

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

14 January 2026

- Present:** The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Nigel Harkness, Professor Quentin Anstee, Professor Jo Fox, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Professor Matthew Grenby, Professor Li Li, Professor Jane Robinson, Professor Ruth Valentine (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr Matej Blazek, Professor Nils Braakmann, Professor Daniel Coca, Professor Cathrine Degnen, Dr Joanna Elson, James Geary (Students' Union Opportunities Officer), Ilsa Hartley (Students' Union President), Professor Ian Head, Dr Thorsten Heidersdorf, Professor Anya Hurlbert, Professor David Kennedy, Professor Rene Koglbauer, Professor Rhiannon Mason, Professor Ruth McAreavey, Dr Meiko O'Halloran, Professor Savvas Papagiannidis, Professor Murray Pollock, Dr Jemima Repo, Professor Jo Robinson, Dr Grega Smrkolj, Muriel Snowdon, Professor Emma Stevenson, Gina Tindale (Students' Union Academic Officer), Professor Athanassios Vergados, Dr Laura Woodhouse, and Dr Emily Yarrow.
- In attendance:** Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Rachel Dearlove (Director of Registry and Education Service) for Items 2.2 and 2.3, Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jen Middleton (Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services) and Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager).
- Apologies:** Professor Stuart Edwards, Claire Morgan, Professor Rachel Pain, Professor Candy Rowe, Dr Robert Shaw, Dr Helen St Clair Thompson, Professor Simon Tate, Professor John Wildman and Dr Katharine Wright.

MINUTES

31. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Professor Li Li, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Global, to her first meeting of Senate.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

33. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 19 November 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

34. 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) Queen Elizabeth Prize

The Vice-Chancellor was delighted to share that the University had been awarded the UK's highest national honour for universities. 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 have 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 research team and the wider University community.

b) Budget

The Vice-Chancellor reported on the government's Autumn Budget which had been announced on 26 November and had confirmed the introduction of an international student levy in 2028-29 at an initial flat rate of £925 per international student (above an annual allowance of 220 students), to be uprated with inflation and collected by the Office for Students. The cost would be significantly lower than under the original 6% proposals, and the Treasury had confirmed that sector lobbying had made a material difference to the outcome.

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 undergraduate tuition fee in England would increase to £9,790 in 2026-27, and £10,050 in 2027-28, subject to parliamentary approval.

c) Office for Students Strategy for 2025-2030

The Office for Students had published a strategy for 2025–2030 which set out a regulatory framework focused on delivering exemplary regulation in the interests of students. The strategy reinforced the role of the Teaching Excellence Framework as a key mechanism for assessing and promoting quality. Other notable changes included a stronger emphasis on collaboration with students and institutions, removal of the proposed Quality Risk Register, and more nuanced language around consumer rights.

d) Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

It had been announced on 10 December that REF 2029 would resume with new policies and guidance updates. Strategy, People and Research Environment, weighted at 20%, would replace the previous People, Culture and Environment element. Weightings for the other elements were refined to 55% for Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding and 25% for Engagement and Impact. The University's institutional code of practice would be submitted in early May 2026, and the timeframe for the full REF submission had been confirmed for November 2028.

e) National Student Survey

The Vice-Chancellor reported on actions that had been implemented, or were planned for implementation, in response to the University's National Student Survey results. These actions included the establishment of new TEF Scorecards and Student Experience Monitoring Group to scrutinise school performance against Teaching Excellence Framework expectations, the implementation of key policy requirements of the Leading Edge Curriculum and the agreement to establish a task and finish group to address key challenges in student voice and support for the student education experience.

- f) Transnational Education
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported on progress towards the establishment of Joint Education Institutes (JEIs) with two partner universities in China. The project team was currently working on validating the operational and financial assumptions of the proposed JEIs with Southeast University and Central China Normal University. It was expected that the academic programme portfolio would be finalised by the end of January, and the project was on track for submission to the Ministry of Education in summer 2026, with the first student cohort anticipated in September 2027.
- g) Erasmus Exchange Programme
The Vice-Chancellor reported on the recent government announcement that the UK would re-join the Erasmus student exchange programme in 2027. British students would be able to participate in vocational training placements and sports exchanges across the EU under the Erasmus+ scheme, as well as further education college and university-based study exchange. There was expected to be an international fee waiver for EU students studying at UK universities under the Erasmus scheme, meaning they would pay the equivalent of domestic fees. In return, UK students would continue paying their standard domestic fees at their home university during their year studying in Europe as part of their UK degree courses.
- h) Civic 2.0
Newcastle University was one of five founding partners in Civic 2.0 which was a national campaign to enable UK universities to become an international exemplar of best practice in working with their local partners and to advocate for the role universities have in their places. The campaign included the University of Birmingham, Queen Mary University of London, Midlands Innovation and the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement.
- i) Professor of Civic Engagement
Richard Brabner had been appointed as Visiting Professor of Civic Engagement to increase visibility of the University's work in this area and drive additional impact. Richard had over a decade of experience as a senior leader in the higher education and social purpose sectors and as Visiting Professor, he would lead the University's involvement in the Civic 2.0 campaign to drive economic growth, support communities and provide opportunities.
- j) Institutional Key Performance Indicators
Since 2018, the University had measured performance against a set of 13 KPIs linked to the 4 core strategies, and each KPI was underpinned by a number of performance measures, leading to reporting against 38 metrics. Council and Executive Board had agreed in March 2025 that Institutional KPIs should be reviewed and refined, and internal workshops held over the previous 6 months had identified the following draft measures as the basis for a revised institutional KPI set:
1. Graduate Outcomes
 2. Good Degrees (% 2i and 1st)
 3. NSS performance
 4. Research Income per FTE
 5. Field weighted citations
 6. Global Reputation
 7. KEF performance
 8. Financial Performance
 9. Colleague engagement
 10. Progress towards Net Zero and sustainability targets

Full details of the KPIs, and the underpinning metrics, would be provided to Council at

its meeting on 19th January. It was expected that the updated KPIs would also form the basis for providing regular metrics-based updates to Senate, as has been discussed in previous meetings of Senate, most likely via PowerBI reports.

k) Castle Leazes

Newcastle University and Unite Students, the UK's largest provider of student accommodation, had finalised the formation of their joint venture to develop new accommodation for 2,009 students. The new development would replace the university's former 1,250-bed Castle Leazes accommodation, which was built in the 1960s and demolished last year to make way for a fit for purpose development that would meet today's students' expectations.

l) Senate Representative on Business, Partnerships and Place Committee

Members of Senate had been invited to submit expressions of interest for a vacancy on the Business, Partnerships and Place Committee for members drawn from the membership of Senate.

Resolved that Senate approve the appointment of Professor Murray Pollock as the Senate representative for the Business, Partnerships and Place Committee.

35. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 8 DECEMBER 2025

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 8 December 2025.

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

36. NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE – FOOD SYSTEMS

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

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

Noted that:

- a) A proposed Newcastle University Centre of Research Excellence in Food Systems would join a portfolio of 20 NUCoREs, enabling the University to offer a coherent and distinctive narrative in the area of food systems research and education.
- b) The stated mission was to produce real-world solutions to food systems challenges and to conduct research through meaningful collaborations with cross-sectoral partners. As food systems were shaped by a diverse array of factors and networks, addressing the related challenges required an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach.
- c) Three cross-cutting themes would frame the work within the proposed NUCoRE: sustainability, security and society, and it was noted that the University was uniquely placed to address food systems challenges as colleagues had made significant contributions to topical issues such as reducing food poverty and increasing the sustainability of food supply chains, and those colleagues were also engaged with external partners across government, industry and the third sector.

Resolved that Senate approve the establishment of the Newcastle University Centre for Research Excellence in Food Systems.

37. LEADING EDGE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK: ASSURING THE COMBINED ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

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

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

Noted that:

- a) The ongoing development of sophisticated generative AI tools presented a challenge in ensuring that students could demonstrate they had met the learning outcomes of their programme in an environment where AI could produce sophisticated responses to many types of unsupervised assessment.
- b) With the existing commitment to Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) as supporting policy for the Leading Edge Curriculum, it was proposed to develop a 'stage-gate' set of assessments for each stage and postgraduate taught programme wherein students would demonstrate progress towards or attainment of PLOs in the stage-gate, using methods of assessment that were either 'supervised' or 'assured'.
- c) 'Supervised' referred to assessments undertaken within a secure environment while 'assured' referred to assessment which included supporting documents such as previously submitted and marked drafts alongside a final dissertation, or consecutive lab books alongside a research project. The stage-gate assessments would have to be passed before a student could progress to the next stage or receive an award.
- d) There would be the option of operating a supervised or assured integrated non-credit bearing stage-gate assessment covering the relevant PLOs for the stage or programme, in instances where the stage-gate was not fully incorporated into modular assessments.

Resolved that Senate approve the proposal to adopt stage-gate assessment with supervised, assured and open assessment types as part of the implementation of the Leading Edge Curriculum.

38. LEADING EDGE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK - SECTION 4. CAPSTONE MODULES

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

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

Noted that:

- a) A capstone module was a culminating course in the final stage of an undergraduate degree or a postgraduate taught programme, wherein students would apply knowledge from their entire program through a single project or portfolio of work.
- b) The choice of outputs could be defined by programme teams and where appropriate, co-created with students, and could include dissertation, oral presentation, policy document, creative media or case studies and a collaborative element.

Resolved that Senate approve the proposal to adopt Section 4. Capstone modules as part of the implementation of the Leading Edge Curriculum Framework.

39. ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS

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

[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. 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.

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

40. DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

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

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

Noted that:

- a) Following a change in awarding patterns during the years affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2023-24 there had been a gradual decline in the proportion of 1st and 2nd degrees awarded to the second lowest level in the last 10 years. However, in 2024-25 there had been a reversal of that trend and there had been a 3.7% increase in the number of degrees awarded.
- b) The Office for Student had introduced two new mandatory reportable events to address the risks in the design and use of algorithms for classifying bachelors' degrees following investigations into three higher education providers relating to compliance with condition of registration B4.

Resolved that Senate endorse the statement for onward submission to Council.

41. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE

Received reports from the meetings of:

- a) University Education Committee: 1 October 2025, with appendices
[Circulated with the agenda as Document J. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
- b) University Engagement and Place Committee: 6 November 2025
[Circulated with the agenda as Document K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
- c) University Research and Innovation Committee: 21 October and 9 December 2025, with appendices
[Circulated with the agenda as Document L. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

- a) University Education Committee had received updates on the Teaching Excellence Framework and actions undertaken in response to the National Student Survey and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. The Committee had also approved the final version of the Qualification, Credit and Programme Design Framework. Members of Senate noted the importance of retaining optionality while also ensuring students were not overwhelmed with choice. Modelling had been undertaken to understand the impact of the move to the 20-credit base and more information about the pilot project would be provided to Senate in June 2026.
- b) University Engagement and Place Committee had been renamed as the Business, Partnerships and Place Committee to reflect the University's commitment to external partnerships and business innovation, within the Next Generation Newcastle initiative. The Engagement and Place Awards (which may also be renamed) were scheduled to

take place on 30 April and the annual Discover Festival had been confirmed for 5 June.

- c) University Research and Innovation Committee had discussed research finances, cost recovery and Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC). Following those discussions a series of recommendations had been identified which would result in the formation of a working group for implementation.

42. **WHITE SPACE**

Noted that:

- a) It was noted that a discussion of cross-institutional level actions taken in relation to the University's National Student Survey results would be welcomed by members of Senate, as it would be helpful to consider those actions in relation to the work that was currently in progress within schools.
- b) The 25 February meeting of Senate would be cancelled. Instead, an informal discussion for Senate members would be convened on the Academic Shape of the University within the context of Next Generation Newcastle. Further information including meeting location would be shared accordingly. Routine business would resume as normal in the 29 April meeting.

43. **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 10 December 2025.

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

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

44. **RESEARCH INTEGRITY**

Received the annual report.

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

45. **UNIVERSITY CLOSURE DATES**

Received the University Closure Dates for 2026-27.

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

46. **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.

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