

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

2 April 2026 online via Microsoft Teams

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: P Judge (Chair), Dr R Blackman-Woods, H Fairfoul, H Kajee, Prof A Long,
Apologies: None
Secretary: G Bailes and B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)
In attendance: Dr Laura Brown, K Barnes [PC25/13], A Carter [CPO Update – Pensions Update], Jane Embley, Katherine Fawcett, L Johnson [PC25/14], Prof Tom Lawson, Dr H Robson [PC25/12], Dr P Rumbold, J Wilson [PC25/15]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1	<u>Chair's Opening</u> [Oral Report] The Chair noted that this would be Professor Tom Lawson's final meeting of the Committee, thanked him for his contribution to the Committee during his time at Northumbria University. <u>Declarations of Interest</u> [Oral Report] No new declarations of interest were made at this meeting. Previously declared interests in relation to pensions were noted as continuing to apply and were taken into account during the discussion of the pensions update. <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 nominations process for the 2026 Shine Awards had opened and the awards ceremony would be held in July. Professor Tracy Finch, from the School of Healthcare and Nursing Sciences, had been appointed as an NIHR Senior Investigator - an award recognising outstanding leadership and exceptional contribution to applied health and care research. The University IT recycling initiative had been recognised as national best practice with students facing financial hardship benefitting from refurbished and redistributed devices. The University had been shortlisted for the Educate North Awards in four categories - Campaign of the Year, Community Engagement HE/FE Sector, Community Engagement University Sector and Digital and AI Innovation, the Law School had been shortlisted for Law School of the Year. Northumbria Students' Union had also been shortlisted for four categories - Charity/Third Sector, Student Experience, Community Engagement HE/FE Sector and, Mental Health and Wellbeing. The Committee noted the update and commended the shortlisting successes. <u>Chief People Officer Update</u> [Oral Report] The Chief People Officer provided an update on key developments across the People and Organisational Culture portfolio. UCU had declared a dispute and fifteen days of strike action had been confirmed. The Shine recognition ceremony would take place on 19 June and Governors would receive an invitation in due course. The Chief People Officer had participated in national work with UCEA on contracts, alongside work on the disclosure of personal data, and sharing of sector good practice. Community citizenship engagement remained strong, with c.300 colleagues participating in the scheme. The University of Birmingham had recently been investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) regarding complaints about work-related stress. The investigation's findings had been made publicly available, and the University was proactively reviewing its own position to identify any gaps and strengthen compliance. The Committee noted the update, the Chair noted that the Shine Awards were very well arranged and celebrated excellence across the University, and encouraged members to attend the forthcoming ceremony. The Committee requested that an update on steps taken to ensure student outcomes continued to be met during the period of strike action, and the impact on colleagues providing cover, be shared at a future meeting.
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2	<u>Items for Approval or Consideration</u> <u>Academic Transformation Project</u> [PC25/12] The Committee considered the update on the Academic Workload Review Project 2025/26. The Academic Workload Review Project had been launched in 2023, recognising that workloading was a source of tension across the sector and within the University. A cross-institutional working group had been established, with extensive staff engagement undertaken across Faculties and Professional Support Services. Phase 1 (July to December 2025) had focused on transparency, consistency, and equity, and included a refresh of the Academic Workload Planning Scheme, new guiding principles, a revised workloading timeline, and the reinstatement of Faculty Academic Workloading Monitoring Groups. The workload planning process was intended as an indicative high-level planning tool, with the 40/40/20 principle representing an aspiration for an average and balanced workload across a School and Faculty. Phase 2 (2025/26 to 2027/28) required a fundamental review of tariffs, planning processes, tools, and organisational culture. A Steering Group had been convened in February 2026 and three workstreams launched in March 2026. The Committee noted the update, noting that workloading was a sector wide concern that most universities were reviewing and the University would be engaging in the sharing of practices and solutions. <u>Pensions Update</u> [Oral Report] The Committee considered the oral update on pensions. UCU had formally rejected the updated offer of 11 February 2026, and both parties concluded that negotiations had reached an impasse on 12 March 2026. The University would implement its final offer from 1 August 2026. A comprehensive package of support had been made available to colleagues and next steps included continued support and communications through to 20 May 2026. Following the triannual valuation of the Local Government Pension Scheme, published in October 2025, employer contributions would reduce from 18.5% to 13.9% from 1 April 2026. The Committee noted the update. <u>2025 Engagement Survey Outcomes</u> [PC25/13] The Committee considered the 2025 Engagement Survey outcomes and next steps. The 2025 Engagement Survey, open from 13 November to 5 December 2025, received 1,808 responses (813 Academic, 995 Professional Support), representing a 54% response rate, the highest achieved since 2018. The survey covered 30 questions on leadership, management and change, alongside free-text comments, with more than 3,500 comments submitted across three free-text questions. Reporting had been modernised through the introduction of a dynamic Power BI dashboard to replace PDF reports, providing self-service access to data at University, Faculty, Service and School levels, with trend analysis maintained at university level to support faster, data-driven decisions. The Committee noted the report and requested that the University's action plan for responding to issues raised by the survey responses be presented at the Committee's next meeting. <u>Pay Gap Report</u> [PC25/14] The Committee considered the 2025 Pay Gap Report. The mean gender pay gap had reduced to 10.7% and the median to 13.9%, driven by underrepresentation of women in senior roles and occupational segregation rather than unequal pay within grades. The overall ethnicity pay gap was broadly neutral at mean -0.4% and median -2.9%, though this concealed significant internal variation, with pronounced disparities for ethnic minority women compared with white men. 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 protected characteristics, the primary driver of pay gaps was workforce composition and occupational segregation rather than unequal pay for equal work. Progress had been made against the three long-standing priority areas: representation of women in the upper pay quartile, representation of ethnic minority colleagues in professional support roles, and disability disclosure rates. These three priorities remained appropriate for 2025/26. The Committee noted the update and approved the University's Pay Gap data for 2025, requesting that wider consideration of the data take place at a future meeting of the Committee. <u>Legal Claims Update</u> [PC25/15] The Committee noted the Legal Claims update. <u>Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy</u> [PC25/16] The Committee considered the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy and Procedure prior
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	to consideration by Audit Committee via Written Resolution. The previously combined Policy and Procedure document had been separated into two distinct documents, consistent with the approach taken for other recently reviewed governance policies. The Policy reflected the Employment Rights Act 2025 amendment adding sexual harassment as a qualifying disclosure category for whistleblowing protection from 6 April 2026, ensuring compliance ahead of the commencement date. Anonymous disclosure provisions had been strengthened in line with OfS and CUC guidance, an appeals process had been added to the Procedure, and a new Roles and Responsibilities section had been added to provide clarity on responsibilities under the Policy. All existing safeguards, the scope of qualifying disclosures, the four-stage investigation process, and the role of Audit Committee remained unchanged. The Committee noted and endorsed the Public Interest Disclosure Policy for consideration by Audit Committee via circulation.

Beth Lenney, Assistant Secretary to People Committee
April 2026