

## NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

## SENATE

24 February 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 and Professor Phillip Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Professor Ashley Adamson, Dr Shoba Amarnath, Dr Vanessa Armstrong, Miss Lucy Backhurst, Dr Bruce Baker, Ms Charlotte Boulton (Postgraduate Officer, Students' Union), Professor Nils Braakmann, Ms Dorothy Chirwa (President, Students' Union), Ms Sian Dickie (Education Officer, Students' Union), Dr Barbara Eberth, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Dr Carmen Hubbard, Jenny Johnstone, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Ms Claire Morgan, Dr Julie Morris, Professor Daniel Siemens, Professor Konstantinos Stellos, Dr David Stewart, Professor David Thwaites, Professor Stefano Utili, Professor Aad van Moorsel.
- In attendance:** Ms Benthe Tanghe (Athletic Officer, Students' Union), 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:** Ms Nadia Ahmed (Welfare and Equality Officer, Students' Union), Professor Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon, Professor Ted Schrecker, Dr Joanne Smith-Finley, Professor Brian Walker.

## MINUTES

## 46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

## 47. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 20 January 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

## 48. 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. Professor Suzanne Cholerton

The Vice-Chancellor reported that this would be Professor Suzanne Cholerton's (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) final meeting of Senate prior to her retirement. Senate thanked Professor Cholerton for her huge contribution to the academic and student experience over many years.

2. COVID-19

Members of Senate continued to receive the regular updates provided by Executive Board. At the meeting the Vice-Chancellor reported on the implications for universities of the government's latest announcement concerning the gradual lifting of lockdown restrictions. The Vice-Chancellor set out the University's intended approach to supporting the phased return of students to campus and reactivation of some limited Present-in-Person teaching in some disciplines where this was essential. In consultation with academic units, the University would be working with the Students' Union to provide opportunities to engage with aspects of the student experience that they had missed out on as a result of their absence from campus. Academic units would be responsible for determining the return date for student cohorts and contacting students with further information. Academic units would also be responsible for identifying which colleagues were available to teach, taking the circumstances of those who were clinically vulnerable into account.

3. NU London

Following the announcement of the closure of NU London, students had been supported to understand the implications of the closure for their studies beyond September 2021. In response to feedback from our students, the University was making arrangements for current Stage 2 students to complete their final year of study in London in the 2021-22 academic year. This would not impact the closure of NU London, but would provide an additional option for current Stage 2 students who were unable to, or did not want to, leave London due to their individual circumstances. Teaching in London in 2021-22 would be delivered by the Business School and a location was currently being established. Students were still able to transfer to study at the Business School in Newcastle if they wished, and were currently confirming their decisions.

The University was currently working with all colleagues affected through a formal consultation process which was ongoing.

A Transitional Services Agreement was in place with INTO University Partnerships (IUP) to ensure continuous provision of key services in Middlesex Street until NUL ceased to operate on 30 September 2021. Teams were working collaboratively across the University and with colleagues at IUP to ensure that services for students and colleagues at NUL were maintained.

4. University Presence in Singapore

At its meeting on 9 February 2021, Executive Board held a discussion on options for ongoing activity in Singapore. An in-depth review of opportunities and challenges had been carried out. Executive Board agreed that an external analysis of market demand should be undertaken, the outcomes of which would inform future strategy in relation to Singapore operations.

5. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech

On 16 February 2021, the government had published a White Paper containing proposals aimed at protecting free speech and strengthening academic freedom at universities in England. As part of the proposals, a new free speech condition would be placed on providers registered with the Office for Students, giving the regulator power to impose fines if the condition is breached. The strengthened legal duties would also extend to students' unions, (the existing 1986 legislation also applies to meetings or other activities on the students' union's premises). A governance session on freedom of speech for all members of Senate and Council would take place on 10 March.

6. Shanxi Research Institute

The University had been approached about the possibility of a joint research institute with Shanxi Province, China but this now seemed unlikely to progress any further.

7. Stage Evaluation – Semester 1

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education reported that the semester 1 evaluation period had closed on 12 February 2021 with almost 10,000 students completing the survey. The response rate of 41% was the highest received since the introduction of stage evaluations and was up from 26% last academic year. The survey covered eight question groups and at an institutional level the two areas which received the most positive responses from students were on Teaching on my course (72.7%) and on Assessment and Feedback (55.98%). Academic support and Student Services have also been well received by students whereas transition and learning community were the areas with the lowest scores. Across all questions between one quarter and one third of students had given neutral responses. Academic Units received quantitative data by programme on 15 February and would receive qualitative data in the week commencing 1 March 2021.

Senate welcomed results for teaching and assessment and feedback as positive endorsement for the efforts of colleagues to support students throughout the pandemic.

8. Climate Change Scholarships

The University, together with the British Council, had announced seven fully funded scholarships for female students from South Asia interested in pursuing master's studies in the field of Climate Change. The scholarships were available from September 2021 for one year, and were part of the British Council's programme to support women and girls in STEM around the world. They were on offer for students from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

9. Staff Successes

Four colleagues had been conferred as Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences: Professor Rose Gilroy (Professor of Ageing, Policy and Planning), Professor Danny MacKinnon (Professor of Regional Development and Governance), Professor Tracy Shildrick (Professor of Inequalities) and Professor Sally Shortall (Duke of Northumberland Chair of Rural Economy).

Three colleagues had been awarded the European Commission Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellowship: Dr Jen Bagelman (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) and Dr Lisa-Marie Shillito and Professor Sam Turner (School of History, Classics and Archaeology).

Dr Fadzilah Hasan (Clinical Associate Professor at NUMed) had been elected to serve on the National Council of the Malaysian Medical Council.

Vicki Hedley (John Walton Muscular Dystrophy Research Centre) had been awarded an Eurordis European Leadership Award 2021 for her contribution to European cooperation in the rare disease field.

Professor Steve Wedge had been awarded £1.5m by Cancer Research UK for a renewal of their drug discovery programme.

10. Admissions Systems Project

At its meeting on 19 January 2021, Executive Board had approved, in line with the University Delegation of Authority Regulations, a business case for the optimisation and digitalisation of the undergraduate and taught postgraduate admission processes. Change was required as current solutions to manage admissions are outdated, complex and vulnerable. The new system would ensure that the University could respond to applicant expectations and compete globally.

11. Executive Director of Finance

The Vice-Chancellor reported that Mr Richard Dale would be taking retirement at the end of the calendar year after 15 years of excellent service as Executive Director of Finance. A recruitment campaign to find a successor was underway.

12. Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Science, Agriculture and Engineering

The Vice-Chancellor reported that Professor Stephanie Glendinning had been appointed as the next Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering. Senate congratulated Professor Glendinning on her appointment which would take effect on 1 June 2021.

**49. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 8 FEBRUARY 2021**

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 8 February 2021.

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

**50. POST-16 EDUCATION REFORMS**

Received a paper from Universities UK.

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

Noted that:

1. On 21 January 2021, the government had published a suite of documents and consultations relating to the post-16 education landscape in England. This had included an Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding (Augar Review) upon which there would be a new government consultation focussing on student finance terms and conditions, minimum entry requirements to higher education institutions, the treatment of foundation years and other matters, the outcomes of which would be incorporated into the next Comprehensive Spending Review. The report confirmed that there would be a tuition fee freeze for one year until potential fee changes were announced. Senate noted with concern the potential for unintended consequences on social mobility of changes to foundation years.
2. Universities UK had expressed concern that the consultation on minimum entry requirements could lead to policy change that restricted access to higher education for some people who would otherwise benefit. It could reduce the overall number of those studying at university and therefore reduce the number of graduates.
3. Teaching grant funding for 2021-22 had been prioritised for 'high-cost, high-value' subjects that supported the NHS, healthcare policy, STEM and specific labour market needs to support economic growth, but reduced for other high-cost subjects with further reductions in future years. This would impact on funding for courses in performing arts, creative arts, media studies and archaeology. Senate noted that the University was

working on advocacy work with a number of subject associations (including the British Academy and the Arts Council) to make the case for arts, humanities and social sciences subjects, and was keen to engage academic colleagues in this work.

4. The Office for Students would be consulting on a more streamlined model for the Teaching Excellence Framework. Senate considered it was positive that the government had acknowledged that an assessment of graduate outcomes should not be based solely on salary data and that regional variation needed to be accounted for.
5. The government had also announced a consultation on a post-qualification university admissions system, and a White Paper setting out a number of proposals and areas for reform concerning apprenticeships and engagement with local employers aimed at boosting the number of people with technical skills needed to drive growth. Implementation of post-qualifications admissions carried the potential for the start of the academic year to be pushed back. Significant reassurance and support for prospective students throughout the process would also be required.

#### 51. **NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CENTRES OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE**

Received a paper from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate considered a proposal for the establishment of two new Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence, in Landscape and Transformative Neuroscience.
2. The Transformative Neuroscience NUCoRE would be focussed on generating world-leading research that advanced fundamental science and brought real benefit to patients and society. The NUCoRE would integrate existing areas of excellence across all three faculties in conjunction with NHS trusts and other academic and industrial partners.
3. The Landscape NUCoRE would examine and advance understandings of the complex interactions and relationships between people and landscapes. The Centre would build on internationally recognised existing strengths and expertise, focussing primarily on a Humanities approach to landscapes. There was potential for the development of synergies with discipline areas in other faculties.

***Resolved that Senate approve the establishment of NUCoREs in Landscape and Transformative Neuroscience.***

#### 52. **STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN**

Received a paper from the Executive Director of Academic Affairs on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. Since 2018, all universities and other higher education providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) had been required to have an approved Student Protection Plan in place. The Plan identified the risks that might prevent the University from providing students with the teaching or research provision they expected to receive,

assessed the likelihood of each risk occurring, and set out the measures the University had put in place to mitigate implications for students should any of the risks occur.

2. The Student Protection Plan currently on the University website included minor changes from the original 2018 version and was approved by Senate and Council in early 2020. The OfS required all providers to review and update their plans regularly and, due to the pandemic and other events of the past 12 months, it had been necessary to make further revisions. Once approved, the updated version would be submitted to the OfS with the intention that it would come into effect from 1 August 2021

***Resolved that Senate approve the updated version of the Student Protection Plan and Summary.***

### **53. ANNUAL STUDENT CASEWORK REPORT**

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

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

Noted that:

1. There had been a noticeable increase in the number of students employing legal representation to support their cases. Comparable legal provision was under consideration to support University investigations for serious cases.
2. There had been an increase in the number of Level 1 Assessment Irregularities investigated by academic units and, subsequently, an increase of those more serious or repeat cases forwarded to the Student Progress Service to be dealt with at Level 2 of the procedure. This may have been the result of written examinations not being held after March 2020, with all assessments carried out remotely including the introduction of 24-hour take-away papers.
3. The Fitness to Practice procedure was currently under review as a result of a recommendation by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
4. While there had been an increase in the number of Level 1 academic appeals, this had not been replicated in the number of cases proceeding to Level 2 cases. This was a positive reflection on the work carried out by academic units to resolve issues at an earlier stage.
5. 2019/20 had been an unprecedented year for students struggling to cope with industrial action and the pandemic, resulting in both health concerns and the implementation of remote teaching. As a result, there had been a large increase in Personal Extenuating Circumstances cases (82%) which would have had a significant impact on colleague workload.
6. Senate welcomed the opportunity to consider examples of learning through casework. It was suggested that learning from Level 1 academic queries might also be shared, and that the sharing of learning could also be disseminated across the University more widely.

***Resolved that Senate endorse the report for submission to Council.***

### **54. WHITE SPACE**

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor invited members of Senate to submit suggestions for future agenda items.

**55. 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 Carol Jagger, with effect from 1 July 2021***

***Professor Suzanne Cholerton, with effect from 1 April 2021***

**56. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE**

Received a report from the meeting of:

- a) University Education Committee: 16 December 2020 and 26 January 2021
  - b) University Global Committee: 21 January 2021
- [Circulated with the agenda as Documents J-K. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

**57. PUBLIC LECTURES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

Received the Annual Report from Public Lectures Committee for 2019/20.  
[Circulated with the agenda as Document L. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

**58. 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 M. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]