

FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

2 February 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: H Fairfoul (Chair), Dr B Bartoli, Dr R Blackman-Woods, Prof A Long, M Larsen
 Observers: A Fellows, M Udeze
 Secretary: G Bailes, B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)
 In attendance: H Bower [to FR25/36], Dr S Corbett, Prof T Lawson, L Mayfield, J McKenna [FR25/37 & FR25/38], V Petersen [FR25/43], N Sweby [FR25/39]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1	<p><u>Vice-Chancellor’s Horizon Scanning</u> [Oral Report] The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local sector and policy developments and their implications for Northumbria. The external sector environment continued to be challenging, with the most recent OfS analysis showing nearly half of English universities forecasting deficit positions for 2025/26. UCAS end of cycle data for 2024/25 showed record growth in acceptances driven by an increase of 3.5% from UK 18-year-olds, though HESA data suggested that the total number of students had fallen for the second year due to a decrease in international PGT students. Engagement activity in relation to the University’s academic pension offer was ongoing, as were negotiations with UCU, and UCEA had written to the Minister of State for Skills on behalf of the sector, highlighting the unsustainable impact of TPS. The government had published its International Education Strategy, key highlights included a £40 billion export target by 2030, prioritising sustainable international student recruitment, a £925 levy per international student from 2028/29, expansion of transnational education, and enhanced global partnerships and mobility, it also highlighted research from Northumbria as a leading example of how UK backed international research was championing the UK as a global leader in research, science and technology. A joint venture between Northumbria and New Writing North, supported by Newcastle Council and NECA, would begin this year, progressing the Centre for Writing and Publishing. Northumbria would be hosting a UUK roundtable on 5 February, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Northumbria and UNEE, and invitees included CEOs and Directors across several North East sectors. Northumbria had been rated as ‘1st class’ for sustainability and was once again the highest ranked university in the North East in the People and Planet League table, ranking 16th overall in the UK for sustainability. The Committee noted the update and noted that the government’s International Education Strategy was high-level and did not include any new measures to support international recruitment.</p>
2	<p><u>Financial Planning and Improvement</u> <u>Student Recruitment 2025/26</u> [FR25/36 & Presentation] The Committee noted an update on Student Recruitment for 2025/26.</p> <p><u>Finance Monthly Report: P5 2025/26</u> [FR25/37] The Committee noted the financial performance for Period 5 (December) which was favourable to budget.</p> <p><u>Medium Term Financial Plan (including Income Diversification Plan update)</u> [FR25/38] The Committee noted the Medium Term Financial Plan update.</p> <p><u>Students’ Union Finance Update</u> [FR25/39] The Committee noted the Student’s Union Finance Report for December 2025 and the Year End accounts for 2024/25.</p>

3	<p><u>Capital, Estates and Contracts</u> <u>Estates Delivery Plan</u> [FR25/40] The Committee noted the Estates Delivery Plan, noting that the University continued to make strong progress against the Estates Delivery Plan and remained on track and on budget.</p> <p><u>Lipman Redevelopment</u> [FR25/41] The Committee noted the update and approved the contract for demolition.</p>
4	<p><u>Policy Regulations and Projects</u> <u>Digital Masterplan (High Performance Compute)</u> [FR25/42] The Committee considered the Digital Masterplan update on High Performance Compute. Digital Initiative 2 delivered the implementation and training of a new High Performance Compute environment, Higgs, named after Newcastle-born Nobel laureate Professor Peter Higgs. Initial benchmarking showed a large DNA sequencing run completed in three hours on Higgs compared to eight hours on the legacy system. The immediate plan was to migrate researchers from legacy clusters to Higgs, and this was expected to be completed during Q1 2026 and once migration was complete, legacy clusters could be decommissioned, reducing associated power and cooling costs that would allow researchers to operate more efficiently with a framework that would allow expansion for future demand. Expansion considerations included increased operating costs for power and heating, and significant RAM price increases in late 2025 and early 2026 which would impact purchasing capacity. The Committee noted the report, noting that the HPC facilities were currently only available to Northumbria staff and students.</p> <p><u>NU People and Finance Roadmap</u> [FR25/43] The Committee considered the roadmap for Northumbria University's People and Finance system. Strong progress had been made in improving stability and performance over the past year including the development of improved dashboards. The roadmap aligned with the One Northumbria programme to remove barriers and create a single intuitive way for staff and students to access information. Priorities for the next phase included completing the rollout of the Redwood interface, exploring automation opportunities, introducing Activity Centres, and further enhancement of dashboards and analytics. Oracle's product roadmap placed strong emphasis on AI-enabled functionality, which would be actively reviewed with a focus on automation in the near-term. Delivery of the roadmap carried no additional cost to the University and would be undertaken within existing resources. All activity would be delivered by the current People and Finance Specialist team, which had reduced by 2 FTE over the past 12 months. Key benefits included enhanced mandatory training with 50% reduction in completion time, 50% reduction in expense processing time, 35-45% enhanced reporting efficiency, and 40% reduction in absence management administration. The Committee noted and noted that feedback on the system was regularly used to inform future developments, including the use of AI, through a user group.</p> <p><u>Travel and Expenses Policy and Code of Practice</u> [FR25/44] The Committee considered the proposed amendments to the Travel and Expenses Policy and accompanying Code of Practice. Following a successful trial period where greater flexibility had been permitted for colleagues to book low risk UK and international travel independently, it was proposed to update both the policy and Code of Practice to reflect those new arrangements. The introduction of flexible booking options in April 2025 had been considered successful, with colleagues welcoming the option to choose and reporting greater visibility of fares and accommodation options. Travel spend comparison showed an uptick in travel being booked through alternative routes, however the Travel Management Company remained the route through which the majority of travel spend was transacted. The majority of changes proposed were largely administrative and focused on ensuring the policy contained key requirements while avoiding procedural detail, and an explicit statement regarding business class travel had been included, clarifying that such instances must be approved by a member of the University Executive to ensure value for money. The Committee approved the proposed amendments to the Travel and Expenses Policy and accompanying Code of Practice.</p>

Beth Lenney
Assistant Secretary to Finance and Resources Committee
February 2026