NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

9 November 2010

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair), Professor C P Day, Professor C Harvey, Professor O R Hinton, Professor E Ritchie, Professor A C Stevenson and Professor N G Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Professor A J Adamson, Dr S Ali, Dr P E Andras, Dr J C Appleby, Professor V G Bruce, Professor S J Bull, Professor J E Calvert, Ms E Collingham (Education Officer), Mr W Connolly, Professor E G N Cross, Mr T Delamere (President, Union Society), Ms S Fears (Welfare and Equality Officer), Professor D Ford, Professor J R Hentschke, Professor B H Hirst, Dr D J Kennedy, Professor J A Kirby, Professor P A Lee, Mr J O’Sullivan (student member), Professor D Parker, Professor N J Reynolds, Professor D J Roddy, Professor C P Rodgers, Professor P Watson 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 Miss E M Niven (Administrative Officer).

MINUTES

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

22. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 5 October 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed.

23. 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.]

24. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor’s report.

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

(i) Deaths

Received a report on deaths recently announced by the University.

Senate members were informed of the death of Emeritus Professor Hugh Berrington on 8 November.

Resolved that Senate record its deep regret and sympathy for the relatives concerned.
(ii) **Vice-Chancellor’s overseas visits**

The Vice-Chancellor had recently visited Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia.

In Singapore the Vice-Chancellor had officiated at the University’s graduation ceremony for students from the Newcastle University Marine International campus. The programmes offered by the School of Marine Sciences were well-received in Singapore and the Vice-Chancellor offered his thanks and congratulations to the school staff on the success of this initiative.

In Indonesia the Vice-Chancellor had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Universitas Indonesia.

The visit to Malaysia had involved a tour of the NUMed campus, the construction of which was progressing well and was expected to result in high quality buildings. It was important for the future success of the NUMed operation for the issue of GMC accreditation of the international provision to be satisfactorily resolved.

The Vice-Chancellor had visited Monash University in Australia. The two universities shared interests in the area of sustainability. It had been agreed that seed funding would be provided in order to develop joint research projects.

(iii) **Joint Meeting of Senate and Council**

As recommended in the recent report from the Working Group on Governance, a joint meeting of Senate and Council had been arranged for the morning of 7 February 2011.

(iv) **The Browne Report**

A task group had been established, chaired by Professor Stevenson, to consider the implications for the University’s fee structure following the Browne and Comprehensive Spending Reviews. It was agreed that the Students’ Union should be invited to participate in this group.

It was noted that the Sabbatical Officers, together with approximately 450 students from Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, would be travelling to London on 10 November to participate in a march against the cuts to higher education.

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25. **THE BROWNE REVIEW AND COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW**

Received a presentation from Professor Tony Stevenson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Planning and Resources and Mr Richard Dale, Executive Director of Finance.

[A copy of the slides used in the presentation is filed in the Minute Book.]

After noting that:

1. The Government was proposing to introduce a lower threshold for tuition fees of £6,000 and an upper cap of £9,000. Institutions would be required to join a National Scholarships scheme if they intended to charge a fee in excess of £6,000 and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) would be granted powers to implement sanctions if certain conditions were not met.
2. The threshold for repayments would rise from £15,000 to £21,000 and a tapered interest rate would apply. All students would be able to apply for loans to cover their living costs and some maintenance grants would be available. Outstanding debts would be written off after 30 years.

3. The Government would continue to provide funding for priority subjects such as medicine, science subjects, nursing and some languages but the funding would be biddable. No public funding would be available for the majority of humanities subjects.

4. The Browne Review made no reference to the funding for postgraduate taught programmes and it was noted that there could be perceptions of unfairness in the fees structure if postgraduate students taking some of the same modules as undergraduate students were charged a different fee.

5. Academic units would be required to take steps to market their courses actively and to provide details of contact hours and the employability of graduates.

6. The fees legislation was expected to be presented to Parliament before Christmas. Further structural changes would be required and, subject to legislation being passed, it was understood that these would be implemented by 2013.

7. It was noted that the consequences for students who failed to complete their degree would be much greater in future due to the high level of fees that would be charged.

8. Competition law prevented institutions from discussing their intended fee structures with other HEIs.

9. Concerns were expressed regarding the implications for the 2011 admissions cycle given that the increased fees would be charged from 2012. This would also result in two groups of students paying different fee levels for the same courses. It was confirmed that students who chose to defer entry from 2011 to 2012 would be charged under the 2012 fee regime.

10. The University would be required to introduce an efficient and effective marketing strategy to improve its visibility in the market place that would emerge. The Registrar was currently considering this issue.

11. Current students had received a letter from the Vice-Chancellor which was intended to provide reassurance. The Sabbatical Officers continued to be contacted by prospective students who were concerned about the implications of the proposed changes. It was agreed that the University would attempt to address these concerns through its external marketing activities.

Resolved that any member who came across any further information or received concerns from current or prospective students were invited to forward these to Professor Stevenson who would bring them to the attention of the Tuition Fees Task Group.

26. REPORT FROM THE 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 2011 be approved.

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

27. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY’S PERFORMANCE

Received a report from Professor Tony Stevenson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Planning and Resources on behalf of Executive Board.

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

After noting that:

1. Much of the data used to prepare Document E was from 2008/09 since this allowed the University to benchmark its performance against that of other, similar institutions. Benchmark data was not yet available for the area of Engagement.

2. It was considered that Document E showed that the University had achieved a steady performance with significant improvements in the areas of International Profile and Financial and Environmental Sustainability. Research Quality and Power was one area where further improvements were required.

3. It was suggested that under the Student Satisfaction and Student Experience section, the percentage of graduates who had found a graduate level job 6 months after graduation should be used rather than the current statistic which covered all graduates in employment regardless of the level of employment.

28. REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of UTLC held on 20 October 2010.

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

National Student Survey 2010 update

Noted that:

1. UTLC had agreed to recommend the introduction of a minimum entrance requirement threshold of BBB or equivalent for all degree programmes for 2012 entry. It would be possible for certain degree programmes to be exempt from this requirement but all such exemptions would require the approval of the relevant Faculty Dean of Undergraduate Studies. It was recommended that a reporting mechanism should be established to enable any approved exemptions to be monitored.

2. A consideration of minimum entrance requirements would form part of a wider discussion on fees and quality that would follow as a result of the Browne and Comprehensive Spending Reviews.

3. At a future meeting Senate would be asked to give some consideration to the proportion of 1st and 2:1 degrees awarded and how this compared with other institutions.

4. UTLC had received a report on the actions being taken to address areas of concern highlighted in the National Student Survey. The report contained a short summary of the actions taken in relation to the issues identified in the Assessment and Feedback section.
Much more was being done than was included in the summary document, including the establishment of a focus group.

Senate noted the remaining items in the report.

29. **ITEM SUBMITTED BY A MEMBER OF SENATE**

**Proposal to set up a Senate ad-hoc committee on the efficiency of administrative procedures related to teaching and research**

Considered a paper submitted by Dr Peter Andras, member of Senate.

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

After noting that:

1. The paper suggested that the administrative burden on academic staff in relation to their teaching and research activities had increased over recent years and had coincided with a perceived transfer of power from academic to administrative staff. It was suggested that many of the administrative procedures that had been introduced were bureaucratic and inefficient. It was proposed that an ad-hoc committee of Senate should be established to consider a selection of University procedures to determine their necessity and efficiency.

2. It was noted that a number of the areas identified for consideration were already subject to review by other groups and committees. For example, the procedures for the approval and change of new and existing modules and degree programmes were currently under review by QuILT. A number of members of Senate had been asked to participate in this review by acting as critical friends. Any additional members who were willing to act as a critical friend were invited to contact the Academic Registrar.

3. A number of the administrative tasks staff were required to fulfil were legislative or externally imposed requirements. It was noted that the QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards that was introduced in 2004 was an externally driven requirement which had led to better processes for ensuring successful and timely completion by PhD students.

4. Senate had recently taken the decision to suspend the activity of Academic Audit Committee for two years.

5. Certain activities were replicated at different levels in the University or in all three faculties and it was proposed that it might be more efficient to undertake such activities at one level only.

6. It was suggested that a summary document which detailed the review processes that were already underway should be prepared and circulated to members of Senate.

7. A review of staff categories identified that the number of administrative staff at the University was low when compared to that of other institutions in the peer group. It was suggested that one consequence of this could be that academics were required to spend more time on administrative tasks.

8. The Value for Money Working Group was reviewing the procedures for the submission of research grant applications and the management of research grants as part of the ‘One University’ initiative. The Value for Money Working group included three members of academic staff amongst its membership and it was suggested that Dr Andras could join as an additional member.
Resolved that:

(i) A report should be prepared detailing the review activities underway within the University which addressed the areas of concern highlighted in Document G.

(ii) Dr Andras should be invited to join the Value for Money Working Group.

30. LIBRARY REGULATIONS

Considered revisions to the Library Regulations submitted by Mr Wayne Connolly, University Librarian.

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

Resolved that the revised Library Regulations be approved with immediate effect.

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