NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
COUNCIL
29 April 2013

Present: Mr Mark I’Anson (in the Chair), the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Peter Andras, Professor Alan Boddy, Mr Neil Braithwaite, Professor Vicki Bruce, Mr Colin FitzPatrick, Professor Deborah Henderson, Mrs Jacqui Henderson, Mr Robert Hull, Mr Peter Johnson, Mr Jeff McIntosh, Mrs Heidi Mottram, Ms Laura Perry (President, Students’ Union), Mr Simon Pleydell, Mrs Kate Priestley, Professor Ella Ritchie, and Ms Rachael Thornton (Education Officer).

In attendance: Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Charles Harvey, Professor Tony Stevenson and Professor Nick Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Mrs Veryan Johnston (Executive Director of Human Resources) and Mrs Lizzie Taylor (Executive Officer (Governance)).

Apologies: Dr John Appleby, Mr Mike Davison, Mr Paul Walker, Professor Chris Day and Professor Steve Homans.

MINUTES

85. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

86. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 11 March 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed.

87. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising or outstanding actions from the previous minutes.

88. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an oral report from the Executive Director of Human Resources on current health and safety issues affecting the University.

Noted that:

1. There will be a routine visit from the Health and Safety Executive to the University’s Containment Level 3 (CL3) facility in Medical Sciences in May. If any areas of concern are identified during the visit, the University may be required to pay a financial penalty.

2. Earlier in April a fire occurred in one of the laboratories in the Bedson Building. The building was empty at the time but a significant amount of damage to one room was caused. The incident has been reported to the Health and Safety Executive and a thorough investigation is underway to identify the cause.
89. **CHAIR’S BUSINESS**

1. **Committee of University Chairs’ Plenary Meeting**

   The Chair recently attended the biannual Committee of University Chairs’ (CUC) plenary meeting in London. The subject of the meeting was Internationalisation and members received presentations from Warwick and Nottingham universities. Nottingham University has extensive international activities, with campuses in China and Malaysia. The presentation from Warwick University explained why the University had decided against establishing a branch campus in Singapore in 2002.

   Members had also received a presentation from Rolls Royce which highlighted issues between university research and technology transfer to industry.

2. **Recommendation from Nominations Committee**

   At its meeting on 12 November 2012, Nominations Committee had considered a recommendation that Mr Jonathan Glass be appointed as a lay member of Council. Mr Glass, an alumnus of the University, has demonstrated previous commitment to the work of the University by providing advice on the University’s development and alumni relations work and on its approach to reputation management and PR. Following discussion, Nominations Committee agreed that, subject to a satisfactory meeting with the Chair and also his willingness to serve (both of which matters have now been resolved), a recommendation should be made to Council that Mr Glass be appointed as a member of Council.

   A brief biography for Mr Glass was tabled at the meeting.

   **Resolved that Mr Jonathan Glass be appointed as a member of Council from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2016.**

3. **North East Economic Review**

   The Chair invited Mrs Heidi Mottram to give details of the recently published North East Economic Review, commissioned by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

   The review team had established that worldwide regions which outperformed others usually had identified clear themes and had implemented structured reforms to progress these themes. Most had a good understanding of their core strengths and had established a clear vision. The vision was also well supported through institutional leadership, from local authorities, business and universities. The proposal for more combined working between local authorities in the North East was welcomed as it was hoped that this would help progress a more coordinated approach in the region.

   Skills, innovation and connectivity (both in terms of transport and digitally) have been identified as key areas for improvement and activities are to be progressed in each of these areas.

   The LEP response to the report is expected to be available in July 2013. The LEP will be asked to consider how the recommendations in the report can be implemented and the review team will reconvene in 12 months’ time to assess progress made.

   There are connections between the review’s finding and the Heseltine Review, as well as those of the Wilson Report which was published in early 2012 and which recommended the establishment of a national centre for business/university collaboration. A further review is to be conducted by Sir Andrew Witty, Chief Executive of GlaxoSmithKline and Chancellor
of Nottingham University, with the aim of identifying practical steps for building stronger relationships between universities, local companies and regional growth bodies including LEPs.

There was a strong presence from ministers at the recent LEP National Network Annual Conference which suggests that the LEPs are beginning to generate political momentum.

4. **Council Briefing Sessions**

The Chair reminded members of the Council Briefing Sessions and encouraged members to attend.

The forthcoming meetings from the programme are:

13 May 2013, 11.00am–12.00noon, L5.18, King’s Gate – Director of Estates, Estates Strategy: overview and current projects and issues.

3 June 2013, 10.30-11.30am, meet at the Robinson Library Reception for a tour of the Robinson Library to be conducted by the Deputy University Librarian.

17 June 2013, 11.00–11.45am, L5.18, King’s Gate – Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation, The Research Strategy: an overview of the key issues relating to this University.

17 June 2013, 12noon–1.00pm, meet at the Students’ Union Reception for a tour of the Students’ Union Building to be conducted by Charles Barry, Chair of the Students’ Union Council.

Members of Council who would like to attend any of the above sessions are asked to inform Lizzie Taylor (Lizzie.Taylor@ncl.ac.uk).

90. **VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS**

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report. Highlights of this report are discussed below.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document B. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

1. **Deaths**

Received a report on deaths recently announced by the University.

Resolved that Council record its deep regret and sympathy for the relatives concerned.

2. **Partnership with Adidas**

The Vice-Chancellor thanked the sabbatical officers for demonstrating a leadership role in the discussions with Adidas which had enabled a partnership agreement to be signed. The Students’ Union was in favour of the partnership and the decision process followed had been documented for the benefit of the current sabbatical officers’ successors. The student newspaper, the Courier, had also published a balanced report of the agreement.

It was noted that some students had expressed concerns over Adidas’ past business practices but assurances have been obtained from the company that it is taking positive steps to resolve these. The Students’ Union was satisfied with the assurances received.
3. **NUS National Executive**

Senate recorded its congratulations to Mr Charles Barry, current Chair of the Students’ Union Council, who has been elected to the NUS National Executive for 2013-14.

4. **Rankings**

The University has improved its performance in a number of league tables:

- Leiden Rankings (measures scientific performance) – the University has improved from 172nd position in 2012 to 133rd position internationally in 2013.
- Times Higher Student Experience Rankings – the University has been placed 14th nationally, up one place from 2012. The Students' Union has been ranked joint 8th, up from joint 72nd in 2012.

5. **Athena SWAN Awards**

The University has recently been informed that its bronze Athena SWAN status has been renewed. The Athena SWAN Charter evolved from work between the Athena Project and the Scientific Women’s Academic Network (SWAN), to advance the representation of women in science, engineering and technology. The Institute of Cellular Medicine was congratulated on being awarded the Silver Department Award.

6. **UUK Board Meeting**

As requested by Council at its previous meeting, the Vice-Chancellor raised the issue of the investment strategy followed by the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) at the most recent Universities UK (UUK) board meeting. UUK is to receive a paper on this issue at its next board meeting.

7. **Government Spending Review**

The Government’s 2013 Spending Review, which will determine departmental budgets for 2015-16, will be announced on 26 June 2013. Most Government departments are thought to be preparing for a 10% reduction in their budgets. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), which determines the budget allocated to the Higher Education sector, will not be protected from any reduction. The Higher Education budget represents the largest area of expenditure for BIS and is likely to be a target for cuts.

Many universities have been prudent in recent years and have generated surpluses for the purpose of reinvestment. The Russell Group and UUK have both made submissions to the Government setting out the investments to be made by universities using the surpluses which have been generated. The sector will continue to reiterate its value to the wider economy in the run up to the announcement on 26 June.

8. **Partnership with Northumberland County Council**

The opportunities which the partnership with Northumberland County Council represents were welcomed. It was considered that there were particular opportunities in the North East in terms of the health economy. The University’s location in Newcastle places it in a good position to provide leadership on both civic and rural matters and it should be encouraged to look to the west as well as to the east.
91. **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER SUMMARY**

Received the Strategic Risk Register Summary.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that no changes have been made to the ratings of the risks since the previous submission to Council. In light of recent developments, the risks which focus on home student recruitment targets and pensions provision will continue to be closely monitored.

92. **INSITUTIONAL KPI SUMMARY REPORT**

Received the summary KPI report from Professor Tony Stevenson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Planning and Resources, on behalf of Executive Board.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that, with the exception of the addition of a performance rating of amber-green for the Social Renewal KPI, there are no changes to report since the previous submission to Council.

93. **STRATEGIC PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Received the strategic progress report for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and a PowerPoint presentation from Professor Charles Harvey, Pro-Vice-Chancellor HaSS, on behalf of Executive Board.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences is one of considerable diversity which represents a strength but which also presents challenges. The Faculty displays strong performance in many areas but in others standards and performance vary.

2. Within the Faculty there are a low number of Principal Investigators (PIs) and steps are to be taken to increase the PI density in future years. Academic staff are to be encouraged to be more ambitious and to respond to the trend towards the award of more large-scale, inter-disciplinary collaborative projects.

3. It will be important for staff to be able to demonstrate the impact of their research, since this represents 20% of the overall rating in the Research Excellence Framework and may increase in future years.

4. Increasing the scores achieved by academic units in the National Student Survey is a high priority. Considerable improvements have been witnessed in the results achieved by schools which have implemented a formal framework designed to improve performance.

5. Developing new programmes is an area of focus for the Faculty. The recently introduced Creative Writing programme has received a high number of good quality applications.

6. The Social Renewal Social Challenge Theme has been well received within the region and is an area where research income should develop further.

7. The move toward STEM subjects and away from traditional humanities subjects is a possible consequence of the new fees regime. It was proposed that the University should consider ways in which humanities subjects could be used to enhance the wider student experience for all students regardless of their core subject, with a view to increasing their
employability. A ‘Languages for All’ programme is to be developed which will make language tuition accessible to all students.

8. It was suggested that the Law and Business Schools should take steps to improve their engagement with the local legal and business communities. It was noted that applied research did not often achieve the highest level in research assessment exercises. The University also needs to balance its reputation for impact and application against a need to develop a strong academic reputation.

9. The need to encourage greater interaction between students from different nationalities was acknowledged and it was noted that was an issue for the institution as a whole.

10. Widening participation remains an issue despite significant amounts of money being spent in this area. The main problem remains that few students from widening participation backgrounds achieved the grades needed to be accepted onto their chosen course. The limit to the University’s core quote has further exacerbated this problem.

11. Reasons for the low submission rates for post-graduate students were requested. It was noted that where students received funding from Research Councils the submission rate is 87% but for self-funded students, the submission rate is much lower. The Faculty will seek to address this by encouraging more students to undertake an MPhil in the first instance, in order to assess their suitability for a PhD. It is also important to ensure that appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place.

Resolved that:

(i) A KPI should be developed for business engagement to monitor progress in this area.

(ii) Professor Harvey be thanked for an informative presentation.

94. UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT TO SENATE AND COUNCIL 2011-12

Received the University Research Committee Report to Senate and Council for 2011-12 (including the Research and Innovation KPIs) from Professor Nick Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, on behalf of Executive Board.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The value of research projects awarded has increased for the second year running from £92.7m in 2010-11 to £97.7m in 2011-12. Performance within each of the three faculties is variable, however.

2. There was a decline in terms of income received during 2011-12 as a result of low awards received in 2009. Income is expected to increase in future years.

3. As with the sector as a whole, the University faces the challenge of responding to the transparency agenda which requires institutions to make all publicly funded research data open access.

4. As noted above (See Minute 90, note 5), there has been welcome progress in terms of Athena SWAN, with the University retaining its bronze status and the Institute of Health and Society being awarded silver status.
5. It was noted that it would be useful if future reports could include information on the profitability of the University’s research. Due to the way in which it is funded, all research activity generates a loss and is cross-subsidised by teaching activity. Research funded by Research Councils and the Government are, in general, more profitable than European and charity funded projects. The University is on the right trajectory but in not immune to short term shocks and volatile trends. Across the University the focus remains on improving the number of Research Council awards.

6. Consultancy income is on a downward trajectory which is, in part, due to the loss of public sector income. The University has, however, been awarded a number of consultancy contracts from the North East LEP.

95. REPORT FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE

Received on oral report from the Chair of Audit Committee of the meeting held on 25 April 2013.

Noted that:

1. Audit Committee considered two strategic risks relating to the estate and received a presentation from the Director the Estates and the Head of Maintenance. A number of Internal Audit reports were also considered.

2. A full report from the meeting on 25 April will be presented to Council at its meeting on 17 June.

96. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY / STUDENTS’ UNION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of the University/Students’ Union Partnership Committee held on 11 March 2013.

[Circulated as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The relationship between the University and the Students’ Union continues to strengthen. There has been a notable increase in the number of societies and participation in societies and the Students’ Union subvention for 2013-14 is to be increased by 3% partly in response to this.

2. The Adidas partnership was discussed and a clear audit trail of the student consultation process has been prepared which provides evidence of the decision making process for the benefit of future sabbatical officers.

3. A digital infrastructure project is underway within the Students’ Union with the aim of improving communications with students. It is hoped that funding in addition to the subvention funding will be available for this.

4. It was suggested that the Students’ Union and the wider student body should be congratulated on the student achievements which were highlighted at the recent ncl+ awards ceremony. It was noted that, James O’Donovan, the student who had received the Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Outstanding Personal Achievement is to be put forward for the NUS Student of the Year award.

97. NEPTUNE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SUBSEA AND OFFSHORE ENGINEERING

Received a report from Professor Nick Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, on behalf of Executive Board.
Noted that:

1. The University’s bid to the HEFCE Catalyst Fund for £3m funding towards the cost of building and equipping a research centre for subsea and offshore engineering has been successful. The University and industry are required to provide £2m each to finance the projected £7m capital cost of the centre. The centre will be an open innovation centre which will encourage collaborations with successful local companies.

2. The building will be owned by the University. The ongoing financial commitment to the centre is considered to be minimal and income from research projects are expected to fund the majority of the running costs.

3. It was important to note the considerable contribution of Barry Rowland, the former Chief Executive of Newcastle City Council, for the success of this bid as he was instrumental in giving the project support at a key stage.

Resolved that Council approve the gross capital investment of £6,964k including net investment of £1,964k by the University.

98. APPLICATION STATISTICS FOR SEPTEMBER 2013

Received a report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching on the current position regarding undergraduate and postgraduate applications for 2013, on behalf of Executive Board.  

Noted that:

1. The majority of the offers to be made to home and EU students have now been issued. 20% more offers have been made compared with the same point in the previous cycle.

2. Core offers have been accepted at a higher rate than non-core offers, largely due to there being fewer of these available. Only 60% of students who have been made an offer have responded to date. The percentage of students selecting Newcastle as their insurance choice has increased slightly compared with the previous year.

3. The University expects to meet the target it has set itself of 4119 new undergraduate students.

4. In terms of postgraduate offers and acceptances, the University is in a positive position on all measures when compared with the same point in the previous year’s cycle.

99. CHAIR’S CIRCULAR

Noted that no Chair’s Circular had been issued in advance of the meeting.

100. HEFCE ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RISK

Received a paper from the Executive Director of Finance

101. COUNCIL BRIEFING SESSIONS FOR 2013-14

Received the schedule for the Council Briefing Sessions for 2013-14.
102. REPORTED BUSINESS

Received a report of action taken in accordance with agreed procedures, approved where necessary by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate and/or the Chair of Council on behalf of Council, and by other University bodies and Chairs.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document M. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]