NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

17 November 2021

Present: The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Julie Sanders (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost), Professor David Burn, Professor Richard Davies, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Jane Robinson, Professor Brian Walker, and Professor Tom Ward (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr Shoba Amarnath, Dr Vanessa Armstrong, Professor Caroline Austin, Dr Bruce Baker, Professor Chris Baldwin, Professor Nils Braakmann, Professor Zofia Chrzanowska-Lightowlers, Dr Barbara Eberth, Professor Darren Evans, Briana Gordhan (Welfare and Equality Officer, Students’ Union), Professor Jens Hentschke, Professor Alex Hughes, Abbie Hutchinson (President, Students’ Union), Jenny Johnstone, Dr Anjam Khan, Dr Gareth Longstaff, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Eleanor McCarthy (Postgraduate Officer, Students’ Union), Kate McGill, Ms Claire Morgan, Livia Scott (Education Officer, Students’ Union), Dr David Stewart, Dr Eimer Tuite, Professor Stefano Utili.

In attendance: David Hill (Director of Research Strategy and Development), Professor John Kirby (Dean of Postgraduate Research, Faculty of Medical Sciences), Professor Candy Rowe, Dr Colin Campbell (Executive Director of Academic Affairs), Mr Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Mr Nick Collins (Executive Director of Finance), Dr John Hogan (Registrar), Mrs Adrienne McFarland (Executive Director of People Services), and Dr Simon Meacher (Executive Office and Governance Manager).

Apologies: Professor Ashley Adamson, Professor Ted Schrecker.

M I N U T E S

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

19. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 22 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

20. 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. COVID-19

Members of Senate had continued to receive the regular updates provided by Executive Board. The Vice-Chancellor and President provided a further update, which focused on current infection rates in the University community and city. The Vice-Chancellor
reported on the University’s approach to the wearing of face coverings. There was a concerted effort being made to republicise the guidance around campus.

2. Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS)

The Vice-Chancellor and President reported that a national consultation on proposed benefit changes to the USS scheme was underway. A series of online and in-person seminars on the consultation process and proposed changes for colleagues was taking place.

3. Student Recruitment

Senate noted the current student number position of the undergraduate and postgraduate recruitment cycle for Newcastle University for 2022 entry. Current numbers suggested that the University would not meet its overall institutional recruitment targets for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught courses.

4. Elsevier

Jisc had received a proposal from Elsevier regarding open access to UK research published in Elsevier journals which was likely to be accepted by UK universities.

5. Climate Emergency

In response to a question from a member of Senate asking for an update about the scale of the financial investment that Executive Board believed was needed to deliver on the pledge of Net Zero by 2030, the Vice-Chancellor informed Senate that it was too early to put an exact cost against what remained a complex challenge. An estimated figure of £100m had been given when Council approved the 2020 Net Zero target and Council approved the commitment on that basis. The University had also set aside £15m p.a. of capital funding for the foreseeable future for Net Zero works across campus. A better estimate for the costs would be available at the end of this financial year.

A full strategic discussion on the Climate Emergency and COP26 would take place at Senate early in 2022.

6. UK Universities Overseas Campuses Network

The University had co-founded a new UK University Overseas Campuses Network, bringing together an initial membership of 17 British universities with 27 campuses located in 17 countries across the world. The network had been founded and was co-chaired by Newcastle University (under the leadership of our Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global, Professor Richard Davies) and the University of Nottingham. Its aims over the next year included working with the UK Government to identify barriers to trade affecting overseas campuses as well as the opportunity they provided the UK to build its reputation as a science and education superpower. The Network would also be supporting mutual learning between UK universities with overseas campuses, helping facilitate better information and experience sharing between the sector.

7. Embedding Sustainable Development in Education

On 15 November 2021, colleagues and students across the institution had taken part in an event led by the UN Sustainable Development Goals Committee to consider approaches to promoting sustainability values and skills into the curriculum, engage with effective practice case studies, and gain a better understanding of the supporting resources available.
8. Learning and Teaching Conference

The call for submissions had been published for this year’s University Learning and Teaching Conference, which would be held on Thursday 31 March 2022. The theme of the conference was learning together, sharing effective practice and exploring an education for all.

9. Knowledge Exchange Concordat

The University had received feedback from the evaluation panel charged with considering its Knowledge Exchange Concordat submission. Feedback had been sought from a cohort of selected volunteer evaluators from inside and outside the higher education community, who collectively represent a diverse range of backgrounds and experience in knowledge exchange, business, and the third sector. The feedback had been moderated by the KE Concordat Operational Group which consisted of representatives from Universities UK, GuildHE, National Centre for Universities and Business, PraxisAuril and Research England.

The evaluators praised the University’s mature and well-presented action plan that reflected depth and diversity of Knowledge Exchange (KE) activity across the institution. Evaluators commented that KE came across as ‘part and parcel’ of the institution’s purpose. Proactive outreach activities were praised, as were the strong examples of recognition and rewards for KE (including for students). Evaluators also acknowledged the strong place-based identity that came out through the action plan combined with a range of disciplinary and sector examples. In terms of areas for improvement, it was suggested that the University could do more to share good practice in national KE networks.

Implementation of an action plan for the Concordat would be overseen by the Knowledge Exchange and Policy Oversight Committee.

10. Research Fellowship Schemes

Senate noted information provided in response to a query raised by a member of Senate about the outcomes of the Newcastle University Research Fellow programme and Independent Researcher Establishment Scheme in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

It was too early to evaluate progression for appointees to the Newcastle University Academic Track scheme as they had not yet completed the full five years of the cycle, in part due to Covid-19 mitigations. Analyses of the diversity of the appointees, which had been reviewed positively by the NUAcT Board, showed that, in the 2020-21 round, for example, 39% of offers were to women and 33% to BAME colleagues, which was improved from the previous round and representative of those who applied.

11. NUCoRE Regulatory Science

The establishment of the NUCoRE in Regulatory Science had originally been approved by Senate at its meeting in June 2019. Since that time, the original Centre director had stepped down and it had not been possible to identify ongoing leadership with the capacity to deliver the Centre’s research mission and associated activities. As a consequence, the recommendation was to close the NUCoRE. A number of relevant activities were being progressed under other NUCoREs, including Rare Disease and Data.
Resolved that Senate approve the closure of the NUCoRE in Regulatory Science.

12. Colleague Success

Professor Jeremy Crampton (School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape) had been elected as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Professor Jarka Glassey (School of Engineering) had been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

Professor Sharon Mavin (Newcastle University Business School) had been awarded the British Academy of Management Medal for Leadership. The BAM Medal for Leadership was awarded for sustained and outstanding leadership of, and contribution to, the academic community.

27 University colleagues from the faculties of Humanities and Social Science and Science, Agriculture and Engineering had been awarded year-long Fellowships by The Alan Turing Institute. They were among 400 Fellows appointed from the Institute’s 13 university partners. The Turing Institute was the UK’s national institute for data science and artificial intelligence and Newcastle University has been a partner since 2018.

13. The Chancellorship

At its meeting held on 9 October 2021, Convocation had approved a recommendation from a joint meeting of Court and Senate to approve the re-appointment of Imtiaz Dharker as Chancellor of the University for a further period of two years with effect from 1 January 2022.

14. Travel and Expenses Policy

Following input from members of Senate some further amendments to the policy had been considered and approved by Executive Board at its meeting on 16 November 2021. The update brought the policy position on international travel into line with the latest public health advice for England and government guidance, whereby travel restrictions for colleagues not fully vaccinated against Covid had been lifted.

21. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 18 OCTOBER 2021

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 18 October 2021.

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

22. SHAPE OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR

Received a paper from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate considered a proposal aimed at resolving issues arising from the revised structure of the academic year for 2021-22 that were impacting on the student educational experience.¹

¹ A member of Senate queried whether, under its Standing Orders, Senate was entitled to consider the proposal, having discussed a similar proposal at its meeting in January 2021. Standing Order VI(4) states that 'No resolution may be rescinded or altered in the term in which it is passed or in the term immediately following; nor may any motion which has been rejected be moved again in the term in which it was rejected or in the term immediately
2. Senate had agreed a revised structure for the 2021-22 academic year in January 2021. While the new structure offered numerous benefits, implementation had demonstrated that it also presented significant challenges that impacted negatively on the student education experience. The major negative consequence was the condensed window that this had created for assessments/resits/moderation and Board of Assessors meetings in August and September 2021, and the confirmation of results for some continuing students.

3. There had been significant negative feedback via the Students’ Union that this had caused anxiety for students – for example it resulted in students needing to make arrangements for the new academic year before they knew if they were able to progress into the new academic year.

4. It was suggested that there had been a very significant volume of Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PECs) and extension requests, a situation exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic, which had delayed the return of assessments. However, the University maintained that there remained a structural problem that would not be resolved by a reduction in the volume of PECs.

5. Three potential options to address these issues had been identified: changing the length of the Easter vacation from four weeks to three; removing the inter-semester break; and shortening the Semester 1 assessment period from two weeks to one.

6. The first of these options had been considered by Senate in January 2021. Members of Senate had expressed some concern that research time would be constrained by the changes proposed, in particular that travel for research purposes and field research, for example, would be impacted by a truncated Easter vacation and that a shortening of the vacation could generate difficulties for colleagues with caring responsibilities.

7. Senate would not be able to reach an informed decision about the proposed shape of the academic year without a full equality impact analysis, modelling the impact of the proposed changes on colleagues and students.

8. It was suggested that the University might consider scheduling resits earlier in August to avoid a repeat of the condensed window for assessment and moderation, however, this would shorten students’ preparation time and was therefore sub-optimal.

9. Senate agreed to consider the proposals for a revised structure of the academic year for 2022-23 and beyond at its meeting in January 2022, once an equality impact analysis had been completed.

23. POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Received a presentation from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources and Postgraduate Officer of the Newcastle University Students’ Union.

Noted that:

following, unless the notice of the motion proposing to rescind or alter the resolution which has been passed, or to re-introduce a rejected motion, be signed by seven members of Senate.’ It was clarified, however, that the word ‘term’ indicated academic term (as opposed to term of Senate) and, as the Summer term of the 2020-21 academic year had passed since the term in which the proposal had first been submitted to Senate, a resubmission at this time did not contravene the Standing Orders.
1. A member of Senate had requested that the committee discuss a number of issues relating to research student funding, career pathways and support.

2. Considered student recruitment, funding procedures, supervisor allocation, employment status, teaching contribution, research culture and the University’s recent performance in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

3. Noted trends in size and shape of the University’s research postgraduate cohort, as well as academic colleagues on research-only, Teaching and Scholarship, and Teaching and Research contracts.

4. Considered the costs of externally-funded and University-funded PhD students, and the proportion of costs from cross-subsidy.

5. Discussed the important role of PhD students in enhancing research outcomes (co-publishing), and agreed that the University should seek to embed this within research culture.

6. Noted that in feedback to the Students’ Union, many research postgraduates had expressed the wish to be treated as members of staff of the University. The implications of this – for supervisor support, working conditions, pension contributions, and tax status, for example, were currently being considered by the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee of University Education Committee. It was essential to listen to a wide variety of opinions on the subject.

7. Employment conditions, health and wellbeing, and opportunities to meet with fellow postgraduates, were issues of major importance for research students.

8. Work was in progress to integrate research postgraduate matters more systematically into the University’s research strategy and culture roadmap implementation.

9. Considered the University’s approach to making strategic bids for research postgraduate places.

24. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CENTRES OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Received a paper from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Strategy and Resources, on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. Senate considered a proposal for the establishment of three new Newcastle University Centres of Research Excellence (NUCoREs) in Children and Youth, Cyber Security and Resilience, and Biomedical Engineering.

2. A formal Equality Impact Analysis of leadership teams across the NUCoRE portfolio was underway.

3. The Children and Youth NUCoRE would focus on inequalities in pre-adult life and would be hosted by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Senate noted the extremely sad news of Professor James Law’s death. Professor Law had been a driving force in the development of the NUCoRE.

4. Biomedical Engineering aligned well with the government’s vision for life sciences, and was potentially a strong candidate for research funding bids.
5. Internal engagement with the Cyber Security and Resilience NUCoRE would include colleagues from all faculties. External engagement included the National Cyber Security Centre, Turing Institute, and European Cybersecurity Agency.

Resolved that Senate approved the establishment of NUCoREs in Biomedical Engineering, Children and Youth, and Cyber Security and Resilience.

25. ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS

Received a paper from the Executive Director of People Services on behalf of Executive Board.

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

Noted that:

1. The current approach to the use of external assessors in the annual Academic Promotions exercise required the Head of Academic Unit to provide four independent external assessors at the point of submission for each case. Assessors are approached to review an application following the first meeting of University Promotion Committee, subject to the committee’s support.

2. The University wished to move to an alternative model to receive input from external assessors. It was proposed that up to three external assessors would be invited to attend the first meeting of University Promotions Committee.

3. The proposed change would bring more clarity to the process, a quicker turnaround on outcomes for colleagues, and recover quality time for colleagues identifying and chasing assessors.

4. Members of Senate welcomed the simplification of the process, noting however that the external assessors would have a significant workload.

5. Some members expressed a preference for being assessed by external colleagues who were specialisation peers, however, detailed contextual information would always be provided for promotion applications, and that the assessors would bring a wealth of knowledge from reviewing academic profiles of the same standing through other promotion and selection exercises at their current and previous institutions.

Resolved that, following a vote in which over three-quarters of members agreed, Senate approve the proposal.

26. EFFECTIVENESS OF SENATE

Received a report from the Registrar on the outcomes of the Effectiveness Review of Senate 2020-21, and an accompanying paper on membership.

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

Noted that:

1. One of the main areas for improvement suggested in by the survey results was better join-up with Heads of School. Members of Senate expressed general support for Heads of School being on Senate; this would bring the University into line with other Russell Group institutions.
2. Care should be taken to ensure that the mechanism for including some Heads of Senate did fundamentally alter the balance within Senate between elected and appointed members on Senate. Co-opting Heads of School in a non-voting capacity would be one way of strengthening engagement with this constituency, whilst leaving the balance of elected and appointed members unaffected.

3. Some members suggested that the move to bring Heads of School onto Senate would inhibit the ability of individual Senators to act independently.

Resolved that one Head of School from each Faculty should be co-opted onto the membership of Senate in a non-voting capacity until 1 August 2023.

27. WHITE SPACE

Noted that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor invited members of Senate to submit suggestions for future agenda items.

28. 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 H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus be conferred on:

Professor Rudy Bilous, with effect from 1 January 2022
Professor Simon Thomas, with effect from 1 April 2022

29. NU WOMEN

Received the NU Women Annual Report.

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

30. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE

Received a report from the meeting of:

a) University Education Committee: 13 September and 13 October 2021
b) University Global Committee: 16 September 2021
c) University Research and Innovation Committee: 7 September 2021

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents K-M. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

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 Chair of Council, and by other University bodies and Chairs.

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