

BOARD OF GOVERNORS' MEETING
2 March 2026 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), Dr Birju Bartoli, Prof Dame Janet Beer, Dr L Brown [to BG25/61] Helen Fairfoul, Dr Stuart Fancey, Katherine Fawcett, Alison Fellows, Peter Judge, Mark Larsen, Prof Andy Long, Ita McCrory, Dr Penny Rumbold, Jan Thompson, Helen Thorne, Mary Udeze [to BG25/64], Ian Wilkin.

Apologies: Hassan Kajee

Secretary: Georgina Bailes, Beth Lenney (Assistant Secretary)

In attendance: Helen Bower [Student Recruitment and BG25/62], Prof Louise Bracken, Jane Embley, Prof Lisanne Gibson [BG25/65], Prof Tom Lawson, Leon Mayfield, John McKenna [Student Recruitment and BG25/62-63], Dan Monnery, Aaron Porter (AdvanceHE) [BG25/60], Jack Taylor [BG25/66-68], Prof John Woodward [BG25/61], Prof Graham Wynn.

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1 Chair's Opening Remarks [Oral Report]

The Chair thanked the PVC Education and wider team for an interesting, informative and useful pre-Board session on Claude AI.

The Chair noted that this was Prof Graham Wynn's last Board meeting and thanked him for his contribution to the Board and its Committees during his time as PVC Education.

Declarations of Governors' Interests [Oral Report]

There were no declarations of interest in any items on the agenda however updated declarations for Peter Judge, who was joining the Hadrian Learning Trust, and Alison Fellows who would soon become Chair of the Board of Groundwork NE and Cumbria, were noted.

2 Strategic Discussion Items

Vice-Chancellor's Report [BG25/59]

The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local developments and their potential implications for Northumbria. The external environment facing the higher education sector remained challenging, with the most recent Office for Students (OfS) analysis revealing that nearly half of English universities were forecasting deficit positions for 2025/26, with sector-wide tuition fee income declining by approximately £438 million, the University was not among those institutions subject to formal monitoring or considered at risk by the OfS. The University had recently hosted a Future Jobs Roundtable meeting on behalf of Universities UK. UCU had commenced industrial action following rejection of the University's Total Reward Scheme proposals, comprising action short of a strike from 12 February and strike action across ten days in February and March, with contingency arrangements in place to protect students' education. The University had been recognised as the most sustainable university in the North East for the fifth consecutive year, achieving a 'First Class' rating in the People and Planet University League Table and ranking 16th nationally. Professor Susan Edwards had been awarded Honorary King's Counsel, Professor John Woodward had received the Polar Medal, and Professor Joanne Atkinson had been awarded the Fellowship of the Queen's Institute of Community Nursing. The North East Space Skills and Technology Centre (NESST) project continued to progress at pace, with a 'topping out' ceremony planned for March 2026. **The Board noted the update.**

Pensions Update [Oral Report]

The Board noted an update on the University pension schemes.

Governance Effectiveness Review - Advance HE Report [BG25/60]

The Board considered the Governance Effectiveness Review 2025/26 Outcome and the final report. The review deployed a mixed methodology including observations of five Board and Committee meetings (Board of Governors, Audit, Finance and Resources, People and Strategic Performance), individual and small group interviews with Governors and Executive members, a benchmark survey completed by over 70 other university governing bodies, and a review of governance documentation. The overall conclusion of the review was that governance at the University was highly effective, with the Board, Executive and Secretariat having set high standards for governance, covering processes, value added by governors, and culture and behaviours. **The Board noted the report thanking Advance HE for presenting the report, noting that the process had been professional, efficient and straightforward and confirmed that the Secretariat would work with the Chair and Vice-Chancellor to develop a formal response, including feedback submitted by the Board, to be considered by the Board at its April meeting.**

Science and Environment 5-Year Strategic Plan [BG25/61]

The Board considered the Faculty of Science and Environment 5-Year Strategic Plan. The faculty comprised four Schools: Architecture and Built Environment, Computer Science, Engineering, Physics and Mathematics, and Geography and Natural Sciences, and had the highest percentage of students from widening participation backgrounds. The faculty had significant research strengths. **The Board noted the plan, noting that RGC targets would be subject specific and realistic, with the focus on driving excellence rather than growth alone, and that staff to student ratios were under review and would be benchmarked against the sector, factoring in NSS results.**

Student Recruitment Semester Two 2025/26 and 2026/27 Intake [Presentation]

The Board noted an update on student recruitment.

3 Performance, Projects, Policy and Regulatory Matters

Medium Term Financial Plan [BG25/62]

The Board noted an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Monthly Finance Report Period 6 2025/26 [BG25/63]

The Board noted the University's financial position and performance for period 6 (to 31 January 2026).

Students' Union President Report [BG25/28]

The Board considered the Students' Union President's Report. Society membership had had increased to 5,823 members, representing 19.5% of the undergraduate population. Sport Northumbria membership had also broken records with 2,731 Sport club memberships, 13% up on the prior year and an all time record. There were 36 candidates for Sabbatical Office and 82 for Student Representative roles, representing the third highest number of Sabbatical candidates on record. Five nominations had been submitted to the Educate North Awards, covering Community Impact, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Campaign of the Year, Student Experience of the Year, and Third Sector of the Year. SU staff and Officers were visiting the London Campus on a fortnightly basis delivering community building activities including representation and society events and had secured several donations of regular supplies for the food pantry. The University and the SU had entered the first round of meetings under the University Partnership framework, looking at areas of collaboration including support for commuter students and helping drive applicant conversion. The SU was leading advocacy work on student payment plans and had been engaging with the University regarding review of short extension approaches to better reflect the reality of students' working lives. **The Board noted the report and commended the success of the food pantry.**

Centre for Writing and Publishing [BG25/65]

The Board considered an update on the Centre for Writing and Publishing.

Strategic Risk Report [BG25/66]

The Board approved the updated Strategic Risk Report, following endorsement from Audit Committee on 16 February, noting that Audit Committee had had a focused discussion on the risks that were substantially out of tolerance and that the Assurance Map, which was under development, would be presented to the Committee and Board in June.

Appointment of External Audit Provider [BG25/67]

The Board approved the appointment of RSM LLP as the University's external Auditor.

Provision of Non-Audit Services by External and Internal Audit Policy [BG25/68]

The Board considered the Provision of Non-Audit Services by External and Internal Audit Policy prior to following endorsement by Audit Committee on 16 February. The policy had been reviewed and updated to align with the standardised policy template format, content had been streamlined for clarity and conciseness whilst retaining all essential elements, reference had been updated to the Financial Reporting Council's 2024 Ethical Standard, and Business Owner roles had been updated to reflect current organisational structure. **The Board approved the Provision of Non-Audit Services by External and Internal Audit policy.**

Health and Safety Report Q2 2025/26 and Annual Review of Operating Arrangements [BG25/69]

The Board agreed that due to timing constraints, this item would instead be considered at its April meeting.

Safeguarding and Prevent Annual Report 2024/25* [BG25/72]

The Board noted the updated Safeguarding and Prevent Annual Report 2024/25.

4 Chair's Reports

Finance and Resources Committee: 2 February [BG25/70]

The Chair of Finance and Resources Committee reported that at its 2 February meeting the Committee had considered the Estates Delivery Plan, considered an update on High Performance Compute as part of the Digital Masterplan and an update on the NU People and Finance Roadmap and approved proposed amendments to the Travel and Expenses Policy and accompanying Code of Practice. **The Board noted the report.**

Northumbria London Campus Board: 12 February [BG25/71]

The Chair of the Northumbria University London Campus Board of Directors reported that at its 12 February meeting, the Board of Directors had considered an update on Governance Arrangements in Response to OfS E8 Conditions, a new UK Educational Partnerships Committee was being established to complement existing university governance structures, which would review and provide assurance on a range of matters including proposed annual enrolments, OfS recognised approaches to counting subcontract student numbers, and annual strategic alignment, considered the Admissions Project Workshop Report and Next Steps, which had been commissioned as part of Project Optimise by QAHE and considered an update on the CMA Policy and Training. **The Board noted the report, noting that the implementation of the new UK Educational Partnership Committee addressed a recommendation in the Governance Effectiveness Review to provide the Board with greater oversight of partnerships in relation to the proposed E8 condition.**

Audit Committee: 16 February 2026 [BG25/72]

The Chair of Audit Committee reported that at its 16 February meeting the Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda for this meeting, including the Strategic Risk Report (subject to clarifications), the Health and Safety Policy and Operating Arrangements, and the Provision of Non Audit Services by External and Internal Audit Policy, approved the management response to the IT Vulnerability and Patch management internal audit report following full discussion of the four areas where it was proposed to take a different approach to the auditor's recommendations. A structured programme of work had been developed to address the accepted recommendations which would be monitored by the Committee until completion. The Committee had also endorsed the Counter Fraud and Bribery Policy for consideration by Finance and Resources Committee on 24 March, noting that consideration would be given to more detailed reporting to the Committee on fraud cases and overall compliance with the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023. **The Board noted the report and the proposed approach to the IT Vulnerability and Patch Management Internal Audit review.**

5 Constitutional Matters

Governor Terms of Office [BG25/73]

The Board noted the Governors Terms of Office, noting that an update on Governor recruitment would be shared at the April meeting of the Board.

Georgina Bailes
Secretary to the Board of Governors
March 2026