NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

5 OCTOBER 2010

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair), Professor C P Day, Professor C Harvey, Professor E Ritchie, Professor A C Stevenson and Professor N G Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Professor A Adamson, Dr S Ali, Dr P E Andras, Dr J C Appleby, Professor A V Boddy, Professor V G Bruce, Professor J E Calvert, Professor I M Clarke, Mr W Connolly, Professor E G N Cross, Mr T Delamere (President, Union Society), Ms S Fears (Welfare and Equality Officer), Ms J Henderson, Professor J R Hentschke, Professor B H Hirst, Dr D J Kennedy, Professor J A Kirby, Professor F Myles, Mr J O’Sullivan (student member), Professor D Parker, Professor N J Reynolds, Professor D J Roddy, Professor C P Rodgers, Professor A Tanaka and Dr K Wolff.

In attendance: Dr J V Hogan (Registrar), Mr R C Dale (Executive Director of Finance), Mrs V S Johnston (Executive Director of Human Resources), Mrs J Strachan (Academic Registrar) and Mrs E M Niven (Administrative Officer).

Professor G J Docherty (Dean of Research, Faculty of HASS), attended for item 6 and Mr M I’Anson (Chairman of the Working Group on Governance) attended for item 8.

MINUTES

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

2. WELCOME

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed Professor A Adamson, Professor F Myles, Mr T Delamere, Ms S Fears, Mr J O’Sullivan and Mrs J Strachan to their first meeting of Senate.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 15 June 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed.

4. MATTER ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Progress of business

Received a business tracking form.

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

5. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
(i) Browne Review and Comprehensive Spending Review

1. The Browne Review of Student Finance and University Funding was due to report on 12 October. The Comprehensive Spending Review would be presented to Parliament on 20 October. The Browne Review was expected to recommend an increase in the cap on tuition fees, or perhaps abolishing the cap altogether, together with recommendations on the management of student support arrangements. The Comprehensive Spending Review was expected to reduce the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) budget considerably.

2. Executive Board would consider the implications of the two reviews and further consideration would be given to them by Council at its away day in December.

(ii) One North East and Science City

1. The Government had announced its decision to abolish the regional development agencies, including One North East (ONE). ONE would cease to exist by March 2012.

2. A Regional Growth Fund would be established but would not have access to the same level of funding that was previously distributed to the regional development agencies. A competitive bidding process would be in operation.

3. ONE was one of the three partners in Science City and it held a one third share of the Science Central site. Following ONE’s abolition, the University and the City Council hoped to maintain a two-way partnership and to purchase ONE’s share of the Science Central site. This, however, would require approval from the Government.

(iii) Local Enterprise Partnerships

The Government had announced its intention to establish Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Five LEP bids had been submitted from the region together with a bid for a North East Economic Partnership. It was understood that the Government’s preference might be for a smaller number of LEPs in the region and, as a result, it was thought unlikely that the five bids would be successful.

6. SOCIETAL CHALLENGE THEME : SOCIAL RENEWAL

Considered a report from Professor Nick Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation on behalf of Executive Board.

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

After noting that:

1. A cross-Faculty Steering Group would be established to develop plans for further scoping and developing the theme.

2. It was suggested that the title ‘Social Renewal’ might not have the same resonance outside the academic community as the titles used for the other two Societal Challenge Themes. The title ‘Social Renewal’ was, however, considered to fit comfortably with the idea of a civic university.
3. It was suggested that while the term 'Social Inclusion' may have a clear meaning for those outside the academic community, the title 'Social Renewal' had a broader application.

4. It was proposed that Document D should be revised to make reference to activities involving children. The University’s role in raising aspirations was cited as an example. Many of the University’s cultural activities, including those offered by the Great North Museum, were designed with children in mind and it was suggested that the document should make this clear.

5. The new theme offered a good opportunity for the Student Community Action Newcastle group to play an important role. It was suggested that student representatives and/or Students’ Union officers should be included in the membership of the Steering Group.

6. The North East region had one of the lowest take-up rates for modern languages in the country. The School of Modern Languages could therefore play an important role in relation to this theme.

Resolved that:

(i) Senate support the adoption of Social Renewal as the third Societal Challenge Theme under the leadership of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

(ii) The outline plan for the Social Renewal theme, attached as Annex I to Document D, be endorsed.

(iii) The Steering Group be asked to consider comments from members of Senate on the chosen title.

7. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY : 2010 RESULTS

Considered a paper from Professor Ella Ritchie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning on behalf of Executive Board.

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

After noting that:

1. The University’s overall satisfaction score of 87% sustained the score achieved in the previous year’s survey. The University was ranked joint 6th in the Russell Group and joint 4th in relation to Executive Board’s comparator group of 14 institutions.

2. The response rate of 69% was an improvement on the previous year and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning expressed her thanks to the Students’ Union Officers and the ‘NSS champions’ across the University for their help in achieving this.

3. Sixteen subject areas had achieved satisfaction ratings of 90% or more. Eleven subject areas were ranked amongst the top five in the sector.

4. In all sections of the survey, except Assessment and Feedback, the University had achieved scores which were higher than the sector average. The scores for the Assessment and Feedback section were beginning to show slow improvement.

5. The performance in relation to the Access to IT question had declined. It was suggested that this was due in part to increasing expectations amongst students. The free text comments had highlighted a number of issues, particularly the fact that clusters were often unavailable as they had been booked for teaching. It was hoped that the
refurbishment work to the Students’ Union would help to improve the situation as the top floor was to become a 24 hour computing cluster. It was also suggested that the question was open to a number of interpretations which could have contributed to the disappointing result.

6. It would be unrealistic to expect an immediate increase in the scores achieved for the Access to IT question since lead times for making improvements to IT facilities could be lengthy. A programme of improvement had recently taken place.

7. Subject areas that had achieved satisfaction scores of 90% or more had received a letter of congratulations from the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor had also written to the faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors asking them to submit action plans for the subject areas which had achieved satisfaction scores of less than 80%.

8. It was suggested that in order to make further improvement, the University needed to work to improve the consistency of the results across all subject areas. A series of events were planned which would enable staff to learn from the experience of colleagues within and outside of the University. The key to achieving a good overall satisfaction score was to reduce the variability of results between subjects and this could be achieved by ensuring good feedback mechanisms were in place.

9. Where subject areas had achieved low satisfaction scores a review of the free text comments often helped to provide an explanation. Common areas of complaint in such subject areas included poor organisation, teaching and feedback and a sense that the students did not feel valued.

10. The possibility of providing 24 hours access to the library was suggested. For this to be viable, it was necessary to measure demand and peaks in demand against available resources. It was suggested that students would appreciate 24 hour access, particularly during examination periods.

11. Prior to the start of the examination period the Law School, which had achieved the highest satisfaction score of 98%, had introduced a lecture which explained the assessment criteria that would be used. The school had been seen to respond to feedback from students made in other forums such as Staff/Student Committees and it was suggested that this had contributed to the school’s consistent results.

12. Many students appreciated the use of Blackboard by tutors since this helped to facilitate interactive learning. It was suggested that consideration should be given to introducing a minimum usage requirement for Blackboard to encourage its use by all staff.

Resolved that the results were reasonable but patchy. It was essential that the subject areas that performed poorly addressed the concerns raised as a matter of urgency and University Teaching and Learning Committee be requested to present a report on the actions being taken to the next meeting.

8. REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON GOVERNANCE

Reported that Council, at its meeting on 12 July 2010, had endorsed and supported the recommendations in a report from the Working Group on Governance and had resolved that the report be submitted to Senate for comment.

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

Received an extract from the draft Council Minutes on Council’s consideration of this item.

[ Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book. ]
Considered the recommendations in the report.

After noting that:

1. The Working Group had concluded that the current structures that were in place were largely appropriate and effective but a number of areas had been identified where improvements could be made.

2. A recommendation had been made to reduce the size of Senate from 42 to 35 members and to provide a majority of elected members, as proposed by the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU).

3. Council currently held two ‘away days’ during the academic year and it was proposed that Senate might also wish to hold an away day as a means of identifying areas of concern for the academic community. A joint meeting of Council and Senate was also proposed to aid communication between the two bodies.

4. The Working Group recommended that a more formal induction process should be developed for members of Senate, similar to that offered to members of Council.

5. Changes were proposed to the committee structure in an attempt to reduce the number of committees reporting directly to Senate and Council. The committees of Senate had been grouped under the University’s core functions of Engagement, Research and Teaching, Learning and Student Experience.

6. Subject to the approval of the proposed Statute changes, it was proposed to disestablish Redundancy Committee. New procedures would be put in place to ensure redundancies continued to be handled appropriately.

7. The Working Group considered staffing issues to be an executive matter and had recommended that Staff Committee should become a sub-committee of Executive Board.

8. A previous review of governance had recommended the establishment of Estates Committee as a sub-committee of Council and it was noted that the current Working Group's recommendations had reversed this decision. The Working Group had considered carefully the position of Estates Committee but had concluded that it had no clear remit due to the fact that the financial and strategic issues surrounding the estate were the responsibility of other bodies, such as Executive Board and Finance Committee.

9. Staff Committee had also been designated as a sub-committee of Council following the previous review. The report did not mention that a lay member should be included amongst the membership of Staff Committee and this should be considered further.

Resolved that Senate and Council's views on the Report from the Working Group on Governance be considered and assimilated into a final report on actions to be taken to be presented to Senate and Council for information.

9. HIGHER EDUCATION LEAGUE TABLES

Reported that:

(a) Council, at its meeting on 12 July 2010, had received a paper from Professor Tony Stevenson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Planning and Resources on behalf of Executive Board. [Circulated with the agenda as Document H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
(b) Council had suggested that the measures proposed in the paper should be implemented and that Senate and UTLC should be asked to consider the systemic and strategic fixes and to present their feedback to Council.

Received an extract from the draft Council Minutes on Council’s discussion of this item.

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

Considered the above matter and the feedback Senate wished to give to Council.

After noting that:

1. Entry tariff score and degree classification had been identified as the two variables which had the most significant effect on a University’s position in a league table.

2. Three further league tables had been published since the appendix to Document H had been produced. The University had moved up four places in the Sunday Times league table to 20th place, was placed 140th in the QS World University Rankings, and 152nd in the new Times Higher Education league table, produced by Thompson Reuters.

3. It was suggested that it might be useful to conduct an analysis of the entry tariffs and the degree classifications awarded to determine whether there was any correlation between the two. Certain subject areas had lower entry tariffs nationally, such as agriculture, and it was important to take this into account to ensure tariffs were set at an appropriate level. A discussion at UTLC had identified that raising entry tariffs could have unintended consequences for the subject mix.

4. Each faculty had adopted its own system for awarding degree classifications and it could aid the University’s position in the league tables if it adopted a standard degree classification template.

Resolved that University Teaching and Learning Committee be requested to consider the points raised on entry tariffs and degree classifications and report to a future meeting of Senate.

10. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

Considered a report from UTLC.

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

(i) Streamlining the University’s response to special circumstances presented by students (Minute 90, 15.6.2010)

After noting that:

1. At its last meeting some members of Senate had expressed concern over the potential lack of impartiality and consistency of the proposed new procedures for handling special circumstances presented by students. These concerns had been discussed by UTLC and had also been raised with academic units.

2. In the interest of impartiality, Senate had suggested that the local Programme Extenuating Circumstances Committees (PECCs) should include a member from outside the school or institute. This suggestion had been adopted by UTLC and the membership of the PECCs had been amended to require them to include a member from another academic unit.
3. Additional training was to be provided and University Concession Committee (UCC) would continue to operate during 2010-11 to provide a source of advice and to hear appeals. It was proposed to disestablish UCC during 2011-12 and to replace it with a new appeals body.

4. It was agreed that a list of example cases together with the appropriate concessions for each case would be prepared and circulated to PECC members as part of their training.

5. Should staff be approached by students unhappy with the decision made, they should be reminded that it was a committee decision and informed of their right to appeal.

Resolved that:

(i) Responsibility for concession matters be delegated to University Teaching and Learning Committee from the 2011-12 academic year.

(ii) University Concessions Committee be dissolved from the 2011-12 academic year.

(ii) Framework for Personal Tutoring

After noting that:

1. The University was required to take action in relation to personal tutoring in order to improve the student experience and also to follow up on a recommendation made during the QAA institutional audit.

2. Guidelines on the minimum time commitment expected from staff had been produced and this required approval from Senate.

3. It was proposed to raise the profile of the Framework for Personal Tutoring amongst academic units throughout the 2010-11 academic year and to implement it fully during the 2011-12 academic year.

Resolved that the Personal Tutor Framework, attached as Appendix II to Document K, be approved for full implementation in 2011-12 with a ‘soft roll-out’ in 2010-11.

11. EMPLOYMENT PROCEDURES

Reported that, as a result of proposed revisions to the University Statutes and, in particular, the proposed removal of employment procedures from Statute 57, existing procedures had been revised following discussions with UCU and other campus unions.

Considered a report from Mrs Veryan Johnston, Executive Director of Human Resources on behalf of Executive Board and revised employment procedures.

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents K.1 - O. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

After noting that:

1. The new procedures, which complied with ACAS guidance, were intended to be easier for all parties to implement.
2. The UCU had indicated that it was content with the new procedures, subject to some minor textual amendments. A member of Senate who was also a member of the UCU committee involved in the consultation process confirmed that the meetings held with University officers had been constructive.

3. The new procedures represented an important change to the contract of employment and as a result, the UCU were obliged to ballot its members on the proposed changes.

4. Management guidance was to be prepared to assist staff with the application of the new procedures which would be implemented once the Privy Council had approved the amendments to the Statutes.

Resolved that Senate endorse the revised procedures circulated with the agenda as Documents L-O for submission to Council on 13 December, and delegate authority to the Executive Director of Human Resources to finalise the detailed wording after any further discussions with the campus unions.

12. ANNUAL REPORT FROM ACADEMIC AUDIT COMMITTEE

Considered the Annual Report from Academic Audit Committee for 2009-10.

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

After noting that:

1. The Academic Audit Committee had been established to act as an independent monitor of all aspects of University activities that contribute to the quality of the student learning experience and the standard of the University’s awards.

2. A review of quality management procedures had taken place which had identified an overlap between the work of Audit Committee and Academic Audit Committee.

3. A systematic review of the University’s quality management processes was due to take place and it was proposed that, whilst this was underway, the activity of the Academic Audit Committee should be suspended.

Resolved that the activity of Academic Audit Committee be suspended for a period of two years, from 2010-2012, and reconvened in 2012-13 after completion of a review of the University’s quality processes.

13. CENTRE IN ORAL HEALTH RESEARCH

Considered a report from Professor Nick Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Resolved that:

(i) The Centre for Oral Health Research be established as a University Research Centre for a period of three years from 1 October 2010.

(ii) Professor Angus Walls be appointed as Director for the same period.
14. **ANNUAL REPORT OF UNIVERSITY ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Received the Annual Report from Ethics Committee which had been endorsed by University Research Committee and Executive Board.

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

15. **NEWCASTLE SCIENCE CITY**

Received a progress report from Professor Nick Wright on behalf of Executive Board.

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

16. **EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY : RESULTS**

Reported that Council, at its meeting on 12 July 2010, had received a paper from Mrs Veryan Johnston, Executive Director of Human Resources on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Received an extract from the draft Council Minutes on Council’s discussion of this item.

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

17. **SENATE STANDING ORDERS : AMENDMENT**

Considered proposed amendments to Senate Standing Orders.

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

Resolved that the amendments to Senate Standing Orders be approved.

18. **MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE 2010-11**

Reported that:

(a) The title of the Union Society Student Support Officer had changed to Welfare and Equality Officer.

(b) Mr James O’Sullivan, BA Hons Politics (Stage 3), had been appointed by the Union Society to serve on Senate for 2010-11.

Received the membership of Senate for 2010-11.

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

19. **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 Chairman of Council on behalf of Council, and by other University bodies and Chairmen.

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

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**RESERVED BUSINESS**

20. **ACADEMIC DISTINCTIONS : TITLE OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS (STATUTE 31(4))**

Reported that, in accordance with Statute 31(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 faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, for the conferment of the title of Professor Emeritus.

*Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on Professor Professor G J Bruce from 1 October 2010.*