Newcastle University
Council Effectiveness Questionnaire 2014-15

Council agreed in December 2005 that it should conduct annual reviews of its effectiveness. The Leadership Foundation prepared an example effectiveness questionnaire which was used in 2010-11 and 2011-12. It was later decided, that a shorter version should be prepared for 2012-13 and to be used thereafter. It was also agreed that the longer version of the questionnaire should continue to be used to inform the wider review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements which takes place every five years (now every four years).

A governance review has taken place during the 2014-15 academic year and the Leadership Foundation effectiveness questionnaire has been reintroduced to inform this review. The responses to the effectiveness questionnaire, as detailed in this report, will be considered by the Working Group on Governance prior to the circulation of the final Governance Review Report.

The effectiveness questionnaire is divided into six parts:

Part A:	The Enablers of an Effective Council
Part B:	Working Relationships and Boardroom Behaviour
Part C:	The Outcomes Achieved by Council
Part D:	Reflection on Personal Contribution to Council
Part E:	Other Views
Part F:	Looking Forward

Part D was added to the questionnaire this year at the request of the Working Group on Governance and was not included in the original Leadership Foundation effectiveness questionnaire.

In **Question 1** respondents were asked to supply their name, however, all responses have been treated confidentially, and no information about individual returns has been made available to anyone other than Lizzie Taylor, Executive Officer (Governance), who has compiled the report. Neither the Chair of Council nor the Vice-Chancellor has seen the individual survey returns.

17 out of 21 members of Council completed the questionnaire in full compared with 16 out of 20 members in 2014.

Areas where significant changes in responses have been witnessed when the results are compared with those from 2011 and 2012, and also recurrent free text comments are noted below. The full responses to the questionnaire are available as an **Appendix** which can be obtained from the Governance Office.

Part A – The Enablers of an Effective Council

Section 1: The Commitment to Effective Governance

The proportion of respondents in full agreement with the statement in Question 3 –
The quality of interaction between the Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Registrar enables effective governance to occur – has declined from 83.3% in 2012 to 58.8% in 2015. The free text comments suggest there is scope for better definition of the roles of certain committees with Remuneration Committee being singled out in one case. It is suggested that Council should be reminded of the roles on a regular basis.

Section 2: Effective Governance Structures and Processes

70.6% of respondents fully agree that the arrangements for Council and sub-committee meetings are fit for purpose (Q10) an improvement from 50% in 2012. The free text comments suggest that there is scope for greater discussion at Council about the University's educational character and that Council members would benefit from a regular update on this subject. The need to provide Council with stronger academic justification for some investment decisions is raised.

Section 3: Effective Council Membership

There has been an improvement in the proportion of respondents who fully agree that the recruitment and succession planning of Council members is effectively undertaken (Q15) from 38.9% in 2012 to 52.9% in 2015. Free text comments suggest that the recruitment process could be more transparent. Knowledge of estates is identified as an area where expertise is lacking and the need to improve the ethnic diversity of Council is mentioned.

Question 16 – Effective support, induction and ongoing professional development exists for members, and is valued by them – is an area where improvements could be made with only 35.3% of respondents fully agreeing with this statement, a decline from 66.7% in 2012. The free text comments support the need to improve the arrangements for Council briefings.

A third of respondents do not know whether the contribution of all members (including the Chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by Council (Q18). This response and the free text comments imply that this in an area which needs some attention and that more regular reviews of the contribution of individual members of Council should take place.

Section 4: Council commitment to organisational vision, culture and values

The majority of respondents (76.5%) agree that Council is effective in encouraging corporate social responsibility and the achievement of public benefit (Q23). Members of Council are less sure that there is trust and confidence in Council amongst those staff and students who come into contact with it (Q24) with only 29.4% agreeing with this statement and 47.1% saying that they do not know. Free text comments reflect this uncertainty and suggest that more opportunities should be provided for members of Council to interact with staff and students.

Section 5: Effective strategic development and performance measurement

A significant increase has been witnessed in the proportion of respondents who agree that Council actively measures and monitors institutional performance (Q27) with those in full agreement increasing from 33.3% in 2012 to 70.6% in 2015. 70.6% of respondents fully agree that Council ensures that regular performance reviews of the Vice-Chancellor are undertaken by Remuneration Committee (Q30) an increase from only 50% in 2012.

Section 6: Effective Council information and communication

Free text comments suggest that too much information is presented to Council and there is a recommendation that a review of best practice for board communications should take place. Responses to Q36 – that there is effective communication to and from Council both within the institution and also with key stakeholder bodies and the public at large – are varied which suggests that there is a lack of information in this area, a sentiment which is reflected in the free text comments.

Section 7: Future Governance

There is scope to improve the information provided to Council about likely changes in the external environment (Q39) since only 64.7% agree that they receive sufficient information about this, a reduction from 90.9% in 2011. The free text comments suggest that Council would also benefit from further information about the arrangements for academic governance.

Part B – Working Relationships and Boardroom Behaviour

The free text comments in this section are largely positive but the suggestion that the papers submitted to Council should be more focussed and succinct is repeated. It is also proposed that comments and questions should be invited from members of Council after each topic covered in the Vice-Chancellor's business paper.

Part C – The Outcomes Achieved by Council

There has been a significant reduction in the proportion of respondents agreeing that enhanced institutional reputation and competitiveness is being achieved (Q56), from 72.2% in 2012 to 41.2% in 2015. Free text comments on these questions suggest that there is scope to provide members of Council with further information about support for innovation, assurance on academic quality, reputation raising and external opinions.

Part D – Reflection on Personal Contribution to Council

The section invited Council members to reflect on their personal contribution to the work of Council. The majority of respondents feel that they are able to make an effective contribution to Council, although one respondent notes that they would welcome an independent opinion of this. The majority of members feel that their commitment of time to Council is reasonable.

Part E – Other Views

Re-circulation of the new CUC Code of Governance, visit to student residences and teaching spaces and streamlining the agenda are suggested as three methods of improving the effectiveness of Council.

Part F – Looking Forward

A number of respondents suggest that no radical change is necessary to the current governance arrangements but note that the 'Raising the Bar' agenda could present some challenges for the future.

The suggestion that the presentation of information to Council should be reformulated is repeated. Reviewing the actions of competitor institutions and identifying improved methods of keeping Council members up to date with developments is recommended. Providing more opportunities to meet with 'ordinary' academics is a further suggestion.

John Hogan
Registrar
19 August 2015