Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair) and 53 members of the Academic Board.

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

NOTES

1. NOTICES OF THE 10 FEBRUARY 2010 MEETING

The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 10 February 2010 were available at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/academic/minutes.htm

2. NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS 2012

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 Friday, 26 August 2011.

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, 17 February 2012.

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 2011. All were eligible for re-appointment:
(b) Members of Academic Board were invited to submit nominations in writing by not later than Friday, 17 June 2011 to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, King’s Gate together with confirmation that the nominee was 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. Following the Browne Report, which was released in October 2010, the Government had recommended significant changes to university funding arrangements. The Comprehensive Spending Review, also in October 2010, had introduced significant cuts to the public sector. These cuts included an 80% reduction in the HEFCE teaching grant. In future, the majority of the teaching funding would come from student fees which would rise to a maximum of £9k.

2. The regional development agencies (RDAs) were to be abolished. This would have implications for the University since One North East had in the past been a key supporter. The (RDAs) were to be replaced by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) of which there were to be two in the region. The Vice-Chancellor had been appointed as the Higher Education representative on the North Eastern LEP. The LEPs were tasked with the identification of enterprise zones and it was hoped that Science Central could be sited within an enterprise zone.

3. The University was in a strong financial position and it intended to maintain this although a number of challenges remained. The University’s total grant from HEFCE for 2011/12 would be reduced by 10% and there were concerns over Research Council and capital funds. New immigration requirements could have implications for international student numbers and it was possible that the Government could impose further austerity measures on the sector due to the fact that the tuition fees that were to be charged by many institutions were higher than had been anticipated.

4. Project September 2012 had been initiated across the University in order to prepare for the first intake of students subject to higher fees. This project involved a number of stages including the decision on the fee to be charged, the student offer and ensuring the University could deliver on its offer. The University had already announced its decision to charge £9k to home undergraduate students from September 2012. The fees to be charged to postgraduate students were still being discussed.

5. In terms of its research activities, overall research income remained at a similar level to the previous year but income from the Research Councils had declined. The University had submitted a successful bid with Durham University to the ESRC to establish a dedicated postgraduate research and training centre to support postgraduate social science research. It had recently been announced that the University had been invited to join the EPSRC Framework grouping of 12 Universities. Framework University status was limited to the top 12 universities in terms of research funding drawn from EPSRC so this was considered to be a significant achievement.
6. With regards to engagement activities, 2011 was the launch year for the ‘Sustainability’ Societal Challenge Theme and ‘Social Renewal’ had been identified as the third theme to be launched 2012. The drilling of the borehole on the Science Central site was proceeding well and had received much positive publicity. It was intended to appoint an interim Director of Public Relations with a view to enhancing the University brand and public image.

7. The estate continued to develop with the refurbishment of the Students' Union currently ongoing and the landscaping of the Claremont Gateway soon to commence. There were plans to demolish the Museum of Antiquities, to expose the rear of the Armstrong Building and to pedestrianise and landscape the area in front to create a Student Forum. The new Business School building on the Downings site would open to students in September 2011 and the official opening of the NUMed campus in Malaysia would take place on 1 November 2011.

8. In its most recent Carbon Management Plan the University has set itself a challenging target to reduce its carbon emissions by 43% by 2020 against a 2005/06 baseline. Achievement of this target was dependent upon on the Government meeting its commitment to increase the volume of green energy available. Recycling rates across the University had increased to 93%. Two charging points for electric cars had been installed across the campus and the University was participating in a six month trial of two electric cars.

9. There had been a number of changes to the membership of Executive Board during the past year. On 1 February 2011, Professor Ella Ritchie had taken up the post of Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Professor Suzanne Cholerton had replaced her as Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching. Professor Oliver Hinton had recently announced his intention to retire at the end of the calendar year.

5. **STATUTE CHANGES**

Reported that the Privy Council had approved the amendments to the University Statutes, subject to the following minor change recommended by the Privy Council advisers:

3.(2) The object of the University is, for the public benefit, to **promote advance** education, learning and research.

6. **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, 16 May 2011.

1. **Dr Joanne Smith Finley (School of Modern Languages)** “What are the University’s plans for strategic investment in language-based area studies and, in particular, in areas of increasing national importance such as East Asian Studies and Arabic Studies?”

Response:

There were no plans at present to diversify into Arabic Studies. An East Asian Studies section had been established within the School of Modern Languages and the University hoped to develop the work done by this section over time. In this regard, there were plans in place to appoint a new research active lecturer in Japanese Studies, pump primed by the Japan
Foundation. Expertise in Area Studies could also be found in schools outside Modern Languages, most notably Latin American Studies.

2. **Dr Martin Dusinberre (School of Historical Studies)** "What does the University estimate to be the cost of an undergraduate degree in the humanities at Newcastle, and how will they justify this cost to students paying £9000?"

Response:

A thorough process had been followed in order to determine the fee to be charged to home undergraduate students from September 2012. Considerations such as whether to charge a flat or differential fee had been taken into account as has the need to charge a fee that would allow for reinvestment. The decision had been taken to charge £9k to reflect the fact that the University offered a high quality experience. It was now essential for the University to continue to meet the challenge of ensuring all students received the quality student experience they had been promised.

3. **Professor Colin Brooks (Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology)** “Would the Vice-Chancellor agree that the majority of academic staff are overwhelmed by excessive workloads, and that if there is to be an improvement in the "student experience" there needs to be a substantial increase in the number of academic staff so as to reduce individual workloads and increase the staff:student ratio?"

4. **Professor Barry Gills (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology)** "Given the University's stated reserve of some £160 million, will the University now adopt an official policy of reducing staff-student ratios, prioritising those that are above the national average? If not, why not?"

5. **Dr Naomi Standen (School of Historical Studies)** “A few years ago the University required that workload models to be developed to measure and compare the amount of work requested of individual members of staff. The VC recently insisted that all academic workloads be returned as 100% exactly, which can only be done by distorting what individual members of staff actually do. Please can he explain the purpose of this time-consuming exercise in falsification.”

Response to questions 3, 4 and 5:

1. Job security had been a concern for the sector during the previous year. A number of other universities had been required to initiate a redundancy scheme and the University was fortunate in that it had not been required to take such a step. At the present time there was still no plan to implement a voluntary or compulsory redundancy scheme but it was important to be aware that no promises could be made in this regard as the position could change due to circumstances beyond the University’s control.

2. In the 2010 Employee Opinion Survey, in response to the question ‘I find my current workload too much and I am struggling to cope’, of the 1125 academic staff who responded, 14.1% agreed, 27.3% tended to agree, 40.2% tended to disagree and 18.4% disagreed. These results showed that the majority of academic staff did not consider themselves to be overwhelmed at the time the survey was undertaken in May 2010. It was suggested that circumstances could have changed since this time and it was agreed that the possibility undertaking a further check of staff opinion in relation to their workload could be considered. In addition, it was suggested that a comparison should be made between those schools with a high proportion of academic staff who had agreed with the above statement and the average number of contact hours reported.
3. As had been noted, the University maintained strong reserves of approximately £150m, however, a large proportion of this was allocated to particular projects and commitments. The University’s liability for its local pension scheme, the Retirement Benefits Plan (RBP), was £30m and £80m had been set aside for future capital developments. The remaining £40m represented just over 10% of the University’s total budget which was considered to provide a prudent buffer.

4. As mentioned above, it was possible that the Government could take further punitive action against the sector as a consequence of the total fees budget being higher than had been accounted for and the University had to be prepared for this. The national pay negotiations were a further consideration which needed to be taken into account.

5. The University had set itself the target to spend no more than 55% of its total annual income on staff. This was in line with most HEIs that were predicting a healthy financial position. Institutions that spent significantly more than 55% on staff were often those that struggled financially. The creation of more posts would increase pressure on the pay budget. It was possible that the higher fee might allow additional posts to be created but it would not be possible to determine this until the new fee regime was in place and the impact on student recruitment was known.

6. Workload models had been introduced at the request of UCU partly to help ensure a reasonably equitable distribution of work. Information on how academic staff spent their time was also collected via the TRAC diary exercise. The Vice-Chancellor had recently asked the three faculties to identify how much time was spent on teaching contact in each school since high contact hours was perceived by the public as being the key factor in determining whether a degree programme provided value for money.

7. It was clarified that staff were concerned about the fact they had been asked to report as if they were working a notional number of hours during the year, even when this was not the case. It was confirmed that this has not been the intention of the original request as it was possible for results to be scaled where necessary for staff who worked part time hours. It was agreed that the Executive Director of Human Resources would look into the questions that had been raised about the current process.

8. In order to bring long-term benefits to the University it was suggested that increased investment should be made in front line staff particularly since the University had the resources available to do this. In response it was highlighted that the next three years were expected to be difficult for the sector and the University had to make plans which would allow it to respond to events as they developed. Investing in increased numbers of staff would increase recurrent expenditure which was considered to be risky in the current climate.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked all those who had submitted questions, and/or attended Academic Board.