

## STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

8 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: C Apsey (Chair), G Atkinson, Dr R Blackman-Woods, S Haagensen, E Kabengele, H Thorne, Professor A Wathey, S Yellowley.  
 Apologies: J Brown  
 Observer: K Ansell (AdvanceHE)  
 Secretary: SF O'Donnell, R Elliott (Assistant Secretary)  
 In attendance: A Dunlop, Professor P Francis, Professor G Marston [SPC20/15], D Monnery, S Newitt, Professor J Reast [TNE Strategy], J Stergiou [SPC20/15].

#### 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. In the short term, Covid developments were becoming more predictable, given vaccine developments, with the DfE plan for the start of term in January published; the focus on Covid and Brexit meant that other Government plans had little visibility beyond the 2019 General Election Manifesto pledges. The Government's vision for HE was awaited, with UUK taking a conservative view; in the longer term, the Government's aspiration for the UK to become a research superpower remained, and the new Chief Executive of UKRI was concerned to preserve equality of opportunity. HE had the potential to play a major role in economic recovery post-pandemic, contributing to the levelling up agenda, where the North East in particular needed more graduates in the regional economy; the Government also saw international education as a key trading area post-Brexit. OfS would shortly be under new leadership, and there was work from several sector agencies around applications and admissions, with debates on the desired number of students in the context of the demographic upswing likely to continue. A "greener" offer and equality, diversity and inclusion work to help counter the inequalities highlighted by the pandemic were likely to be areas of focus. **The Committee noted the update and agreed that work to assess the alignment of current and emerging issues with the Strategic Risk Register would be more fully developed and reported to a future meeting. The relatively fragmented political structures in the North East would present a challenge to the levelling up agenda, but the north east HEIs were working closely together.**
2. **Strategic Discussion Items**  
**University Strategy 2018-23 Update and Performance Report** [SPC20/12]  
 The Committee considered the performance of the University Strategy KPIs and the implementation of Business Outcomes at Period 3 2020/21. The current status as reported to Board of Governors on 23 November was six KPIs rated as red, four as green and one where no rating was yet possible; year-end performance was projected to be five KPIs at green, three at amber and one red, with two KPIs where targets were yet to be set. 18 Business Outcomes (BOs) were defined as 'on-track', 11 had some issues that were being managed and 20 were 'off-track'; work to develop implementation plans for the revised BOs was progressing, and would be reported to Committee on 4 February 2021. **The Committee agreed that a RAG-rated transformation map approach would be valuable but that the full detail should remain available and should be discussed at least annually. The pandemic had resulted in many People and Culture related BOs being off track and plans were being reviewed to take account of new activity arising from the Covid response. Future reports on BO status should include a year-end forecast position as for KPIs as well as the current status.**  
  
**TNE Strategy** [Presentation]  
 The Committee considered the University's new strategic approach to TNE development, which was

	<p>significantly influenced by lessons from Project Sand. It was much clearer on ensuring that only new opportunities that aligned well with the University Strategy were pursued, focused on markets with strong and sustainable growth potential and demonstrable demand for subjects that aligned with the University's offer; a Gateway process to ensure that only viable opportunities progressed to development was in place. <b>The Committee commended the new approach and welcomed the increased focus on contribution. A skills analysis of the new TNE team and others involved in the strategic development process should be carried out to identify any skills gaps and training requirements in areas such as international commercial and legal skills. Development of a summary dashboard for reporting to University Executive and Governors was requested.</b></p>
3.	<p><b><u>Performance Monitoring</u></b>  <b><u>Student Experience and Learning Outcomes</u></b> [SPC20/13]  The Committee considered the annual summary of Student Experience and Learning Outcomes 2019/20. Updates on HESA good degree, non-continuation, completion and widening participation data were provided, with performance generally positive. Attainment gaps were in general reducing, and related work to decolonise the curriculum was underway. Formal complaints were handled via the central Student Engagement Team, with an informal complaints process in place within Faculties; both levels of complaint were recorded for monitoring purposes. A new Continuous Programme Performance Review process was being developed to replace Annual Programme Monitoring, with greater emphasis on delivery of change, and key data reported for action at the most relevant time of year. The decline in recruitment of students from low participation neighbourhoods reflected a trend in the North East; joint work with Newcastle University to address this was in progress; Northumbria had recently signed up to the social mobility pledge and an action plan was being developed. <b>The Committee emphasised the importance of effective management of both informal and formal complaints to avoid early warnings of student dissatisfaction being missed and to ensure visibility and comparability of data and trends. Complaints were now reported to Education Committee more frequently and work was ongoing to improve categorisation of complaints; a detailed overview on the complaints management process would be provided to a future meeting.</b></p> <p><b><u>Student Recruitment Update December 2020</u></b> [SPC20/14 and Presentation]  The Committee received an update on the student recruitment position for 2020/21 as at 6/7 December 2020. UCAS applications continued to recover to a level comparable with competitor institutions although still behind the sector as a whole, but this gap was expected to close in the coming weeks with "deconstructed" open days continuing to be effective. Risks remained around international and former EU recruitment. London, Distance Learning and Degree Apprenticeship pipelines remained strong, with Amsterdam below target but ahead of last year. <b>The Committee noted that Amsterdam represented a foothold in the EU to help mitigate the impact of Brexit and requested a detailed discussion of how best to use the campus at a future meeting.</b></p> <p><b><u>Research Strategy Update</u></b> [SPC20/15 and Presentation]  The Committee considered an update on research grants and contracts income (RGCI); lower than planned application levels in 2018/19 combined with the impact of Covid meant that growth targets for 2020/21 and 2021/22 were unlikely to be achieved, but the position was expected to recover to allow targets to be hit for 2022/23. Work to benchmark market share was in progress and would need to be adjusted to take account of the anticipated impact of the REF results. Northumbria's recent growth in securing Research Council income positioned it well post Brexit, when the majority of research funding was likely to be routed via Research Councils. <b>The Committee noted that newly-appointed professors often joined from HEIs with superior support infrastructure, which could explain an apparent drop in output. Expectations, culture and research mindsets needed to be adjusted to focus on managing portfolios of grants rather than individual sequential projects. Northumbria's application success rate was below the sector average but was improving, particularly where the right level and type of support could be provided; the need to step back and consider the post REF period and related aims was endorsed.</b></p> <p><b><u>Any Other Business</u></b> [Oral Report]</p>
4.	<p>The Chair noted that this was Graham Atkinson's final meeting as Co-opted Board Committee Member. The Committee thanked him for his invaluable contribution to its work and wished him well for the future.</p>