NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

THE SIXTY-SECOND ORDINARY MEETING OF CONVOCATION

Saturday 12 October 2019

Present: Mr A E Jones (in the chair) and c. 40 members of Convocation.

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the sixty-second ordinary meeting of Convocation.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 23 June 2018 were approved as a correct record.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document A.]

3. MATTERS ARISING

The Chair proposed that any matters arising could be covered in the main during the presentation given by the Vice-Chancellor and President, including any pre-submitted questions and subsequent contributions from the floor.

4. THE CHANCELLORSHIP

Received an update on the appointment of a University Chancellor from the Chair of Convocation.

Noted that:

1. The process for identifying a new University Chancellor had been very thorough and had sought a diverse range of inputs. A Working Group charged with bringing forward a nomination for consideration had been formed early in 2019 including representatives from Court, Council, Senate, Alumni, Executive Board and the Students’ Union. In addition, the process had been widely communicated across the University’s diverse community to encourage suggestions for as broad a range of candidates as possible.

2. The Working Group had meet regularly over the last six months and, after updating the outline description for the role, had also identified a set of key attributes that it would be desirable for the Chancellor to possess which were then given a weighting. A long list of over 100 candidates had been compiled following the receipt of nominations from across the University’s community and the Group considered each candidate in relation to the role description and the weighted attributes. It was considered most important that the Chancellor should clearly embody the values that the University had identified for itself.

Secretary’s Note: The appointment of Imtiaz Dharker as Chancellor was confirmed at an extraordinary meeting of Convocation on 20 November 2019.

5. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S STATEMENT 2018-19

Received: The Vice-Chancellor and President’s Annual Report to Convocation, 12 October 2019.
The Vice-Chancellor and President’s report highlighted a number of successes over the previous year, across all aspects of university life including the following:

Noted that:

1. The University had launched its Vision and Strategy in October 2018. The Vice-Chancellor and President provided a summary of how the University had been performing against its strategic objectives and commitment to values-led decision-making over the course of the last year.

2. The Vice-Chancellor reported on a number of significant achievements where the University had employed its values to drive decision-making, including: declaring a Climate Emergency, aiming to achieve net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2040 and reviewing its travel policy; becoming a member of the Race Equality Charter; seeking accreditation as a University of Sanctuary and introducing the Real Living Wage.

3. As part of its commitment to addressing the attainment gap of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, the University had agreed an ambitious Access and Participation Plan and was engaged in a Closing Attainment Gaps project with AdvanceHE. It had also pledged to address the poor representation of BAME staff in academic and professional leadership roles.

4. A particular focus of the University’s commitment to improving the economy, health and social wellbeing, and cultural richness of the places in which it operates, was development on the Newcastle Helix (the former Scottish and Newcastle brewery site), a £350m regeneration project bringing together industry leaders, businesses and world-class researchers. The Helix site was home to a new £60m Urban Sciences Building, a new home for the National Innovation Centres for Ageing and Data (The Catalyst), and a new £40m Frederick Douglass Centre – with 750 seat lecture theatre and conference facilities.

5. The University’s position in the QS World University Rankings remained in the top 150 and it remained in receipt of a Gold award in the Teaching Excellence Framework. The level of overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey had decreased to 85% and a range of actions were being introduced to improve the quality of the student experience.

6. In the Times Higher Impact Rankings 2019 the University was ranked second in the world for responsible consumption and 7th in the world (1st in Europe) for Climate Action, achievements that the University could be particularly proud of.

7. Special congratulations were offered by the Vice-Chancellor to some individual members of staff and students for their successes over the past year:
   - Professor Phil Blythe: named as the Government’s Chief Scientific Advisor for the Department for Trade for a further three years
   - Professors Martin Embley and Doug Turnbull: elected Fellows of the Royal Society
   - Professor Stephen Graham: elected Fellow of the British Academy
   - Professor Mary Herbert: elected Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences
   - Professors Natalio Krasnogor and Ian Metcalfe: awarded Royal Academy of Engineering Chairs in Emerging Technologies.
   - Professors Sharon Mavin, William Maloney, Jane Pollard, and Falko Sniehotta elected Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences
• Emeritus Professor Herbie Newell: awarded a CBE in the New Year Honours for services to Medical Research and Drug Development
• Professor Louise Robinson: made a Dame in the New Year Honours for services to Primary Care and for improving older people’s quality of life and care they receive
• Professor Peter Stone: named as UNESCO Chair for Cultural Property Protection and Peace for a further four years.
• Sam Pooley: winner of two silver and two bronze medals in the World Transplant Games
• Andrew Watson: work exhibited at The Royal Institute of Oil Painters Annual Exhibition 2018

8. In terms of collective student successes, the Newcastle University Boat Club had won the Boat Race of the North 2019

9. The Vice-Chancellor reported that some significant new appointments had been made which included:
   • Professor Jane Robinson, Dean of Engagement and Place.
   • Professor Rene Koglbauer, Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice.
   • Dr Colin Campbell, Executive Director of Academic Affairs.
   • Professor Nic Palmarini, Director of the National Innovation Centre for Ageing.
   • Mrs Adrienne McFarland, Executive Director of People Services.

10. The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on initiatives underway to fulfil the objectives of the University’s core strategies, such as the development of ‘School X’ with a focus on establishing an honours degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences (Education Strategy); the appointment of Newcastle University Academic Track (NUAcT) Fellowships (Research Strategy); examples of how the University is working to help meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Global Strategy); and the continuing development of the Helix and Campus for Ageing and Vitality (Engagement and Place Strategy).

Contributions and questions from the floor:

a. Mr Horace Regnart (LLB, 1968)

   i. Would it be possible for the University to found or contribute to its existing endowment fund 1% of its annual gross income to achieve long term financial self-sufficiency?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor stated that the University recognised the need to put aside University funds to finance future developments and help deliver its strategy. 3% of the annual budget was allocated to University strategic funds which were used for a wide range of strategic initiatives across the University. For 2019/20, this amounted to about £16m. The use of these funds was carefully controlled by Executive Board and Council to ensure the University gained maximum value from our investment.

The University would not be able to add the suggested retained 1% to endowments as by definition an endowment is a donation/bequest and the University cannot make donations to itself. If it did wish to add a percentage of University income to endowment reserves, then it would be placing undue restrictions on University unrestricted funds which was against advice given from the Charity Commission.

University income should be used for the purpose it was originally meant for, which in the
case of government funding, was in year activities for education and research. Diversion to endowment funds would probably put the University in breach of its funding agreements with the government.

b. Mr Mike Thakoordin (BEng Environmental and Ecological Engineering, 1994)

i. What is the University doing for its existing students and staff in the area of improving and safeguarding their mental health?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor that the University took the matter of mental health extremely seriously and had increased its funding for this area as well the number of counsellors to improve the level of access to support. The University worked very closely with the NHS and other external partners to provide a multi-agency approach to mental health support. An Employee and Postgraduate Assistance Programme offered counselling, CBT and other health and wellbeing initiatives.

c. Dr David Parker (PhD Chemistry, 1974)

ii. How had student:staff ratios changed over time and what impact did this have on how much guidance could be provided?

Response:

The University had improved its student:staff ratios over recent years. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University’s student:staff ratio compared well when compared with other Russell Group universities.

d. Mr Mike Thakoordin (BEng Environmental and Ecological Engineering, 1994)

iii. What does the University feel it could do for its alumni in the area of their mental health?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor reported that NU Advancement would be happy to offer an online platform on the NCL Spark website to allow alumni the opportunity to share experiences.

e. Mrs Gretel Dixon (MBA, 2014)

iv. Can the University extend mental health support to international alumni who are attempting to establish start-up businesses when faced with the need to obtain a visa?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor recommended the suggestion be discussed with the Director of Student Health and Wellbeing.

f. Mr Tony Brookes (MSc Applied Sciences, 1973)

v. The University should be commended for its Rise Up (Entrepreneurship) programme that supports graduates opting to start their own business.

Response:
The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University is justifiably proud of its Entrepreneurship programmes and is ranked third in a national table of businesses started by its graduates (Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey). The Vice-Chancellor suggested this would be a useful topic for a further presentation at future meetings of Convocation given that the last two meetings of Convocation had included specific sessions in relation to the University’s Entrepreneurship activities which had been well received.

**g. Mr Harry Watkins (BSc Geography and Geology, 1969)**

vi. To what extent does the University focus its mental health support on issues that are peculiar to the student experience?

**Response:**

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University was keenly aware that young people were most likely to commit suicide between the ages of 18 and 24, although according to statistics, young people were less likely to commit suicide if they were at university. A potential reason for this was the level and range of support provided by universities. The University was working to implement Universities UK Step Change sector-wide framework as a whole university approach to supporting the mental health of students and staff.

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chancellor and President for his presentation.

**6. THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR AND EDUCATION OFFICER OF THE NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ UNION**

Received a presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Education Officer of the Newcastle University Students’ Union

Noted that:

1. The Newcastle University Students' Union works in close partnership with the University to address issues that are important to students, ensuring that the student voice is taken into account in decision-making processes.

2. The University’s students were engaged in an extensive and diverse range of activities, projects and campaigns, including a Black History Month, Disability Sports Campaign, and offering free English language teaching to the refugee community.

3. A key priority for the Students’ Union this year was the Climate Emergency. To underscore this commitment, in 2019, the Students’ Union had fully divested from fossil fuel extracting companies.

4. As a mark of its commitment to values-led activity in which the Students’ Union and University were working together, a Global Social Justice week was to be held in November 2019. This would include a Climate Conversation event focused on co-developing a roadmap for change, and the opening of the new learning and teaching centre on the Newcastle Helix, which had been named the Frederick Douglass Centre in honour of the 19th century social reformer and abolitionist.

**7. AMENDMENTS TO THE STATUTES**

Received a summary of proposed changes to the University Statutes.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document B.]
Noted:

1. That an important underlying drive behind the proposed alterations was to update the language on equality, diversity and inclusion. Some changes had also been proposed to the membership of Council and Senate following an external review of governance.

2. That, with regard to Convocation, changes were proposed for the Chair and Deputy Chair of Convocation to bring the term of office into line with the term of office for lay members of Council and Court; to clarify the mechanism to be used for determining the procedure for electing the Chair and Deputy Chair; and to enable Convocation to include online participation in decisions.

3. The proposed changes would next be considered by Senate, Council and Court prior to being sent to the Privy Council for final approval.

*Resolved that Convocation endorse the proposed changes.*

8. **HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE**

Reported:

That the term of appointment on Honorary Degrees Committee of the alumni representative Dr David Moffatt, had ended on 31 July 2019.

Considered:

A representative from the alumni to join Honorary Degrees Committee.

*Resolved that, following a vote, Mrs Lil Collingham-Clark (BA History, 2010) be elected as the alumni representative on Honorary Degrees Committee.*

9. **CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONVOCATION**

Reported:

The five-year term of office of the current Chair of Convocation, Mr Antony Jones (BA Politics, 1980) had been due to end on 31 July 2019. The five-year term of office of the current Deputy Chair of Convocation, Mr Ally Robson (BA Combined Studies in Arts, 2003) had also been due to end on 31 July 2019. In accordance with Statutes 43 and 49, Convocation would need to hold an election at its meeting in 2019 for the roles of Chair and Deputy Chair. This had been widely promoted to all alumni in 2019 and nominations invited for both roles, so that an election could be held, and appointments made at the meeting of Convocation in 2019.

There were two candidates who had been nominated for the position of Chair of Convocation:

- Mr Hector Macdonald (BSc Physiology and Biochemistry 1977)
- Miss Sophie McDermott (BA Politics and History 2018)

It was also noted that no nominations had been received for the position of Deputy Chair of Convocation. Each candidate for the position of Chair of Convocation was asked to address the meeting briefly. Miss Sophie McDermott was unable to attend the meeting but had asked for a statement on her behalf to be read by Teresa Graham. Following each statement, a ballot took place with the following result:

- Mr Hector Macdonald received 13 Votes
- Miss Sophie McDermott received 28 Votes
Resolved that, following the ballot, Miss Sophie McDermott (BA Politics and History, 2018) be elected as the Chair of Convocation.

10. HONORARY DEGREES AWARDED IN 2018-19

Noted that:

Honorary degrees were conferred on the following individuals at degree ceremonies held on the 16th, 17th and 18th July 2019:

- **DEng** Professor Leo Heller
  United Nations Special Rapporteur

- **DCL** Ms Uma Imam
  Executive Director, the Angelou Centre

- **DLitt** Ms Ali Smith
  Novelist and Playwright

- **DSc** Professor Paul Davies
  Regents' Professor, Arizona State University

- **DSc** Dr Patrick Gallagher
  Chancellor, University of Pittsburgh

- **DHuSc** Sir Liam Donaldson
  Chancellor, Newcastle University

- **MD** Dr Tedros Adhanom-Ghebreyesus
  Director-General, World Health Organisation

- **DMus** Ms Kathryn Tickell
  Musician and Composer

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Noted:

On behalf of the University and its wider community, the Vice-Chancellor thanked the outgoing Chair and Deputy Chair of Convocation for their considerable efforts in supporting the alumni and student community.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Reported that a provisional date for an extraordinary meeting of Convocation to consider the appointment of a new Chancellor had been arranged for Friday 31 January 2020. A provisional date for the sixty-third Ordinary Meeting of Convocation had been arranged for Saturday 10 October 2020. This date would be confirmed in due course.

Dr Simon Meacher
Secretary to Convocation
21 August 2020