NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

11 November 2014

Present:  Professor Tony Stevenson (Acting Vice-Chancellor) (in the Chair), Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Charles Harvey, Professor Nick Wright, (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr John Appleby, Ms Claire Boothman, (President, Students’ Union), Professor Colin Brooks, Dr Heather Brown, Dr Tim Cheek, Professor Zofia Chrzanowska-Lightowlers, Professor Peter Clarke, Professor Steven Clifford, Mr Wayne Connolly, Mr Mike Davison, Dr Stuart Dawley, Professor John Fitzgerald, Professor Tom Joyce, Ms Abi Kelly, Mr Tolu Kolawole, Professor Neill Marshall, Mr David Morris (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Julia Newton, Dr Ole Pedersen, Dr Lindsay Pennington, Professor Paul Seedhouse, Dr Ruth Valentine and Dr Tony Young.

In attendance:  Mrs Lesley Braiden (Academic Registrar), Mr Richard Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Mrs Veryan Johnston (Executive Director of Human Resources), Professor Phil Taylor (Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor SAgE) and Mrs Lizzie Taylor (Executive Officer, Governance).

Apologies:  The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Day, Dr Joanna Elson, Professor Steve Homans, Ms Olivia Jeffery (Welfare and Equality Officer, Students’ Union), Dr Sara Maioli, Mr Steve Williams, Professor Martha Young-Scholten.

Mr Simon Pallett (Dean of Undergraduate Studies, HaSS) attended for Minute 21.
Mr Simon Gerry (Chief Executive, Students’ Union) attended for Minute 25.

MINUTES

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

18. RETIRING MEMBERS

The Chair thanked Professor Charles Harvey for his contribution to the work of Senate and wished him every success in the future.

The Chair thanked Professor Colin Brooks for his contribution to the work of Senate and wished him well for his forthcoming retirement.

19. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 7 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed.

20. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Progress of business

There were no outstanding items on the business tracking form.
21. **VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS**

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report.

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

Noted:

1. **Deaths**

   Received a report on deaths recently announced by the University.

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

2. **Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences**

   Senate were informed that the selection panel for the appointment of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Humanities and Social Sciences had now been determined and consultation within the Faculty was underway.

3. **“The University Paper”**

   A free newspaper had been distributed to residences in Sandyford and Jesmond entitled, ‘The University Paper’ giving the impression that it was an official University publication. The University had received a number of complaints from the public due to the unpleasant nature of the paper’s content. Investigations had established that the publisher was based in London and it produced customised versions of the paper for a number of university cities using content provided by local students.

   The Vice-Chancellor, in conjunction with his counterpart at Northumbria University and the Chief Executive of the City Council, had written to the publisher stating their strong objections to the paper’s contents and its method of distribution. A letter had been sent to the Journal and the Chronicle explaining that this was not an official University publication. The Vice-Chancellor had also written to the residents who had received the paper. It was understood that approximately 1000 copies of the paper had been produced.

   The Vice-Chancellor had subsequently received a response from the publisher who had agreed to publish a full apology on the front page of the next edition.

4. **Pensions and UCU**

   Negotiations regarding the proposed changes to the USS pension scheme would continue until mid-January 2015, however, the UCU had balloted its members who had agreed to take industrial action and would boycott assessments from 6th November.

   Action short of a strike constituted a breach of contract and, as a result, the University would withhold 25% of the daily rate of pay for staff involved in the action. To date, two members of staff had notified their Head of School of their intention to take part in the assessment boycott. 14 students had written to the Vice-Chancellor requesting a partial refund of their tuition fee should they not receive the expected tuition.

   Senate was advised that, should the action continue into the assessment period, it might prove necessary to invoke emergency regulations, prepared during previous periods of industrial action. Senate’s approval of the regulations would be required and an emergency meeting of Senate could be arranged to consider the proposal.
The UCU was concerned that the proposed changes to the USS represented a drastic reduction in benefits for its members. The basis of the revaluation of the scheme was also a contentious issue for the union. The likelihood of all member institutions going bankrupt was low and, as a result, it was the view of the UCU that the assumptions used during the most recent revaluation were overly prudent.

The University’s response to the proposals was determined by Remuneration Committee, which included a majority of lay members in its membership. Remuneration Committee supported the proposals but considered that the revaluation assumptions should be open to robust challenge. It was also considered necessary for the impact of the proposed changes to be communicated clearly to members.

The proposals included the introduction of a £50,000 threshold up to which all members of the USS would continue to receive defined benefits on the existing Career Revalued Benefits (CRB) scale of 1/80 of salary each year, plus a tax-free cash sum of three times the annual pension. Beyond the £50,000 threshold, benefits would be provided in a new Defined Contribution section. It was noted that 75% of Newcastle University staff would fall below the £50k threshold.

The basis of the most recent valuation had been determined by the USS trustees with the approval of the pensions’ regulator. The trustees included employer, independent and member representatives. The assumptions used were not considered to be dissimilar from those applied to previous valuations.

Students would be kept informed of developments through messages sent from the Academic Registrar’s office. If it was known that an academic unit would be particularly affected by industrial action, local messages would be sent. The Academic Registrar would keep the Education Officer, Students’ Union, informed of developments.

It was noted that, were the proposed changes to be progressed, there was a risk that the pensions offered to staff at pre-’92 institutions would be of a lower value than those offered by post-’92 institutions and this could have an impact upon staff recruitment. There was an unavoidable anomaly between the two schemes due to the fact that the scheme offered at post-’92 institutions, the Teachers’ Pension Scheme, was taxpayer funded whereas the USS was funded by contributions from employer institutions and scheme members.

In recent years the USS investments had matched the market and the deficit had been created by above inflation pay rises and increased life expectancy.

Members of Senate were advised to attend the briefing sessions that were to be scheduled for further information about the proposed changes.

22. PROGRESS REPORT ON XIAMEN

[Minute classified as ‘commercial in confidence’. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

23. REPORT FROM HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE

Considered a report from the Honorary Degrees Committee.

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

After a vote on a motion ‘that the list be approved’, which was approved nem.con,
Resolved that the nominations made by the Honorary Degrees Committee for the award of honorary degrees in July 2015 be approved.

[Note: Senators were reminded of the continued confidential classification of the report until further notice.]

24. UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS FOR 2014 ENTRY

[Minute classified as ‘strictly confidential’. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

25. STUDENTS’ UNION IMPACT REPORT

Considered the Students’ Union Impact Report from Ms Claire Boothman, President, Students’ Union and Mr Simon Gerry, Chief Executive, Students’ Union.

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

Noted that:

1. The Students’ Union had continued to increase its activities and levels of student participation.

2. In the most recent National Student Survey, the Students’ Union had been placed 8th out of 136 institutions, which was considered a significant achievement and meant that the Union had achieved the target it had set itself a year early.

3. The Union had achieved a 97% satisfaction score in the International Student Barometer which placed it in 5th position nationally and 24th position globally. It was important to continue to improve in order to maintain this strong position.

4. The number of societies and sports clubs had continued to increase during 2013-14 along with increased levels of participation.

5. The student newspaper, ‘The Courier’ had achieved the award of student newspaper of the year for the second year running.

6. Many of the Union’s activities were designed to enhance employability and 91% of students polled believed that they had acquired skills which made them more employable.

7. In terms of volunteering activities, students had contributed 44,680 hours during the past year which accounted for a total social return of £670,200.

8. The Union received a gold award from the NUS Green Impact Team which reflected the efforts made to encourage positive, student-led environmental action.

9. The implementation of a strategic project to replace the IT systems within the Union meant that it was now better placed to engage with students. In future there were plans in place to increase engagement with students based at the University’s satellite campuses in Singapore, Malaysia and, eventually, in London, once the University’s presence was established.

10. The Students’ Union was in the process of preparing its next three year plan and members of Senate were invited to submit suggestions of issues to include via the NUSU website.

Resolved that:
(i) The Sabbatical Officers and the staff at the Students’ Union be congratulated on an informative and comprehensive report;

(ii) The Director of Corporate Affairs would work with the President of the Students’ Union and her counterpart at Northumbria University to promote the community work undertaken by the two Students’ Unions in the local press.

26. GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2015

Considered a report from Dr John Hogan, Registrar, on behalf of Executive Board.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copies filed in the Minute Book]

1. A Governance Review would be undertaken during the 2015 calendar year, as required by the Committee of University Chairs. It was proposed that this should be a joint review of Council and Senate.

2. The review would be chaired by Mrs Jacqui Henderson, Vice-Chair of Council and, in addition to lay and academic members, there would also be external participation. Any member of Senate who was interested in participating in the review was invited to contact the Registrar.

Resolved that the Governance Review of 2015 be a joint review of Senate and Council.

27. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of ULTSEC held on 16 October 2014.

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

Noted that a report on ‘Admissions Complaints, Academic Appeals, Student Complaints, Fitness to Practise Cases, PEC Cases and Student Casework’ had been omitted from the ULTSEC report in error and would be circulated to members of Senate by email for information following the meeting. A copy of the report would be filed in the Minute Book.

28. ACADEMIC DISTINCTIONS – TITLE OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS (STATUTE 29(4))

Reported that, in accordance with Statute 29(4), Senate may accord the title of Professor Emeritus on professors retiring from the University.

Considered a proposal from Professor Tony Stevenson, Acting Vice-Chancellor following consultation with the relevant faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors, for the conferment of the title of Professor Emeritus.

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

Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on Professor David Harvey with immediate effect.
29. 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 K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]