NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD

16 May 2018

Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair) and approximately 160 members of the Academic Board.

NOTES

1. NOTES OF THE 10 MAY 2017 MEETING

The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 10 May 2017 are available at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/academic/minutes.htm

2. NOMINATIONS FOR HONORARY AWARDS 2019

2.1 Honorary Degrees

The Honorary Degrees Committee invites nominations in writing for next year’s Congregations. Any member of Academic Board, Court, Council and the alumni present at meetings of Convocation at which the request for nominations is tabled, may make a nomination and support for nominees for honorary degrees should be sought only from members of these bodies. Where several members make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination is made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Degrees can be found at: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/nom_hongrad/

Proposals should be sent by email marked ‘Confidential – Honorary Degrees’ to Dr John Hogan, Registrar (Email: John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) by Monday 18 June, 2018.

2.2 Honorary Fellowships of the University

Court invites nominations in writing for the award of next year’s Honorary Fellowships of the University. Any lay member of Academic Board, Court, Council, and the alumni present at meetings of Convocation at which the request for nominations is tabled may make a nomination. Where several members make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination is made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships and Nomination Forms can be found at: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/nom_honfell/

Proposals should be sent by email marked ‘Confidential – Honorary Fellowships’ to Dr John Hogan, Registrar (Email: John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) by Thursday, 28 February 2019.

Please make it clear whether the nomination is for an Honorary Degree or an Honorary Fellowship.

When making a nomination for an honorary degree or honorary fellowship, this should be done in the strictest confidence and must not be discussed with the potential recipient. Successful nominations will be publicised following approval by the awarding body (i.e. Senate or Court respectively) in advance of the relevant honorary ceremony.
3. **ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF SENATE AND COUNCIL**

Reported that:

1. Applications or Nominations were invited from any member of academic staff on Grade E and above to stand for election to Senate and Council in this year's elections. There were 9 vacancies on Senate (6 professorial, 3 non-professorial) and 2 vacancies on Council (1 professorial, 1 non-professorial).

2. This year Senate had been considering its composition and had decided to include a member of Professional Services in the co-opted category. There would be an election to determine who would be considered for this position and Senate would then co-opt a member. Applications for the co-opted position on Senate may be made by any member of professional services staff from Grade E and above.

Further details of this year's elections could be found at:  
https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/hub/executive/Pages/governance.aspx

Applications and nominations should be sent to Dr J V Hogan, Registrar, by email (John.Hogan@ncl.ac.uk) marked 'Confidential Senate Membership' or 'Confidential Council Membership', to arrive by not later than noon on Tuesday 29 May 2018.

4. **REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT**

Received an oral report by the Vice-Chancellor and President on current business. The session was recorded and is available from  
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/academic/minutes.htm

Noted that:

1. Universities were facing a changing UK and global context. The term ‘civic university’ had been dropped as the notion of the university contributing to society was fully embedded in the University’s approach. In terms of education, universities were now obliged to produce students who are critical and resilient global citizens, and to respond to students’ expectations around the use of technology. With regard to research, responding to global challenges required working with external partners, academic, business, community and public.

2. The impact of Brexit was to a large extent still unclear, particularly in terms of future access to European Union research funding. The University had a strong track record in securing funding from this source. The University was also following closely potential changes to UK immigration policy, the review of post-18 education, and the implementation by the government of its Industrial Strategy.

3. Higher education institutions within the UK were coming to terms with regulatory reform, in the guise of the Office for Students and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The latter was aimed at supporting more collaborative research that would tackle the major cross-disciplinary questions.

4. There was significant external interest in university activities as a result of political and media pressure. The value of degrees, degree class inflation, freedom of speech, academic freedom, vice-chancellor pay, tuition fees and student debt, and student mental health were examples of issues that were currently the subject of national attention.
5. There were a number of reasons to be proud of the University’s achievements. For example, the University was ranked 175 in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings; held a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework and an institution-wide Athena Swan Silver Award; and had secured £107.6m in research funding in 2016-17. The institution could also take pride in the diversity of its student body, student satisfaction levels, and being in the top 10 of world universities for sustainability.

6. Developments at the Newcastle Helix site (formerly Science Central) were gathering pace. The new Urban Sciences Building had opened in summer 2017, and a new National Centre for Innovation in Ageing and Data and Learning and Teaching Centre (with a 700 seat capacity lecture theatre and conference facilities) were also being constructed.

7. The University had considerable strengths, including world-leading research in the fields of ageing, data, energy, cities, culture and the creative arts. Teaching and learning had been recognised for its excellence with the award of a TEF Gold rating. Newcastle graduates were not only satisfied and highly employable, but when compared with competitor institutions they were increasingly entrepreneurial. Newcastle was currently 4th out of all Russell Group institutions for the level of financial turnover achieved by student start-ups.

8. The new University Vision and Strategy had been developed with staff, students and external stakeholders over the course of the last year. The underpinning strategies around education, research, engagement and place and influencing globally would embed the common values (excellence, creativity, and impact) and guiding principles: working together, visibly leading, freedom and opportunity to succeed, and responding to current and future changes.

9. Further detail of the underpinning strategies and their enabling objectives was emerging. The Education Strategy had been endorsed by Senate, whilst Research, Engagement and Place and Influencing Globally would be finalised by the end of the year. The Vision and Strategy would be formally launched in September, with a series of launch campaign events over the course of the next academic year.

5. **QUESTIONS**

The following questions were taken from members of Academic Board during the meeting.

1. Given the potential combined strength of the two institutions would the University consider a merger with Durham University in the future?

The idea of a re-merger or similar has been raised on a number of occasions but is not currently under consideration. Newcastle and Durham have a strong relationship and are committed to close collaboration. Sharing of some back-office functions is an area of useful potential future collaboration and the University’s preference was to improve its own performance in ranking terms whilst continuing to work closely with Durham in areas of shared interest.

2. Will the values and principles of the Vision and Strategy be embedded into Performance Development and Review, so that staff can contribute, and celebrate their achievements towards a common goal?

The aim was to make the values and principles real for staff. How to do this was being evaluated as part of the current development of a People Strategy, looking at recruitment, induction and review procedures as part of the Engage and Aspire initiative, being led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
3. How are aspects of student mental health being taken into account in the development of the University’s Vision and Strategy?

There was a controversial academic view which suggested that society had medicalised the normal transition of teenagers leaving home and going into higher education, cautioning against the belief that modern-day students are affected by new mental health problems. The University recognised that there was a significant issue with student mental health, however, and had been listening to staff concerns. It had increased the level of resource available to support students who are affected. Alongside this it necessary to support staff who are required to deal with students facing emotional issues, and to try to understand what is behind the current volume of problems.

Members of Academic Board expressed a number of further opinions on this topic:

- that the increase in frequency of student mental health issues is a result of changes in secondary education, where students are no longer taught to be self-directed learners and therefore prepared for higher education – which makes the transition to university study more of a challenge –, and also a result of stress and anxiety at having to deal with tuition fee debt;
- that past generations of students did suffer from mental health problems to a similar extent, but the level of awareness of such conditions was lower, and the current generation is more inclined to talk about mental health;
- that awareness of the problems faced by students could be greater still, and procedures (such as PEC) could go further to make allowances for students in difficulty.

4. Following significant investment in the physical campus, will the University be investing in its IT infrastructure?

A new Chief Information Officer had recently taken up his appointment, and was assessing current and future IT requirements. The University had already committed to a three-year programme of upgrading SAP.

5. How will the University cope without access to European Union research grant funding post-Brexit?

The University’s success rate with EU grant applications was currently higher than that for research council applications, and staff should continue to submit applications for EU funding as normal for the time being. Clarity was being sought on access to EU funding post-2020, however, it was likely that research funding for UK higher education institutions from the EU would ultimately decrease overall as a result of Brexit.