

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

29 January 2024

Present: Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Shah Yaseen Ali (President, Students' Union), David Bird, Tom Caulker, Lulu Chen (Education Officer, Students' Union), Linda Conlon, Jan Deckers, Jo Geary, Alex Lamb, Bill MacLeod, Claire Morgan, Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips, Pat Ritchie (Vice-Chair of Council), Angela Russell, Mags Scott, Nitin Shukla, Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Angela Woodburn.

In attendance: Paul Kett (Senior Adviser and Global Director Education and Skills, PwC) and Damien Ashford (Education Lead Partner, PwC) for Item 38, Professor David Burn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Medical Sciences) for Item 39, Lindsey Lockey (Chief Executive, Student's Union) for Item 41, Professor Ruth Valentine (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) for Item 42, Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Nick Collins (Executive Director of Finance), Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Lorraine Mighty (Birmingham University – Observer), and Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services).

Apologies: Dr Shoba Amarnath, Professor Rhiannon Mason.

MINUTES

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in advance of the meeting.

33. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 December 2023.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document A. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that, subject to a minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

34. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Noted that:

1. Management standards for Vibration, First Aid, and Stress, would be considered at the next meeting of University Health and Safety Committee on 15 February 2024.
2. An invitation to tender for delivery of University Occupational Health provision and Employee Assistance Programme had been issued.
3. The University's annual chemical weapons return requested by the Chemical Weapons Convention National Authority had been completed for the 2023 reporting year with nothing of concern to report.

35. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. Members of Council were reminded that a speed networking session with colleagues from the Newcastle University Students' Union would take place later in the day, and that Council's joint away day with Executive Board would be held on Monday 18 March 2024.

36. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor and President's report. Highlights of this report are provided below.

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

Reported that:

1. New Year's Honours

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

Knight Bachelor Emeritus Professor Amritpal Singh Hungin OBE DL. For services to Medicine.

CBE Shirley Rogers (BA Hons Social Studies, 1986; MA Human Resource Management, 1996). Chair of the Board at Scottish Qualifications Authority. For services to Scottish Community Healthcare and to Major Events.

Catriona Schmolke (MPhil Civil Engineering, 2003). CEO and Founder of CharlieFive Ltd and Visiting Professor of Sustainability, Risk and Resilience at Newcastle University. For services to Engineering.

OBE Anthony Bravo (BSc Hons Agriculture and Environmental Science, 1985; PGCE, 1989). Principal of Basingstoke College of Technology. For services to Education.

MBE Richard Bottomley (BA Hons Economics, 1996). Head Teacher at Bradford Alternative Provision Academy. For services to Vulnerable Children and Young People.

Jack Deverson (BA Hons German and Chinese, 2015). Co-Founder and Managing Director, Evidence Based Education. For services to Education.

James Fenny (LLB, 1990). Solicitor at Public Defender Service. For services to Law and Organ Donor Awareness.

Dr Alice Hartley (PhD Molecular Biology, 2020). Consultant Urologist at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust. For services to Medicine.

Melanie John-Ross (MSc Coaching and Mentoring, 2023). Coach and Mentor, Newcastle University. For services to Children and Families in Barnsley.

King's Fire Service Medal Andrew Roe (BA Hons English Literature, 1995). London Fire Brigade Commissioner. For services to the Fire Brigade.

2. Online Data Science

Council received an update on the University's development and delivery of three online MSc programmes in data science.

3. Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

The University has seen a strong performance in the third sector-wide Knowledge Exchange Framework exercise (KEF). The results represented further improvement on good performances in earlier iterations of the exercise. On average, the University performed better against its cluster group in three of the seven perspectives (working with business; working with public and third sector; and public and community engagement), level in three perspectives (IP and commercialisation; research partnerships; and local growth and regeneration). The University performed below the cluster average in the metric for CPD and graduate start-ups but was improving its position from a low base.

Newcastle had also improved its performance in four of the KEF overall metrics (CPD/Continuing Education income; Regeneration and development income; Public and community engagement self-assessment; and Consultancy and facilities income with SME businesses) and gone down in one (licensing and other IP income). Further detailed work was being done to analyse trends at Faculty level, so areas for further continuous improvement could be identified.

4. Health Innovation Neighbourhood

The University continued to await confirmation of the outcome of its bid for funding from the Research Partnership Investment Fund.

5. Teesside Medical School

Heads of Terms had been drafted for a collaboration that would support Teesside University to open a Medical School in 2025. The draft had been considered and supported by Faculty of Medical Sciences Executive Board and colleagues at Teesside, and reviewed by Executive Board. University Education Committee would consider the academic collaboration and report this to Senate in the New Year.

6. International Student Recruitment

Council noted the publication in The Sunday Times a day earlier of an article critiquing international foundation year programmes, which offer international student the opportunity to develop the knowledge needed to progress to an undergraduate degree whilst acclimatizing to university life in the UK. The article was also critical of the use of international agents by UK universities. Newcastle University was a signatory of the Agent Quality Framework, which was jointly led by Universities UK International, the British Council, the UK Council for International Student Affairs, and the British Universities' International Liaison Association.

7. Voluntary Severance Scheme

The University was in the final stages of developing a voluntary severance scheme aimed at reducing the University's recurring spend on its colleague base and reinvesting in areas of strength.

37. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and Registrar provided an update on risks relating to the University's strategic objectives.

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

Noted:

1. Since the December meeting of Council two strategic risks had been updated by their risk owner and reviewed by Executive Board (SR8 – International Student Recruitment; and SR11 – Cybersecurity). There had been no change to the risk scores.
2. It was suggested that the wording of risk names and descriptors could be reviewed ahead of submission of the full strategic risk register to Council in Autumn 2024.

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

STRATEGY AND KPIs

38. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Paul Kett and Damien Ashford (PwC) introduced a discussion on the financial sustainability of the higher education sector.

Noted that:

1. PwC had been commissioned by Universities UK to consider the current financial sustainability of the UK Higher Education sector and its outlook by analysing the 2022/23 regulatory forecasts of participating UUK members and assessing how those forecasts would be impacted by certain sensitivities.
2. The analysis of UUK member forecasts had highlighted that there was provider optimism around sustained international student growth and around expenditure growth falling below historical levels. As a result, most providers were particularly exposed to shocks in international student demand and to persistent inflationary pressures.
3. Reducing cost would continue to be important for all institutions. As meaningful and sustainable measures to reduce cost often required upfront investment and time to implement, many providers would need to make shorter term, tactical decisions to delay necessary investment or reduce provision to protect cashflow.
4. The future of the sector would depend on how well it responded and adapted to change. Opportunities for the sector included responding to future UK government policy and regulation through a focus on articulating the place-based outcomes of HE, and working in collaboration across the tertiary sector, adaptation of existing business models, shifting to forms of alternative delivery, and diversification of income streams.

39. FACULTY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences introduced a discussion.

Noted that:

1. The Faculty had three overarching areas of focus: increasing income (through the recruitment of international students, and commercial partnerships); enhancing the quality of the student experience, research outputs, and professional service support; and reputation (via regional, national, and international visibility and presence).
2. Shaping factors for the Faculty through to 2034 included: alignment with University Strategies & KPIs; responding to the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and local healthcare alliance changes; the external funding landscape and ministerial priorities for medicine; developments in data science and biomedical technology; the Health Innovation Neighbourhood; and equality, diversity, and inclusion.
3. The Faculty's approach to delivering NU Shape placed a focus on more even distribution of teaching across units and individuals; doing less, better (through reviewing non-viable modules/courses, and prioritising areas of excellence and recruitment; and effectiveness and efficiency of professional services.
4. Plans to develop the Faculty's education portfolio included the review of curricula and recruitment pathways in the short-term, and the development of new programmes (including cross-faculty programmes and 2+2 articulations with NUMed) in the medium to long term.
5. Considerations to develop research capacity and capability in the Faculty included extending unit research income targets, increasing the commercialisation of research, and a critical appraisal of estate and equipment requirements.
6. The Faculty was proposing two major multi-unit projects with commercial or funder potential, grounded in areas of excellence – drug discovery and delivery relating to cancer, rare diseases, and antimicrobial resistance; and a hub for healthier lives, involving inter-professional and taught postgraduate opportunities.
7. Since 2020, Newcastle had been home to one of only eight Academic Health Science Centres in the UK – Newcastle Health Innovation Partners. The aim of the Centre was to combine basic and translational health research, clinical care and education and work together to create world-leading improvements in healthcare and wellbeing.

REPORTS

40. FINANCE REPORTS

The Honorary Treasurer and Executive Director of Finance introduced a report from Finance Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had reviewed the business case for the DigECarE building at the Health Innovation Neighbourhood, noting the case had been developed on the assumption of successful receipt of £19.8m of external funding from the Research Partnership Investment Fund. In the absence of confirmation of the funding the Committee had agreed to defer the item.
2. The Committee had also received a presentation from four of the University's investment managers.
3. Further to Council's consideration of the future of Castle Leazes halls of residence at its meeting in October 2023, Finance Committee had considered in detail a proposal for the University to enter into a joint venture arrangement with Unite Students for the

redevelopment of the site. Joint governance arrangements would ensure that the University maintained full visibility over the project progress, costs, and stage gates, updates on which would be provided to Finance Committee and Council. The University would continue to undertake financial viability stress tests relating to the student numbers that could be accommodated, as well as out-turn.

Resolved that Council agreed to proceed with the development of a Framework Agreement that would result in a Joint Venture, subject to satisfactory conclusion of outstanding legal, tax and accounting matters, and agreed to delegate authority to Finance Committee to finalise the approval and signing of the Framework Agreement.

41. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION IMPACT REPORT

The Chief Executive and President of Newcastle University Students' Union introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. The year 2022-23 had seen the launch and beginning of a new Strategic Plan, enabling a renewed focus based upon student feedback. Annual survey results had been positive with overall satisfaction with Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU) at 97%, and 89% of students agreeing that NUSU had had a positive impact on their university experience.
2. Analysis of participation levels suggested that the Students' Union had engaged with 55% of students, and increased participation would be sought going forward. This would be achieved through more outreach, increased presence in schools and building up online engagement where possible.
3. The role of the Students' Union had changed in recent years and now included increased practical support around the cost-of-living crisis and wellbeing support. NUSU leadership believed the Students' Union still needed to focus on engagement, fun activities, and friendship-building to help ensure that some wellbeing needs were met proactively.
4. Members of Council had participated in a tour of the Students' Union earlier in the day and provided positive feedback about the experience.

42. ANNUAL REPORT ON ASSURANCE OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. The report provided a summary of the operation of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards, to demonstrate that the University was meeting national regulatory requirements in this area.
2. The Office for Students (OFS) published a revised regulatory framework in March 2022 with implementation from May 2022, and the organisation of the report had been updated to reflect the revised conditions. The framework covered all higher education courses, at any level (including PGR), any volume of study and included face to face or distance learning or a combination.
3. Upon considering the report at its meeting on 17 January, Senate had been assured that the University was fulfilling the general conditions of registration with the OfS relating to quality

and standards (conditions B1-5). The University had also fulfilled its requirement under condition B6 to take part in the Teaching Excellence Framework in 2023.

4. Data on student outcomes was also being considered via the University's review of compliance with condition A of the OfS regulatory framework, concerning Access and Participation.
5. The University's degree apprenticeship provision was subject to external review by Ofsted, with confirmation of the overall effectiveness being rated as Good in June 2023. Also at institutional level, the Health and Care Professions Council had approved seven programmes across three professions (Dietitian, Practitioner psychologist, and Speech and Language Therapist).

Resolved that Council approve the report.

43. ANNUAL EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION REPORT

The Executive Director of People Services introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received the University's annual Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion report. The report provided an update against progress on Public Sector Equality Duty Equality Objectives and EDI priorities for the year ahead. A summary of the institution's Gender Pay Gap report was also provided.
2. It was suggested that the report could articulate more clearly what difference had been made by measures that had been implemented.
3. It was acknowledged that the University aspired to enhance its approach to data collection and was working on building colleague trust in disclosure.

Resolved that Council endorse the report.

44. REPORT OF AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the January meeting of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. At its most recent meeting on 18 January, the Committee had received an update on the Cyber Security Programme and Accountability Framework. The programme had implemented a robust delivery structure, and excellent progress was being made against the workstreams within its scope.

45. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Received a report from Nominations Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. Nominations Committee had agreed to recommend to Council the re-appointment of three individuals as members of Council.

Resolved that Council approve the re-appointment of Angela Russell as Honorary Treasurer from 1 August 2024 until 31 July 2027.

Resolved that Council approve the re-appointment of Linda Conlon and Marta Phillips as members of Council from 1 August 2024 until 31 July 2027.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

46. ANNUAL REPORT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY

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

47. SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 17 JANUARY 2024

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

[Secretary's Note: A Chair's Circular was issued on 9 February 2024, with a single item of business as detailed below]

48. ACCEPTANCE OF A DONATION

Resolved that Council approve the acceptance of a donation from Santander Universities.