NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

19 January 2016

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair), Professor Tony Stevenson (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Chris Day, Professor Julie Sanders, Professor Nick Wright, Professor Phillip Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Mr Luke Allison (Welfare & Equality Officer, Students’ Union), Dr Phil Ansell, Dr John Appleby, Professor Paul Christensen, Mr Wayne Connolly, Professor Nicola Curtin, Dr Stuart Dawley, Mr Dominic Fearon, (President, Students’ Union), Dr Lindsey Ferrie, Professor John Fitzgerald, Dr Ruth Graham, Professor Nigel Harkness, Dr Joan Harvey, Professor Tom Joyce, Ms Abi Kelly, Dr Lindsay Pennington, Mr Matthew Price (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Klaus Schoefer, and Mr Steve Williams.

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

Apologies: Mr Mike Davison, Dr Emma Foster, Dr Sara Maioli, Professor Neill Marshall and Dr Ruth Valentine.

Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, was not present for Minute 45.

The Vice-Chancellor was not present for Minute 46. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor was in the Chair for Minute 46.

M I N U T E S

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

35. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 17 November 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed.

36. MEMBERSHIP

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed Professor Phillip Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor SAgE, to his first meeting of Senate.

37. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(i) Progress of business

There were no outstanding items on the business tracking form.

38. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document B. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
Senate, 19 January 2016

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. **Update on Science Central**

   The City Council had advised the University of its plan to bid for a Smart Data Institute to be located on the Science Central site. Funding was to be made available for this by the Government as part of the devolution arrangements. The University would be required to provide match funding.

3. **Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015**

   Open debate was considered to be the best preventative measure that could be taken to guard against students being drawn into terrorism but the University also needed to ensure it met the legal obligations set out in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This would require a careful balance. The guidance provided to universities stated that the risks should be ‘fully mitigated’ in relation to external speakers but this was considered difficult to achieve and it was unclear how this would be interpreted in a legal context.

   A prayer room policy is under preparation to clarify the intended users (i.e. Newcastle University students, staff and families only) and the purposes for which it should be used.

   It was confirmed that ‘closed meetings’ would not normally be permitted at the University.

   It was suggested that advice and guidance on the University’s responsibilities in this area should be provided to students as part of the induction process. Consideration would be given to the most appropriate methods of increasing awareness amongst students.

   It was noted that the work of Dr Simon Meacher, Senior Development Officer, and his colleagues in the Learning & Teaching Development Service should be commended for providing reassurance to staff around this sensitive area.

   It was noted that in a recent meeting, UCU had confirmed that it was satisfied with the University’s approach in this area.

4. **Higher Education Green Paper**

   The University’s response to the Higher Education Green Paper had now been submitted and would be available for members of Senate to view on the Senate members’ secure website.

5. **Marjorie Robinson Library Rooms**

   The Marjorie Robinson Library Rooms opened to students on 11 January 2016 and by lunchtime on the first day of opening the space was filled to capacity demonstrating that it was meeting a clear need. Students had been consulted on the design of the space and internal expertise had been used which had resulted in significant savings for the University.
6. *The Times* article on Free Speech at Universities

On 18 January 2016 *The Times* had published a front page article claiming that a significant proportion of universities were ‘curbing free speech’. The article was based on the Free Speech University Rankings 2016 organised by online magazine Spiked, which rated Newcastle as red for censorship, largely based on the fact that the University and the Students’ Union had a zero tolerance policy to sexual harassment, that initiation ceremonies were banned on campus and that there was a promotional guidance policy in place which banned smoking advertising, commercial pub crawls and the promotion of payday loans to students. The University and the Students’ Union had prepared robust responses to the claims.

It was suggested that the debate raised an important point in that a common sense approach should be adopted when preparing University policies that set out guidance on behaviour.

7. Raising the Bar

Immediately prior to the meeting of Senate a meeting had been held with a number of Professors who had written to the Vice-Chancellor in November to express their concerns about the Raising the Bar initiative. During this meeting the motivation behind the setting of the faculty research expectations had been explained and the need for a step change in performance had been set out. This explanation had been accepted by the majority of those present although different views remained around the process to be followed to achieve this desired improvement in performance.

The Vice-Chancellor had proposed establishing a number of workshops during the calendar year to consider and address aspects of the University environment that created barriers for staff and prevented them from achieving at their highest level. Members of Senate and the wider academic community were invited to identify potential topics for these workshops.

Resources had been made available to assist staff but it was clear from the discussion that these resources were proving difficult to access. The Vice-Chancellor had asked for action to be taken to identify and remove any blockages in current systems and processes which prevented available funds from reaching the staff who required it.

In time the current initiative would develop into the preparation for the next Research Excellence Framework which was likely to take place in 2020. Progress toward the REF would become regular business and would be monitored via processes such as staff PDRs.

It was suggested that the current focus on research would be to the detriment of teaching. It was explained that the Vice-Chancellor continued to emphasise the parity of esteem and the current focus on research followed previous in-depth consideration of teaching and engagement, the University’s two other core functions, which had taken place over previous years.

It was suggested that a balanced consideration of all the elements that were included in league tables should be undertaken, including staff:student ratios. It was noted that league tables could be heavily influenced by reputation surveys, the responses to which were usually based on the perception of an institution’s research performance rather than its teaching activity. The Reputation and Rankings Special Interest Group reviewed the University’s performance in a number of league tables on a regular basis and sought to identify steps that could be taken to improve its performance. It was suggested that this area could be considered in more detail in a workshop.
It was suggested that the introduction of the research performance expectations could have the effect of reducing the enthusiasm of staff to the extent that they became less willing to participate in international collaborations which, in turn, could impact upon performance in future reputation surveys. It was proposed that to avoid this, consideration should be given to withdrawing the research performance expectations documents. In response it was acknowledged that whilst there had been problems in the way in which the research performance expectations had been communicated to staff, the need to improve performance in future rounds of the REF remained and, therefore, the research performance expectations that had been set could not be withdrawn. It was confirmed that it was not the intention to create anxiety but all staff should be concerned and wish to work to improve the University’s position.

It was suggested that rather than focusing on individual performance consideration could be given to setting targets for each unit of assessment to allow a team approach to be adopted.

39. STUDENT RECRUITMENT STRATEGIC PROGRESS REPORT

Received the Student Recruitment Strategic Progress Report from Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. Whilst the overall KPI for Student Recruitment remained at Amber Green there had been developments in this area which had resulted in changes to the ratings of a number of the component KPIs.

2. The rating for the KPI relating to the admission of high-quality students from the UK and overseas had improved from Amber Green to Green as a result of an increased proportion of student entering with grades of ABB+ or equivalent (from 72.7% in 2014 to 75.9% in 2015). It was noted that there remained work to do in relation to the quality of postgraduate students entering the University and strategies were in place to address this.

3. The rating of the KPI to achieve postgraduate targets had been downgraded from Amber Green to Amber as a result of a significant decline in the number of international Postgraduate Taught (PGT) new entrants which had resulted in an 18.2% shortfall against target and a drop of 12.9% on 2014 entry. The £5m decline in fee income that this had created had been partially offset by undergraduate targets being exceeded. Action was to be taken to improve application turnaround times and conversion rates, including the possible introduction of an application fee in some subject areas. The biggest decline had been witnessed in engineering subjects. The SAgE Faculty had appointed a Postgraduate Dean who would be reviewing this area. A review of all PGT provision was also to take place. Anecdotal evidence of PGT recruitment for the sector created a mixed picture with some universities reporting an increase and others a decline.

4. The KPI for Widening Participation (WP) had improved from Amber to Amber Green as a result of the University making progress towards its WP targets.

40. LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE STRATEGIC PROGRESS REPORT

Received the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategic Progress Report from Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, on behalf of Executive Board.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
1. The overall rating of the KPI for the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy had been reduced from Green to Amber/Green. This was in recognition of the changes that were taking place in the external environment as part of the Green Paper consultation. The introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was likely to result in different metrics being used to assess the quality of an institution’s teaching offer and the University would be required to make changes to address this once further detail was available.

2. The TEF was expected to include postgraduate teaching in its assessment of teaching quality. The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) provided two external indicators of the University’s performance as determined by student satisfaction scores. In both, the University outperformed the sector and the Russell Group in terms of overall satisfaction scores but failed to reach the internal benchmark of 90%.

3. The University’s performance for employability as measured by The Sunday Times Good University Guide had declined from 12th position in 2013 to 24th in 2015. Whilst employment rates following graduation had improved, this has been insufficient to maintain the University’s position. Work was underway to address this. The timing of the data collection for the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey had been identified as a potential factor that had contributed to the decline in the University’s performance and this was to be reconsidered.

4. The University remained in the list of top 20 University’s targeted by top employers and it was considered that its position as a Russell Group university was an important factor here. Steps were to be taken to ensure all students had the opportunity to undertaken a placement during their studies as this was a key consideration for many recruiters.

5. The increase in the proportion of students achieving 1st/2:1 degree classifications in recent years and the possibility of grade inflation was a current issue for the sector and the subject of media reports. A previous review by external examiners had given little cause for concern at Newcastle but the issue of grade inflation had been identified as an area to be addressed in the Higher Education Green Paper. It was important to acknowledge this as a potential issue and to have a strategy to prevent this from occurring. This was, however, something which required action on a sector-wide basis. Internally it was suggested that the University should review degree classifications awarded on a subject basis and compare these against data from the sector at subject level.

6. Whilst the University continued to perform well in the National Student Survey (NSS) in terms of overall satisfaction the anticipated changes in the external environment were likely to result in an increased focus on teaching quality, an area where the University's performance in the NSS was not as strong.

41. HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW – SELF-EVALUATION DOCUMENT

Received a report on the Higher Education Review Self-Evaluation Document from Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:
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1. The University was required to submit its Self-Evaluation Document (SED) and supporting documents to the QAA by 27 January 2016. In addition to the SED it was anticipated that approximately 800 additional documents would be submitted.

2. The review panel was expected to consider any partnership agreements in detail. It was acknowledged that the University’s partnership with Singapore was in transition but the review panel would only be concerned with the provision currently delivered and therefore the proposed changes to the delivery in Singapore were unlikely to have an impact on the outcome of the review.

Resolved that:

(i) The members of Senate who had assisted with the completion of the Self-Evaluation Document be thanked for their contribution.

(ii) The Self-Evaluation Document be approved for submission to the QAA.

42. REPORT FROM HONORARY DEGREES COMMITTEE

Considered a report from the Honorary Degrees Committee.
[ Circulated with the agenda as Document F. 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 December 2016 be approved.

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

43. REPORTS FROM UNIVERSITY LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

Received the reports from the meetings of ULTSEC held on 15 October and 4 November 2015.
[ Circulated with the agenda as Documents G & H. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The November meeting of ULTSEC had taken place with participation from the University’s branch campuses in Malaysia, Singapore and London. The agenda had focused on areas of interest to this wider group.

2. The report from the meeting on 15 October 2015 noted that the University’s ranking for its staff:student ratios in the Times and Sunday Times University League Table for 2016 had declined significantly and the reason for this was requested. It was noted in response that recruitment of teaching staff had not kept pace with the significant increase in student numbers witnessed in some subject areas in recent years. Action was being taken to address this.

44. 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 the 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 J. Copy filed in the Minute Book]

**Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on:**

*Professor Nick Cowern with effect from 1 January 2016*
*Professor Steve Homans with effect from 1 January 2016*
*Professor John Robinson with effect from 1 November 2015*

45. **RE-APPOINTMENT OF A PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR**

Senate Standing Order X states that ‘The Vice-Chancellor may recommend to Senate and Council the re-appointment of an existing Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the period of the appointment’.

Considered recommendations in a paper from the Vice-Chancellor.

[Circulated with the Agenda as Document K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

**Resolved that the recommendations in Document K be approved.**

46. **VICE-CHANCELLORSHIP**

Considered a report from Dr John Hogan, Registrar.

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

Noted that:

1. Executive search firm Perrett Laver had been appointed to support the process leading to the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor. Perrett Laver had highlighted the benefits of a smaller joint appointment committee and it was therefore proposed that the committee should comprised of seven members constituted as follows:

   The Chair of Council (Chair)
   Three members appointed by Senate
   Three members appointed by Council

2. It was considered that four of the seven members of the committee should be academic members. The remaining three members would be lay members. The four academic members should represent the broad interests of the University and should include a current or former Head of Academic Unit, one of the Societal Challenge Theme leaders and one or more high-performing research stars. In addition, it was considered that at least three of the seven members should be female.

3. An extensive consultation process would commence in early February to identify the key issues for the next Vice-Chancellor and the sorts of characteristics that would be of the highest importance. The process would involve meetings with various groups from across the University community, including members of Senate. An internal website would also be set up to which written responses could be submitted.

4. It was intended that the appointment would be made at a joint meeting of Senate and Council to be held at 2pm on 11 July 2016.

5. Proposed possible additional characteristics amongst the appointment committee membership included a high performing all-rounder, i.e. someone who could speak in
support of teaching, research and engagement, an individual with experience of working in another higher education institution in the UK, and an individual who could represent the views of ethnic minority groups and/or demonstrate a commitment to diversity. It was suggested that all participants in the appointment committee should be able to demonstrate sound interviewing technique.

Resolved that:

(i) The establishment of the joint committee of Council and Senate to make a recommendation as to the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor be approved;

(ii) The following constitution of the joint committee, be approved:

- The Chair of Council (Chair)
- Three members appointed by Senate
- Three members appointed by Council

(iii) Senate be invited to suggest the names of individuals to be considered for membership of the joint appointment committee to the Registrar by 12 noon on Thursday 21 January 2016.

(iv) Senate delegate authority to the Vice-Chancellor to discuss the nomination of Senate members with the Chair of Council (the Vice-Chancellor will play no further part in the selection committee).

(v) The list of members of the joint appointment committee be circulated to members of Senate for information.

47. ANNUAL REVIEW & ACCOUNTS

Received the Annual Review and Accounts of the University.
[Document tabled at the meeting. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

48. INTO ANNUAL REPORT

Received the INTO Annual Report from Professor Tony Stevenson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of Executive Board
[Circulated with the agenda as Document M. Copy filed in the Minute Book]

49. ANNUAL REPORT FROM PUBLIC LECTURES COMMITTEE 2014-15

Received the Annual Report from Public Lectures Committee for 2014-15.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document N. Copy filed in the Minute Book]

50. STUDENT DEATH PROCEDURE

Received the updated Student Death Procedure which was approved by University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee at its meeting on 23 September 2015.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document O. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that the updated Student Death Procedure be approved.
51. **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 P. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]