to a joint meeting with Senate on 20 November at 17:00 to consider a recommendation for a new Chancellor.

(b) The next scheduled meeting of Court will take place at 10:30 on Friday 22 May 2020.

(c) Court Steering Committee has agreed that a presentation on the Newcastle Helix should be the main item on the agenda. The meeting will be held in the Frederick Douglass Centre on the Helix site.