NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD

13 May 2009

Present:  The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair) and 30 members of the Academic Board.

There were insufficient members at the meeting to constitute a quorum (100 members).

NOTES

1. NOTES OF THE 14 MAY 2008 MEETING

Reported that the notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 14 May 2008 had been previously circulated and were available on the web at:
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/governance/internal/academic/meetings/agmin.html

2. NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS 2010

2.1 Honorary Degrees

Reported that the Honorary Degrees Committee invited nominations in writing for next year’s Congregation. Any member of Academic Board may make a nomination and support for nominees for honorary degrees should be sought only from members of Academic Board. Where several members made a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination was made should be clearly stated.

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

Proposals should be sent in envelopes marked ‘Confidential - Honorary Degrees’ to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, 6 Kensington Terrace by Friday, 21 August 2009.

2.2 Honorary Fellowships of the University

Reported that Court invited nominations in writing for the award of next year’s Honorary Fellowships of the University. Any lay member of Court and Council and any member of Academic Board may make a nomination. Where several members made a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination was made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships of the University could be found at:
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/ceremonies/honorary/nom_honfell.php

Proposals should be sent in envelopes marked ‘Confidential - Honorary Fellowships’ to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, 6 Kensington Terrace by Friday, 26 February 2010.
3. REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Received an oral report by the Vice-Chancellor on current business.

1. There had been a number of significant developments during the past year, the most notable of which was the change in economic conditions. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) results had been published in December 2008 and the University’s Executive Board had completed its first year with its new membership.

2. A strategic overview process was underway which involved a review of the entire University and its operations from a strategic perspective. A Strategic Overview document had been prepared which aimed to provide a clear articulation of the following points:

- The University’s history and its past development;
- Its current position;
- Its future aims;
- How it intended to achieve its aims.

This document was available on the following website:

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/internal/planning/annual_reports/strategic_overview/strategic_overview.pdf

3. The Strategic Overview document had been prepared via an iterative process. In order to maintain a competitive edge, it was recognised that the University needed to develop and articulate its distinctiveness and it was proposed that this would be achieved through the response to a number of societal challenge themes. These themes would be developed over the next 3-5 years.

4. Faculty plans had been prepared using the Strategic Overview document as a starting point. Plans for the academic units were underway.

5. The University’s performance in the RAE was considered to be solid. Various league tables were available which allowed the University’s performance to be compared with that of other institutions. From 2012, the RAE would become the REF (Research Excellence Framework) but this was now expected to be less of a significant change than had first been anticipated.

6. The funding the University received from the Research Councils was steadily increasing. This was particularly welcome since, unlike grants from charities, Research Council grants provided 80% of full economic costs (fEC).

7. The University had established the Angel Alliance in collaboration with Durham University and One North East, the regional development agency. This initiative had received an initial award of £2.6 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to fund additional staff working on commercialisation projects. The University had recently learned that the EPSRC had added a further £1 million to the award.
8. The principle of parity of esteem had been pursued, *inter alia* with the introduction of readerships based on excellence in teaching and learning. The first applications for this award were in the process of being considered by external assessors. The Vice-Chancellor had also established an award for excellence in teaching and learning and an award ceremony was planned for June 2009.

9. It was understood that the rate of response to the most recent National Student Survey had increased to 65%. In response to a request from the Education Officer, the University was seeking to enhance student representation within the University and work was already underway within the faculties to address this.

10. The Ncl+ scheme enabled students’ extra-curricular activities to be recognised. The University was also pursuing a national initiative, the Higher Education Achievement Record, to provide students with a formal record of their academic and extra-curricular achievements at the end of their studies.

11. The University would undergo a Quality Assurance Agency Institutional Audit from 30 November to 4 December 2009. The audit was conducted every 5 years and a successful outcome would preserve the University’s degree-awarding status for a further six years.

12. A report of all the University’s current engagement activities was in the process of being prepared. Engagement activities which had taken place during the past year included the University’s 10 step plan to help the regional economy. Some of the initiatives that were included in this plan had been funded from the University’s VAT saving and also from the £488,000 which the University had received from the Economic Challenge Investment Fund.

13. It was necessary to make a distinction between Newcastle, City of Science, the initiative which was intended to develop new ways of applying science and technology to the benefit of society, and Science Central, the land developments on the former Newcastle Brewery site. It had been agreed by the recently established Newcastle Science Co., that the development of the Science Central site would be undertaken by the City Development Corporation (1NG). A phased approach would be adopted and the first building on the site would be a ‘Science Gateway’ building.

14. Despite the difficult financial climate, the University’s financial performance at the end of the current academic year was expected to be good. The high level of Government debt was expected to impact upon public spending and, consequently, the University’s finances from 2010/11 onwards. HEFCE had informed the University of its grant allocation in February 2009, however, following the announcement of the Budget, it had been required by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to make efficiency savings of £180 million by 2010/11. The University therefore, expected HEFCE to make adjustments to the grant allocation that had previously been announced.

15. The University’s capital projects were progressing. Construction of the Business School was expected to commence in the near future. A Coherent Campus project was underway to improve the spaces in between the buildings on the main campus. Ultimately, the building which formerly housed the Museum of Antiquities would be removed to create a central plaza. This would take place once the refurbishment of the Union Society was complete.
16. Two ‘Think Tank’ events had taken place which focused on gender in academic careers and Internationalisation. A third ‘Think Tank’ on philanthropy was planned for the near future.

17. The University would soon welcome the first intake of students onto the NUMed course. These students would ultimately complete their studies at the University’s Medical Sciences campus in Malaysia, part of a development named EduCity in which a number of universities were participating. Further collaboration opportunities were also possible in Singapore, where the University offered a Naval Architecture degree programme in conjunction with Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

18. The University was making good progress in terms of sustainability as a result of the recent introduction of a recycling scheme across campus.

4. **QUESTIONS**

   It was reported that the Vice-Chancellor would be pleased to answer questions at the meeting from members of Academic Board and would be grateful to receive notice of these as far as possible. Members were asked to submit to him in writing details of any questions they wished to raise by noon on Monday, 11 May 2009.

   No questions had been received in advance of the meeting but the Vice-Chancellor invited questions at the end of his presentation.

1. The Vice-Chancellor was asked how the recent improvements in the amount of funding received from Research Council grants had been achieved. It was noted that there had been an all round improvement, with more applications and more awards.

2. The Vice-Chancellor was asked if the University was considering making any redundancies given the current difficult financial conditions. Academic Board was informed that, providing there was a reasonable level of restraint in the pay settlement, the University did not expect to make any redundancies during the next year beyond those that would be expected to occur as part of the ending of particular funding streams, termination of contracts or reviews of activities.

3. In response to a question about the plans for Kensington Terrace once the Central Services had moved to the Student and Administrative Services Building, Academic Board was informed that the intention was to convert it into student residences which would provide flexible accommodation.

4. A question was asked about the number of complaints the University received about students from residents in the city and whether they were on the increase. The Academic Registrar responded by saying that it was difficult to know whether the behaviour of students was getting worse or whether complaints were becoming more vociferous due to other motivations, such as political reasons. It was noted that the behaviour exhibited by a minority of students was unacceptable and needed to be addressed.
5. The current capital developments were causing some difficulties for staff when lecturing and undertaking other teaching activities. The Herschel Building had been affected recently due to the demolition of Joseph Cowen House. The Registrar would discuss this matter with colleagues in the Estate Support Service.

6. The Vice-Chancellor was asked about the University’s position on the tuition fee debate and whether the fee cap should be removed. It was noted that this was not a politically popular item in the current climate, but it was likely that it would be raised again following the next general election. It was the Vice-Chancellor’s opinion that the current fee cap could not be maintained indefinitely.