

Council**5 November 2024**

- Present:** Joe Docherty (Chair), Rebecca Askew, Andrew Baldwin, Leslie Ferrar, James Grierson, Nic Johnston, Anthony Jones, Denise Lievesley, Dan Lonsdale, Amir Michael, Cheryl Millington, Karen O'Brien, Nigel Perry, Ari Sadanandom, Corinne Saunders, Rob Senior, Mike Shipman, JJ Thakkar and Terry Toney.
- In Attendance:** Neil Scott, Amanda Wilcox and James Walsh (Minutes).
- Apologies:** Jonathan Bewes, Richard Dale, Oliver Foster, Cheryl McEwan and Philip Plyming.

Minutes of a Meeting of Council held in Lindisfarne Centre, St Aidan's College.**03. Welcome and Apologies****Noted:**

- a) the Chair welcomed Andrew Baldwin, Anthony Jones, and Nic Johnston to their first full meeting of Council;
- b) apologies had been received from Jonathan Bewes, Richard Dale, Oliver Foster, Cheryl McEwan, and Philip Plyming.

04. Declarations of Interest

Noted: there were no declarations of interest.

05. Minutes of Meetings 9 July 2024 and 10 September 2024 (C/24/02, /16)

Approved: the minutes of meetings held on 9 July and 10 September 2024.

06. Matters Arising

Noted: in the relation to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, from the University Secretary the following:

- a) the new Secretary of State for Education had paused implementation of the Act, which included regulation by the Office for Students (OfS) and the introduction of a Complaints Scheme;
- b) the University had republished on its website the Code of Conduct on Freedom of Speech, which Council had approved on 9 July, with reference to the OfS's complaints scheme removed from the final version.

07. Action Log and Schedule of Business (Confidential C/24/03, /04)

Noted: the status of the Action Log and Schedule of Business

08. Chair's Business (C/24/05)**Noted:**

[Secretary's Note: Due to the events and activities undertaken by the Chair since the last meeting of Council absent from Boardvantage, these were circulated to Council following the meeting.]

09. Vice-Chancellor's Report (C/24/06)**Noted:****Closed Minute**

- b) noting the increase in research income and the ambitious targets set in the Strategy Refresh, UEC was pleased to note that the Government had committed to maintaining current research funding levels. In tracking the increase in research funding, Council would receive an update via the Strategy Refresh at a future meeting;

- c) the Act of Reflection held on 7 October was an excellent example of partnership working between the University and Durham Students' Union (DSU), where the whole community had come together in a humanitarian act of solidarity for all those affected by the conflict in Gaza;
- d) Universities for North East England was a collaborative approach by the five North East universities to strengthen partnership working and as a commitment in continuing to contribute to strengthening the regional economy. As part of the launch of the initiative, conversations had been held with the North East and Tees Valley Mayors;

Closed Minute

10. Senate Report (C/24/07)

Noted:

- a) although Senate had agreed changes to timetabling at a previous meeting, challenges with implementation should be dealt with at a Faculty level;
- b) attendance monitoring was an important aspect for students required to meet UKVI compliance requirements. However, attendance was not necessarily the same as space usage and there was a separate piece of work which was examining how University space was used;
- c) although there was some evidence of students relying on recorded lectures, this sometimes related to cost-of-living challenges with students increasingly needing to work.

11. Students' Union Report (C/24/08)

Noted:

- a) although there had been some problems associated with enrolment and accommodation, these had been resolved swiftly and robustly. It was hoped that this situation would not arise in the future;
- b) although there was an acceptance that the funding model for Higher Education required revision, increasing the higher tuition fee level was not the answer;
- c) in relation to the Durham Union Society (DUS), the following:
 - i) the DSU continued to have concerns about the operation of the DUS, noting the most recent challenges around the DUS not being offered a space at the Fresher's Fair;
 - ii) a complaint had been raised against the DUS in 2015, under the previous Vice-Chancellor, although the outcome of the complaint had not been made available to the DSU;
[Secretary's Note: Following the meeting a thorough search was undertaken of the University's Archives, but no record could be found of the Vice-Chancellor receiving a complaint in 2015 about the DUS, or of any action taken.]
 - iii) any allegations about the behaviour or actions of the DUS currently should be raised with the University Secretary. Although the DUS was legally separate to the University, they did occupy premises owned by the University.

12. Council Lay Member Recruitment Update (C/24/09)

Noted: the update on progress made in relation to recruitment for forthcoming Council Lay Member vacancies.

Approved: the appointment of Mark Jagger as a new Lay Member of Council with effect from 1 August 2025.

13. Student Recruitment and Financial Implications

Received: Student Recruitment 24/25 Intake Presentation (C/24/10)

Noted:

- a) the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor and Provost provided Council with a presentation on the 2024-25 student recruitment intake including: the planned student intake figures; the factors which had impacted on recruitment; the 2024-25 figures taken from enrolment; the breakdown of student numbers by Faculty; widening access figures; student intake diversity;
- b) although international student Postgraduate Taught (PGT) numbers were comparable to the 2023-24 Academic Year, they were below the target set due to a number of factors

- including: fierce competition from Australia and Hong Kong; the government announcement on student visa restrictions; the outcome of the Migratory Advisory Committee's (MAC) review of the graduate route; a fall in QS World Rankings;
- c) home PGT figures were down across the sector, reflecting the cost-of-living challenge experienced by students, although the University's introduction of scholarships had some positive impact;
- d) conversion rates were difficult to predict for international PGT students, with students holding multiple deposits for courses at different institutions;

Closed Minute

- f) there had been a positive improvement in home students studying at the University who came from non-traditional higher education backgrounds. This was an OfS regulated area and was reflective of the University's ambitions detailed in its Access and Participation Plan;
- g) noting the progress of the University in ensuring a more diverse student body, the following:
 - a. United States (US) students were encouraged to come to the UK through sports scholarships;
 - b. the emergence of new programmes, such as Islamic Finance, would enable reach into non-Chinese markets.
- h) the outcome of having not met PGT targets had impacted on the baseline budget, and would require the following measures:
 - a. short-term in-year reductions in expenditure;
 - b. consideration of options to reduce the University's expenditure on areas such as heating, which cost the University £18m per year;
 - c. the appointment of a new Chief Operating Officer (COO), although not a short-term solution, would help better manage medium and long-term efficiency planning.
- i) the increase in National Insurance Employer contributions would cost the University an additional £5.3m, and would not be offset by the announced increase in student tuition fees, which would leave the University in a worse financial position;
- j) the announced uplift in the maintenance grant for students, did not go far enough and would not likely reduce the University supporting students through Hardship Funding and the Durham Grant.

14. Prevent Accountability Return (C/24/11)

Noted: the University Secretary was the Prevent Officer for the University and had a good working relationship with the North East Prevent Officer, where concerns of a Prevent nature could be shared.

Approved: the Prevent Monitoring Data Return for submission to the OfS.

15. People and Organisational Development Committee Report: 6 June 2024 (C/24/13)

Noted:

- a) the People and Organisational Development Committee (PODC) was continuing to look at how it could add value to the operation of the University;
- b) Council were asked to note the exceptional service provided by staff in Human Resources in supporting and developing staff;
- c) noting the previous success of the volunteering programme, particularly in relation to school governors, the PODC may benefit from receiving an update on the programme;
- d) progress against the Race Equality Charter was encouraging, although it may be useful to see the list of objectives which the University were working towards;
- e) in relation to the WISER programme, the following:
 - i) WISER was seen as a 3-year initiative to address workload concerns for Professional Services and Academic staff;
 - ii) resulting from WISER, the Provost had developed a task and finish group which would be specifically looking to address academic workloads, particularly where workload models were not in place;

iii) Council would receive an update on progress following discussion at Senate.

16. Finance Committee Report: 9 October 2024 (C/24/14)

Noted:

- a) Finance Committee had agreed to extend Sarasin's role for 24-months as the University's investment managers, pending the creation of the Investment Sub-Committee, which would undertake a full procurement exercise;
- b) the investment in the University Commercialisation & Spin Out Fund required further work and although linked to the Council Strategy Day, had only been agreed in principle pending further work on the financial model and KPIs.

Approved:

- a) delegated authority to Finance Committee to sign off the University five-year Financial Forecast for submission to the OfS;
- b) Finance Committee's Terms of Reference.

17. Audit and Risk Committee Report: 4 October 2024

Noted:

- a) Audit and Risk Committee had agreed to extend the external audit contract with Grant Thornton until 31 March 2026, as that coincided with the start of the next audit cycle and ensure better alignment for any tender process;
- b) Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC), although somewhat flawed in its methodology, provided the best measure of the full economic costs of University activity. TRAC also provided a useful evidential base for the cost of delivery and the ability to identify anomalies which required further investigation.

Approved:

- a) the increase in the residual score for SR01 Brand and Value Proposition from 15 to 20;
- b) the extension of the contract with Grant Thornton as external auditor to 31 March 2026;
- c) the updated ARC Terms of Reference.

18. Register of Sealings (C/24/15)

Received: the Register of Sealings for information

19. Business Agreed by Circulation since Last Meeting (C/24/17)

Noted: action taken by circulation since the last meeting of Council, relating to:

- a) The appointment of the Executive Dean for the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health;
- b) Heads of Department for Chemistry; Economics; Management & Marketing; and Philosophy.

20. Dates of Future Meetings

Noted: 10 December 2024, 25 February 2025, 20 May 2025 and 15 July 2025.