NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

COUNCIL

20 April 2026

Present: Pat Ritchie (Chair of Council), Mags Scott (Deputy Chair of Council) until 10:00am, 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), 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), Colin Riordan (Lay Member), Angela Russell (Honorary Treasurer), Nitin Shukla (Lay Member), and Sir Nigel Wilson (Lay Member)

In attendance: Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Nick Collins (Chief Financial Officer), Neil Gardner (Director of Strategic Planning and Change) for Minute 47 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 46 only, Jackie Scott (Executive Director of People Services), and Heidi Shultz (Executive and Governance Team Manager)

Apologies: Will Garton (Lay Member), Alex Lamb (Lay Member), Emma Reay (Elected Professional Services Member), Gina Tindale (Academic Officer, Students' Union)

M I N U T E S

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

41. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Received the draft minutes of the meeting of Council held on 19 January 2026.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document A. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 19 January 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed.

42. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Received an update from the Executive Director of People Services.

Noted that:

1. University Health and Safety Committee had met on 12 February and approved three actions in the strategic plan: management standards for Legionella, Occupational Noise and Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres. Information would be available on the Occupational Health and Safety website week commencing 27 April.

2. The Committee had agreed a proposal to share first aiders across buildings in close proximity to assist with first aid resilience and cover. Units had been tasked to update their first aid needs assessment as a first step and further updates would be provided when this had progressed.

3. Campus building security was also discussed due to the number of buildings found unsecured by afterhours security personnel; this was considered a significant organisational risk due to the number of final exit doors and windows being left open. Further updates would be provided to Council, Executive Board and the Business Continuity and Risk Group.

43. **CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

Noted that:

1. A progress update on lay member recruitment was provided, and it was noted that seven candidates had been shortlisted for interview for three vacancies. Further updates would be provided to Council in due course.

44. **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. <u>Queen Elizabeth Prize</u>

   The Vice-Chancellor had been delighted to attend the prestigious Queen Elizabeth Prize award ceremony at St James's Palace, along with the Chancellor and researchers from the University, where the University's reputation as a driving force for research into dementia had been recognised with the highest national honour for universities. The award highlighted the University's work in transforming the understanding, diagnosis and care of people with Dementia with Lewy bodies. Built on the visionary early work of scientific and clinical pioneers within the University community, the 2025 Prize recognised more than three decades of ground-breaking research and unwavering dedication.

2. <u>University Rankings</u>

   The Times Higher World Subject Rankings 2026 had placed Newcastle University in the top 85 for Medical and Health grouping, which included the subjects Medicine and Dentistry. Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Life Sciences were ranked in the top 125, while Law had maintained its place in the top 200.

   The University had also been ranked 36th in the QS World University Rankings: Europe 2026.

3. <u>Office for Students – Freedom of Speech</u>

   It had been announced that the Office for Students (OfS) would draw up a statement of expectations to ensure that arrangements between higher education institutions and foreign states met freedom of speech and academic freedom requirements. A working group would provide input as the OfS developed the statement of expectations, which would focus on the contracts and arrangements institutions have with foreign states and institutions in other countries.

4. <u>UKRI Funding Announcements</u>

   UKRI had made several announcements about their funding and pauses to some grant schemes. Most important, funding for UKRI overall was going up, to £38.6 billion across the four years to 2029-30. This was welcome news in a period when all Government spending is under pressure. On the immediate funding pauses, it was understood that MRC, BBSRC and EPSRC had curtailed the number of awards they would be making in current rounds and suspended applications to some of their schemes. These pauses and cuts were designed to put the Research Councils' finances on a sustainable footing in preparation for the implementation of a new funding model. The University was engaging with UKRI through organisations, like the Russell Group, and was requesting more clarity and transparency about the decisions being made.

At the 2025 Spending Review, the UK government announced record public research and development investment of £86 billion across the spending review period, covering the financial years 2026/27 to 2029/30. On 30 October 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology published more detail on its plans to allocate its £58.5 billion budget for the spending review period, including a new more agile model, and set out three research and development priorities ('buckets') supporting:

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

It was noted the University would need 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.

5. Blyth Festival of Energy

The four-day Festival of Energy, presented as part of Blyth Celebrates, had been launched on 5 March 2026 at the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult in Blyth. The event included Luke Jerram's spectacular seven-metre artworks of the Earth and Moon, as well as a presentation from Helen Sharman, Britain's first astronaut. The festival had been commissioned by Northumberland County Council, and was delivered in partnership with the University, the Port of Blyth, the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult and Energy Central Campus.

6. Senior Appointments

Executive Board had recently considered and agreed a proposed approach to take when proposing a further term of office for a Pro-Vice-Chancellor or University Dean. The suggested governance process had been developed following requests from Senate to include members of Senate in the review of role holders prior to renewal of term of office. The formal re-approval of appointments remained one of Council's reserved powers.

7. Dean Appointment

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that Professor Dave Jones (NIHR Newcastle Biomedical Research Centre) had been appointed as the Dean of Clinical Academic Development from 1 February 2026 for a term of five years.

8. Head of School Appointments

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that Professor Chris Vernazza had been appointed as the Head of School of Dental Sciences from 1 March 2026 for a term of five years, and Dr Ilona Obara had been appointed as the Head of School of Pharmacy from 1 August 2026 for a term of five years.

45. **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. Since the last meeting of Council in January six strategic risks had been reviewed and updated by risk owners and Executive Board, including two new risks covering the University's information technology and the suitability of the estate.

2. Changes in measures used in the UKVI's Basic Compliance Assessment had taken effect from the 2025-26 academic year. The Student Visa and Immigration Policy Committee were taking forward actions agreed by Executive Board to help mitigate the risk of non-compliance. In addition, the government had announced study visas and skilled work visas would no longer be issued to individuals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan. This would impact approximately 130 offer-holders and some current students at INTO and NUMed, and colleagues were reviewing potential options.

3. A response group had been convened to monitor the impact of the conflict in the Middle East, including the impact on students and colleagues as well as the resulting disruption to travel The potential emerging risks were also being monitored, including the impact on student and colleague wellbeing, student and colleague mobility, oil and gas prices, the potential for protest and future student recruitment.

4. Law firms Assersons and Harcus Parker (AHP) were representing a large group of former students across over 30 universities attempting to take legal action over claims their education had been damaged by the pandemic. The University had decided to retain existing external lawyers to conduct further legal analysis and an evaluation of the merits of the claim itself.

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

46. **UNIVERSITY VALUES**

The Dean of Culture and Inclusion introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document D. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The University's values and guiding principles required a refresh to ensure they could assist in shaping University culture by providing a framework that could be embedded more completely in decision-making processes and be put into everyday practice. It was also necessary to consider how the values could be more relevant, impactful and inclusive for all, while also underpinning the University's institutional narrative and strategic ambitions.

2. The consultation had started in October 2025 with Executive Board approval for the development of a refreshed values set and had continued through March 2026 with participation from colleague and student voice, University Leadership Group, a Community Working Group (dedicated to the development and refinement of the values set) and final approval from Executive Board in March 2026.

3. The refreshed values were designed to be non-overlapping, and to apply at both organisational and individual levels. They are as follows: We embrace difference; We thrive together; We act with integrity; We are bold.

4. To ensure practical and real impact throughout the organisation, the values would be built into all People Services processes, and crucial checkpoints would be built into governance processes. To demonstrate visible leadership, the values would also be embedded into decision-making processes for University governing bodies including Council and Executive Board.

5. It would be crucial to understand how to measure and see the outcomes resulting from the refreshed values exercise, and it was also critical to ensure that any momentum around the application of the Race Equality Charter continued within the framework of the refreshed values, as there would likely continue to be relevant funding challenges

6. It was noted that academic and intellectual freedom was embedded within the values – though not made explicit – and could be demonstrated in the application of the refreshed values throughout the academic and professional services communities. Colleagues would develop trust in the values when results and outcomes were visible 'on the ground' in their everyday interactions.

7. Council wished to record their thanks to Professor Candy Rowe, colleagues on the Community Working Group and all other colleagues who participated in the consultation process for their contributions in developing and refining the refreshed set of University values.

Resolved that Council approve for final development and launch the refreshed set of University values and associated 'Values in Action' behaviour framework.

47. **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced a discussion.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document E. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. At its 19 January meeting, Council had approved a new set of nine institutional KPIs. Council was now presented with the first draft report of performance against the new KPI set, along with an introduction to the PowerBI dashboard which would be available to Council members through the Strategic Insights Portal.

2. Implementation of the revised KPI set would require relevant owners and committees to regularly review both the institutional KPIs and the underpinning leading indicators. KPIs would be cascaded to unit level where appropriate, through the performance and financial quadrants of the new discipline and unit review framework.

3. Included alongside the KPI report was an Assessment Framework that described each KPI and the agreed boundaries and thresholds that were applied to judge whether performance was Red, Amber or Green. Criteria from the Office for Students had formed the basis of the RAG ratings, and therefore also provided a basis for benchmarking against competitor institutions.

4. Further and more detailed management information including graduate salaries, student-staff ratios and research income could be built into future iterations of the report. The data would be utilised where feasible to assist in decision-making and action planning.

KPIs data would be deployed in the current academic year, to aid in developing action plans for schools and individual units in response to the National Student Survey.

5. The KPI Dashboard Report would be submitted to Council twice per year, in April and October, and would next be submitted to Council in October 2026.

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

48. **REPORT FROM FINANCE COMMITTEE**

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the reports.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document Fi and Fii. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. At the end of January, the University had reported an underlying 6-month surplus of £7.0m and an improved full year forecast of an underlying deficit of (£0.7m) compared to a full year budget deficit of (£13.9m). The Q2 statutory result, including pension adjustments, showed a surplus of £8.2m.

2. The overall outlook on net tuition fees had improved from original budget by £9.4m. Year to date staff costs were £3.6m favourable to budget and were forecast to be £5.7m favourable by year end, with the benefit of lower than assumed pay award and slower pace of recruitment than anticipated.

3. Finance Committee had noted the positive direction of travel for the current financial year but had also noted concerns about potential deterioration in future years. It was key to protect the financial sustainability and strategic direction of the University, further emphasising the need for the Next Generation Newcastle transformation programme.

4. It was projected that cash would not be an issue in the short-term, but it was noted that robust student recruitment remained crucial to cash generation. The University's cash position and covenants would be stress-tested as part of the next three-year financial plan.

49. **REPORT FROM AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE**

Received a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 12 March 2026.
[Circulated with the agenda as Document G. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The Committee had read and received the report.

50. **EQUALITY POLICY**

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 Committee had read and received the policy.

Resolved that Council approve the policy.

51. **REPORT FROM PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE**

Received reports from the meetings of the Committee held on 29 January and 25 March 2026. [Circulated with the agenda as Documents Ji and Jii. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

Noted that:

1. The University and Newcastle City Council were collaborating on developing a response to the Office for Students sexual misconduct survey and Partnership Committee had requested formal updates from the Changing the Culture working group.

2. Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU) and the University were developing a response to external work done on student representation, which had indicated some interventions were required to ensure student voice was more effectively received and understood.

3. A refurbishment of the NUSU building would take place across May through October 2026 following approval by Executive Board.

4. A small budget surplus was projected for the current academic year, and it was noted that operational KPIs were broadly on track.

5. Sabbatical Officers had discussed progress against pledges for the academic year and also discussed how Council member sponsorship could assist in facilitating completion where possible. The current NUSU President had developed a 'buddy scheme' for implementation during the next academic year. The NUSU President, Chair of Partnership Committee and Chair of Council would meet to ensure onward momentum.

6. It had been proposed that the block grant from the University to NUSU would be increased at a rate of 2% from the previous year; this was supported and would be included in the University budget that would be submitted to Council.

7. Council wished to record its thanks to Lindsey Lockey for her contributions as Chief Executive of Newcastle University Students' Union, as Lindsey would be leaving her role at the end of the current academic year. The process to appoint a successor was underway.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

52. **NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S UNION CONSITUTION**
[Circulated with the agenda as Document K. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

Resolved that Council approve the proposed changes to the constitution.

53. **SUMMARY OF THE MEETING OF SENATE, 14 JANUARY 2026**
[Circulated with the agenda as Document L. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]

54. **REPORTED BUSINESS**
[Circulated with the agenda as Document M. Copy filed in the Minute Book.]