NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
C O U R T
13 OCTOBER 2015

Present: The Chancellor (in the Chair), Vice-Chancellor, Ms Parveen Akhtar, Councillor Joe Carlebach, Sir Peter Carr, Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Mr Alan Clarke, Professor Chris Day, Professor Richard Davies, Mr Andrew Davison, Professor Robert Edwards, Mr Dom Fearon (President, Students’ Union), Mr Colin FitzPatrick, Mrs Olivia Grant, Ms Jacqui Henderson, Professor Steve Homans, Mr Jack Jeffery, Mr Peter Johnson, Mr Antony Jones, Lord Frank Judd, Professor Eileen Kaner, Ms Abi Kelly, Miss Florence Kirkby, Dr Mike Laker, Professor Patrick Lavery, Mr Stephen Lightley, Mr Richard Maudsley, Ms Pummi Mattu, Ms Claire Morgan, Ms Fiona O’Connor, Councillor Sue Pearson, Baroness Joyce Quin, Sir George Russell, Professor Julie Sanders, Sir Nigel Sherlock, Professor Mark Shucksmith, Mr Nitin Shukla, Mr Michael Stephenson, Professor Tony Stevenson, Ms Sarah Stewart, Dr Robert Teoh, Ms Hannah Underwood, Lord John Walton, Mr Rob Williamson, Ms Angela Woodburn and Mr Paul Woolston.

In attendance: Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar) and Mrs Yvonne Lee (Executive Assistant).

1. WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Chancellor welcomed the following new members to their first meeting of Court:

Ms Parveen Akhtar
Mr Dom Fearon
Ms Pummi Mattu
Professor Julie Sanders
Dr Robert Teoh
Mr Paul Woolston

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

[Circulated with the Agenda as Document A]

3. MEMBERSHIP

Received:
(a) The membership of Court for 2015-16.
(b) A document detailing the profiles of members of Court.

[Circulated with the Agenda as Documents B and C]

4. LEAGUE TABLES

Received a presentation from Professor Tony Stevenson, Deputy-Vice-Chancellor on League Tables.
Noted that:

Presentation

1. Rankings within the HE sector are divided into single topic ranking (Research Excellence Framework (REF); National Student Survey (NSS); UG Employability (DHLE); Leiden Citation) and multiple topic rankings (Guardian; Complete University Guide; Times; Times Higher Education (THE) International; QS World University Rankings).

2. Each ranking is derived using a different methodology and can have an impact on recruitment. For example, some international governments will only consider sponsorship of a student if the institution is in the top 200 of the THE World University Rankings.

3. Both the QS World Rankings and the THE World University Rankings have an academic reputational element to their methodology, whereby they survey academics around the world and ask them to list the top 15 institutions in the world in their particular subject area. This obviously focuses on perceptions rather than hard metrics, the latter being the methodology in which this University comes out best. In addition, small changes in voting numbers can impact hugely on an institution’s position in the top 200.

4. The University is responding with a number of initiatives, including web development, the Science Central development, our overseas campuses, ‘raising the bar’ and a higher media profile.

Discussion

5. A strategic focus on more international collaborations and attracting more academics to Newcastle hosted conferences could influence this reputational element.

6. None of the multi-topic rankings take any account of student feedback through the NSS, which in our case is good, or the DHLE where our current standing is 23rd in the UK.

7. The University is not just running a business and needs to build an effective, high quality community of scholars and not be side-tracked by chasing league table positions, which could have a detrimental effect on staff morale.

8. Some evidence shows that home applicants are influenced by the NSS, while international students have more focus on the multi topic international rankings.

9. The REF is an example of how rankings and ratings are not straightforward and are dependent not only on what is evaluated but crucially what is submitted for evaluation. Some universities only submitted a small percentage of staff (e.g. Cardiff only submitted 62% of its staff, while UCL submitted 95% of its staff). How the data are turned into a single number is crucial.

Resolved that:

Professor Stevenson be thanked for an interesting and informative presentation and Court members be thanked for the lively debate that followed.

5. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

Received a report from the Vice-Chancellor.

[Circulated with the Agenda as Document D]
Noted that:

Report

1. Our ‘Raising the Bar’ objective is to improve each subject with Schools working towards the top half of our Russell Group comparators in the REF and some Schools aiming for top 50 in the world status.

2. In the Learning and Teaching area we had a good admissions process and good results in the NSS for student satisfaction. We are joint 1st with Oxford in the Russell Group in this category. However there are no grounds for complacency as the possible introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) by the new HE Minister will have no focus on student satisfaction.

3. Home Office initiatives present challenges for universities with the focus on immigration figures having a possible impact on student recruitment. In addition there is a tension between the PREVENT initiative obliging universities to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”, set against our duty enshrined within the Statutes to protect free speech.

4. The University’s award of the Outstanding Leadership & Management Team in the Times Higher Leadership and Management Awards can be seen as part of the reputation raising element of the discussions on League Tables above.

Discussion

5. The North East universities play a role in the wider civic communities, with the Vice-Chancellors of the local universities serving on the LEP Board alternately. In addition the North East Race Equality Forum was set up by representatives from the 5 regional universities.

6. Despite the difficulties experienced nationally in the NHS, the relationship between the University and the local Foundation Trust is working well. The Trust is in good financial shape and the University's Medical Faculty contributes to its success.

7. The Vice-Chancellor noted the contributions to the success of the University made by Professor Steve Homans, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering and Mrs Veryan Johnston, Executive Director of HR, both of whom were attending their last meeting of Court prior to retirement.

6. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S QUESTIONS

Received from Lord Judd:

“To ask the Vice-Chancellor how far in the university’s outstanding research work free standing, original research is cherished and protected?”

Received from Sir George Russell:

“Further to the Vice-Chancellor’s presentation to Court on The Civic University in May 2014, should lay members of Court, and in particular civic leaders and other key stakeholders in the region, be asked if they have any particular areas they would wish the University to consider in the context of the University’s Civic University ethos?”

Noted that:

1. The University is fully committed to academic freedom and academic excellence and the esoteric nature of some research is still an inherent part of our “excellence with a purpose” agenda.
2. The University has a good working relationship with both Newcastle and Gateshead Council with a two-way flow of ideas and initiatives ongoing. There is also good interaction with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

3. The University is also fortunate to be advised by various constituencies represented by its lay members of Convocation, Court, Council and the Alumni Consultative Group. Lay members are particularly encouraged to submit any ideas they may have for initiatives through the filter of our Societal Challenge Themes.

4. We continue to contribute to local communities in a variety of ways.

7. **PAST COURT PRESENTATIONS: UPDATES FOR MEMBERS**

Reported:

That Sir George Russell has suggested that, following the excellent and informative presentations received at each Court meeting, members might find it useful to receive an update on each topic, perhaps two years’ on.

Received an update on the presentation received by Court at its meeting in October 2013, delivered by Professor Ella Ritchie, on Internationalisation.

[Circulated with the Agenda as Document E]

Noted that:

**Update**

1. We have a strong international strategy based on “excellence with a purpose” and we are working to create strong international links.

2. Our Internationalisation strategic objectives are distilled through a new University Internationalisation Committee and a re-structured international team.

3. In addition to our three major initiatives, our overseas campuses in Singapore and Malaysia and our relationship with Xiamen, we also have effective ongoing collaborations in Europe.

4. We constantly need to develop focused quality partnerships and recent visits to Cornell, Pittsburgh, Monash and Groningen Universities have underpinned this.

5. Our students and staff reflect our Internationalisation credentials with staff from around 80 countries and students from 120. We also work to ensure that students and staff have exchange opportunities.

6. We also provide funding for academics to attend international conferences and to attract academics from around the world to Newcastle.

**Discussion**

7. In an interdependent world it is important to look at all learning and research in an international context. It was also important to try to strengthen relationships with the Third World and proactively identify developing nations for future collaborations. We are currently developing relationships with IIT Delhi, a leading Indian Research University. In addition many of the electives undertaken by our Medical students and funded by our Medical Graduates’ Association are in the developing world.

8. We need to be mindful at all times of academic freedom, particularly in our relationships with countries with a difficult record in this area.
9. Other Russell Group universities have developed branch campuses overseas, with Nottingham having a campus in China. However UCL is beginning to withdraw from its overseas campuses.

10. All staff are being asked to consider potential overseas partners and we use a three tier pyramid scheme to focus our energies.

11. While we are currently underrepresented in the US, recent visits undertaken by the Vice-Chancellor and senior colleagues may lead to further future collaborations.

12. Under the auspices of the WHO and its push to strengthen healthcare systems worldwide, North American universities are doing more than just medical education work; they are also looking to facilitate the building of new hospitals and there may be opportunities for the University in this area.

8. MEMBERSHIP OF COURT STEERING COMMITTEE

Reported that:

The membership of Court Steering Committee for 2015-16 is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Observers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Richard Maudslay (Chairman)</td>
<td>Professor Richard Davies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Michael Darrington</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
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<td>Ms Claire Morgan</td>
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<td>Professor Chris Brink</td>
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<td>Mr Mark I’Anson</td>
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9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No items were raised.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Reported that:

(a) The next meeting of Court will take place at 10.30am on Friday 20 May 2016 (venue to be confirmed).

(b) That Court Steering Committee has agreed that a presentation on plans and progress to date for Science Central should be the main item on the agenda.