

BOARD OF GOVERNORS' MEETING
29 June 2026, Room 209, Sutherland Building, City Campus West

CONFIRMED SUMMARY MINUTES

Contact Georgina Lawson, georgina.lawson@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 Laura Brown [excluding where noted], Alison Currie, Robin Earl, Keri Elborn, Helen Fairfoul [from BG25/108], Dr Stuart Fancey [from BG25/108], Katherine Fawcett [excluding where noted], Peter Judge, Hassan Kajee, Mark Larsen, Prof Andy Long, Ita McCrory, Jan Thompson, Helen Thorne, Mary Udeze, Dr Penny Rumbold [excluding where noted].

Apologies: Alison Fellows

Secretary: Georgina Bailes (online), Beth Lenney (Assistant Secretary), Clare Stogden

In attendance: Isaac Akakpo, Dr Guy Brown [BG25/118], Georgia Burdis, Angela Carter [BG25/112], Prof Louise Bracken, Gilly Gosling-Bell [BG25/108], Ashley Clemmet [BG25/123], Rob Carthy [BG25/108], Jane Embley, Prof Jane Entwistle [BG25/123], Prof Lisanne Gibson [BG25/107 and BG25/116], Leon Mayfield, John McKenna [BG25/109, BG25/113], Dan Monnery, Jack Taylor [BG25/121-BG25/122], Jay Wilson [BG25/112]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING	
1	<u>Chair's Opening Remarks</u> [Oral Report] The Chair thanked the outgoing Student Governors, Ita McCrory and Mary Udeze for their huge and helpful contributions to the Board, wishing them every success and welcomed the incoming Student Governors, Isaac Akakpo and Georgia Burdis. The Chair welcomed three new Governors, Alison Currie, Robin Earl and Keri Elborn to their first meeting of the Board. The Chair noted that this was Helen Thorne's last meeting of the Board, thanking her for her contribution as both a member of the Board and as Chair of Audit Committee commending her knowledge of the sector, which had been invaluable in navigating difficult decisions <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. Insolvency was being treated as a credible risk across the sector, with asset sales being seen and redundancies made at a significant number of institutions, as summarised in a recent sector report. Immigration remained the most material near-term shift in the operating environment and a new Basic Compliance Assessment RAG rating system had been introduced from 1 June 2026, under which a visa refusal rate above 5% placed an institution in the red category with a reduced CAS allocation, and a repeat red rating risked loss of licence. UCU had undertaken 20 days of official strike action, with 325 colleagues participating in at least one day, student impact had been fully assessed and mitigations applied, with a small number of activities in the Faculty of Society and Culture not fully mitigated. UCU had passed a motion of no confidence in the Board and issued a censure, to which the University had responded, UCU had additionally declared a dispute in relation to the cost savings measures and indicated it would ballot for further action. The Chair and the Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) had participated in a roundtable discussion in May on social mobility and place-based collaboration, and the Vice-Chancellor had participated in a Westminster panel

discussion attended by over 30 MPs and business representatives. The University had won two Educate North awards, the Times Higher Education sustainability league table ranked the University 31st in the world and 4th in the UK, and the University had been recognised as one of the top 50 employers of veterans. Four members of the University community had received significant external recognition in the King's Birthday Honours 2026, Nigel Coates, MBE, Colin Ritchens, OBE, Michael Stockdale, who received an outstanding commendation, and Gavin Oxburgh, who had been nominated for a lifetime achievement award for his work with veterans. The UNEE Spinout Inspire Fund had been launched on 11 June following an IP showcase, with the North East Mayor Kim McGuinness in attendance. **The Board noted the report and welcomed the inclusion of the honorary awards list, noted that suggestions from staff in relation to cost saving initiatives related mainly to efficiencies in space utilisation and building opening hours, and a piece of work was underway to consider the suggestions and engage with colleagues on developing them, and noted that international students had raised concerns about the strike compensation amount being the same for both home and international students, noting that the amount was notional and that students were able to submit a complaint. The Board welcomed an offer from the Students' Union to join, with other SUs, in lobbying on the issue of visa refusals.**

FPVC Update (Society and Culture) [BG25/107]

The Board considered the FPVC Update (Society and Culture). The Faculty of Society and Culture comprised four schools: Newcastle Business School, Northumbria Law School, the School of Design, Arts and Creative Industries, and Humanities and Social Sciences, Newcastle Business School was ranked 9th in the UK for research power (REF 2021), the largest rise in the sector. The School of Design, Arts and Creative Industries was ranked 4th in the UK for research power in Art and Design (REF 2021), 9th for Interior Design and Top 15 for Art and Design in national league tables, and was the largest design and creative industry school in the North East. The School received funding from almost all major research funding bodies. Northumbria Law School was the largest in the North East and one of the largest in the UK, ranked 7th nationally for research power (REF 2021), the School was an emerging leader in AI legal research and education through its contribution to the Northumbria Centre for Responsible AI and the PROBABLE Futures project. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences delivered police apprenticeships with Durham and Northumbria Police and English was ranked 6th best in the UK for research quality, and in History, three REF subject areas were represented, with History ranking in the top 10 for quality. The University was the largest producer of creative industry graduates in the region, and the Faculty's cultural partnerships - including Baltic, Live Theatre, New Writing North, and the British Film Institute - underpinned this position. The Centre for Writing and Publishing represented a longer-term investment in humanities teaching and research, and was identified as a tool to facilitate social mobility. Student outcome performance was mixed across schools, with NSS results being worked on across the Faculty. Student-staff ratios, research income growth, and cross-faculty working were identified as priorities for the period ahead. **The Board noted the update, noting that Governors would be invited to the next Reveal event.**

Student Recruitment 2026/27 [BG25/108]

The Board noted an update on Student Recruitment.

Planning and Budget Proposals 2026/27 [BG25/109]

The Board approved the 2026/27 Planning and Budget Proposals.

May Elections and Beyond [BG25/110]

The Board considered the May Elections and Beyond update. The Tyne and Wear local elections on 7 May 2026 were a significant realignment, with Reform UK winning 34.7% of the vote and 171 seats, a gain of 171. Labour won 23.2% of the vote but lost 148 seats. Reform won Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside outright and the most seats available in North Tyneside. Newcastle was an outlier, with a three-way tie resulting in a Liberal Democrat minority administration with Green support. Nationally, the picture reflected a five-party election in which winning parties frequently secured far more seats than their vote share warranted. Reform's performance was more pronounced outside of London, with 42.7% of seats won compared to 4.4% in London. North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Cabinet following the elections comprised Reform members making up half of the elected membership. Andy Burnham had won the Makerfield by-election and, speaking the same day as the Board meeting, had indicated that if he became Prime Minister, it would represent the biggest rebalancing of power the nation had seen, with a place-based operation through a North 10 devolution model. **The Board noted the update and welcomed the context ahead of the Board Away Day on 30 June 2026.**

Students' Union President Report [BG25/28]

The Board considered the Students' Union President's Report. the Students' Union had won the Charity/Third Sector Organisation of the Year award at the Educate North Awards 2026, achieved the National Union of Students' Quality Students Union Award, and retained SOS UK Green Impact status, moving from Good to Very Good. Society membership had continued to exceed records, with 6,249 students holding at least one membership, representing one in five undergraduate students. The first year of the agreed NU/NSU partnership had created a productive and positive framework for structured engagement between the University and the Students' Union. A code of practice for student representation had been agreed, the first of its kind at the University, with an awareness campaign in development. The Students as Partners city partnership model had produced tangible outcomes including commitments to engage students in housing consultation and engagement with the Mayor on transport costs for students aged 21 and over. Total student fundraising for the year reached £53,000, and the weekly Wellbeing Café was supporting 60 to 80 students every Wednesday. Student Forum had mandated the Students' Union to develop guidance for trans and non-binary students on their rights and opportunities on campus for release in the new academic year. **The Board noted the report.**

Pensions Update [Oral Report]

Staff Governors Dr L Brown, K Fawcett and Dr P Rumbold were in the room for the discussion of this item but left the room at the point a decision was made

The Board noted an update on the University's Pension Schemes and approved the contractual terms of the Total Reward Strategy.

Monthly Finance Report Period 10 2025/26 [BG25/113]

The Board noted the Period 10 report.

Gas and Electric Contract Extensions [BG25/114]

The Board approved the Gas and Electric Supplier Contract Extensions, following endorsement by Finance and Resources Committee on 18 June 2026, noting that both contracts had performed well since commencement in October 2024 and were procured through The Energy Consortium, and there was no commercial or operational reason to change supply arrangements.

Institutional Position on Defence Sector Engagement [BG25/115]

The Board considered the Institutional Position on Defence Sector Engagement report following endorsement by Audit Committee on 1 June 2026 which proposed a formal institutional position statement to provide clarity for staff and students on the University's engagement with defence-related activity, covering research, education, knowledge exchange, commercial activity and partnerships, and community work. **The Board raised a number of questions and comments, and approved the position statement in principle to allow for a period of consultation to take place before further consideration for approval by Board of Governors at its 12 October meeting.**

Centre for Writing and Publishing [BG25/116]

The Board noted an update on the Centre for Writing and Publishing, noting that the recent awards ceremony had effectively communicated the scope of the project, what would be happening in the building, and suggested that Governors should have the opportunity to understand the reach of New Writing North through a tour of the building.

OfS Condition E10: Subcontracting [BG25/118]

The Board considered the paper on OfS Condition E10 of the Office for Students Regulatory Framework, relating to subcontracted educational partnerships which came into force on 31 March 2026 and required providers with 100 or more students on relevant subcontractual courses to maintain a Single Subcontracting Information Source, in place by 30 June 2026. A working group had reviewed existing governance, policies and processes and implemented enhanced measures including a University Subcontracting Rationale Policy, an updated partner approval process with enhanced independent due diligence, and a new University Educational Partnerships Committee as a sub-committee of Academic Board, which would provide an annual health check to Strategic Performance Committee and continued Governor visits to partnership provision remained a key element of the ongoing in-situ monitoring requirement under the condition. **The Board noted the update, noting that the OfS encouraged the same student engagement and feedback practice to be applied across all provision, and extending the existing student voice arrangements to TNE provision was being considered, and noted that the Board would receive additional assurance on Condition E10 as it had been included in the 2026/27 internal audit plan.**

Competition and Markets Authority Policy [BG25/119]

The Board considered the Updated Competition and Markets Authority Policy, following endorsement by Audit Committee on 1 June 2026. The CMA Policy had been originally approved in February 2021 and last updated in June 2025, and had been reviewed to ensure continued compliance and alignment between policy, guidance and practice. All changes were administrative updates, with the exception of the change to previous references to London Campus and Pathway to UK Educational Partnerships, which had been updated to add clarity of scope. **The Board approved the updated policy acknowledging the significant amount of work involved in applying the policy in practice.**

Annual Quality and Standards Report 2024/25 [BG25/120]

The Board considered the Annual Quality and Standards Report for 2024/25, following endorsement by Academic Board on 21 May 2026 and Strategic Performance Committee on 8 June 2026. The report provided an overview of key activities relating to the Office for Students Quality and Standards (B) Conditions, fulfilling the Board's responsibility to ensure the University's compliance with all Conditions of Registration, and provided assurance around the University's quality processes. Performance against the OfS B3 numerical thresholds showed 3 out of 48 areas below threshold on the four-year aggregate view, and only 1 area below threshold in the latest year of data, with the below-threshold areas relating to PGCE progression and full-time postgraduate with undergraduate components completion. Periodic review had been formally reintroduced during 2025/26 following a pilot year, with the three pilot reviews in Architecture and Built Environment, the School of Law, and Nursing, Midwifery and Health all resulting in positive outcomes. From the following year, the Students' Union would co-author the report, following discussion between the Interim Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the outgoing Sabbatical Officers. **The Board noted the report, noting that the report gave assurance that the B Conditions were being appropriately addressed, and that the University was approaching the exercise not purely as a compliance matter but as an opportunity to improve, which would be monitored via reporting to the Strategic Performance Committee.**

Appointment of Internal Audit Provider [BG25/124]

The Board considered the Appointment of Internal Auditors following endorsement by Audit Committee on 1 June 2026. The University's contract with its current internal audit provider, PwC, was due to expire on 31 July 2026 following a two-year extension approved in June 2024. A full competitive tender process had been conducted in April 2026 and the reappointment of PwC as Internal Auditor was recommended. **The Board noted the update and approved the reappointment of PwC as the University's Internal Auditors.**

Strategic Risk Register [BG25/121]

The Board approved the Strategic Risk Register following endorsement by Audit Committee on 1 June, requested that the Strategic Risk Report be placed higher on the agenda at the October Board meeting.

Risk Appetite Statement [BG25/122]

The Board approved the amended Risk Appetite Statement.

Health and Safety Report: January–April 2026 [BG25/123]

The Board considered the Health and Safety Report for January to April 2026. Accident rates per 1,000 FTE had improved for both staff and students compared to the previous period (September to December 2025), with staff rates down by 4.9 and student rates down by 2.7, with both figures now below the sector average based on USHA benchmarking data. Mandatory training completion rates were broadly static, with ten of fifteen schools remaining below the 95% target, and Health and Safety and Stress Management for Managers modules identified for targeted follow-up via faculties. Planned preventative maintenance stood at 98% or above across BES, Sodexo and CBRE, and the VEGA contract had been extended by 12 months for asbestos management. Tyne and Wear Fire Rescue Service inspections of Glenamara House and New Bridge Street found no deficiencies. An external audit programme was proposed for reintroduction on a four-year rolling cycle, prioritising high-risk units. **The Board noted the report and requested that Health and Safety was placed earlier on the agenda at the October Board meeting.**

BlueLight Tender* [BG25/117]

The Board noted the forthcoming tender application for the BlueLight Commercial Tender

Beacon Education (China) – Distance Learning Franchise* [BG25/148]

The Board noted an update on Beacon Education.

4	<u>Chair's Reports</u> <u>Academic Board: 21 May 2026</u> [BG25/125] The Board noted that at its meeting held on 21 May 2026 the Academic Board had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda and had approved a proposed approach to a review of the academic misconduct policy to include artificial intelligence considerations, noting an increase in upheld cases. <u>Audit Committee: 1 June 2026</u> [Oral Report] The Board noted that at its meeting held on 1 June 2026 the Audit Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda, including the Institutional Position on Defence Sector Engagement, the Competition and Markets Authority Policy, the Appointment of Internal Auditors, the Strategic Risk Report, and the Risk Appetite Statement. The Committee had welcomed RSM to their first meeting of the Committee as the University's new external auditors and noted that the Committee was very pleased with the plan and the mobilisation from the team. The Committee had also approved the 2026/27 draft internal audit plan, noting that issues had been identified with the delivery of internal audit governance and PwC was working to improve this and discussed IT-related items including outstanding actions and the University's cyber security posture. <u>Strategic Performance Committee: 8 June 2026</u> [BG25/127] The Board noted that at its meeting held on 8 June 2026 the Strategic Performance Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda, including the Annual Quality and Standards Report 2024/25, and considered a Strategic Ambition deep dive, focused on research culture and the duality of teaching and research in academia, with candid conversations about research income and commended the growing number of staff with responsibility for research. <u>People Committee: 17 June and 24 June (Special - Pensions) 2026</u> [BG25/128] The Board noted that at its meetings held on 17 and 24 June 2026 the People Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda, including the Total Reward Strategy, received a detailed report on the technical aspects of the Total Reward Strategy commitment, and considered pay gap reporting. <u>Finance and Resources Committee: 28 May (Special – Budget) and 18 June</u> [BG25/129] The Board noted that at its meetings held on 28 May 2026 and 18 June 2026 the Finance and Resources Committee had considered and endorsed several items on this agenda, including the Planning and Budget Proposals 2026/27 and the Gas and Electric Contract Extensions.
5	<u>Constitutional Matters</u> <u>Governor Terms of Office 2026/27</u> [BG25/131] The Board approved the second terms of office for Dr Laura Brown, Prof Dame Janet Beer, Alison Fellows and Jan Thompson, and Janet Beer's appointment as a member of Finance and Resources Committee. <u>Students' Union Code of Practice 2027/28</u> [BG25/132] The Board approved the Students' Union Code of Practice 2027/28. <u>Annual Evaluation of Board Effectiveness 2025/26</u> [BG25/133] The Board considered its effectiveness during 2025/26. Responses to the effectiveness survey were received from 18 of 25 potential respondents (72%), comprising 14 Board Members or Co-opted Members and four members of University Executive. Responses to questions were overall positive with 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the Board demonstrated the attribute in question the majority response though three questions received 'neither agree nor disagree' responses: The Board is able to distinguish between governance and executive leadership; The Board was effectively advised and supported; and Members receive effective and timely papers and communications relating to Board business. Five free text responses were revised mainly in relation to the volume of business and this would be reviewed. The Board noted the report.