

BOARD OF GOVERNORS' MEETING
30 June 2025 in Room 209, Sutherland Building, City Campus West

CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

Contact Georgina Bailes, georgina.bailes@northumbria.ac.uk, Secretary to the Board of Governors, with any queries about these Summary Minutes.

Present: Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (Chair), Prof Dame Janet Beer, Helen Fairfoul, Katherine Fawcett, Alison Fellows [to BG24/135], Peter Judge, Hassan Kajee, Sophie Haagensen, Mark Larsen, Prof Andy Long, Ita McCrory, Arushi Sinha, Jan Thompson, Ian Wilkin

Apologies: Dr Birju Bartoli, Dr Stuart Fancey, Helen Thorne, Prof James McLaughlin, Dr Penny Rumbold

Secretary: Georgina Bailes, Beth Lenney (Assistant Secretary)

In attendance: Helen Bower [to BG24/113 and BG24/112-BG24/113], Prof Louise Bracken, Dr Guy Brown [BG24/110], Prof Jane Entwistle [BG24/119], Jane Embley, Mark Gill [BG24/110], Professor Tom Lawson, Leon Mayfield, Dan Monnery [to Student Recruitment and from BG24/110], Dr Heather Robson [B24/113], Jack Taylor [BG24/120], Gary Tideswell [BG24/119], Prof Graham Wynn.

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

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| 1 | <p><u>Chair's Opening Remarks</u> [Oral Report]
 The Chair extended thanks to the new Students' Union Sabbatical Team for a very interesting pre-Board presentation outlining the manifestos of the President and each Sabbatical Officer. The Chair also noted that this would be Arushi Sinah's last meeting of the Board and thanked Arushi for her input to the Board and its Committees.</p> <p><u>Strategic Discussion Items</u>
 <u>Vice-Chancellor's Report</u> [BG24/108]
 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local developments and their potential implications for Northumbria. Recent headlines reflected the financial strain on universities, with many announcing job cuts and cost-saving measures. The Pamela Gilles report had been published on 19 June, following recent media coverage of Dundee University, and the Government's White Paper on immigration had been published on 12 May - the University continued to monitor the impact of the changes on the sector. The recent report from the UUK Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce emphasised that UK universities were facing acute financial pressure and ultimately called for a new collaborative model - a combined effort across the sector, government, and funders. The Freedom of Speech Act would come into force on 1 August and Northumbria was in the process of developing a Free Speech Code of Practice in line with the new legal duties. The latest OfS report on the financial sustainability of the sector predicted that circa 43% of universities were projected to be in deficit for 2024/25 and without mitigating actions this could rise to 72%, Northumbria remained in a good financial position but must continue to plan prudently to ensure long term stability. Appointments had been made to the three Faculty PVC roles and would be in place from 1 August 2025. The University had been awarded Higher Education Institution of the Year at the NEON Awards, Professor Glyn Howatson had been appointed as Deputy Chair of Unit of Assessment (UoA) 24 for REF 2029, Professor Matt Keirman recently won 'Inspiration of the Year' in the British Forces in Business Awards 2025, and Professor Alan Kildair had been awarded an OBE for services to palliative care in the King's Birthday Honours. The Board considered the update and noted that the Pamela Gillies report was an opportunity for institutions to learn and to reflect on key issues in the context of their own governance structure and processes. The Board commended Professor Glyn Howatson's</p> |
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	<p>achievement of the role of Deputy Chair for a UoA in REF 2029, noting that this was a significant responsibility, and noted that the Freedom of Speech Act represented a step forward from the previous outline guidance and that the Code of Practice would replace the existing Policy.</p> <p><u>Student Recruitment 2025/26</u> [Presentation] The Board noted an update on student recruitment.</p> <p><u>Planning and Budget Proposals 2025/26</u> [BG24/109] The Board approved the Planning and Budget Proposals for 2025/26 following endorsement by Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2025</p> <p><u>Educational Partnership Opportunity with Global Banking School/GEDU</u> [BG24/110] The Board noted the Global Banking School/GEDU Business Case following endorsement in principle from Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2025, noted that the external due diligence activity underway through Muckle Solicitors would consider negative online commentary however, the current level of this was considered to be reasonable due to the size and scale of GBS. The Board requested further information on the employability rates of students on courses offered through GBS partnerships with other Universities, further assurances, particularly around the nature of the partnership, it's branding and identity, and the mitigation options for the potential reputational risks, and that the proposal be further developed in line with the above requests prior to submission to Finance and Resources Committee in September and the Board in October.</p> <p><u>Pensions Strategy</u> [BG24/111] The Board noted an update on the University's pension strategy.</p>
2	<p><u>Performance, Projects, Policy and Regulatory Matters</u></p> <p><u>Achievement of Athena Swan Silver Award</u> [BG24/113] The Board considered the Achievement of Athena Swan Silver Award following consideration by People Committee on 16 June 2025. Advance HE's Athena Swan Charter was a framework used to support and transform gender equality within Higher Education and research, Universities and research institutes voluntarily participated in Athena Swan. The University obtained an Athena Swan Bronze Award in 2015 which was renewed in 2019 and the application in March 2025 was for a Silver Award. The application included a thorough self-assessment and required the University demonstrate progress against the 2019 action plan and priorities and evidence the impact and success in addressing gender inequality. Work was now underway to bring together the Race Equality Charter and Athena Swan action plans, and to review data and actions intersectionally across all characteristics where relevant. All gender equality actions had a 'responsible owner' to drive forward progress, would be monitored by the University Equality Actions Group, and would be regularly reviewed. The Board noted the update and commended the University on its achievement of the Silver Award at an institutional level.</p> <p><u>Students' Union President Report</u> [BG24/114] The Board considered the report of the Students' Union President for 2024/25 which had been a record year with 5,172 students voting in elections, 13,100 students with at least one recorded interaction with the Union, 5,715 members of societies and 85% of students stating that the Union had had a positive impact on their time at the University. The Union had been shortlisted for Educate North Wellbeing Award and had achieved Investors in People Gold. Work to expand the use of SafeZone had faced some logistical challenges and had moved to focus on private accommodation providers rather than the entire city. The Union had lobbied MPs for HE funding and housing reform and influenced changes to University policies and practices such as resit timings to aid International Students, ethical banking, AI guidance and use of agents. A partners' forum with Newcastle Student's Union, Newcastle College and Newcastle City Council had been launched. The Board noted the report, commended the level of Sabbatical Officer activity outlined, and thanked Arushi Sinha for her contribution as President of the Students' Union.</p> <p><u>Annual Quality and Standards Report</u> [BG24/115] The Board considered the Annual Quality and Standards report for 2023/24 following endorsement by Strategic Performance Committee on 9 June 2025 and Academic Board on 19 June 2025. The Office for Students (OfS) required that the Board of Governors ensured the University's compliance with all Conditions of Registration and the report was an overview of the key activities relating to the Quality and</p>

	<p>Standards (B) Conditions reflecting both on the previous year and proposed future developments. Strategic Performance Committee and Academic Board had reviewed the paper in the context of its purpose of enabling the Board of Governors to ensure compliance with the B Conditions. Of the 48 numerical thresholds used by the OfS to inform regulation of condition B3, three were below the threshold using the four-year aggregate view and two were below threshold in the latest year of data. The PG continuation metric was below threshold due to an historical error in how the continuation of MLaw students was entered onto SITS while Bar exam results from external markers were awaited. There were concerns with the progression of some specific groups of students on the QA pathway programme and an action plan had been developed to address this. The Board approved the Annual Quality and Standards Report.</p> <p><u>Access and Participation Plan</u> [BG24/116] The Board considered the Access and Participation Plan (2024/25-2027/28) following endorsement by Strategic Performance Committee on 9 June 2025 and Academic Board on 19 June 2025. In 2023, the Office for Students (OfS) initiated a pilot for new Access and Participation Plans (APPs) as part of a revised approach to enhancing equality of opportunity in English higher education with plans beginning in the 2024/25 academic year, the University was part of the Wave 1 group of volunteer institutions, Wave 2 was in progress with Wave 3 expected to happen from the following year. 12 risks had been cross referenced with the student demographic groups to identify potential gaps and this formed the Equality Control Risk Register which was used to inform the action plan. The new APPs emphasized a comprehensive strategy that not only focused on fair access but also on student success and progression with key elements including, collaboration with schools, clarity and accessibility, flexible provision and enhanced evaluation. The initiatives outlined in the plan would help the University achieve its targets and outline the provider approach to social mobility, including risks and opportunities. The Board noted the report and approved the Access and Participation Plan.</p> <p><u>Media Planning and Services Agency – New Supplier Contract</u> [BG24/112] The Board noted the recommendation to appoint a media buying and planning services agency, which had been through a comprehensive tendering exercise, following endorsement by Finance and Resources Committee on 12 June 2025. The Board noted that the existing supplier had not progressed to the second stage of the process and approved a four-year contract with SMRS</p> <p><u>Competition and Markets Authority Policy</u> [BG24/117] The Board noted the Competition and Markets Authority Policy following endorsement by Audit Committee by Written Resolution on 24 June 2025. The Policy had been updated to ensure compliance with the introduction of a new Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Act 2024. The Board noted that it was useful for Governors to have sight of the full Policy and the context in which Universities operate, and approved the revised Competition and Markets Authority Policy.</p> <p><u>Monthly Finance Report Period 10 2024/25</u> [BG24/118] The Board noted the University’s financial position and performance for period 10 (to May 2025).</p> <p><u>Health and Safety Report Q3 2024/25</u> [BG24/119] The Board considered the Health and Safety Q3 (January - March) report, following consideration from Audit Committee on 2 June 2025, noting that there had been three Health, Safety and Sustainability Services Inspections and four accompanied laboratory inspections. The Board noted the report.</p> <p><u>Strategic Risk Report</u> [BG24/120] The Board approved the updated Strategic Risk Report, following endorsement from Audit Committee on 2 June 2025.</p>
3	<p><u>Chair’s Reports</u> <u>Audit Committee: 2 June</u> [BG24/121] The Board noted that its 2 June meeting Audit Committee had considered and endorsed the several items on the agenda for this meeting, considered internal audit reports for Academic Misconduct, Academic Quality (TNE) and Counter Fraud (International Agents) and considered the indicative External Audit Plan for 2024/25, and a draft Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 which was considered to be a well-balanced programme of internal audits encompassing a variety of strategic risk and compliance-based activity.</p>

	<p><u>Strategic Performance Committee: 9 June</u> [BG24/122] The Board noted that at its 9 June meeting the Committee had considered and endorsed updates on many of the items on the agenda for this meeting, considered a rich and comprehensive deep dive into the Creating New Knowledge Strategic Ambition, considered a quarterly update on Student Experience and Learning Outcomes, Sustainability League Table Performance and the Carbon Management Annual report and requested that Student Enterprise be added to the 2025/26 schedule for Pre-Board visits.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resources Committee Special Budget Meeting: 15 May 2025</u> [BG24/123] The Board noted that at its 15 May Special Budget meeting, Finance and Resources Committee had considered the proposed budget for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025-30 in depth.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resources Committee: 12 June 2025</u> [BG24/124] The Board noted that at its 12 June meeting the Finance and Resources Committee had considered and endorsed updates on many of the items on the agenda for this meeting, considered a report on 2025/26 Student Recruitment and received assurances on the financial performance of the University, considered an update on the University’s Digital Technology and Transformation Service, and the Digital Masterplan and requested a report be brought to a future meeting of the Committee around the ways that digital and AI were being used to achieve efficiencies and new ways of working.</p> <p><u>People Committee: 16 June 2025</u> [BG24/125] The Board noted that at its 16 June meeting People Committee had considered the People Scorecard, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion update and an update on the 2025 Pay Gap report, requested that a sub-group was convened to further explore the Committee’s overall effectiveness, and requested that its Terms of Reference for 2025/26 be updated to reflect the findings of the above sub-group, before submission to Board at its October meeting.</p> <p><u>Academic Board: 19 June</u> [BG24/126] The Board noted that at its 19 June meeting the Academic Board had considered and endorsed updates on many of the items on the agenda for this meeting, approved changes to the Handbook of Student Regulations, Academic Regulations for Taught Awards, Academic Regulations for Research Awards, Student Unacceptable Behaviours Policy, and the Learning and Teaching Survey Policy and Review Framework, and considered the NSU Annual Quality Review and reports from its Sub-Committees.</p>
3	<p><u>Constitutional Matters</u></p> <p><u>Governance Effectiveness Review</u> [BG24/127] The Board noted and approved the proposed scope and process for the Governance Effectiveness Review 2025/26 following endorsement by Nominations Committee on 19 June 2025. The CUC HE Code of Governance 5.13 recommended that “a regular, full and robust review of governance effectiveness with some degree of independent input” take place every three years.</p> <p><u>Scheme of Delegated Authority</u> [BG24/129] The Committee noted and approved the updated Scheme of Delegated Authority following endorsement by Audit Committee on 2 June, noting that it provided an excellent reference document for Governors, outlining the responsibilities of the Board and its Committees.</p> <p><u>Review of Governing Documents 2025/26</u> [BG24/130-134] The Board noted and approved the revised Governing Documents for 2025/26 which would be effective from 1 August.</p> <p><u>Students’ Union Code of Practice 2025/26 and 2026/27</u> [BG24/135] The Board considered the Students’ Union Code of Practice for 2025/26 and 2026/27 in accordance with section 3.6 of the CUC HE Code of Governance and with Article of Government 8.1. following approval of the Handbook of Student Regulations for 2025/26 and 2026/27 by Academic Board on 19 June 2025. As a one-off measure the Code had been updated for the following two academic years (2025/26 and 2026/27) to ensure that offers for the 2026/27 academic year, which would be made from autumn 2025 onwards, contained the terms and conditions</p>

Beth Lenney
Assistant Secretary to the Board of Governors
July 2025