

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC BOARD
20 May 2026

Present: The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair) and 334 members of Academic Board.

NOTES

1. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 21 May 2025 were noted and approved as a correct record and signed.

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

2. MEMBERS OF COURT APPOINTED BY ACADEMIC BOARD

Reported that:

The term of appointment of one member of Court appointed by Academic Board would terminate on 31 July 2026, and University Executive Board had agreed to recommend to Academic Board that they were reappointed.

Dr Carys Watts (2026)

There were three further vacancies and nominations had been reviewed by Executive Board. The recommendation to Academic Board was to appoint:

Dr Fiona Whitehurst (NUBS) 1 January 2027

Imamraza Rahman (Faith and Spirituality Coordinator, Chaplaincy) 1 August 2026

Katy Storie (Director of Sport) 1 August 2026

Resolved that:

Academic Board approve the appointment to Court of the above colleagues effective from the dates stated for a period of three years.

3. MEMBERS' BUSINESS

None to report.

4. REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT

Received a report from the Vice-Chancellor and President on key developments over the past year and future priorities for our University community.

A transcript of the session is available from:

<https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/hub/executive/Pages/Academic-Board.aspx>

- a) The Vice-Chancellor reported on the recent local elections and discussed the implications for the higher education sector. Party manifestos had included proposed changes such as student recruitment caps, research funding reallocations and visa limitations which would significantly impact the sector landscape if carried through to the next general election for implementation.
- b) The Vice-Chancellor reported that the Office for Students had committed to review its approach to quality management and had signalled proposed changes to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) including that TEF outcomes would be linked to specific

consequences for those providers that do not achieve Silver or Gold status, and TEF outcomes may also be linked to tuition fees limits.

- c) The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 exercise had resumed 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 REF code of practice had been submitted in early May, and the timeframe for the full REF submission had been confirmed for November 2028.
- d) The Vice-Chancellor reported that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) had made several announcements about their funding and pauses to some grant schemes. Most importantly, funding for UKRI overall was going up, to £38.6 billion across the four years to 2029-30. The University was engaging with UKRI through organisations like the Russell Group, and was requesting more clarity and transparency about the decisions being made.

On 30 October 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology had published plans to allocate its £58.5 billion budget for the spending review period and set out three research and development priorities ('buckets') supporting:

- curiosity-driven, foundational research
- strategic government and societal priorities
- innovative companies

The University would seek to find a balance between highlighting where University research was world-leading currently, and areas for development where research could be world-leading in three to five years.

- e) The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University's recognition and progression programme had been reinstated in a fair and sustainable way despite financial constraints. The Real Living Wage had increased and would be implemented across Grades A through E. The academic promotions exercise had been reinstated with set budget parameters, and spotlight awards would be launched by the end of the current academic year. Enhancements to family friendly policies would be implemented from 1 June 2026.
- f) The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University's values and guiding principles had required a refresh to ensure they could assist in shaping University culture, providing a framework that could be embedded more completely in everyday practice. The new values were as follows: We embrace difference; We thrive together; We act with integrity; We are bold. To ensure practical impact, the values would be built into People Services and governance policy and processes, and would be embedded into decision-making procedures for University governing bodies.
- g) The Vice-Chancellor reported that Executive Board had recently taken the opportunity to review the scope of the Next Generation Newcastle (NGN) Programme to ensure that projects were aligned with strategic objectives and Key Performance Indicators. The programme had subsequently been shaped into the following areas of focus: Academic Shape, Commercial, Future Students, Infrastructure, People and Performance, Research, Professional Services Transformation, World Class Civic University. The Academic Shape project would review the University's academic structures to facilitate more effective ways of working, to align disciplines to respond to future opportunities and to ensure financial sustainability across both education and research.

- h) The Vice-Chancellor reported that an estates optimisation programme was underway in collaboration with architectural design practice, BDP. The goal was to create an integrated university-wide estate plan which would serve to create an attractive, future-ready and sustainable campus by optimising and using spaces more effectively, reducing costs, improving co-location, and ensuring adaptability for changing needs. The Project Board was meeting monthly and quick wins had already been actioned, with longer-term planning also underway.
- i) The Vice-Chancellor reported on key strategic highlights including the implementation of the new Education for Life 2030+ strategy, the further development of regional partnerships such as the collaboration with Universities for North East England, the Research Strategy refresh to replace the current strategy from 2018, and critical work taking place to expand the University's international markets and grow the University's Transnational Education footprint.

5. QUESTIONS

The following questions were submitted by members of Academic Board during the meeting and responses were provided by the Vice-Chancellor.

- a) Laura Jones, SAgE Professional Services asked:
 'Are there any plans to review grade F pay scales? It feels increasingly less desirable to be an existing F now that pay scales have been uplifted for grades A-E and nothing comparable has been put in place for Fs. Previously grade F received 30 days annual leave which was understood to be compensation for lack of access to overtime. Increasing responsibility for Grade F no longer seems to be reflected in pay scales/annual leave compared with grades D/E.'

The Executive Director of People Services advised that within the organisation there was not a current plan to review Grade F in particular, but noted that work had started externally on a review of the national pay scale which could impact the University's pay scales.

- b) Sarah Kendall, Translational and Clinical Research Institute, asked:
 'You mentioned that as part of PS pay review that bonus awards were the only option as our financial position could not accommodate long term increases at this time, yet the academic promotions process had a limited budget allocated to allow this. It would be good to have clarity on this decision to understand the difference between the job families, as this does not appear to be an equitable approach.'

The Executive Director of People Services advised that the pay review process was the same for Professional Services and Academic colleagues. The point of difference was that promotions exercise for Academic colleagues had been reinstated and that exercise involved grade changes; the promotions exercise was not available, nor had it ever been, for Professional Services colleagues.

- c) Lizeth Sloom, Translational and Clinical Research, asked:
 'You talked about the effect of policy on international changes on students. What about staff? I refer to changes in visa duration, insecurity regarding getting indefinite leave to remain etc.'

The Executive Director of People Services acknowledged the changes to UKVI Indefinite Leave to Remain pathways, but advised the University was taking a one-to-one approach with colleagues who would be impacted by any changes and further advice could be provided offline following this meeting.

- d) Dr Robert Shaw, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, asked:
'The specialisms in the research strategy are notably narrower than our current identified strengths (eg ageing and health becomes ageing, culture and creative becomes creative, cities and place is gone). What implications will this have for people who currently don't strongly align with the identified strengths?'

The Vice-Chancellor noted that the research specialisms (including Ageing and Health as an agreed area of strength) had been provided as illustrations of exceptional areas of work but were not meant to define the entire research landscape within the organisation. The University would continue to highlight and support all the various strengths within the University's research community. Research specialisms were areas where the University could be defined as 'world-leading' either now or in the future, and could form the basis for building a partnership with UKRI.

- e) Deepa Sundaraiyer, NUIT, asked:
'How is the international student recruitment looking for 2026/27 considering the current political landscape? Online courses on offer in the future?'

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University would be launching a series of fully online courses in January 2027. It was projected that international student numbers were likely to decrease again for the 2026-27 academic year, but longer-term projections suggested the market may begin to revive 2027-28, in part due to decreasing international student recruitment to areas including North America and Australia, resulting in the possibility to increase international recruitment numbers in the UK.

- f) Peter Bradshaw, School of Computing, asked:
'You mentioned that our estate is 25% too large for the number of staff and students. Is there a plan for that, and what alternatives are there to selling off property?'

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the estates optimisation plan was to reduce the University estate to a size that was fit for purpose and that was also aligned with estate sizes of partner institutions. Peripheral buildings that were located away from the city centre campus and the Helix site were in scope for selling or renting.

- g) Brian Boyle, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, asked:
'Having seen a reduction in staff FTE, the push to increase undergraduate student numbers, and the reduction of research funding, as well as the workload involved in the new transformation project, have expectations been changed with regard to REF and TEF performance?'

The Vice-Chancellor advised that it was expected the University's REF and TEF submissions would proceed without a change in expectations, and it was noted the TEF outcomes were largely governed by the National Student Survey results which was an area that still required ongoing focus. At University level, the decrease in student numbers over the previous academic year had outweighed the decrease in staff FTE meaning that student-staff ratios remained stable. Issues of workload were being monitored by faculties and schools.

6. HONORARY FELLOWSHIPS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Court had invited nominations in writing for the award of next year's Honorary Fellowships of the University. Any member of Academic Board could make a nomination. Where several members make a joint nomination, one should be shown as the nominator and the others as supporters. The grounds on which the nomination are made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships and Nomination Forms could be found at:
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/ceremonies/honorary/nom_honfell/php

Proposals should be sent to Dr Colin Campbell, Registrar (colin.campbell@ncl.ac.uk) by Friday 7 August 2026.

FOR DISCUSSION BY EXCEPTION

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Received the updated Terms of Reference.

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

Resolved that:

Academic Board approve updated Terms of Reference.