



EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

7 June 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: H Fairfoul (Chair), C Apsey, Dr R Blackman-Woods, Dr S Fancey, D Pearson, Professor A Wathey
 Apologies: S Pelham, N Pope, C Shaw (E Kabengele attending), A Dunlop, Professor P Francis
 Observers: L Brown [until Pensions Update], E Kabengele
 Secretary: G Bailes, R Elliott (Assistant Secretary)
 In attendance: H Bower [EF20/104], R Brown [EF20/96], J Embley, Professor T Lawson, Professor G Marston [EF20/95, EF20/99 and EF20/105] D Monnery, S Newitt, E Pritchard [EF20/95]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

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| 1. | <p><u>Introduction</u>
 <u>Vice-Chancellor’s Horizon Scanning</u> [Oral Report]
 The Committee considered an update from the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive on the latest local, national and sector developments. The 2020/21 Academic Year had concluded as planned; focus was now on planning for 2021/22, with specific Government guidance expected by the end of June, but still significant uncertainties around international recruitment. The confirmation and clearing period was likely to be challenging given the impacts of Centre Assessed Grades and deferrals from the previous year; Northumbria’s focus would remain on maintaining quality and accepting marginal growth where that was available. Consultations on elements of the Government’s HE reform programme were under way. Northumbria had risen from 52nd to 49th in the recently published Complete University Guide. The Committee noted the update.</p> |
| 2. | <p><u>People</u>
 <u>Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report Q3 2020/21</u> [EF20/95]
 The Committee considered an update on the period February to April 2021; two external Faculty audits had been carried out by Imagile and no high risk items were raised. Inspection of two of the University’s accommodation blocks had been carried out by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service with satisfactory outcomes. CQC was satisfied with the University’s approach to the research incident and had requested a progress update on the remedial actions, and remedial works had started at the leased accommodation block where some fire safety issues had been identified. Mandatory health and safety training and PAT testing were both back on track. Wellbeing work was currently focused on mental health and consideration was being given to a Pulse survey to obtain staff feedback and engagement data. The Committee noted the report and that the beneficial elements of remote working would be developed and carried forward as part of the Future Ways of Working project, with the return to on-campus working being managed to ensure proper support both for staff keen to get back on to campus and those who were nervous about doing so.</p> <p><u>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2020</u> [EF20/96]
 The Committee considered the 2020 Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Report ahead of its publication. The Report fulfilled the University’s requirement to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty established by the Equality Act 2010, and highlighted a wide range of advances and achievements in the field of EDI. The Committee commended the report, noted the positive direction of travel for EDI and noted that consideration was being given to how best to communicate and promote the University’s progress to partners, staff, students and potential students.</p> <p><u>Unacceptable Behaviours</u> [EF20/97]
 The Committee considered an update on the Unacceptable Behaviours project; staff and student polices had been developed together to ensure consistency but had been tailored for their specific audiences. Technology issues relating to data protection and anonymity had been addressed with the input of the University’s key research academics in this area. Case rates were likely to increase significantly in the first six months of operation as the ease of reporting would be likely to bring historical</p> |

cases to light and make people more comfortable to report current issues. **The Committee commended the report and project, and noted that Unison, UCU and the Students Union had been involved in the development work and supported the outcomes.**

People and Culture Update [EF20/98]

The Committee considered continuing developments to the organisational culture as part of the response to Covid and in the longer term; a core group of staff were taking the culture framework forward, supported by the Faculty PVC of Health and Life Sciences. The departments of *Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation*, and *Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing* had achieved Athena Swan Bronze in recognition of their work and future plans to progress gender equality. The Future Ways of Working project (see below) was a good example of the progress that was possible with positive engagement from staff. **The Committee noted the report and noted that more frequent and shorter Pulse surveys were being considered in preference to a large-scale engagement survey, but with care as to their timing in terms of achieving good response rates.**

Future Ways of Working Update [EF20/99]

The Committee considered the progress made in developing and adopting new ways of working in light of the changes that had been necessary for many staff since March 2020. The University remained a campus-based institution, with on-campus working essential for most staff but not necessarily all of the time. The transition to new ways of working beyond the pandemic-enforced changes would have three phases - the current state where the University is predominantly working from home and delivering online, the 2021/22 academic year in which blended ways of working could be tested and their impacts reviewed and requirements addressed to enable the third, long-term phase. **The Committee noted the update and that the proposals were being developed in close consultation with students. A fuller report on 2021/22 arrangements, including wider links between this work and the emerging Estates Strategy, would be brought to a future meeting.**

Pensions Update [Oral Report]

The Committee noted that the University's response to UUK's consultation on the USS valuation had been submitted including the feedback provided by the Committee at its 13 May meeting.

3. Core Financial Performance and Planning

Finance Monthly Report: P9 2020/21 [EF20/100]

The Committee considered the University's financial position and performance at Period 9 (30 April 2021); both the overall financial position and the cash position for 2020/21 were positive compared to budget. The Quarter Three reforecast further improved projected year-end outcomes. There continued to be no current requirement for the University to report an event to the OfS around short term threats to financial viability or cessation or suspension (actual or planned) of HE delivery. **The Committee noted the report and update.**

Planning and Budget 2021/22 [EF20/101]

The Committee considered the University's proposed budget for 2021/22, which had been further developed following engagement with the Committee at the Budget Meeting on 13 May but remained substantively the same as the information considered by the Committee at that point. It showed a very stable position that remained in line with the five-year forecast endorsed by the Committee on 5 February. **The Committee thanked the team for the high quality of the budget report and endorsed the budget for submission to Board of Governors on 28 June 2021.**

Barclays Loans – Transition to a Risk Free Rate (LIBOR to SONIA) [EF20/102]

The Committee considered the transition to a Risk Free Rate (LIBOR to SONIA) and the approach to ensuring the best outcome for Northumbria including the engagement of legal and financial advisors in order to determine the best options for Northumbria in relation to the transition. The transition would happen during 2021, with all sterling commercial loans, revolving credit facilities and derivatives being transitioned by 31 December 2021. **The Committee approved the engagement of advisors and noted that a full proposal would be brought to the 20 September meeting.**

Treasury Management Strategies – Proposals [EF20/103]

The Committee considered the recommended next steps to improve treasury management following the discussion at Committee on 15 March. The Treasury Management and Ethical Investment policy would be amended to increase the credit limits for counterparties, and alternative investment approaches would be explored for the element of cash holdings which relate to working capital. **The Committee noted that the Treasury Management and Ethical Investment policy was intended to**

	<p>enhance the University as an ethical investor, approved the proposed amendments to the Treasury Management and Ethical Investment policy and approved the development of alternative investment approaches as proposed, with progress to be reported to future Committee meetings.</p> <p><u>Student Recruitment 2021/22</u> [EF20/104 and Presentation] The Committee received an update on student recruitment for 2021/22. UK UG and PGT firm acceptances were ahead of 2020/21, but were largely offset by the expected fall in EU recruitment; significant risks and uncertainties around the impact of Centre Assessed Grades and deferrals from 2020/21 remained. The international picture was positive but still very volatile, and recruitment to other key cohorts was progressing well. Planning for confirmation and clearing was at an advanced stage, taking into account a range of potential Covid scenarios, but it seemed likely that the process would be longer and more volatile than in “normal” years. The Committee noted the update.</p>
4.	<p><u>Policy/Regulation/Projects</u> <u>Learning from the Expanding Excellence in England (E3) funding bid</u> [EF20/105] The Committee considered the lessons from the successful Expanding Excellence in England (E3) fund application for the world’s first interdisciplinary research hub for Biotechnology for the Built Environment (HBBE) between Newcastle and Northumbria. For large calls, a Funding Application Project Lead role should be identified to provide a Project Management Package of Support, with a project mobilisation team created at the point of award. The lessons from the unsuccessful IC3 bid would also be reported to a future Committee meeting. The Committee commended the approach to learning from both successful and unsuccessful bids, and endorsed the recommendations of the report.</p> <p><u>Contracts and Legal Claims Update</u> [EF20/106] CONFIDENTIAL AND LEGALLY PRIVILEGED <i>(NB: this item is Legally Privileged and included in Reserved Business Minutes)</i></p> <p><u>Students’ Union Finance Report – April 2021*</u> [EF20/107] The Committee noted the report.</p>

Richard Elliott
Assistant Secretary to Employment and Finance Committee
May 2021