UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

CONVOCATION

Minutes of the Forty-sixth Ordinary Meeting of Convocation held in Lecture Theatre 3, Herschel Building, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, on Saturday 7 June 2003

MINUTES

Present:

Mr Jack Jeffery (Chairman of Convocation), Professor Christopher Edwards (Vice-Chancellor), Dr Joseph Banks, Mr Stephen Bennett Dr Keith Broomfield, Dr Ann Brown, Mrs Anne Brown, Mr Hugh Brown, Mr Peter Byrne, Mr Rene Canela, Mr Peter Cobbett, Dr Kenneth Coghill, Mr Esmond Collett, Mr Chris Cox (Director of Development), Ms Katherine Denham, Mrs Hilary Dixon, Ms Valerie Doulton, Dr Donald Gascoigne, Mr Anthony Gibbs, Miss Elspeth Gould, Dr Frederick Hardy, Dr Anne Hargreaves, Mr Charles Harvey, Mr Roger Harvey, Mrs Isabel Holmes, Mrs Barbara Inskip, Mr Alan Jarvis, Dr June Jeans, Miss Pamela Jeffreys, Dr Graeme Lawson, Mrs Wilma Lister, Dr Herbert Loeb, Mrs Ann Makepeace, Mr John McGregor, Mr Robert McNay, Dr Eileen Miller, Mr Bill Oliver, Mrs Elizabeth Pallister, Mr Andy Pape, Mr David Park, Professor David Parker, Mr John Pearcy, Mrs Patricia Pearcy, Mrs Judith Penny, Mr Dominic Pinto, Mrs Ethel Randall, Dr Bert Randall, Mr Geoffrey Reay, Mr Horace Regnart, Mr Bob Richardson, Mrs June Richardson, Mrs Lisa Richards, Dr Lorna Rozner, Miss Jean Scott, Mr Mark Scrimshaw, Dr Brian Shenton, Mrs Diana Snowdon, Miss Wendy Taylor (Assistant Alumni Development Officer), Mr Bob Theaker, Mrs Adele Timlin, Mr Gareth Trainer, Reverend Alison Wagstaff, Professor Anthony Walton, Lord Walton of Detchant, Mr Frank Ward (Deputy Chairman of Convocation), Miss Jennifer Watson, Mr Ashley Wilton.

In attendance:

Dr Joel Burden (Alumni Development Officer), Mrs Doris Byrne, Mr Matthew Cowan, Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Mr Terry McCarthy, Mr Paul Mitchell, Mr Damon Querry.

Apologies:

Mr John Alexander, Miss Marguerite Benson, Mr George Bruce, Mr James Duncan, Professor John Goddard (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Mrs Cathryn Harvey, Mr Adrian Mannall, M Hylton Owen, Professor Trevor Page (Pro-Vice-Chancellor), Mr Basil Preuveneers, Mrs Jeanne Ross, Dr William Ross, Dr Janis Smith, Dr Ian Spencer, Mrs Pat Stevenson, Professor Roy Storer, Mrs Maureen Taylor, Mr Andrew Thomson, Mrs Judith Wallace.
Introductory Remarks:

Mr Jack Jeffery, Chairman of Convocation welcomed the Vice-Chancellor and members of Convocation. A list of those members who had sent apologies was noted, as was a list of those members known to have died since the last meeting. [NOTE: Due to an unfortunate error two members, Dr Rosemary Boon and Dr Claire Shenfine, were incorrectly included in the second list. Dr Joel Burden, Alumni Development Officer, took immediate action to write to these two members to apologise for the error and any upset it may have caused.]

1. MINUTES

Received:

Minutes of the Forty-fifth Ordinary Meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 8 June 2002 had been circulated and were approved as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising from the Minutes:

(a) It was noted that Mr Dominic Pinto was wrongly referred to as Vice-Chairman rather than Chairman of the Alumni Association under item 5a. The Minutes would be corrected.

Received:

Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of Convocation held on the 11 November 2002 had also been circulated and were approved as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising from the Minutes:

(b) The Chairman of Convocation reported that a recommendation had been made by Convocation for consideration by Court that: The University may wish to re-examine how the Statutes define the way in which Court, Council, Senate and Convocation relate to one another, with the aim of achieving greater clarity over the respective roles, responsibilities and relationships of these senior bodies. This proposal had now been discussed by Court and had led to the establishment of a Working Party to review the role and functioning of Court. Recommendations made by this Working Party were made available at the meeting of Convocation. Dominic Pinto noted that the important role of Convocation was not adequately reflected in the governance and management section of the University’s main website.

(c) It was noted by Mr Frank Ward, Deputy Chairman of Convocation, that the Minutes of the previous Extraordinary Meeting of Convocation held on 26 January 1999, at which the election of the current Chancellor was proposed, had not come back to Convocation for approval. Mr Chris Cox, Director of Development, responded that this was an oversight and that the Minutes would be presented retrospectively at the next Ordinary Meeting in 2004.

(d) Mr Horace Regnart sought further clarification on the implications of the proposed demolition of the Debating Chamber within the campus master-plan (Item 3) to the future of debating at the University, and sought reassurance that important pieces of external sculptural work on the building would be saved. The Vice-Chancellor explained the rationale for the demolition indicating that the building was no longer fit for use, but
reported that sculptural work was being saved and that the Debating Society was in fact enjoying a renaissance.

2. VICE CHANCELLOR’S STATEMENT 2001-02

Received:

It was noted that copies of the University’s Annual Report including the Vice-Chancellor’s statement had been circulated.

Received

An oral report by the Vice-Chancellor on the University’s performance during 2001-02 and some anticipated future developments. The following were among the issues discussed:

(a) The University was disappointed by the unsuccessful outcome of Newcastle Gateshead’s 2008 European Capital of Culture bid, despite much hard work by the bid team, but had been very encouraged by what had already been achieved and the vision the University had been able to contribute as a key bid partner, not least through Terry Farrell’s master-planning work.

(b) Plans remained on course for developing a Cultural Quarter on the Barras Bridge site bringing together the museum collections located in disparate parts of the campus and within the Hancock Museum. This was linked to a re-development of the Playhouse Theatre and a number of other cultural activities and developments on campus.

(c) The Higher Education White Paper had raised a number of issues which would have a fundamental impact on universities from 2006.

i) Much debate had focused on proposals for increased levels of tuition fees up to £3,000 per year. Fees would be payable once an agreed earnings threshold had been crossed post-graduation, no longer ‘up-front’ at the point of entry.

ii) The introduction of a new 6* research rating was proposed, and this had worrying implications in terms of a potential resulting concentration of leading research within the Oxbridge/London ‘Golden Triangle’ at the expense of the UK regions. Additionally, Newcastle could stand to lose £5 million per annum in research income if funding for research departments rated at 4 was discontinued as was being proposed, even though the University had a median 5 research rating.

iii) The University was concerned at proposals that suggested the separation of teaching and research functions within the sector.

iv) The interface of universities and business was a key focus within the White Paper, but this tended to be conceived along linear model lines, whereas most universities would argue that the relationship tended to be more complex and iterative in terms of commercialisation of research processes.

v) The expansion of student numbers focused primarily on foundation degree courses, and this would require the University to re-examine its existing expansion plans.

(d) Two issues within the White Paper required universities to take action themselves:

i) Increasing access to universities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The North East had the lowest rates of progression to higher education from secondary education of all UK regions, but the University was responding
effectively to this challenge through its acclaimed PARTNERS programme with local schools. The system involved offering places (sometimes with bursaries) to disadvantaged students on lower entry grades where strong degree potential could be demonstrated. The first cohort of PARTNERS students had completed their degree courses. A 96% retention rate amongst this group was equivalent to the overall retention rate for the University, and an equivalency in average grades had also been achieved. Furthermore, there had been a 49% increase in applications from non-disadvantaged students from PARTNERS schools, indicating that aspirations to study at Newcastle were being raised more widely within the region as result of the programme.

ii) *Improving the harnessing of knowledge to wealth creation.* One NorthEast had placed the regional universities at the heart of its Regional Economic Strategy. The University was taking action to deliver on the key points within the Strategy. The mission statement of the University has been re-written to embrace a commitment to the economic, social and cultural development of the North East region.

(e) The process of restructuring the University had begun to bring benefits in terms of increased financial headroom and flexibility. Key points to report included:

i) The University had produced a detailed five-year business plan for the first time.

ii) The University had built up a £39 million restructuring fund and had been successful in bidding for £3.8 million from the HEFCE Restructuring Fund.

iii) The University’s voluntary severance scheme had produced financial headroom of around £6.5 million per annum.

iv) A ‘Research Beehive’ was being developed in the Old Library Building to improve academic interaction across the University and encourage collaborative research.

v) Appointments had been made to the new positions of Director of Business Development and Director of External Relations.

vi) A major new building programme had begun on campus. New buildings under construction included homes for the new Institute for Research on Environment and Sustainability the new Northern Institute for Cancer Research.

vii) Overall financial health was good with a 14% growth in income in 2001-02, compared with an overall growth of 9% in the four years proceeding.

viii) Increased investment in international student recruitment had led to a 49% increase in the number of international students recruited in the past year. Meanwhile, international applications had risen fourfold in the same period.

ix) The University was an active partner in the five new Centres of Excellence established within the region by One NorthEast to transfer research ideas in specific areas into regional business activity.

x) An Equity Committee had been established at the University.

xi) The sale of the University spin-out company Novacastra had provided the University with a £5.5 million equity share.

xii) New approaches to the interaction of research and business interaction were being explored, including plans to establish a ‘technology village’ with campus facilities that businesses could occupy.

xiii) There had been increased collaboration with the other regional universities on a wide range of projects.

xiv) Excellence in graduate enterprise activity had been reflected in our graduates winning prizes in four out of six national graduate enterprise categories.

(f) The Vice-Chancellor thanked Dominic Pinto on behalf of the University for his very positive contribution over the past three years as Chairman of the Alumni Association.
The Vice-Chancellor answered questions on a number of subjects.

3. HONORARY DEGREE NOMINATIONS 2003

Reported

That honorary degrees had been conferred on the following individuals at an Honorary Congregations held on 9 May 2003:

DSc Dr Herbert Loebl OBE (BSc Electrical Engineering 1949, PhD History 1985)
DLitt Fiona Reynolds CBE
DCL Sir Bobby Robson CBE
DSc Professor Fred Schneider

The Chairman of Convocation noted a message from Mr Richard Fothergill, requesting that Convocation thank the staff of the Congregations Office for the excellent job they do in organising the degree ceremonies each year. Convocation agreed.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ALUMNI DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Received

A report from the Alumni Development Group (ADG) recommending changes to the structure of the ADG and the Alumni Association.

The Chairman of Convocation explained the process by which the report had been developed and rationale for the proposals. He then put each of the five proposals to the meeting of Convocation. The following points arose in discussion:

(a) Dr Lorna Rozner sought clarification on Proposal 1, defining ‘alumni’, whether groups and branches affiliated to the Alumni Association had the freedom to define their own membership. It was agreed that as separately constituted entities such groups and branches could define the terms of their own membership.

(b) There was some discussion on Proposal 5 regarding a redefinition of the membership of Convocation in order to bring it into line with the membership of the Alumni Association. One member felt that extending the membership to certain groups of non-graduates of the University was not desirable. However, following discussion the proposal was put to a vote and overwhelmingly carried.

Resolved:

All proposals within the report were agreed in the form proposed.

Reported

The Chairman of Convocation indicated that following Convocation’s endorsement of the proposals, a second phase of work would be undertaken by the Working Group established by ADG on issues of electoral procedure. A further set of recommendations would be brought to the next meeting of Convocation for approval.
5. ELECTIONS FOR THE CHAIR OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Received

Mark Scrimshaw, current Vice-Chair of the Alumni Association, had been nominated for the position of Chair of the Alumni Association. The Chairman of Convocation asked whether there were any other nominations. No other nomination was made.

On a point of order, Dominic Pinto, retiring Chair of the Alumni Association, commented that the election process had not been fully open, as nominations had not been actively sought prior to the meeting. His interpretation of the election protocol agreed by Convocation in 2000 was that any member ought to be able to stand for the position. The Chairman of Convocation agreed that any member was entitled to stand for election. He reminded the meeting of the title of the agenda item and that he had begun the agenda item by inviting further nominations. He added that although Convocation had not made the transition from Vice-Chair to Chair automatic, it had in his view been the clear intention of Convocation that the Vice-Chair would proceed to the Chair at the end of the three-year term of office of the Chair, except in exceptional circumstances. He felt sure that the University had acted properly in its arrangements for the election. The Chairman of Convocation added that the point raised by from Mr Pinto showed that the election process ought to be more clearly defined and he proposed that the Alumni Relations Working Group be asked to consider possible changes that might be brought to the next meeting of Convocation.

The Chairman of Convocation then asked Convocation whether it was content with the explanations provided and with the process that had been followed. Lord Walton and Peter Cobbett suggested that members were content and proposed proceeding to the election. This was agreed.

Resolved:

Mark Scrimshaw was elected unopposed as the new Chair of the Alumni Association. The Chairman of Convocation congratulated him on his election and thanked Dominic Pinto, on behalf of Convocation, for his active involvement and support during his three years as Chair.

6. ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Received:

(a) A written report from Mr Dominic Pinto, Immediate Past Chair of the Alumni Association.

(b) An oral report from Dominic Pinto. Key points mentioned by Mr Pinto were the need to continue opening up the University, for it to pursue real partnerships and continue to develop more business-like approaches, and for it actively to involve alumni in helping the University to fulfil its ambitions and objectives.

7. DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS OFFICE

Received

(a) A written report from the Dr Joel Burden, Alumni Development Officer.
(b) A written report from the Mr Chris Cox, Director of Development.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Received:

A motion from Mr Frank Ward, Deputy Chairman of Convocation:

Convocation regrets the practice in recent meetings of the ‘Platform Party’ not wearing full academic dress at Convocation.

Resolved:

Convocation did not support this motion.

(b) Received

A second motion from Frank Ward:

Convocation requests that all functions on campus are held in a place accessible to the disabled.

Resolved:

Convocation warmly supported this motion.

(c) Received

A question from Frank Ward seeking clarification on the basis on which hospitals were entitled to use the designation ‘University Hospital’.

The Vice-Chancellor responded that the issue of the provenance of the university designation was a serious matter of concern for universities, since it seemed hospitals could use the designation even where teaching links to a university were not strongly developed.

Resolved:

The Vice-Chancellor asked Lord Walton to table a question seeking clarification on this matter at the House of Lords.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the Forty-Seventh Ordinary Meeting of Convocation would be fixed according to the availability of the Convocation Lecturer.

Joel Burden
Alumni Development Officer