

Academic Senate

Handbook



2024

**For Members of the University of Newcastle
Academic Senate and its Committees**

This Handbook has been prepared by Governance and Assurance Services on behalf of the President of Academic Senate and is subject to annual review by the President of Academic Senate in line with yearly inductions to Academic Senate and committees. Other reviews and updates may be conducted by the President of Academic Senate in line with organisational changes as they arise.

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Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	4
2.	THE ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK	4
	<i>Definition of Academic Governance</i>	4
	<i>University of Newcastle Governance Framework</i>	4
	<i>Delegations</i>	5
	<i>Legislation and Regulation</i>	5
	<i>Academic Senate</i>	6
	<i>The Functions of Academic Senate</i>	6
	<i>Committees of Academic Senate</i>	8
	<i>Roles of the President of Academic Senate (PAS) and Deputy President of Academic Senate (DPAS)</i>	9
	<i>Deputy Presidents of Academic Senate (DPAS)</i>	9
3.	RESOURCES	10
	<i>The Cycle of Meetings</i>	10
	<i>Standing Orders</i>	10
	<i>Papers, Presentations, and Minutes</i>	10
	<i>Self-Evaluations and Reviews</i>	10
4.	MAXIMISING YOUR CONTRIBUTION AS A MEMBER	11
	<i>What makes an effective Member?</i>	11
	<i>Student Mentor Program</i>	11
	<i>Items for the Agenda, Papers and Presentations</i>	11
	<i>Discussants</i>	12
	<i>Confidentiality of Academic Senate items</i>	12
	<i>External Program Reviews</i>	12
	<i>Working Groups</i>	13
5.	POLICY FRAMEWORK	13
6.	ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES, LEAVE AND FEEDBACK	13
	<i>Attendance</i>	13
	<i>Apologies</i>	13
	<i>Going on leave?</i>	13
	<i>Feedback</i>	13
7.	USEFUL LINKS	14
8.	CONTACTS	14

1. Introduction

This handbook provides a general guide for new members of the Academic Senate and its Committees/Boards. It is designed to help you maximise your contribution and assist you to understand your roles and responsibilities as a member.

Additional information is available on the University of Newcastle [Governance Hub](#) web page or from the [Secretariat Team](#), Governance and Assurance Services.

2. The Academic Governance Framework

Definition of Academic Governance

The [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency \(TEQSA\)](#) provides the following definition of academic governance:

Academic governance is concerned with the integrity and quality of the core higher education activities of teaching, student learning, research (including research training) and scholarship. It refers to the framework that regulates a provider's academic decisions and quality assurance, incorporating policies, processes, definitions of roles, relationships, specifications of delegations, systems, strategies and resources that ensure academic quality and continuous improvement.

Academic governance that is robust and high functioning is a primary contributor to establishing a reputation as a quality provider through self-assurance of academic and research integrity, and delivering expected outcomes for students. Academic governance is also important to ensure a provider's activities adhere to its institutional policy obligations, and that all qualifications awarded reflect the requirements within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). At many providers, the responsibility of overseeing academic governance, rests with an academic board.

The National Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates describes the [purpose and function of academic boards and senates](#) in Australian universities:

The Board is the principal policy-making and advisory body on all academic matters relating to and affecting a university's teaching, research and educational programs. It is responsible for overseeing and assuring academic standards and quality, and, in fulfilling this function, ensures academic freedom, academic integrity and high standards in research, assessment and admissions. It carries out these functions in partnership with, but independently of, the Vice-Chancellor's executive management team, referred to in this document as the "University Executive". It is separate from and accountable to the Council and works with the Vice-Chancellor, the University Executive and the Council in pursuit of the shared goals of the university to pursue truth and the creation and dissemination of knowledge.

University of Newcastle Governance Framework

The University of Newcastle Act 1989 (the Act) establishes the Academic Senate and provides that the Vice-Chancellor and President of Academic Senate are members. The University of Newcastle By-law 2017 (the By-law) and the Governance Rule sets out the composition and functions of the Academic Senate and provides for those matters that must be dealt with in Rules. Academic Senate has a number of policies and procedures to guide its operation. As such, the Academic Senate Governance Framework is categorised by the following components:

- [University of Newcastle Act 1989](#);
- [University of Newcastle By-law 2017](#);
- [Governance Rule](#); and
- [Policies, procedures and guidelines](#).

Delegations

The Act states that Council is the governing authority of the University. The University [Council Charter](#) sets out the role and responsibilities of the Council and the responsibilities delegated to committees or to management.

Council has delegated a number of its functions and activities to:

- the Vice-Chancellor to manage and operate the University on a day-to-day basis;
- Committees of Council (including Academic Senate);
- Committees of Academic Senate; and
- individual positions (eg. President of Academic Senate, Heads of School).

Delegations are described in the following schedules:

- [Matters Reserved for the Council and Council Committees](#);
- [Delegation of Academic Matters](#) (Schedule 2 of the Governance Rule); and
- [Schedule of Operational Sub-Delegations made by the Vice-Chancellor](#).

Legislation and Regulation

The University's academic governance is assessed every seven years by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia's independent national regulator of the higher education sector. In 2015, the University successfully renewed its TEQSA registration and re-registration is currently underway in 2024. Section 6.3 Academic Governance of the Higher Education Standard Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 states:

1. *Processes and structures are established and responsibilities are assigned that collectively:*
 - a) *achieve effective academic oversight of the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training*
 - b) *set and monitor institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes*
 - c) *establish and maintain academic leadership at an institutional level, consistent with the types and levels of higher education offered, and*
 - d) *provide competent advice to the corporate governing body and management on academic matters, including advice on academic outcomes, policies and practices.*
2. *Academic oversight assures the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training effectively, including by:*
 - a) *developing, monitoring and reviewing academic policies and their effectiveness*
 - b) *confirming that delegations of academic authority are implemented*
 - c) *critically scrutinising, approving and, if authority to self-accredit is held, accrediting or advising on approving and accrediting, courses of study and their associated qualifications*
 - d) *maintaining oversight of academic and research integrity, including monitoring of potential risks*
 - e) *monitoring and initiating action to improve performance against institutional benchmarks for academic quality and outcomes*
 - f) *critically evaluating the quality and effectiveness of educational innovations or proposals for innovations*
 - g) *evaluating the effectiveness of institutional monitoring, review and improvement of academic activities, and*
 - h) *monitoring and reporting to the corporate governing body on the quality of teaching, learning, research and research training.*
3. *Students have opportunities to participate in academic governance.*

Academic Senate

Academic Senate is the principal academic body of the University of Newcastle. As such, it is responsible for advising Council and the Vice-Chancellor on academic activities in our institution including teaching, learning and research.

Academic Senate is intended to be the primary forum for debate on academic issues in the University. Members are strongly encouraged to actively contribute to discussions and deliberations. Consistent with its collegial traditions, Academic Senate decisions are usually made through consensus. On rare occasions, it may be necessary to adopt more formal meeting protocols and these are specified in the *Standing Orders of Academic Senate* found under [Report Template and Resources](#) on the Academic Senate webpage.

In addition to discussion of academic issues, Academic Senate also approves and amends academic policies and has a major role in the University's academic quality assurance processes. This includes overseeing and improving the academic standards and quality within the University.

The Functions of Academic Senate

The functions of Academic Senate are stated in the By-law (clause 18) as follows:

- a) to be the principal academic body of the University;
- b) to oversee academic governance and the maintenance of academic standards;
- c) to advise the Vice-Chancellor and Council on matters relating to the conduct and standards of teaching, scholarship and research within the University;
- d) to consider and report on matters referred to it by the Council or by the Vice-Chancellor;
- e) any functions delegated to it by the Council; and
- f) any other functions that may be prescribed by rules made by the Council.

The [Governance Rule](#) further states that the functions of the Academic Senate are:

Section 3 Part K - Functions of the Academic Senate

(27) The Academic Senate has the following functions that include, for the purposes of clause 19(f) of the By-Law and [Schedule 1](#) to this Rule, the teaching and learning, research, and research training (academic) governance functions as described in the Higher Education Standards Framework Threshold Standards (HESF).

The following page outlines the Functions of Academic Senate. Members are asked to ensure that they indicate what Function of Academic Senate their paper addresses in the compliance box on the Academic Senate Coversheet found on the Academic Senate webpage under the [Report Template and Resources](#) section.

The Governance Rule outlines the following Functions of Academic Senate. These are reported on annually, as part of its Quality Assurance obligations.

Item	Academic Senate Assurance Summary
(a)	Is the principal advisory committee to the Council and Vice-Chancellor providing academic (teaching and learning, and research and research training) leadership advice, reporting and compliance assurance on academic governance and standards, and providing oversight of academic risk processes.
(b)	Provides appropriate academic input to the University's strategic plan
(c)	Acts as (i) the principal academic forum for discussion and deliberation of academic and research matters through informed and open discussion and (ii) critically evaluates the quality and effectiveness of educational innovations or proposals for innovations (based on HESF).
(d)	Jointly manages effective and targeted two-way communication between the Academic Senate, Council, senior executive, committees and the wider University community on academic and research activities and relevant academic standards across the University.
(e)	Considers any relevant teaching and learning and/or research and research training proposal made by any college, school, or board, at or in connection with the University, including providing general advice on academic priorities.
(f)	Approves new programs and/or awards that meet self-accreditation requirements, having been satisfied of effective quality assurance of new program design and consistency of processes.
(g)	Ensures that existing and established programs are regularly monitored, reviewed and updated for continuous improvement, utilising internal and external advice/input where appropriate.
(h)	Approves, monitors and reviews the development of academic and research rules, policies and other high-level procedural documentation as appropriate, and oversees their effectiveness and implementation.
(i)	Maintains oversight of academic and research integrity including monitoring for potential risks.
(j)	Reviews required performance reports and survey outcomes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the University's academic and research monitoring and review systems, including endorsing internal and external institutional benchmarking to support best practice.
(k)	Maintains standing orders for the Academic Senate and its committees.
(l)	Determines the structure and functions of its committees.
(m)	Monitors, reviews and recommends updates to the Delegation of Academic Matters to align with the academic and research policy framework and ensure effective and consistent implementation across the University.
(n)	Conducts regular self-evaluation (reviews) of the effectiveness of academic governance and monitoring systems.
(o)	Exercises the authority delegated to the Academic Senate by the Council under Schedule 1 of the Governance Rule .

Committees of Academic Senate

Academic Senate is assisted by the following committees which have specific purposes and functions. Academic Senate develops and approves the membership and Terms of Reference for each of its committees and such other matters as the Academic Senate by resolution determines. The Vice-Chancellor and the President of Academic Senate are, by virtue of office, members of all Academic Senate committees. These documents are available on the [Governance Hub](#) web page.

The Chair of each committee reports to Academic Senate on actions, issues and discussions specific to their committee. The following committees may also form sub-committees as required to address certain issues. The Terms of Reference for each Committee can be found [here](#).

Academic Senate Executive Committee

The Academic Senate Executive Committee's purpose is to advise and assist the President of Academic Senate on matters and assist to ensure that the Academic Senate fulfils its functions and obligations.

Teaching and Learning Committee

The Teaching and Learning Committee provides strategic advice to the Academic Senate on the quality of teaching and learning to ensure high academic standards and to support the strategic directions of the University. The Teaching and Learning Committee is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

Research Committee

The Research Committee provides strategic advice to Academic Senate on research, research training and research related matters to ensure sustained high academic standards and to support the strategic directions of the University. It is supported by the Research Training Sub-Committee. The Research Committee is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

Program and Course Approval Committee

The Program and Course Approval Committee (PCAC) is focused on programs and courses, providing strategic advice on establishing, disestablishing and reviewing programs and courses to improve the global competitiveness of graduates, innovative program offering and course delivery models at the University. The PCAC is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

College Boards

Each of the University's Colleges has a College Board chaired by the College Pro Vice-Chancellor. They oversee teaching, learning, assessment and research activities within the College. They are responsible for continuous improvement, approving academic content of new courses, College procedures and managing Schools.

As Committees of Academic Senate, they are supported by their own advisory sub-committees including the College Progress and Appeals Committee, the College Research Committee and the College Teaching and Learning Committee.

Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre Board

The Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre (PALS) has a PALS Board that is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Innovation). The Board oversees quality assurance for teaching, learning and research activities within the PALS Centre.

As a Committee of Academic Senate, the PALS Board is supported by advisory sub-committees that include the PALS Teaching and Learning Committee and the PALS Progress and Appeals Committee.

Roles of the President of Academic Senate (PAS) and Deputy President of Academic Senate (DPAS)

In addition to Section J, Clauses 21-26 of the Governance Rule for the roles of President of Academic Senate and Deputy President of Academic Senate, the following functions are considered part of the respective roles:

President of Academic Senate (PAS)

- a. chair meetings of the Academic Senate;*
- b. approve agendas for and minutes of the Academic Senate meetings;*
- c. provide leadership in the development of academic policy through the Academic Senate and its Committees;*
- d. represent the Academic Senate on University bodies;*
- e. be an official member of the University Council as provided for in the Act; and*
- f. undertake such other functions as the Academic Senate may determine by resolution from time to time.*

Deputy Presidents of Academic Senate (DPAS)

- a. The Deputy responsible for teaching and learning will be the deputy chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for teaching and learning to be the chair.*
- b. The Deputy responsible for research will be the deputy chair of the Research Committee, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research to be the chair.*
- c. The role of the Deputy President in relation to each of the committees in (a) and (b) above is to include setting the committee meeting agendas with the chair.*
- d. The role of each Deputy President will principally be focused on issues and development of policy within the ambit of the Academic Senate, lead major projects of the Academic Senate and engage with the respective Assistant Deans.*
- e. During any absence of the President, the President will appoint one Deputy President to act as President who will have all of the functions of the President.*
- f. In the event that the President is unable to appoint one Deputy President, the Returning Officer will appoint one Deputy President, by lot, to act as President with all the functions of the President.*

3. Resources

The Cycle of Meetings

A [schedule of meeting dates](#) and times for Academic Senate and each Committee/Board is available from the [Academic Senate](#) web page.

Upon joining Academic Senate or a Committee/Board, you will be invited to all meeting dates so they can be confirmed in your diary/calendar.

Standing Orders

Meetings are conducted in accordance with the [Standing Orders of the Academic Senate](#). In addition to details of the quorum and meeting procedures, the Standing Orders of Academic Senate also contain information about the preparation and submission of papers for meetings and detail information about agendas and minutes.

Papers, Presentations, and Minutes

All papers are emailed to members one week prior to the meeting. Meeting papers, presentations and pre-recorded presentations are available to all members on the Academic Senate SharePoint site. Members are encouraged to use a laptop or tablet in the meeting as part of the University's commitment to sustainability.

Unconfirmed minutes are circulated to members and submitted at the following meeting for confirmation.

Confirmed, non-confidential minutes are publicly available from the Academic Senate web page. A brief *Communique* summarizing the key outcomes from each meeting is also available [here](#), and is distributed to the University community through internal media.

Self-Evaluations and Reviews

The President of Academic Senate (PAS) may commission a review of aspects of Academic Senate performance.

Annual membership surveys are conducted and feedback and recommendations for improvement are provided back to Senate.

Academic Senate conducts an Annual Assurance report at the end of each year evaluating its performance against its Functions. This report is provided to the Academic Senate and Council at the start of the following year.

SharePoint Site

Academic Senate maintains a SharePoint Site which is available for members only. Some of the Committees of Academic Senates also maintain separate SharePoint sites.

4. Maximising your Contribution as a Member

Regardless of whether the committee is Academic Senate or one of its Committees/Boards, your contributions are highly valued and can have a significant impact on the decisions taken in the University.

What makes an effective Member?

Active Engagement

- Read the papers
- Arrive prior to the nominated meeting start time. If attending via zoom, **please log on 10 minutes before the start of the meeting** to allow time to rectify any technical issues and to ensure you are counted in the quorum.
- Ask questions and clarify points or concerns, but don't repeat what other speakers have said
- Raise issues - speak to PAS, DPAS or your Chair about submitting a paper or suggesting a future topic for discussion.

Commitment

- Be committed and learn how Academic Senate and your Committee/Board operates.
- Attend all meetings.
- Submit a formal apology or appoint a proxy if unable to attend.

A Respectful and Collaborative Approach

- Be open to and appreciative of different views and perspectives.
- Communicate openly and listen carefully.
- Recognise the complexity and interdependencies in the University community.

Student Mentor Program

The Student Mentor Program has been developed to support students newly appointed as members of Academic Senate or its Committees/Boards. The program provides the opportunity for students to partner with an academic Member, to provide students with access to friendly advice and guidance as they navigate their way as a new Member. A mentor provides students with a 'sounding board' and encouragement to facilitate a smooth integration to the operation and Function of Academic Senate or a Committee/Board and supports them to provide a valuable contribution to meetings.

If you have not already received an invitation to be part of the Student Mentor Program, contact the [Office of the President of the Academic Senate](#) and you will be paired with a mentor.

Items for the Agenda, Papers and Presentations

If there are any matters about which you are unclear, relating either to the functioning of Academic Senate, or its Committees/Boards, or the business of any particular meeting, contact the Chair or the Secretary for assistance. Both contribute to developing the agenda for each meeting and should be able to advise you of the background or the intent of any item. They can also advise on the most appropriate way of raising any issues or concerns you may have.

If you would like to request a new agenda item, advance notice should be provided to the Secretary or the Chair. The PAS, in consultation with the University Secretary, may determine if a matter is appropriate for Academic Senate or referred to another Committee/Board or forum. If you are unsure whether an item may

be appropriate for the committee or how best to present it, the Secretary and the Chair can provide guidance so your issues can be considered appropriately.

To facilitate more discussion time at the meeting, the PAS may request that a pre-recorded Zoom presentation be provided in place of, or in conjunction with your paper. The pre-recorded presentation will be required at the same time that your paper is due (ie. 2 weeks prior to the meeting).

To ensure adequate time for the preparation and reading of papers, please ensure that all material is provided to the Secretariat by the designated due dates.

Call for Papers:	3 weeks prior to meeting
Papers and Pre-Recorded Zoom Presentations Due:	2 weeks prior to meeting
Papers Published:	1 week prior to meeting

Discussants

It is often the case that discussants will be assigned to items on the agenda. The role of discussants is to open discussion by raising any questions and making comments in relation to their allocated item. The allocation of discussants to an item does not mean other members are unable to comment or discuss an item.

The PAS will indicate to the Secretariat those items needing discussants and allocate two discussants for each item in advance of the meeting. A list of items and discussants will be forwarded when the papers are published. Please ensure you check to see if you have a paper assigned to you as you will be expected to summarise the issues and ask relevant questions.

Confidentiality of Academic Senate items

Academic Senate items are not usually subject to confidentiality clauses and open discussion and dissemination of academic topics among colleagues is actively encouraged. Any confidential papers will be clearly marked as 'Confidential' and circulated to members only. Confidential papers are not for wider circulation.

External Program Reviews

Academic Senate ensures programs are regularly monitored, reviewed and updated for continuous improvement. It approves the cycle of these reviews and ensures that the University complies with the legislation that requires programs to be reviewed at least every 7 years.

External program review panels conduct a formal appraisal and are comprised of a group of academic, professional experts.

As an academic staff member of Academic Senate or it's Committees, you can assist in the good academic governance in this process by becoming a panel member or acting as a Chair of a review panel. This will allow you to learn the mechanics of the University's quality assurance cycle, share your expertise and can assist you in supporting your next academic promotion through engagement.

More information about the External Program Review process and panels can be found in the [Education Quality Assurance Policy](#), the External Program Reviews Information Hub Sharepoint site for staff or by contacting programreviews@newcastle.edu.au directly.

Working Groups

From time to time, opportunities will arise for Senate and its Committee members to contribute as members of smaller working groups, to focus on specific academic matters.

5. Policy Framework

In accordance with the functions of the Academic Senate and its governance role, a primary activity of the committee is the development and revision of academic policies which relate to quality outcomes in teaching, learning and research. In this way, Academic Senate contributes to academic quality assurance processes across the University.

The [Policy Library](#) provides access to the University's approved policies, including the [Policy Framework](#). The Policy Framework was updated in 2023, and members are encouraged to refer to this document when formulating new or considering amendments to policy and procedure.

6. Attendance, Apologies, Leave and Feedback

Attendance

The meeting dates for all meetings of Academic Senate and its Committees/Boards for the year are sent at the beginning of the year, allowing Members to plan their leave and activities, so that they can attend.

Members are required to sign the attendance sheet upon arrival at the meeting. Your attendance is recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Attendance requirements for membership are detailed within the Standing Orders.

Students who attend at least four meetings will have their membership recorded on their Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS), which accompanies the student's testamur received following graduation. Students should contact the Secretariat Team if they have any questions regarding AHEGS.

Apologies

Members who are unable to attend a meeting should advise the Secretary in writing via email to academicsenate@newcastle.edu.au prior to the meeting. This is particularly important for the Chair who may need to ascertain the likelihood of a quorum in advance of a meeting.

Going on leave?

If you are expecting to take extended leave, you should advise the Secretary in writing prior to your leave.

Feedback

Feedback on this handbook, or any other matter is welcomed by the Chair.

Please email: pas@newcastle.edu.au.

7. Useful Links

- [University of Newcastle Act 1989 \(NSW\)](#)
- [University of Newcastle By-law 2017](#)
- [Standing Orders of the Academic Senate](#)
- [Governance Rule](#)
- [Delegation of Academic Matters \(Schedule 2 of the Governance Rule\)](#)
- [TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#)
- [The Purpose and Function of Academic Boards and Senates in Australian Universities](#)

8. Contacts

Academic Senate Teaching & Learning Committee and Research Committee	<p>Please email: academicsenate@newcastle.edu.au</p> <p>Or contact: Francesca Suters Zoe Ward Una Harris-McNeill</p>
Program and Course Approval Committee	<p>Please email: academicpolicy@newcastle.edu.au</p> <p>Or contact: Kim Austin.</p>
Board of the Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre	<p>Please contact: PALS-Education@newcastle.edu.au</p>
College Board College of Engineering, Science and Environment (CESE)	<p>Please contact: cese-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au</p>
College Board College of Human and Social Futures (CHSF)	<p>Please contact: chsf-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au</p>
College Board College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing (CHMW)	<p>Please contact: chmw-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au</p>