

STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

21 September 2020 - via Microsoft Teams (including videolink)

CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

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

Present: C Apsey (Chair), G Atkinson, Dr R Blackman-Woods, J Brown, S Haagenen, C Shaw, H Thorne [from SPC20/03], Professor A Wathey, S Yellowley.
 Apologies: A Dunlop, E Kabengele [C Shaw attending]
 Secretary: SF O'Donnell, R Elliott (Assistant Secretary)
 In attendance: H Bower [Student Recruitment Update], Professor P Francis, Professor T Lawson [SPC20/05], D Monnery [absent Student Recruitment Update], S Newitt, L Winskell [SPC20/04].

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1. **Introduction**

Vice Chancellor's Horizon Scanning [Oral Report]

The Committee considered an update from the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive on the latest local, national and sector developments. The consequences of Covid-19 were likely to dominate the environment for the foreseeable future. The University's main focus was on completing the 2020/21 recruitment and enrolment process, welcoming new and returning students and beginning teaching; challenges were significant and included rapidly changing Government policies, the A-level results episode and the recent cyber incident. Nevertheless, UK undergraduate recruitment was broadly on target and international recruitment was within adjusted budget parameters. Nationally, in the short term, Ministers continued to be supportive in the overall context of manifesto commitments, with issues such as the productivity challenge and the role of Further Education (FE), and comments on the value of some degrees, having lower profiles, although the issue of potential refunds for students was re-surfacing. The Government seemed to have been surprised by the positive public view of Universities around the A-level results time. Medium term issues, alongside Covid, were likely to include the Government's vision for the respective roles of FE and HE, the agenda of the new Chair of OfS, continuing pressure on bureaucracy, the Government's International Education Strategy, recently signalled fundamental reform of NSS and the impacts of Brexit. In the longer term, the debate on the size and shape of the sector and addressing the demographic upswing would be added to the agenda. **The Committee noted the update, and received assurance that, in light of the cyber incident, the implications continued to be addressed, with core systems expected to be available to support the start of teaching and effective workarounds for registration in place. The risk of higher levels of withdrawal during 2020/21 was acknowledged, given the issues around the A-level results combined with the six month break in formal education that most students had experienced. The current positive public view of universities represented an opportunity for the sector, particularly around employability and the economic role of HE, but was probably contingent on the sector's effective management of Covid-19 implications. The debate around Level Four and Five teaching and the role of FE would continue to develop, with demand for flexibility and the capability of FE at Level Five yet to be properly assessed. The uncertain international recruitment position was noted, with demand from China and India continuing despite issues around flight availability, travel restrictions and visas affecting applicants.**

2. **Strategic Discussion Items**

Mid-Point Review of University Strategy 2018-23 [SPC20/01]

The Committee considered the outcomes of the mid-point review of the University Strategy discussed with the Committee and Board of Governors in June 2020. Five key themes shaped the discussion: content, place, international, technology and people. Business Outcomes had been reviewed to ensure

continued relevance and, where possible, to streamline the Strategy; this had resulted in a net reduction of five Business Outcomes. Final proposals, which incorporated the Committee's feedback, would be submitted to Board of Governors on 5 October 2020 for approval, following which further dialogue with staff would take place, to continue the important engagement that shaped the development of the Strategy in 2017 and 2018. **The Committee confirmed that the proposals represented appropriate mid-course adjustments to a Strategy that was already constructed around the student experience. Organisational structures and capacity would be reviewed to support the changes in Business Outcomes, including changes to the IT Strategy and business continuity in the light of the cyber incident, and change capacity more generally. The emphasis on employability was endorsed and the need to build capacity and capability around research commercialisation was noted.**

University Strategy 2018-23 Update and Annual Performance Report [SPC20/02]

The Committee considered an update on the performance of the University Strategy KPIs at the end of 2019/20 and related performance issues. Six KPIs had a RAG rating of green, with one rated amber and two rated red. No rating was given for KPI 4 (no target was set because of the new methodology used this year) and KPI 10 (new staff survey results would be published in September 2020). The University had improved its ranking in the Guardian League Table by 20 places, moving up to 27th in the overall rankings, and in the Times/Sunday Times League Table by eight places to 57th. **The Committee noted that small changes in metrics could result in large movements because rankings were very tightly grouped for most metrics. The limitations of spend per head metrics were also noted.**

3. Performance Monitoring

National Student Survey (NSS) Results 2020 [SPC20/03 and Presentation]

The Committee considered the results of the 2020 NSS and action planning in response. The overall results were disappointing, with Northumbria's student satisfaction score decreasing to a greater extent than the sector (all institutions) average, which also decreased in the same period. There were nevertheless some positive outcomes: the rank for the Times Good University Guide Teaching Quality measure had improved and the majority of the subjects identified for priority consideration in 2019//20 had made good progress in relation to student satisfaction across nearly all categories, and with regards to rank against the Times providers, although they still required further improvement. Priority subjects for 2020/21 were identified, which included those identified in 2019/20 (based on the NSS results from 2018/19) and a small number of additional subjects that had underperformed in 2019/20. Other subjects at risk of decline had been placed on a "watch list". **The Committee expressed its disappointment with the latest results but welcomed the helpful analysis provided, which provided insight into positive and negative movements. Factors that may have reduced the desired impact of 2019/20 action planning were explored, including staff turnover, cultural buy-in and the significant leadership changes in priority subjects, which would take time to embed. The positive correlation between research-focused staff and overall student satisfaction should mean that anticipated improvements in Northumbria's research focus translate into future satisfaction levels. Improvement areas within priority subjects included leadership, student focus and the integration of the student voice. The Committee noted that the NSS would be subject to review led by OfS on behalf of DfE, but the 2021 survey would proceed largely unchanged.**

Student Recruitment Update September 2020 [Presentation]

The Committee considered a presentation on recruitment progress for 2020/21 and its headline financial impact; available data was limited by the current cyber incident. For UK undergraduates the outcomes of clearing had been positive despite having to run the process twice because of the Government's u-turn on A-level results; the use of centre assessed grades had resulted in a level of over-recruitment, but no subject had more students than it could accommodate. For UK postgraduates, a minor shortfall in recruitment was being addressed through additional offers. International recruitment was more challenging; forecast numbers were below the reduced targets put in place to reflect the Covid situation but within budget tolerances. The position for London and Amsterdam and for Degree Apprenticeships was strong. The overall position would leave the University's budget and cash headroom largely intact, although work was obviously required to return to the desired trajectory. **The Committee commended the recruitment teams on their achievement under very challenging circumstances, and noted the transition provisions in place to support students who had been away from formal education for six months.**

Graduate Outcomes Survey Results 2020 [SPC20/04]

	<p>The Committee considered an initial summary of the first set of Graduate Outcomes Survey data results for Northumbria, and the sector, 2017/18 leavers, published by HESA in July 2020. It replaced the previous Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, but with significant differences in methodology, content and delivery so that results from the two surveys were not comparable. Northumbria's KPI in this area was to be Top 30 by 2023 in terms of the proportion of graduates in professional level employment or graduate level further study, and initial modelling of the results data seeking to replicate the Times League Table methodology indicates that Northumbria could be placed c. 56th from these results. The Committee noted the major focus on careers and employability support which was helping 2019/20 leavers cope with the uncertainty of the current employment market; work-related experience was being built into many programmes. The response rate now the survey was centralised had been disappointing, reflecting the national experience. Further detailed analysis would be brought to the 08 December 2020 Committee meeting.</p> <p><u>REF 2021 Update</u> [SPC20/05]</p> <p>The Committee considered an update on REF2021 covering changes to the REF timetable and the progress made against the Significant Responsibility for Research (SIGRES) target to be entered for REF 2021. Changes to the timetable after the census date of 31 July (which was unchanged) were that the Impact Assessment Period now ended on 31 December 2020 instead of 31 July, the submission deadline was 31 March 2021 and the results were expected in April 2022. Following a process of ratification in Faculties at the beginning of August 2020, and subject to confirmation by REF Strategy Group, the number of SIGRES staff was expected to exceed the desired target number. The Committee commended the result, which was likely to represent one of the largest rises in SIGRES staff in the sector, and noted that the next stage of work would address the impact case studies, where good progress was already being made with some external support.</p>
4.	<p><u>Constitutional/Other Business</u></p> <p><u>Committee Terms of Reference and Membership 2020/21</u> [SPC20/09]</p> <p>The Committee noted its membership for 2020/21, and confirmed that its Terms of Reference as approved by Board of Governors on 24 February 2020 remained appropriate for 2020/21.</p>

Richard Elliott
Assistant Secretary to Strategic Performance Committee
September 2020