Council Communique

University of Newcastle Council – Report of Outcomes – 28 August 2026

The University of Newcastle's vision is to be a world-leading university for our regions. Our purpose is to deliver an exceptional student experience, preparing graduates for life in an increasingly interconnected society, and to serve our regions by taking research that matters to the world and bringing our global expertise home. Our roadmap to achieving this vision is the Looking Ahead 2030 Strategic Plan.

The University Council is the governing body of the University. The Council's role is to act in the best interests of the University, to be responsible for the strategy for the University and to hear from senior management on the implementation of that strategic direction. The Council operates in accordance with the *University of Newcastle Act 1989 (NSW)* and the *University of Newcastle By-law 2017 (NSW)*, which set out the powers and functions of the Council and how these must be performed.

To find out more, visit the Council pages of our University website.

Meeting Details and Site Visit

The Council held its biennial Tamworth meeting at the Tamworth Education Centre on Friday 28 August 2026.

Acknowledgements

The Council opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and then held a minute's silence in recognition of the flooding disaster in Nepal, its impact on the Nepalese community and the news that two students of the University were listed as missing.

The Council welcomed Professor Lisa Wood who was attending the meeting as an observer, along with incoming Council Member Dr Tim Connor. Council noted that this was the final Council meeting for Professor Brendan Boyle and Dr Annika Westrenius, given the conclusion of their terms as elected academic representatives on Council. Council thanked Professor Boyle and Dr Westrenius for their contribution during their terms on Council and particularly expressed its gratitude to Professor Boyle for his significant commitment, having served eight years on Council.

Work Health and Safety Update

Ms Megan Clark, Associate Director Wellbeing Health and Safety, and Mr Martin Sainsbury, Chief People and Culture Officer, joined the meeting and presented the quarterly WHS report, providing information to assist in applying due diligence to the University's health and safety management system. This report also included a response to Council's request for information about management of contractor safety.

Chancellor's Update

The Chancellor provided a summary of the changes announced to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards). These amendments focus on racism and university governance, and will come into effect from 1 January 2027.

The Chancellor noted the successful event held the previous evening to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the University's Department of Rural Health in Tamworth.

Vice-Chancellor's Update

The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on his recent engagements, including:

- Hunter Nexus Event focused on manufacturing innovation;
- Indigenous Nationals;

- Hunter Insight Series event;
- Newcastle Industry Open Day; and
- Central Coast Research and Innovation Showcase.

A new partnership with McDonald's Australia was also outlined, which will provide recognition of prior learning equivalent to 60 units of credit towards our Bachelor of Business degree. Council was also advised of a collaboration with Tower Cinemas to provide real-world industry experience for students studying film, design, animation and journalism.

Council noted:

- graduations at the end of June saw over 1,100 graduates cross the stage at the Great Hall;
- Schools Visit Day was held on 2 July and involved over 1,700 students from more than 75 high schools participate in the Callaghan visit;
- the recent appointments of: Professor Brett Nixon as Dean and Head of School, School of Science; Professor Karen Blackmore as Dean and Head of School, School of Computer and Information Science and Dr William (Bill) Lyon as Pro Vice-Chancellor Industry and Engagement; and
- Associate Professor Nicole Nathan, Dr Natalie Trigg and Dr Jordan Stanford have secured a total of more than $4 million in NHMRC Investigator grants that support projects across biomedical, clinical, public health and health services research.

The Vice-Chancellor also provided an overview of recent government engagement, sector news, financial performance and year to date student load.

Rural Health Strategy Update

Professor Leanne Brown, Director of the Department of Rural Health, joined the meeting and provided an update on the Rural Health Strategy. It was noted that since 2001, students have spent almost 90,000 weeks on placement across the Rural Health Department's service area, 1,500 medical students have spent a full year training in the rural hospitals and communities, more than 5,000 students from the local area have enrolled in health courses with the University of Newcastle and the Department of Rural Health staff have provided training and skills development for 30,000 practitioners in the local health workforce.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that we are formally seeking approval to make Tamworth a full campus of the University through an expanded offering in nursing and midwifery. This would allow students to commence their first-year studies in nursing and midwifery in Tamworth from 2027.

Looking Ahead 2030 – Supporting Plans

Mr Joel Palmer, Director Strategy, Planning & Performance, joined the meeting and presented the range of refinements that had been made to the draft plans following staff feedback.

The draft supporting plans (Education Plan, Research Plan, Engagement Plan) were outlined by their respective deputy vice-chancellors and approved by Council.

President of Academic Senate Update

The President of Academic Senate provided an overview of his report.

Council noted that Senate had:

- undertaken detailed consideration on key University initiatives including proposals to discontinue the use of Turnitin AI detection by the end of 2026, to continue the use of Zoom supervised assessments for online courses and the operationalisation of program level assessments;

- approved the consolidation of several awards and program schedules into a single schedule, and considered revisions to the governance for animal ethics, Research Integrity Support and Evaluation (RISE) and the Policy Framework;
- received updates from the Chairs of the Research Committee, Teaching and Learning Committee, College Boards and Pathways, Academic Learning Support Board and an Annual report from NAIHE; and
- actively engaged in strategic and academic matters, including consideration of academic risks, particularly in relation to Third Party arrangements, providing oversight, challenge and assurance in accordance with its governance responsibilities, and approving a range of academic governance and policy matters.

Council Committee Reports – Meetings held 13 and 14 August 2026

Finance and Infrastructure Committee Update

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 14 August, including the financial report, investment performance update, international student recruitment update and 2027 planning, and an update on Sydney campus. In addition, the Committee discussed the Horizons update including the space optimisation program, the carbon emissions report and the Chief Financial Officer's report.

The Council approved the following items that had been discussed by the Finance and Infrastructure Committee:

- NSW Audit Office annual engagement plan;
- 2027 budget assumptions and Long Term Financial Plan planning;
- contracts for demolition and hydraulics services procurement;
- annual non-tuition fees report; and
- SSAF Fee and Consultation Plan for 2027.

Risk Committee Update

Council was provided with an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 14 August, including the internal audit root cause analysis summary, internal audit reports, and a briefing on Climate Risk Treasury Disclosures. In addition, the Committee discussed the post incident review of the Canvas system event, cyber security matters relating to Singapore operations, and an update from the Cyber Security and AI Sub-Committee. The Committee also noted the Risk Services update, the insurance renewal update, the Litigated Matters report and the Changes to Legislation report.

The Council approved the following items that had been discussed by the Risk Committee:

- Enterprise Risk Profile update;
- Climate-related financial disclosure report.

The Council also noted the report on the Enterprise Risk Deep Dive – Health Safety and Wellbeing that had been provided to the Committee.

Nominations and Governance Committee Update

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 13 August, including an update on Council membership and the ongoing progress of the public EOI process, emeritus professor nominations, policy reviews, and an update on progress towards fully implementing the Expert Council on University Governance recommendations.

The Council approved the following items that had been discussed by the Nominations and Governance Committee: honorary degree nominations and building naming proposals (to be announced separately), the revised Policy Framework and its associated delegation changes, changes to the Governance Framework for Controlled Entities, and appointments to controlled entity boards. The Council also noted

the update on the Student Led Organisation and 2027 SSAF Transition Plan that had been provided to the Committee.

People and Culture Committee

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 13 August including, a presentation on the College of Human and Social Futures Workforce profile, the 2026 SFUN Survey Results and response, an update on the Strategic Review Health Check report, Fair Work Ombudsman Update (LSL Calculations), the six-monthly People and Workforce report, HR matters update, and a report on Governance and Accountability in Complaints and Grievances.

Chancellor's Committee Update

The Chancellor provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 13 August, including an update on enterprise agreement negotiations, an update on executive recruitment, succession and development plans, emerging workforce issues and the half yearly performance review of the Vice-Chancellor's individual goals.

Senior Executive Updates

The Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Engagement & Equity provided Council with updates on their areas of business.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council will be held at Callaghan on 30 October 2026.

Contact: Hamish Lithgow, Acting University Secretary.