



**Newcastle University/Students’ Union Partnership Committee**

**Thursday 23 January 2025, 10-12**

**Howden Room, KGVI Building**

**MINUTES**

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies**

**PRESENT**

Mags Scott (Chair), Jasmine Banks (Education Officer), Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Leo David (NUSU President), Alex Duggan (AU Officer), Iain Garfield (Director of Estates and Facilities), Lindsey Lockey (NUSU Chief Executive), David Miller (NUSU Trustee), Jane Robinson (PVC Engagement and Place), Lucy Backhurst (Academic Registrar and Director of Student Services), Ruth Valentine (PVC Education), Kathryn Scott (People Services Business Partner), Swati Subramaniam (Activities Officer), Gail Moore (Committee Secretary).

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Yvonne Chase (Head of Student Life) attended for item 5.

**APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Chris Day (VC and President).

Nick Collins attended for items 1-5 only before leaving to attend another meeting.

1. **Notes from the last meeting**

Received as Document A, the notes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024.

Resolved that, the minutes be agreed as an accurate record.

1. **Action Log and Matters Arising from the Minutes**

Received as Document B, for information and updates, the log of open actions from previous meetings.

Noted that all outstanding actions would be addressed via matters arising.

1. Students in Newcastle Forum (SINF) meeting update

A joint meeting had been held between Newcastle City Council (NCC), the universities and students’ unions. There was broad agreement about students inputting into policy and having a role as partners. A meeting with the new lead identified at NCC would be scheduled in the coming weeks - with a view to quarterly meetings thereafter. Newcastle College would also be approached to ensure all students in the city were involved.

1. Merchandise outlets in King’s Gate

NUSU were working with the King’s Gate Project Steering Group to set up an outlet on L1 King’s Gate. The plan was to display merchandise for online sales alongside self-service coffee vending. NUSU felt that this would be financially beneficial so long as there were no unforeseen costs e.g. deemed change in use triggering additional business rates. They were planning to lease out the current merchandise space in the SU building, which would be the main source of additional income that this may generate. NUSU were working with the University Legal Services Team to put in place an agreement to use the space which would not incur any additional cost to either party.

A further update would be given at the next meeting.

**ACTION An update on plans to have a NUSU led outlet in King’s Gate to be shared at the next meeting.**

1. Income generation opportunities in sport

There was no update on the plans to discuss income generation opportunities in sport with NU Advancement. It was agreed that this action should be completed in advance of the next meeting.

**ACTION Chis Day and Alex Duggan to meet with Paul Tyack, Director of NU Advancement to discuss income generation in sport.**

1. Formation of the Dangerous Behaviours Working Group and immediate interventions.

Document C, the terms of reference for the Dangerous Behaviours Working Group, was shared for information. There were no comments.

The first meeting was scheduled for early February. It was noted that there was a good level of representation included in the membership.

A number of immediate actions, in response to a high number of reports of dangerous behaviours in the autumn term, had been taken, including; additional training, bans for teams and a [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikCZn7esKeI) highlighting dangerous and coercive behaviours. (Note that the video is not yet for wider circulation).

NUSU had also centralised compliance and complaints management under a new role, introduced on an interim basis as a secondment, but planned longer term as part of the restructure. This centralisation had allowed for better data insights into trends to allow early intervention.

1. Updates from Student Spaces Working Group

The Student Spaces Working Group was one workstream of a larger infrastructure project reviewing space management. The group was working to optimise computer cluster use and was, for the first time, looking at the whole estate of computer clusters in a holistic way and engaging with colleagues and students about their needs, including access to specialist software.

Whilst the plans to improve computer clusters had been identified as a first priority, there was also student-led demand to review access to social and study spaces on campus. It was agreed that a further update on the Cluster Optimisation work should be provided at the next meeting.

**ACTION An update on cluster optimisation and student spaces to be given at the next meeting.**

1. **NUSU Staffing Structure, Pay Review and Financial Forecasting**

Received, an update fromLindsey Lockey, NUSU Chief Executive on future plans for NUSU.

Pay Review

A summary of the pay and reward review was shared as Document Di.

Noted that;

1. The recommendations of a recent independent pay review exercise were approved by the NUSU Trustee Board in December.
2. The aim of the review was to improve fairness, transparency and financial sustainability.
3. The recommendations included a new pay and reward policy that was no longer aligned to the University’s pay scales and pay award.
4. NUSU had previously committed to pay Real Living Wage and the board have agreed to review this decision annually. This would next be reviewed in February.
5. All roles would be re-evaluated and placed on to the new pay scales which would have consistent differentiation between grades, each with five increments at 3% with a range of 12.5% for all grades. There was a short-term impact to financial forecasting since it was not possible to predict each colleague’s response and a level of pay protection would be included initially. In the medium term, the level of control over expenditure on salaries would be more easily controlled.
6. The pay scales would no longer track UCEA pay negotiations and any pay awards would be agreed by the Trustee Board. Nick Collins, (Chief Financial Officer) noted that there was a level of risk associated with this, if the Board approved an award which could not be covered by the block subvention grant. The committee felt that the level of risk was acceptable.

Restructure Proposal

A final proposal detailing plans to restructure departments within NUSU was shared as document Dii.

Noted that;

1. An exercise to evaluate all job descriptions had been completed. Job descriptions would be finalised after individual consultations and a full impact assessment on current roles was underway.
2. The restructure aims to improve operational efficiency and to provide cost savings. The proposed structure offers an 11% saving on salaries and related costs.
3. The structure allows for more strategic leadership across all areas, improved risk management and a cohesive structure for the Support and Advice Hub.
4. There would be a reduction in staffing for certain student facing activities, such as volunteering opportunities and financial advice. Support for these activities would still be available via signposting to opportunities and third-party delivery, e.g. financial advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau.
5. There would be six Sabbatical Officer roles in future years, with the introduction of a combined “Academic Officer” role supporting both UG and PG students.
6. A full review of BUCS activity was planned for 25/26 as costs continued to rise.
7. The financial forecasts relating to the restructure were based on a continuation of the block subvention grant at the same level in year one and with an increase of 2% in years two and three. The University was unable to commit to this increase due to financial challenges within the sector, but Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer) confirmed that the University was committed to continued support for NUSU and would work towards a flat position (rather than a reduction as planned for University budget areas).
8. The forecasts were also based on current income projections but Lindsey Lockey (NUSU CEO) highlighted the potential risk to commercial income as third parties and their supply chain will also be impacted by the increase in employers national insurance contributions.

 Resolved;

The committee were supportive of the restructure proposal and it was agreed that a further update would be given at the July meeting.

**ACTION Lindsey Lockey to give a further update on NUSU restructure plans at the July meeting.**

The Chair requested that the income and expenditure forecasts be presented to display only direct costs to NUSU, e.g. not energy, IT costs etc which were paid for in kind by the University. Such costs should continue to be shown as a memo item so that the true cost of running NUSU are clear; but also be clear that due to funding from the university these are not part of NUSU’s core budget. There was agreement that, where possible, all grants should be combined into the block grant, rather than additional project-related income streams.

The Chair requested that, as a future development, NUSU considers reporting based on each area of NUSU having an income allocation designed to cover agreed costs. This would provide more meaningful reporting than currently, which shows large surpluses in some and large deficits in others.

**ACTION NUSU income and expenditure budgets and forecasts to be presented based on each area of NUSU having an income allocation designed to cover agreed costs.**

1. **Cost of Living Support for Students**

Received, a joint presentation from Leo David, NUSU President and Yvonne Chase, Head of Student Life, on measures to support students.

Noted that;

1. NUSU conducted a student cost of living survey in late 2024. The same survey had been conducted in 2023 and results were compared.
2. Whilst the number of students who had considered dropping out of University due to the cost of living had reduced since 2023 (30% down from 44%). This was still clearly a very significant challenge and higher than the nationally reported 20%.
3. Four out of five students with low mental health attributed this to difficulties with cost of living.
4. NUSU continued to campaign for cost of living support as a primary objective, continuing schemes such as the NUSU pantry and free period products whilst piloting new schemes such as the food fob, via which supported students could access reduced rates from on campus outlets. Student feedback on this scheme was positive since it was discreet and removed stigma of accessing support.
5. A main challenge continued to be access to support the students who were most in need. The £1 meal deal had not been continued due to the significant cost to the University and the fact that the most in need students could not access this offer due to paid work commitments.
6. NUSU and the University continued to work together to communicate available support to students.
7. Leo David, (NUSU President), continued to campaign nationally on measures to support students such as a review of maintenance grants, renters’ rights and access to subsidised public transport.
8. **NUSU 2024/25 Management Accounts**Received as Document E, a report on the 2024/25 budget at Q1 from Lindsey Lockey, NUSU Chief Executive.

Noted that;

1. The accounts up to 1 December were shared.
2. Marketing sales were looking positive against the budget plan.
3. Bars were in surplus for the first time but still behind the target.
4. BUCS costs were looking higher than the planned budget and this spend would be reforecast at Q2.
5. An issue had been reported with Co-op retail, due to a Co-op system fault and so figures could not be reported accurately.
6. NUSU were working towards an improved presentation of their management account to clearly display profit and loss.
7. **NUSU Operational Plan**Received as Document F, an update on Q1 of the NUSU Operational Plan 24/25 from Lindsey Lockey, NUSU Chief Executive.

Noted that;

1. At the end of Q1 most KPIs were on target.
2. The KPI on appointment levels on Student Advice Centre appointments

may need revision due to the withdrawal of finance advice and the departure of the Academic Advisor.

1. The trend towards increased participation in give it a go activities and sports clubs and decrease in society membership was continuing. Academic Societies reported that this was due to cost, with students joining fewer societies.
2. **NUSU President’s Report**Received as Document G, a report from NUSU President, Leo David on current activities.

Noted that;

1. Footfall in the Students’ Union building remained high and 51 events had been hosted.
2. Key initiatives for the team had been identified as; improving the academic experience, challenging stigmas and confronting the cost of living.
3. “Your Voice” Sabbatical Officers had been involved in the NUS lobby day, travelling to London to lobby MPs on housing rights. The Newcastle housing market was reliant on multiple occupancy rentals and restrictions on HMO’s would be impactful, especially since Castle Leazes development was not yet underway.
4. Research had begun on supporting students with dissertations and end of module feedback mechanisms.
5. New disability awareness training for colleagues was being developed jointly with the Student Health and Wellbeing Service.
6. Officers continued to support the Education for Life 2030+ strategy.
7. Student media remains successful with high levels of engagement.

1. **NUSU/University Ops Group Updates**

Received as Document H, the notes of the meeting which took place on 18 December. Noted that;

1. Attendance at the operations groups was high and many agenda items had been raised.
2. The group had identified and progressed immediate actions to tackle dangerous behaviours.
3. The service level agreement between the University and NUSU for health and safety had been shared with the group.
4. Following a Council motion requesting increased training on anti-racism and conflict management for security colleagues, details of colleague essential training had been shared with the NUSU President, and tailored training for appropriate colleagues was being discussed with the University Head of EDI.
5. **Annual Changing the Culture Report**

Received as Document I, an annual report from the Changing the Culture working group.

Noted that

1. The Changing the Culture (CtC) Working Group meets termly to oversee the University’s response to tackling harassment, hate-related incidents and sexual misconduct across the institution.
2. The Office for Students had announced a new general ongoing condition of registration for HE providers, placing a duty on providers to take reasonable steps to prevent and respond appropriately to incidents of harassment and sexual violence.
3. Following an assessment, the University reported that all recommendations were already being met or had been exceeded.
4. The Government had announced that the HE Freedom of Speech Act would be implemented but with some substantial changes, including the decision to have Students’ Unions regulated by OFS, in relation to FOS and the removal of a complaints scheme whereby universities could be sued for failing to uphold the Act.
5. Data showed that reported incidents by students had remained at a similar level to the previous year.

Resolved;

Partnership Committee requested that the CtC Working Group considers what objectives and related reporting could be used to demonstrate progress towards the Group’s objectives and outcomes. Lucy Backhurst, Academic Registrar, would give this feedback to the group.

**ACTION Lucy Backhurst, Academic Registrar to discuss with members of the Changing the Culture Working Group, objectives that could be used to help understand whether the culture had been changed as a result of the work taking place.**

1. **Sports Partnership Governance Group**

Received as Documents Ji, Jii and Jiii, the Terms of Reference, notes of the first meeting and review summary.

Noted that;

1. The group was set up in response to recommendations made as part of the independent University Sport and Active Wellbeing review (December 2024).
2. It will oversee the University Sport and Active Wellbeing offer through the collaboration of key stakeholders and focus on improving the student experience and engagement levels in sport and active wellbeing.
3. There were no comments made on the terms of reference.
4. The group is intended to be agile to respond to the changing demands and context and will work towards more efficient and effective ways of working relating to the sport offer for students.
5. The overall objective is to maximise the number of students engaging in active wellbeing activities.
6. A detailed review of performance sport will report in February.

Resolved;

To receive an update on sport at a future meeting, following the performance sport review.

**ACTION Gail Moore, Committee Secretary, to schedule a further discussion on sport at an upcoming meeting (July onwards).**

1. **Any other business**

Iain Garfield, Director of Estates and Facilities was thanked for his contribution on what would be his last meeting before retiring in February.

1. **Meeting Dates**
* Monday 24 March 2025, 2-4, History Room, NUSU
* Monday 7 July 2025, 11.30-1.30, Henry Daysh Building, Boardroom 10.01