

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

30 January 2023

Present: 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, Alex Lamb, Dr Phillip Lord, Bill MacLeod, Mack Marshall (Education Officer, Students' Union), Claire Morgan, Heidi Mottram, Dianne Nelmes, Marta Phillips, Angela Russell, Mags Scott, Nitin Shukla, Professor Daniel Siemens, Professor David Thwaites and Angela Woodburn.

In attendance: Maria Hussain (University of Leeds) and Jessica Valli (Heriot-Watt University), Sally Ingram (Director of Student Health and Wellbeing) for Item 2.1, Professor Tom Ward (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) for Items 3.2 and 3.3, Simon Gerry (Chief Executive, Students' Union) for Item 3.4, with 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: Jo Geary, Pat Ritchie and Professor Brian Walker (Deputy Vice-Chancellor).

MINUTES

33. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Maria Hussain and Jessica Valli, who were attending the meeting in an observer capacity as participants on the Advance HE and Wellcome Success on the Board programme.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

35. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 12 December 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 12 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

36. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Noted that:

1. The next meeting of University Health and Safety Committee would take place on 16 February 2023. A review of key performance indicators for Quarter 1 would be considered.
2. The University had completed its annual return to the Chemical Weapons Convention on time.

37. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. Council expressed its deep regret on the passing of member of Council Professor Sir Mike Rawlins. A memorial service would take place and details would be circulated.
2. The Chair congratulated the Vice-Chancellor and President on the award of a CBE in the New Year's Honours.
3. Council were reminded that the joint Council and Executive Board away day would take place on 20 March 2023.

38. 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. Industrial Action

The University and College Union had announced a series of 18 days of strike action due to take place beginning on Wednesday 1 February and with the remaining dates to be announced shortly.

2. Cost of Living

As Council had been informed at its previous meeting, a trial for the subsidised provision of affordable breakfasts and lunches for students and colleagues was begun in December. The scheme would continue into Semester 2 and would be reviewed regularly in line with other measures to support students with the cost of living.

3. North East Devolution

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has agreed a devolution deal between the government and the local authorities of the North East on Friday 27 January. The deal would transfer new powers and include a £1.4 billion investment fund over 30 years focusing on economic growth areas closely linked to the University's core business.

4. High Voltage Infrastructure

At its meeting on 20 December 2022, Executive Board had considered the impact of inflationary pressures on materials, particularly metal, and labour on the overall forecast spend on the High Voltage Infrastructure project to £6.564m. This was against a previously Council approved budget of £5.9m. Committing the funds would not have any impact on other capital expenditure. Financial Monitoring and Budget Scrutiny Group was actively considering the risk of inflationary pressures on other live projects, and it was agreed that Council should be provided with an overview of this work.

Resolved that Council approve an additional £664k spend to complete the High Voltage Infrastructure installation works.

5. International Student Recruitment

A member of Council had submitted a question prior to the meeting seeking clarification about the implications for recruitment of the government's plans to change visa requirements for international students. Under current rules, international students could obtain post-study work visas for two years but a new proposal would see that period

reduced to six months, a smaller period of time than what was permitted by international competitors, and a potential risk to the attractiveness of studying in the UK.

6. Antisemitism

The University had hosted a visit from a representative from the Taskforce on Antisemitism in Higher Education on 8 December 2022. The visiting team had expressed a positive view about the University's approach to tackling discrimination.

Noted that:

1. Council would continue to receive assurance about the University's progress in relation to its Race Equality Charter action plan via reports from Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Executive Board.
2. The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Robert Halfon MP, had written to all universities on 18 January 2023 to encourage universities to continue working to meet the skills needs of the economy. In particular, the letter asked universities to set out their approach to entry requirements for students with 'T (technical) level' qualifications; to ensure there is no risk of medical and/or dentistry schools being oversubscribed in 2023-24 and beyond; and to advance social justice by helping disadvantaged applicants through the provision of degree apprenticeships. The University had replied to the letter with the offer of hosting a ministerial visit to showcase current work.

The University was providing degree apprenticeships relevant to its expertise and demand. Discussed how there was a need for employers to provide and fund students for degree apprenticeships. Liaising with the Confederation of British Industry and regional Chamber of Commerce would help with sharing experience and communicating about opportunities.

39. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

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

Noted:

1. Since the last meeting of Council, four strategic risks had been updated by their risk owner and reviewed by Executive Board. Three risks had also been reviewed in depth by Audit Risk and Assurance Committee at their recent meeting. Work was underway to review the scope of SR12 so that it covered both the University's physical and digital infrastructure.
2. The first meeting of the Business Continuity and Risk Group had taken place on 14 December 2022. The newly proposed leading risk indicators were agreed, and the group would now start monitoring and reporting on these.
3. The University's Education Continuity Group was meeting regularly to agree mitigating actions and communications in light of the ongoing industrial action by members of the University and College Union.
4. Issues relating to the availability and cost of student accommodation were being monitored and by a city-wide group convened with the City Council and Northumbria University.

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

40. **STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

Noted that:

1. Council congratulated the Director of Student Health and Wellbeing on being awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours.
2. Council received a presentation on the scope and shape of the University's Student Health and Wellbeing service which featured a faculty-aligned 'hub and spoke' model allowing school-based advisers to shape the provision of support according to local need.
3. An external review of the service was underway focusing on eleven key areas including governance arrangements, resourcing and value for money, and service provision.
4. In response to recent updates issued by Universities UK relating to what universities could do to be safer places, the University had taken a number of steps to enhance its provision. These included implementation of mandatory suicide awareness training for all staff, membership of cross-agency groups, and provision of an onsite NHS Mental Health nurse. The availability of more central on-site services delivered in collaboration with outside agencies would be pivotal, although student understanding of external referred services would continue to be important for students' independence.
5. The higher education sector was currently awaiting a response from the Office for Students to a report it had commissioned from SUMS Consulting evaluating its Statement of Expectations for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students. This was likely to result in new regulation and the issue becoming the subject of an additional condition of registration.
6. Council noted the recommendations made following a recent Students' Union society campaign for survivors of sexual violence entitled 'It Happens Here'. The recommendations called on the University to place a greater focus on student survivor needs and mandatory training. The University was reflecting on how to communicate what was being done more effectively.
7. With regard to drug awareness, the University had developed and implemented a harm reduction policy in tandem with the Students' Union.
8. University and Students' Union representatives had met with the delegation from the government's antisemitism taskforce upon the occasion of their visit in December 2022. It was suggested that some students had concerns about microaggressions and unreported incidents. Closer conversation with students would be needed to understand these concerns. Council noted that the University had implemented active bystander training for colleagues, and had an ongoing commitment to raising awareness of the religious calendar, and key periods of faith and worship.
9. Other current work included the development of a drug and alcohol awareness programme for pre-registered students, raising engagement with training on mental health and inclusivity and monitoring training metrics.

41. **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

The Executive Director of People Services introduced the annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report and Gender Pay Gap Summary.

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

Noted that:

1. The report brought together the University's reporting on its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Equality Objectives and annual reporting of equality information, whilst also providing a summary of the institutional Gender Pay Gap Report.
2. The University had continued to make progress across its Equality Objectives in the 2021-2022 reporting period and, although slightly outside the reporting period, a particular highlight of 2022 had been achieving a Race Equality Charter (REC) Bronze Award for the University's work to tackle race inequality.
3. Other key areas of progress included work towards developing an inclusive culture, increasing the representation and progression of protected characteristic groups among professional service and academic colleagues, improving graduate outcomes for students from protected characteristic groups, and work towards becoming a family-friendly organisation.
4. Executive Board had agreed to a move to a three-yearly update on the objectives and actions whilst continuing to monitor data on an annual basis.
5. Council should be able to have confidence that progress was being made against actions that had been agreed. Impact was key if, despite the many activities, the experience of students and colleagues was not good.
6. It was suggested that Council diversity profile data could be included in future reports.

Resolved that Council approve the report.

42. DEGREE OUTCOMES

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education provided an update on the University Degree Outcomes Statement for 2022.

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

Noted that:

1. The report, which had been considered by Senate on 18 January, provided an analysis of the University's degree classification profile for undergraduate and Integrated Master's awards.
2. The data showed a slight upward trend over the period since 2014-15 in the proportion of First Class honours degrees awarded, followed by a 10% increase during the two most pandemic-affected years. The 2021-22 results showed a fall back towards pre-pandemic levels of awarding, but a full return had not yet been observed.
3. The University was concerned about awarding gaps and attainment levels in an intersectional sense. Analysis of this data was underway. There was a notable difference between the proportion of First Class degrees awarded to Black and White students, and it was understood that this gap had grown nationally as well as at Newcastle. Engendering a sense of belonging among all students was key to outcomes.

Resolved that Council approve the statement.

43. ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education a summary of the operation of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards.

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

Noted that:

1. The report, which had been considered by Senate on 18 January, demonstrated that the University was meeting national regulatory requirements for the management of academic quality and standards.
2. Council noted that the Quality Assurance Agency would cease to be the Designated Quality Body for English universities from 1 April 2023.

Resolved that Council approve the report.

44. NEWCASTLE STUDENTS' UNION IMPACT REPORT

Received a presentation from the Chief Executive and President of the Students' Union.

Noted that:

1. Although students still valued the Students' Union very highly, there had again been a reduced engagement rate in the previous year compared with pre-Covid levels.
2. As a result, a new strategic plan with three cross-cutting principles of wellbeing, accessibility and inclusion, and sustainability had been developed. There was a significant emphasis on support and advice, through the opening of a new advice hub, the appointment of a new Accessibility and Inclusion coordinator, and outreach activity across campus aimed at tackling mental health issues.
3. A number of space improvement proposals were being drawn up for submission with the Students' Union subvention bid. Themes revolved around accessibility and welfare, and more modern spaces for social learning.
4. Members of Council reflected on potential future long-term options for enhancing the Students' Union facilities, including refurbishment or major redevelopment of the Students' Union building.

45. REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the January meeting of the Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had discussed three Strategic Risks in detail: Education and Student Experience, Student Health and Wellbeing, and Colleague Wellbeing. More active measuring and response methods had been deployed with respect to Colleague Wellbeing.
2. The Committee had received an update on resource and recruitment from the Head of Internal Audit.

46. SENATE: 18 JANUARY 2023

Received an update on the January meeting of the Committee.

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

47. **RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY**

Received an updated version of the policy.

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

48. **RESEARCH INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

Received the University's annual statement outlining how its activities align to the principles of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

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

ROUTINE BUSINESS

49. **REPORTED BUSINESS**

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