

Newcastle University Students' Union/ Newcastle University Partnership Committee

COUNCIL REPORT

August 2024

Summary

This paper summarises the discussions held between the Students' Union and Newcastle University at the final two meetings of Partnership Committee for the academic year 23/24. The scheduled meetings were held on 21 March 2024 and 8 July 2024.

1. Attendance and Membership

The meetings were all quorate and were well attended. The July meeting was attended by the new team of Sabbatical Officers who each provided an update on their early priorities.

Pat Ritchie completed her role as Chair of Partnership Committee for 23/24 and a new Chair would be identified ahead of the first meeting in 24/25, in line with Pat commencing her role as Chair of University Council.

2. President's Report

The NUSU President gave an update on the wide-ranging activities and campaigns that the Sabbatical Officers were working on:

- i. The new team had successfully finalised two campaigns on behalf of their predecessors, via the pasta basket offering, as a cost of living support measure and implementation of the Rate Your Landlord platform.
- ii. A student-led debate session for the candidates for the new mayor for the North East Mayoral Combined Authority had been organised collaboratively by the relevant universities.
- iii. Active bystander and consent training had been rolled out successfully, in-person training was being piloted with one school.
- iv. The new safe space in the SU building was now open.
- v. Student disbursement funding had been sourced to replace equipment used by student radio.
- vi. An opportunity for students to develop sports journalism skills had been secured at NUFC and links with the journalism course had been formed as a mutually beneficial arrangement.
- vii. A raising awareness campaign had been launched on visa surcharges and changes for international students.
- viii. Student Council had unanimously voted in favour of adding a Working Class Liberation Officer role.

3. Accessibility and Out-Of-Hours Access to Student Spaces

Iain Garfield, Director of Estates and Facilities and Lulu Chen (outgoing Education Officer) had completed a campus tour of study facilities, focussing on accessibility and opening hours. Iain

had drafted a paper which was to be taken to an upcoming meeting of Executive Board, which recommended a working group to review out of hours provision and to hold wider engagement with students and colleagues. Progress would be reported to Partnership Committee.

4. Voter Registration

The University and NUSU had worked together to deliver measures to support and encourage voter registration, focussing on communications in the run up to the General Election on 4 July. A system change had been agreed so that, at the point of registration, students will be prompted to agree data sharing with electoral services. This change will be implemented from August 2024.

5. NUSU/University Ops Group

The Operations Group continues to meet ahead of each Partnership Committee to address any operational issues.

6. NUSU Budget and Management Accounts

The University had supported the NUSU Block Grant Subvention bid. Budget pressures continued with NUSU forecasting a year end deficit. The Summer/Graduation Balls had made losses and retail income was unpredictable but the major challenge continued to be additional costs following a very successful year in BUCS.

The request for an additional in-year grant to support BUCS had been supported by the University but this had not covered the continued additional costs, mostly relating to travel and expenses.

The onsite Wetherspoons had improved footfall and engagement levels but margins remained small and the percentage of food versus drinks sales remained higher than anticipated, which required a greater level of staffing. The importance of keeping pricing competitive was noted. The team were continuing to identify target groups to ensure footfall remained out of term time. A review of the Wetherspoons installation would take place after year one, but it was agreed that the addition had greatly improved the offer.

In response to the forecast deficit, NUSU had implemented targeted recruitment freezes wherever possible, without impacting the student experience.

7. Student Mental Health Support

Sally Ingram, Director of Student Health and Wellbeing attended the meeting on 21 March. The HE Mental Health Taskforce had recommended Student Minds accreditation for all HEI's. Newcastle University will go ahead and apply for accreditation. A student-led report forms part of the accreditation.

An "agile" sprint had been completed around student mental health provision. This involved working with colleagues and students to understand what would need to happen to ensure that students could access the support they needed. The main student feedback was about the importance of short referral pathways.

**Gail Moore on behalf of Pat Ritchie
Chair of University/Union Partnership Committee
August 2024**