

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

2 June 2025

Present: Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Jasmine Banks, Derek Bell, Leo David, Will Garton, Arun Harish, Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Lisa Hunter, Dr Anjam Khan, Alex Lamb, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Claire Morgan, Dr Meiko O'Halloran, Marta Phillips, Emma Reay, Colin Riordan, Angela Russell, Mags Scott (Deputy Chair of Council), Nitin Shukla.

In attendance: Dr Joanna Elson and Dr Sarah Joyce (Observers), Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services), and Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office).

Apologies: Linda Conlon, Bill MacLeod, Adam Serfontein.

MINUTES

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received in advance of the meeting.

62. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 31 March 2025.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document A. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 31 March 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed.

The Chair thanked Leo David and Jasmine Banks for their excellent contribution to Council throughout their term as Students' Union sabbatical officers.

63. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an update from the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. Progress against strategic actions for asbestos, competence, and transportation would be considered at the next meeting of Health and Safety Committee on 19 June.
2. The Department for Transport had visited the University on Wednesday 2 April 2025 to audit arrangements for managing the transport of high consequence dangerous goods under the Transport of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment Regulations 2009. This currently only applied to waste consignments arising from the Bedson Building. The facilities were judged to be fully compliant.

64. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. The Chair reported on their attendance at the recent Westminster launch of Universities for North East England on 12 May and at the University's Honorary Fellowships ceremony on 9 May.

65. VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

Received the Vice-Chancellor and President's report. Highlights of this report are provided below.

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

Reported that:

1. Immigration White Paper

The government had published an Immigration White Paper on Monday 12 May 2025. The terms of the Graduate route remained unchanged, though the duration had been reduced from 24 months to 18 months. The introduction of a 6% levy on higher education provider income earned through international tuition fees was being 'explored', with an indication that the money generated would be reinvested into higher education and the skills system.

2. Industrial action

On 22 May 2025, the University received official notification from UCU of their intention to take further discontinuous strike action on 30 days between 6 June and 17 July. This is in relation to the dispute concerning 'job losses across the institution; failure to rule out compulsory redundancies; detrimental impact of cuts on staff, including increases in workload, and its impact on health and wellbeing'. The union had also announced its intention to hold a ballot for further action beyond the current mandate to include a marking and assessment boycott.

The University had submitted a reportable event to the Office for Students on 7 May 2025. A report was provided to the regulator regarding the second period of industrial action announced by UCU for 21 days taking place through April, May, and June. Having considered the criteria for reportability, and the OfS guidance on disruption to marking and assessment, the University took the decision to report the disruption for its potential to materially affect the education of students in the subject areas impacted. A further update would be provided to Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

3. Supreme Court Ruling

On 16 April 2025, the UK Supreme Court had ruled that the legal definition of a woman should be based on biological sex. University colleagues had been proactively considering the implications of the ruling including discussions with representatives of the University's Rainbow network and across the sector in providing feedback to the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Internally, the University had confirmed that access to toilets and changing spaces at the University continued as normal, and the University's facilities remained inclusive and compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and recent legal guidance. Student Unions were also working on a collected response to the ruling. Further guidance was expected from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in summer 2025.

4. Sector Efficiency

UniversitiesUK had published a report into university transformation and efficiency,

aiming to demonstrate a proactive, sector-led response to the financial challenges it faces, as a counterpart to its advocacy for increased financial support from governments in all four nations of the UK in the run-up to the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review; and to position the sector as partners with government. The report emphasized the importance of university collaboration and made the case for a sector body to provide coordination and support for structural changes in England.

5. Joint Institute for Clean Hydrogen

Work had progressed following the Prime Minister's announcement in December 2024 on the development of a Joint Institute for Clean Hydrogen (JICH). This was a collaborative initiative led by Newcastle University with Northumbria, Durham, Teesside, Cranfield Universities, and a consortium of Saudi universities and research organisations led by KFUPM in Saudi Arabia. The institute would integrate hydrogen research and innovation with a focus on commercialisation pathways, promising significant economic and environmental benefits. Initially, the JICH was an opportunity to secure large-scale research funding from both UK and Saudi governments. It would commence as a virtual entity led from the School of Engineering at Newcastle University, with the potential to leverage further collaboration and research in clean hydrogen technology. Senate endorsed the creation of the JICH at its meeting on 30 April, noting that final approval would be sought from Council. This would be contingent upon a business case and the completion of an updated due diligence evaluation and an equality impact assessment.

6. Engagement and Place Awards

On Wednesday 23 April, the University had hosted its fifth annual Engagement and Place Awards ceremony, where colleagues and students from across the institution came together with University partners in a showcase of exemplary engagement practice.

7. Colleague Success

Professor Clare Bamba (Professor of Public Health) and Professor Rob Taylor (Professor of Mitochondrial Pathology) had been elected to the Fellowship of the Academy of Medical Sciences.

Professor Cathrine Degnen (School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) had been elected to become a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences for her substantial contributions to social science for public benefit.

Professor Judith Rankin (Population Health Sciences Institute) had been made a Senior Investigator with the National Institute for Health and Care Research for her significant impact on health and care.

8. Appointment of a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences

Professor Quentin Anstee (currently Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation) had been appointed as the next Pro-Vice-Chancellor Medical Sciences for an initial period of five years, effective from 1 August 2025. Professor Anstee would take over from Professor David Burn upon his retirement from the role in July.

9. Workforce Resizing

At its meeting on 20 January 2025, Council had agreed a business case for workforce resizing for the achievement of £20m savings in recurring staff costs from 2025-26. Following the closure of a further Voluntary Severance scheme, £3.8m in academic staff

cost savings were still required. Business cases for a redundancy procedure had been produced by each Faculty, and the deadline for applications for enhanced Voluntary Redundancy had closed on 1 June. Executive Board would take a decision on whether it was necessary to progress to the Compulsory Redundancy stage after considering VR applications and alternative proposals produced by academic units and trade unions. In shaping workforce resizing proposals, the University had been guided by a clear set of principles: protecting the integrity of our teaching, ensuring the continued delivery of our degree portfolio, and maintaining the excellence of our research across its diverse subject areas.

Several letters expressing concern and opposition to the redundancy procedure had been received from colleagues, trade union members, and external individuals.

At its meeting on 6 May 2025, Executive Board agreed that the cases for redundancy would not result in a change of academic character and mission, meaning that Statute 52(2), which required Senate to have opportunity to make representations to Council about redundancy proposals, would not be invoked. Notwithstanding this decision, as resolved by Senate at its meeting on 19 February 2025, an extraordinary meeting of Senate had been arranged for Senate to receive the business cases for redundancies. Senate was invited to consider the business cases and to consider whether to make representations to Council about their implications for the academic character and mission of the University. A report from this meeting had been submitted to Council.

Members of Senate wished to convey the view to Council that the business cases and the associated voluntary and potentially compulsory redundancies did have the potential to impact upon the overall academic character of the University due to the deleterious effect on reputation and colleague morale, and the effects of a reduced capacity for research that would impact REF/QS, grant capture, the attraction and retention of high-performing staff, and the recruitment of talented students. Members of Senate also expressed concern that redundancies might have a bearing on academic character by undermining the University's capability for delivering on its commitments in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Some members of Senate and Council sought assurance about the University's Equality Analysis process. It was acknowledged that colleague disclosure rates were low in relation to some protected characteristics despite University efforts to encourage colleagues to disclose; however, the Equality Analysis process requires scenarios and mitigations to be considered for all protected characteristics, irrespective of whether they are disclosed.

The report from Senate also expressed support for Senate and Council working together more closely to deliver the academic strategy of the University, to be facilitated by a joint meeting. Council agreed that it would welcome the opportunity to work with Senate, particularly in the context of the transformation programme and academic strategy, but also on the shared understanding of roles.

Members of Council also agreed that financial understanding needed to be embedded more thoroughly across the range of University activities. Given the continuing uncertainty in the financial outlook for higher education for the years ahead, the University needed to keep working to restore a sustainable balance between income and expenditure and this could not be achieved by using cash reserves or repurposing capital expenditure.

Council encouraged the University to accelerate progress with the transformation programme, an update on which would be provided at Council's next meeting in July.

66. RISK MANAGEMENT

Received an update on risks relating to the University's strategic objectives.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted:

1. The University now had four red rated risks: SR1 (Educational offer does not meet expectations), SR8 (International student recruitment), SR9 (financial viability in the long term) and SR11 (cyber, data and information security). Executive Board were closely monitoring actions in place to mitigate risk impact.
2. The implications of AI for University activities had been embedded within the risk register. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee would discuss this topic in detail.

Council confirmed that it had received sufficient assurance that the risks facing the University were being managed appropriately.

STRATEGY AND KPIs

67. BUDGET

The Chief Financial Officer and Honorary Treasurer introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D1-4. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received the proposed University Budget for 2025-26 and three-year financial plan. Both had been reviewed in detail and endorsed by Finance Committee.
2. In light of the current financial position of the University and the challenges faced by the wider higher education sector the budget setting process had been extremely challenging. The principles used to guide budget setting were those agreed by Council in December 2024 as part of the Medium Term Forecast approval.
3. An operating deficit of £13.9m in 2025-26 was proposed, improving in plan years back to break even by 2027-28. Actions taken to reduce recurring staff and non-staff costs by £20m and £10m respectively had been fully embedded in the 2025-26 budget. It was acknowledged that a deficit position was unsustainable in the long-term if the University was to return to a surplus position. The transformation programme would develop the plans to deliver this target surplus.
4. Current data indicated a further material reduction in international postgraduate intake (PGT) for September 2025, and therefore a budget scenario had been adopted that provided protection for up to a -30% reduction in international PGT. Given the impact of the assumptions on student recruitment, Council was provided with a separate paper on international student recruitment scenario and risks.
5. The University was seeking to mitigate the risk of reliance on recruitment from China by exploring the development of transnational education in China and other territories, and by monitoring intelligence about opportunities arising from geopolitical decisions elsewhere in the world. Council noted the potential impact on recruitment from overseas of industrial action, which could be reputationally damaging.

6. Whilst the home undergraduate fee would increase for 2025-26, the benefit had been fully eroded by changes to national insurance contributions. Further uplifts to home undergraduate fees were uncertain and had therefore been excluded from planning assumptions.
7. There would be a higher level of certainty on both final student numbers and any impacts of the HE spending review when revisiting the three-year plan as part of the Medium Term Forecast in November/December 2025.
8. Planned investment into capital projects had been reduced, and was largely allocated to existing commitments of IT network replacement and redevelopment of Castle Leazes, which were of critical importance in improving resilience and income generation respectively. All other capital spend would be restricted until there was certainty on student recruitment risks.
9. The financial plan would ensure that cash reserves would continue to be carefully managed and remain within financial covenant levels.
10. Student Recruitment Strategy Committee had proposed to Council a fee increase of 3% for International Students and 2% for Postgraduate Taught Home students based on latest market data. In a small number of cases fees had been lowered or frozen following a review of peer benchmarking data. Council noted the Student Union's opposition to the proposed increase in international student fees. The Students' Union advised that the increase could have an adverse impact on the cost of living and participation in student activities.
11. The University would reflect on approaches to the presentation and communication of its budget situation in order to enhance its understanding by the wider University community.

Resolved that Council approve the University budget for 2025-26 and three year financial plan, including proposed tuition fee increases.

REPORTS

68. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The Registrar introduced a paper.

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

Noted that:

1. The paper provided an update on changes to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill following the change in government, in addition to an updated Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech. The government had indicated that the legislation would take effect on 1 August 2025. Minor amendments had been made to the Code and the new version would supersede the one approved by Council in June 2024.
2. The revised Code of Conduct would be promoted to colleagues and students in the new academic year. The principles of free speech applied across all of the University's campuses but the 2023 legislation, including the complaints scheme, was specific to the UK. An Equality Impact Assessment had been initiated and was available on request.

3. It had been agreed with Newcastle University Students' Union that the Code of Conduct would apply to both the University and Students' Union, and would incorporate the external speaker policy, however there were separate appeal routes for the University and Students' Union.
4. In addition to the Code of Practice there were a number of existing University policies that would require an update to reflect the new act. These policies would make it clear that in case of any conflict, the Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech would take precedence.
5. As the Code was one of the University's governing documents, the Office for Students would be notified that a revised Code of Conduct had been approved.

Resolved that Council approve the revised Code of Conduct for Freedom of Speech.

69. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Honorary Treasurer introduced a report from the meeting of Finance Committee of 22 May 2025.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had recommended that the budget and financial plan be endorsed for approval by Council (see Minute 67). Members had expressed disappointment in the planned outturn but acknowledged that the plan reflected the best available scenario while preserving operational delivery and transformation momentum. The President of the Student Union had noted their mandate to object to endorsement of the budget on the basis of the tuition fee increases proposed.
2. The Committee received an update on the Castle Leazes redevelopment. Planning approval had now been secured, but delays had resulted in inflationary cost pressures. The projected net investment had increased to £63–65 million, up from the £60 million previously approved by Council in January 2024. Despite cost increases, the project remained within its planned return on investment thresholds. The additional £3-5 million investment required to do so was affordable and aligned with the overall capital plan.
3. The Committee had also considered an update on the Workforce Resizing process, and endorsed a revised Capital Expenditure Policy.

Resolved that Council approve Finance Committee's recommendation to maintain the University's 49% stake in the Castle Leazes Joint Venture and authorise the necessary funding adjustment, which had been included in the budget, noting the investment remained strategically important and continued to achieve the planned return.

70. REPORT FROM NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Received a report from Nominations Committee.

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

Noted that:

1. The Committee had agreed to recommend to Council the re-appointment of three individuals as lay members of Council, as well as appointments/re-appointments of

members of University committees appointed by Council, all for the period covering 1 August 2025 until 31 July 2028.

Resolved that Council approve:

The re-appointment of Alex Lamb, Bill MacLeod and Nitin Shukla as members of Council;

The re-appointment of Alex Lamb as a lay member of Finance Committee appointed by Council;

The re-appointment of Bill MacLeod as Chair of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee;

The re-appointment of Marta Phillips as a lay member of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee appointed by Council;

The re-appointment of Nitin Shukla as a lay member of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Museum and Gallery Board, and Remuneration Committee appointed by Council;

The re-appointment of Professor Andy Husband as Chair of the Radiation Protection Sub-Committee.

RESERVED BUSINESS

71. RE-APPOINTMENT OF A UNIVERSITY DEAN

Received a paper proposing the re-appointment of a University Dean.

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

Noted that:

1. In accordance with Senate Standing Order 10, the Vice-Chancellor may recommend to Senate and Council the re-appointment of an existing Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor or University Dean and the period of the re-appointment.
2. It was proposed to extend the appointment of Professor David Kennedy as Dean of Digital Education until 1 September 2030 to allow the University to advance plans in developing and implementing the new Education strategy, where online learning will play a significant and integral part. Senate had endorsed the re-appointment at its meeting on 30 April.

Resolved that Council approve the re-appointment of Professor David Kennedy as Dean of Digital Education until 1 September 2030.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

72. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

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

73. SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF SENATE, 30 APRIL 2025

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

74. REPORTED BUSINESS

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