

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

THE SIXTY-EIGHTH ORDINARY MEETING OF CONVOCATION

Friday 4 July 2025

Present (online): Clare Talbot-Jones (Acting Chair of Convocation), Professor Chris Day (Vice-Chancellor and President), Tola Adegbola, Julie Alderson, Shah Yaseen Ali, Chima Amadi, Lesley Atkinson, Jason Bain, Lytt Barrett, Lauren Bell, Helen Bennett, Adam Brandt, Caroline Brunton, Joe Carlebach, Jessy Cheng, Professor David Croisdale-Appleby OBE, Kushal Dammannagar, Clair Elliott, Leslie Fornah, Dr Matthew Goode, Margaret Hence, Paul Hilton, Bola Hollist, Carole Jeffery, Robert Johnson, Ioannis Kalyvinos, Peter Kelly, Sotaro Kobayashi, Revd John Latham, Xiao Liang, Kian En Lim, Jingky Lozano-Kuehne, Ellie Lythe, Greg Mayhew, Diana McAlpine, Angus McVittie, Ekhlash Mohsin, Chun Wee Ng, Annabelle Obeng Frimpong, Tony Okonkwo, Khai Miin Ong, Olga Pepple, Octavian Pitigoi, Sam Pritchard, Roy Rangarirai, Alun Rees, Michelle Sheehan, Martin Sirak, Ria Snowdon, Gareth Trainer, Silvia Trullu, Nur Deniz Unsal, Andrew Walster, Jonathan White, Jaclyn Wright, Christal Zhu, Amy Zhu.

In attendance: Joshua Adams (Alumni Engagement Officer), Dr Colin Campbell (Registrar), Lauren Huntington (Deputy Director, NU Advancement), Professor Anya Hurlbert (Dean of Advancement), Dr Simon Meacher (Head of Executive and Governance Office), Jack O'Toole (Head of Advancement Operations), Rebecca Stobbs (Alumni Relations Manager, Paul Tyack (Director, NU Advancement), Laney Wang (International Alumni Manager), Professor Dennis Wong (Regional Provost and Group CEO, East and South East Asia).

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the sixty-eighth ordinary meeting of Convocation.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of Convocation held on Saturday 13th July 2024 were approved as a correct record.

3. UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT

Received: An overview of the University from the Vice-Chancellor and President and an update on alumni engagement from Paul Tyack (Director of NU Advancement).

Reported that:

1. The Vice-Chancellor and President began by thanking all alumni attending the meeting for their continuing interest in and commitment to the University.
2. The Vice-Chancellor and President then gave an update on the University's progress in implementing its Vision and Strategy, notable developments, challenges and achievements.
3. In keeping with the rest of the higher education sector, the University was facing significant financial challenges. Since their introduction in 2010, the undergraduate tuition fee had effectively remained at the same level, meaning that universities' principal source of income had been held completely flat against inflation for the past 14 years, while costs had continued to rise. Faced with this challenge, universities had turned to the international student market to help subsidize the cost of teaching but, due to government policies discouraging immigration, this was becoming increasingly difficult.

4. The University had recently completed a voluntary scheme which had reduced its colleague FTE by about 5%, bringing its cost base down to the level that its income could support. Whilst a small deficit budget was projected for next year, the overall state of University finances remained sound when compared to many others in the sector, and it hoped to return to a surplus budget in the near future.
5. Newcastle, as a city and University, continued to be a popular destination for students. The University had been ranked 1st in the Russell Group and 4th overall in the University Compare Ranking 2026. This was a new ranking that used recommendation scores and student reviews to determine an overall score that was validated by a quantitative scoring system similar to TripAdvisor. Within the ranking, Newcastle had been ranked 1st in the UK for Student Life. The University had also won top place in the What University Student Choice Awards (WUSCA) in the category of 'Student Life'. The award recognised all aspects of student life from extra-curricular activities to the general feel of campus. Recent campus open days had witnessed their highest ever attendances.
6. The University was committed to adding value for all students through education, academic support, and the wider student experience. Around 95% of Newcastle students were in a graduate-level job or further study three years after graduation.
7. Around 20% of all University students came from overseas, delivering benefits to the University in the form of cultural diversity and different lived experience, as well as a hugely significant financial contribution.
8. Newcastle continued to thrive as a research-intensive university, and had last year achieved its highest ever level of research funding derived from research councils, medical charities, industry and government departments. In addition, the University was now recognized as one of 10 centres of excellence for data, and was increasingly gaining recognition for its research strength in the field of artificial intelligence.
9. In March 2025, the University agreed became a development partner in a growing global community focussed on the concept of the 4th Generation University (4GU). This community of practice envisions universities as orchestrators of regional innovation ecosystems, achieving societal and economic impact through partnerships with industry, government, and civil society. This approach builds on the history of Newcastle University and aligns to its core values of social and environmental justice, and to its civic role as an anchor institution, and would permit it to align well with the UK government's Industrial Strategy priorities and funding opportunities.
10. Paul Tyack provided a report on the University's work with the global community of alumni, beginning by thanking the many who take part in activities and support.
11. There were three aims for the university's activity with alumni: the first concerns student experience and outcomes, and is about harnessing the power of a large global community, so that our students and future students have the very best possible chances of success; the second aim is fostering a long term, mutually beneficial relationship between alumni and the University, with a particular focus on the transition from student to graduate to make sure that the university and the alumni community itself are able to support and help people in the early career stage, and also through lifelong learning opportunities; and the third aim is about generating support for education and research in response to the challenges that the world faces.
12. Alumni relations programmes are grouped under four headings:
 - Connect – Helping Newcastle graduates keep in touch with each other and their university

- Develop - Supporting the career development of Newcastle graduates so that they can reach their potential
- Discover – Providing lifelong learning opportunities and sharing the latest discoveries from the university community
- Support – Fundraising and volunteering for future students, future research and a future of positive change in our city and around the world.

13. The theme of last year's NCL in Action programme was exploring AI's impact in the world. Almost 1,000 people spanning five generations took part, volunteering their time to upskill their fellow alumni, with 44 companies participating, including startup companies from the alumni community.

In response to questions from members of Convocation that had been submitted before the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor and President responded:

1. Regarding workforce resizing – the question was addressed as part of the Vice-Chancellor and President's presentation.
2. Regarding the international competitiveness of the University and UK higher education as a whole – it was clear that other countries were investing in higher education, and catching up with UK universities in global rankings in some cases, while at the same time the UK university sector was struggling financially. For its own part, Newcastle was working hard to enhance its performance in reputation surveys and, in terms of publications and outputs, ensure that these were correctly attributed.
3. Regarding the lived experience of medical and dental students and exposure to patients with lived experience of dementia, care, and also perspectives such as alcoholism and drug addiction – Newcastle is very well-known for its research into dementia, so students receive significant exposure to that. The University also has a very well-connected service for looking after patients with alcohol and drug problems.

In response to questions from members of Convocation that had not been addressed during his presentation, the Vice-Chancellor and President responded:

1. Regarding online study – the University was working with a number of potential providers to help it enter the online market at scale.
2. Regarding methods of attracting students via fee discounts and hybrid funding – the University had devoted significant efforts to enhancing its fee discount offer, scholarships and pricing, as well as how it was working with agents.
3. Regarding support for the alumni community in Africa – the University was keen to establish alumni groups in Africa and was interested to hear from individuals who were interested in taking the lead in supporting that.
4. Regarding alumni access to University resources and whether paid access would be considered – whilst the scale of the alumni community could make this challenging, the University would welcome a further conversation about making resources available in a way that was useful to alumni.
5. Regarding the importance of creativity and the creative industry sector – there is an active creative industry sector in the North East that takes many Newcastle graduates, and the University is a national leader in policy for the creative industry, with a Policy Evidence Centre funded by the Arts Council. The University was fully committed to the importance

of creative thinking and helping graduates to identify opportunities for employment in a wide variety of sectors.

6. Regarding the reduction in headcount and the University's ability to maintain the same high level and quality of research – the reduction in FTE was arrived at by a voluntary scheme, throughout which great care was taken to preserve the quality of the University's education and research offering without closing courses or modules or detracting from important research in flagship areas.
7. Regarding issues with use of AI in student work – the University was committed to supporting students' critical awareness of generative AI and their development of good academic practice. Students are supported to thinking critically about how to use generative AI tools responsibly and ethically, and to understand when their use is inappropriate.

4. CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR OF CONVOCATION

Reported that:

The three-year term of office of the current Deputy Chair of Convocation (Acting Chair), Clare Talbot-Jones, was due to end on 26 November 2025.

Convocation is a statutory body of the University. The Chair of Convocation is also by custom an ex officio member of the Court of the University. Statute 43 states that:

"The convocation, from its own members, shall elect a chair and may elect a deputy chair, under procedures as the court may from time to time decide, taking into account any recommendation from convocation. The chair and deputy chair shall respectively hold office for three years. Any retiring chair or deputy chair shall be eligible for re-election subject to not holding the post for more than nine consecutive years in total. Neither the chair nor the deputy chair shall be a member of the salaried staff of the University."

For the 2025 election, an invitation to comment on the process for the future chairing was included in the November 2024 edition of *Arches* and discussed with the acting Chair. Subsequently, at its meeting on 9 May 2025, Court endorsed the following process for the election of a Chair of Convocation:

- To invite members of Convocation to self-nominate for the role of Chair and to register to vote in the election. Nominations should include a candidate statement written by the nominee (maximum of 150 words). Candidates are strongly recommended to contact the University for a discussion about the role at governanceoffice@newcastle.ac.uk. The deadline for nominations is 31 August 2025, and the deadline for voter registration is 14 September 2025.
- To hold an online election for the role of Chair (on a first past the post basis) during September 2025. Voting is by registration only.
- To advertise the upcoming election in the next edition of *Arches* online magazine.

A role descriptor for the Chair of Convocation can be found at:

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/executive/governance/convocation/>

Eligible members of Convocation who wish to vote in this election, should register by completing a form by 17.00 (BST) on 14 September 2025: [Registration Form](#). All those who register by the deadline would be contacted with information on the next stages of the process.

Court has determined to consider a process for the Deputy Chair at its next meeting in October 2025.

5. HONORARY DEGREES

Reported that:

Nominations were currently being invited for the award of honorary degrees by the University. Further information, including a video featuring recent honorary graduates, and a link to the online nomination form is available at:

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/honorary-graduates/>

Proposals should be sent via [email](#) to Dr Colin Campbell, Registrar.

6. HONORARY FELLOWSHIPS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Reported that:

Court invites nominations in writing for the award of Honorary Fellowships of the University in 2026. Any member of Convocation may 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 is made should be clearly stated.

Principles for the award of Honorary Fellowships and Nomination Forms can be found at:

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/congregations/honorary/honorary-fellows/>

Proposals should be sent via [email](#) to Dr Colin Campbell, Registrar, by Friday 8 August 2025.

7. CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chancellor and colleagues for their contributions to the work of the University in challenging times, and thanked members for their participation in the meeting, as well as those who had attended alumni events and/or helped to grow alumni networks and volunteering initiatives.

The Registrar thanked the Acting Chair of Convocation on behalf of the University for stepping into the role at short notice, and to acknowledge and appreciate their encouragement and support for the University's alumni relations work, and NCL in Action in particular.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Date of the Sixty-Ninth Ordinary Meeting of Convocation will be announced later in the year.