NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD

15 May 2013

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair) and 56 members of the Academic Board.

There were insufficient members at the meeting to constitute a quorum (100 members).

NOTES

1. NOTES OF THE 16 MAY 2012 MEETING

   The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 16 May 2012 were available at:
   http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/academic/minutes.htm

2. NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS 2014

   2.1 Honorary Degrees

       The Honorary Degrees Committee invited nominations in writing for next year’s Congregation. Any member of Academic Board, Court, Council and the Alumni Consultative Group may make a nomination and support for nominees for honorary degrees should be sought only from members of these bodies. Where several members made a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination was made should be clearly stated.

       Principles for the award of Honorary Degrees could be found at:
       http://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/ceremonies/honorary/nom_hongrad.php

       Proposals should be sent in envelopes marked ‘Confidential - Honorary Degrees’ to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, King’s Gate by Tuesday, 31 July 2013.

   2.2 Honorary Fellowships of the University

       Court invited nominations in writing for the award of next year’s Honorary Fellowships of the University. Any lay member of Court and Council, the Alumni Consultative Group and members of Academic Board may make a nomination. Where several members made a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination was made should be clearly stated.

       Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships of the University could be found at:
       http://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/ceremonies/honorary/nom_honfell.php

       Proposals should be sent in envelopes marked ‘Confidential - Honorary Fellowships’ to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, King’s Gate by Friday, 7 March 2014.

3. MEMBERS OF COURT APPOINTED BY ACADEMIC BOARD

   Reported that:

   (a) The term of appointment of the following members of Court appointed by Academic Board would terminate on 31 July 2013:
Professor Erica Haimes
Professor Michael Whitaker

Professor Haimes is eligible for re-appointment but Professor Whitaker has served a total of 11 years and is not eligible for re-appointment.

(b) Mrs Jane Clubley, Director of Development, DARO, would retire in July 2013 which would leave a further vacancy amongst the members of Court appointed by Academic Board.

(c) Members of Academic Board were invited to submit nominations in writing by not later than Friday, 14 June 2013 to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, King’s Gate together with confirmation that the nominee is willing to be nominated. Nominees should be members of Academic Board.

4. REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Received an oral report by the Vice-Chancellor on current business.

Noted that:

1. September 2012 saw the first students enter the University under the new fees and funding regime. Despite fluctuations elsewhere in the sector, the University’s recruitment remained stable. The work required by staff across the University to maintain this position was acknowledged.

2. September 2012 also saw the removal of a cap on the recruitment of students who achieve grades of AAB or higher. From September 2013, the removal of the cap will be extended to students who achieve grades of ABB or higher. This will further increase competition in the sector.

3. In terms of the recruitment of widening participation students, the University maintained a similar position to that achieved in September 2011. International undergraduate students increased by 22.4%.

4. Rankings and league tables are key considerations for the sector. The Vice-Chancellor presented a slide which showed the University’s position in relation to the other Russell Group institutions across a number of rankings. The slide showed the volatility of league tables and the competitiveness of the Russell Group institutions. The measures for student experience are the areas where the University’s performance is strongest.

5. In terms of learning and teaching activity, Project 2012, which was designed to improve the student experience in preparation for the new fees regime, has been completed. The University maintained the score it had achieved in 2011 for overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey (89%). The results from International Student Barometer revealed that the University was ranked 1st out the 15 participating Russell Group institutions for library, learning technology, careers advice, work experience, eco-friendly attitude, living costs and support overall.

6. The University’s research income declined slightly in 2011-12 which was attributed to lower research grant awards being awarded two years previously. Provisional results for 2012-13 suggest that this decline has been reversed. The University performs strongly in terms of the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) it initiates – it is ranked 7th out of 101 institutions in this area. The University has also performed strongly in terms of the amount of European funding it receives.
7. Recent notable successes include the award of funding from HEFCE to launch the Neptune National Centre for Subsea and Offshore Engineering and a £21.9m award to fund a drugs trial in conjunction with the NHS Trust over a period of 10 years. Professor Sugata Mitra has achieved a notable individual success, having been awarded the TED prize of $1m for his ‘School in the Cloud’.

8. Working towards the REF submission in November 2013 remains the main priority for academic staff during the current academic year. The results of the REF are expected in December 2014.

9. The University’s engagement activities have continued with the launch of the third Societal Challenge Theme - Social Renewal. The British Science Festival is to be hosted by the University in September 2013. Work is about to commence on the first building on the Science Central site, funded by the City Council. Following much publicity of the City Council’s plan to cut its budget for cultural activities, the University has reached an agreement whereby any savings which can be achieved as a result of shared services between the University and the City Council will be redirected to fund the cultural institutions in which the University has an interest, for example, the Great North Museum. A Memorandum of Understanding is soon to be signed between the University and Northumberland County Council.

10. In terms of internationalisation activity, the University’s campuses in Malaysia and Singapore are continuing to expand. Recruitment to NUMed is expected to stabilise at around 180 students per year from 2015/16 onwards. The University is to launch its partnership with Xiamen University and also a Confucius Institute on 17 and 18 May 2013.

11. Following a 7% (£8m) reduction in HEFCE grants and cuts elsewhere, 2011-12 proved to be a difficult financial year for the University. Financial performance in 2012-13 is expected to be better with a 12% increase being witnessed in research grant income over the year to date. There are longer term funding concerns, however, with the achievement of student recruitment targets becoming increasingly important for the University’s financial sustainability. The forthcoming Government spending review, to be announced on 26 June, is of concern and it is anticipated that this could result in a cut to the budget for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

12. Improvements on the estate continue with the conversion of Kensington and Park Terraces into student accommodation which is expected to be completed by June 2014.

5. QUESTIONS

It was reported that the Vice-Chancellor would be pleased to answer questions at the meeting from members of Academic Board and would be grateful to receive notice of these as far as possible. Members had been asked to submit to him in writing details of any questions they wished to raise by noon on Monday, 13 May 2013.

1. Simon Meacher, Senior Development Officer, Quality in Teaching and Learning (QuILT)

‘I would like to ask if you would be prepared to expound on your thinking behind asking the Registrar to consider changes to the service cluster arrangements in the Professional Support Services, which rests on the principles of:

- The alignment of and contribution by PSS to the strategic objectives of the University
- Effective and consistent join-up on service delivery
- Focus on implementation - getting the detail right
Better communication

I am also particularly interested in how this review relates to the faculties, on whom service delivery is of course dependent, and with whom – in some cases – service and process delivery is shared.'

Response:

Following the increased marketisation of higher education an increasing number of activities are falling within the Registrar's domain. The Vice-Chancellor had asked the Registrar to consider how activities could be re-clustered to result in fewer individuals reporting directly to him which, in turn, will provide him with more time to focus on the University’s strategic activities.

It was acknowledged that across the University there are areas where support services could be better joined up, to provide an improved staff and student experience, and discussions with the Heads of Administration are underway to identify key areas for improvement.

2. Professor Máire Cross, School of Modern Languages

'In the light of the Finch report on Open Access, what is the University’s position regarding the implications for university research, particularly in the Arts and Humanities?

We are particularly concerned about the implications for:

- individual academics (whether they are ECRs or ERs on full or fractional contracts)
- postgraduate researchers through Leverhulme, AHRC, ESRC or British Academy
- learned societies/journals as critical outlets for publications in niche areas of research
- the future status of non-Open Access journals and monographs as research outputs.'

Response:

The traditional model for the publication of research papers involves the user paying to read the publications. Papers are selected for publication via a peer review process – the majority of academics who are involved in peer review provide this service for free. The cost of subscriptions for publications have significantly increased over time and universities had requested that the arrangements be reviewed in an attempt to mitigate these costs.

The review resulted in the publication of the Finch report which recommended that it should be the universities who pay for the publication of the research papers and that research data should be made ‘open access’. There is real concern that the Finch report recommendations could severely damage the sector by limiting opportunities for publications especially for new PhD students. The University is taking steps to mitigate the harm which could be done and is working with organisations such as the Russell Group to lobby the government.

Within the University there is an Open Access Implementation Group which is considering the practical implementation of the review recommendations. It has already been established that there will be a significant increase in workload for library staff. Research Libraries UK are working with the Russell Group to lobby the government in an attempt to mitigate the difficulties for academics.
3. **Professor Barry Gills, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology and President of the UCU**

‘Does the VC believe that a cross-section of all staff should be represented on University Remuneration Committee?’

Response:

The current constitution of the University’s Remuneration Committee is in line with guidance published by HEFCE and also by the Committee of University Chairs.

4. **Professor Colin Brooks, Institute for Cell and Molecular Biosciences**

‘Is the VC aware that many academic units in the University are failing to follow the rules for REF2014 that state “No sub-panel will make any use of journal impact factors, rankings, lists, or the perceived standing of publishers in assessing the quality of research outputs”, and that those units thereby risk damaging the University’s REF outcome?’.

Response (from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor):

It was clarified that, whilst individual academic units will have processes in place to enable them to prepare for the REF, it is University Research Committee (URC) that is responsible for making decisions about which staff will be submitted. Any assessments made by individual academic units will not be prove decisive at the URC as they have their own procedures in place which are based on expert peer review. It was clarified that the University code of practice is the guiding document in this case.

The Vice-Chancellor ended by thanking all staff and students for the successes enjoyed by the University over the past year.