

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

19 January 2026

Present: Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Mags Scott (Deputy Chair of Council), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Derek Bell (Lay Member), Linda Conlon (Lay Member), Will Garton (Lay Member), Arun Harish (Lay Member), Professor Nigel Harkness (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Alex Lamb (Lay Member), Bill MacLeod (Lay Member), Dr Vicky Long (Elected Member of Council), Professor Rhiannon Mason (Elected Senate Member), Claire Morgan (Lay Member), Dr Meiko O'Halloran (Elected Senate Member), Marta Phillips (Lay 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) and Sir Nigel Wilson (Lay Member)

In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Clair Elliot (Director of Transformation) for Minute 32 only, Sabrina Hua (University of York), observing, Professor Li Li (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Global) for Minute 33 only, Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jen Middleton (Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs), Professor Candy Rowe (Dean of Culture and Inclusion) for Minute 36 only, Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services), Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager), and Dennis Wong (Regional Provost and Group CEO (E and SE Asia)) for Minute 33 only.

Apologies: Ilsa Hartley (President, Students' Union)

MINUTES

25. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Sir Nigel Wilson and Dr Vicky Long to their first meeting of Council.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

27. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 8 December 2025.

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

Resolved that, subject to minor amendments, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 8 December 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed.

28. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an update from the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. The next meeting of the University Health and Safety Committee would take place on 12 February 2026, and the following management standards would be presented for consultation and approval: Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres, Noise and Legionella.

2. The Committee would also consider the risks from insecure doors on the University Estates during out of hours. The Committee would discuss occurrences, view statistics and identify a RAG (Red-Amber-Green) rating. Buildings identified as red-rated would be assessed by Security colleagues to identify further controls for implementation

29. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Noted that:

1. It was reported that Adam Serfontein had resigned his membership of Council due to personal work commitments. Consequently, there were three vacancies for lay members of Council to commence appointment on 1 August 2026, and a recruitment process would commence to fill those vacancies.
2. The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) had announced that it would publish a new Code of Governance in 2026, with early recommendations expected in the spring and the final code published in the summer. University governance practices and structures would be reviewed in reference to the new code and updates would be provided to Council throughout the review process.

30. 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. Castle Leazes

On 19 December the University had legally completed the formation of the joint venture with Unite Students to redevelop and run Castle Leazes. This included the appointment of Bowmer and Kirkland as the main builder and, following the conclusion of lender due diligence, the finalisation of a debt facility with Rothesay.

2. 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 recommended maximum of five outputs per researcher had been reinstated for clarity but to avoid pressure on individuals, the minimum of one had been removed. 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.

3. Higher Education Policy Institute Report

A recent report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute had highlighted the University's engagement with students, specifically in helping to ensure student members can effectively engage with Council. Annual Speed Networking Sessions were hosted by the University and attended by lay members of Council and representatives from the Students' Union, and served to enable informal discussions about student life while bridging the gap between students and institutional leaders.

4. Erasmus 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 that are capped at £9,535 a year. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Council Election

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that Dr Vicky Long (School of History, Classics and Archaeology) had been elected as the new academic member of Council.

31. **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 risk scores since Council had received the full risk register in December. There were 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). These risks and associated mitigations were discussed regularly by Executive Board.
2. Changes in measures used in the UKVI's Basic Compliance Assessment (BCA) were effective from the current academic year. Certain thresholds relating to the compliance measures used for student sponsors had been increased: 95% enrolment (up from 90%), 90% course completion (up from 85%), and a maximum 5% visa refusal rate (up from 10%) previously. The Student Visa and Immigration Policy Committee were implementing actions agreed by Executive Board to help mitigate the risk of non-compliance.

3. The Employment Rights Bill received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025, becoming the Employment Rights Act 2025 (ERA 2025). The Act introduced major changes to UK employment law, with most reforms due to be gradually phased in across 2026 and 2027. An assessment of the impact on the University strategic risk relating to People was underway.
4. The Business Continuity and Risk Group served to ensure effective and transparent monitoring of risk and resilience across the University. The annual report providing a summary of activities for the 2024-25 academic year was provided to Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee at the 3 December meeting.

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

32. NEXT GENERATION NEWCASTLE

The Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. The Next Generation Newcastle (NGN) programme had been developed with a dual focus on improving the University's current position while also looking ahead to shape the future of the University.
2. The Vice-Chancellor would provide strategic leadership for the development and delivery of the programme supported by Executive Board. The Vice-Chancellor would chair monthly meetings of the Transformation Portfolio Board, which would have oversight of the entire NGN programme, including the Education for Life programme, ensuring delivery of institutional objectives, strategic management of timelines and resourcing, benefits realisation, and effective risk management.
3. The programme would coordinate existing strategies for a series of seven key projects, each sponsored by a member of Executive Board, and these projects were underpinned by 17 individual workstreams. Project Boards had been identified for each project, using existing governance structures and committees that could be repurposed during the transformation programme to oversee and coordinate the various streams of work.
4. It was projected that the transformation programme would deliver a recurring financial improvement of £25m by the 2028-29 academic year. This would be achieved through a mixture of cost control, income diversification and growth.
5. Work was underway to develop a refreshed set of values which would be submitted to Council for consideration at the 20 April meeting.
6. An external partner had been commissioned to undertake a review of the programme strategy, design and delivery plans against sector best practice. Their recommendations had focused on three main areas, as below, and actions to embed these in the programme were already underway.
 - Define the transformation narrative and continue to share key messages through robust communications planning.
 - Ensure clear articulation of deliverables and impact.
 - Track and communicate outcomes effectively to support change management activities.

7. The University had adjusted student recruitment targets to ensure optimism bias did not inflate numbers; targets were now aimed towards achieving flat recruitment figures. A more flexible approach to targets-setting had also been implemented to ensure real-time data would underpin financial decision-making as part of an ongoing process, which was a change from the previous approach where targets were set once per year and then remained relatively fixed.
8. Council members reflected on the need for defined reporting methods to ensure Council could receive assurance that the projects and workstreams were on track, and also reflected on the need to continue articulating the programme's strategic imperative and financial impact to underscore the project's strategic basis.
9. Council members also encouraged rapid delivery of achievable outputs (e.g. investible propositions) wherever possible, to avoid loss of momentum through process dependencies and bureaucracy. Council members also encouraged reflection on whether the programme and projects could deliver more ambitious long-term outcomes, and noted this could form the basis of a discussion at the joint Away Day with Executive Board on 20 March 2026.
10. The University's place-based agenda could be utilised to articulate the University's distinctiveness within the context of its global strategy, thereby explaining why certain international partnerships or networks were vital due to shared academic methods, research outputs and/or industry connections.

Resolved that Council endorse the direction of travel and next steps as outlined in the paper.

33. TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION UPDATE

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Following Executive Board approval to initiate the China Transnational Education (TNE) project in June 2025, the project team had completed a sprint phase in August 2025, and an accompanying report had been submitted to Executive Board in September 2025.
2. The project team was currently working on validating the operational and financial assumptions of the proposed Joint Education Institutes (JEIs) with two leading Chinese Universities: Southeast University and Central China Normal University.
3. It was expected that the academic programme portfolio development would be finalised by January 2026, which would inform the development of a full business case by spring 2026 which would be considered at Finance Committee and Council.
4. An application would be submitted to the Ministry of Education in summer 2026, with the first student cohort anticipated in September 2027.
5. Council members reflected on key data that should be included in future iterations of the business case, including financial scenario analysis, projected financial cost to the University, information about how proposed JEIs could contribute to each of the institutional KPIs, clarification of how these partnerships would (or would not) ensure the University kept pace with competitors, and explicit mention of the benefits afforded to the University and the two partner universities.

6. Council noted the progress being made on the project and the next steps towards the development of a business case. It was agreed that the wider geopolitical risks and proposed mitigations should be more clearly defined within the business case, and that more work was required to ensure that the University's strategic rationale in reference to the JEIs was clarified and made explicit in relation to the Global Strategic Plan and Next Generation Newcastle.

34. **UPDATED KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.

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

Noted that:

1. Council and Executive Board had agreed in March 2025 that the number of Institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be limited to 10 to 12 and should be used to give Council and Executive Board confidence that the institution was on track to deliver its overarching objectives and therefore its vision and goals. Senate sub-committees would continue to monitor progress against the objectives of the University's core strategies
2. Internal workshops over the last six months, running alongside the development of the Next Generational Newcastle Transformation Programme, had resulted in a number of statements that articulated the purpose of the University from which an institutional KPI set could be determined.
3. It was anticipated that the KPI reports would be tabled at meetings of Executive Board and Council each April and October and would be accompanied by a short update from the relevant KPI owner to include relevant insights, for example on EDI implications.

Resolved that Council endorse the proposed institutional Key Performance Indicators and reporting schedule.

35. **ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND STANDARDS**

The Registrar introduced the annual report on the assurance of academic quality and standards, and the University's degree outcomes statement.

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

Noted that:

1. The annual 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.
2. The Office for Students 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.
3. The Office for Students (OfS) was consulting on a new quality assessment system and a revised Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The revised TEF would run on a cyclical basis, with the frequency of an institution's assessment dependent on its rating and ongoing risk monitoring. Each institution would receive a rating of Gold, Silver, Bronze or

Requires Improvement for each aspect, as well as an overall rating based on the lower of the two aspect ratings.

4. The University was developing a revised approach to assessment through the implementation of the Leading Edge Curriculum programme and in response to National Student Survey scores; status updates would be provided to Council members at a future meeting.

Resolved that Council approve the annual report on the assurance of academic quality and standards.

36. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION, AND GENDER PAY GAP

The Executive Director of People Services introduced a report.

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

Noted that:

1. The Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Gender Pay Gap (GPG) summary report provided an update on the University's progress against its Public Sector Equality Duty Equality Objectives, and on its EDI priorities for the year ahead. A summary with key findings of institutional equality and diversity data (for the period 1 August 2024 – 31 July 2025) and key findings of institutional Gender Pay Gap data (covering the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025), was also provided.
2. Members of Council noted that future iterations of the report should include data regarding the impact and tangible outputs of ongoing EDI initiatives.
3. It was noted that disclosure rates continued to be a consideration when gathering data, but an internal disclosure campaign was aiming to highlight to colleagues the value of providing information and to make explicit how the information would be used.

Resolved that Council approve the Annual EDI and Gender Pay Gap report.

37. REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Received a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 3 December 2025.

Noted that:

1. The Committee had considered the audited consolidated Financial Statements of Newcastle University for the financial year ended 31 July 2025 and considered the accompanying report from the Director of Financial Control to Finance Committee along with a report from Executive Board on Going Concern. As noted at the December meeting of Council, Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee had agreed to recommend the 2024-25 Integrated Annual Report to Council for approval.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

38. ANNUAL REPORT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY

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

39. REPORTED BUSINESS

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