

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

SENATE

17 September 2025

- Present:** The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair), Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Professor Quentin Anstee, Professor Jo Fox, Professor Stephanie Glendinning, Professor Matthew Grenby, Professor Ruth Valentine, Professor Chris Whitehead (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr Matej Blazek, Professor Nils Braakmann, Professor Cathrine Degnen, Professor Daniel Coca, 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, Claire Morgan, Professor Anoop Nayak, Dr Meiko O'Halloran, Professor Savvas Papagiannidis, Dr Jemima Repo, Muriel Snowdon, Dr Robert Shaw, Dr Grega Smrkolj, Muriel Snowdon, Professor Emma Stevenson, Gina Tindale (Students' Union Academic Officer), Professor Athanassios Vergados, Professor John Wildman, Dr Laura Woodhouse, Dr Katharine Wright and Dr Emily Yarrow.
- In attendance:** Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Carolyn Laws (Head of Internal Communications), Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services) and Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager).
- Apologies:** Professor Stuart Edwards, Professor Rachel Pain, Professor Murray Pollock, Professor Jane Robinson, Professor Jo Robinson, Professor Candy Rowe, and Professor Simon Tate.

MINUTES

1. WELCOME

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

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Senate on 25 June 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed.

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

Noted that:

- a) There was a vacancy for a Senate Representative on University Engagement and Place Committee. Members of Senate were invited to submit expressions of interest and recommendations would be brought to the next meeting of Senate.
- b) Professor Jo Robinson would revert to her seat as a co-opted member of Senate after having served as Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

4. 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) Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

On 4 September 2025 it was announced that the four UK higher education funding bodies would pause the criteria-setting and publication of final guidance for REF 2029 for a short period. The University would continue with planning and preparations, which include finalising its REF Code of Practice, as well as the work required to produce and assess outputs, develop impact and build research culture and environment.

A second announcement the same day had published the names of those appointed to the expert panels for all 34 Units of Assessment which had included the appointment of 13 University colleagues to a variety of panels and sub-panels. The majority of these appointments were for the criteria-setting phase of the REF, which meant that Newcastle colleagues would be playing vital roles in setting the guidance for submissions in Units of Assessment, as well as providing rigorous and trusted assessment of research after the submission date.

b) Athena Swan Gold Award

The University had reached a significant milestone in its commitment to gender equality by being awarded the prestigious Athena Swan Gold Award, for demonstrating progress in priority areas over a prolonged period. The Gold Award acknowledged the University's long-standing dedication to creating a fair and inclusive environment for staff and students. From pioneering inclusive recruitment strategies to supporting career progression for women in leadership roles, the University had consistently demonstrated impact-driven change.

c) Workforce Resizing and Next Steps

The University had achieved its target for £20 million salary savings in June 2025 through the workforce resizing exercise. As reported at the previous meeting, this enabled the University to look ahead in the context of the Strategic Vision to deliver plans for long-term sustainability. In taking this forward, colleagues across different portfolio areas contributed lessons-learned that will inform future plans. This has drawn on feedback from key stakeholders received throughout the process including collective consultation with trade unions and feedback from leadership teams and governance committees including Senate. Next steps had been discussed with the University Leadership Group on 15 September and a further update would be provided to Senate at the November meeting.

d) Industrial Action

Following constructive negotiations with the University and College Union (UCU) on 26 June, the University had reached agreement to end the industrial dispute. Commitments were made to address casualisation, improve workload planning, and support staff wellbeing. Confirmation was also provided that, having achieved £20 million in recurring salary savings, the University did not plan to undertake a further workforce resizing exercise for FTE reductions in 2025-26. Workload concerns would be addressed through faculty-level initiatives and a commitment to repeat the Workload and Wellbeing Survey. The University also reaffirmed its approach to managing workplace stress, with tools and risk assessments in place and a willingness to engage further with trade unions. While there had been significant disruption to students in some areas, the Education Continuity Group ensured that all

students progressed or graduated on time. A lessons-learned session was planned to review mitigations and student support during industrial action.

It was noted that the period of Industrial Action had been submitted to the OfS as a Reportable Event. The University had followed the new OfS guidance for compensating students following Industrial Action and had been one of the first to put the new guidance into practice.

- e) National Institute for Health and Care Research Innovation Observatory
Newcastle University's NIHR Innovation Observatory (IO) had secured a new £22 million, five-year contract to deliver a next-generation Horizon Scanning Centre, commencing April 2026. This marked a significant shift from the previous contract, altering the required skill mix and necessitating a reorganisation of the IO team to align with new deliverables, including enhanced use of AI, real-time data insights, and broader stakeholder engagement. The restructure would reduce the number of research roles, particularly at Grade F, while increasing technical and engagement capacity. The restructure reflected strategic realignment to meet evolving health and care sector needs and ensure long-term viability of the IO's work.
- f) Industrial Strategy
On 23 June 2025, the government had 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, which would be supported through a mix of targeted, sector-specific investments; interventions on skills, innovation, sites, investment promotion, catalytic finance, and housing; partnerships with devolved governments including through the Interministerial Group for Business and Industry; and joint working with Mayors and local authorities to align with 10-year Local Growth Plans.
- g) Office for Students – Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom
On 23 June 2025 the Office for Students had 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. It provided examples of steps that providers must take to secure freedom of speech. Minor editorial changes would be needed to the University's Code of Practice, which had been endorsed by Senate and approved by Council at its meeting in June 2025.
- h) Universities UK September Conference
The Vice-Chancellor reported on key speeches relating to research and teaching which had been given at the conference. In the research landscape, it was suggested the government would be expecting the university sector to become more specialised and differentiated. Areas of specialisation should also be aligned with government priorities, and research outputs should demonstrate direct societal impact to validate the need for taxpayer funding. In the teaching landscape, it was indicated that the Teaching Excellence Framework may become linked to fees increases, wherein higher ranked institutions were able to raise tuition fees, and that those institutions not receiving a Silver or Gold TEF rating may expect more frequent visits from TEF regulators.
- i) Race Equality Charter Confidential Listening Exercise
Professor Candy Rowe, Dean of Culture and Inclusion, has extended an invitation for colleagues to take part in a confidential listening exercise to help understand how the

University can improve systems, processes and culture to create more equity in funding success. Academic colleagues who apply for grants, and who identify as coming from a minority ethnic background, were invited to attend a confidential listening session. More information and links to register for sessions were made available.

j) Executive Director of External Relations

After nearly four years at Newcastle, Justin Cole (Executive Director of External Relations) left the University at the end of June to take extended leave with his family and spend time with relatives in Australia. The Vice-Chancellor thanked Justin for his contribution and wished him and his family well for the future.

k) Vice-Chancellor, University of Galway

The Vice-Chancellor reported that Professor David Burn (previously Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Medical Sciences) had been appointed to the position of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Galway starting in September 2025. The Vice-Chancellor congratulated him on this tremendous achievement. In light of this appointment, Professor Burn would become a Visiting Professor of Newcastle University, rather than an Emeritus Professor which had been approved by Senate in the 25 June 2025 meeting.

l) Head of School Reappointment

The Vice Chancellor reported that Professor Annie Tindley had agreed to a six-month extension of her post as Head of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, until 31 August 2026.

m) Late News – Student Recruitment

It was reported that the University had over-recruited against plan for this academic year with the expectation that this year's conversion rate would be similar to that in 2024-25. Currently, it appeared that the recruitment numbers would align with the provisional budget set for 2025-26 and workforce resizing during this academic year would likely not be required. The University had a three-year budget plan wherein a surplus would be achievable by the 2027-28 academic year. It was noted that a limited promotions exercise may be undertaken this year.

n) Late News – Dean Appointments

The Vice Chancellor reported on the following appointments and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education, provided detail around the role and remit of the Dean of Students.

- Dr Helen St Clair-Thompson (School of Psychology) appointed as Dean of Students and will become a member of Senate.
- Professor Rich Dawson (School of Engineering) appointed as Dean of Research and Innovation, Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering.
- Professor Justin Durham (School of Dental Sciences) appointed as Dean of Research and Innovation, Faculty of Medical Sciences.
- Professor Matthew Prina (Population Health Sciences Institute) appointed as Dean of Global, Faculty of Medical Sciences.

5. SUMMARY REPORT FROM COUNCIL, 7 JULY 2025

Received a summary report from the meeting of Council that took place on 7 July 2025.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document C. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

6. NEXT STEPS FOR AI IN EDUCATION

Received a paper from Professor Ruth Valentine, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education and Professor David Kennedy, Dean of Digital Education.

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

Noted that:

- a) The University had introduced guiding principles for generative AI in education in March 2023. Although ongoing work was required, significant progress had been made in relation to principle 1 (students and colleagues would be supported in developing their AI literacy, enabling them to critically, effectively, responsibly, and ethically communicate with and use AI tools).
- b) As awareness and confidence in the capabilities of AI tools had grown there was a need to define the University's position as to where and how use of such tools may be acceptable.
- c) University Education Committee (UEC) had discussed two specific areas in relation to AI and had been asked to determine: 1) measures of risk and potential actions required to mitigate against the threat of AI to academic integrity and standards, and 2) any limitations in how AI is deployed so colleagues could be provided with clear guidance and permission to innovate within any research area and academic subject.
- d) Risks included the perceived devaluing of a degree if it was also perceived that assessments had been completed with a heavy reliance on AI. OfS Conditions of Registration required institutions to ensure students are assessed effectively and that the awards granted were credible and reflected the knowledge of the student against recognised standards.
- e) Actions and mitigations included the development of a workstream to consider assessment within the Education for Life 2030+ strategy, mandatory assessment briefs and auto-enrolment for all colleagues on an AI for Educators course.
- f) Senators were invited to provide feedback regarding a proposed review of assessment to take place in Semester 2 of the current academic year. While colleague workload required careful consideration, it was recognised that AI is an area that is fast-moving and the risks of doing nothing or delaying a response were significant.
- g) Mandatory AI training for students – in line with the training available for colleagues – could help ensure that students understood how and when to use AI effectively and responsibly, and also when using it may be inappropriate. It was also necessary for educators to set clear boundaries for students to apply when determining whether or not to use AI in assessments. The difficulty in proving AI had been used in producing assessments and course work was also noted.
- h) Suggested mitigations included increased weighting on parts of assessment that fundamentally exclude the possibility of using AI, further advice and empowerment for Exam Officers, and ensuring that educators were exemplifying good practice rather than also relying on AI in producing teaching materials.
- i) AI in education remained an area for national consideration and sector alignment was critical to ensure a joined-up approach. It was confirmed that AI was a live conversation among Russell Group colleagues with a focus on agreed standards and influencing national assessment criteria.

7. MINUTES FROM COMMITTEES OF SENATE

Received a report from the meeting of:

- a) University Engagement and Place Committee: 13 May and 24 June 2025
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]
- b) University Research and Innovation Committee: 7 April and 16 June 2025
[Circulated with the agenda as Document F. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

- a) University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) discussions had included a focus on EU and International funding, and how research activity at NUMed Malaysia could be more integrated with research at Newcastle. The political climate in the US had the potential to significantly impact areas of grant funding, but at the institutional level this was being dealt with on a case-by-case basis where required.
- b) The discussion on AI in Education (see Minute 6) was also almost entirely applicable to research, and guidelines for research were less developed than those for education though some guidelines could be deployed across both areas. URIC would continue to discuss the impact of AI on research as an urgent matter at future meetings.
- c) Queries and comments about the University Engagement and Place Committee minutes were invited and would be shared with the Chair as needed who was unable to attend today's meeting.

8. STUDENT SURVEYS

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

Noted that:

- a) A summary had been provided of key metrics from this year's National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Survey (PTES) focusing on Russell Group and sector comparison. A more substantial item on the institutional actions in relation to NSS and PTES would be submitted for consideration at the next meeting of Senate in November following discussion at University Education Committee.
- b) Key results indicated that University scores had increased across all themes, but benchmarks in all themes had increased more, leaving the University in a weaker position in reference to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

9. WHITE SPACE

Noted that:

- a) The Vice-Chancellor invited members of Senate to submit suggestions for future agenda items.

10. 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 H. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that the title of Professor Emeritus or Emerita be conferred on:

Professor Graham Farmer effective from 3 October 2025

Professor Richard Talbot effective from 1 November 2025

Professor Brian Walker effective from 1 January 2026

Professor John Whitworth effective from 1 January 2026

11. MEMBERSHIP OF SENATE

For information: The Senate membership for 2025-26.

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

12. SENATE DELEGATION OF POWERS

For information: Senate's Delegation of Powers.

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

13. STANDING ORDERS OF SENATE

For information: The Standing Orders of Senate.

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

14. 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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