

Academic Senate

Handbook



2026

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

This Handbook has been prepared by the President of Academic Senate and is subject to annual review 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.

Reviewed By	Date
Melinda Hannan – EA to President of Academic Senate	11 May 2026
Associate Professor Marcus Rodrigs – President of Academic Senate	9 October 2025
Professor Tania Sourdin – President of Academic Senate	24 September 2024
Professor Tania Sourdin – President of Academic Senate	30 October 2023
Melinda Hannan – EA to President of Academic Senate	30 October 2023
Melinda Hannan – EA to President of Academic Senate	12 January 2023
Professor Victoria Haskins – President of Academic Senate	2 August 2022

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1. Introduction



This handbook provides a general guide for new and existing members of the Academic Senate and its Committees/Boards. It is designed to help maximise your contribution and assist understanding of 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 set 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. The University is not due for reaccreditation until April 2032. Section 6.3 Academic Governance of the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021](#) sets out the roles for Academic Senate (see below). These are reflected in the [Functions of Academic Senate](#) as set out in Section 3, Part K of the Governance Rule.

- 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. It is responsible for advising Council and the Vice-Chancellor on academic activities in the institution including teaching, learning and research and providing effect oversight.

The Academic Senate is the primary forum for debate on academic issues and has a major role in academic quality assurance processes. Together with its sub-committees and College Boards, the Academic Senate is responsible for developing, approving and monitoring academic programs, courses and policies. This includes overseeing and improving the academic standards and quality within the University.

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](#).

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 18(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](#).

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 President of Academic Senate (DPAS)

- a. The DPAS will be the deputy chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee with the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Global) to be the chair.*
- b. The DPAS will be the deputy chair of the Research Committee, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) to be the chair.*
- c. The role of the DPAS 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 the DPAS 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, or during the inability of the President to act, the DPAS will to act as President who will have with all of 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 also contain information about the preparation and submission of papers for meetings and information about agendas and minutes.

SharePoint Site

Academic Senate maintains a SharePoint Site which is available for members and their nominated support staff only. Some of the Committees of Academic Senates also maintain separate SharePoint sites. Members

are added to the relevant SharePoint sites for their Committees by the Committee Secretary. If you have difficulties in accessing the SharePoint site, please contact your Committee Secretary as soon as possible to ensure access.

Papers, Presentations, and Minutes

All papers are added to the Academic Senate SharePoint site as they are submitted to the Secretariat. A compilation pdf file of all papers is emailed to members one week prior to the meeting or once all papers are received. 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.

The *Senate News* summarises the key outcomes from each meeting is also available [here](#), and is distributed to the University community through internal media. Members are encouraged to discuss items in the *Senate News* with colleagues at their School.

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.

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

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.

Effective Membership

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 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 is designed to support students who have been appointed as members of the Academic Senate or its Committees/Boards. Through this initiative, students are paired with an academic staff member who serves as a mentor, offering guidance and support as the student becomes familiar with their role.

The mentor acts as a point of contact and provides informal advice to assist the student in understanding the operations and responsibilities associated with their membership. This partnership aims to foster a smooth transition into the governance environment and to empower students to make meaningful contributions 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.

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 its Committees, you can assist in the good governance 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. Working groups are a great opportunity for members to build closer working relationships, create better communication among members, improve skills and develop expertise.

5. Agenda Items and Papers

Queries About Existing Agenda Items

If you have any questions or uncertainties about the operations of the Academic Senate, its Committees or Boards, or the agenda of a specific meeting, please reach out to the Chair or Secretary. They play a key role in shaping the meeting agenda and can provide context, background information, and guidance on how best to raise any concerns or propose discussion items.

Requesting a New Agenda Item

To propose a new agenda item for an upcoming meeting, please notify the Secretary or Chair in advance. The President of Academic Senate (PAS), in consultation with the University Secretary, will assess whether the item is suitable for Academic Senate or should be referred to another Committee, Board, or forum.

If you're unsure whether your item is appropriate or how best to present it, the Secretary or Chair can offer guidance to ensure your proposal is considered effectively.

To allow sufficient time for discussion during meetings, the PAS may request a pre-recorded Zoom presentation to accompany or replace your written paper. This presentation must be submitted at the same time as your paper—**two weeks prior to the meeting**.

To support timely preparation and review, please ensure all materials are submitted to the Secretariat by the designated deadlines.

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

Discussants may be allocated to specific agenda items to help open the discussion at the meeting. The role of discussants is to begin discussion by raising any questions and making comments on the item. Other members can still discuss the item and are encouraged to do so.

Discussants will be advised once the paper published to the Sharepoint Site.

Confidentiality of Academic Senate items

Wherever possible, authors should try to remove any items that would make papers confidential. Open discussion and dissemination of academic topics among colleagues actively encouraged and authors should carefully consider if items contained in their paper would be classified as confidential or commercial in confidence.

Confidential papers should be clearly marked as confidential. These papers will only be distributed via the Sharepoint site to members and are not for wider circulation.

6. 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.

7. Attendance, Apologies, Leave and Feedback

Attendance

Attendance requirements for membership are detailed within the Standing Orders. Meeting dates for all meetings of Academic Senate and its Committees/Boards are sent at the beginning of the year, allowing members time to plan their leave and activities, so that they can attend.

Your attendance is recorded on the attendance sheet before the start of each meeting to ensure quorum is met prior to the meeting starting. Attendance is also recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

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 and Use of Proxies

Members who are unable to attend a meeting should advise the Secretary via email to academicsenate@newcastle.edu.au prior to the meeting and allows the Chair and Secretary to ascertain that quorum can be met or if the meeting will need to be rescheduled.

If you're unable to attend a meeting, it's recommended that you nominate a proxy to attend on your behalf. Please notify the Secretariat in advance to confirm your proxy is eligible and to ensure their attendance is properly recorded. For further details on proxy arrangements, refer to the [Standing Orders of the Academic Senate](#).



Going on leave?

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

8. 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



9. Contacts

Office	Email
President of Academic Senate	PAS@newcastle.edu.au
Academic Senate Teaching & Learning Committee and Research Committee	academicsenate@newcastle.edu.au
Program and Course Approval Committee	academicpolicy@newcastle.edu.au
Board of the Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre	PALS-Education@newcastle.edu.au
College Board College of Engineering, Science and Environment (CESE)	cese-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au
College Board College of Human and Social Futures (CHSF)	chsf-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au
College Board College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing (CHMW)	chmw-collegeboard@newcastle.edu.au

10. Feedback

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

Please email: pas@newcastle.edu.au.