

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

THE SIXTY-FIFTH ORDINARY MEETING OF CONVOCATION

Saturday 26 November 2022

Present: Sophie McDermott (in the chair), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President) and 95 other members of Convocation.

In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar); Lauren Huntington (Deputy Director, NU Advancement); Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office; and Paul Tyack (Director of NU Advancement).

1. WELCOME

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

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 9 October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document A.]

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising to report.

4. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT TO CONVOCATION FOR 2021-22

Received: The Vice-Chancellor and President's Annual Report to Convocation.

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor provided Convocation with an update on the University's performance in the past year and notable developments.
2. The University was performing well in domestic and international rankings. In results published on 16 September, the University had improved its overall ranking in the Times Good University Guide to 33rd, up 9 places from last year, and had risen to joint 139th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (from 146th).
3. In the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2022, the University had been first in the UK and eighth in the world for its performance on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The University had been ranked 18th in the inaugural QS World University Rankings: Sustainability, a new ranking evaluating how universities are taking action to tackle the world's most pressing environmental and social issues
4. Recent causes for celebration included a Race Equality Charter Bronze award, being ranked 5th in the UK for graduate start-up turnover, and Newcastle being voted as the best student city in the country. The University had also been shortlisted for University of the Year in this year's Times Higher Education Awards in recognition of its commitment to Social and Environmental Justice. The University had also achieved its highest ever place in the national British Universities and Colleges Sport league.

5. A summary was provided of the University's current financial position and draft results for 2021-22.
6. The government's November fiscal statement had placed universities at the heart of plans for growth, committing to investing £20bn per year on research and development 2024/25, proposing new investment zones based around universities, and offering the possibility of a new devolution deal for the North East region.
7. The student experience remained a high priority for the University following a disappointing series of student survey results. There was a strong focus on student wellbeing and belonging, with the introduction of student wellbeing advisors in schools, a new Survivor Support Service for students affected by hate crime, sexual violence and spiking, and extensive cost of living support.
8. In terms of the University's three faculties, Medical Sciences had achieved notable research funding successes, including the award of £23m for a National Institute of Care and Health Research Biomedical Research Centre. A £110m redevelopment of the Stephenson Building was underway to make it a place for future engineers, researchers, designers and visionaries to tackle the world's challenges together. In Humanities and Social Sciences, the Business School was celebrating reaccreditation for a five year period from EQUIS, one of the three major global accreditations.
9. In partnership with Northumbria University, the Into University Newcastle centre had opened in the west end of the city, with the aim of raising aspirations of 7-18 year olds among the city's most disadvantaged communities.
10. The University was leading the Institute of Electrification and Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing (IESAM), providing vital skills training to support our region's ambition to be the centre of the UK's electrification industry.
11. In response to global crises, the University had worked with the Council for At Risk Academics to provide safety and shelter for Ukrainian academics, provided new Sanctuary Scholarships for students and partnered with National University of Water and Environmental Engineering in Western Ukraine to help rebuild capacity.
12. A new Campaign for Newcastle had been launched, with highlights so far including generous donations for our Sanctuary programmes in response to the war in Ukraine, substantial support for Biomedical Engineering equipment in the Stephenson Building, and over £460k donated by alumni and many others to the new Newcastle Student Fund, with thousands of student beneficiaries across the University.
13. The University's alumni community had grown past the 250,000 mark, with 16 alumni networks around the world and more due to be launched.

Contributions and questions:

1. A member of Convocation enquired about the University's values in relation to climate change. In response, the Vice-Chancellor outlined the institution's commitment to social and environmental justice as a core value and its pathway to achieving Net Zero by 2030 through its Climate Action Plan. The Vice-Chancellor also spoke about the University's world-leading research in sustainability and the development of degree programmes in support of climate education.
2. A member of Convocation asked how the University was measuring the performance of staff and nurturing their development to ensure the institution remained competitive. In response, the Vice-Chancellor talked about the University's new Conversations and

Priorities initiative, through which colleagues would have structured conversations with their manager to agree tangible priorities and goals, helping colleagues to perform at their best and to contribute to the future of the University.

3. A member of Convocation asked the Vice-Chancellor to describe how continuing uncertainty about the UK's association with the European Union's Horizon Europe research programme was affecting the University. The University's position, in keeping with the sector as a whole, is to remain hopeful of full association, and it was understood that a decision would be made by the government in January 2023. In the meantime, the government was setting aside £2bn per year to funding international partnerships and collaborations. There would be significant downsides for UK universities should association with Horizon Europe be abandoned.
4. A member of Convocation asked the Vice-Chancellor about the ongoing performance of the University's PARTNERS programme, whereby eligible students were supported to make a successful application to the University. The PARTNERS programme had been running since 2000 and was one of the most well-established supported entry routes to higher education of its kind. It was one of several initiatives that the University had to address retention in the region. Over 8,000 students had entered the University via this route.
5. A member of Convocation asked the Vice-Chancellor to provide more detail about the University's plans to increase its recurring income. At present, the University received the majority of its recurring income from research funding and student fee income, and its ambition was to maximise both, particularly with respect to unregulated income derived from attracting more international students. The size of the international student population at Newcastle lagged behind comparator universities.

5. SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH THE COST OF LIVING

Received: a presentation on, delivered by Paul Tyack (Director of Advancement) on behalf of Naomi Oosman-Watts (Director of Student Success).

Noted that:

1. An action-focused Cost of Living Working Group had been convened by the Academic Registrar involving Sabbatical Officers, Newcastle University Students' Union staff and key stakeholders. The purpose of the group was to develop a package of support for all students to offset the impact of the cost of living increase on the student education experience.
2. The key elements of the scheme included a range of financial measures in the form of emergency bursaries, an increase in hardship funding, a stipend uplift for research postgraduates, and city-wide student discounts.
3. Alongside the work within the institution, work with Northumbria and Durham universities was taking place to share practice and leverage support from the city and region for additional measures.
4. The Students' Union had also launched a cost of living crisis campaign, and a range of support and guidance was available. For example, students were being encouraged to apply for a Participation Bursary to remove financial barriers from impacting on students' experience and, with University support, a Food Pantry (food bank) had been launched.

6. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

Received: a presentation from the Newcastle University Students' Union, delivered by Meg Howe (Student Media Officer).

Noted that:

1. Convocation was provided with a summary of the Students' Union's values and priorities, the latter being improving the student experience, supporting mental health and wellbeing, prioritising accessibility and inclusion, and the cost of living crisis.
2. This autumn the Students' Union had staged the first in person Freshers' Week since 2019. In 2023, there would be a series of celebratory events taking place to mark 75 years of student media.
3. Another notable highlight of the Students' Union activity included North East Solidarity and Teaching, a multi-award winning and internationally recognised project that empowers the refugee community in the region through English teaching, sports and creative arts.
4. In support of student welfare, a new Student Support and Advice Hub had been launched, as a physical and digital space for information, advice, and guidance, with three student wellbeing ambassadors alongside professional staff.

7. CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONVOCATION

Reported:

- (i) That the three year term of office of the Chair of Convocation, Sophie McDermott (BA Politics and History, 2018) had come to an end.
- (ii) That in accordance with Statute 43, '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.'
- (iii) In accordance with principles agreed by Court, an election was held online between Thursday 29 September and Friday 13 October 2022.
- (iv) Nick Richardson had been elected as Chair, and Clare Talbot-Jones had been elected as Deputy Chair.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. The outgoing Chair, and new Chair and Deputy Chair of Convocation offered some closing remarks.
2. It was suggested by the new Chair that the next ordinary meeting of Convocation should be held in Spring 2024.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Reported that the date for the sixty-sixth ordinary meeting of Convocation would be confirmed in due course.

Dr Simon Meacher
Secretary to Convocation
November 2022