**NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY**

**COUNCIL**

**11 December 2023**

**Present:** Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Shah Yaseen Ali (President, Students’ Union), Lulu Chen (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Linda Conlon, Jo Geary, Alex Lamb, Bill MacLeod, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips, Pat Ritchie (Vice-Chair of Council), Angela Russell, Nitin Shukla, Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Angela Woodburn.

Jan Deckers and Claire Morgan attended via Zoom.

**In attendance:** Chris Walton (Head of Occupational Health and Safety Services) for Item 17, Professor Justin Durham (Academic Director of the Campus for Ageing and Vitality) and Professor Jane Robinson (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Place) for Item 22, Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Nick Collins (Executive Director of Finance), Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office) and Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services).

**Apologies:** Dr Shoba Amarnath, David Bird, Tom Caulker, and Mags Scott.

**M I N U T E S**

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received in advance of the meeting.

16. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 2 October 2023.

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

***Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 2 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.***

17. **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Received the Annual Health and Safety Report and a report on key performance indicators.

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

Noted that:

1. All nine strategic Health and Safety objectives for 2022-23 had been completed, with several additional objectives having been identified and completed following the receipt of annual reports from faculties and units, except for the implementation of a system to provide corporate capture of all travel abroad. Mechanisms for staff and student overseas travel data capture were already in place but the University was hoping to introduce a system that would record all this data in a single place. Greater use of the SafeZone app was being explored, and the University would also look at clarifying the guidance on supporting students in emergency situations. The current approach did not affect the University’s ability to achieve insurance cover.
2. There had been an increase in accident reporting, with 309 reports received this year, an increase from 248 in 2021/22. The University had raised awareness of near-miss reporting and would continue to do this. The main increase had come from student accidents being reported with student communications being the likely contributing factor. Council reflected on how to create a culture where near misses were reported systematically as well as the visibility of incidents when working with third parties for which agreed management arrangements were in place.
3. During 2022/2023, 9050 delegates had been provided with Health and Safety training. This was an increase of 1602 from the last academic year. A competency management standard, including a training matrix, was in place specifying what training should be undertaken by role and activity. Managers use the standard and matrix to ensure their team receives the relevant training required and report on this as part of their annual unit health and safety reports.
4. An external HASMAP audit had been undertaken between May and June 2023 with the report identifying that the University had a robust health and safety management system.

***Resolved that Council approve the University’s Annual Health and Safety Report.***

18. **CHAIR’S BUSINESS**

Noted that:

1. Members of Council were encouraged to attend a speed networking session with Newcastle University Students’ Union officers which would take place on Monday 29 January.

19. **VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS**

Received the Vice-Chancellor and President’s report. Highlights of this report are provided below.

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

Reported that:

1. Queen’s Anniversary Prize

The University had won a prestigious Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education in recognition of its long-standing excellence in water research. The University had been recognised for its role in leading an interdisciplinary research programme of global excellence in water security. The prize reflected Newcastle’s work in partnership with communities, industry, governments, and NGOs to deliver lasting real-word impact in a field that encompasses floods, droughts, water quality and public health. This was the fourth time that Newcastle University had been awarded a Queen’s Anniversary Prize.

1. Sir Eric Thomas

It was with great sadness that the University had learned of the death of Professor Sir Eric Thomas, the inaugural Chair of the Advisory Board for the philanthropic Campaign for Newcastle University. Sir Eric was a graduate, honorary graduate and lifelong friend of Newcastle University as well as an eminent clinician and one of the most influential figures in higher education of his generation.

1. Online Data Science

At its meeting in July 2023, Council had agreed to give delegated authority to Financial Monitoring and Budget Scrutiny Group to agree the final terms of the contract with Cambridge Education Group (CEG) to support the development, and delivery, of three online MSc programmes in Data Science. This was to ensure the contract terms can be signed in a timely way to not delay commencement of programme delivery. The contract negotiation was now nearing completion although taking longer than initially anticipated.

1. Regional Innovation Fund

The government has announced a Regional Innovation Fund (RIF) aimed at boosting support for universities in areas with lower levels of research and development investment and Higher Education Innovation Funding allocation. It was expected that the University would receive c.£800k to be spent by March 2024. The funding could be put towards capital expenditure and would offer the potential to leverage further funding from the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

1. Northern Accelerator Partnership

The partnership of Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Teesside, Sunderland, and York universities had secured an additional £4.3m across two funding streams to expand its support and create more successful businesses in crucial sectors. Northern Accelerator universities would work with partner organisations in key sectors to proactively develop solutions to crucial issues, and to ensure new businesses are embedded within the North’s innovation ecosystem.

1. Innovating Together – Universities in the North East (In-TUNE) Partnership

The Innovating Together - Universities in the North East (In-TUNE) partnership had been launched to deliver two business support programmes which aim to strengthen the region’s economy. The consortium had received £4.75m from Durham County Council and North of Tyne Combined Authority, through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), to work together to help strengthen business in the North East, driving forward the Levelling Up agenda.

1. Local Black Histories and Intergenerational Stories of Resilience

Newcastle University's Race Equality Network (NUREN) have been working on a project led by undergraduate intern Taskeen Nasif-Whitestone to capture the lives and work of local ethnically minoritised people who are making positive changes in the North East. The project, entitled Local Black Histories and Intergenerational Stories of Resilience takes the form of video interview and blog series. The current video featured Nitin Shukla (Lay Member of Council) and his father, Hari Shukla CBE (former member of Court), talking about their contributions to the local and regional community.

1. Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

Professor Jenny Read (Professor of Vison Science) had been announced as one of the founding Programme Directors of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA). Professor Read’s work would explore advances in robotic hardware to unlock the potential of intelligent machines. ARIA aims to focus exclusively on projects with potential to produce transformative technological change, or a paradigm-shift in an area of science.

1. Chancellor

At its meeting on 4 November 2023, Convocation had approved the re-appointment of Imtiaz Dharker as Chancellor of the University for a further four years from 1 January 2024.

1. Appointments

Professor Quentin Anstee (Translational and Clinical Research Institute) had been appointed Dean of Research and Innovation (Medical Sciences), effective from 1 November 2023.

Professor Stuart Edwards (currently Interim Dean and CEO, NUIS) had been appointed Dean of Global & Education Development (SAgE Faculty) for a term of three years, effective from 1 January 2024.

Dr Sara Marsham (currently Acting Dean of Education) had been appointed Dean of Education (SAgE Faculty) for a term of three years, effective from 1 January 2024.

Professor Rachel Pain (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) has been appointed to the role of University Dean of Social Justice, effective from 1 January 2024.

Dr Samantha Ryan had been appointed as Head of Newcastle Law School, effective from 1 January 2024.

1. Research Excellence Framework

It had been announced on 7 December that the next REF exercise would be postponed for one year. In response to a consultation, several decisions about the format of the exercise had been reaffirmed in the recent announcement. These included the use of HESA data to determine the size of each Unit of Assessment; the principle of full ‘decoupling’ of outputs from individuals (breaking the link between staff members and Unit submissions, including removing minimum and maximum publications that can be submitted from specific individuals); and reaffirming that outputs will be submissible from anyone with a ‘demonstrable and substantive link to the submitting institution within the REF period’. Some other changes to the next REF that were proposed originally had been dropped, so outputs sole-authored by postgraduate research students would not now be submittable. More detail on how these changes would work in practice would be forthcoming in Spring 2024.

1. HESA Mobility Statistics

The Higher Education Statistics Agency had released data relating to international student mobility for 2021-22 (when Covid restrictions were still in place). Newcastle University was ranked third in the Russell Group for percentage of international mobility compared to overall student population (3.46%), behind Oxford and Bristol, and eighth on total numbers (943 students). The University was also ranked ninth for international mobility compared to 127 other UK institutions.

1. Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia (NUMed)

A formal constitution for NUMed outlining organisational structure and operational procedures was being drafted to meet Ministry of Higher Education requirements in Malaysia. Council would be provided with an update at its meeting in January 2024 and will then be asked to give formal approval to the constitution, on behalf of the University,.

1. Immigration

On 4 December, the UK government announced a new plan to cut net migration, increasing the earning threshold for overseas workers by nearly 50%, and changing rules on dependants coming to the UK. Confirmation of transitional arrangements and replacement of the Shortage Occupation List by an Immigration Salary List was still awaited. The University was supporting colleagues about to join or who had a visa that was shortly to expire on a one-to-one basis.

20. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and Registrar provided an update on risks relating to the University’s strategic objectives.

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

Noted:

1. There had been an increase in antisocial behaviour across much of the University campus, with some serious incidents occurring at the Health Innovation Neighbourhood site despite the concerted efforts of the police, security teams and improved security in the areas being targeted.
2. As the conflict in the Middle East continued, a group of colleagues including representation from the Students’ Union, Student Wellbeing, and People Services had been meeting regularly to discuss campus issues and how to support students and colleagues. Regular meetings had also taken place between the Vice-Chancellor and President and representatives of student societies. In the last week there had been a small number of reported cases of antisemitism. A task and finish group had been set up to assess and respond to the requirements of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act.
3. The University continued to monitor issues relating to the availability and cost of student accommodation that had been experienced in student cities across the UK. A city-wide group continued to meet to consider issues and potential solutions.
4. Detailed discussions would take place on how the University could work with Nissan following the company’s announcement that it planned to expand electric car and battery production at its Sunderland site.

***Council confirmed that it had received sufficient assurance that the risks facing the University were being managed.***

**STRATEGY AND KPIs**

21. **STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received a summary of the progress being made against the Vision and Strategy referenced against the high-level key performance indicators used to measure progress. The KPI update was accompanied by each Faculty’s strategic review of 2022-23, detailing performance against their strategic priorities and KPIs.
2. A revised forward-looking approach to prioritised implementation should be finalised in time for reporting to the July 2024 meeting of Council. In addition, each Faculty was scheduled to provide a forward-looking update focusing on student experience at upcoming meetings of Council (in January, June, and July 2024 respectively).
3. An Equality Impact Analysis was not required for this report, however, where applicable, all the data and underlying action were reviewed by protected characteristic by the relevant committees (for example, University Education Committee reviewed the detailed breakdown of National Student Survey data, continuation statistics etc.).
4. The progress status for research intensivity had been upgraded from Amber to Yellow to

reflect the improving performance in research grant capture and income.

1. Student Experience remained at Red. The key performance indicator had been altered to reflect the removal of the overall student satisfaction question from the National Student Survey. It was suggested that the key performance indicator should reflect a basket of averages from student survey outcomes. Council noted that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education was developing a revised strategy for Education which would demonstrate and provide assurance on how the student experience was improving.
2. Council noted that the report showed incorrectly that the progress status was Amber (instead of Yellow) for Inclusive Economic Growth, and Red (instead of Amber) for South East Asia Sustainability.

22. **HEALTH INNOVATION NEIGHBOURHOOD**

The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents Fi and Fii. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received a presentation on the University’s vision of a world-leading Health Innovation Neighbourhood (HIN) on the former Campus for Ageing and Vitality site.
2. The project was key to the direction of travel for the organisation and to responding to external imperatives in relation to ageing, healthcare and demography. Delivering the vision for the HIN aligned with the University’s strategic imperatives for research power and intensivity, inclusive economic growth, and lifelong learning. In addition, it offered potential to provide experiential learning and lifelong learning opportunities for students of the future.

1. The University had recently secured keystone partners to co-develop HIN and had signed a memorandum of understanding with Newcastle City Council, the North of Tyne Combined Authority, and Legal and General, enshrining a shared commitment to working on the aspirations for the HIN. The HIN was one of three strategic sites being prioritised by the City Council, while the Combined Authority had designated senior colleagues to work on the project, and Legal and General had experience of working on similar regeneration projects. Closing the healthy life expectancy gap was also a key priority in the North East devolution deal.
2. A proposal was presented for the first new academic building on HIN, the Hub for Digitally Enabled Care Everywhere (DigECarE) for which the outcome of an application for capital funding from the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund was expected soon. A positive discussion about the proposed Hub and its research opportunities had taken place at Senate. Consideration by Executive Board had included affordability, risk management, and an options appraisal for the potential sequencing of development of HIN, including considering whether University investment should precede other public and commercial investment, and whether DigECarE should be placed at the South gateway to HIN or adjacent to existing University buildings to the North of the site.
3. Council voiced significant support for the vision and ambition for DigECarE as well as enthusiasm for the headline objective of the HIN. Members reflected on the project’s bearing on the long-term financial viability of the institution, risk mitigation, and use of the space at the HIN were partner funding not to be secured. It was suggested that the University develop a route map indicating how the headline objective for HIN would be delivered over the lifetime of the project.
4. Council considered a proposal for the demolition of unoccupied buildings at the HIN to remove hazards, reduce health and safety risks, and limit the potential for reputational risk and the potential for criminal/civil actions. Actions were underway to secure public funding for the ground works and demolition which ideally would minimise the need for a financial contribution from the University.
5. The cost of demolition was estimated at £5.96m. This cost would be paid back in approximately 5.7 years by the savings (cost avoidance). It was suggested that a higher level of contingency may ultimately be needed to fund the removal of asbestos should this be found within the unoccupied buildings.

***Resolved that Council endorse the overall vision for the Health Innovation Neighbourhood, and approve demolition of unoccupied buildings, subject to the University exploring other options to co-fund the demolition including potential input from development partners.***

**REPORTS**

23. **FINANCE REPORTS**

The Honorary Treasurer and Executive Director of Finance introduced a report from Finance Committee.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document Gi and Gii. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The University was required to submit an updated five-year financial forecast to the Office for Students by the end of January 2024. The plan built upon the existing figures approved by Council in June 2023, and had been updated for known developments. The University retained confidence from scenario modelling and covenant tests performed at the time of the previous Council approval. The revised forecast included additional prudency on income forecasts and retained cost contingency, which provided additional coverage for the downside risks.
2. High inflationary pressures remained a key risk and affected the University’s cost base. Static home tuition fees were a challenge and represented a reduction in real terms, driving a need to increase international student recruitment. Staff cost planning estimates had been uplifted following challenge from Finance Committee to review costs more assertively considering risks to income expectations.
3. The latest USS pension scheme valuation had seen the overall scheme move from a deficit to surplus position. This represented a real cost saving to the Council approved budget. The investment strategy for the Retirements Benefit Plan pension scheme was under review and would need to be agreed by the trustee.
4. The Committee had reviewed the Integrated Annual Report with a particular focus on the financial performance elements, application of accounting standards and policies, and matters identified by the external auditor. The report had been endorsed for onward approval by Council.
5. Following approval from Finance Committee and Council in October, the University had signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding with Unite Students with a view to developing a joint venture for the purpose of redeveloping and operating Castle Leazes student accommodation. Work is now progressing at pace including the development of the legal documents to support the joint venture formation. It was suggested that early action should be planned to mitigate the risk of criminal and safety issues once the Castle Leazes site had closed.
6. Council noted the Committee’s approved high-level assumptions that would underpin the preparation of the University budget for 2024-25. The short-term objective was to return to a growing level of operating surplus, with a longer-term aim of reaching an operating surplus of a minimum 3% of total income.
7. With regard to income from student recruitment, Council noted that the University’s level of growth in international undergraduate and taught postgraduate numbers had not increased as hoped for, due to conversion rates and geopolitical instability. To target this, the University was investing further in its strategic approach to student recruitment. It was agreed that Council should hold a more in-depth discussion about student recruitment later in the academic year.

***Resolved that Council:***

1. ***Approve the Medium-Term Financial Plan***
2. ***Approve the consolidated Financial Statements of the University for the financial year ended 31 July 2023, subject to completion of the work of the external auditor.***

24. **ANNUAL REPORT OF AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

Received the annual report from the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. In line with its terms of reference, Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had received and considered assurance on a variety of topics from various sources, including the University’s management, the University’s Internal Auditors, and the External Auditors, and believed that the procedures undertaken by the Committee provided a reasonable basis for the expression of this opinion.
2. In respect of the year ended 31 July 2023, it was the Committee’s opinion that the University’s arrangements for risk management, control and governance, sustainability, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness; and management and quality assurance of data were effective and could be relied upon by Council. The External Auditors and the Head of Internal Audit had both given an unqualified opinion.

***Resolved that Council approve the Annual Report of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.***

25. **REPORT OF AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

Received a report from the October and November meetings of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had agreed to recommend the 2022-23 Integrated Annual Report to Council for approval, subject to completion of the work of the external auditor.
2. The Committee had considered updates on significant events impacting the University from the Vice-Chancellor and President, a presentation on strategic risks from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, and a further update from the Head of Internal Audit.

26. **REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

Received a report from Nominations Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. At present there were eleven lay members of Council, not counting the Chair, Vice-Chair and Honorary Treasurer, and two vacancies. An external recruitment campaign conducted by Nurole on behalf of the University had sought applications from individuals with skills and experience in supporting an embedded global approach, and in healthcare and higher education policy. A longlist of seventeen candidates had been considered by a sub-group of Nominations Committee, with two stand-out candidates for the lay vacancies being identified based on relevant skills and experience.
2. Nominations Committee had agreed to recommend the appointment of the two candidates. A decision about the appointment of one candidate would however be made by Council at a future date.
3. Reflected on the use of non-executive search partners in improving the diversity profile of Council.

***Resolved that Council approve the appointment of Derek Bell as a lay member of Council from 1 January 2024 until 31 December 2027.***

27. **REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT’S UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE**

Received a report from the University and Students’ Union Partnership Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. Council would receive the annual Newcastle University Students’ Union Impact Report at its next meeting in January 2024.

28. **ACCOMMODATION RENTS**

The Executive Director of Finance introduced proposals for the 2024-25 academic year rent increase.

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

Noted that:

1. The University proposed retaining a progressive ladder of rents to ensure University accommodation remained attractive and affordable for first year students, and commensurate with the wider market.
2. The rent ladder featured a clear demand-led pricing structure with varying rent increases across the portfolio to provide a choice of weekly price points, recognising and balancing the cost of living for students and the increasing costs incurred by the University.
3. The Newcastle University Students’ Union had been consulted about the proposals and had raised no concerns.
4. Action was being taken to secure additional rooms through nomination agreements for the period of the Castle Leazes redevelopment.

***Resolved that Council approve the proposed rent ladder for the 2024-25 academic year.***

**RESERVED BUSINESS**

29. **RE-APPOINTMENT OF UNIVERSITY DEANS**

Reported that, in accordance with Statute 12, Council may, after consultation with the Senate, appoint one or more University deans in pursuit of strategic academic objectives. They shall hold office for periods fixed by Council.

Considered a proposal from the Vice-Chancellor and President following consultation with the Senate, for the re-appointment of the current Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the current Dean of Research Culture and Strategy.

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

Noted that:

1. It was proposed to extend the tenure of both Deans to 31 July 2025 to support ongoing work and allow the University to advance plans for leadership across the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, and cultural agendas.

***Resolved that Council approve the proposals and reappoint the University Deans.***

**ROUTINE BUSINESS**

30. **SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 15 NOVEMBER 2023**

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

31. **CHAIR’S CIRCULAR**