

## STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

7 April 2025 in room 209, Sutherland Building, City Campus West

### CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

**Contact Georgina Bailes, [georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk). Secretary to the Board of Governors, with any queries about these Summary Minutes.**

Present: Dr S Fancey (Chair), Dr R Blackman-Woods, K Fawcett, Prof A Long, A Parker [to SPC24/20], J Thompson

Apologies: I McCrory

Secretary: G Bailes and B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)

In attendance: H Bower [SPC24/20], Je Taylor [SPC24/24-25], M Foalle [SPC24/20], G Gosling-Bell [SPC24/20], Prof T Lawson, D Monnery, T Urwin [SPC24/20], Prof G Wynn

#### MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

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| <b>1.</b> | <p><b><u>Declarations of Interest</u></b> [Oral Report]<br/>There were no declarations of interests in any items on the Agenda.</p> <p><b><u>Vice-Chancellor's Horizon Scanning</u></b> [Oral Report]<br/>The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local developments and their potential implications for Northumbria. Recent headlines reflected the financial strain on universities, with many announcing job cuts and cost-saving measures. Northumbria remained in a strong financial position but would continue to plan prudently to ensure long-term stability. Since the announcement from the Secretary of State last year, the sector had received little in the way of further clarity and awaited further announcements. The UUK had set up a Transformation &amp; Efficiency Taskforce to investigate how universities could partner, collaborate and deliver transformation and cost savings through new models and ways of working, and the Vice-Chancellor would be attending a roundtable on structured approaches to cost reduction and efficiency and financial improvement, and on how to drive the best value from estates and infrastructure. In March, the University had hosted a roundtable in Westminster titled 'Addressing barriers to opportunity', bringing together business leaders, parliamentarians, and experts to explore how best practices in social mobility can be shared and integrated into organisations. Work continued on the areas required to support the launch of the new Academic Structures including data and systems changes and estates considerations. The University had submitted an Athena Swan application for the institutional Silver Award, emphasising the commitment to its EDI ambitions and EDI Director, Rachel Brown, had won Mentor of the year at the recent Northern Power Women Awards. Northumbria had been shortlisted five times at the 2025 Educate North Awards, showcasing some of the fantastic work underway to support its students and encourage engagement across the region, and Linda Lightley, a technician from the School of Design, Arts and Creative Industries, has been shortlisted for a Papin Prize in the Excellence in Sustainability category. The annual SHINE awards ceremony would be taking place again in July, with an aim to recognise and celebrate colleagues who personify the University's Values. <b>The Committee noted that update and that it was very positive to see Northumbria's involvement in the recent roundtable discussions, noting that the University would continue to lobby the government around maintenance grants and the parental income threshold.</b></p> |
| <b>2.</b> | <p><b><u>Strategic Discussion Items</u></b></p> <p><b><u>University Strategy 2024-30 Strategic Ambition Deep Dive: Driving Social Mobility</u></b> [SPC24/20]</p>   |

	<p>The Committee considered the performance deep dive into the Driving Social Mobility Strategic Ambition which covered its Measures of Success, current performance and the 2025/26 trajectory, and its relation to the Strategic Delivery Plans and mitigations required to address issues raised. The North East continued to have low Higher Education progression and pre-university attainment rates and Northumbria played a crucial role in widening participation within the North East region, achieving the highest intake from low-participation backgrounds within its entry tariff bracket. Social mobility was a complex issue, involving work across the whole University, including its education, research and its role as an anchor institution in the North East, and involving multiple initiatives from multiple Strategic Delivery Plans. The University would develop a whole provider approach via an Access and Success Framework, to provide integrated support across the student journey and focus resource on what was evidenced to work best. Northumbria's ambition was to ignite aspiration, remove barriers for the communities that it served and offer routes for students from all backgrounds to access and succeed in higher education. The University had a strong story to tell on social mobility and stakeholders were receptive to it however, the narrative needed to be connected to ensure clear communication of the overall message and Northumbria was exceptionally well placed to meet the Secretary of State's priority for HEIs to 'play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students. <b>The Committee thanked the presenters and the wider team for the rich and comprehensive Deep Dive presentation, noted that the OfS' Equality of Opportunity Register surveyed circa 23-24k students with a completion rate of circa 75-78% and was considered to be a reliable measure, noted that an increase in students living at home and commuting to University had been seen due to the cost-of-living crisis which particularly affected the University's students from widening participation backgrounds, and noted that Northumbria's social mobility initiatives also supported Northumbria's recruitment and retention goals, and brought promotional benefits through positive engagement. The Committee requested that a deeper analysis of the participation rates by demographics including ethnicity and gender be shared with the Committee at its June meeting as part of the Access and Participation Plan update, requested further data to demonstrate national widening participation levels and Northumbria's relative versus absolute catchment be brought to a future meeting of the Committee, and requested further data on the level of students who outperformed their contextual offer.</b></p>
3.	<p><b><u>Performance Monitoring</u></b>  <b><u>Student Experience and Learning Outcomes – Q2 2024/25</u></b> [SPC24/21]</p> <p>The Committee considered an update on Student Experience and Learning Outcomes, providing an overview of ongoing initiatives, performance metrics, and recent developments, along with reporting of key data sets from the 2024/25 academic year. Performance against the Apprenticeship Achievement Framework (AAF) metrics used by ESFA and OFSTED as a means of measuring provider quality remained positive. The National Student Survey opened on 8 January and would be closing on 30 April 2025 and the results of the Semester One 2024/25 MEQs showed a positive increase to the Overall Satisfaction question however the institutional response rate continued to decline. <b>The Committee noted the update and that visits to all Departments had recently been conducted by the PVC (Education) to ensure that any specific concerns around retention were being monitored by Departments and would be reported on through standard processes via the Faculty Executive Groups.</b></p> <p><b><u>Degree Outcomes Statement 2023/24</u></b> [SPC24/22]</p> <p>The Committee considered the Degree Outcomes Statements for 2023/24 which formed part of assurance relating to OfS' ongoing conditions of registration on quality and standards (B4 and B5). Since 2023/24, the statement had reverted to the original headings following the changes made to the 2021/22 statement, to demonstrate that the sector had addressed the perceived issue of grade inflation in response to UUK guidance. The high-level figure showed that good awards for 2023/24 had dropped by 1% and remained below pre-pandemic levels and although sector data was not yet available for 2023/24, the 2022/23 data showed that Northumbria continued to be ranked mid-sector on the good awards measure. The UK black attainment gap had narrowed to 4.1% however, the small population of black students meant this figure could be highly variable and the attainment gap between UK domiciled students and non-UK domiciled students has closed marginally to 19.5% and remained an area of focus for the University. The attainment gap for mature students was no longer evident, and the gender attainment gap had increased in the most recent year and was now the largest gap seen in the last six years, driven primarily by a sharp decrease in the proportion of male students being awarded a first. <b>The Committee noted that it would be useful for contextualisation to understand how Northumbria's ethnicity and gender gaps compared to other institutions however, there was a lack of comparable data available due to Northumbria taking a more transparent and detailed approach to the data shared</b></p>

within its Degree Outcomes Statement, and endorsed the Degree Outcome Statement for 2023/24 for submission to Board of Governors on 28 April 2025.

**Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2023/24** [SPC24/24]

The Committee considered the Annual Statement on Research Integrity for 2023/24 which assured the Committee that the University met the Concordat commitments through its leadership, training and policies, and would be published on the University's Research Ethics and Integrity webpages if approved by Board of Governors on 28 April. Significant developments in 2023/24 included the review and update of the Misconduct in Research Policy, significant changes to the University's consent and participation information documentation, and the development of a process to support research on political extremism.

**The Committee noted the Statement, requested that a progress update on the review of the Misconduct in Research Policy, including sector insights, was brought back to a future meeting of the Committee and endorsed the Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2023/24 for submission to Board of Governors on 28 April 2025.**

**Researcher Development Concordat** [SPC24/25]

The Committee considered the Annual Statement on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and an updated version of the Concordat Action Plan. Presentation of an annual statement to the Committee prior to submission to Board of Governors on 28 April and subsequent publication demonstrated the University's commitment to the Concordat. The Statement covered the research environment, research culture, career development for researchers and any employment issues, and the Action Plan identified opportunities for further development in the next twelve months. **The Committee noted the Annual Statement on the Concordat, noting the importance of embedding research culture within the University's provision in order to support its Strategic Ambition: Creating New Knowledge, and endorsed the Annual Report and Annual Statement to support the Career Development of Researchers for submission to Board of Governors on 28 April 2025.**

**Closing Comments**

The Committee noted that the performance deep dive into the Driving Social Mobility Strategic Ambition had been incredibly useful, meaningful and appreciated, and that the deep dive presentations continued to be a valuable reporting mechanism which were used for multiple purposes, provided a level of detail and assurance to various audiences, and generated a good level of meaningful discussion.

Beth Lenney  
Assistant Secretary to Strategic Performance Committee  
April 2025