

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

10 October 2022

Present: Mr Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Madeline Baugh (President, Students' Union), David Bird, Tom Caulker, Linda Conlon, Jan Deckers, Jo Geary, Alex Lamb, Mack Marshall (Education Officer, Students' Union), Pat Ritchie, Mags Scott, Nitin Shukla, Professor Daniel Siemens, Professor David Thwaites, Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Angela Woodburn.

Professor Sir Mike Rawlins attended via Zoom.

In attendance: Lucy Backhurst (Academic Registrar) for Item 7; Wyn Morgan and Will Spinks (Halpin Partnership) for Item 8; Professor Tom Ward (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) for Item 9; Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Nick Collins (Executive Director of Finance), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services), and Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office).

Apologies: Dr Phillip Lord, Bill MacLeod, Claire Morgan, Heidi Mottram, Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips, Angela Russell.

MINUTES

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 July 2022.

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

Resolved that, subject to a minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

3. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an update from the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. Health and Safety Committee would be meeting on the 20 October 2022 to consider a number of items for approval and recommendation to Council, including the University Health and Safety Management System and Annual Health and Safety Report.
2. On Thursday 8 September there had been a major gas leak on the Royal Victoria Infirmary side of Queen Victoria Road associated with ongoing local authority works. A number of University buildings had been closed temporarily as a result. An Emergency Management Team had been convened and considered the actions taken and any learning points.
3. The University had increased its Biological Safety auditing and inspection for higher risk locations and a 3 year programme has been arranged. This has been started and will be

monitored by the Biological Safety Committee, which is a sub-committee of University H&S Committee.

4. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. This year, in lieu of the joint meeting of Council with Senate, there would be a joint Council and Executive Board away-day on Monday 21 March 2023. Further details would be circulated in due course. Members of Council and Senate would be invited to a dinner to be held on 12 December 2022.
2. Meetings of Council would normally be held in-person going forward.
3. Council would receive an update on colleague wellbeing as well as a report on student wellbeing during the year.
4. On 22 September 2022, the Chair had taken Chair's action on behalf of Council to approve the appointment of Professor Brian Walker as Deputy Vice-Chancellor with effect from 1 October 2022.

5. 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 B. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Reported that:

1. HM Queen Elizabeth II

Council recorded its deep regret at the death of the Queen and sympathy for the members of the Royal Family.

2. Ukraine

On 8 September 2022, the University announced that it had formalized its twinning partnership with the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering (NUWEE) in Ukraine. A five-year agreement had been signed to support long-term research and educational collaboration. The partnership would provide vital support so that NUWEE students and researchers could continue their work at their home university, and help with the rebuilding of the NUWEE campus.

3. Times Higher Education Awards

The University had been shortlisted for the prestigious Times Higher Education University of the Year award in recognition of its commitment to Environmental and Social Justice. The University had also been shortlisted for Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for its Inclusive Futures programme, which aimed to support ethnically minoritised emerging leaders within the institution. Glyn Nelson, a Specialist Experimental Scientific Officer in the BiImaging facility had been shortlisted for Outstanding Technician of the Year. The winner of the University of the Year will be revealed at the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards ceremony in London on 17 November 2022.

4. Domestic Rankings

In results published on 16 September, the University had improved its overall ranking in the Times Good University Guide to 33rd, up 9 places from last year. The University's rank had increased in 3 measures: Student-Staff Ratio (+14), Graduate Prospects (+8), and Student Experience (+4); and fallen in 2 measures: Teaching Quality (-2) and Research Quality (-5). Our rank remains unchanged in Entry Standards, Completion and 1st/2:1s. The University ranked joint 22nd in the Russell Group, up 2 places from last year and in the Top 10 for 10 subjects (previously 8 subjects).

In results published on 24 September, the University dropped 8 places in the Guardian University Guide 2023, down to joint 63rd from 55th last year. The change in institutional position was largely driven by performance in the NSS Teaching and NSS Overall Satisfaction metrics, as well as the Value Added metric. The small improvement in student staff ratio (14.9 to 14.7) had improved the University's ranking for this measure from 45th to 30th. In terms of subject groupings, the University ranked 3rd for Fine Art (out of 63 providers) and in the top 10 for Dentistry (7th), Anatomy & Physiology (6th), Biomedical Science (8th) and Animal Science & Agriculture (6th).

5. International Rankings

The University had risen to joint 139th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (from 146th).

QS would be releasing its inaugural QS Sustainability: ESG ranking on 26 October 2022. The ranking is designed to reflect outwards impact and influence across two categories: Social Impact, and Environmental Impact. Infusing both categories are elements of institutional good governance. Preliminary results indicated that the University would be ranked 4th in the UK and top 18 in the world.

6. Access and Participation

The University had received notification from the Office for Students that it was making sufficient progress in the delivery of its current Access and Participation Plan. A summary of the findings had been circulated to members of Council. Council welcomed the positive progress being made, and agreed that it should receive a detailed update on Graduate Outcomes data and University Employability Strategy at a future meeting.

7. Office for Students Conditions of Registration

The revised Condition B3 on regulating student outcomes had come into effect on 3 October. The outcomes used to assess compliance related to student continuation and completion, degree outcomes, including differential outcomes for students with different characteristics, and graduate employment and, in particular, progression to professional jobs and postgraduate study. New guidance on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) had been published with a now extended window for submissions taking the deadline to mid-January 2023. Council would be provided with opportunity to comment on the University's TEF submission in due course.

8. Darwin Medal

Professor Martin Embley (Biosciences Institute) had received the Royal Society's Darwin Medal in recognition of his fundamental, paradigm-chancing contributions to the understanding of mitochondrial endosymbiosis and the origins of eukaryotes in a new two-domain tree of life.

9. Drug Misuse

In response to a question from a member of Council, an update was provided on drug misuse amongst Newcastle University students and the steps being taken by the University to support those affected. The issue of drug and alcohol misuse in the student community is one that the University took very seriously. As such, the University hosts an Alcohol and Drugs Working Group, which is made up of representation from the University and Students' Union, and external partners such as the Council and Police. This group produced the *Student Drug Policy: Reducing Harm* and coordinated and shared activities in line with the four pillars of the Policy: Support, Education, Safeguarding and Effective Procedures. The University prioritises safeguarding and supportive activities. However, there are occasions where drug and alcohol-related misconduct must be addressed for the health and safety of all and the University aimed to do this with effective procedures, including a Student Disciplinary Policy.

10. Castle Leazes

The University's design team was working towards the appointment of an external design partner to progress the options for Castle Leazes redevelopment to RIBA Stage 2. It was hoped that this would be completed in Spring 2023 and further progress would then be dependent on a final business case to Council. In the meantime, the financial option appraisal continued and Turner and Townsend had been appointed to assist with the construction cost models and construction programming and phasing.

11. George Brown Endowment Fund

Resolved that Council approve a recommendation that funding from the George Brown Endowment be granted to support an exhibition of work by Newcastle University alumnus, Matt Rugg.

Noted that:

1. Two Newcastle University alumni had been appointed to ministerial positions in government: Dr Caroline Johnson (Health Minister) and Kit Malthouse (Secretary of State for Education).
2. It was suggested that the University consider involvement in Academic Intersectionality Mentoring in Medical Schools (AIMMS), a national initiative across nine medical schools to support the career development of minority women.
3. The Discovery Museum had highlighted the story of Newcastle Medical School alumna, Dr Irene Ighodaro, the first Sierra Leone woman to become a doctor.
4. Universities UK was seeking to engage actively with the government over its intentions for international students. An overarching principle for the University in policy engagement continued to be the promotion of investment into the North East, an issue of interest for both major political parties. The Vice-Chancellor was a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on universities.

6. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

Received a report from Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar).

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

Noted:

1. Council received a revised strategic risk register and risk appetite statement. The register had been re-ordered to align more closely with the University strategic objectives, and a new

risk template had been developed to include details of how and when risks would be further mitigated.

2. The risk appetite statement had been developed and agreed by Executive Board and considered by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee. The statement would support more constructive thought and discussion about where risk would be tolerated.
3. Council discussed the University's risk appetite position for cyber security and data governance. The risk status for cybersecurity would be reviewed and updated to take account of the outcomes from the external review of cyber governance.
4. It was suggested that Council should receive more information about the trajectory and target date for risks relating to the student experience returning to green.
5. Council noted the number of red and amber risks as well as the risk trends. It had been agreed that any risk rated as red would be reviewed by Executive Board on a monthly basis. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had also discussed what frequency it should consider the red risks and a schedule would be produced. It was suggested that the risk controls should do more to reflect what actions the University was taking to treat and tolerate specific risks.

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

7. COST OF LIVING – STUDENT SUPPORT

The Vice-Chancellor and President introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received a presentation on measures to support students with the cost of living rise.
2. A Cost of Living Working Group had been convened by the Academic Registrar involving Sabbatical Officers, NUSU staff and key stakeholders. The purpose of the group was to develop a package of support for all students to offset the impact of the cost of living increase on the student education experience. In addition, the Doctoral College Executive Group was considering the specific needs of research students in this context. Prioritisation was being determined in accordance with what students want.
3. Alongside the work within the institution, work with Academic Registrar's from Northumbria and Durham universities was taking place to share practice and leverage support from the city and region for additional measures to be put in place.
4. The Students' Union had launched a cost of living crisis campaign, and a range of support and guidance was available. For example, students were being encouraged to apply for a Participation Bursary to remove financial barriers from impacting on students' experience, and a Food Pantry (food bank) was due to be launched soon with University support.
5. Council discussed the intersection of the cost of living crisis with students' academic performance, and the imperative to recognise the negative impact on students' mental wellbeing. It was important to convey to tutors that some students needed to supplement their income with part-time work, and there was therefore a need for empathy from colleagues. Council noted that the University had recently invested heavily in wellbeing advisors and its focus was on making wellbeing support as easily accessible as possible.

6. It was suggested that the University could do more to address what was perceived to be the high cost of food on campus and introduce subsidised hot meals where possible.
7. Council noted that the higher education sector, led by Universities UK, was lobbying government to reintroduce maintenance grants for students in the face of rising costs and pressures on income.
8. The University was also taking measures to support colleagues with the cost of living crisis. The largest year-on-year uplift in the Real Living Wage had recently taken effect, and moves to modernise the lower end of University pay scales would see positive outcome for a large number of colleagues. There was a focus on promoting existing benefits and discounts.

8. **EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

The Chair introduced the recommendations from the independent governance review.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received a presentation from Halpin Partnership, setting out the main findings of the external governance review.
2. Overall, when measured against Halpin's governance maturity framework, University governance had been deemed to be improving, with some areas of good practice.
3. The report made three priority recommendations relating to better feedback to members of Council, the clarification of the role of Senate in the new regulatory environment and increasing the visibility of academic assurance activities. A number of lower-priority recommendations and suggestions, as well as six commendations, had also been made.
4. The report and recommendations would be considered in detail by Nominations Committee, and Council would be invited to consider a proposed action plan at its next meeting in December 2022.

9. **STUDENT SURVEYS**

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received an overview report relating to the outcomes of the University's participation in the National Student Survey 2022 and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2022, and Semester 2 Stage Evaluations. Detailed survey reports had been considered by Senate at its meeting on 21 September 2022.
2. The key concerns across all three survey reports were consistency of student experience, communication, assessment and feedback, closing the feedback loop, and value for money.
3. A number of stakeholder events had taken place to identify institutional challenges, as well as conversations with key individual academic units. Council noted that it was important for academic units not only to understand their responsibilities but also to feel empowered to fulfil their obligations.

4. Council noted that current students had been through a massively disrupted secondary school experience, and that universities needed to do things differently to respond. Colleagues needed to show empathy towards the challenges faced by students.
5. It was suggested that the University needed to do more to understand the equality implications for students with protected characteristics, for whom outcomes were generally not as good as their counterparts.
6. Council discussed measures that could be taken to tackle colleague underperformance in delivering teaching and supporting the student experience. There was a need to find positive ways to support colleagues to perform at a better level, with Heads of School being provided with the necessary support to set expectations, and to demonstrate and model behaviours.

10. **UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE ADMISSIONS**

The Vice-Chancellor and President introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received an update on the 2022 entry recruitment and admissions cycle against student number targets.
2. The year had not been without its challenges, not least because of the extremely competitive environment, as home students sat exams for the first time in two years, as well as the ongoing uncertainty for international applicants and their ability to travel and start their studies.
3. The University had responded well to key recruitment challenges. To support international conversion in particular, it had been possible to provide late starts and adapt entry requirements to enable a wider range of English Language tests to be considered. Timely communications had been implemented to inform all applicants of these changes, and the University's response to other emerging barriers.
4. At undergraduate level, and following a successful confirmation and clearing period in August, the University was on target to reach its home and international targets, thanks to teamwork and colleagues' efforts from across our University. In terms of taught postgraduate, there was confidence that the overall international target would be met, however, new Covid restrictions on movement in China posed a risk for student attendance and formal guidance on remote learning was expected from the government. There had been a drop in demand from PGT home students and this trend was evident across the sector.

11. **REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

Received an update on the July and October meetings of the Committee.

Noted that:

1. The Committee had recognised the long service of the outgoing Head of Internal Audit.
2. The Committee had reviewed the revised version of the Strategic Risk Register, and had been encouraged by the University's efforts in relation to student education experience.

3. The Committee had received the final report of the external cyber governance review, and noted the main recommendations, which focused on accountability, and improving asset management.
4. The Committee had received the first draft of the University's Integrated Annual Report and had provided some comments.
5. A number of internal audits and risk-based audits reports had also been received.

12. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of Finance Committee held on Tuesday 4 October.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had received the University's draft consolidated year-end financial results and a draft of the University's annual accounts. The latter would be considered by a joint committee of Finance Committee and Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee in November, and Council would be asked to consider the accounts for approval by Council at its next meeting in December.
2. The Committee had received an update on actions underway to drive improvement in future financial performance. The Committee had noted the approach and progress of the professional services efficiencies workstreams and data collection underway to inform other areas where efficiencies may be targeted.

RESERVED BUSINESS

13. REAPPOINTMENT OF A PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR

Council was asked to consider a recommendation from the Vice-Chancellor and President.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document J. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The University needed to identify a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation following the appointment of Professor Brian Walker as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. At its meeting on 21 September 2022, Senate had agreed to recommend to Council the appointment of an Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, and noted that an external search for a permanent appointment would commence as soon as possible. Members of Council were invited to nominate members of a joint Senate and Council selection panel.
2. The departure of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost had resulted in the need to reallocate other responsibilities. It was proposed that the remit of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global should be enhanced to include Sustainability, and that Professor Richard Davies should be re-appointed to the role for a new five year term.
3. Responsibility for Social Justice would now sit fully with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Place. With respect to leadership of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, a period of consultation was underway, and the Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion would be attending meetings of Executive Board as an interim arrangement in the short-term. The Vice-Chancellor would return to Senate and Council with a recommendation for leadership of this portfolio later in the academic year.

Resolved that Council:

- 1) endorse the proposed approach to the reappointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation.***
- 2) approve the change of title for the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global to Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global and Sustainability and the reappointment of Professor Richard Davies for a new five-year term.***

ROUTINE BUSINESS

14. SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 21 SEPTEMBER 2022

15. CHAIR'S CIRCULAR