

**NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC BOARD
21 May 2025**

A

Present: The Vice-Chancellor and President (in the Chair) and 331 members of Academic Board.

NOTES

1. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The notes of the meeting of Academic Board held on 22 May 2024 and the notes of the extraordinary meeting of Academic Board held on 31 July 2024 were noted and approved as a correct record and signed.

[Circulated with the agenda as Documents A1 and A2. Copies filed in the Minute Book.]

2. MEMBERS OF COURT APPOINTED BY ACADEMIC BOARD

Reported that:

The term of appointment of two members of Court appointed by Academic Board would terminate on 31 July 2025, and University Executive Board had agreed to recommend to Academic Board that they were reappointed.

Dr Jo Matthan (2025)

Professor Maggie Roe (2025)

Resolved that:

Academic Board approve the appointment to Court of the above colleagues effective from 1 August 2025 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 external context including government plans and forthcoming reports. The Chancellor's Spring Statement had included no significant announcements for Higher Education but defence was highlighted as a central pillar of the forthcoming Industrial Strategy. The Department for Education's Higher Education Reform white paper was expected in summer 2025 and key priorities would include widening access contribution to economic growth and teaching quality and efficiency. The Immigration white paper had confirmed that the Post Study Work Visa duration had decreased to 18 months, and related compliance had increased.
- b) The Vice-Chancellor reported that the UK Higher Education (HE) sector continued to face financial challenges, and it was expected that international student recruitment cycles would

remain challenging across the sector. There was unlikely to be short-term or medium-term aid from the government but the University and partner institutions would continue to lobby for changes to the HE funding model via Universities UK and the Russell Group.

- c) In reference to the University's financial situation, the Vice-Chancellor reported that continued effort would be required to navigate the financial situation responsibly as there were no guarantees of improvement in international student recruitment. The University would need to achieve a reduction in recurring costs to balance the decrease in recurring income. Capital investment plans had been scaled back, but it was also necessary to prioritise essential work and maintenance of the estate. Cash reserves could not be used to cover recurring multi-million pound deficits or the University would face liquidity and covenant issues.
- d) The Vice-Chancellor reported that the final round of voluntary severance had closed and the scheme had resulted in a savings of approximately £16m. Due to the remaining deficit it was necessary to move forward with the next stage of mitigating measures which involved redundancy. Each of the Faculties had developed a detailed proposal to identify the remaining savings required in their area, and these proposals had been shared with trade unions and would be discussed with Senate on 21 May.
- e) The Vice-Chancellor confirmed University leadership would continue to explore every available avenue to mitigate the need for compulsory redundancies, and recognised these were difficult and significant decisions impacting all of the University community.
- f) The Vice-Chancellor encouraged the University community to continue to consider the future of the University, and to engage with key future endeavours. The 200th anniversary of the founding of the University would take place in 2034, and this provided an opportunity to build on the University's history to exemplify a new generation university.
- g) The Vice-Chancellor reported that areas of focus for strategic change included the implementation of the new Education Strategy, a refresh of the Research Strategy, the development of a new PGR Strategy and the development of new markets including growing Transnational Education (TNE).
- h) Notable highlights were provided for each of the three cross-cutting strategies: Research and Innovation, Global and Engagement and Place, and these highlights included the significant and diverse contributions from NUCoREs, the development and growth of global partnerships and the successful launch of Universities for North East England.

5. QUESTIONS

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

- a) **What specific training and welfare support have you provided for managers tasked with selecting who among their colleagues will be made redundant?**
Decisions in relation to selection for redundancy would be made by a panel of colleagues including the Heads of Academic Unit. Panel members would undertake all necessary training and briefing in advance of those processes and each panel would have access to professional support regarding the process. A Manager's Hub had been set up to support those managers dealing with any aspect of the current change ranging from guidance to support their colleagues through the process to personal support.

- b) Have you considered the effects of your redundancy programme on staff morale, interpersonal relationships among colleagues, and trust in Heads of School?**

University leadership and colleagues were acutely aware of the impact of the current financial situation on staff morale. They were doing everything they could to support any colleagues who had been affected, and especially those in the areas that were in scope for further savings.

- c) We are all now very aware of the measures the University has undertaken this year to reduce costs; what steps has the University taken this year to increase revenues, for example by improving recruitment, which would have reduced the need to make staff redundant?**

University leadership was doing all they could to maximise student recruitment for 2025 and beyond, including an enhanced scholarship offer to support international applications and conversions across a range of key markets. They had also implemented a turn-around for decisions on applications of 5 working days.

- d) Now that the vast majority of the necessary financial savings have been made, and on the assumption that academic strength, research power and staff's trust and goodwill are strategically important assets, will you end the redundancy process to await the outcome of government review, and instead focus your attention on influencing that outcome?**

The government had not given any indication that universities would be a priority for further investment, and so it was not advisable to rely on potential policy changes to address the financial challenges. University and sector representatives were doing all they can to influence government wherever possible, but it was necessary to take action now to secure the future.

- e) Have you considered the effects of your redundancy programme on the reputation of Newcastle University and especially on our ability to attract high-quality colleagues in future years?**

The priority was to restore financial sustainability, which was essential for the University's reputation and future as a globally leading university.

- f) Why are you proceeding with a redundancy programme based on crude financial targets ahead of a strategic review of the shape of the university next year?**

The strategic review of the shape of the University would take time, and it was necessary to reduce costs quickly to balance our reduced income and avoid significant deficits. The savings targets were based on projected income if student recruitment in the 2025/26 academic year remained flat. All indications were that the position in September was likely to be lower than this, and so delaying action was not a viable option.

The following questions were submitted by members of Academic Board during the meeting:

- g) If you are cutting capital spending to the minimum, are you reviewing the cost of the Castle Leazes' development?**

The initial assessment of the increase in cost had demonstrated that there should be sufficient return on the investment to safeguard profit and also service the debt, but Council and Finance Committee would continue to review the position to ensure financial viability.

- h) Can you shed any more light on what is meant by PS alignment please?**

The academic size and structure of the University was under consideration as part of the NUShape programme and it was therefore appropriate to review the Professional Services model accordingly, to ensure alignment and the optimisation of service delivery.

- i) **The revenue generation efforts appear to be heading in the right direction. Have we considered enhancing our University Outreach capacity by training all staff to promote our current offerings, rather than concentrating on new ones?**

Key initiatives relating to raising income, student recruitment and outreach would include colleagues from the Faculties and relevant schools as well as subject experts. The Vice-Chancellor noted he had a meeting planned with the Head of the International Office that same day to discuss these matters, given the pressures around international student recruitment and the need to maximise every effort to increase student recruitment numbers where possible.

- j) **As you know, the higher education job market is shrinking. Many of those in scope for redundancy will struggle to get other jobs. What support is there for them?**

Colleagues leaving the University have access to advice and support signposted by People Services; the sources covered include advice and wellbeing support, CV, interview and job seeking skills, access to work and money advice.

- k) **Could you give an indication of what specialist HR capacity will be re-assigned to or recruited for revenue-generation in the future, and what the action priorities are on the income side?**

Any additional resource to support new activity would be included in and considered in business cases for approval.

- l) **Could the university push the option for staff to purchase 5 or 10 days of additional leave. Even with a 50% uptake, this initiative could lead to meaningful cost savings?**

Colleagues already have the option of buying annual leave and whilst this would offer in year savings it would not deliver recurring savings as required from the current resizing activity.

6. HONORARY FELLOWSHIPS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Court invited nominations in writing for the award of next year's Honorary Fellowships of the University. Any member of Academic Board 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 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 8 August 2025.