

STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

4 February 2021 - via Microsoft Teams (including videolink)

CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

Contact Georgina Bailes, georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk. Secretary to the Board of Governors, with any queries about these Summary Minutes.

Present: C Apsey (Chair), Dr R Blackman-Woods, J Brown, S Haagensen, E Kabengele, H Thorne, Professor A Wathey, S Yellowley.
Secretary: SF O'Donnell, R Elliott (Assistant Secretary)
In attendance: A Dunlop, Professor P Francis, J Kerr [SPC20/22] D Monnery [absent SPC20/22], S Newitt, L Winskill [SPC20/23]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1. Introduction

Vice-Chancellor's Horizon Scanning [Oral Report]

The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive reported on the latest local, national and sector developments. OfS had requested that HEIs assess how they were adhering to their publicised Covid learning and teaching delivery approaches, which was underway. The Minister for Universities had stated that delivery concerns should be treated as complaints and not as grounds for refunds. There was a significant national focus on student and staff mental wellbeing and on planning for delivery post-Easter, with teaching beyond the normal end of year being considered. Recent Government policy developments included the Skills for Jobs White Paper, within which the Lifelong Learning Entitlement proposals could impact on HE; changes to the teaching grant to focus on perceived "high cost, high value" subjects; OfS consultations on post qualification admissions and on proposed changes to TEF to remove the subject level, adjust the core metrics and set the frequency to every four to five years instead of the current annual approach. Policy developments expected later in the year included a response to the fee level recommendations of the Augar review, the potential for minimum entry requirements, consideration of the future provision of Foundation Years and the role of Universities in overseas trade and development. The recent Pulse survey showed that most students were keen to be back on campus and there was much to be gained from the maximum safe level of face-to-face teaching. Discussions with unions on staff issues were ongoing. **The Committee noted the update and that a measured response was required to the proposed policy changes during the current circumstances. It was important that the University responded to the OfS consultations and adjusted its plans as issues were clarified, and to ensure that any extension of the teaching year allowed students to graduate in a timely manner.**

2. Strategic Discussion Items

University Strategy 2018-23 Update and Performance Report [SPC20/21]

The Committee considered the performance of the University Strategy KPIs and progress on the revisions to the suite of Business Outcomes (BOs). The International Strategy approved by Board of Governors on 23 November 2020 included revised forecasts for TNE Income (KPI3ii) but the overall target remained unchanged. For BOs, a revised summary of key outputs was provided; delivery timelines, resourcing requirements and benefits realisation would be addressed in full delivery plans that were being prepared. Key new or revised BOs addressed academic quality, academic recruitment, the postgraduate offer and the Place agenda. The mapping of the suite of BOs and KPIs to the Strategic Objectives involved direct and indirect contributions, with multiple interdependencies, but the most significant alignments would be contained in the Transformation Map. **The Committee noted the report and suggested slight BO wording amendments to improve the clarity and measurement around the intended stretch outcomes; this would be addressed in the full delivery plans. The importance of engaging and supporting staff through reviews of the subject offer was emphasised. An agreed IPR Strategy and approach was key and the Committee received clarification that BO16 would address this, alongside wider University Executive discussions on the commercialisation agenda; further progress was still required. IP commercialisation and spin-outs should focus on impact and reputation as well as income generation, and it was**

	<p>acknowledged that world-class research could have a local economic impact. The Committee commended the focus on Widening Participation that ran through the BOs and noted that a RAG-rated Transformation Map would be provided to the next meeting.</p>
3.	<p><u>Performance Monitoring</u> <u>Student Experience and Learning Outcomes</u> [SPC20/22 and Presentation] The Committee considered the results of recent Pulse and Module surveys and an update on subject surgeries, which provided key lead indicator information. Feedback from the Pulse survey would allow digital access support to be targeted to those students most in need; a number of mental health and wellbeing issues were also being followed up, with supportive communications to students in place. The Module survey had allowed work on student satisfaction to be targeted prior to the opening of the NSS survey. The feedback question in the survey covered informal feedback rather than the formal feedback at the end of each module. Subject surgeries supported the achievement of KPI 6 (continuation rate) alongside the learning analytics framework. The Committee noted that BO6 (digital fluency) had targeted staff first but was now addressing student issues; a pre-enrolment digital literacy module had been introduced for the 2020/21 intake. Student engagement, including social and academic interaction outside their own programmes, would continue to be a key factor. It was noted that an update on NSS improvement plans would be provided to the 22 February 2021 Board meeting. The Committee considered an overview presentation on student complaints; informal complaints were usually dealt with at the point of query/concern, while formal complaints were governed by UK law and subject to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. It was acknowledged that the boundary between informal and formal was not always clear, given the level of queries generated by students. Levels of formal complaints were very low, which was in line with sector norms, and reflected the efforts made to resolve complaints at the informal level. Plans were under development to ensure that management information from informal complaints was properly and consistently captured to enable emerging patterns of issues to be addressed and the positive student experience to be maintained. The Committee would be updated on proposals at a future meeting. The Committee suggested that a future Pulse survey could ask specific questions around the handling of informal complaints and emphasised that comprehensive and consistent informal complaints data was key to identifying and addressing emerging threats to student satisfaction.</p> <p><u>Graduate Outcomes Survey Results</u> [SPC20/23] The Committee considered an update on the results of the Graduate Outcomes Survey which had now been analysed at Department and Programme levels, with action plans in place to drive improvements. Recent leavers had graduated into a very challenging economic environment, with fewer good quality placements and jobs and an overview of the student support offer was provided, including a much strengthened “Graduate Futures” Team. There had been some procedural errors with HESA’s data collection process for the current year’s survey which had led to very low response rates for Northumbria; remedial action was now in place and response rates were improving. The Committee noted the update, and that the HESA process issue was being discussed at sector and UUK level. Shortcomings in the data were inhibiting analysis of issues such as the regional impacts of the Covid-driven economic downturn.</p> <p><u>Student Recruitment Update February 2021</u> [SPC20/24 and Presentation] The Committee received an update on the student recruitment position for 2020/21 as at 1 February 2021. Semester 2 2020/21 recruitment had recovered to close to target. Home undergraduate applications had recovered to expected levels; there was likely to be pressure on sector capacity resulting from rising numbers of 18 year olds as well as Covid impacts. International recruitment reflected increased demand that would need careful management to maintain required quality levels, and other cohorts were progressing well. The Committee noted the update and the possible increase in demand for Foundation Year places from students with lower confidence levels as a result of the impact of the pandemic restrictions on their education, which would be noted in the University’s response to OfS consultations underway.</p>

Richard Elliott, Assistant Secretary to Strategic Performance Committee
February 2020