

STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

30 March 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: R Blackman-Woods (Chair), K Fawcett, Prof A Long, I McCrory, A Parker, J Thompson
 Apologies: Dr S Fancey
 Secretary: G Bailes and B Lenney (Assistant Secretary)
 In attendance: H Bower [to SPC25/21], Prof L Bracken [SPC25/25], M Foalle [to SPC25/22], G Gosling-Bell [to SPC25/21], Prof T Lawson, D Monnery, Dr H Robson, Prof G Wynn

MAIN ITEMS DISCUSSED/DECIDED ON AT THE MEETING

1. **Chair's Introduction**
 The Chair noted that this was the final meeting of the Committee for Professors Graham Wynn and Tom Lawson, who were both leaving the University, and thanked them for their contribution to the Committee during their time at the University.

 The Chair welcomed Dr Heather Robson, interim PVC Education, to her first meeting of the Committee.

Declarations of Interest [Oral Report]
 There were no declarations of interest.

Vice-Chancellor's Horizon Scanning [Oral Report]
 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive provided an update on national, regional and local developments and their potential implications for Northumbria. The external environment facing the higher education sector remained challenging, with the most recent Office for Students (OfS) analysis revealing that nearly half of English universities were forecasting deficit positions for 2025/26, and sector-wide tuition fee income declining by approximately £438 million. Following several months of engagement with UCU, both parties had acknowledged an impasse on the proposed Total Reward Approach for academic staff. The University would proceed with implementation while continuing to monitor the impact on students and teaching. The University was developing its offer around NEETs and adult skills, following the model established with EPNE. A topping out ceremony for the NESST building had taken place that week, marking a significant milestone in the project's development and generating positive publicity. **The Committee noted the update.**
2. **Strategic Discussion Items**
University Strategy 2024-30 Deep Dive: Driving Social Mobility [SPC25/21]
 The Committee considered the Driving Social Mobility Strategic Ambition deep dive presentation. The deep dive covered the context of the Strategic Ambition, its Measures of Success, current performance, 2030 trajectory, and mitigations required. The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper (October 2025) introduced several relevant policy changes, including a revised national participation target, replacement of level 3 vocational qualifications with V-Levels, reintroduction of targeted maintenance grants, and tuition fee increases linked to inflation from 2026/27. The North East continued to have one of the lowest higher education participation rates in England, the lowest A-level attainment rates, and the highest proportion of 16-17 year olds NEET of any English region. The University's widening participation reach was predominantly North East and retention for students from low participation backgrounds had

	improved. The gap in positive graduate outcomes between students from low participation backgrounds and their peers had closed, with the University performing in the top quartile nationally for skilled employment outcomes. 65% of graduates remained in the North East one year after graduation, confirming a net positive contribution to the regional economy. The Access and Success Framework, launched in 2025, provided a whole-provider approach to student support from pre-entry through to graduation. Outreach activity included the NU Navigators programme, a second IntoUniversity centre in Gateshead opened in spring 2025, and Uni Connect activity, and the University had been named Higher Education Institution of the Year at the NEON Awards in June 2025. The Committee noted the report and commended the University's strong performance on widening participation and social mobility, while acknowledging the complexity of the challenges ahead. The Committee noted that going forward, careers and employability support would be embedded in experiential learning, and that there were concerns around the perception of the impact of AI versus reality in some areas.
3.	<u>Performance Monitoring</u> <u>Strategy Reporting Framework</u> [SPC25/22] The Committee considered the Strategy Reporting Framework as approved by University Executive on 16 December 2025. The Framework consolidated eleven Strategic Delivery Plans into three Strategic Ambition-aligned plans: Powering an Inclusive Economy, Creating New Knowledge, and Driving Social Mobility and was built on four core principles: Golden Thread Connectivity, Exception-Based Reporting, Standardised RAG Rating, and Celebrating Success. Exception-based reporting was designed to direct executive attention where most needed, with brief updates for areas on track and detailed analysis for areas requiring intervention. Full implementation was recommended and proceeding in phases, with complete deployment targeted for 2026/27. Current SDPs would continue through 2025/26 to maintain governance continuity. Effective communication of the Framework to staff, including through spotlights on Strategic Ambition Deep Dives to build strategy literacy, was considered particularly important in a period of constrained resources. The Committee noted the report and welcomed the clarity of the framework, particularly the “golden thread” between the activities being undertaken and the delivery of the strategic outcomes. <u>Student Experience and Learning Outcomes – Q2</u> [SPC25/23] The Committee considered the Quarterly Student Experience and Learning Outcomes Report for March 2026. Internal retention had shown three consecutive years of improvement providing strong grounds for confidence in future Office for Students continuation performance. Withdrawal numbers for 2025/26 were tracking broadly in line with 2023/24 and considerably below levels seen prior to that period. Career Readiness remained static, though this should be read alongside Graduate Outcomes data showing the University in the top quartile nationally for highly skilled employment. Analysis showed that students undertaking placements, internships or live projects demonstrated substantially higher career readiness rates, reinforcing the strategic importance of expanding curriculum-embedded experiential learning. TEF data published in December 2025 confirmed Silver performance across all Student Outcomes metrics for full-time provision and Gold for part-time. The graduate labour market context had become increasingly competitive, with implications for student support and employer engagement activity. The University's Student Sponsor Licence remained compliant and in good standing. The Committee noted the report, noting that part-time undergraduate numbers were relatively small and were Bronze for student experience but Gold for student outcomes, consistent with the previous TEF cycle. <u>Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25</u> [SPC25/24] The Committee considered the Degree Outcomes Statement 2024/25, following endorsement by Academic Board on 11 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, 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, UK BAME attainment gap had reduced to its lowest in six years, the gap between UK and non-UK domiciled students had almost halved and the gender gap had closed to its lowest in four years. Attainment gaps had widened for students from low participation postcodes, low socio-economic areas, and BAME students. Annual external examiner reports confirmed that 100% of examiners considered the University's approach to quality and standards consistent with sector norms. The Committee noted and endorsed the Degree Outcomes Statement for consideration by the Board on 20 April.

Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024/25 [SPC25/25]

The Committee considered the Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024/25 which 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 statement would be published on the University's Research Ethics and Integrity webpages, subject to Board approval. 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. 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 Committee noted the report, noting that the statement would be published on the University's website in a slightly updated format from the previous year and that a refresh of the Research Misconduct Policy was underway. The Committee noted that University policies had been revised to reflect the use and implications of AI, and that further specialist development around the “black box” problem was on-going, and endorsed the annual statement on research integrity for consideration by Board of Governors on 20 April.**

Beth Lenney
Assistant Secretary to Strategic Performance Committee
April 2026