

**NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY COURT**  
**15 October 2024**

- Present: Professor Chris Day, Bethany Ainsley, Katie Bushby, Leo David, Hilary Florek, David Flory, Tony Gates, Lady Jane Gibson OBE, Jonathan Glass, Olivia Grant OBE, Professor Matthew Grenby, Professor Nigel Harkness, Ajay Khindria, Vijaya Kotur, Ian Levy, Professor Jo Matthan, Henri Murison, Dianne Nelmes, Naomi Oosman-Watts, Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, Professor Murray Pollock, Emeritus Professor Ian Postlethwaite, Sanjee Ratnatunga, Professor Jane Robinson, Professor Jo Robinson, Lucy Robson, Professor Maggie Roe, Sir Nigel Sherlock, Giselle Stewart OBE, Nick Swales, Claire Talbot-Jones, Dr Carys Watts and Professor Chris Whitehead
- In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer) Professor Richard Dawson (School of Engineering) for Item 4, Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Victoria Morley (Executive Assistant), Heidi Shultz, (Executive and Governance Team Manager), Professor David Werner for Item 4 and Professor Claire Walsh for Item 4.

**MINUTES**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted there had been a number of apologies of absence.

**1. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2024 were approved as a correct record.  
 (Circulated with the Agenda as Document A)

**2. MEMBERSHIP OF COURT**

Considered the membership of Court for 2024-25.  
 (Circulated with the Agenda as Document B)

The Chair welcomed Leo David, Tony Gates, Lady Jane Gibson OBE, Vijaya Kotur, Dianne Nelmes and Nick Swales to their first meeting of Court

**3. REPORTS FROM COURT STEERING COMMITTEE**

Considered the following reports from Court Steering Committee:

- (a) A report on the membership of Court Steering Committee.
- (b) A report on the membership of Court.

(Circulated with the Agenda as Document C)

Membership of Court Steering Committee

Noted that:

- 1. Helen McArdle CBE and Catherine McKinnell MP had both resigned from Court with effect from 1 August 2024.

2. Nick Richardson, Chair of Convocation, had decided to stand-down following the meeting of Convocation on 13 July 2024. Both the Chair and Deputy Chair had been elected in Autumn 2022 for a term of three years. In accordance with Statute 43, the procedure to elect a new Chair would be a matter for Court taking into account any recommendations from Convocation. It was proposed that consultation will take place in the autumn of 2024 and recommendations would be presented to Court Steering Committee and Court at the respective meetings in the Spring. In the meantime, the Deputy Chair, Claire Talbot-Jones, had agreed to deputise as required for the remainder of her three-year term.

Resolved that:

The award of an Honorary Fellowship in 2025 be offered to the following:

1. \* Dame Jackie Daniel
2. \* Emeritus Professor Paul Flecknell
3. Richard Dale (former Executive Director of Finance)
4. Emeritus Registrar Dr John Hogan

[ \* **Secretary note:** These awards had been been deferred from 2024 due to availability of recipient]

#### 4. **VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS**

Received a report from the Vice-Chancellor and President.  
(Circulated with the agenda as Document D)

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor reported that UniversitiesUK had worked with ten commissioners, largely drawn from outside higher education, and consulted with UUK members and stakeholders, to produce a package of reforms aimed at stabilising, mobilising and maximising the contribution of UK universities in the next decade and beyond. Published on Monday 30 September, the UUK blueprint covered what universities already do in education, research, knowledge exchange and innovation, and examine what works, what should change and what the sector needs from government to achieve more. Amongst other things, the blueprint argued that Government should increase funding for teaching to meet the real costs through a combination of linking fees to inflation and restoring the teaching grant.
2. A collaboration between Newcastle University, Teesside University, Durham University, Northumbria University, and University of Sunderland alongside The North East Combined Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority had been launched. The initiative, Universities for North East England (UNEE), aimed to ensure the five universities were speaking with a unified, place-informed voice to make higher education in the North East more accessible for study, business, innovation and investment and offering regional insight to help inform national higher education policy.
3. The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that the University had been reaccredited as a University of Sanctuary for a further three-year period. The University had held this status since 2021 as recognition of long-standing commitment to offering educational, research and engagement opportunities to people fleeing violence and persecution.

4. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University was facing significant financial challenges this academic year owing to a shortfall in international student recruitment. There were systemic issues in the UK higher education funding model as the funding universities receive from the Government and UK students' tuition fees did not cover the real costs of teaching courses or conducting research. This had resulted in a shortfall which was increasingly covered by tuition fees from international students. Demand from international students to study in the UK had recently reduced from a high point in 2022, owing to a range of factors including the impact of UK Government policy changes. Student visa applications in August 2024 were down by around 17 per cent across the sector compared with August 2023.

The University had made provision for a decrease in income when submitting the budget to Council earlier this year. The scale of the shortfall was likely to be larger than anticipated, however, and further measures such as a recruitment freeze and travel restrictions had been implemented. University leadership and working groups were exploring whether there were factors specific to Newcastle that the University could learn from to inform future recruitment strategies. Continued efforts to maintain financial sustainability would include potential policy advocacy for government support, such as increased teaching grants.

5. Newcastle University had hosted the Faraday Institution's biggest science dissemination conference to date on 10-12 September 2024. The three-day event highlighted the latest battery storage research from around the world. It helped to raise the visibility of UK scientific excellence in energy storage against the backdrop of Newcastle and the North East of England's drive towards net zero emissions through vehicle and battery manufacturing, research and electrification.
6. The Vice-Chancellor reported that, following the arson attack in June 2023, efforts had been focussed on securing the structural safety of Henderson Old Hall, assessing damage and determining the most appropriate action in light with conservation and listing requirements. To meet local authority requirements the building now had scaffolding and weather protection in place, with costs to date covered by insurance. In parallel a full range of future options for the building were under consideration, ensuring these works retain as much flexibility for future use as possible.
7. An extraordinary meeting of Academic Board had taken place on 31 July 2024, in response to questions regarding the University approach to the Newcastle Apartheid Off Campus encampment protest. The timeline of the encampment was presented in the meeting, along with the demands from protesters in the encampment. The University's responses to each demand were noted, and it was confirmed that the responses had been presented and discussed in meetings of Senate and Council. The University's approach to the encampment protest was explained, which included the University's aim to support lawful freedom of speech and an environment where everyone feels safe to express their views. Considering ongoing risks to wellbeing and health and safety of members of the University community, including the protesters, the University had decided to seek to end the encampment. Ahead of taking legal action the University issued a notice to the protesters to leave the campus on 21 June 2024. When the encampment was evacuated on 21 July 2024, legal action was paused and the University facilitated independent mediation supported by Newcastle University Students' Union and undertook a 'lessons learned' exercise.

## **5. WATER SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HUB**

Received a presentation from Professor Richard Dawson (Professor of Earth Systems Engineering), Professor David Werner (Professor of Environmental Systems Modelling) and Professor Claire Walsh (Professor of Water Security).

Noted that:

1. Water security underpinned our health, wealth, wellbeing and environment and the Newcastle University Water Security and Sustainable Development Hub was therefore timely and urgently needed. Led by Professor Richard Dawson, and sponsored by the UKRI, the Hub was a five-year project focused on improving water security for a resilient future. The presentation highlighted that the absence of water security could lead to wider issues impacting health, equity, and education.
2. The potential for addressing financial shortfalls through partnerships was discussed, with suggestions to commercialise research and explore industrial opportunities through collaborations with organisations such as UNEE and commercial partners in the financial sector. This approach would require input from external partners and Court members to ensure effective advancement.
3. Emphasis was placed on improving the public perception of international students by highlighting the University's significant research contributions and societal impact. The water security project was cited as an example of how such work can demonstrate the value that the University and its students bring to the community, both locally and globally.
4. The potential to revive a regional collective identity was discussed as a means to showcase the region as a centre for innovative research and problem-solving.
5. Recognition was given to the project staff and leadership for winning the Queen's Anniversary Prize, which acknowledged both exceptional research and its positive societal effects, further emphasising the University's role in contributing to the broader community.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None to report.

## **7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Reported that:

- (a) The Spring 2025 meeting of Court will take place at 14:00 on 9 May 2025.
- (b) The May meeting will be followed by a reception and the Honorary Fellowships Ceremony and Dinner.
- (c) Court Steering Committee has agreed that the topic for the main presentation at the May meeting of Court will be the North East Mayoral Combined Authority, and the role of universities in the North East ecosystem.

Members were asked to note these dates for their diaries.