

ELECTION OF ONE NON-ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBER TO THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
FOR TERM 1 SEPTEMBER 2026 TO 31 AUGUST 2028
(10 NOMINATIONS RECEIVED)

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

'The views expressed in the statements are those of the candidates only, and the statements and assertions expressed are made solely by the candidates and have not been validated by the Returning Officer'



Dr Matt Lumb

I am a non-academic staff member within the Engagement and Equity Division. I grew up on Gumbaynggirr Country, studied at the University of Newcastle, and am passionate about this organisation serving its regions and communities. With a background in community development and teaching, I have worked at the university for 15 years and have been a member of the NTEU throughout this time. I am currently Associate Director at the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE). I believe university governance can and should reflect the values of our organisation (equity, engagement, excellence, sustainability) and our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. This is particularly important during challenging policy and funding conditions. I'm interested to explore ways this organisation can improve that are different to recent improvement programs. I'm also keen to explore how non-academic and academic staff can better understand and support one another's work.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Ben O'Brien

As a professional services staff member within the Academic Division, I am seeking election to Council to provide a grounded, constructive voice for our workforce. My background encompasses a decade of management across multiple east-coast higher education institutions, focusing on student demand and recruitment—a key driver of our financial viability.

My qualifications in marketing and digital business allow me to blend market-facing strategy with technological capability, ensuring I understand our operational realities alongside emerging digital challenges and opportunities. If elected, I will look to bridge the gap between high-level strategic direction and day-to-day operations. I am committed to helping leadership navigate emerging cultural and workload challenges, cultivating a supportive environment where staff are equipped to succeed, and ensuring we sustainably fulfill our social licence.

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M Ashhar Mehdi

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I have held 7 diverse roles at the University with Newcastle within DTS and Student Central. In these roles, I have direct connection with a high number of the incoming, ongoing, and outgoing students as well as staff members at the University of Newcastle.

I have previously engaged with strategic plans and key policies through my democratically elected position as Vice President on the University of Newcastle Student Representative Council.

As Vice President, I represent over 37,000 students on the board of the highest student-led corporate governance body within the university.

As a young international staff member from South Asia, I would bring a valuable perspective that would contribute to a more diverse and representative University Council.

As both a staff member and an international university student, I reflect a wide range of the university community which enriches me to be an asset to the University Council.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Pierre Gouhier

I am nominating for Council because professional staff are central to the University's success and deserve a clear, practical voice in its highest governance forum. I bring more than 20 years of experience across industry, engineering, research commercialisation and university leadership, including senior roles with RPC Technologies, ResTech, NIER and TRaCE. This gives me a strong understanding of how universities work with industry, how strategy translates into delivery, and how professional staff enable outcomes across research, education, partnerships, and operations.

If elected, I will bring independent judgement, integrity and a collaborative approach to Council discussions. I will advocate for decisions that recognise the expertise, diversity and contribution of professional staff, while remaining focused on the long-term interests of the whole University.

I would be honoured to serve and contribute to stronger governance, performance and culture.

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Dr Ben Shelton

I have been proud to serve the University of Newcastle for more than 12 years across professional, research and teaching roles, providing me with a broad understanding of how our University delivers for students, staff and the wider community.

My professional experience spans student administration, governance, service delivery, compliance, systems and organisational improvement. Throughout my career, I have been passionate about equity of access to higher education and supporting student success across the student lifecycle, particularly for students from diverse backgrounds. As a University of Newcastle alumnus with three degrees, including a PhD, I have experienced our University as a student, researcher, teacher and professional staff member, and developed a deep appreciation of its impact on individuals, communities and the region. If elected to Council, I will bring a practical, collaborative and evidence-informed perspective, focused on strong governance, thoughtful decision-making and the long-term success of the University.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



John Di Gravio

I have served this University's staff, students, and regional communities for over thirty years. If elected, it will be my honour to:

- Uphold and promote the educational and research ideals of the founding mothers and fathers of this University (and its related educational institutions) enshrined in the University of Newcastle Act 1989 as our core business.
- Advocate for the views and concerns of our staff directly to Council.
- Champion openness, transparency and scrutiny into our university's managerial regime, its ethics, and compliance with the law.
- Scrutinise the use of consultancies at this University, especially the scandal ridden Big 4 and their associated entities.
- The University of Newcastle (UoN) has been ranked the worst of the public Australian universities for psychosocial health and safety risk to staff in a national survey. I can provide real lived experience on this matter to advocate that it properly dealt with through Council's direction.

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Bret Barton

Bret is a former Chief Executive of three Australian companies and currently serves as a Senior Business Advisor to HunterNet, alongside his role as a Business Development Manager Defence and Aerospace at UON. He holds several governance and advisory positions, including Director of Hunter Innovation Festival (HiF), and serves on the Test and Evaluation Advisory Board (TEAB) as well as a Strategic Industry Advisor (SIA), reporting to the Vice Chief of the Defence Force. Bret is a Certified Professional Engineer and Engineering Executive, holding a Master of Engineering (Aeronautical) and an MBA from the University of Newcastle. He brings extensive experience across defence, aerospace, and advanced manufacturing sectors. He has also contributed significantly to the engineering profession through Engineers Australia, where he served for over five years on the Newcastle Division Committee, including Leadership and Management Committees, supporting the development of industry capability and professional standards.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Wendy Taggart

I have proudly served the University for more than 14 years and, for the past 10 months, as a non-academic staff member of Council. I bring strong sector experience across research, education, governance, and operations. During a period of significant change and concern about workload, wellbeing and governance, I have worked hard to ensure staff perspectives are more clearly considered in Council decision-making. I have made meaningful progress and would welcome the opportunity to continue to build on this momentum. I have consistently advocated for staff wellbeing, sustainable workloads and greater transparency, helping Council discussions better reflect the realities facing our people. At a time when many staff feel unheard, I am focused on rebuilding trust through listening, engagement and representing diverse views. If re-elected, I will continue to be a strong, trusted voice for professional staff and support decisions that strengthen both our people and the University's long-term success.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Luke Boulton

I have worked at the University of Newcastle for the past 20 years, the last several within our central teaching and learning unit, LDTI, where I currently serve as Assistant Director. I am seeking election to Council because I believe our institution's enduring strength lies in its core business of teaching and research, and that decisions keeping this focus front and centre will serve us well in the years ahead. I have also seen, time and again, that it is the hard work, professionalism, and dedication of everyday University staff that has carried us through real challenges in recent years. I would bring that perspective, and a grounded understanding of how the University operates, to Council.

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Dr Cathy Day

I have worked in non-academic roles at UoN and other universities for 13 years. As Senior Program Manager of the Field Epidemiology in Action team in CHMW, I currently support health security workforce training throughout the Pacific.

There has never been a more important time to have strong staff voices who can contribute to effective university governance. I have relevant expertise and experience as a representative on governance committees outside the university, and have represented staff in negotiations with management within the university sector. As a member of the NTEU, I am committed to the rights of all workers. During the Covid pandemic, I was the ACT State Secretary of the NTEU and I have a solid understanding of how change affects the lives of workers, particularly non-academic and non-tenured staff. I feel that this will help me to represent you well on the Council, and I hope to earn your vote.

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