

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

16 June 2025 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: P Judge (Chair), Dr R Blackman-Woods, H Fairfoul, H Kajee, Prof A Long
 Apologies: Dr P Rumbold
 Secretary: G Bailes and B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)
 In attendance: R Brown [PC24/24-PC24/26], A Carter [PC24/26], Dr S Corbett, J Embley, L Hurford [PC24/23], L Johnson [PC24/28], Prof T Lawson, L Mayfield [Pensions Strategy Item]

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1	<p><u>Vice-Chancellor's Horizon Scanning</u> [Oral Report]</p> <p>The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local sector and policy developments and their implications for Northumbria. The latest OfS report on the financial sustainability of the sector predicted that c 43% of universities were projected to be in deficit for 2024/25 and without mitigating actions this could rise to 72%, Northumbria remained in a good financial position but must continue to plan prudently to ensure long term stability. The Government's White Paper on immigration had been published on 12 May and the University continued to monitor the impact of the changes on the sector. Following the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of women for the purposes of the Equality Act, the University had set out a statement regarding the ruling on its EDI intranet pages conveying that it continued to emphasise its absolute commitment to creating a community in which all colleagues and students felt safe to express their identity. The University of Sussex had been fined by the OfS for failing to uphold Freedom of Speech and planned to legally challenge the finding. The introduction of the new E6 condition by the OfS coincided with new obligations under the EDI act and a coordinated approach was being taken to ensure the University met all requirements, including a working group to oversee efforts on gender-based violence using the related IDRT to leverage internal research expertise. Annual pay award negotiations were underway and a final offer of a 1.4% increase on all points on the pay spine from 1 August had been made to Trade Unions who would now take the offer through their decision-making structures. The University had been awarded Higher Education Institution of the Year at the NEON Awards, Professor Glyn Howatson had been appointed as Deputy Chair of UoA 24 for REF 2029, Professor Matt Keirnan had been shortlisted for 'Inspiration of the Year' in the British Forces in Business Awards 2025 and Professor Alan Kildair had been awarded an OBE for services to palliative care in the King's Birthday Honours. The Committee noted the update, commending the achievements of the University and its individuals staff members as outlined in update, and welcomed the use of internal academic expertise on the issue of gender-based violence.</p>
2	<p><u>Items for Approval or Consideration</u></p> <p><u>People Scorecard</u> [PC24/23]</p> <p>The Committee considered the People Scorecard which measured success against the goals of the Strategic Delivery Plan for People, a People Scorecard had been developed in consultation with the previous Employment and Finance Committee which would be reported twice a year and which used people metrics to identify patterns, trends, and correlations, benchmarking against external standards when available. In a change from previous editions, the June report featured more topical content, reflecting current priorities and developments. The Scorecard highlighted strategic workforce cost management in response to financial pressures, strong engagement with leadership development and mandatory training, enhanced personal data completeness for EDI purposes, the launch of the Community Citizenship Scheme to encourage wider staff engagement, and the strengthened support and reporting systems in line with new harassment legislation. Mandatory training completion rates showed an overall average completion rate of 95.7% which was just over the target threshold of 95%</p>

and the reasons for low completion rates in some modules were being explored. **The Committee noted the People Scorecard and that work on improving Measures of Success reporting and presentation on the reporting portal was on-going, and noted that engagement from new starters with mandatory training was generally positive and existing modules were being reviewed to improve quality and strengthen engagement.**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Six-Monthly Update [PC24/24]

The Committee considered the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Six-Monthly Update. The Public Sector Equality Duty required the publication of an annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) report. The 2024 EDI report covered the 2023/24 academic year and was considered by the Committee in November 2024, this report provided an update on activity since the November iteration of the report. Work continued to advance Disability Equality with a redeveloped approach to the Disability Steering Group, invigorated by a new Senior Sponsor, Louise Bracken, and to advance LGBTQ+ Equality, also with a new Senior Sponsor, Chris Ashford, who brought both lived experience and academic expertise in the field, marking a significant step forward in inclusive leadership. A new structure for University-wide EDI governance and the delivery of EDI initiatives within Faculties was confirmed to be in place for the upcoming academic year. There had been a marked improvement in personal data disclosure across most protected characteristics, significantly reducing the volume of undisclosed data and enhancing overall data quality, and the LGBT pay gap had been reported for the first time in March 2025, enabled by the University's access to previously unavailable data. **The Committee noted the update, commended the progress made in improving personal data disclosures and extended congratulations to all involved in this achievement, and noted that discussions had been held regarding the onboarding and offboarding experiences of staff and that additional data on these experiences would be included in future reports where available. The Committee also noted that the overall representation across the University was considered strong in comparison to other institutions and the regional context however, the underrepresentation at senior leadership level remained a concern and while some progress had been made, work to address this continued.**

Athena Swan Silver Award [PC24/25]

The Committee considered the University's achievement of an Athena Swan Silver Award and the Executive Summary of the submission. Advance HE's Athena Swan Charter was a framework designed to support and advance gender equality in Higher Education and research, and participation was voluntary. Northumbria University had held an Athena Swan Bronze Award since 2015, which was successfully renewed in 2019 and in March 2025, the University applied for a Silver Award, which was awarded in May 2025. The Silver Award application had involved a comprehensive self-assessment and demonstrated measurable progress against the 2019 action plan and priorities, including evidence of impact and success in addressing gender inequality. Work was ongoing to integrate the University's Race Equality Charter and Athena Swan action plans, with a focus on reviewing data and actions through an intersectional lens across all relevant characteristics. **The Committee noted the update.**

Pay Gap Report 2025 Update [PC24/26]

The Committee considered the initial Pay Gap 2025 summary data. Northumbria University was committed to creating an inclusive and equitable workplace, with the goal of eliminating median pay gaps related to gender, ethnicity and disability by 2030 and to support this ambition, the University published a comprehensive annual pay gap report that went further than the statutory requirements, offering transparent analysis and tracking progress over time. The gender pay gap had narrowed significantly, with the median gap falling from 15.8% in 2024 to 13.9% in 2025, marking the largest annual reduction since reporting began, the ethnicity pay gap had reversed, with the mean moving from +0.8% to -0.4%, and the median moving from 0% to -2.9%. The disability pay gap had seen a substantial reduction, with the mean halving from 13.4% to 6.3%, and the median decreasing from 13.4% to 6.7%, alongside increased disclosure rates. **The Committee noted the update and commended the action focussed approach.**

Academic Structures [PC24/27]

The Committee considered the new academic structure, the engagement that took place to help shape this and the steps that are being taken to implement the new structure from 1 September 2025. In September 2024 University Executive approved a proposal to revise the current academic structures from four faculties and 18 departments into a simplified structure of three faculties and 12 Schools from the 2025/26 academic year, the new academic leadership and management structure contained fewer roles with wider remits to ensure greater accountability for delivery against the strategic aims and priorities. The recruitment process for the faculty leadership and management structure would be

completed by the end of June 2025 with recruitment of Associate Heads of School beginning in June and ending in July, to be in post for the start of the 2025/26 academic year. Professional and technical support structures had been rationalised and realigned to support the new academic structure and plans were in place to make the necessary systems and estate changes, changes to the staff systems had been completed with student systems updates expected to be completed by end of July. **The Committee noted the update and commended the smooth implementation of the changes.**

Pensions Strategy [Presentation]

H Fairfoul, Prof A Long and Dr S Corbett declared an interest in this item as holders of USS pensions; P Judge declared an interest in this item as a holder of USS and T&W LGPS pensions; Dr R Blackman-Woods declared an interest in this item as a holder of a TPS pension.

The Committee considered an update on the University pension schemes. TPS employer contributions were unaffordable at 28.68%, compared with USS at 14.5%, TPS was only available to grades 6-10 with teaching responsibilities and LGPS, from 2016, was available to PSS grade 6-10. The University was considering options for an affordable yet competitive pension scheme as an alternative for academic staff. **The Committee noted the update, noting that the LGPS valuation would take place in Autumn 2025 with any changes taking effect from 1 April 2026.**

Mercer Master Trust Annual Report [PC24/28]

The Committee considered the Aviva Governance Report and Mercer Master Trust Annual Report 2024 following endorsement of continued participation in the Scheme from the Northumbria University Services Ltd Board of Directors on 5 June 2025. The report covered the period 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 and provided assurance that both Northumbria University and Northumbria University Services Limited employees were in a well-managed pension scheme (UCRSS). Engagement with retirement planning remained low, although the proportion of members who had appointed a beneficiary had increased from 4.6% to 5.6% and the number of members that had logged into their online pension account in the period had increased from 9.1% to 16.6%. **The Committee noted the update, noting that work to encourage engagement was a priority, and approved continued participation in the UCRSS pension scheme.**

Beth Lenney, Assistant Secretary to People Committee
June 2025