

BOARD OF GOVERNORS' MEETING
20 April 2026 in MBC009 Ground Floor, C Block, Coach Lane 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, Dr Laura Brown, Helen Fairfoul, Dr Stuart Fancey, Katherine Fawcett, Alison Fellows, Peter Judge, Hassan Kajee, Mark Larsen [absent BG25/97], Prof Andy Long, Ita McCrory, Jan Thompson, Helen Thorne, Mary Udeze

Apologies: Dr Birju Bartoli, Dr Penny Rumbold, Ian Wilkin

Secretary: Georgina Bailes, Beth Lenney (Assistant Secretary)

In attendance: Dr Guy Brown [BG25/80], Prof Louise Bracken, Ashley Clemmet [BG25/88], Jane Embley, Prof Jane Entwistle [BG25/88], Mark Gill [BG25/80-81], Prof Tom Lawson, Leon Mayfield, Dan Monnery, Prof John Unsworth [to BG25/80], Prof John Woodward [BG25/80]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING	
1	<u>Chair's Opening Remarks</u> [Oral Report] The Chair thanked Prof John Unsworth, Associate PVC Education in the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, and wider team from an excellent pre-Board session at Coach Lane Campus, noting that the high quality of teaching and engagement from students was evident. The Chair noted that this was Prof Tom Lawson's last board meeting and thanked him for his contribution to the Board and its Committees during his time as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Chair noted that this would have been Ian Wilkin's last Board meeting as a Governor, though he would be attending the 1 June meeting of Audit Committee. The Chair noted that a draft of the revised CUC Code would be released by CUC for public comment that afternoon, with the final version due to be launched on 10 June. <u>Declarations of Governors' Interests</u> [Oral Report] Previous declarations in relation to the Pensions update were noted.
2	<u>Strategic Discussion Items</u> <u>Vice-Chancellor's Report</u> [BG25/59] The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local developments and their potential implications for Northumbria. The Office for Students' most recent analysis had found that, without mitigating action, 124 institutions faced a deficit in 2025/26. The University had set out in March the need to reduce its cost base by the end of 2026, with good progress made through Voluntary Severance schemes following two All Staff briefing sessions on 10 March 2026. The Home Office had announced an emergency visa brake on 5 March 2026, halting student visa applications from nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan from 26 March 2026. The graduate route to post-study work was to be reduced from two years to 18 months from January 2027, with more stringent sponsor compliance requirements under a new RAG banding system taking effect from June 2026. Prof Andy Dougill from the University of York had been appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost from 1 August 2026, and Professor Gabrielle Finn from the University of Manchester had been appointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 6 July 2026. The NESST topping out ceremony took place on 27 March 2026. The University had been shortlisted four times in the Educate North Awards, for Campaign of the Year, Community Engagement, Digital and AI Innovation, and Law School of the Year. The Board noted the update noting that the AI Growth Zone and potential partnerships remained on the Combined Authority's agenda and commended the recent funding

success of Prof Joanna Allan who had been awarded MRC funding for a project relating to climate change and Prof Clare Watt who had been awarded STFC funding for her space related project.

Faculty of Health and Wellbeing FPVC Update [Oral Report]

The Board considered the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Update. The Faculty comprised four schools - Communities and Education, Healthcare and Nursing Sciences, Psychology, and Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation - preparing students for professional practice, engaging with partners, and delivering impactful research. The School of Healthcare and Nursing Sciences had been ranked first in England for Adult Nursing and first in the UK for Children's Nursing in the Guardian University Guide 2025 and had received a Times Higher Award for outstanding student support. The School of Communities and Education delivered CPD through the Centre for Children and Young People's Psychological Training and had received a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence. The Schools of Psychology and Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation had research highlights including the Technology Empowered Dementia Independence project and internationally recognised work in Women's Health and Wellbeing, Bloodflow Restriction, and Space Medicine. The Faculty was developing a vision centered on addressing the social determinants of health and wellbeing and enabling equitable access to health and social care, under the heading of a Compassionate University. **The Board noted the update.**

'The Bridge' Educational Partnership Opportunity [BG25/80]

The Board noted an update on 'The Bridge' Educational Partnership Opportunity and approved the partnership subject to independent due diligence and contracts.

Beacon Education – Distance Learning in China [BG25/81]

The Board noted an update on Beacon Education and requested a further meeting to consider the opportunity in greater depth.

St George's University Update [Oral Report]

The Board noted an update on St George's University provision as required under the Finance Regulations.

3 Performance, Projects, Policy and Regulatory Matters

Students' Union President Report [BG25/28]

The Board considered the Students' Union President's Report. The Students' Union's priorities for 2025/26 were stronger campus communities, student mental health and wellbeing, and improved SU visibility and engagement. The 2026 elections saw 4,565 students vote, the third-highest turnout ever, society membership had reached a record high of over 6,000 members, and three sports teams had been named National Champions at Big BUCS Wednesday. International Students' Week 2026 had attracted strong attendance, and the Students' Union had agreed to make International Week an annual tradition. RAG Week had raised £8,460 for charity. The weekly Wellbeing Café continued to attract 60–80 students each Wednesday, and University Mental Health Day had reached over 750 students across both campuses. The University had agreed to underwrite pantry costs of approximately £30,000 for 2026/27. The main student concern remained the impact of industrial action, with the Students' Union focused on ensuring students understood their rights regarding mitigation and compensation. The Students' Union had been shortlisted for five Educate North Awards, and the Board were invited to attend the annual Awards Ceremony. **The Board noted the report.**

Students' Union Returning Officer Report [BG25/83]

The Board noted the Students' Union Returning Officer Report, noting that the Lead Northumbria full-time officer and representative elections ran from 26 January - 12 March 2026, with 77 candidates and 4,565 votes cast, representing a voter turnout of 10.5%, 15 complaints and 1 appeal were received, of which 5 complaints and 0 appeals were upheld. The Returning Officer, Peter Robertson (NUS Charity CEO) declared that the election had been run in a fair and democratic manner satisfying the stipulations of the 1994 Education Act.

Medium Term Financial Plan [BG25/84]

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

Monthly Finance Report Period 7 2025/26 [BG25/85]

The Board noted the University's financial position and performance for period 7 (to 28 February 2026).

Pensions Update [Oral Report]

The Board noted an update on the University's Pension Schemes.

Pay Gap Report 2025 [BG25/86]

The Board considered the Pay Gap Report 2025, following its approval by People Committee on 2 April 2026. The University continued to work towards eliminating all pay gaps by 2030, with the 2025 analysis showing modest progress alongside persistent structural disparities. The mean gender pay gap had reduced to 10.7% and the median to 13.9%, with the overall gap driven by underrepresentation of women in senior academic and leadership roles rather than unequal pay within grades. The overall ethnicity pay gap was marginally negative, indicating ethnic minority staff earned slightly more on average than white staff, however, pronounced disparities existed for ethnic minority women compared with white men, particularly in professional support roles. The disability pay gap had narrowed substantially to 6.3% mean and 6.7% median, largely due to improved declaration rates, though disabled staff remained underrepresented at senior levels. A mean LGBTQ+ pay gap of 8.2% and median of 3.7% was reported, with variation between academic and professional support groups. Across all characteristics, the primary driver of pay gaps was workforce composition and occupational segregation rather than unequal pay for equal work. Progress had been made on representation of women in the upper pay quartile, ethnic minority colleagues in professional support roles, and disability disclosure rates, however, current financial pressures were likely to limit the ability to shift representation through recruitment, making awareness-raising across leadership a priority for 2026/27. **The Board noted the report and suggested that consideration be given to how the pay gap analysis could include factors disproportionately affecting women, including maternity leave, progression and research continuity.**

Staff Engagement Survey 2025 [BG25/87]

The Board considered the Engagement Survey Outcomes 2025, following consideration by People Committee on 2 April 2026. The 2025 Engagement Survey ran from 13 November to 5 December 2025, receiving 1,808 responses from 3,337 eligible colleagues, a response rate of 54% and the highest since 2018. The top positive outcomes were in relation to flexible working, supportive colleagues and managers, and competitive salary and annual leave. The top areas for improvement were in relation to workload pressures, pay and pension constraints, and low confidence in change. Findings had been presented across University Executive, Senior Leadership Group, EDI Committee, and Faculty and Service areas, with 52 reports provided to enable local priority-setting. **The Board noted the report and that the results were broadly in line with the wider sector.**

Health and Safety Report Q2 2025/26 and Annual Review of Operating Arrangements [BG25/88]

The Board considered the Health and Safety Report Q2 (September to December 2025) and Annual Review of Health and Safety Operating Arrangements, following endorsement by Audit Committee on 16 February 2026. Mandatory training completion rates were below 95% in 10 of 15 schools, though trends showed improvement in all but two areas, this was now reported at a school level which allow for more informative reporting. Key performance indicators for planned preventative maintenance, asbestos management and water hygiene were at or above target. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service had conducted three building inspections with no actions required, and fire marshal training provision had increased by 62% for in-date training. The management action plan for the HASTAM reviews of risk assessment and hazardous substances management had been developed and reviewed by the University Health and Safety Committee who would continue to monitor progress. The Health and Safety reporting schedule to the Board and its Committees would move from quarterly to triennially, to better align with Faculty and Service reporting timelines. Terms of Reference for UHSMG had been revised, including a change of name to 'committee', and would inform updated Faculty and Service Terms of Reference. The Health and Safety Policy and Operating Arrangements had undergone periodic review, with updates to reflect the new Faculty structure, simplified risk categories and clarity on insurance arrangements for home working. **The Board noted the report and approved the Health and Safety Policy and Operating Arrangements.**

Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024/25 [BG25/89]

The Board considered the Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024/25 and Commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, for approval following endorsement by Strategic Performance Committee on 30 March 2026. The Annual Statement assured the Committee that the University met the commitments of the updated Concordat to Support Research Integrity, to which the University was required to commit by end of April 2026. The 2025 Concordat introduced a formal definition of research integrity and questionable research practices, extended expectations to partners and subcontractors, and required greater detail in annual statements. The Managing Misconduct in Research Policy, approved in February 2025, set out procedures for raising concerns, protecting those who did so in good faith, and managing conflicts of interest. A new Research Publications Policy had been approved in July

2025, underpinned by a rights retention statement providing the University with a licence to make Author Accepted Manuscripts publicly available. The Research Ethics and Integrity team had been repositioned within a new Research Quality and Compliance team, enabling closer alignment with research governance and compliance colleagues. During 2024/25, three allegations were reported, one of which proceeded to formal investigation. Two allegations were upheld in part or in full, including one relating to multiple areas of concern. **The Board noted the report and approved the Annual Statement on Research Integrity for 2024/25.**

Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25 [BG25/90]

The Board considered the Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25 following endorsement by Academic Board on 11 March 2026 and by Strategic Performance Committee on 30 March 2026. The Degree Outcomes Statement was an expectation established by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment and served to provide transparency on degree outcomes in response to concerns about grade inflation and variation in degree classifications across the sector. Good awards for 2024/25 had increased by 3.6 percentage points from 77.6% to 81.2%, remaining at pre-pandemic levels, with the year-on-year increase driven primarily by an increase in the proportion of first class degrees. Several attainment gaps had narrowed in 2024/25. The UK BAME attainment gap had reduced to 3.8 percentage points, its lowest in six years. The gap between UK and non-UK domiciled students had almost halved to 9.9%. The gender gap had closed from 11.2% to 4.4%, its lowest in four years. Attainment gaps had widened for students from low participation postcodes, low socio-economic areas, and BAME students, with potential implications for Strategy Measure of Success S1. Areas for improvement would be explored. Annual external examiner reports confirmed that 100% of examiners considered the University's approach to quality and standards consistent with sector norms. The University was undertaking a full review of its degree classification algorithm as part of the Education Strategic Delivery Plan. **The Board noted and approved the report.**

Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan [BG25/91]

The Board considered the Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan, following approval by Academic Board on 11 March 2026. The Faculty of Health and Wellbeing was a clear strength, with programmes including Occupational Therapist and District Nurse achieving 100% achievement and retention rates. Achievement rates for Chartered Surveying remained low, reflecting a wider sector challenge, with programme-level action plans introduced to address this. Overall withdrawals had reduced and achievement rates had improved across all demographic groups since 2021/22. A gender and ethnicity performance gap persisted. Ofsted had found governance arrangements placed a strong focus on apprenticeship provision but identified limited apprentice understanding of safety risks in their communities. Actions to strengthen safeguarding had been put in place, including membership of the Safeguarding Steering Committee and Prevent Committee for the Dean of Apprentices and Academic Registrar. **The Board noted the report, noting that employer satisfaction had moved to green since the paper was finalised and welcomed the detail provided in the report and the assurances provided to the Board.**

4 Chair's Reports

Academic Board: 11 March [BG25/92]

The Chair of Academic Board reported that at its 11 March meeting the Academic Board had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda for consideration by the Board of Governors at this meeting, including the Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25 and the Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan, and had approved an updated End Point Assessment Policy, a new Level 7 Integrated Masters award to support the St George's University Medical Sciences programme, and a position statement on the review of degree classification algorithms confirming that the process would include sector benchmarking and consultation with staff. **The Board noted the report.**

Finance and Resources Committee: 24 March [BG25/93]

The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee reported that at its 24 March meeting the Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda for consideration by the Board of Governors at this meeting, including 'The Bridge' and Beacon Education partnership opportunities as part of the contracts update, approved the Counter Fraud and Bribery Policy following its review and update in response to requirements of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023, and had approved Financial Regulations for Northumbria University Digital Services Ltd. The Committee had also approved the University entering into a Pre-Construction Services Agreement with Wates for the Lipman redevelopment, noting that the University continued to make strong progress against the Estates Delivery Plan. **The Board noted the report.**

	<u>Strategic Performance Committee: 30 March</u> [BG25/94] The Chair of the Board of reported that at its 30 March meeting Strategic Performance Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda for consideration by the Board of Governors at this meeting, including the Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25 and the Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024/25, and had considered a deep dive into the Driving Social Mobility Strategic Ambition, commending the University's strong performance on widening participation and social mobility while acknowledging the complexity of challenges ahead. The Board noted the report. <u>People Committee: 2 April</u> [Oral Report] The Chair of People Committee reported that at it 2 April meeting the Committee had discussed several items on this agenda and commended the regular update from the CPO the Committee received at each meeting. The Board noted the report.
5	<u>Constitutional Matters</u> <u>Governance Effectiveness Review – Management Action Plan</u> [BG25/96] The Board considered the Governance Effectiveness Review 2025/26 Management Action Plan following endorsement by Nominations Committee on 30 March 2026. The final report had been presented to Board on 2 March 2026, with the overall finding being that governance at the University was highly effective, noting high standards for how governance was executed extending to processes, the value added by Governors, and culture and behaviours. The report made six recommendations and ten suggestions, with key recommendations relating to strengthening financial and digital and IT expertise on the Board, improving information security around the circulation of papers, and clarifying delegated authority arrangements in relation to franchise provision. The Board noted the report and approved the Management Action Plan. <u>Governor Terms of Office</u> [BG25/97] The Board approved a one-year extension to Mark Larsen's term of office, a short extension to Ian Wilkin's term of office to 2 June 2026, a second term of office as Co-Opted Member of Strategic Performance Committee for Adam Parker, the transition of Dr Birju Bartoli to Co-opted Governor from 1 September 2026, and the appointment of Alison Currie, Robin Earl and Keri Elborn as Independent Governors from 1 June 2026. <u>Approach to Triennial Evaluation of the Chair of the Board and Committee Chairs and Annual Evaluation of Board and Committee Effectiveness</u> [BG25/98] The Board noted and approved the arrangements for the triennial evaluation of the Chair of the Board and Committee Chairs and the annual evaluation of Board and Committee effectiveness.

Georgina Lawson
Secretary to the Board of Governors
May 2026