

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

15 January 2025

Present: The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Professor Matthew Grenby, Professor Jane Robinson, Professor Jo Robinson, Professor Ruth Valentine, Professor Chris Whitehead (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Professor Chris Baldwin, Jasmine Banks (Education Officer, Students' Union), Leo David (President, Students' Union), Dr Marie Devlin, Professor Stuart Edwards, Professor Catherine Exley, Professor David Kennedy, Dr Ray Kent, Professor Claire Lomax, Professor Ruth McAreavey, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Claire Morgan, Professor Anoop Nayak, Dr Meiko O'Halloran, Professor Rachel Pain, Professor Savvas Papagiannidis, Professor Murray Pollock, Professor Judith Rankin, Dr Jemima Repo, Dr Shweta Sharma, Dr Robert Shaw, Dr Grega Smrkolj, Muriel Snowdon, Linming Sun (Postgraduate Officer, Students' Union), Professor Simon Tate, Dr Laura Woodhouse, Dr Katharine Wright and Dr Emily Yarrow.

In attendance: Lindsey Lockey (Chief Executive, Newcastle University Students' Union) for Minute 43, Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jen Middleton (Head of Communications), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services) and Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager)

Apologies: Professor David Burn, Dr Joanna Elson, Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Anya Hurlbert, Dr Darren Kelsey, Professor Rene Koglbauer, Professor Candy Rowe, Hisham Salamathullah and Professor John Wildman

MINUTES

35. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed new members to their first meeting of Senate:

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

37. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 13 November 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

Noted that:

- a) An election for a professorial vacancy for an elected member of Senate was held in December and Professor Savvas Papagiannidis had been the successful candidate.
- b) An election for a non-professorial vacancy for a Senate appointed member of Council was held in November and Dr Meiko O'Halloran had been the successful candidate.

- c) A vacancy remained for a Senate to serve on the University Environment and Sustainability Committee and interested colleagues were invited to contact Professor Jane Robinson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Place, to discuss the role.

Resolved that Senate approve the appointment of Professor Simon Tate as the Senate representative on the University Education Committee.

Resolved that Senate approve the appointments of Professor Daniel Coca (SAGÉ), Professor Ruth Morrow (HaSS) and Professor Emma Stevenson (FMS) as the co-opted members of Senate from their Faculty.

38. 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:

a) New Year's Honours

The following individuals associated with the University were recognised in the New Year's Honours list:

MBE Alison Pamela Murdoch. Professor of Reproductive Medicine. For a career dedicated to fertility research

OBE Imtiaz Dharker. Chancellor of Newcastle University, poet, artist and filmmaker. For services to the Arts.

Christine Harrison. Emerita Professor of Childhood Cancer Cytogenetics in the Faculty of Medical Sciences. For services to children with acute leukaemia.

Liz Todd. Professor of Educational inclusion in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences. For services to children and young people.

b) Sector Finances

An update to financial modelling from the Office for Students (OfS) had found continued pressures on the higher education sector in England. The analysis, which updated the OfS's annual financial sustainability report published in May 2024, found reductions in the numbers of students entering higher education. Without taking steps to address financial risks, OfS modelling suggests that nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of higher education providers could be in deficit by 2025-26. The government had announced that from September 2025 both the maximum cap for tuition fees, and maintenance loans for students, would increase in line with inflation. These changes, as well as the increase in national insurance contributions for employers announced in the Budget, had been included in the OfS analysis.

On 9 December 2024, Council had approved Executive Board's recommendation to increase the home undergraduate fees from £9,250 to £9,535 in line with the increased fee cap, for new and continuing students for 2025-26. This was subject to parliamentary approval of the new fee cap, which was expected in January 2025.

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that a business case for workforce resizing would be presented to Council on 20 January and, if approved, the proposed approach would be communicated with colleagues very soon thereafter. The business case set out a proposal to resize the workforce by implementing another Voluntary Severance Scheme, to achieve a reduction in staff costs via voluntary methods. It was noted that the previous recent Voluntary Severance Schemes had been successful in achieving projected savings but the impact on budgets would not be realised until the following financial year, after the severance pay-out had completed. Members of Senate discussed the reduction in travel budgets for the current academic year and noted the allocations were managed at school-level and were subject to local decision-making and prioritisation. In-cycle actions had been put in place to maximise student recruitment opportunities for the 2025-26 academic year though it was recognised that improved coordination between centralised marketing and schools could serve to ensure higher conversion rates in upcoming cycles.

c) Universities for North East England

The five universities in North East England had responded to the UK Government's priorities for higher education reform, indicating their commitment to work together and with others to drive growth. Speaking at a launch event for the newly formed 'Universities for North East England' (UNEE) partnership, the Vice-Chancellor and the vice-chancellors of Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside universities had outlined their vision for greater collaboration to improve access for disadvantaged students.

d) North East England Doctoral Landscape in Biosciences

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) was making an investment of more than £500m to help thousands of doctoral students across the UK to develop their skills and experience in their respective universities' areas of strength. Newcastle University would lead North East England Doctoral Landscape in Biosciences (NEEDL) in partnership with the universities of Durham, Northumbria, Teesside, Sunderland, and with industry.

e) Inequalities in Maternity Care and Outcomes

Experts at Newcastle University were co-leading a consortium to help tackle inequalities in maternity care and outcomes. Working together across the North East, the consortium aimed to achieve better, fairer maternity health and care by delivering high-quality impactful research, and through developing the next generation of our researchers and practitioners.

f) Land Use and Net Zero Research

Newcastle University experts would help deliver a new project to support agricultural practices, land use change and soil health. Led by the University of East Anglia (UEA), the £4m OpenLAND project would see researchers carry out an evaluation of climate-resilient interventions for land management and soil health that could benefit net zero targets, biodiversity and agriculture.

g) Rapid Engagement with Stressed Peatland Environments and Communities in Transformation

Led by the University of Glasgow, Rapid Engagement with Stressed Peatland Environments and Communities in Transformation (RESPECT) was an innovative project that would produce data and methods for governance reforms to change agricultural practices on peatland, and reduce emissions from land use. RESPECT had been awarded £4.5 million by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Land Use for Net Zero Research programme over three years.

- h) North East Space Communications Accelerator
The North East's reputation for world-class space research and innovation had been recognised with the announcement of £2.5 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. The funding was awarded to a consortium of academic, civic and industry partners who together would form the North East Space Communications Accelerator.
- i) Collaborative Newcastle Universities Agreement
The Collaborative Newcastle Universities Agreement (CNUA) had been established in 2021 as a civic university agreement between Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, working with local partners to benefit the city. A joint meeting on September 19 involved both Vice-Chancellors and key leaders to discuss progress and next steps, particularly in the priority areas of Social Mobility, Skills Agenda, and Students as Partners.
- j) Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Medical Science
Professor David Burn had announced his intention to step down from his role as Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Faculty of Medical Science at the end of July 2025. A selection committee would be convened to appoint a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and Senate was invited to submit nominations for members to serve on the selection committee by 31 January 2025.
- k) Late News - Artificial Intelligence (AI) Opportunities Action Plan
The Vice-Chancellor reported on the government response to the AI Opportunities Action Plan published on 13 January. Universities would be asked to report on progress against a number of recommendations which would have implications for University operations, research and teaching delivery.
- l) Late News - Coimbra Group
Newcastle University had received an invitation to join the Coimbra Group, the oldest European university network (1985) and one of the best regarded stakeholders at EU and international levels. The group's future aims included amplifying their collective voice on climate issues and sustainability development, on AI in Higher Education and on research security. The shared values and areas of focus between the group and the University suggested it would be mutually beneficial to investigate the opportunity to join the network.

39. **SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 9 DECEMBER 2024**

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 9 December 2024.

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

40. **ATHENA SWAN SUBMISSION**

Received a paper from Professor Judith Rankin, Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

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

Noted that:

- a) The draft Institutional Athena Swan application and action plan covered the five-year period from 1 April 2025 to 31st March 2030 and included a comprehensive set of actions to be implemented over that period. Following discussion at Executive Board it had been agreed to apply for a gold level award.

- b) The action plan had been devised in relation to the current financial climate and included assurance that specific actions could be completed and delivered in alignment with financial sustainability.

41. **ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

Received a paper from Professor Ruth Valentine, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

- a) The report provided a summary of the operation of the University's framework for the management of academic quality and standards, in order to demonstrate that the University was meeting national regulatory requirements in this area.
- b) Since the last annual report to Senate the Office for Students (OfS) had continued to undertake a series of targeted 'quality assessments' of providers across the sector where there were concerns around their meeting of the B conditions. These reports and the OfS thematic reflections on their work to date had been published. The Quality Assurance Agency published in the summer a new Quality Code for higher Education 2024, which was currently being implemented.
- c) The increase in the number of programme withdrawals, as noted in the report, was partly an administrative decision (moving long-term suspensions to withdrawn status), but also a decision to streamline programme choice for students who often reported that the choice was overwhelming due to the large number of programmes offered. Benchmarking indicated that streamlining the University's offer would also align us with partner institutions.

Resolved that Senate approve the report for onward submission to Council.

42. **DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT**

Received a paper from Professor Ruth Valentine, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

- a) Institutional-level degree awarding patterns in 2023-24 were similar to pre-Covid levels. More variation was found in relation to the patterns at a level of an academic unit as would be expected, and within these there were likely to be further disciplinary differences, particularly in large and multi-disciplinary academic units.
- b) The University Education Committee had endorsed the use of an internal benchmark as proposed to identify variations in degree outcomes over time and agreed that this should be included in the Committee's developing operational KPIs.
- c) The international degree awarding gap was noted, including the reduction in the gap in 2023-24. Further analytical work would be required to understand and address any contributing factors.

43. **NEWCASTLE STUDENTS' UNION IMPACT REPORT**

Received a report and presentation from the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Students' Union.

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

Noted that:

- a) Despite challenges during the 2023-24 academic year, including on-going inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, students continued to maintain high engagement with the Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU) and remained positive about their experiences, with 98 per cent of students satisfied or above, and 89 per cent agreeing they would recommend NUSU to a friend.
- b) Key highlights of the year had included the impressive performance of sports teams with recognition given to the leaders of University sports clubs and the NUSU team who facilitated and supported the delivery of all student-led sport at Newcastle University.
- c) A Strategic Review would be undertaken during the 2025-26 academic year and the NUSU leadership team would seek to gather and analyse feedback from students in a more data-driven way to support the review.
- d) Sector benchmarking remained an area of development for students' unions, to ensure partner institutions had useful comparison data and consistent measurement standards to encourage shared and best practices.

44. RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS AND COPYRIGHT POLICY

Received a paper from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation.

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

Noted that:

- a) The policy had undergone minor amendments and was submitted to Senate for review. A change record had been included with the document for ease of reference.

Resolved that Senate approve the proposed amendments.

45. WHITE SPACE

Members of Senate were invited to raise other academic matters for further investigation and consideration.

46. ACADEMIC DISTINCTIONS – HONORARY DEGREES (STATUTE 29(4))

Reported that, in accordance with Statute 29(4), Senate may grant honorary degrees.

Received a report from the meeting of Honorary Degrees Committee which took place on 14 December 2023.

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

Resolved that Senate approve the award of honorary degrees to the individuals recommended by the Committee.

47. 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 K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

***Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus or Professor Emerita be conferred on:
Professor Ann Daly with effect from 1 February 2025
Professor Stephen Graham with effect from 28 February 2025
Professor Gill Rowlands with effect from 31 January 2025***

48. RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Received the University's Annual Report on Research Integrity
[Circulated with the agenda as Document I. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

49. SENATE EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY REPORT

Received the annual report on the Senate effectiveness survey.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document M. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

50. NORTHUMBRIAN UNIVERSITIES MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

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

51. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE

Received a report from the meeting of:

- a) University Education Committee: 21 November 2024
[Circulated with the agenda as Document O. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
- b) University Research and Innovation Committee: 17 September 2024
[Circulated with the agenda as Document P. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

52. UNIVERSITY CLOSURE DATES

Received the University Closure Dates for 2025-26.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document Q. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

53. 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 R. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]