NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
THE SIXTY-THIRD ORDINARY MEETING OF CONVOCATION
Saturday 10 October 2020

Present: Ms S McDermott (in the chair) and Mr Faris Alumutawah; Mr Lyttleton Barrett; Mr David Bowskill; Mr Richard Caine; Mr Ian Campbell; Miss Maura Candelier Vargas; Mr Pablo Charro de la Fuente; Dr Helen Coyne; Mr Kushal Dammannagaru; Mr Gabriel Diaz Castilho; Ms Suzanne Foster; Mr Ludjero Garcia; Mr Richard Gee; Dr David Golding; Mr Sammani Idris; Mr Adam Jowett; Mr Peter Kelly; Mr Sotaro Kobayashi; Mr Revocatus Kuluchumila; The Revd John Latham; Mr Donald Lloyd; Mr Stuart Makemson; Mr Samer Mitri; Mr Chun Wee Ng; Mrs Karen Nickel; Dr Bonahis Oko; Professor David Parker; Professor Dimitris Pavlidis; Mr Haaris Qureshi; Mr Nick Richardson; Mr Ethem Sakioglu; Mrs Jo Scriven; Mr Alberto Testoni; Mr Bruce Tozer; Mrs Suzanne Wright; Ms Yuxiao Yang.

In attendance: Professor David Burn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences); Dr Colin Campbell (Executive Director of Academic Affairs); Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President); Professor Nigel Harkness (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences); Dr John Hogan (Registrar); Mrs Lauren Huntington (Assistant Director, NU Advancement); Professor Anya Hurlbert (Dean of Advancement); Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office and Governance Manager); Mrs Angela Mulvenna (Operations Administrator); Mrs Lucy Pritchard (Alumni Relations Manager); Ms Aerian Rogers (Acting Director of NU Advancement); Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor); Mrs Sam Taylor (Executive Assistant).

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the sixty-third ordinary meeting of Convocation which was held on Zoom.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 12 October 2019 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 VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S STATEMENT 2019-20

Received: The Vice-Chancellor and President’s Annual Report to Convocation, 10 October 2020.

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor reported on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the University, together with the steps taken by the University to respond and recover. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic had increased the government’s emphasis on
universities’ economic and social contribution, and as a result the University was working with key partners to support regional economic, social and cultural recovery and renewal.

2. In terms of student recruitment for 2020-21, after two periods of Confirmation and Clearing the University had met its institutional target for home undergraduate students and had also exceeded its international undergraduate target. Looking ahead to 2021-22, recruitment of students from mainland Europe would be challenged as they switched from home to international fees post-Brexit.

3. The University had implemented an Education Resilience Framework to guide the development of taught modules and programmes for 2020-21. This featured a combination of online and present-in person on-campus learning activities where these could be delivered safely. The University was following government guidance to adjust the level of present-in-person teaching according to the Covid-19 infection rate, and was working closely with local public health officials on its approach. In parallel, a Student Experience Resilience Framework had been introduced to support the full student lifecycle from admission, registration, induction, student services, academic progression and employment.

4. The Vice-Chancellor provided Convocation with a summary of the University’s current financial position in light of the impact of the pandemic, and the measures that had been taken to safeguard the financial standing of the University for the longer term.

5. Maintaining research ambition and delivering on the implementation of University Research Strategy was another key priority for the year ahead. A range of measures had been introduced to maintain capacity through the pandemic, restore activity (through blended working and recruitment to the Newcastle University Academic Track programme, for example), and resuming the trajectory of strategic aims for research through alignment with the government’s research and development roadmap and connecting with regional regeneration.

6. Highlights during the past year had included:

- The appointment of Imtiaz Dharker as Chancellor of the University;
- 10th anniversary of Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed);
- The opening of the Frederick Douglass Centre by Kenneth B Morris Jr, the great, great, great grandson of the abolitionist;
- The University’s first ever virtual graduation ceremony for medical students to enable them to join the effort to combat Covid-19;
- Achievement of Institutional Athena Swan status;
- The inaugural Climate Conversation in November 2019;
- THE Impact Ranking of 11th in the world for leadership in sustainable development;
- Real Living Wage Foundation accreditation.

7. Special congratulations were offered by the Vice-Chancellor to some individual members of staff and students for their successes over the past year:

- Dr Meenakshi Choudhary: shortlisted for Asian Women of Achievement Award
- Professor Muzz Haniffa: awarded 2019 Foulkes Foundation Prize
- Professor Jackie Kay: awarded CBE in the New Year’s Honours List
- Eleanor Norton: Zoology student who received a Best Neighbour on Campus award for her role in setting up a support group to assist vulnerable villagers in Burnhope
• Dr Katherine Rietig: named British Academy Watson Fellow
• Professor Sally Shortall: elected as President of the International Rural Sociology Association
• Masitano Sichone: graduate who received the Duke of York Young Entrepreneur of the Year award for Spareable, an app that lets community foodbanks send out notifications when essential items are low in numbers
• Professor Brian Walker: appointed Chair of the Medical Research Council Population and Systems Medicine Board

8. In terms of collective student successes, volunteers from student-run group North East Solidarity and Teaching had provided online support to over 400 asylum seekers during lockdown; and University students had also set up the North East group of Medical Students Helping Hands, giving practical help to frontline workers during the Covid-19 outbreak.

9. The Vice-Chancellor reported that some significant new appointments had been made which included:

• Professor Dawn Craig: appointed new Director of National Institute for Health Research Innovation Observatory
• Professor Grainne Gorman: appointed Director of Newcastle’s Wellcome Centre for Mitochondrial Research
• Owen Hopkins: appointed Director of the Farrell Centre for Architecture and Cities
• Professor Sherry Coutu: appointed Visiting Goldman Professor

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 Dimitris Pavlidis (PhD, Applied Science, 1976)

i. What are the University’s plans for strengthening its commitment to in-campus and off-campus international student experience and education?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor stated that the university had set itself an ambitious goal to increase the number of students who benefit from international mobility. We aim to double the percentage of undergraduate graduating students that have gained an international mobility experience. Now with Covid we are looking at how we can do more in the area of virtual mobility. By doing this we open up international experience to a wider cross section of students. 27% of our staff are international and therefore can bring their perspectives into the classroom. On the campus or in the city, we also have international food days and hold international events, the biggest of which is the Chinese new year celebration. At our campuses in Singapore and Malaysia we try to replicate these types of activities. We internationally co-teach courses. For example we run modules of our postgraduate ‘World Politics and Popular Culture’ course with York University in Canada. These are just a handful of examples across our many schools, undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.
b. Mr Pablo Charro de la Fuente (B)

i. In light of the tragic events that happened last weekend, how is the University planning to inform students about the safe use of drugs and how is it planning to support the ambition of the Students’ Union to provide free drug tests (in terms of resources and funding)?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor stated that the health and safety of students was the University’s utmost priority. The University had increased its funding for student health and wellbeing, including the number of counsellors available to improve the level of access to support. The University was currently reviewing its arrangements for student support and relevant policies.

c. Mr Nick Richardson (BSc Zoology, 1977)

ii. What is the University doing to put in place measures to ensure that any future attacks on the IT platforms will not succeed in collecting data or bringing down any IT systems?

Response:

The Vice-Chancellor provided a summary of measures that the University was taking in response to a major cyber attack. A ‘Gold Command’ structure had been introduced to oversee and manage mitigating activity and recovery. Most services and servers that had been affected were now operational again. The University was taking appropriate steps to harness and gain learning from the experience of the cyber attack, and had identified a number of key practices to correct, in order to prevent a recurrence.

5. DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONVOCATION

Reported:

‘The convocation, from its own members, shall elect a chair and may elect a deputy chair, under procedures as the court may from time to time decide, taking into account any recommendation from convocation. The chair and deputy chair shall respectively hold office for three years. Any retiring chair or deputy chair shall be eligible for re-election subject to not holding the post for more than nine consecutive years in total. Neither the chair nor the deputy chair shall be a member of the salaried staff of the University.’

The Chair invited expressions of interest from alumni who wished to learn more about the role of Deputy Chair.

6. AMENDMENTS TO THE STATUTES

Noted that:

The changes to the University Statutes, considered by Convocation at its last meeting, were approved by the Privy Council on 21 July 2020.

7. DEATHS AND OBITUARIES

Noted that:
A list of deaths was available on the Alumni website.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Noted:

There was no other business.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

   Reported that a provisional date for the sixty-fourth Ordinary Meeting of Convocation had been arranged for Saturday 9 October 2021. This date would be confirmed in due course.

Dr Simon Meacher  
Secretary to Convocation  
November 2020