

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

18 November 2020

- Present:** The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Professor David Burn, Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Brian Walker and Professor Phillip Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Professor Ashley Adamson, Nadia Ahmed (Welfare and Equality Officer, Students' Union), Dr Shoba Amarnath, Dr Vanessa Armstrong, Miss Lucy Backhurst, Dr Bruce Baker, Charlotte Boulton (Postgraduate Officer, Students' Union), Dorothy Chirwa (President, Students' Union), Sian Dickie (Education Officer, Students' Union), Professor Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon, Dr Barbara Eberth, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Dr Carmen Hubbard, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Ms Claire Morgan, Dr Julie Morris, Dr Joanne Smith-Finley, Professor Konstantinos Stellos, Dr David Stewart, Professor David Thwaites, Professor Stefano Utili, Professor Aad van Moorsel.
- In attendance:** Dr Colin Campbell (Executive Director of Academic Affairs), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Ms Louella Houldcroft (Acting Head of Corporate Affairs), Mrs Adrienne McFarland (Executive Director of People Services), Professor Jane Robinson (Dean of Engagement and Place), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office and Governance Manager).
- Apologies:** Professor Nils Braakmann, Jenny Johnstone, Professor Ted Schrecker, and Professor Daniel Siemens.

MINUTES

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

18. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 23 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

19. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

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

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

Reported:

1. COVID-19

The University was focused on the development of an asymptomatic testing facility to enable students to make better informed decisions about their behaviours as they return home ahead of the winter vacation. The facility would be operational by the end of November. Following the lifting of the national lockdown on 2 December, students would

be allowed to return home during a designated travel window of 4-9 December. A two-week accommodation rebate had been agreed for those living in University-owned residences who were leaving Newcastle in the travel window. The University would be introducing a programme of support for students who would remain in Newcastle over the winter break.

The Covid-19 infection rate remained a concern in the local community, where there were circa 4 cases per 1000 people. The number of cases confirmed within the University community were significantly below the rate of prevalence for comparable age groups in Newcastle as a whole.

As a result of the pandemic colleagues had experience a number of changes and disruption to their working lives. This would have longer term impacts on their careers. The University had produced Covid-19 Impact Statement setting out how it would fairly and consistently approach decision-making during key people processes.

2. Race Equality Charter (REC)

Senate received a summary of progress towards the University's submission for an Advance HE Race Equality Charter Bronze Award by July 2022. Successful delivery of the REC Action Plan would rely on a number of colleagues (including Heads of Unit and university committees) and student leaders across the institution being able to dedicate time to achieve the targets. There was a heartening level of buy-in across the institution and a shared desire to make progress at pace.

3. Early Pulse Survey

An update on the outcomes of the survey was provided by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, Executive Director Academic Affairs, and Students' Union sabbatical officers. The purpose of the survey had been to carry out a short sense check of the views of taught students at all Newcastle campuses about their learning experience. The survey had achieved a response rate of just over 30%.

In terms of the headline outcomes, only 35% of students felt connected with teaching staff – reflecting how programmes were being delivered – whilst just 27% felt connected with other students, suggesting that students were missing the informal opportunities to engage with their peers. The scores provided an opportunity to improve provision for Semester 2.

The results had been distributed to academic units and, together with the outcomes of a Students' Union campaign survey on supporting students, would be considered in detail at the next meeting of University Education Committee.

4. Times Higher Awards 2020

The University had been shortlisted for four Times Higher awards: David de la Haye (Outstanding Technician of the Year), Dr Heather Smith and Professor David Graham (both for Research Project of the Year), and Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year. The awards would be announced at a virtual ceremony on 26 November 2020.

5. Head of School Appointments

Professor Annie Tindley had been appointed as the new Head of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology and took up her appointment on 1 November 2020.

Professor Jo Robinson had been appointed as the Head of School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, and would start her appointment in February 2021.

6. Semester 2 Planning

The Vice-Chancellor reported that Executive Board had been discussing what approach the University should take to the delivery of the student experience in Semester 2. The plan was to revert to the Education Resilience Framework approved by Senate, which would mean that each student would receive at least three hours of Present-in-Person teaching on-campus per week. This would be governed by advice from the local Director of Public Health and the prevailing situation with Covid-19 infection rates among the University's student and colleague population as well as the local community. A meeting about the proposal would take place with trade unions over the coming days.

Noted that students in some subject areas were finding synchronous online provision effective in helping them to structure their own time and feel more productive as a result. However, not all students were receiving the same signposting to support their learning that they would have done under normal conditions. Colleagues were encouraged to make use of resources that the University had developed to help in structuring the teaching week.

7. Cowie Scholarships

Reported that the University was partnering with the Cowrie Scholarship Foundation to provide scholarships for at least three students over a decade from 2021. Any Black British student who successfully gained a place to study any undergraduate degree course at Newcastle University from October 2021 could apply for the funding. The University would cover tuition fees while the Cowrie Scholarship Foundation would cover maintenance and living costs through links with business and individual donors. The Foundation would also provide mentorship, role models, and resilience programmes for the students.

8. Staff Successes

Senate recorded congratulations to:

Professor Phil Blythe (Professor of Intelligent Transport Systems, and Chief Scientific Adviser, Department of Transport), who had been made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Dr Rob Forsyth (Senior Lecturer in Child Neurology), who had been awarded a £1.15m grant from the NIHR's Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation Programme for work on seizure control

Dr Clare Guilding (Dean of Academic Affairs, NUMed), Professor Simon Tate (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) and Dr Iain Keenan (School of Medical Education), who had been made National Teaching Fellows. This was the second consecutive year three Newcastle academics had been elected as fellows. At the same time the University's E-Learning Unit in the School of Mathematics, Statistics and Physics had won a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence.

Professor Ian Haynes (Professor of Archaeology), who had been elected as a Fellow of the Academia Europaea.

Professor Fiona Matthews (Professor of Epidemiology, Ageing and Geroscience) and Professor John Pendlebury (Professor of Urban Conservation), who had been elected Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Professor Sinead Morrissey (Director of the Newcastle Centre for Literary Arts), who had been awarded the Gdansk European Poet of Freedom Literary Award 2020.

Professors Helen Reeves and Fiona Oakley, in collaboration with Dr Marco Zaki from Minia University, Egypt, who had won the 2020 Newton Prize for their international study into liver cancer.

9. University Research and Innovation Committee

Resolved that Senate approve a change to the Terms of Reference of University Research and Innovation Committee to add the Faculty Deans of Postgraduate Studies as members, which would support the consideration of Postgraduate Research matters.

10. Senate representatives on Senate sub-committees and other University committees

Noted that at the last meeting of Senate on 23 September 2020, members of Senate had been invited to nominate themselves for vacancies for representatives on Senate sub-committees and other University committees. A total of six expressions of interest had been received: two women and four men. In two of the cases the individuals expressed an interest in more than one of the committees available. The Registrar had written to all of the candidates to explain the situation and two of the men decided not to run. In addition, the two that had expressed an interest in more than one committee agreed to be put forward for a single committee.

Resolved that Senate approved the following appointments:

<i>Environment and Sustainability Committee</i>	<i>Professor Stefano Utili</i>
<i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee</i>	<i>Jenny Johnstone</i>
<i>University Engagement and Place Committee</i>	<i>Professor Aad van Moorsel</i>
<i>University Global Committee</i>	<i>Dr Jo Smith Finley</i>

11. Office for Students Quality and Standards

Reported that the Office for Students, as regulator for higher education in England, had announced a consultation on plans to set new, more challenging requirements for student outcomes, and new definitions of 'quality' and 'standards' setting out what universities needed to do to satisfy the OfS conditions of registration. A consultation was open until 12 January 2021, and the University's response would be coordinated by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. A draft of the response would be circulated to Senators for comment.

Universities UK had also launched a task force to develop a charter to help ensure they take a consistent and transparent approach to identifying and improving potentially low value or low quality courses. UUK had also announced a commitment that, in the longer term, universities would also consider options for external assurance or independent review to make their processes stronger.

Agreed that Senate would hold a White Space discussion on the quality and standards of programmes at one of its meetings early in 2021.

12. Newcastle University London

The Vice-Chancellor informed Senate that discussions with INTO University Partnerships regarding the future of the NU London joint venture were reaching their conclusion. The University was hopeful that an agreement could be reached very shortly, after which colleagues at NU London would be informed. Senators would receive further information about this matter as soon as possible afterwards.

20. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 19 OCTOBER 2020

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 19 October 2020.

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

21. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CENTRES OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources.

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

Noted that:

1. The proposed Centre for Climate & Environmental Resilience (CCER) would be a transdisciplinary centre of excellence in environmental and societal issues resulting from intensifying global change. The University was extremely well-placed to lead on climate and environmental resilience because of its diverse research base across natural, social and medical sciences, as well as its strong tradition of engagement with policy, locally, nationally and globally. The NUCoRE would draw together dispersed expertise from across the university, focus on integrated policy and systems-approaches, enabling the application for large upcoming funding streams and delivering impact locally, nationally and internationally.
2. The importance of Rare Disease was increasingly being appreciated by the NHS, industry, research funders, policy makers and others. Newcastle had a long and distinguished history of both research and clinical care in diseases which were rare. Historically, however, the University had neither developed links between the different rare disease areas, nor fully explored their broader aspects, looking across disease lines to their impact on people and their families and the attitude and degree of awareness of society.

Resolved to approve the Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence in Climate and Environmental Resilience, and in Rare Diseases.

22. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate received a detailed report on the University's performance in the 2020 National Student Survey, including analysis of subject-level results and free text comments. Although many subject areas continued to perform well, overall the results demonstrated a serious continuing decline in the University's performance in absolute terms and when compared both to the higher education sector and the Russell Group.

2. In all nine question domains there had been a decrease in the number of subject areas within the top quartile since 2018, with significant decline for Teaching on my Course, Assessment and Feedback, Organisation and Management, and Overall Satisfaction, for which Newcastle was in the third quartile nationally. For Teaching on my Course and Organisation and Management, the number of subject areas in the fourth quartile had doubled since 2019. There had been an increase in the number of subject areas that had moved into the fourth quartile for Assessment and Feedback.
3. A total of 1889 positive and 1854 negative comments had been received. When categorised under question domain headings in accordance with the survey, particular areas for concern were Assessment and Feedback and Organisation and Management. 27% of all negative comments referenced industrial action.
4. The survey outcomes had been used as key metrics in the Guardian and Sunday Times Good University Guides, and contributed significantly to the University's position of 51st (down from 35th in 2019) and joint 31st (down from 28th in 2019) respectively. Early UCAS data suggested that Newcastle's performance in these league tables may adversely affect 2021 recruitment.
5. Action plans had been developed in response to 2019 results and were in train prior to the significant pivot in delivery required as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. While some 2019 actions could still be pursued, it was no longer appropriate or possible for others to continue given the very significant focus on delivery of programmes of blended more. Academic units would now need to reflect on the 2020 outcomes. Reporting would take place through the Annual Monitoring and Review process, with a key focus on Assessment and Feedback, Student Voice and Learning Community.
6. Senators observed that the University had held similar conversations about National Student Survey results over consecutive years. A marked change in approach to arrest the decline in performance was now required.
7. Senate discussed factors that could have influenced this year's survey results. Poor communication about what had been changed in response to feedback raised by students could be a contributing factor in declining satisfaction.
8. In terms of ways in which the University might seek to improve its survey performance, it was suggested that diversification and decolonisation of the curriculum could help students to feel more recognised, which in turn may lead to an increase in satisfaction.
9. Senate agreed that the University as a whole needed to become far more effective at sharing good practice within the institution and learning from what had worked well at discipline level at other universities. Consideration should be given to the enhancement of existing and development of additional opportunities/platforms to allow the sharing of information and good practice. Student input, partnership and co-creation of the educational experience, such as the collaboration between the University's Futures Group and Students' Union sabbatical officers on assessment and feedback, would be crucial.

23. QUALITY AND STANDARDS ASSURANCE REPORT

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education on behalf of Executive Board.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The paper provided a summary of the operation in 2019-20 of the University's framework for assuring academic quality and standards, to provide a basis for Senate, and ultimately Council as the governing body of the University, to confirm that the framework was effective.
2. The report highlighted the impact of Covid-19 which presented considerable challenges in the operation of assessment from March 2020 onwards, and led to a significant increase in programme suspensions reflecting rationalisation of the programme portfolio for 2020-21.

Resolved that, based on the information provided in Document F, a recommendation be made to Council that an effective framework for managing academic quality and standards is in place and had been implemented in 2019-20.

24. DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education on behalf of Executive Board.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The report had been produced in response to a Statement of Intent published in May 2019 by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA). This had proposed that providers should publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and providing additional information and evaluation of related aspects of quality assurance and enhancement. Universities UK had asked that all institutions publish Degree Outcomes Statements by the end of the 2020 calendar year.
2. The proportion of First Class degrees awarded by the University for level 6 and 7 Honours degrees had increased by 28% since last year, up to 32% overall in 2020 (25% in 2019). However, the University had consistently awarded a smaller proportion of Firsts than its Russell Group comparators, and had seen a smaller increase in the proportion of Firsts awarded over the last 12 academic years. Senate noted that University Education Committee would shortly be considering an analysis of the rise in the award of First Class degrees at Newcastle, with the intention of a further confidential report being made available in time for the meeting of Council on 14 December 2020. Sector level data is not yet available so comparison is not possible.
3. Considered suggestions from Senators for factors that might have had a bearing on degree classifications in 2020. Students may have been able to spend more time preparing for exams, therefore increasing their chances of obtaining a higher mark.

Resolved that Senate endorse the Degree Outcomes Statement for submission to Council.

25. REPORT FROM STUDENT FINANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education on behalf of Executive Board.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. EU, other EEA and Swiss national students would no longer be eligible for home fee status, and financial support from Student Finance England for courses starting in 2021/22, and would instead be designated as International fee status.

2. The change to international fee status, combined with the loss of access to student loans was likely to significantly impact the student intake unless other measures were put in place.
3. The University was proposing to develop a legally compliant scholarship, bursary and fee discount strategy to achieve agreed EU student recruitment targets.

26. WHITE SPACE

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor invited members of Senate to submit suggestions for future agenda items in addition to the upcoming discussion on quality and standards referred to in Minute 19 above.

27. PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR SCIENCE, AGRICULTURE AND ENGINEERING

Received a report from the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. In accordance with Standing Order X, the Vice-Chancellor had recommended to Senate and Council the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor Science, Agriculture and Engineering.
2. Further in accordance with Standing Order X, a joint selection committee would be established to consider the appointment to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor post, comprising the Vice-Chancellor (in the chair), three members appointed by Council, and three members appointed by Senate. The three members appointed by Senate would be: Professor Natalio Krasnogor (School of Computing), Professor Sally Shortall (School of Natural and Environmental Sciences) and Professor Stefano Utili (School of Engineering).

Resolved that Senate approve the arrangements for the appointment of a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Science, Agriculture and Engineering, and the appointment to the joint selection committee of the three representatives of Senate named above.

28. ACADEMIC DISTINCTIONS – TITLE OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS (STATUTE 29(4))

Reported that, in accordance with Statute 29(4), Senate may accord the title of Professor Emeritus on professors retiring from the University.

Considered a proposal from the Vice-Chancellor and President following consultation with the relevant Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, for the conferment of the title of Professor Emeritus.

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

Resolved that the title of Professor Emerita be conferred on:

Professor Janet Wilson, with effect from 1 December 2020

Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on:

Professor Brian Lunn, with effect from 1 May 2021

29. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE

Received a report from the meeting of:

- a) University Education Committee held on 25 August, 16 September, 28 September and 14 October 2020
- b) University Engagement and Place Committee held on 28 September 2020
- c) University Global Committee held on 28 September 2020
- d) University Research and Innovation Committee held on 14 September 2020
[Circulated with the agenda as Documents L-O. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

30. SENATE EFFECTIVENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Received the report of the Senate Effectiveness Questionnaire for 2019-20.

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

31. REPORTED BUSINESS

Received a report of action taken in accordance with agreed procedures, approved where necessary by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate and/or the Chair of Council, and by other University bodies and Chairs.

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