1. NOTES OF THE 13 MAY 2015 MEETING

The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 13 May 2015 are available at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/academic/minutes.htm

2. NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS 2017

2.1 Honorary Degrees

The Honorary Degrees Committee invites nominations in writing for next year’s Congregations. 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 make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination is made should be clearly stated.

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

Proposals should be sent by email marked ‘Confidential – Honorary Degrees’ to Dr John Hogan, Registrar (Email: John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) by Friday, 29 July 2016.

2.2 Honorary Fellowships of the University

Court invites 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 make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination is made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships and Nomination Forms can be found at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/ceremonies/honorary/nom_honfell.php

Proposals should be sent by email marked ‘Confidential – Honorary Fellowships’ to Dr John Hogan, Registrar (Email: John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) by Friday, 28 February 2017.

Please make it clear whether the nomination is for an Honorary Degree or an Honorary Fellowship.

When making a nomination for an honorary degree or honorary fellowship, this should be done in the strictest confidence and must not be discussed with the potential recipient. Successful nominations will be publicised following approval by the awarding body (i.e. Senate or Court respectively) in advance of the relevant honorary ceremony.

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 will terminate on 31 July 2016:

Professor Louise Robinson  
Professor Mark Shucksmith  
Professor Phil Taylor

All three have served one term and are eligible for re-appointment.

(b) Members of Academic Board are invited to submit nominations in writing by not later than Friday, 17 June 2016 to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, (Email: John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) 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. Highlights from the past year included some significant staff achievements. Notable examples included Professor Vicki Bruce’s award of a Damehood for services to Higher Education and Psychology, Professor Mark Shucksmith’s award of a Carnegie Fellowship and Professor Paul Watson’s successful £15m application to the government to establish the National Institute for Smart Data Innovation.

2. The University had continued to grow its relationship with Siemens and was now one of its Global Principal Partners. An Athena SWAN silver award had been received at an institutional level, making the University one of only eight institutions in the country to receive such an award. The University had been recognised by the Times Higher Education for the outstanding support it provided to students and had been awarded the title of University of the Year by Educate North.

3. Student satisfaction levels remained high amongst undergraduate students at 91%, according to the National Student Survey, which placed the University joint sixth in the UK and joint first in the Russell Group. 83% of postgraduate research and 85% of postgraduate taught students were satisfied with their experience, both of which were upper quartile results. International student satisfaction as recorded by the International Student Barometer was 93%. The University had successfully completed the five-yearly Quality Assurance Agency Higher Education Review in April 2016. Staff were commended for their efforts to ensure that high quality teaching standards and high student satisfaction levels were maintained.

4. The University’s branch campuses continued to develop: NU London had begun teaching its first students in September 2015; the most recent graduation ceremony in Singapore included the campus’ 1,000th graduate and the University’s agreement with the Singapore Institute of Technology had recently been renewed.

5. Highlights from the Faculty of Medical Sciences included the achievement of 44th place in the Leiden Rankings for biomedical & health sciences; the highest ever annual research income (£69 million) and achieving NSS scores of over 90% overall satisfaction in all subjects areas. Within HaSS a number of significant projects had been launched during the past year including Creative Fuse North East and the Gertrude Bell Archive. Research awards within the Faculty this year to date had reached £6m (compared to £2.4m for all of last year). SAgE had secured the £15m award for the National Institute for Smart Data
Innovation, and had established the National Centre for Energy Systems Integration, and the National Institute for Agri-Food Research & Innovation.

6. Investment in the estate continued with the major refurbishment of the Armstrong Building still ongoing. Plans were underway to redevelop the Jubilee Quadrangle to the rear of the Armstrong Building and to reconfigure the Boiler House to create a space to be used by students but which would also be used for ceremonial events such as graduation ceremonies. Additional research and social working space had been provided for students in the Marjorie Robinson Reading Rooms and the INTO building had been extended. The Richardson Road student residences were soon to be replaced by the Park View Student Village.

7. On the Science Central site, the Urban Sciences Building was under construction which would ultimately house the Institute of Sustainability that would open in September 2017. A Learning & Teaching Centre was also to be constructed on the site which would provide an auditorium with 700 seats, student learning spaces and expansion space for Business School. Finally, an Innovation Hub was planned for the site that would house both the National Institute for Smart Data Innovation (NISDI) and the National Institute for Ageing Science and Innovation (NASI).

8. Forthcoming issues that were likely to impact upon the University included the EU Referendum; staff were encouraged to vote and also asked to encourage their students to vote. Legislation on Higher Education would come forward in the near future that would result in the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and an Office for Students. Concern was expressed about the future of international student recruitment which had experienced a downturn that could be attributed, in part, to the international reputation and positioning of the University.

9. With regards to Raising the Bar, staff were reminded that this was a university-wide initiative to improve performance in core academic functions of research, teaching and civic engagement. It was intended to reinforce the vision of ‘A World-Class Civic University’ and to include a particular focus on research and REF 2020. £45m of investment was available to support the initiative which could be in equipment, people or match funded initiatives. £13m had been made available to invest in the Research Excellence Academy to provide funding for research studentships.

10. The aim of the Raising the Bar initiative was to improve the University’s performance in the measures against which it was judged externally including the Research Excellence Framework (REF), rankings and league tables, measures of student satisfaction and the forthcoming TEF. The University’s image and reputation as a research-intensive university was crucial for staff and students alike and it was essential to be clear about the level that it needed to achieve in order to maintain and improve its position.

11. In 2014 the University had fallen to 202th place in the Times Higher Education/Thomson Reuters World Rankings and this had had consequences for its performance in terms of international student recruitment and the receipt of international grants. To respond to this, a Research Expectations document had been prepared which sought to set out the average levels of research achievement the University had to attain collectively to do well in REF 2020. The documents had been prepared following an analysis of the results of REF 2014 and the understanding of the requirements of REF 2020. They were intended to enable every research-active academic to be REF-able for 2020 and to set out clearly what being ‘REF-able’ meant.

12. It had not been the intention to cause disquiet amongst staff and the Vice-Chancellor expressed regret for the way in which the Research Expectations documents had been communicated to and received by staff and any anxiety that had been caused.
13. It was confirmed that the University remained as strongly committed as ever to Teaching and to Civic Engagement. Staff would not be expected to meet all of the research expectations every year as the documents set out averages across each Faculty to which each member of research active staff should contribute. It was noted that some of the University’s competitors were already achieving these expectations and were likely to make further improvements prior to the next REF. The University’s performance had to be in line with that its competitors in order to maintain its position.

14. With regards to the University’s support activity, the University was one of nine Russell Group universities to have participated in benchmarking the cost of support staff throughout the institution. The exercise used a methodology developed by an Australian firm, Cubane, that had been undertaking this work successfully for many of the leading universities in Australia and New Zealand. The first data collection exercise was undertaken in the summer and autumn of 2015 and the results were available in February 2016. The results were both informative and positive for the University: We had the lowest comparator costs of any of the nine universities and we were second highest in the effectiveness survey out of the eight universities that participated. During 2016 another four or five Russell Group universities were expected to participate.

15. Although the results were good overall, the University was examining a number of areas in order to seek improvements in the way that the work was organised. These areas included: travel administration arrangements, research administration, staff recruitment, international student recruitment, Records Management and technical support for teaching in SAgE.

16. Looking forward, the University was exploring the possibility of relocating medical students from Durham to Newcastle and discussions on this issue were underway. 2017 would see the launch of the Freedom City celebrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King’s receipt of an honorary degree from the University and a new Vice-Chancellor was to be appointed who would take up office from 1 January 2017.

4. QUESTIONS

Members were invited to submit questions to the Vice-Chancellor ahead of the meeting. One question was received and answered as follows:

Dr Victoria G Mountford, Careers Service

‘How will staff involved in high quality teaching and learning excellence in the Professional Services ‘faculty’ (for example, Career Service cross-faculty module delivery) be recognised for their (academic and otherwise) contributions to important measures such as the impending TEF?’

Response:

There are a number of existing mechanism that allow Professional Support Services staff to be recognised for their contribution to academic and non-academic operations. Reward, as in recognition, comes through various mechanisms: Spotlight Awards, Celebrating Success, Teaching Awards. Reward, as in remuneration, for PSS staff, comes via annual Pay Review. Cross-over is common. Many academics make contributions in non-academic ways, just as Professional Support Services staff can make a valuable contribution to learning & teaching, research or civic engagement.

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