

# NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

## COUNCIL

14 October 2024

**Present:** Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Jasmine Banks (Education Officer, Students' Union), Linda Conlon, Leo David (President, Students' Union), Will Garton, Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Lisa Hunter, Anjam Khan, Alex Lamb, Bill MacLeod, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Claire Morgan, Marta Phillips, Emma Reay, Angela Russell (Honorary Treasurer), Nitin Shukla.

Colin Riordan attended via Teams.

**In attendance:** Professor Brian Walker (Strategic Advisor) and Neil Gardner (Director of Strategic Planning and Change) for Item 8, Rachel Dearlove (Head of Educational Governance and Quality Assurance) for Item 10, Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer) and Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office).

**Apologies:** Derek Bell

## MINUTES

### 1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed new members to their first meeting of Council, and wished to place on record Council's thanks to Paul Walker, who had retired as Chair of Council in July 2024, for his service to the University and exemplary stewardship of Council.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 8 July 2024.

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

***Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 8 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.***

### 4. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an update from the Registrar on behalf of the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. The University Health and Safety Committee would be meeting on the 24 October 2024 and the following reviewed management standards would be subject to approval: Review of the Health and Safety Policy; Review of the University Health and Safety Management System; Review of the Contractors Management Standard; Review of the HASMAP Audit Process; and changes to the Legionella Management Standard.
2. The annual Health and Safety reporting cycle was partly complete with the draft University Annual Report due to be provided to the Health and Safety Committee for

consideration. Following agreement by the Committee, the report would be submitted to Executive Board in November and Council in December.

3. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) had undertaken an investigation following a contractor drilling into an Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) on the 27 June 2024. The contractor who was installing a CCTV camera on Ridley Building 1, had drilled into an ACM asbestos insulating board. The HSE identified that the University had failed to implement the identified steps in its Asbestos Management Plan and failed to sufficiently manage contractors while on site by virtue of failing to liaise with and supervise the contractor carrying out work. An internal investigation had been undertaken within Estates and Facilities and an action plan would be sent to the HSE by the required date. A notice of contravention had been received by the University. Council was assured that associated risks were being managed appropriately by the University.

## 5. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. Linda Conlon had been honoured as a Fellow of the Association of Science and Technology Centers, (ASTC) for performing 'exemplary service to the field and furthering the public understanding of science'. ASTC, which represents 600 organisations from more than 40 countries, had only presented the Fellow Award for Outstanding Contribution 32 times in its 50-year history and this was the first time it had been given to a European woman.

## 6. 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. Mike Davison

The University had been deeply saddened to hear about the death of Mike Davison in early July. Mike had done a great deal to support Newcastle University, as a lay member of Council between 2010-19, a member of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee from 2005 until 2017 (chairing the committee between 2013-17), as Honorary Treasurer of the Development Trust, lay member of Senate, and as a member of Research Ethics Committee. He performed his role as a lay member with an open and inclusive style, ready to challenge when appropriate but without causing unnecessary friction. His engagement had been exemplary.

### 2. Academic Board

An extraordinary meeting of Academic Board had taken place on 31 July 2024, in response to questions received from members regarding the University's approach to the Newcastle Apartheid Off Campus encampment protest. The timeline of the encampment was presented, along with the demands from protesters the University's responses, which 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 sought an end to the encampment, which ended voluntarily on 21

July 2024. Next steps included independent mediation supported by Newcastle University Students' Union and a 'lessons learned' exercise which included input from UniversitiesUK on lessons learned elsewhere in the sector.

Council noted that the protest encampment had had a negative impact on some students and colleagues who had been made to feel vulnerable. In the event of future protests, it was important that all members of the University community shared a commitment to respectful behaviors and dialogue.

3. Opportunity, growth and partnership: A blueprint for change from the UK's universities

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 did in education, research, knowledge exchange and innovation, and examined what worked, what should change and what the sector needed 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.

4. Universities for the North East

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 involved the five universities 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.

5. Access and Participation Plan

The Office for Students (OfS) had provisionally approved the University's 2025-26 access and participation plan for a period of one year in the first instance. Approval would automatically roll over each subsequent year for a maximum of three years unless the OfS expressly notified a provider in writing that a new plan needed to be submitted for approval. The total possible duration of the plan's approval was therefore four years.

6. Faraday Institute

Newcastle University had hosted the Faraday Institution's biggest science dissemination conference to date on 10-12 September 2024. Attended by over 500 delegates, the Faraday Institution Conference 2024 brought together the Energy Storage community of academics, industry organisations, policymakers and funders from the UK and around the world. 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.

7. Henderson Old Hall

Following the arson attack in June 2023, efforts had been focussed on securing the structural safety of the building, 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 which had incurred costs to date of £1.2m, currently covered by insurance.

Taking account of surveys and external advice, the University had concluded that demolition was not a viable option, and the building should be restored to a state to meet its listing requirements. Works would now commence to secure the structure and weatherproof the building, including construction of a new roof and replacement windows and doors.

A high-level estimate of these works was around £6m which would be confirmed as covered by the insurance policy prior to making any financial commitments. In parallel, the University would continue to consider a full range of future options for the building, ensuring these works retained as much flexibility for future use as possible.

#### 8. Race-Related Riots

Council discussed the far-right, anti-immigration protests and riots that had taken place in various towns and cities across parts of England including the North East, in late July and early August. The riots did not extend to Newcastle, however, the targeted abuse and violence over that weekend had left many people in the local community feeling scared and vulnerable. The University was proactive in maintaining positive community relations and had been represented at a meeting of faith leaders in the city.

#### 9. Retirement Benefits Plan

***Council approved the appointment of Daniel Spurr (Head of Accounting and Control) as one of the three University-nominated Trustees of the RBP Pensions Scheme.***

### 7. RISK MANAGEMENT

Received the full strategic risk register.

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

Noted:

1. The risk score for research growth, power and intensity had been reduced earlier in the academic year, reflecting an increase in research awards and income. The risk scores associated with the global vision had been increased to reflect political and geopolitical instability and the impact that this has had on the reputation of UK higher education.
2. Council noted that the University would be exploring the possibility of merging the strategic risks for home and international student recruitment, and advised that the feasibility of doing this should be explored with care. Were the result to be a single strategic risk for student recruitment, it would be important to preserve granularity in the information provided for assurance purposes.
3. It was noted that the University's annual review of its approach to risk appetite would be considered at the next meeting in the context of current financial headwinds.
4. Council welcomed the assurance provided that the strategic risk register was comprehensive and consistent with risks reported elsewhere in the Higher Education sector and the wider public sector in the UK.

***Council confirmed that it had received sufficient assurance that the risks facing the University were being managed appropriately noting that further discussion would take place at the upcoming meeting of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.***

## 8. NU SHAPE

The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor introduced a presentation and discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received an update on progress and interim outputs from the NUShape (Shaping Newcastle to 2030) programme which had been in progress since March 2023 and had been discussed at joint Council/Executive Board Away Days in March 2023 and March 2024.
2. NUShape had been conceived to address perceived deficiencies in the University's implementation of Vision and Strategy, including planning horizons for academic priorities being too short and priorities at different levels of the institution being too numerous and poorly aligned. Its primary objective was to change the culture of strategising and planning.
3. A secondary objective was to underpin the choices the University should make for deployment of resources and attainment of financial sustainability. Prior to NUShape, in the absence of clear academic priorities, it was difficult to have confidence in the choices which would best support the longer-term health of the institution.
4. A University-level Strategic Delivery Plan and a framework for the NUShape Delivery Phase to be initiated from academic session 2024/25 had been produced. At later meetings, Council would have the opportunity to review Faculty Strategic Delivery Plans.
5. The five-year implementation framework enshrined the changes that the University had collectively committed to in pursuit of its vision and refreshed goals: (i) to be a provider of leading-edge, inclusive education that is fit for the future; (ii) to deliver leading-edge research for discovery and impact; (iii) to be sustainable in all that we do. Three interdisciplinary 'grow' topics had been identified: Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Sustainable Resources and Climate Change, and Healthy and Productive Life Course.
6. Council welcomed the progress being made with NUShape, and expressed a desire to receive further information on how the programme would deliver financial benefit for the University, connectivity with the University budget, as well as greater clarity about the timeline for realisation of benefits and criteria to address under-performing activity.

## 9. UNIVERSITY FINANCES UPDATE

The Chief Financial Officer introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. Council received an update on the University's current financial position which had resulted from a significant shortfall in international student intake, as well as the immediate mitigating actions taken in response and consideration of longer-term implications.
2. Due to the shortfall in international student intake, the University was facing approximately £30 -35 million shortfall in tuition fee income. The budget approved by Council had anticipated a shortfall of £15 million under a moderate downside scenario.

3. The sector had experienced a decrease in international student enrolment, driven by external factors such as government immigration policy, political rhetoric, and social unrest. Additionally, Newcastle had been impacted by a fall in its QS rankings at the time students were making final decisions about where to study.
4. A range of short-term actions had been implemented with immediate effect to create savings in the 2024/25 financial year that would largely offset the shortfall in income. Should the actions deliver the intended benefits, they would be sufficient to protect the in-year operating surplus and in-year operating cashflow.
5. Finance Committee had welcomed these measures but noted that it was crucial to protect the student experience while continuing to invest in the University's future and build financial reserves to buffer against next year's challenges. Continuation of sensible capital investments was encouraged where they related to necessary future improvements.
6. Executive Board and Finance Committee had considered the option of deferring the 2024 national pay award, and had recommended that it was more beneficial to implement the full award as advised by UCEA, as to defer would have adverse impacts on all colleagues. Council endorsed the recommendation.
7. Council discussed the University's decision to pause the academic promotions and progression exercise for the current academic year, and noted that a new phase of the voluntary severance scheme for academic colleagues would be launched.
8. A range of measures for the 2025 recruitment cycle and future recruitment sustainability had been considered by Executive Board.

***Resolved that Council approve the implementation of the national pay award in full for all colleagues backdated to 1 August 2024.***

## 10. STUDENT SURVEYS

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.

Noted that:

1. Council received an update on the University's 2024 performance in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and National Student Survey (NSS). Institutional and subject level scores in the PTES were broadly positive, and positivity measures had increased for all 7 themes in the NSS. However, five themes remained below benchmark, with two (assessment and feedback, and learning opportunities) materially below benchmark.
2. Council noted the potential bearing of the University's NSS scores on its performance in the next Teaching Excellence Framework scheduled to take place in 2027. Whilst progress was positive, there were several immediate challenges arising from the present financial situation, as well as longer-term pressure to deliver on the transformational commitments included in the revised Education Strategy.

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

Received a report from the meeting of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee held on.  
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had received updates about the protest encampment, National Student Survey results, Strategic Risk 6 (Engagement and Place), and Strategic Risk 9 (Financial Sustainability).

## 12. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of Nominations Committee held on 16 September 2024  
[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. An external recruitment campaign, conducted by Peridot on behalf of the University, had sought applications from individuals with senior, strategic leadership experience, to enhance the diversity of, and to address some of the skills requirements among, the Council membership. A longlist of 10 candidates had been considered by a sub-group of Nominations Committee, from which two stand-out candidates for the lay vacancies had been identified based on relevant skills and experience. The Committee had agreed to recommend to Council the appointment as lay members of Arun Harish and Adam Serfontein.
2. The Committee had considered a proposal from the Chair of Council regarding the appointment of a new Deputy Chair of Council. Having spoken with all existing lay members of Council, the Chair proposed that Mags Scott be appointed Deputy Chair.
3. Claire Morgan's current term on Council and tenure as Senior Independent Governor was due to end on 31 July 2025. Nominations Committee had agreed to recommend to Council re-appointment as a lay member of Council and Senior Independent Governor until 31 July 2026 (an extension of the current appointment for a further year), taking appointment on Council to 9 years in total, the maximum length permitted.
4. The Committee had also recommended to Council the approval of some changes to the lay membership of, and Council appointments to, University committees.

***Resolved that Council approve the following appointments from 1 August 2024 until 31 July 2027:***

<b><i>Council</i></b>	<b><i>Arun Harish</i></b>
	<b><i>Adam Serfontein</i></b>
<b><i>Deputy Chair of Council</i></b>	<b><i>Mags Scott</i></b>
<b><i>Audit, Risk and Assurance</i></b>	<b><i>Linda Conlon</i></b>
<b><i>Chair of Biosafety</i></b>	<b><i>Dr Ilke Turkmendag</i></b>
<b><i>Sub-Committee</i></b>	
<b><i>Finance Committee</i></b>	<b><i>Mags Scott</i></b>
<b><i>Nominations Committee</i></b>	<b><i>Will Garton</i></b>
	<b><i>Mags Scott</i></b>
<b><i>Remuneration Committee</i></b>	<b><i>Colin Riordan</i></b>
<b><i>Chair of University-Students'</i></b>	<b><i>Mags Scott</i></b>
<b><i>Union Partnership Committee</i></b>	

***Resolved that Council approve the extension of Claire Morgan's appointment as a member of Council and Senior Independent Governor until 31 July 2026.***

## 13. 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 H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Students' Union continued to face budgetary pressures and was forecasting a year-end deficit for 2023-24. In response, targeted recruitment freezes wherever possible had been implemented, without impacting the student experience. The University had supported a Block Grant Subvention bid from the Students' Union.
2. Council was alarmed to learn that student initiations had been taking place and asked to receive an update at its next meeting on actions taken by the University to address this.

### **RESERVED BUSINESS**

#### **14. SENIOR APPOINTMENTS**

Received a proposal from the Vice-Chancellor and President.

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

Noted that:

1. The need for greater leadership capacity around education and the student experience has been identified as part of the development of the Education for Life 2030+ Strategy. Accordingly, it was being recommended that a Dean of Students should be appointed for a period of 5 years, aligned with the timeframe of the Education Strategy. Funding for the post would come from funding allocated for implementation of the Education Strategy. Senate had endorsed the recommendation to appoint at its meeting on 18 September 2024.
2. Following colleagues' resignation, Council was also being asked to approve the appointment of a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global and new Dean of Culture and Creative Arts.

***Resolved that Council approved the proposals in the report.***

### **ROUTINE BUSINESS**

#### **15. SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 18 SEPTEMBER 2024**

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

#### **16. CHAIR'S CIRCULAR**

***Resolved that Council approve the acceptance of a donation from Dr Anthony Trapp.***