

# NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

## THE SIXTY-SIXTH ORDINARY MEETING OF CONVOCATION

**Saturday 4 November 2023**

**Present:** Nick Richardson (Chair of Convocation, in the chair), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Clare Talbot-Jones (Deputy Chair of Convocation), Millicent Acheampong, Kevin Bartlett, Lauren Bell, Shaun Boyle, David Dunscombe, James Edwardson, Anthony Grindrod, Norman Huntington, Jamal Hussein, Ngozi Iheukwumere, Benjamin Ile, Ting Jiang, Sarah Johnson, Antony Jones, Sotaro Kobayashi, George Korobokis, Daniel Large, Martin Lawrence, Kian En Lim, Eleanor Lythe, Andrew McDonald, Angus McVittie, Luis Mendes, Ekhlas Mohsin, John Pain, David Parker, Patricia Percy, Shu Peng, Lucy Philipson, Caterina Raimondi, Mallika Raj, Camilla Razzo, Josephine Scriven, Katherine Sheeran, Diane Smeed, Howard Thompson, Kaye Totts, Paul Velluet, Eric Waggott, Lucy Waters, Jane Wigfield, Joseph Wilson, Susan Wilson, Suzanne Wright, Peiyan Wu, and Gordon Wynn.

**In attendance:** Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar); Lauren Huntington (Deputy Director, NU Advancement); Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office); and Paul Tyack (Director of NU Advancement).

### 1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the sixty-sixth ordinary meeting of Convocation, noting that 2023 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne by Act of Parliament in 1963. The Chair referenced the longer history of the institution, starting with the School of Medicine and Surgery in 1834, the College of Physical Sciences in 1871, which later became Armstrong College, and all of which evolved into Kings College in 1937. Finally coming of age in 1963 as Newcastle University.

For those new to Convocation, the Chair explained that Convocation is a term used for a meeting of all graduates. In the University Statutes, Convocation is one of the Statutory Bodies that governs the University. It meets to discuss matters and provide the University with an alumni perspective on the world.

The Chair also offered some personal reflections on the role of Convocation as an 'interested friend' of the University.

### 2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 22 November 2022 were approved as a correct record.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document A.]

### 3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising to report.

### 4. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT TO CONVOCATION FOR 2022-23

Received: The Vice-Chancellor and President's Annual Report to Convocation.

Reported that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor and President provided Convocation with an update on the University's progress in implementing its Vision and Strategy, notable developments, and achievements including colleague success.
2. The University had achieved its highest ever position in global rankings – 110<sup>th</sup> in the QS World University Rankings 2024 – and had ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the UK for research power in the most recent Research Excellence Framework exercise. Also of note were the University's ranking within the top 25 in the world for sustainable development in the Times Higher Impact Rankings, its position of 4<sup>th</sup> in the UK for graduate start-up performance, top 10 position in the British Universities and Colleges Sport league table, and Race Equality Charter accreditation.
3. In terms of challenges faced by the higher education sector at large, these included: the cost of living crisis and industrial action and their respective impacts on students; the government capping the value of tuition fees, the university's largest source of income, at £9,250 since 2017, despite rising costs elsewhere; and the government including international students within targets to reduce migration to the UK.
4. A review of the University's Education Strategy was underway. The overarching aim of the revised Strategy would remain largely unchanged, with a focus on ensuring that the University remained a global future-facing institution, offering all students an education for life that supported them to fulfil their potential. Despite a disappointing performance in some recent student surveys the University was now starting to see signs of improving student satisfaction, and the University had achieved a Silver rating in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) that assessed student experience and student outcome indicators. The University had received a Gold rating in the first TEF exercise, although this had been based on National Student Survey results up to 2017.
5. The institution's long-term strategic aim for research and innovation was to fulfil its potential as a world-class research-intensive university. Notable initiatives underway included a focus on improving research culture and researcher skills training. The University had also recently seen a significant increase in research funding awards.
6. In terms of Engagement and Place Strategy, the University sought to work collaboratively with partners to ensure its teaching and research were of benefit to society. Underlining the University's commitment to widening participation was its support for the IntoUniversity Newcastle East centre in Walker. The University also had a major ambition to develop the former Newcastle General Hospital site as a Health Innovation Neighbourhood that would help to tackle the global challenges of ageing populations and widening health and social inequalities.
7. Newcastle's long-term global aim was to excel by being an internationally networked and diverse community of students and colleagues who identified as global citizens and who could respond to global challenges. The University now had its highest ever number of international students and had won a prestigious European Association for International Education award for excellence in internationalisation. A twinning arrangement had been established with the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering in Ukraine, focussing on complementary areas of academic strengths, including water, engineering, agriculture, and economics.
8. The Vice-Chancellor and President thanked alumni whose generosity as part of the University's major philanthropy campaign had helped support students to address cost of living challenges.

In response to questions from members of Convocation, the Vice-Chancellor and President responded:

1. Explaining the University's approach to the performance evaluation of senior management, the Vice-Chancellor and President described how reviews reflect progress against institutional performance metrics and priorities.
2. Henderson Old Hall had been badly damaged by fire in June 2023. Formerly used as a hall of residence, the location had been vacant at the time of the fire, and an assessment of structural damage was ongoing. The future use of the site was unclear, although interest had been received from developers.
3. It was suggested that one approach to fostering a sense of community and belonging for students could be to support students' exposure to other students and staff with common scholarly interests. Currently, the University seeks to address this through the staging of enrichment weeks – a programme of events available in person and online to help students acquire skills, start conversations, and make new connections -, and through School X, which aimed to serve as a focal point for cross-disciplinary education and research collaborations across the University.
4. Outlining the University's strategy for European students in the absence of participation in Erasmus+, the European Union's programme to support education and training, the Vice-Chancellor and President stated that the University wished to see levels of participation in overseas work and study return to those of the Erasmus+ programme. The UK government had established the Turing Scheme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world as a replacement for participation in Erasmus+. The Turing Scheme provided funding for UK students only and at a reduced volume, however, and not for overseas students to come to the UK to work or study.
5. Summarising the University's strategy for working overseas and the perceived benefits of doing so, the Vice-Chancellor and President explained that the University seeks to collaborate and develop partnerships with other institutions elsewhere in the globe in areas of mutual education and research strength, and for reputational gain. The University had no plans to develop new campuses overseas.

## **5. CHAIR'S REPORT TO CONVOCATION**

Reported:

1. The Chair stated his ambition for the University to grow its alumni network, connecting with Newcastle graduates from across the globe.
2. At present there were 27 alumni networks around the world, comprising 16 regional networks and city groups and 11 common interest or subject-specific networks.
3. Alumni events of note that had taken place in 2023 included celebrations organised by the University in Shanghai, Beijing, and London. A total of 18 reunion events, celebrating 20,30-, and 40-year anniversaries had been run for Newcastle graduates.
4. In October 2023, the University had awarded 193 Honorary Bachelor of Education degrees during a special graduation ceremony for teaching alumni who had studied at partner colleges of the University in the late 1960s.
5. A range of support services existed to help alumni to reach their full potential and build their personal and professional networks. These included NCL Develop, a professional

development event programme; NCL Discover, a webinar programme; and NCL in Action, where the alumni community had been invited to take part in volunteering activities and other events with a focus on celebrating the might of a multi-generational society.

6. Opportunities for alumni to give back to their University, with a network of 500 alumni volunteers in place, offering around 50 different opportunities including mentoring and careers talks, and over 1,000 alumni donors having helped to raise over £750k for the Newcastle Student Fund in support of current Newcastle students struggling with the cost of living.
7. An Alumni Survey had taken place in June 2023, attracting over 3,800 responses from alumni in nine countries and spanning seven generations. The aim of the survey was to identify how Newcastle alumni perceive and utilise current networks and support and to analyse how this has changed over time. 63% of graduates felt connected to the University and 72% were interested in what was going on at the University today. The survey findings also suggested that 40% of those alumni responding recognised one or more of the benefits or services offered by NU Advancement. Reflections for further action around the promotion of alumni engagement and services were under consideration by NU Advancement.
8. The Chair of Convocation offered several ideas aimed at supporting the development of further networks, including the appointment of ambassadors and advisory boards, and the development of a toolkit. The Chair's suggestions for the development of the Convocation Weekend included a 'Re-Fresher Conference', a graduation ball, an alumni awards event, exhibitions, and rolling date reunions.

Noted:

1. Members of Convocation reflected on the ideas for the development of alumni networks as outlined by the Chair. There was support voiced in favour of a focus on building community and alumni engagement activities with content capable of generating higher levels of participation.

## **6. THE CHANCELLORSHIP**

Reported:

1. That Imtiaz Dharker had been appointed as Chancellor of the University at an extraordinary meeting of Convocation in November 2019 for a period of two years effective from 1 January 2020, and reappointed at the meeting of Convocation held in October 2021 for an additional two years from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. The Chancellor had indicated her willingness to be re-appointed for a further period of four years.
2. In accordance with Statute 5.4, the Chancellor shall be appointed by Convocation on the nomination of Court and Senate sitting in joint session.
3. The Vice-Chancellor and President presented a recommendation from the joint meeting of Court and Senate held on 20 September 2023 to re-appoint Imtiaz Dharker as the University Chancellor for a further four-year period from 1 January 2024.

Noted:

1. It was suggested by a member of Convocation that the Chancellor could be encouraged to become more involved with the alumni community of the University.

Resolved:

Convocation unanimously approved the recommendation from the joint meeting of Court and Senate that Imtiaz Dharker be re-appointed as Chancellor for a further four-year period from 1 January 2024.

## **7. HONORARY DEGREES**

For information:

Nominations were currently being invited for the award of honorary degrees by the University. Further information, including a video featuring recent honorary graduates, and a link to the online nomination form was available [here](#).

Proposals should be sent via [email](#) to Dr Colin Campbell, Registrar. The closing date for receipt of nominations was 1 December 2023.

## **8. HONORARY FELLOWSHIPS OF THE UNIVERSITY**

For information:

Court had invited nominations in writing for the award of Honorary Fellowships of the University in 2025. Any member of Court, Council, Academic Board and Convocation may make a nomination. Where several members make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination is made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships and Nomination Forms can be found at: [https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/nom\\_honfell/](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/nom_honfell/)

Proposals should be sent via [email](#) to Dr Colin Campbell, Registrar. The closing date for receipt of nominations is 24 June 2024.

## **9. CLOSING REMARKS**

Noted that:

1. The Deputy Chair of Convocation emphasised the importance of alumni engagement activities adding value through a focus on building community and social connections. The Deputy Chair of Convocation also invited members of Convocation to submit their suggestions and ideas for strengthening the alumni community, as well as their feedback on current arrangements.
2. The Chair of Convocation thanked the Vice-Chancellor and President for his report and thanked the University's Advancement team for organising the meeting, as well as all members of Convocation who had attended it.
3. The Chair of Convocation invited members of Convocation to provide feedback on the arrangements that had been made for holding the meeting.

## **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Reported that the sixty-seventh ordinary meeting of Convocation would take place on

Saturday 13 July 2024.

Dr Simon Meacher  
Secretary to Convocation  
November 2023