

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

18 March 2024

Present: Paul Walker (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Shah Yaseen Ali (President, Students' Union), Dr Shoba Amarnath, Lulu Chen (Education Officer, Students' Union), Jan Deckers, Jo Geary, Alex Lamb, Bill MacLeod, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips, Pat Ritchie (Vice-Chair of Council), Angela Russell, Mags Scott, Nitin Shukla, Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Angela Woodburn.

In attendance: Professor Ruth Valentine (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education) for Item xx, Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Nick Collins (Executive Director of Finance), and Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services).

Apologies: David Bird, Tom Caulker, Linda Conlon, and Claire Morgan.

MINUTES

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

49. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 29 January 2024.

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

Resolved that, subject to minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 29 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

50. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Noted that:

1. University Health and Safety Committee had met Thursday 15 February, and had approved three management standards: Vibration; Stress; Work Equipment. The Committee had also noted that three out of six strategic actions had been completed.
2. During a legionella risk assessment carried out by HSL, the University's current water safety provider, it had been identified that a cooling system used at the Design Unit in Walker should be considered a cooling tower. As a result of this the University was required to notify the City Council. This information was also available to the HSE who would need to inspect the Unit every 2-3 years. The system posed a risk to the immunocompromised in surrounding locations, although the risk was relatively low, with all the required control measures in place, and the University was working with Hydrop, a Water Hygiene Specialist, to ensure that these were correct.
3. There had been a fire in the Marley accommodation block at Castle Leazes, on 2 March 2024. The fire had started within the kitchen area of a student flat, causing extensive damage. No injuries had been reported. Following investigation, it had been concluded that the cause of the fire was unknown. The Tyne and Wear Fire Service had attended the site on 7 March 2024 to carry out a post fire audit of the premises. All mitigations in place were judged to be suitable and sufficient.

51. **CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

There was nothing to report.

52. **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. Free Speech and Conflict in the Middle East

As the conflict in the Middle East continued there had been increased tensions on campus, which had been used for two protests to date, and there had been a smaller protest outside of a careers event in the Hadrian Building due to the presence of an organisation which had links to the defence industry. Guidance for protests had been approved and would be rolled out to students and colleagues. A group of colleagues including representation from the Students' Union, Student Wellbeing and People Services was meeting weekly to discuss campus issues and how to support students and colleagues.

The University's Code of Practice for Free Speech was being updated for the 2024/25 academic year. Further guidance from the Office for Students was expected following recent consultations regarding a new complaints scheme.

The family of Sage co-founder David Goldman had withdrawn its support for the University following comments made on social media by one of the University's honorary graduates, asking for the degree to be rescinded. The Vice-Chancellor had taken advice on the issues concerned including from Lord Mann (the UK Government's independent adviser on antisemitism) and Catherine McKinnell MP (chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism), and none of the advisors agreed that the University should take any further action. Senate had also considered the issues at its meeting on 17 January, reaching the same conclusion.

2. Definitions of Discrimination

The Vice-Chancellor had engaged extensively with sector representatives and other experts on the use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism in higher education, perceptions of which varied among different parts of the University and wider higher education community. A message had been cascaded to University colleagues to provide assurance that endorsement of IHRA did not interfere with academic freedom. The Department for Education had announced plans to develop and implement a programme of activities to support universities in tackling antisemitism on campus including the development of a "Quality Seal". Professor Judith Rankin (Dean of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) would gather input to support the University in responding to sector consultations.

3. UK-KSA International Institute for Sustainable Energy

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global and Sustainability and the Director of Business Development and Enterprise had attended Number 10 Downing Street on 7 February 2024 to meet with UK government officials, representatives from UK Infrastructure Bank and dignitaries from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to discuss the proposed joint development of an international institute for sustainable energy. A formal proposal would be brought to Council for approval when ready.

4. Health Innovation Neighbourhood

Following the government's announcement of a 'North East Trailblazer' Devolution Deal worth £100m, funds had been designated by the North East Mayoralty Combined Authority for the development of a Health Innovation Zone including the Health Innovation Neighbourhood.

5. Newcastle Helix

It was agreed that Council should receive an update on the status of the development of affordable housing at the Helix site, following the granting of planning permission for a project led by Future Homes Alliance, a Community Interest Company formed by the University, together with Ryder Architecture, Zero Carbon Futures, the Elders Council, the Sustainable Communities Initiative, and the Innovation Super Network.

6. Voluntary Severance Scheme

A total of 177 applications for voluntary severance had been received so far, with almost 80% of the total from professional services colleagues. Decisions would be communicated in early May.

53. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and Registrar provided an update on risks relating to the University's strategic objectives.

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

Noted:

1. Financial viability continued to be one of the highest rated risks for the University. Cost pressures continued to influence the financial outlook for the 2023/24 financial year and beyond. Ongoing high inflation and energy costs were also a factor that would influence planning and budgeting assumptions for future years.
2. The University continued to work within an extremely challenging environment when it comes to recruiting international students. Increasing global competition and government changes to immigration policy (among other factors) meant that all UK universities were operating in a volatile environment in relation to this market.
3. The Spring Budget on 6 March 2024 included £10 million towards a Health Innovation Zone as part of the North-East Mayoral Combined Authority Trailblazer Deal. From the University's perspective, the funding would support the clearance of vacant buildings that would facilitate future development of the Health Innovation Neighbourhood (HIN).

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

STRATEGY AND KPIs

54. **EDUCATION STRATEGY**

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education introduced a revised Education Strategy.

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

Noted that:

1. The new Strategy had been endorsed by Senate at its meeting on 28 February 2024, and had been created in partnership with colleagues and students and aimed to enhance the education experience of all the University's students, wherever and whatever they study, and empower them to build their own education for life, preparing them to be global citizens that can visibly lead and tackle social and environmental challenges.
2. The Strategy had three key aims:
 - Equity (to provide a core, universal offer for all students, including tailored provision where needed, to ensure equity of access, experience and in outcomes for all, regardless of background, identity, nationality, location or mode of study);
 - Encounters with the Leading Edge (to put at the heart of the curriculum and learning experiences, encounters with world leading research and the leading edge of industry and practice); and
 - Fit for the Future (students, teaching, learning, assessment, and support, and colleagues).
3. Members of Council welcomed the clarity for the long-term provided in the Strategy, as well as the focus on skills and employability.
4. Council had considered the high-level implementation plan for the Strategy earlier as part of its joint away-day with Executive Board. Cost implications, and key performance indicators which would support Council in monitoring progress, would be developed in the coming months.

Resolved that Council approve the Education Strategy.

REPORTS

55. ANNUAL STUDENT CASEWORK REPORT

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education introduced the annual report relating to Formal Student Procedure Casework including Appeals, Complaints, Assessment Irregularities, Disciplinary, Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) submissions, Support to Study, and Fitness to Practise cases.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate had considered the annual report in detail at its most recent meeting which was held on 28 February 2024.
2. There was an increasing trend of cases across most of the other categories covered by the report, with a growing demand for resource within Academic Units and the Student Health and Wellbeing Service to support students experiencing health issues. Over 12,000 students had engaged with the Student Health and Wellbeing Service during the 2022-23 academic year. Partnerships and signposting were in place to ensure students were receiving necessary medical care where appropriate.
3. The 2022-23 year had been challenging for many students, with the cost-of-living crisis and the rising prevalence of mental health difficulties presenting additional challenges. The overall number of Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) submissions and the number of individual students requesting adjustments had continued at the same high-volume, which continued to cause difficulties in processing. Internal workshops had been held to help understand the underlying issues.

4. A working group within Student Services was reviewing the process for Support to Study Plans (SSP), with a view to reducing workloads by ensuring universal and inclusive design where possible.
5. Reports of antisocial behaviour and noise nuisance had decreased following a sustained effort by the University to develop and maintain key community partnerships in this area.
6. Council recorded its thanks to all colleagues involved in supporting student casework and procedures.

56. DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education introduced the University's Degree Outcomes Statement for 2022-23.

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

Noted that:

1. The University had consistently awarded a smaller proportion of firsts and upper second-class awards than the average across the Russell Group.
2. In July 2022 Universities UK had made a commitment on behalf of the sector to return to pre-pandemic levels of awarding First Class and Upper Second-Class degrees by 2023 and the University's 2022-23 results had met that commitment.
3. The largest awarding gaps were for international students, minoritised ethnic students and mature students (those age 21 or over on entry). The Access and Participation Plan would include interventions to address awarding gaps and to ensure the offer was inclusive. XXX.

Resolved that Council approve the Degree Outcomes Statement.

57. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Honorary Treasurer and Executive Director of Finance introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered the latest quarterly financial review at its meeting on 6 March 2024, noting that operating costs continued to remain higher than budget with further increases on core staff-related costs – such as travel, which had returned to pre-Covid levels – and utilities. Cost contingency had been reduced to compensate for an energy cost increase over budget. Executive Board had been asked to produce an action plan showing how these costs would be brought under control and back in line with budget.
2. Council reflected on the need for the University to develop an effective long-term capital plan covering Net Zero, estate, and IT spend.
3. Following agreement by Council, and clearance from the University's legal advisors, the Framework Agreement with Unite Students for the redevelopment of Castle Leazes had been executed on 15 February 2024. Work was now progressing at pace with procurement of the main contractor and to implement the governance arrangements for the project phase.

58. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY-STUDENTS' UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Received a report from the February meeting of the Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had agreed to improve student voter registration arrangements in line with sector best practice and a request from CitizensUK to participate in their voter registration champions scheme.

RESERVED BUSINESS

59. APPOINTMENT OF A UNIVERSITY DEAN

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. The current Dean of Innovation and Business would retire from the post in May 2024. Council was asked to approve the continuation of the University Deanship, to allow for the recruitment of a successor.

Resolved that Council approve the appointment of a Dean of Innovation and Business.

60. RE-APPOINTMENT OF A UNIVERSITY DEAN

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. The current term of appointment of the Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice would end on 31 July 2024. Council was asked to approve the extension of Professor René Koglbauer's tenure as Dean until 31 July 2029, allowing the University to advance plans in developing and implementing its new Education Strategy.

Resolved that Council approve the re-appointment of Professor Rene Koglbauer as Dean of Lifelong Learning and Professional Practice until 31 July 2029.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

61. SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 28 FEBRUARY 2024

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