NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

JOINT MEETING OF SENATE AND COUNCIL

11 April 2016

Present: Mr Mark I’Anson (in the Chair), the Vice-Chancellor, Mr Luke Allison (Welfare & Equality Officer, Students’ Union), Dr Phil Ansell, Dr John Appleby, Mr Neil Braithwaite, Professor Paul Christensen, Mr Wayne Connolly, Professor Nicola Curtin, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Chris Day, Mr Dominic Fearon (President, Students’ Union), Dr Lindsey Ferrie, Professor John Fitzgerald, Dr Jonathan Galloway, Dr Ruth Graham, Mrs Teresa Graham, Mr Jonathan Glass, Professor Nigel Harkness, Ms Abi Kelly, Mr Tolu Kolawole, Mr Stephen Lightley, Dr Sara Maioli, Mr Jeff McIntosh, Mrs Heidi Mottram, Ms Dianne Nelmes, Dr Ole Pedersen, Dr Lindsay Pennington, Mr Simon Pleydell, Mr Matthew Price (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Julie Sanders, Professor Tony Stevenson, Mr Paul Walker, Professor Nick Wright, Ms Vicky Wright and Professor Phillip Wright.

In attendance: Mrs Lesley Braiden (Academic Registrar), Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Miss Ruth Draper (Head of Executive Office), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Mrs Louise Edwards-Holland (Acting Director of Human Resources) and Mrs Lizzie Taylor (Executive Officer (Governance)).

Apologies: Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Mr Mike Davison, Dr Stuart Dawley, Dr Emma Foster, Dr Joan Harvey, Mrs Jacqui Henderson, Professor Tom Joyce, Professor Neill Marshall, Professor Klaus Schoefer, Dr Ruth Valentine and Mr Steve Williams.

1. Welcome and Introduction

   Received introductory remarks from Mr Mark I’Anson, Chair of Council and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Brink, Chair of Senate.

2. Raising the Bar Update

   Received:

   (i) An update and a PowerPoint presentation on progress with the Raising the Bar initiative from Professor Chris Day, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences and Chair of the Raising the Bar Steering Group.

   [Copy of PowerPoint slides filed in the Minute Book]


   [Copy of Guidance Noted filed in the Minute Book]

Noted that:

1. It is important to consider the full spectrum of inputs and the resources that are required to achieve the University’s strategic objectives, including the research expectations. Issues such as staff:student ratios will need to be addressed to reduce the burden on academic staff. It was also noted that there will be a similar focus on teaching in the near future (Teaching Excellence Framework). It has been
established however, that there is no direct correlation between staff:student ratios and performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It was suggested that some of these issues could be explored in a Professors’ Workshop.

2. It was suggested that competitor analysis on inputs should be undertaken, however, it was difficult to find full comparative data in order to do this and it would be useful to seek feedback from colleagues on investments being made elsewhere that they are aware of.

3. It was proposed that information presented at meetings of Council and Senate on our academic performance, such as the Faculty Strategic Progress Reports, could be shared more widely, for example, in a Town Hall meeting format.

4. It was suggested that each unit should be asked to identify what might be preventing it from improving its academic performance. Care should be taken with the use of internal quality assessment (IQA) to ensure that it does not demoralise. There is a Senate-approved process for undertaking IQA and it was advisable for this to be undertaken by staff as close to the subject as possible but with safeguards in place to avoid staff being over generous to their colleagues.

5. It was considered that early career researchers need to publish papers more quickly at an early stage to establish themselves in their career. It was suggested that the requirement to focus on 3* and 4* papers could have unintended consequences for early career researchers. More senior researchers were in a position to take their time and take more risks, which might result in 4* papers. All researchers should be encouraged to aim for quality rather than quantity and those at an early stage in their career should be given the opportunity to have a mentor or another source of advice to support them. A team approach could be adopted to provide early career researchers with the opportunity to collaborate on a ‘star’ professor’s paper. Researchers should aim to achieve the highest quality research as early as possible in their career.

6. Other universities had put in place programmes for those returning to academia following a career break and it was suggested that this was an area where the University could be more pro-active.

7. Strong academic leadership is key and should cascade down via mentoring and other support mechanisms. Leadership structures and the quality of leadership across the University should be reviewed. It was noted that it could be difficult to persuade good leaders and researchers to take on Headship roles.

8. The communications strategy for the dissemination of the Guidance Note would be discussed at the next meeting of the Raising the Bar Steering Group.

9. It was suggested that language used in the Guidance Note should be reviewed to ensure that it articulates the mutual benefits that could be achieved. At present the benefits for the University appear to be more prominent that those that could be achieved by the individual academic.
Resolved that the ‘Research Expectations, REF preparation and Performance and Development Reviews - Guidance Note’ be approved for circulation to staff.

3. Business Engagement Consultation

Received a PowerPoint presentation on the emerging approach to Business Engagement which was presented to Council and Senate as part of the consultation process by Professor Richard Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Internationalisation.

[Copy of PowerPoint slides filed in the Minute Book]

Noted that:

1. Consideration should be given to how the University could engage with business on an emotional level to develop deeper relationships. Offering Visiting Professorships to individuals in the business community was suggested as one method of achieving this. A stocktake of current Visiting Professorships could be undertaken. Professors of Practice was another area that could be developed further. It was important to make effective use of Visiting Professors/Professors of Practice to prevent them from becoming disillusioned.

2. The University should be clear about what hoped to achieve by working with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). More sophisticated SMEs would normally be members of umbrella organisations and approaches should be considered via this route.

3. The University should develop a clear idea of the business areas that it wants to develop and then assess its company contacts to identify any synergies that could be developed. Companies are more likely to respond where there is a clear link and where a degree of effort to interact with them has been made.

4. It was proposed that networking dinners could be arranged to discuss global challenges. Business leaders would probably be interested in attending such events if the guest list included other key individuals from the business world. The subject matter should ideally be an area of research on which the University is an authority, such as Smart Cities.

5. Proposals presented to businesses should support the University’s corporate objectives but should also be mutually beneficial. Consultancy could be an enabler of business engagement. There is a team of business account facilitators in the University who could assist with the management of relationships with businesses by maintaining an overview of all existing activity.

6. Engagement with business provides opportunities to enhance impact case studies that could be submitted into the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
7. Some staff may be unwilling to participate in business engagement activity as a degree of mistrust exists following the implementation of the Raising the Bar initiative. However, taking into account the available data, it was necessary to take this action to improve the University’s performance in the sector in order to meet our strategic objectives. Interactions with staff will continue in order to encourage engagement with the process.

4. **Briefing on the Results of the Cubane Benchmarking Project**

Received a PowerPoint presentation on the results of the Cubane Benchmarking Project from Dr John Hogan.

[Copy of PowerPoint slides filed in the Minute Book]

Noted that:

1. The University’s results seemed very positive overall but also provided with a wide range of issues to be considered to help improve service delivery. Investing in IT systems will be key to reducing costs in some areas. Previous investment in the SAP system may have resulted in lower costs at Newcastle when compared to the other members of the benchmarking group.

2. The data does not provide an obvious method of assessing where investment should be made to maximise the performance of academic staff since the survey focused on support staff only. It is therefore necessary to make some assumptions about the impact that the results could have on academic staff when implementing any process improvements.

Lizzie Taylor
27 April 2016