

# NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

## SENATE

20 January 2021

**Present:** The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost), Professor David Burn, Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Jane Robinson, 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), Professor Nils Braakmann, Dorothy Chirwa (President, Students' Union), Sian Dickie (Education Officer, Students' Union), Professor Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon, Dr Barbara Eberth, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Dr Carmen Hubbard, Jenny Johnstone, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Ms Claire Morgan, Dr Julie Morris, Professor Ted Schrecker, Professor Daniel Siemens, Dr Joanne Smith-Finley, 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), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office and Governance Manager).

**Apologies:** Professor Konstantinos Stellos.

## MINUTES

### 32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

### 33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 18 November 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to one minor amendment, and signed.

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

### 34. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

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

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Reported:

#### 1. COVID-19

Members of Senate continued to receive the regular updates provided by Executive Board. At the meeting the Vice-Chancellor reported on current Covid-19 infection rates in the Newcastle community and the number of cases reported by the University. Senate discussed the problem of students having to pay substantial rent for unoccupied private accommodation or being required by their landlords to return to the accommodation

against their wishes. Senate noted that the higher education sector was lobbying government about these issues. Locally the university was working to protect students' interests together with Northumbria University and Newcastle City Council, and has been in correspondence with accommodation providers and the national landlords' association.

2. NU London

The University had announced the closure of the NU London operation from 30 September 2021 on 25 November. Following consultation, a significant number of current Stage 2 students expressed concerns over the decision, particularly related to the lack of confirmed alternatives available to them for those who want/have to stay in London in order to complete their degree. The timing of the announcement, combined with HEI entrance requirements, meant that options for transfer of NUL stage 2 students into stage 3 at another institution were limited. Many students were not able or did not wish to transfer to Newcastle University Business School as they had chosen NU London as a Russell Group university based in London. Executive Board had therefore agreed that a feasibility study should be undertaken for current stage 2 students to be taught out in London until July 2022.

3. Climate Action Plan

At its meeting on 10 November 2020, Executive Board had approved a Climate Action Plan for the University. The Plan, which had been developed in consultation with students, academics and professional services colleagues, set out a path to net zero CO2 emissions by 2040 as a result of University activities through reducing carbon expelled into and/or removing carbon out of the atmosphere. The plan included sector-leading carbon reduction targets and introduced the concept of an institutional Carbon Budget in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement. Members of Senate suggested that the higher education sector should lobby the Universities Superannuation Scheme to move towards making greater use of sustainable investments.

4. Brexit

Senate received an update from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global on the implications for research and student mobility of the trade deal with the European Union announced by the UK government in December 2020. As an associated country, the UK would be able to participate fully in Horizon Europe, providing access to research funding. As a university, Newcastle would need to forge a plan to increase its success rate in the programme.

Senate noted with disappointment that the UK government had decided not to sign up to the new Erasmus+ programme. The government had instead announced that they would replace the programme with a UK alternative, called the 'Turing Scheme'. The scheme would be international in nature, but would not be an exchange programme, meaning there would be no funding for incoming students. The sector would need to ensure that the Turing scheme met the needs of universities and students; issues for modern languages schools could be acute due to the loss of the bilateral arrangement afforded by Erasmus+.

Members of Senate suggested that more information on travel for work purposes, to clarify who would need a visa when travelling to the European Union, would be welcomed.

5. New Year's Honours

The following individuals associated with the University had been recognised in the New

Year's Honours list:

- CBE Professor Edward Peck (PhD Management, 1997). Vice-Chancellor, Nottingham Trent University. For services to Higher Education.
- MBE Mrs Lesley Braiden. Lately Academic Registrar. For services to Higher Education.
- MBE Mr Nigel Mellor (Diploma in Town and Country Planning, 1968). Chair, Emmaus Merseyside. For services to the Homeless and Disadvantaged in Merseyside.
- MBE Dr Joanne Thwaite (BSc Microbiology, 1997; PhD Biochemistry and Genetics, 2002). Senior Scientist, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. For services to the NHS during the Covid-19 response.
- OBE Professor Linda Anderson. Professor of Modern English and American Literature. For services to Higher Education.
- OBE Professor Lorraine Maltby (BSc Zoology, 1981). Professor of Environmental Biology, University of Sheffield. For services to Environmental Biology, Animal and Plant Sciences.
- OBE Dr Paul Williams (MBBS, 1996). Former Member of Parliament for Stockton South. For services to Parliament and to Healthcare.
- Medal of the Order of the British Empire. Dr Alistair Forbes (PhD Neurology, 1987). Co-founder, Scottish Tech Army. For services to Charity during the Covid-19 response.

6. Remainder of Academic Year 2020/21

Further to Senate's discussion at its meeting on 18 November, Executive Board had given further consideration to what approach the University should take to the delivery of the student experience in Semester 2 in light of the prevailing Covid-19 situation. Senate reaffirmed its support for the following approach to educational provision for the remainder of the academic year:

- a. Prioritising the necessary measures to ensure that students were given the educational opportunities (learning, teaching, research and assessment) that as far as was practicable enabled them to progress in or achieve their award (as appropriate to their stage of study).
- b. Implementing the proposed Safety Net 2020-21.
- c. Seeking to implement the approach outlined here in ways that continued to protect the health and safety, and wellbeing, of students and colleagues, taking full account of changes in the public health situation.
- d. Progressing this approach in line with the established powers and delegated authority already set out for Senate and University Education Committee (UEC).
- e. Senate would be appraised of the current situation and developments on a regular basis, utilising e-consultation to facilitate effective decision-making if and when necessary.

Consideration had been given as to whether it would be appropriate to ask Senate to declare an emergency situation, and invoke University-wide emergency regulations. It was felt that the combination of existing arrangements, the established powers and delegations of Senate and UEC and the introduction of Safety Net 2020-21 meant that it was not currently necessary to ask that an emergency situation be declared. This matter would, however, be kept under review and if necessary such a request would be brought to Senate.

Essential in-person teaching was continuing for a limited number of programmes as defined by the Department for Education. Assuming that lockdown restrictions would ease week commencing 22 February, Present-in-Person teaching would then resume for

programmes where this was deemed essential. This would be determined by individual academic units. Students on all other programmes would return no earlier than the week commencing 19 April, following the Easter vacation. Additional changes would be influenced by advice from government, the local Director of Public Health and the prevailing situation with the Covid-19 infection rates among the University's student and colleague population as well as the local community.

7. Black Scholarships

The University, with Ubisoft, had announced an initiative to encourage and promote diversity in the UK games industry. The Ubisoft Scholarship for Black UK Students would include a three-year programme of support for two Black students applying to a Computer Science degree programme from 2021. Two successful students would each receive a yearly bursary of £11,250 to go towards fees and living expenses. In addition, Ubisoft would provide an ongoing and comprehensive programme of mentorship from Ubisoft developers, incorporating expert support in relation to engineering, a broad insight into games development and a suite of soft skills coaching and training. The support would culminate in a three-month paid internship for both students at Ubisoft Reflections.

8. REF

At its meeting on 15 December 2020, Executive Board received Faculty presentations on preparations for the 2021 Research Excellence Framework. Executive Board noted the quality and breadth of the impact case studies highlighted, and their potential for showcasing the benefit of the University's research for society; the inclusive nature of the research environment statements, including EDI perspectives and the contribution of PhD students and technicians; and the extent of cross-faculty collaboration which featured in the submission. More staff are being returned for the REF when compared with the previous exercise as a result of significant University investment as well as REF rule changes. Executive Board had been reassured that the submission would be a true reflection of the University's research. Considerable time and effort had gone into preparing the submission and colleagues were thanked for their huge efforts.

9. Staff Successes

Professors Linda Anderson had been elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society for Literature and Professor Jackie Kay had been elected as a Vice-President of the society.

Professor Avan Sayer (Professor of Geriatric Medicine) and colleagues had been awarded £3.8M by the Medical Research Council for ADMISSION, a UK collaborative study on multiple long-term conditions in hospital.

Professor Luke Vale (Professor of Health Economics) and colleagues had been awarded an NIHR Centre for Technology Assessment Reviews (£2.9M) to conduct work received from NICE and other NHS and Government bodies.

Professor Andy Husband (Head of the School of Pharmacy) had been appointed Chair of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain Education and Standards Committee.

Dr Sara Walker (Director of the National Centre for Energy Systems Integration) and Dr Stephen Elstub (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) had joined the oversight panel for the North of Tyne Citizens' Assembly on climate change.

10. Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education

Professor Tom Ward had been appointed as the University's new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education. Professor Suzanne Cholerton would retire at the end of March, from which time Professor John Kirby (Dean of Postgraduate Research, Faculty of Medical Sciences) would serve as Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education until Professor Ward took up his position in May.

11. Title Change for Deputy Vice-Chancellor

From 1 January 2021 the title of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor had changed to Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost. This addition to Professor Sanders's title better reflected her current roles including line manager of the three Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors and aligned with similar positions across the sector in the UK and globally. There was no change to her role.

12. Dean of Education

At its meeting on 12 January, Executive Board had agreed to change the title of the role of Taught Programme Dean to Dean of Education.

13. OfS Regulation during the pandemic

The Office for Students had written to all English higher education institutions on its register setting out actions it was asking universities to take in connection with continued compliance with existing regulatory requirements. In summary, the University was asked to:

- Be fair to students over accommodation charges and engage with private providers on their behalf on this issue.
- Review during the first half of the spring term our compliance with consumer law and provide assurance to Council about our ongoing compliance with ongoing condition C1 (guidance on consumer protection law).
- Consider whether it had or planned to deliver what was promised to students this academic year and, if it had not, to consider its "obligations under consumer law for refunds or other forms of redress".
- Inform students about changes to teaching and assessment methods and "their entitlement to seek refunds or other forms of redress – such as the opportunity to repeat parts of their course that you are unable to deliver this year – if they have not received the teaching and assessment promised".
- Maintain standards and consider a safety net.

14. Museum and Gallery Board

Following her appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Place, Professor Jane Robinson – as institutional lead for Engagement – had taken over from Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost) as Chair of the University Museum and Gallery Board.

35. **SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 14 DECEMBER 2020**

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 14 December 2020.

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

### **36. OFFICE FOR STUDENTS QUALITY AND STANDARDS CONSULTATION**

Received a paper from the Executive Director of Academic Affairs.

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

Noted that:

1. The Office for Students had recently issued a consultation on proposed revisions to its approach its conditions of registration relating to academic quality and standards. The proposed changes reflected a growing government agenda emphasising the importance of quantitative data.
2. The key features of the proposed revisions were a revised definition of academic quality and standards; the setting of numerical baselines and assessing providers against these alongside consideration of other information, e.g. reportable events and concerns and complaints raised by stakeholders; and a revised approach to intervention where monitoring demonstrated a cause for concern. There was a clear intention to progress with the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework.
3. Senate considered the University's proposed response to the consultation and noted with concern the regulator's proposed move away from nationally agreed definitions of academic quality and standards, international benchmarks, leading to sector fragmentation and endangering the profile of the sector. The perceived diminution of how the student voice was taken into account, and de-emphasis of the importance of peer review, both of which were regarded as hallmarks of UK higher education, were also regarded as retrograde developments. Senate noted that the proposed new monitoring regime would be more intrusive, and it was not clear that the resulting regulatory burden would be any lighter despite this being promised. Senate welcomed the robustness of the proposed institutional response.
4. Senate noted that, from 1 April 2021, Ofsted would become the regulator for all level 6 and 7 degree apprenticeships, and the University could expect to be inspected in respect of all its degree apprenticeships this year.
5. Changes to external requirements would serve as a prompt for the internal review of processes, allowing for greater consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion and decolonisation, for example.

### **37. PLANNING FOR THE 2021/22 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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

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

Noted that:

1. Academic units were now needing to plan their delivery of taught programmes for 2021-22, both to enable academic planning and allow key learning and teaching administrative processes to take place (including preparations for student module registration in May 2021, and the preparation of a teaching timetable for 2021-22). A document, which was subject to final approval from Senate, setting out the structure for the 2021-22 academic year, and principles for the design, delivery and assessment of taught modules and programmes, to support academic units to do this had been circulated to staff to allow planning to proceed.
2. Senate had been consulted on a previous version of the document via circulation in December 2020. Following consultation with Senate and other academic and

professional services colleagues, a number of changes had been made. It was proposed that teaching would now start a week earlier so that Semester 1 teaching would finish before the winter vacation in line with sector norms; the Easter vacation would be reduced from four weeks to three; the definition of contact hours would now include synchronous online modes of delivery, a move that had been welcomed by student representatives.

3. An inter-semester week break, following the Semester 1 assessment period and prior to the start of Semester 2 had been introduced as it was felt this would create advantages for colleagues and students.
4. Members of Senate expressed some concern that research time would be constrained by the changes proposed to the shape of the academic year. Travel for research purposes and field research, for example, would be impacted by a shorter Easter vacation. The commencement of teaching earlier in September would also make it more difficult for colleagues with a substantial teaching load to attend international conferences and establish international networks. Senate noted there was a key challenge for the University to ensure that researchers did not have to rely on sabbatical leave or holidays as the only times when they could conduct research. A shortening of the Easter vacation could also generate difficulties for colleagues with caring responsibilities. A decision about whether the Easter vacation should be of 3 or 4 weeks duration would be taken by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education outside the meeting reflecting on the points made by Senate.
5. As the changed structure of the academic year would also apply to future academic years, approval by Senate would therefore also constitute approval for the change of dates for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years.

***Resolved that Senate approve the approach to planning the delivery of taught programmes, subject to a final decision about the length of the Easter vacation which would be approved by the Vice-Chancellor taking Chair's action on behalf of Senate.***

### **38. SAFETY NET POLICY 2020/21**

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 move of the north east into Tier 4 Covid-19 restrictions followed quickly by the start of a new national lockdown (with no clarity as to when this would end) had had a significant impact on all members of the University, and all areas of activity, including student assessment. Although the University had planned its assessment for 2020-21 to take account of the likely Covid-19 situation, it did not anticipate the current situation. There was therefore a need for Newcastle, as with all other UK universities, to take additional steps to support its students given the new situation whilst maintaining the integrity and value of its academic awards.
2. A proposed Safety Net 2020-21 Policy included six measures to address this situation. Main elements. The proposals had been developed taking account of the Student Union's Near Miss Policy proposals, sustained and valuable discussions with sabbatical officers, a Russell Group statement on how to approach the situation, and the response of Russell Group Students' Unions to that statement. The six measures were:
  - A revised policy for the late submission of assessed work;
  - Amended timing of deadline for the submission of assessed work;

- Increasing the entitlement to resits for taught postgraduate students;
  - A streamlined approach to the Personal Extenuating Circumstances process;
  - Moderation of the profile of student cohorts in 2020-21 against the performance of previous years for all modules and at all stages;
  - Amended approach to the use of discretion by boards of examiners in relation to final classification.
3. In supporting the proposals, Senate highlighted the importance of fairness towards previous and future graduates, as well as the need to provide guidance to colleagues and external examiners on the operation of revised processes.
4. Senate noted that the moderation of cohort profiles and likely rise in the volume of PECs that would be submitted would lead to an increase in colleague workload. An implementation group had been established to work through the detail of the implications for school, faculty and central service representatives.

***Resolved that Senate approve the safety net approach for 2020-21, encompassing consequential changes as follows:***

- ***changes to examination conventions for taught postgraduate programmes to allow students a single resit attempt as of right for all their taught modules, and to progress to the dissertation / final project carrying fails from the taught modules;***
- ***changes to the examination conventions for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes to increase the discretionary zone where a Board of Examiners must consider whether to exercise discretion from 2 marks to 3 marks.***

#### **39. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION IMPACT REPORT**

Received a presentation from the President and the Chief Executive of the Students' Union.

Noted that:

1. Senate was grateful to receive an informative update on NUSU activities over the past year. In particular, Senate acknowledged the Students' Union's continuing effort to deliver the best possible experience for students under difficult conditions.

#### **40. WHITE SPACE**

Received a paper from Dr Bruce Baker.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate received a paper requesting greater clarity regarding the authority of Senate in relation to three recent matters of academic importance.
2. With regard to Senate's involvement in the decision to conclude negotiations regarding the future of Newcastle University London, the University had been constrained both by the nature of the commercial relationship and the importance of communication with colleagues and students in London. There was an appropriate discussion at Senate about the position in London in March and June 2019 making clear there was an understanding that the University would be looking to leave its London base. Council was subsequently informed of Senate's views but Council, in keeping with its own



powers, had been considering the business case. Council approved the final leg of negotiation at its meeting in October 2020.

3. In terms of academic promotions, and specifically, Executive Board's decision to pause academic promotions this year, it was highlighted that under the Statutes, Senate had the power 'to be consulted by and make recommendations to the Council on the framework of duties and conditions of employment of all members of academic staff'. Senate, therefore, had the right to make any comments it wished on the promotions decision but it was not a requirement for it to approve the decision. Senate had no role in ratifying the decisions of promotions committees: although it had been the University's custom and practice to send a list of promotions to Senate there was no requirement for this to be done.
4. Planning assumptions had been circulated to Senate in December with a short time period for responses due to the urgency to have an outline for planning assumptions for both the remainder of this and next academic year. A revised version had been submitted to this meeting, affording Senate a second opportunity to consider the proposals in detail and, in recognition of Senate's authority, to approve them.
5. There was broad support for holding extraordinary meetings of Senate at short notice to consider matters of importance when necessary, and for using more interactive modes of sharing responses to consultations where desirable.
6. The Vice-Chancellor invited members of Senate to submit suggestions for future agenda items.

#### 41. **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 H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

***Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on:***

***Professor Sean O'Brien, with effect from 1 August 2021.***

#### 42. **MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE**

Received a report from the meeting of:

- a) University Education Committee: 29 October, 12 November and 1 December 2020
- b) University Engagement and Place Committee: 30 November 2020
- c) University Global Committee: 25 November 2020
- d) University Research and Innovation Committee: 26 October and 7 December 2020  
[Circulated with the agenda as Documents L-O. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

#### 43. **NU WOMEN ANNUAL REPORT**

Received the NU Women Annual Report for 2019/20.

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

#### 44. **UNIVERSITY CLOSURE DATES**

Received the University Closure Dates for 2021/22.

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

45. **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.

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