NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

7 July 2025

Present: Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Professor Derek Bell, Linda Conlon, Will Garton, Arun Harish, Ilsa Hartley, Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Bill MacLeod, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Claire Morgan, Dr Meiko O'Halloran, Marta Phillips, Emma Reay, Professor Colin Riordan, Angela Russell, Mags Scott (Deputy Chair of Council), Adam Serfontein, Nitin Shukla, Gina Tindale.

In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), and Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office).

Apologies: Lisa Hunter, Dr Anjam Khan, Alex Lamb.

M I N U T E S

75. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

76. **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 2 June 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 2 June 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed.

77. **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Received an update from the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. A meeting of University Health and Safety Committee had taken place on 19 June. All ten strategic actions for the academic year had now been completed.

2. A reduction in the number of accidents and incidents being reported had been noted. This followed several years of increased reporting following continued efforts to increase awareness. A 5-year review would be undertaken, and a report would be provided to University Health and Safety Committee in October.

3. The results from internal HASMAP audits had continued to see a general improvement on the previous audits undertaken.

4. A Chemical Amnesty had been undertaken to remove unused and legacy waste. Committee members considered this positive in terms of future learning despite the need to remove c.2,000 legacy items of unused stock.

78. **CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

Noted that:

1. The Chair welcomed Ilsa Hartley (President, Newcastle University Students' Union) and Gina Tindale (Academic Officer, Newcastle University Students' Union) to their first meeting of Council.

79. **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. King's Birthday Honours

The following individuals associated with the University had been recognised in the King's Birthday Honours list:

Dame	Chi Onwurah. Member of Parliament for Newcastle Central and West and honorary member of Newcastle University Court. For Political and Public Service.
OBE	Judith Rankin. Professor of Maternal and Child Health in the Population Health Sciences Institute. For services to Maternal and Child Health and Research Inclusion.

2. Industrial action

Members of Council had received the email circulated on Friday 27 June announcing that the local trade union dispute had ended by mutual agreement.

3. Transnational Education

At its meeting on 17 June, Executive Board had considered options for the establishment of one or more Joint Education Institutes (JEIs) in China in the context of broader TNE developments globally, and particularly in IndiaIt was agreed to proceed with the business cases for two JEIs with universities that had demonstrated a deep commitment to partnering with Newcastle. This would put Newcastle in a situation of relative parity with comparable UK universities. Establishing the JEIs would create a considerable opportunity to raise the profile of the University, enhancing reputation and visibility, and boosting research collaboration across all faculties. The proposed mix of programmes for the JEIs remained under discussion to ensure financial and operational stability. It was noted there were established concerns about collaboration with Chinese universities in relation to geopolitical dynamics and trusted research. These risks affected all UK universities engaged with China in educational partnerships and would be factored into due diligence of the final proposals. Full business cases would be brought forward to Finance Committee and Council for approval.

Council endorsed proceeding with the JEIs and noted that a further update would be provided in the autumn.

4. Coimbra Group

Newcastle University had been admitted to the Coimbra Group, a prestigious association of European universities, which expanded its membership to 42 universities, including Newcastle, Leeds and Wroclaw, in Poland. The association leveraged advocacy and collaboration to promote higher education internationalisation, academic collaboration, excellence in learning and research, and service to society.

5. Government Spending Review

On 11 June 2025, the UK government published a spending review, the first multi-year review since 2021, with a focus on research and development and funding that would flow to regions with combined mayoral authorities. Key features included an £86bn research and development funding package over the next four years to support key growth sectors and local growth funds for specific mayoral city regions.

6. Industrial Strategy

On 23 June 2025, the government published its Industrial Strategy setting out a ten-year plan to unlock growth, increase investment and reposition the UK as the best place in the world to do business. The white paper stated that the Industrial Strategy would be “unashamedly place-based” with interventions centred around City Regions and clusters including the North East, working with Mayors and local authorities to align with 10-year Local Growth Plans.

7. QS World Rankings

The University had been ranked 137th in the world, down eight places from last year, and ranked 21st in the UK, down one place from last year.

8. OfS Strategic Priorities Grant

Guidance to the Office for Students from the Secretary of State for Education had been published on 16 May 2025, including an overall reduction of c.7% in funding. Media and journalism courses would no longer receive strategic priorities funding, and funding for overseas study would be removed.

9. Freedom of Speech

On 23 June 2025, the Office for Students published Regulatory Advice Notice 24 on free speech duties under the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. The guidance set out in broad terms how providers might ensure they meet the new duties. The University did not expect any substantive changes would be needed to the Code of Practice approved by Council at its meeting in June 2025. There were however case studies in the new guidance that would require careful consideration, covering for example: arrangements for anonymous reporting; conditions of employment; and contracts associated with sponsored students.

10. Student Experience Rankings

The University had been ranked 1st in the Russell Group and 4th overall in the University Compare Ranking 2026. This was a new ranking that used recommendation scores and student reviews to determine an overall score that was validated by a quantitative scoring system similar to TripAdvisor. Within the ranking, Newcastle had been ranked 1st in the UK for Student Life.

The University had also won top place in the What University Student Choice Awards (WUSCA) in the category of ‘Student Life’. The award recognised all aspects of student life from extra-curricular activities to the general feel of campus.

The University had been ranked joint 31st overall in the Complete University Guide, down five places on the previous year. A total of 12 out of 44 subjects were ranked in the top 10 nationally.

11. Turing Scheme

The Department for Education (DfE) had confirmed that the 2025/26 national budget for the Turing Scheme (the UK government initiative that provides funding for students to study and work abroad), had been reduced by almost a third from £110m to £78m. The University had anticipated a reduction and expected to be successful in securing just over £1m, which was down from last year but broadly equivalent to 2023/24.

12. Cybersecurity

Executive Board had considered an update on cybersecurity at its meeting on 17 June 2025, and a copy of the report was provided for Council's information. Council was pleased to note the progress being made. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee would hold a detailed discussion of cybersecurity at a subsequent meeting.

13. Colleague Success

Professor Hayley Fowler (School of Engineering) had been awarded a Faraday Discovery Fellowship worth £8m over 10 years by the Royal Society.

80. **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. There had been no change to the risk scores since the last meeting of Council.

2. The Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS) had come into force on 1 July. The scheme was led by the Home Office and aimed to protect the safety and interests of the UK by improving understanding of foreign influence. Awareness raising sessions for colleagues had taken place throughout June.

3. Regarding SR12 'University Estate', Council agreed that it would be useful to gain a better understanding of the market value of property on the estate.

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

STRATEGY AND KPIs

81. **STRATEGIC VISION AND TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME**

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received an update and presentation on work which Executive Board had undertaken, since the joint Council-Executive Board Away Day on 31 March 2025, on refining the strategic vision, agreeing a framework for aligning strengths with opportunities and partnerships, developing a communications and stakeholder engagement plan, and establishing the scope and focus for a transformation programme.

2. Having achieved financial savings required for 2025/26, the University needed to review operations to ensure long-term sustainability. This needed to be informed by a long-term vision or 'North Star' to guide decision-making in a volatile environment, with an approach that would actively engage colleagues, students, and stakeholders.

3. In March 2025, the University became a development partner in a growing global community focused on the concept of the 4th Generation University (4GU). This articulated a vision for universities as orchestrators of regional innovation ecosystems, achieving societal and economic impact through partnerships with industry, government, and civil society. It built on the history of Newcastle University and aligned to its core values of social and environmental justice, and to its civic role as an anchor institution.

4. Further work was now needed to set out in more detail what this meant in practice for Newcastle University in the future.

5. In progressing this work, the University was drawing on NU Shape, cross-cutting strategies, and the Behaviour Matters project. Cultural change and performance improvement would begin with the co-creation of shared clarity on purpose and vision, major priorities, and behavioural expectations. This co-creation with colleagues, students and partners adds the "how" to the 'why' and 'what' of the North Star.

6. To support work on the new operating model, Executive Board had launched a transformation programme with distinct areas of focus for strategic change including: the development of new markets; growth of Transnational Education; academic structures, governance and leadership; Professional Services alignment; and optimising and reducing overall size of the estate. In addition to existing internal governance arrangements, an informal advisory group of Council members would be established to support the design of the programme and the implementation of associated projects.

7. Council agreed that there was a need for increased efficiency and productivity and for clear prioritisation and articulation of the things that the University would stop doing. Whilst a focus on performance management was necessary, this would also pose a significant challenge. Success would depend on all stakeholders working from a shared basis of understanding of culture and behaviour.

8. Council reflected on the challenge of stakeholder engagement in communicating the University's key strengths and the transformation programme, and for the latter to be accompanied by a communication plan using language that was relatable and understandable.

9. Council requested a phased timeline for each of the transformation programme workstreams and evidence to demonstrate that the work was deliverable and would realise benefits to the student experience as well as cost savings.

Resolved that Council endorsed plans for the transformation programme linked to the Strategic Vision.

82. **STRATEGY PERFORMANCE**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Council received a summary of the progress being made against the Vision and Strategy referenced against the high-level KPIs that were used to measure institutional progress. There had been no changes to the KPI ratings since the previous report in December 2024. Student Experience remained the only area with a red rating.

2. Council also received an update on the University's KPI review project, which would propose a revised set of institutional KPIs early in the 2025/26 academic year. This would be accompanied by a change to the timing of KPI reports to better align with reporting, business and data cycles, as well as strategic risk management. A draft version of the new KPI set would be available for Council's consideration and comment in Autumn 2025 and, subject to approval, the first formal report on the new KPI set would be in March/April 2026.

REPORTS

83. REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Honorary Treasurer introduced a report from the meeting of Finance Committee of 2025.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered the University's Financial Report for the quarter ending 30 April 2025. The full-year statutory result was forecast to be a broadly break-even position.

2. The Quarter 3 position included an accrual of £3m student compensation payments related to recent teaching disruption due to strike action.

3. Cash balance position remained strong, taking into account planned material outflows relating to workforce changes and payments to research collaborators.

4. The Committee had endorsed changes to the wording of the section of the Endowments Investments Policy relating to exclusion criteria and indirect investments and recommended that these be approved by Council.

Resolved that Council approved the proposed changes to the Ethical Investment Policy.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

84. REPORT FROM RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

85. SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF SENATE, 25 JUNE 2025
[Circulated with the agenda as Document H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

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