

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

8 December 2025

Present: Mags Scott (Deputy Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Derek Bell (Lay Member), Linda Conlon (Lay Member), Arun Harish (Lay Member), Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Ilsa Hartley (President, Students' Union), Alex Lamb (Lay Member), Bill MacLeod (Lay Member), Professor Rhiannon Mason (Elected Senate Member), Claire Morgan (Lay Member), Dr Meiko O'Halloran (Elected Senate Member), Emma Reay (Elected Professional Services Member), Colin Riordan (Lay Member), Angela Russell (Honorary Treasurer), Nitin Shukla (Lay Member), Gina Tindale (Academic Officer, Students' Union).

Marta Phillips (Lay Member) attended via Teams.

In attendance: Lindsey Lockey (Chief Executive of the Student's Union) for Item 21 only, Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services), and Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager).

Apologies: Will Garton (Lay Member), Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Adam Serfontein (Lay Member)

MINUTES

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none to report.

12. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 13 October 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 13 October 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed.

13. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received the University's Annual Health and Safety Report.

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

Noted that:

1. The University had all the necessary fundamental elements of a robust Health and Safety management system in place to ensure regulatory and best practice compliance. The strategic five-year plan was based on a gap analysis of all the necessary elements of the University's Health and Safety management and governance arrangements and was in its first year for this reporting period.
2. Accident rate trends were provided for a five-year period up to 2024-25, and it was confirmed the number of reported accidents was within the expected range considering the University's size and complexity as an organisation.

3. The Fire Service had not attended the University for any fire alarm activations across the 2024-25 academic year. This was an outstanding achievement and was a credit to the current fire management processes and colleagues who supported and facilitated those processes.
4. In the 2024-2025 academic year, the Occupational Health Team undertook a total of 695 new management referrals and 2,146 referral reviews. The improvement in this area was in part due to closer collaboration with colleagues in the faculties and enhanced cross-University networks.
5. Building security and fire safety would continue as areas of focus with relevant objectives developed accordingly within next year's Health and Safety plan and strategy. Future reports would include sector benchmarking for reference. Work had already commenced to ensure the University would be compliant with Martyn's Law, and specific actions would be developed once the government had published the relevant guidelines and regulations.

14. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. The Newcastle University Council-Students' Union Speed Networking Session would take place on Monday 19 January from 4:00 – 5:30pm in the Bamburgh Room of the Hadrian Building.

15. 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 C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Reported that:

1. Queen Elizabeth Prize

The Vice-Chancellor was delighted to share that the University had been awarded the UK's highest national honour for universities recognising its work transforming the understanding, diagnosis and care of people with Dementia with Lewy bodies. The prestigious Queen Elizabeth Prizes for Higher and Further Education (formerly known as the Queen's Anniversary Prizes) were awarded by the monarch every two years in recognition of world-class excellence and achievement at academic institutions. Built on the visionary early work of scientific and clinical pioneers at Newcastle University, the Prize recognised more than three decades of ground-breaking research and unwavering dedication that had significantly advanced the diagnosis and care of individuals and families affected by Dementia with Lewy bodies. This award was a great honour and a testament to the outstanding achievement of the Dementia with Lewy bodies team and the wider University community.

2. Budget

The government's Autumn Budget, announced on 26 November, had confirmed the introduction of an international student levy in 2028-29 at an initial flat rate of £925 per international student to be uprated with inflation and collected by the Office for Students. The cost would be significantly lower than under the original 6 per cent proposals, and the Treasury confirmed that sector lobbying had made a material difference to the

outcome. Details of the levy were subject to a short consultation and would not be passed into legislation until next year. According to the Treasury, the majority of revenue raised from the levy would pay for the reintroduction of maintenance grants.

In a separate policy document, the Department for Education had confirmed that maintenance grants would provide a maximum of £1k per year for the most disadvantaged students to begin in 2028-29. Using the Office for Budget Responsibility's inflation forecasts, the proposed maximum undergraduate tuition fee in England would increase to £9,793 in 2026-27, and £10,055 in 2027-28, subject to parliamentary approval.

Changes to introduce national insurance on salary-sacrificed pension contributions above £2k per year would impact universities, with UCEA's initial estimate suggesting this would cost the sector at least £50m. The government had earlier announced real-terms protection for core QR and HEIF budgets over the course of the Spending Review period with a cumulative increase of over £425m. Detailed allocations from UKRI were expected in December. The North East was one of seven mayoral authorities that would be given at least £13bn funding to invest in skills, business support and infrastructure via integrated settlements from 2026-27 to 2029-30.

Council resolved to approve the new undergraduate tuition fees for 2026-27 and 2027-28, subject to parliamentary approval, which would apply to new and continuing students.

3. National Student Survey

Since the last meeting of Council on 13 October 2025, the below actions had been implemented, or were planned for implementation, in response to the University's National Student Survey (NSS) results.

- The Vice-Chancellor had established a new TEF Scorecards and Student Experience Monitoring Group to scrutinise performance of Schools and their quota groups against Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) expectations, while also hosting conversations with the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education and the Dean of Students to understand actions being taken at a local level and to identify actions that may be beneficial at an institutional level.
- Key policy requirements of the Leading Edge Curriculum relating to the operation of assessment had been implemented early to have an impact from 2025-26. Academic units will monitor compliance to allow Heads of Academic Units to take action if expectations are not being met.
- All academic units were now required to ensure that a space is made available in Canvas (Virtual Learning Environment) to share student feedback received, and to record a response from the unit.
- Executive Board had agreed to establish a University task and finish group during 2025-26 to address key weaknesses in student voice and support for the student education experience. The University and Newcastle University Students' Union had jointly commissioned an external review of student representation; the discovery stage had completed and identifying recommendations for change had commenced.
- End-of-module evaluation would be piloted in Semester 2 in three Schools; wider implementation would follow on as a component of the Leading Edge Curriculum

review and redesign to take place across the 2026-27 academic year.

- The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education was collaborating closely with the Faculty Deans of Education and Education Cross-Cutting Deans to identify actions for 2026-27 to support a step-change in the overall student experience.

4. Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper

The long-awaited Post-16 White Paper had been published on 20 October 2025. In a statement to Parliament, the Secretary of State had set out the government's commitment to building a world-class skills system that breaks down the barriers to opportunity, meets the needs of students and employers, drives economic growth, and improves lives across the country.

In the statement, the Secretary of State had laid out a challenge to universities to drive up access, drive out low quality provision and improve collaboration, while pushing forward on leading innovation and research. It was confirmed that the maximum tuition fee cap would increase in line with forecast inflation in academic years 2026-27 and 2027-28 and maintenance loans would increase in line with forecast inflation every academic year.

5. Times Higher Education World University Rankings

Newcastle University had moved up in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and was now positioned 144th globally. This latest ranking, which placed Newcastle in the UK's top 20, represented an improvement of 13 places from last year's guide. Newcastle University had achieved strong results in several of the indicators that Times Higher Education uses to compile the ranking, including Research Quality where the University rose to 65th place in the world and International Outlook, which measured the proportion of international staff, proportion of international students and the scale of international co-authorship, where the University was ranked 131st. Notably, the University had been ranked 5th in the UK for its ability to help industry with innovations and inventions.

6. Office for Students Strategy for 2025 to 2030

The Office for Students (OfS) had published a strategy for 2025–2030 which set out a regulatory framework focused on delivering exemplary regulation in the interests of students. OfS would ensure providers deliver high-quality education and strong outcomes, intervening where standards fall short. Equality of opportunity remained central, with targeted measures to close gaps in access, attainment, and progression.

The strategy reinforced the role of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as a key mechanism for assessing and promoting quality, though plans to make TEF “more routine and widespread” had been scaled back following consultation. Other notable changes included a stronger emphasis on collaboration with students and institutions, removal of the proposed Quality Risk Register, and softer language around consumer rights—shifting from regulatory enforcement to student empowerment.

7. Higher Education Innovation Funding Review

Research England had confirmed plans for implementing a programme of review and associated adjustments for Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF), focusing on delivering the government's priority mission of driving economic growth, as directed through guidance received from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. The HEIF review and associated adjustments followed a period of

evaluation and would incorporate longer-term learning from the 2022 to 2023 Knowledge Exchange review and the development of the Knowledge Exchange Framework.

8. Convocation

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that Shah Yaseen Ali had been appointed as Chair of Convocation following an election which closed on 31 October 2025, and the term of appointment was for a period of three years in the first instance. Yaseen graduated from Newcastle University in 2023 with a degree in Law and served as President of Newcastle University Students' Union from 2023-2024.

9. Transnational Education

Executive Board had been monitoring the development of transnational education projects and an update would be provided to Council in the 19 January meeting.

10. Late News - Ballot for Industrial Action

The Vice-Chancellor reported all three trade unions had recently balloted for industrial action, but the required threshold had not been met and it was now unlikely that industrial action would take place during the remainder of the current academic year.

11. Equality of Opportunity for Disabled Students

The Office for Students (OfS) had published an Insight Brief exploring the experiences of disabled students in higher education. In the report, the OfS found that disabled students' experience of higher education is persistently found to be poorer than their non-disabled peers. Work was underway to evaluate the experience of disabled students at Newcastle University and further discussion would take place at the Partnership Committee to identify any arising actions for implementation.

16. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Chair of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and the Registrar provided an update.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book]

Noted that:

1. The Strategic Risk Register had been updated following review by risk owners and relevant leadership teams, and by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.
2. There had been no change to risk scores since the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee meeting in October. The University had four red rated risks, SR1 (Educational offer does not meet expectations), SR8 (International student recruitment), SR9 (the University is not financially viable) and SR11 (cyber, data and information security). Executive Board were closely monitoring actions in place to mitigate risk impact.
3. It had been agreed that SR12 (University Estate (physical and digital) is not suitable for current and future needs) would be revised to become two separate risks, one each for the digital and physical estate. The updated risks would be presented to Executive Board in January 2026.
4. The Office for Students (OfS) had sent a letter to University Chairs of Council in November highlighting five emerging risks for the sector. Those risks had been cross-referenced with the University's Strategic Risk Register and the Assurance Framework for OfS Conditions. Executive Board had also considered the risks highlighted to confirm they were sufficiently

represented in the Strategic Risk Register or within the Assurance Framework for OfS Conditions and that appropriate mitigations were either in place or in development as required.

5. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had noted that Confucious Institutes (CI) vary widely across Higher Education institutions. The CI at Newcastle University was formed as a joint arrangement with Xiamen University and the institute's primary focus was to promote Chinese language and culture. The CI was not involved in degree-level teaching or research and did not employ academic staff
6. Guidance was still pending relating to the application of the Supreme Court ruling on gender, but work was underway at the University to develop an impact assessment in the interim with special consideration given to living spaces, changing areas and toilets
7. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had recently received a comprehensive update regarding the University's digital infrastructure and cyber security. The Committee had been reassured by significant progress made towards developing and implementing an Accountability Framework and the resulting increase in NUIT-managed digital estate ensuring more robust controls and oversight.

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

17. STRATEGY UPDATE AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced a presentation and discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. The University's high-level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) offered an overview of strategy implementation organised into the four interconnected cross-cutting areas of: Education for Life, Research for Discovery and Impact, Engagement and Place, and Global. An attached schedule and report illustrated the overall performance and profile of the 13 KPIs.
2. Council also received an update regarding progress towards finalising a new set of institutional KPIs which would be submitted to Council for consideration and approval in January 2026. Further discussion on alignment with the University Vision and Strategy refresh would take place at the March Away Day.
3. Discussed how to account for research specialisation across the wider sector and in line with government spending, while also not limiting the University's ability to diversify and innovate independently.

Council endorsed the existing institutional Key Performance Indicators and the summary of changes since July 2025.

18. CASTLE LEAZES

The Chief Financial Officer introduced a presentation and discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. The key objectives of the Castle Leazes project were reviewed, and it was noted that following the last meeting of Council, the Joint Venture (JV) pre-conditions had all been completed and additional external review had provided assurance relating to the transaction as a whole. Executive Board and Finance Committee had each recommended the formation of the Joint Venture.
2. The final contract had been reviewed by an external legal partner on behalf of the University, and it was noted the contract had included fixed construction cost, key delivery milestones, adequate liquidated damages and liability protections. Unite Students had confirmed the contract included commercially acceptable terms and was also in line with their recent large-scale development contracts. The University's external auditors had also reviewed the JV documentation for additional oversight.
3. The debt contract with the Lender was now in a finalised form, and had been negotiated on behalf of the JV by Unite, in their role as the Development Manager. The University was regularly updated and involved throughout the contract development and the due diligence undertaken by the Lender.
4. Student First had been engaged by the University to provide an external assurance review of the project. The scope of the review had included project governance, achievement of objectives, financial model review, risks and JV structure. Key conclusions included recognising the project had sound governance and offered an attractive financial return for the University and the recommendation to proceed with forming the JV.
5. A financial model had been developed for the JV at the time of the Framework Agreement and the model had been updated for key changes including final construction cost, debt terms, phased opening, weekly rent and contract amends, and operating costs.
6. The Chair recorded thanks to the Chief Financial Officer and his team for their time and resource commitments which had served to ensure the external review could take place.

Council resolved to approve the formation of the joint venture arrangement with Unite Students, subject to satisfactory finalisation of Lender due diligence, and to approve an additional £1m funding for early works.

19. FINANCE REPORT

Received a report from the meeting of Finance Committee held on 1 December 2025 and the Integrated Annual Report 2024-2025

[Circulated with the agenda as Document Gi and Gii. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. Executive Board, with support from Finance Committee and Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had recommended to Council that it had reasonable expectation that the University had adequate resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future and should continue to adopt the going concern basis when preparing the annual accounts
2. The Integrated Annual Report for 2024-25 had been reviewed by Finance Committee with particular focus on the financial performance elements, application of accounting standards and policies and significant matters identified by the external auditor. The Integrated Annual Report had also been considered by Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee at its meeting on 3 December and endorsed for onward approval to Council.

3. The University was required to submit an updated five-year financial forecast to the Office for Students by the end of January 2026. The revised medium-term financial plan had incorporated the impact of the government's November 2025 Budget, including the introduction of the international student levy from 2028-29 and inflationary uplifts to home undergraduate fees. Risks to the revised plan continued to centre on international student recruitment and delivery of transformation programme benefits.
4. The University and the Development Trust had established a Joint Working Group to review the future management of endowed funds. The Development Trust Board had concluded that its donors' interests were best served by combining its funds with the University's under this unified structure.
5. Having reviewed legal options and taken independent advice, the Joint Working Group recommended a formal merger of the Development Trust into the University, with all assets transferred on their existing terms and the Trust then dissolved. King's Council advice had been received, and the possibility of incorporation had been considered but with the final recommendation being to undertake a formal merger.
6. Under the proposed governance arrangements, oversight of investment for all endowed funds would sit with the University's Finance Committee, and a new Endowment Disbursal Committee would be created as a sub-committee of Finance Committee. Under the proposed merger, the University would indemnify trustees against future claims related to their period of service.
7. Accommodation Services was facing substantial increases in operating and investment costs, and below-inflation or frozen rents were not sustainable. A 5 per cent increase had been recommended for 2026–27 across University-owned accommodation, with a reduced 2 per cent uplift for a small number of older sites where conditions did not justify the full price rise.
8. Representatives from Newcastle University Students' Union and members of Council noted that, due to the impact on students, they were opposed to the increase. The proposal was voted on by show of hands to represent a) those not in favour with the rent increase, and; b) those in favour of the rent increase. It was confirmed that the majority vote was in favour of the rent increase as proposed.

Resolved that Council:

- (i) Approve the Medium-Term Forecast.**
- (ii) Approve the proposed merger of the Development Trust with the University's Endowment Fund, with the associated governance arrangements and the indemnification of the trustees, enabling the University and the Trust to proceed to Charity Commission consultation.**
- (iii) Approve the five per cent rent increase for University-owned properties for the 2026-27 academic year, with a reduced 2 per cent uplift for a small number of older sites where conditions did not justify the full price rise.**

20. AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

The Chair of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee introduced the reports.

[Circulated with the agenda as Document Hi and Hii. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. In respect of the year ended 31 July 2025, it was the Committee's opinion that the University's arrangements for risk management, control and governance, sustainability, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness; and management and quality assurance of data

were effective and could be relied upon by Council. The report from the interim Head of Internal Audit had provided reasonable assurance.

2. In line with its terms of reference, Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had received and considered assurance on a variety of topics from various sources, including the University's management, the University's Internal Auditors, and the External Auditors, and believed that the procedures undertaken by the Committee provided a reasonable basis for the expression of this opinion.
3. The Committee recorded their thanks to the Chief Financial Officer and his team for their work in ensuring the financial statements were completed and could be approved in a timely fashion.

Resolved that Council:

- (i) Approve the Annual Report of Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.***
- (ii) Approve the consolidated Financial Statements of the University for the financial year ended 31 July 2025.***

21. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S UNION ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

The Chief Executive and President of the Student's Union introduced the reports.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document J. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. In the annual survey undertaken by Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU), 98 per cent of students had rated the Students' Union as satisfactory or above with the excellent rating rising from 28 to 35 per cent. Engagement levels across all areas had continued to increase with notable success continuing in the Give It A Go programme, as well as within various clubs, societies and volunteering opportunities.
2. NUSU had been awarded SOS-UK accreditation, demonstrating leadership in harm prevention from alcohol and drug use. Work was ongoing to ensure increased awareness and resources were in place to assist students who may be impacted by sexual violence and misconduct.
3. The sports teams had continued to enjoy much success and had again achieved a top ten finish in British Universities and Colleges Sport leagues, as well as securing a fourth consecutive Varsity win against Northumbria University.

RESERVED BUSINESS

22. RE-APPOINTMENT OF PRO-VICE-CHANCELLORS

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a report.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document K. 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 or Pro-Vice-Chancellor and the period of the re-appointment.

Resolved that Council:

- (i) Approve the re-appointment of Professor Jane Robinson as Pro-Vice-Chancellor with the revised title of Pro-Vice-Chancellor Business, Partnerships and Place until 31 December 2030.***
- (ii) Approve the re-appointment of Professor Stephanie Glendinning as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering until 31 July 2031.***

ROUTINE BUSINESS

23. SUMMARY FROM THE MEETING OF SENATE: 19 NOVEMBER 2025

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

24. CHAIR'S CIRCULAR

Resolved that Council approve the updated Modern Slavery Statement.