



**EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

7 December 2020 - via Microsoft Teams (including videolink)

**CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES**

Contact Susan O'Donnell, [susan.odonnell@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:susan.odonnell@northumbria.ac.uk), Secretary to the Board of Governors, with any queries about these Summary Minutes.

Present: H Fairfoul (Chair), C Apsey, Dr R Blackman-Woods, Dr S Fancey, N Pope, Professor A Wathey  
 Apologies: None  
 Observers: L Brown, C Shaw, S Pelham  
 Secretary: S F O'Donnell, R Elliott (Assistant Secretary)  
 In attendance: A Dunlop, J Embley, Professor P Francis [until EF20/50], Professor G Marston [EF20/49 and EF20/50], D Monnery, E Pritchard [EF20/49 and EF20/50], S Newitt.

<b>MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Introduction</u></b>
<b>2.</b>	<p><b><u>People</u></b>  <b><u>Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report 2019/20</u></b> [EF20/49]            The Committee considered the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report for 2019/20. The key focus for much of the year had been on the response to Covid-19; a Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) audit of Covid security noted City Campus as an exemplar of Covid-19 controls. Health and safety compliance and effectiveness was in line with the Health and Safety Policy and there were no concerns with regards to fire safety management, accidents, incidents or near misses and there were no failures in relation to health and safety compliance. The University retained its RoSPA Gold Award and achieved third place in the competitive RoSPA Education and Training sector. Both the percentage of working time lost and the average number of working days lost per FTE had decreased compared to 2018/19, and both were below sector benchmarks. <b>The Committee commended the major team effort across the entire University that had contributed to these positive outcomes and extended its thanks to those involved. Approaches for improving the assessment of the impact of wellbeing measures were being developed, and the sickness absence policy would be reviewed.</b></p> <p><b><u>Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report Q1 2020/21</u></b> [EF20/50]            The Committee considered the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report August - October 2020. Health and safety compliance and effectiveness was in line with the Health and Safety Policy and there were no concerns relating to accidents, incidents or near misses. Following a review of some fire-related building defects at a leased student accommodation by a Fire Engineer and the Fire Risk Assessor (FRA), and consultation with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, it had been confirmed the blocks remained safe to occupy based on the active fire protection systems in place and the ability to evacuate in a timely manner. <b>The Committee noted that the landlord had alerted the University to the issue and was working with the building contractor to establish the full extent of the defects and remedy them, which could be achieved without having to move students out of the building. The Committee noted the defects were not connected with any building cladding issues and further work was underway. The Committee noted that both UCU and Unison had been consulted on risk assessment arrangements prior to activities starting on campus but that the University had not concurred with all of UCU's requests as being necessary, e.g., on temperature testing being done.</b></p>
<b>3.</b>	<p><b><u>Core Financial Performance and Planning</u></b>  <b><u>2019/20 Annual Report and Financial Statements</u></b> [EF20/51]            The Committee considered the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2019/20. Despite the</p>

pandemic, the University's operating performance for 2019/20 remained strong, helping provide headroom for the greater challenges expected in the 2020/21 financial year. The KPMG external audit was ongoing but no items were expected to be included in the external auditor's report to Audit Committee. The longer-term stability of the University was not considered a significant risk but in the short term confidence was required that the Going Concern basis of accounting could be supported by the external auditors, avoiding a scenario where longer-term stability was compromised by a modification to the audit opinion. The 2019/20 financial performance meant that the short-term position was strong and headroom would be maintained, and this was also likely to be the case for 2020/21 given recruitment levels, so that headroom levels should be maintained and existing banking covenants achieved during 2020/21. It was also possible that the deployment of Covid vaccines globally would mitigate some of the current risks around international recruitment. Nevertheless, it was thought prudent to ensure that short-term "safety nets" were in place to support stability during 2020/21 if required. Arrangements to achieve this had been put in place via the application to Bank of England Covid Corporate Financing Facility endorsed by the Committee on 21 September 2020 and approved by Board of Governors on 5 October 2020 and via a proposed variation to the University's bank covenants for the year to 31 July 2021. **The Committee suggested a number of minor revisions to narrative sections that would be actioned before the Annual Report and Financial Statements were considered by Audit Committee and noted that much of the risk around the University's financial position was short to medium term, and that the operating position was strengthening. The Committee commended the Finance team for its excellent production and presentation of the Annual Report and Financial Statements under challenging circumstances. The Committee endorsed the 2019/20 Annual Report and Financial Statements, prior to them being submitted to the Audit Committee for review and endorsement and subsequently submitted for approval to the Board of Governors. The Committee noted the direct interest of Audit Committee in its work on Going Concern and confirmed its confidence that the use of the Going Concern basis of accounting was appropriate, endorsing the University's approach. This conclusion would be reported to Audit Committee on 9 December 2020. The Committee approved in principle the proposed variation to the University's bank covenants for the year to 31 July 2021.**

**P3 Finance Report 2020/21** [EF20/52]

The Committee noted the update.

**4. Policy/Regulation/Projects**

**Professional Services Enterprise Solution** [EF20/53]

The Committee considered an update on the plans for development of the workflow technology underpinning the ongoing transformation of professional services, including plans which would prevent a poor value for money decision being made. It was possible that wider use of the current technology solution could approach the Committee's approval thresholds in future. **The Committee noted the update and commended the approach taken to reporting the issue.**

Richard Elliott  
 Assistant Secretary to Employment and Finance Committee  
 December 2020