NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

22 January 2020

Present: The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Brian Walker and Professor Phillip Wright (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Miss Lucy Backhurst, Professor Nils Braakmann, Miss Sara Elkhawad (Welfare and Equality Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Dr Carmen Hubbard, Dr Helen Jarvis, Dr Phillip Lord, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Professor Nick Megoran, Ms Claire Morgan, Dr Julie Morris, Dr Andrew Pike, Professor Ted Schrecker, Professor Daniel Siemens, Miss Katie Smyth (President, Students’ Union), Miss Karina Sorrels (Postgraduate Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Konstantinos Stellos, Dr David Stewart, Professor David Thwaites, Professor Stefano Utili, Professor Aad van Moorsel.

In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Executive Director of Academic Affairs), Mr Simon Donoghue (Director of Strategic Planning), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Ms Abi Kelly (Executive Director of Corporate Affairs), Mrs Adrienne McFarland (Executive Director of People Services), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office and Governance Manager).

Apologies: Professor Ashley Adamson, Professor David Burn, Mr Pablo Charro de la Fuente, Professor Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon, Dr Stacy Gillis, Professor Julie Sanders, and Dr Joanne Smith-Finley.

M I N U T E S

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 20 November 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

40. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor and President’s report. Highlights of this report are discussed below.

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

Reported:

1. Dame Margaret Barbour Building

Clugston Construction Ltd, along with its holding company, went into administration on 6 December 2019. At the time, Clugston had been working on three projects for the University: the Dame Margaret Barbour Building, refurbishment of the old sports centre and snagging/finishing work on the new sports centre. Work had been suspended as a consequence, with the impact that the Dame Margaret Barbour building had not been
made available for teaching in Semester 2 as planned. New contractors had since been appointed and work was now progressing with a completion date in June 2020 envisaged.

2. Industrial Action

The University had responded to a survey from the Universities and Colleges Employers’ Association considering options around the non-pay issues of the dispute. The questions and the University’s responses aligned well with the conversations that had taken place locally with UCU colleagues. A framework for consultation on these matters had been agreed and would be discussed at an extraordinary Heads of Unit Forum on 7 February.

Following the publication of the second Joint Expert Panel report (JEP2) in December 2019, the next valuation of the USS would be as at 31 March 2020. UCU, USS and employers would be meeting to consider the report’s recommendations, and it was hoped that this would lead to the deferral of further industrial action. It was unclear, however, whether the JEP2 recommendations relating to the governance of the Universities Superannuation Scheme would be accepted by the Trustee.

3. Office for Students Teaching Grant

The Office for Students had opened a consultation to seek views from the sector on how to implement a cut of £58m to the teaching grant as announced in budget guidance issued by the government. The potential impact on the University was expected to be manageable within the institution’s surplus margin.

4. Times Higher Awards

The University had won the Outstanding Support for Students award at the Times Higher Awards 2019. The award recognised the University’s in-house Psychological Therapies Training and Research Clinic, a service which delivers cognitive behavioural therapy to students who have been assessed by counselling staff, and is delivered by staff involved in Newcastle’s postgraduate courses.

5. New Year’s Honours

Senate recorded its congratulations to the following individuals associated with the University who had been recognised in the New Year’s Honours list:

- Dame Teresa Graham CBE. For services to Small Businesses (Graduate, Honorary Fellow and Member of Council, Newcastle University).
- CBE Professor Jackie Kay, MBE. For services to Literature (Professor of Creative Writing).

6. PVC Research Strategy and Resources

Professor Brian Walker (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources) had been appointed as Chair of the Medical Research Council’s Population and Systems Medicine Board. In light of this appointment, Executive Board had approved the establishment of a part-time Dean of Research Culture and Strategy post to whom some of Professor Walker’s leadership responsibilities would be delegated.

7. Pulse Survey
Executive Board had considered the headline results of the Pulse Survey which had been run to find out how colleagues feel about working at the University. The findings had been issued to faculties and academic units, and a formal report would be submitted to Senate once the feedback had been considered.

8. Student Policies

In light of recent high-profile student cases, Executive Board had agreed that it was timely to undertake a review of student policies. A Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and President would submit recommendations to University Education Committee and Senate in the summer term. Senate was provided with a copy of the group’s terms of reference.

9. Workload Model Planning Policy

Following the meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee on Monday 13 January, additional representation had been received from the Universities Colleges Union regarding the revised Workload Planning Policy produced by the Workload Allocation Task and Finish Group. The group would now need to take adequate time to review and make decisions based on the information received. Due to the volume of the proposed revisions, the revised Workload Planning Policy was unlikely to be implemented during this academic year.

10. Chancellorship

The University had hosted a visit from its new Chancellor, Imtiaz Dharker, on 16 January. Her enthusiasm for the Chancellorship and the work of the University was very obvious. The Chancellor’s formal inauguration was scheduled to take place on Monday 13 July 2020.

11. N8 Pioneers

Four University Early Career Researchers (Dr Piergiorgio Gentile - School of Engineering; Dr Hannah Durkin – School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics; Dr Shoba Amarnath - Translational and Clinical Research Institute; and Dr Michael Mulvihill - School of Geography Politics & Sociology) had been highlighted in the N8 Research Partnership’s ‘New Pioneers’ scheme, which aimed to highlight up and coming academics in the north of England.

12. Student Admissions

There were positive indications of strong recruitment to the University’s degree programmes in 2020. UCAS applications for home undergraduates and also from EU and international-domiciled students to Newcastle had increased, and compared favourably with the national and competitor trends. There had been notable growth in applications for undergraduate programmes in Engineering.

13. Reports from Committees of Senate

University Education Committee (UEC) – Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education

The Committee had held its biannual meeting with representatives from NU London, and the NUMed and NUIS campuses in November. The very positive outcome of the QAA Transnational Education Review of Malaysia was noted.
Wide consultation had taken place on a new Assessment Framework and this was now being piloted in FMS and SAgE. A key feature of the framework was a move to 20-credit modules as the standard currency, with a maximum of three pieces of assessment per module, including one piece of formative assessment. The potential impact of adopting this approach systematically was currently being scoped. Drivers for the 20-credit module approach included feedback about assessment loads, interdisciplinarity (the ability for programmes to incorporate modules from other subject areas) – although it was suggested this could have the effect of diluting course content – and the reduction of associated administrative work. Although exemptions would be possible the University was determined to address the issue of high assessment loads which had been cited by both students and staff.

The Committee was monitoring the implementation of the new institutional Virtual Learning Environment (‘Canvas’). Members of Senate were encouraged to pass information about the project on to colleagues to help with raising awareness about the changes involved.

**University Engagement and Place Committee (UEPC) – Dr Helen Jarvis, on behalf of Professor Julie Sanders, Deputy Vice-Chancellor**

The Committee had received an update on the UKRI Place-based Partnerships bid which had been submitted to UKRI in partnership with Northumbria University. If successful, the bid would be a pilot that would help inform the development of long-term community partnerships, including activities to support access from low participate neighbourhoods.

The Committee had also held discussions on Access and Participation and the University’s focus and communication on the Climate Emergency. Professor Alison Shaw had been appointed as Professor of Practice for Success and Progression to work on inclusivity and fair access initiatives.

**University Global Committee (UGC) – Professor Richard Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global**

The Committee had considered the progress of six projects that were integral to the success of the Global Strategy. Applications from international students for undergraduate programmes were at a higher rate than 2019, and significant growth in international postgraduate taught numbers was also expected. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global also reported on recent successful visits to South East Asia and India.

**University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) – Professor Brian Walker, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources**

The Committee had overseen the appointment of Professor Simon Woods as University Convenor for Research Integrity and Ethics.

The Wellcome Trust had staged a Town Hall meeting at the University on 16 January to present the findings of their survey on research culture, serving as a useful opportunity for the University to highlight its efforts to address staff concerns about both research and workplace culture.

With regard to the Research Excellence Framework preparations, work was ongoing to ensure colleagues were provided with the relevant information required for interpreting the guidelines. It would be particularly important to capture exceptional circumstances that may have impacted the research productivity of individuals.
The next Newcastle University Academic Track recruitment round was now open. The NUAcT team was working with People Services to encourage applications from a more diverse cohort. Senate was reminded of the process for School involvement in agreeing to NUAcT appointments, and the process for ongoing evaluation of the scheme.

41. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 16 DECEMBER 2019

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 16 December 2019.

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

42. SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Received papers from Dr David Stewart and the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering on academic provision in the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences.

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents D and E. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. A reorganisation of the deployment of Teaching Fellows had taken place in the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences (SNES) concerning colleagues who had been employed within the School on fixed-term contracts due to end between August and October 2020 either to fill teaching gaps until strategic appointments had been made; to provide support for a period of transition following the Faculty reorganisation; or to create short-term research capacity for colleagues on Teaching and Research contracts.

2. Recognising that long-term fixed-term contracts did not provide employment stability, the School had sought to create open-ended Teaching Fellow positions. This had resulted in the creation of 4.85 FTE open-ended positions and the reorganisation process to populate this had been ring-fenced to 7 colleagues (5.85 FTE). The proposed FTE had been based on School management knowledge of student numbers and teaching to be delivered. The School considered this data alongside the outcomes of an external review and external examiners' feedback, and workloads as described in the School’s workload allocation model to validate the proposal of 4.85 FTE.

3. As part of the consultation process a number of meetings had been held including colleagues affected, UCU, School and People Services. The UCU had become involved in the case as a result of routine consultation on an academic unit restructure. The UCU had queried a number of procedural matters arising from the case which had prompted wider concerns about acceptable justifications for redundancy and, as a result, had proposed that Senate should take an active interest in these matters. This case was deemed worthy of discussion at Senate because it highlighted a number of issues around casualization, a broader topic that the University was proactively giving careful consideration to. It was important to note, however, that Senate did not need to be consulted every time a redundancy was required.

4. The UCU had argued that little evidence had been provided by the School to justify the proposed redundancies. Although the School had asserted that it had undertaken an assessment of teaching and teaching-related activities in the School, this information had not been shared. In the absence of this evidence, the UCU maintained that Senate could not be assured there was a sound academic rationale for the redundancies.

5. It was agreed that a meeting would be held for School and Faculty leaders and People Services to discuss the redundancy procedure in more detail with UCU representatives.
Following this meeting, Senate would need to be provided with reassurance that a clear rationale for the restructure was in place and understood by all parties.

43. ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

Received a paper from Professor Suzanne Cholerton (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) on behalf of Executive Board.

Noted that:

1. The paper provided a summary of the operation in 2018-19 of the University’s framework for assuring academic quality and standards, to provide a basis for Senate, and ultimately Council as the governing body of the University, to confirm that the framework is effective.

2. A thematic analysis of recommendations arising from Learning and Teaching Reviews conducted in 2018-19 identified multiple recommendations in the area of student support. Many of these would be addressed through two of the 2019-20 priority actions for implementation of the Education Strategy – the reviews of personal tutoring and academic skills support.

3. It was suggested that the University’s ability to assure academic quality through internal student surveys might be adversely affected in the future when stage evaluations, for which response rates were notably low, replaced module evaluation. Although stage evaluation questionnaires would continue to provide opportunity for students to comment on individual modules, as well as other issues relating to their experience, the analysis of robust data from student groups in order to close the feedback loop remained integral to the assurance of quality and standards.

Resolved that, based on the information provided in Document G, a recommendation be made to Council that an effective framework for managing academic quality and standards is in place and had been implemented in 2018-19.

44. PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR ENGAGEMENT AND PLACE

Received a recommendation from the Vice-Chancellor regarding the establishment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor post.

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

Noted that:

1. In accordance with Standing Order 10, the Vice-Chancellor may recommend to Senate and Council the establishment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor post. Senate considered a proposal for the establishment of a fourth cross-cutting Pro-Vice-Chancellor to take responsibility for Engagement and Place Strategy, ensuring that all four underpinning strategies would have equal weight in the University’s leadership structure.

2. Following discussion, it was agreed that a more detailed document should be submitted to the next meeting of Senate, outlining the portfolio for the role and why the outward-facing nature of duties and responsibilities required the establishment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor post. The document should include the proposed job description.

3. Senate considered the skills, knowledge and experience necessary required by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Engagement and Place charged with delivering the implementation of an academic strategy.
4. If the post was agreed, the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor would become an ex officio member of Senate. Members of Senate noted that this would affect the balance between ex officio and elected members, although it was pointed out that the changes to the Statutes considered by Senate in November 2019 would increase the elected membership of Senate by two.

45. **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 and President following consultation with the relevant Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor, 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 Emerita be conferred on:* 

Professor Dame Vicki Bruce, with effect from 1 February 2020  
Professor Anne Maguire, with effect from 1 March 2020  

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

Professor Steve McHanwell, with effect from 1 March 2020  
Professor Sir Doug Turnbull, with effect from 1 November 2020  
Professor David Reay, with effect from 1 February 2020

46. **MINUTES FROM COMMITTEE OF SENATE**

The following meetings of Senate committees had taken place and the minutes from each committee were provided for information:

(a) University Education Committee: 13 November and 11 December 2019  
(b) University Engagement and Place Committee: 25 November 2019  
(c) University Global Committee: 7 November 2019  
(d) University Research Committee: 28 October and 16 December 2019  

[Circulated with the agenda as Document K-P. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

47. **NORTHUMBRIAN UNIVERSITIES MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Received the annual report of the Northumbrian Universities Military Education Committee.  
[Circulated with the agenda as Document Q. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]