UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

ACADEMIC BOARD

13 NOVEMBER 2002

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (Chairman) and 35 members of the Academic Board.

The Vice-Chancellor drew attention to the fact that there were insufficient members at the meeting to constitute a quorum (100 members). The meeting could not conduct formal business as the Academic Board.

I UNIVERSITY STATUTES

1. Noted during a useful discussion the following points:
   
   (a) That the proposed introduction of the title of Pro-Chancellor for the Chairman of Council was essentially a titular change reflecting distribution of responsibilities already in place.
   
   (b) That in view of the revised status of Court and Council, the powers of Council should be further amended to include the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of a joint Council and Senate committee.
   
   (c) The omission in the statutes of any reference to the procedure for removal of certain officers, for example the Chairman of Council and also the members of Council and Court and that this should be addressed.
   
   (d) The potential for confusion in the phrase “teachers or salaried officers of the University” and such equivalent phrases pertaining to the appointment of “lay/independent” members.
   
   (e) That current statute 43(3) suggested that Provosts could only be appointed from existing staff but in practice the Provosts may be appointed from outside the University, although the intention that this post should be filled by a full-time academic was still applicable.
   
   (f) That the powers of the Boards of Faculty needed to be amended to include the appointment of members to Court.

II QUESTIONS

2. The Vice-Chancellor responded to the following questions from members of Academic Board as follows:
A. A primary goal of restructuring in this University is to enable Newcastle University to improve its research performance in relation to competitor institutions. Given lead times for publication in refereed journals, the academic year 2002/03 is a critical one for staff to fulfil research output plans for the next RAE. Could the Vice-Chancellor please update Academic Board on progress with respect to targets, monitoring and feedback mechanisms enabling timely research productivity of staff with respect to the following:

1. Numbers of Schools with a full complement of administrative and support staff in place and with job descriptions and task allocations clarified, and names of any Schools not yet in this position.

   The Vice-Chancellor presented the figures for the faculties of MS and SAgE; the information was also available for HASS.

2. Names of any Schools in which academic staff had not yet got a clear allocation of discipline and school level teaching, administrative and school governance roles in place.

   Faculty and school governance structures had now been agreed and the allocation of discipline and school level teaching was completed.

3. Numbers of Schools with budgets in place against which to provide research related support (e.g. conference travel, replacement teaching etc), and names of any Schools not yet in this position.

   All the School budgets were in place with the exception of one which was due to be finalised very soon.

4. Names of any Schools in which RAE active staff have not been provided with one to one advice and support to fulfil personal research plan output goals since the end of last academic year.

   That all staff had had one-to-one discussions with their Head of School. Members of Academic Board expressed the hope that staff would receive personal help and encouragement in respect of their research plans and not simply be advised of targets to meet.

   The Vice-Chancellor had by this stage visited 22 Schools during which he had obtained a good idea of the situation and progress of each. Generally these had been positive meetings and many were optimistic about the future. It was important to be aware that this was a very early stage of implementation and the new structures would need time to bed down.
There was some concern in respect of the timetable for the preparation for the next RAE. Professor Page was very encouraged by the structures being put in place and believed that the University would be even better prepared than last time.

5. Proportions of RAE active staff who have fallen behind with their personal research plan goals (outputs, applications etc.) over the last 6 months, and the development of plans to deal with shortfalls.

There was no information available in this respect.

B. What was the total number of research grant applications made in the six month period April 1st to September 30th 2002, and in the twelve month period October 2001–September 2002, and how do these compare with the same periods in 2000-2001?

- The Vice-Chancellor presented figures showing the number of grant applications and awards over the past two years.

- There had been a decrease of research grant applications over the period April to September 2002 compared with the same period the previous year but this did not comment on the quality.

- The grant awards for Medical Sciences had increased dramatically over the period October 2001 to September 2002 but there had been a significant drop in awards in SAgE.

- The FP6 expressions of interest were an important set of figures in view of the fact that this was the first time grant applications for FP6 had been formally facilitated.

C. Does the Vice-Chancellor recognise the extent and depth of the morale problems that have been created by the process of restructuring, and what structures of consultation and democratic process are being put in place to provide staff with ready access to the means to make their views known to the people who need to hear those views and at times that staff deem appropriate?

- The Vice-Chancellor expressed the view that this University’s consultation process over restructuring had been one of the most extensive and involved that he was aware of in the HE sector and that evidence of its effectiveness had been demonstrated in the influence it had had on the decision-making process in a number of respects. It had been intended to be a democratic process and as such the final outcome could not possibly reflect every individual view and preference. It was agreed that it was crucial at least to listen.
• Communication was a key element to the success of any large organisation. The new PDR process would be a helpful opportunity for staff to express their views at every level.

• The Vice-Chancellor re-affirmed his open door policy and willingness to meet and discuss with staff any matters relating to the University.