

# NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

## COUNCIL

12 December 2022

**Present:** Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Madeline Baugh (President, Students' Union), Linda Conlon, Jan Deckers, Jo Geary, Alex Lamb, Dr Phillip Lord, Bill MacLeod, Mack Marshall (Education Officer, Students' Union), Claire Morgan, Pat Ritchie, Mags Scott, Nitin Shukla, Professor Daniel Siemens, Professor David Thwaites, Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor).

Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips and Angela Woodburn attended via Zoom.

**In attendance:** Paul Britton (Head of EDI and Colleague Wellbeing) and Lisette Nicholson (Director of People Engagement and Culture) for Item 22; 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:** David Bird, Tom Caulker, Heidi Mottram, Professor Sir Mike Rawlins, and Angela Russell

## MINUTES

### 16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 17. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 10 October 2022.

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

***Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 10 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.***

### 18. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received the Annual Health and Safety Report and a report on Key Performance Indicators.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document Bi and Bii. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. In the last year, 10 out of 11 priority actions had been completed. The review of the Out of Hours Management Standard had been delayed, with a number of factors still being considered including student expectations, Health and Safety, wellbeing, sustainability, marketing, and costs.
2. There had been a significant increase referrals for musculoskeletal issues. It was understood that colleagues identified working from home and undertaking an increased level of sedentary work as a cause.

3. All Health and Safety Management Audit Profile (HASMAPP) audits had been completed to schedule. Planning had begun for the University external independent HASMAP audit to take place in 2022/23.
4. Over 7400 delegates had taken part in health and safety training, including specialist and general courses.
5. A survey of First Aid and Fire Warden support roles had been undertaken, but some units had failed to return information. An additional action for 2022/23 to ensure the correct amount of First Aid and Fire Warden support was had therefore been identified.

## 19. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. The Chair reminded members that there would be a joint Council and Executive Board away day and dinner taking place on 20 March 2023.

## 20. 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. Race Equality Charter

The University has been awarded a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award for its work towards tackling race inequality, valid until the end of November 2027. This had been a huge amount of work by a team of colleagues and students across the University and particular credit should be given to the University's Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team and the wider Newcastle University Race Equality Network. An action plan for embedding this work across the institution would be considered by Executive Board.

### 2. Newcastle University Business School

Newcastle University Business School had been officially re-accredited by the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), one of the highest standards of achievement in business education. The Business School had held EQUIS accreditation since 2010. Re-accreditation for five years recognised that the school had exceeded expectations in numerous areas and acknowledged the excellent achievements and outstanding commitment to continuous improvements.

### 3. Office for Students Capital Funding

The University had successfully secured £5.52m of Office for Students funding to strengthen the delivery of two priority capital projects supporting the teaching and learning and strategic growth of student numbers in Mechanical Engineering and Dentistry.

### 4. Research Funding

Research England had announced the provision of £100m of additional QR (Quality-Related) and £70.65m of additional RCIF (Research Capital Investment Fund) allocations and a new £30m Talent and Research Stabilisation fund for universities to address

ongoing uncertainty over access to the European Union's Horizon Europe research funding programme. Newcastle University expected to receive over £5m in additional funding. The funding was provided to support retention of wider research capabilities, development of international collaborations and partnerships, recruitment and retention of talent, and supporting early career researchers.

With regard to Horizon Europe, the government had recently announced that full association was still being pursued, and its guarantee to honour EU research grants would be extended beyond 31 December 2022.

## 5. The Newcastle Hub for Digitally-Enabled Care Everywhere

As part of the development of plans for the Campus for Ageing and Vitality (CAV), the University had submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Research Partnership Investment Fund (RPIF). The potential grant funding would support the build and development of the Newcastle Hub for Digitally-Enabled Care Everywhere, which would be one of the first developments on the CAV site. Financial Monitoring and Budget Scrutiny Group had approved a budget allocation of £600k to commence design development of the Hub project. Costs were not considered to be dependent on the success of an RPIF bid. In the event the RPIF bid was unsuccessful, these costs represent a development the University is likely to progress regardless. Council would remain informed of the progress of the RPIF bid and the CAV development generally.

## 6. Prevent

The Chair of Council had taken Chair's action on behalf of Council to approve the University's annual Prevent return for submission to the Office for Students. A copy of the return was provided for Council's information.

## 7. Student Education

Council received a paper, considered at the previous meeting of Senate, on priority action areas for the University to improve the student education experience in the current academic year.

## 8. Teaching Excellence Framework

Council noted that preparation of the University's submission for the Teaching Excellence Framework exercise was ongoing, and a draft copy would be circulated to members of Council for comment prior to final submission.

## 9. Institute of Electrification and Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing

The University is to lead a consortium of regional HE and FE providers in the creation of Power Electronics, Machines and Drives content to enrich T-level, Higher Technical Qualifications as well as Advanced and Degree Apprenticeship programmes. The Institute of Electrification and Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing is funded by the Driving the Electric Revolution Challenge, delivered by Innovate UK for UK Research and Innovation.

## 10. Online Postgraduate Taught Degrees

Further to the update provided to Council in October, the University had progressed the development of new online data science Resource. Another update would be provided at the January 2023 meeting of Council. Subject to the receipt of suitable tender bids, the University would be seeking endorsement to enter into a contract with an Online

Programme Management provider.

#### 11. Global Engagement Principles

Executive Board had approved a Due Diligence Framework for external University activity, proposed principles for engagement, and a framework for determining when to make public statements on national and international events. The principles had been considered by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee which had been supportive of the University's approach.

In most cases, global collaboration would proceed on a 'business as usual' basis, albeit within certain defined parameters and subject to appropriate regulations and procedures. In some cases, however, as the 2020 UUK report Managing Risks in International Higher Education identified, greater scrutiny and consideration would be required.

#### 12. Infrastructure Strategy Group

At its meeting on 8 November 2022, Executive Board approved the establishment of an Infrastructure Strategy Group as a new sub-committee of Executive Board to replace the Estate Capital Strategic Planning Committee, Digital Campus Steering Group, and Campus of the Future Group. The creation of the group sought to build on outcomes of the Campus of the Future Group and aimed to bridge the gaps that had been identified in future planning for the University's infrastructure, including its physical and digital estate and facilities. It aimed to overcome 'siloed' thinking of estates and IT projects in isolation, and to move from a reactive project-by-project approach to a proactive masterplan which would deliver infrastructure in support of the University's academic strategy and ambitions for sustainability.

#### 13. Convocation

The 65th ordinary meeting of Convocation had taken place on Saturday 26 November at The Catalyst, Newcastle Helix. Convocation had welcomed its new Chair and Deputy Chair, Nick Richardson and Clare Talbot-Jones.

### 21. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

Received a report from the Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and the Registrar.  
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted:

1. The risk register remained unchanged since the previous meeting. At its meeting on 10 October, Council had approved the risk appetite statement and the updated strategic risk register in its revised format. Work was now underway to embed the risk appetite statement across the institution.
2. A repurposing of the Business Continuity Steering Group had been agreed by Executive Board at their meeting on 15 November. This group will now be known as the Business Continuity and Risk Group and would monitor an agreed set of operational risk indicators.
3. A timetable of when the strategic risks would be discussed by Executive Board had been approved on 8 November. A schedule of deep dives into specific risks would be operated by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.
4. A business continuity scenario planning exercise had been held on 3 November to address the possibility of power outages this winter. Representatives from the other four North East

universities, the City Council, NHS Trust and experts from Northern Gas Networks and Northern Powergrid had taken part. A lessons-learned summary would be prepared for Executive Board and any further planning would be undertaken with the Emergency Management Team.

5. Issues relating to the availability and cost of student accommodation had been experienced in student cities across the UK. The underlying causes were linked to several factors that had differential impact on each city. Newcastle had been over-supplied in recent years with Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA), however this had now changed. The potential redevelopment of Castle Leazes from autumn 2024 would also impact on the accommodation choices. The University's strategic risk associated with accommodation would be discussed at Executive Board in December and a city-wide group had been convened with the City Council and Northumbria to consider wider issues.
6. Council suggested that the risk register should acknowledge the potential failure of functional IT provision, as it already did for the estate condition.

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

## 22. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The Executive Director of People Services introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received an update on the development of the University's new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including progress toward the strategic objectives and future actions from a colleague health and wellbeing perspective.
2. A key component of the development and delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy was collaboration between the Colleague Health and Wellbeing Team, the Occupational Health and Safety Service, and Student Health and Wellbeing Services, to ensure a consistent approach was taken to health and wellbeing across the University community as a whole.
3. A primary focus of the plan was to take a proactive approach to raising and enhancing awareness through normalising conversations around health and wellbeing and internal and external wellbeing support.
4. A Health and Wellbeing Action Plan would be developed to deliver the objectives outlined in the strategy. The plan would retain flexibility to adapt to any opportunities or unforeseen health and wellbeing issues that may arise, and would be revised annually. A summary of the plan and its delivery would form part of the annual health and safety report to Council.
5. Members discussed the impact on student health and wellbeing of blended learning. More proactive engagement with students was needed to understand students' experience of and engagement with different modes of learning and academic support. A student analytics dashboard to support students and colleagues to improve access to information on education engagement would be fully implemented in 2023-24 following a soft launch working with pilot schools in Spring 2023.
6. Council would devote more time to discussing student engagement at its forthcoming joint away-day with Executive Board.

## 23. STRATEGY PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced an update on progress being made against the Vision and Strategy referenced against high-level key performance indicators.

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

Noted that:

1. The report tracked progress against the revised set of key performance indicators approved by Council in July 2022. Faculty Strategy Overview reports, detailing a review of progress made by each faculty against the institution's strategic priorities, were also provided.
2. Council considered and endorsed the updated position for each strategy. The overall direction of travel was positive, and the key performance indicator assessment profile reflected the stretching nature of the targets as well as challenges encountered more recently. One key performance indicator (Student Experience) was flagged as high risk, five as medium risk (Research Intensivity, Inclusive Economic Growth, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Global Student Mobility and South East Asia).
3. It was suggested that the format and content of the Faculty Strategy Overview reports should be standardised.

## 24. NETWORK REPLACEMENT

The Executive Director of Finance introduced a business case for the replacement of the University's IT network infrastructure and underpinning network services.

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

Noted that:

1. The existing IT network infrastructure had been in place for nine years and had reached the end of its supportable life. This, coupled with the incumbent supplier pulling out of the UK market and the University's need to improve its cyber security posture, had led to the need to replace all wired and wireless networking infrastructure across campus and satellite sites.
2. The proposal detailed a modern, fit for purpose network with up-to-date security controls in line with industry best practice and leveraging cloud and artificial intelligence (AI) to meet the University's existing needs while providing agility to meet future demands and to underpin campus developments.
3. The replacement network would support the University's digital aspirations and strategies, and be easier to upgrade in the future therefore providing a lower incremental upgrade cost.
4. Council noted the indicative costs of the project over 3 years. Approval to proceed would be sought from Council again if overall costs were greater than 10% variance.
5. Discussed project management and the engagement with academic units necessary for the project to succeed. The eventual project partner would be required to work with the University's in-house team on the transfer of knowledge and development of skills needed to ensure optimal performance.

***Resolved that Council agreed to replacement of the IT network as proposed, and to proceed to a formal competitive tender exercise.***

## 25. ACCOMMODATION RENTS

The Executive Director of Finance introduced the proposals for the 2023/24 academic year rent increase.

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

Noted that:

1. It was proposed to implement a ladder of rents to ensure University accommodation remained attractive and affordable for first year students. There would be a clear demand-led pricing structure with varying rent increases across the portfolio. Student contract lengths were shorter than those in the private sector, meaning that overall cost was competitive.
2. The proposals had been considered in light of the need to recognise and balance the cost of living for students and increasing costs incurred by the University. The actions proposed were designed to ensure the achievement of surplus needed to reinvest in the quality of the accommodation.

***Resolved that Council approve the accommodation rent proposals for 2023/24.***

## **26. ANNUAL REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

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

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

Noted that:

1. In line with the terms of reference of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee, the report provided an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's arrangements for risk management, control and governance; sustainability, economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and the management and quality assurance of data.
2. The Committee's opinion was that the University's arrangements were effective and could be relied upon by Council.
3. Amendments relating to length of members' appointments and periodic self-assessment had been made to the terms of reference for Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee in light of recommendations in the report from the external review of governance.

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

## **27. REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

Received an update on the November meeting of the Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered the draft Integrated Annual Report in detail prior to its submission to Council.

## **28. FINANCE REPORTS**

Received a report from the Finance Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered the University's financial report for the three months to 30 October 2022. The year-end forecast was for a smaller loss compared to budget. Further improvement was expected following the recent notification of additional government funded research income not yet represented in the figures presented.
2. Council noted the Committee's recommendation to Executive Board for preparation of the University's budget for 2023/24.
3. The Committee had approved a new Treasury Management Policy which included extended approved instruments and counterparty selection and limits. In addition, the University's taxation strategy had been reviewed as part of the annual cycle and no changes had been proposed.
4. The University was required to submit an updated five-year forecast to the Office for Students by the end of January 2023. The plan built upon the Council-approved budget and plan, updated for known developments. High inflationary pressures remained a key risk affecting the University's cost base, but the forecast for 2022-23 was showing improvement based on positive student income and signs of positive change on research income.
5. The external governance review suggested the University consider the merit of including non-executive staff members of Council on Finance Committee. Council was minded not to take forward the recommendation given that material items required Council approval, but the issue would be reviewed in due course. A number of unrelated minor amendments to the terms of reference had also been proposed.

***Resolved that Council approve the submission of the Medium Term Financial Plan to the Office for Students, and the revised Finance Committee terms of reference.***

Received the Integrated Annual Report 2021-22

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

Noted that:

1. The Integrated Annual Report had been reviewed by Finance Committee with a particular focus on performance elements, accounting standards and policies and significant matters. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had reviewed and endorsed the Integrated Annual Report for Council approval, providing assurance that there had been a robust examination via the internal process and the completion of the external audit.
2. Executive Board, with support from Finance Committee and Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had recommended to Council that it had reasonable expectation that the University had adequate resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future and should continue to adopt the going concern basis when preparing the annual accounts.
3. The external audit work was materially complete with only minor elements requiring finalisation, as was normal immediately prior to the point at which accounts were signed. The audit work had identified two factual adjustments and two judgement adjustments which would be disclosed within the management representation letter.
4. Updated format. Reduced duplication and repetition. External Audit completed with unqualified opinion.

***Resolved that:***

**1. Council approved the following recommendation from Executive Board that:**

***“Council confirms that it has reasonable expectation that the University has adequate resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future and should continue to adopt the going concern basis for preparing the accounts.”***

**2. Council endorse the 2021/22 Integrated Annual Report and authorise the Honorary Treasurer to sign off the accounts.**

## **29. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY/STUDENT’ UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE**

Received an update on the October meeting of the Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had received presentations relating to the Mental Health Charter Mark, and Strategic Plan for Sport, as well as a report on options for the redevelopment of the Students’ Union building which would be discussed further as part of the budget-setting process.
2. The Committee had discussed residential accommodation issues affecting students in the city of Newcastle. The issue of the availability of rental accommodation had been added to the strategic risk register.

## **30. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

Received an update on the November meeting of the Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. Following a recommendation from Nominations Committee, the Chair of Council had taken Chair’s action to approve the appointment of Alex Lamb as a new member of Finance Committee. The Committee had also recommended the appointment of Mags Scott as a new member of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.
2. The terms of office of the current Vice-Chair and Chair of Council would end on 31 July 2023 and 31 July 2024 respectively. The Committee recommended that an appointment process for a new Chair of Council should commence in Spring 2023. Should a suitable candidate be identified and appointed, the individual could take the role of Vice-Chair for 2023-24 prior to taking the Chair in 2024. This would support an effective transition and provide an opportunity for the individual to get know members of Council and Executive Board.

***Resolved that Council approve the appointment of Mags Scott as a member of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee from 1 August 2022 until 31 July 2025.***

## **31. EXTERNAL REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE**

Received a report from a sub-group of Nominations Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. A sub-group of Nominations Committee had been convened to consider in detail the outcomes of the external review of governance and to make recommendations to Council.

2. Most recommendations were already underway, but there were two suggestions for which the sub-group had not seen a clear business reason for taking forward (lengthening the term of appointment of staff members on Council, and altering the reporting line of Executive Board so that it reported directly to Council through the Vice-Chancellor). Regarding the length of appointment of staff members on Council, Statute changes approved in 2020 affecting the length of appointment on Senate of members of Council elected by Senate still needed to take effect. It was anticipated that these changes would improve the effectiveness of the relationship between Senate and Council.
3. One recommendation would require a change to the University Statutes. It was proposed to expand the membership of Senate through the inclusion of University Deans as ex officio members to help in the consideration of strategic academic aims and provide Council with academic assurance. The Registrar would bring forward a proposal on this matter.
4. Periodic updates on the implementation of the agreed governance review outcomes would be reported to Council.

***Resolved that Council approve the proposed action plan.***

## **ROUTINE BUSINESS**

### **32. CHAIR'S CIRCULAR**