



University of Exeter

COUNCIL – STRATEGIC AWAY DAY

MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL

23 November 2023

10.15am-4.40pm

Reed Hall and Exeter Student's Guild

NB text in BLACK for publication; text in BLUE has been redacted for publication

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Council Meeting

No: Item:

23.23	Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest
23.24	Vice-Chancellor's Introduction and Strategic Update
23.25	Enabling Strategy 2030
23.26	Capital Update
23.27	Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Net Zero
23.28	Global Brand and Reputation
23.29	Research Excellence Framework (REF)
23.30	Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Student Surveys
23.31	Prevent Accountability and Data Return
23.32	Tour of the Exeter Student's Guild Facilities
23.33	Update on the Strategic Priorities of the Exeter Student's Guild and Student Led Panel Discussions

Attendees:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Quentin Woodley	Pro-Chancellor and Chair
Professor Lisa Roberts	President and Vice-Chancellor
Sir Richard Atkins	Pro-Chancellor
Professor Dan Charman	Senior Vice-President and Provost
Professor Tim Quine	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)
Nicholas Cheffings	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Damaris Anderson-Supple	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	Independent Member
Professor Barrie Cooper	Senate Representative
Professor Karen Knapp	Senate Representative

Professor Sue Prince	Senate Representative
Shades Chaudhary	Professional Services Representative

Connie Chilcott	President, Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union
Alex Stanley	Education Officer and Representative of the Exeter Students' Guild

SECRETARY

Mike Shore-Nye	Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary
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MEMBERS APOLOGIES

Sally Cabrini	Independent Member
Salam Katbi	Independent Member
Sarah Matthews-DeMers	Independent Member
Malcom Skingle	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent Member

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Dave Stacey	Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services
Alison Chambers	Chief Executive Officer, University of Exeter Guild of Students
Imelda Roberts	Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources
Dr Jeremy Diaper	Assistant Director, Governance (minutes)
Jo Chamberlain	Director of Sustainability (Minute Item 27)
Alicia O'Grady	Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global (Minute Item 28)
Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) (Minute Item 29)

ADDITIONAL GUILD REPRESENTATIVES IN ATTENDANCE DURING SESSION AT EXETER STUDENTS' GUILD

Guild Officers

Pip Shaw	Student Living Officer
Rhys Wallis	Societies and Employability Officer

Guild Senior Leadership Team

Thomas Barras	Head of Student Engagement
Cassie Thornton	Head of Brand and Marketing

Guild Trustees

Alex Martin	Independent Member
David Craddock	External Trustee
Ella Trudgeon	Student Trustee
Margaret Laithwaite	External Trustee
Natalie Stewart	External Trustee
Nur Farah Meor Azlan	Student Trustee
Reuben Sek	Student Trustee

23. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest

- 23.1 the Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from: Sally Cabrini, Salam Katbi, Sarah Matthews-DeMers, Malcolm Skingle and Tim Weller;
- 23.2 it was noted that there were no new declarations of interest in relation to agenda items;
- 23.3 the Chair provided a verbal update following the Autumn Plenary meeting of the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 and noted the following:
- 23.3.1 the Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education had presented on Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), which was part of the Government's reforms to post-18 education and training. It was recognised that the loan entitlement would be equivalent of 4 years of post-18 education and could be used flexibly to pay for short courses, modules or full courses at a College or University and would have a profound impact on Higher Education;
- 23.3.2 that Professor Alex Gerbasi (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of ESE) had presented on Degree Apprenticeships at the meeting, which had reaffirmed the University's remarkable track record in successful delivery of Degree Apprenticeships and affirmed it as best practice within the Russell Group;

Closed Minute

AGREED: that an update would be scheduled for Council to enable further discussion of the long-term implications and strategic opportunities emerging from the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

24. President and Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Update (CNL/33/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

- 24.1 to enable successful delivery of the Strategy 2030 objectives and to mitigate against the current sector-wide international recruitment shortfalls, the University needed to achieve the annual target operating surplus by delivering ongoing efficiencies and increased margin improvements year on year;
- 24.2 the key drivers underpinning Strategy 2030 would be critical to enabling the University to build its global reputation and achieve its strategic ambition to achieve a Greener, Healthier and Fairer world. The key strategic drivers included:
- 24.2.1 enhancing the financial sustainability through high margin activity;
- 24.2.2 continuing to develop research power growth and an excellent education and student experience;
- 24.2.3 achieving top 100 global reputation;
- 24.2.4 enhancing business engagement and innovation growth;
- 24.2.5 investing in our people to ensure there was further opportunities for reward and recognition;

- 24.2.6 achieving net zero;
- 24.3 at the forthcoming Council meeting on 12 December 2023, a strategic update would be provided in relation to the recommendations for 2024/25 student number plans (including financial implications) alongside an overview of the importance of Transnational Educational (TNE) to enable further growth in international recruitment;
- 24.4 at the subsequent Council meetings in February 2024 a paper would be provided to Council outlining the reprofiling of international student number plans to 2030 alongside a strategic discussion on Access and Widening Participation, including: Social Mobility Commission; Success for All; Access and Participation Plan;
- 24.5 in the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) annual awards, the University had been awarded 'Outstanding HE Partner of the Year' in recognition of the exceptional performance of the Centre for Degree Apprenticeships and positive impact on student employability and professional development;
- 24.6 growing the University's global reputation and reach would be critical to delivering Strategy 2030. A working group had been established to look at international league table performance and to analyse in detail the metrics that underpin the rankings to identify a clear strategy for improving performance;
- 24.7 the Registrar and Secretary provided a brief update in relation to the actions, meetings and responses overseen by the University in respond to the challenging situation in Palestine, Israel and Middle East:
- 24.8.1 the University continued to be committed to supporting all members of the University community irrespective of their background and ensuring that it fostered a community which enabled students and staff to feel safe. Members of the University Executive Board had been attending meetings and engaging with specific student societies and communities and additional meetings had been offered;
- 24.8.2 University-wide communications had been developed in close consultation with General Counsel and Assistant Director (Communications) to ensure that the University continued to fulfil its legal obligations and safeguard freedom of speech and expression and academic freedom for all members of our community;
- 24.8.3 that the University would continue to promote a culture of debate and to actively promote free speech and ensure academic staff are able to undertake teaching and research without hindrance of their right to freedom of speech beyond limitations of the law;
- 24.8.4 a number of demonstrations had been held on Streatham campus which had not been held via prior agreement with the Guild. The University had subsequently enhancement the protocols surrounding risk assessment and ensuring relevant student organisations and communities received appropriate support and guidance in arranging activities;

Closed Minute

25. Enabling Strategy 2030 (CNL/34/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

- 25.1 margin and efficiency targets were a key part of the University's 5-year financial plan and critical to delivering year-on-year savings targets by Faculty and Professional Services;

25.2 an Enabling Strategy 2030 Group had been established to support delivery of efficiencies and provide enhanced governance, oversight and assurance over the next 3 years. The was being co-led by the Senior Vice-President and Provost and Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary and had representation from across the 3 Faculties and Professional Services, including: Finance, Human Resources and Communications;

25.3 key areas of focus would be on delivering teaching, research and digital efficiencies, alongside various non-pay and Professional Services efficiencies to achieve in-budget margin improvements;

25.4 the delivery of efficiency targets would be supported by a project team with dedicated Human Resources support, data analysis capability, finance and communications support;

Closed Minute

26. Capital Strategy (CNL/35/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

26.1 the Strategy 2030 roadmap had identified a series of faculty initiatives to drive margin improvement as well as investment in STEMM. The Capital Strategy would need to be developed in alignment with targeted growth in size and shape;

26.2 an Outline Capital Plan and Strategy was in the process of being developed for consideration by Council in February 2024, which would set out a 10-year capital programme in alignment with future strategic needs;

26.3 a number of key aspects were being considered in the development of the Capital Strategy, including: analysis of the current space utilisation and future space demands (based on student FTE and research income); the strategic initiatives that would deliver margin soonest; optimising existing buildings before additional new builds, and continued commitment to delivering a Carbon Net Zero programme;

26.4 the emerging ideas for estate development based on the most critical areas of strategic growth in the 2030 Delivery Plan, including: Workspace; 2030 Phase 1; Al Qasami Initiative; St Luke's Bench to Bedside Building and Learning Futures Building;

26.5 that Exeter was located in the middle of the Russell Group in terms of the ratio of borrowing to turnover and was lagging behind the rest of the sector in terms of levels of capital investment;

26.6 the stages of Council Approval for Capital Projects, including: Strategic Outline Case, Outline Business Case and Final Business Case;

26.7 that there were a number of Capital Plan Placemaker Projects underway, including: Al-Qasimi building; Penryn 20; Penryn Sports Pitches; West Park Enabling and Penryn Wind Turbines;

Closed Minute

26.10 in discussion, the importance of the following: ensuring that Council were provided with sufficient assurance surrounding margins, including sufficient numerical detail on benefits realization, clarity surrounding how it will be measured, delivered and who will be held

accountable for successful delivery; considering strategic opportunities to pivot towards additional levels of investment if it would enable higher margin growth over a long-term period; exploring enhanced utilisation of technology to monitor building usage to develop a clearer sense of space utilisation across the built estate; continuing to undertake post investment reviews to enable lessons learnt from recent capital projects; providing Council with more detail surrounding the iterative strategic thinking and rationale for prioritised projects, including any discounted projects and the basis on which they had been deprioritised or discounted from being progressed further; providing more explicit indications of where projects would be progressed because they would enable development of research reputation rather than an enhanced return on investment; clearing demonstrating how further investment at scale Penryn would add further value and enable growth in the student population; delivering the Capital Plan in the most cost-effective manner and maximising benefits realization; ensuring that for all Capital expenditure between £1m-£5m there was an equally rigorous governance process for approval and ensuring accountability for benefits realization;

26.11 it was recognised that there would need to be an effective mechanism to engage the entirety of Council in the strategic prioritisation and development of the Capital Plan, the approval of significant capital projects above £5m and to provide assurance on delivery. It was anticipated that the Council Financial Review Sub-Committee would also provide an important mechanism for review and scrutiny of significant Business Cases in the Academic Year 2023-24 prior to Council consideration;

26.12 further consideration would be given to the most effective and efficient mechanisms for providing independent and scrutiny of capital projects as part of the ongoing Council Assurance Review;

26.12 that the Student Residences Steering Group had been previously established given the significant scale of investment and complexity of managing long term relationship with provider, and to draw on specific expertise of Independent Council members who had significant Property Law and Estates experience.

27. Sustainability (CNL/36/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

27.1 the University had committed to leading meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis as part of Strategy 2030;

27.2 to maintain net zero carbon emissions by 2030 across Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions would be immensely challenging and would require significant investment in decarbonising the estate, improving estate utilisation and culture change in how the University operates, including how we travel and buy goods and services;

27.3 the University had risen 18 places in the second QS World University Rankings for Sustainability, and was now ranked 30th in the world (out of 1,403 institutions);

27.4 the following work was being undertaken over the next 12-18 months to examine the University's current carbon trajectory:

27.5.1 modelling the impact of Strategy 2030 initiatives, including cohort rebalancing and globalisation;

- 27.5.2 defining a Science Based Target to understand how this compared to the current institutional target
- 27.5.3 developing the University's Offsetting Strategy to enable a better understanding about the potential role of offsetting;
- 27.3.4. the University was one of only 4 Russell Group institutions (including Glasgow, Leeds and King's College London) that had committed to delivering net zero (Scope 1, 2 and 3) emissions by 2030;
- 27.4 the range of strategic initiatives relating to sustainable food, sustainability education and biodiversity to further embed sustainability into University culture and institutional decision making;
- 27.5 an interactive light project, "The Climate Wall", would be on display at the University of Exeter's campuses in the lead up to COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, to enable members of the University community to view facts about climate change and post live reflections on climate change;

Closed Minute

28. Global Brand and Reputation (CNL/37/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair of Council welcomed Alicia O'Grady to the meeting to deliver a presentation on global brand and reputation.

- 28.1 that growing the University's global brand, reputation and reach would be critical to delivering Strategy 2030;
- 28.2 horizon scanning had been undertaken to ascertain what students were looking for up to 2030 and beyond. Emerging findings had indicated that a new era of conscious branding was on the horizon, with students increasingly placing greater emphasis on values such as sustainability, social equality and authentic activism and transformative activism;
- 28.3 the future-focused concerns of students were increasingly considered with specific global issues relating to the environment, health, finance and conflict, which increasingly seen as interconnected and interdisciplinary challenges;
- 28.4 the importance of the following, considering how the University can adopt effective brand positioning in different countries and territories; developing future focused branding focused on enabling future-focused leaders to help embrace change and transformative action to create positive solutions that impact the future in relation to the environment, society, technology and global demands;
- 28.5 key flagship initiatives within the University would have their own positioning statement to speak directly to the audiences they engage with focused on 'Future Positive' as an ethos for momentum and change;
- 28.6 a series of campaign strands would be developed around mission-led story telling through social media channels; thought leadership pieces showcasing academic expertise;

28.7 in discussion: that a wide-range of internal and external stakeholders had already been actively engaged, including future University students currently in school communities, industry partners, alumni and others; that prospective students were increasingly concerned with global issues relating to climate, economic stability and wider geopolitical issues, so a continued focus would remain on embedding these global challenges within the curriculum; that following the redevelopment and reshaping of the University's Global brand it would be important to continue to develop wider understanding and awareness across the institution.

29. Research Excellence Framework (CNL/38/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair of Council welcome Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova to the meeting to deliver a presentation on the Research Excellence Framework.

29.1 the Research Excellence Framework (REF) was the UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK Higher Education and the outcomes were used to inform the allocation of around £2 billion per year by UK Funding Councils;

29.2 the REF was also significant as it influenced University rankings, decisions by prospective Research and Development partners and student applicant choices;

29.3 Assessment was made by academic peers within 34 discipline sub-panels (or Units of Assessment) which sat within four Main Panels;

29.4 the University had been on an upward trajectory of growth since REF 2014 and there had been a number of significant achievements in REF 2021, including:

29.4.1 71% growth in FTE since REF 2014;

29.4.2 20% increase in impact case studies since REF 2014;

29.4.3 increasing the percentage of institutional 4* (world-leading) research from 29% to 46.9%;

29.5 a number of changes had been introduced for REF 2028, including changes to the three assessment elements and rebalancing of percentage weightings in order to recognise and reward a broader range of research outputs, activities and impacts and reward institutions striving to create a positive research culture;

29.6 a number of areas of continued improvement had been identified and to ensure momentum maintained in advance of REF 2028, including:

29.6.1 more external review of outputs for selection to better benchmark quality and enable continuous Improvement;

29.6.2 exploring more opportunities for double-weighted monographs in Humanities and Social Sciences;

29.6.3. increasing level of strategic investment in key areas (including Neuroscience and the Medical School; Engineering; Data Science and AI and the Business School to help develop critical mass and maximise Quality-Related (QR) funding and research quality/REF reputational gains for REF 2028 and REF 2035;

28.6.4 development of a REF 2028 Code of Practice to ensure all REF 2028 policy decisions effectively undertaken by Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEF) and via governance structures);

29.6.5 improving the number of PhD Students per FTE, to help with enhancing performance in research environment indicators;

29.7 in discussion, the importance of the following: continuing to rebalance our current portfolio towards STEMM as the University was currently below the Russell Group median position and further growth would make it easier to generate increased research power, secure more research awards and to demonstrate impact; developing a strategic and targeted approach towards areas for further research growth in STEMM;

30. Teaching Excellence Framework (CNL/39/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

30.1 the Teaching Excellence Framework had been introduced by the Office for Students in 2017 to incentivise excellence in teaching, learning and student outcomes;

30.2 The University of Exeter had secured a prestigious gold rating in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework assessment which was underpinned by receiving Gold rating ratings in the two aspects of the assessment - Student Experience and Student Outcomes. Exeter was one of only four Russell Group institutions to achieve the 'solid gold' assessment;

30.3 TEF 2027 readiness would be achieved through a combination of Business as Usual Enhancement and delivery of education strategy, Curriculum for Change and recommendations of Task and Finish Groups (Mental Health and Wellbeing; Student Academic Support; Graduate Outcomes)

30.4 This included the following actions:

30.4.1 Teaching Excellence Action Plans and Teaching Excellence Monitoring meetings across every Department to ensure a continued focus on continuous improvement in student experience;

30.4.2 Development of the Curriculum for Change Programme redesign to enable personalised skills acquisition; specialisation in employment-focused modules and optimum use of digital education;

30.4.3 Collation of data (both centrally and at Departmental level) for inclusion as evidence in the TEF 2027 submission, in recognition that the current first year students were the final data point for TEF 2027 and the group that we can most impact on during their experience;

30.4.4 improving our preparedness for writing the provider submission and building our evidence over time;

30.4.5. Delivery of significant innovation initiatives and new education governance models to improve oversight, accountability and decision-making.

31. National Student Survey (CNL/39/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

- 31.1 the University's performance in the National Student Survey (NSS) demonstrated a broadly positive position for the University continuing to build on improvements from 2022. The University was ranked in the top ten in the Russell Group for all question sets, except for 'Learning Opportunities' where we were ranked 11th. This built on the significant progress made in the 2021/22 NSS Results;
- 31.2 whilst the NSS offered a valuable tool for measuring Departmental performance, it was recognised that a small percentage change could produce a significant change in ranking;
- 31.3 Department specific interventions were captured in the Teaching Excellence Action Plans that had been revised every year in response to NSS and direct student feedback;
- 31.4 key areas of focus for ongoing improvements would be in relation to Assessment & Feedback and Learning Opportunities.

Closed Minute**32. Prevent Accountability and Data Return (CNL/40/23-24, CNL/40a/23-24, CNL/40b/23-24, CNL/40c/23-24 Strictly Confidential)**

- 32.1 as the monitoring body for the Higher Education Sector, the Office for Students (OfS) required every relevant Higher Education Body to provide a data and accountability return evidencing compliance with the Prevent Duty;
- 32.2 the narrative report provided assurance surrounding ongoing compliance with the Prevent Duty and had been produced in accordance with guidance produced by the OfS;
- 32.3 a Prevent specific risk assessment and action plan was maintained throughout the year and had been reviewed and discussed by the Prevent Compliance Group at its meetings in October 2022, March 2023, July 2023 and October 2023, which had representation from relevant internal colleagues and external partners.

Closed Minute

APPROVED: the submission of the Prevent Data Return and Accountability Statement to the OfS by the deadline of 1st December 2023.

AGREED: that an accountability declaration from the Governing Body would be signed by the Chair of Council to confirm assurance that the University had due regard to the Prevent Duty.

33. Strategic Update from the Exeter Student's Guild (CNL/42/23-24)

- 33.1 that the current Guild of Student Priorities had been developed in response to over 2,000 pieces of student feedback and were focused on the following: Job Prospects; Living Costs; Campaigns, Initiatives and Activism; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Events and Activities; Health and Wellbeing;
- 33.2 following the Guild's rebranding, feedback received had indicated that 80% agreed that the Guild's brand and communications were relevant and shaped by students;

33.3 36% of the Exeter Student Population currently engaged with the Guild, including 12,376 individuals and 34,452 interactions;

33.4 the University continued to strengthen its sector leading partnership through TEF, NSS, Academic Representation, Freedom of Speech and Student Experience Partnership Board and Student Experience Framework;

33.5 as part of Council's visit to the Guild of Students a tour of the newly refurbished facilities in Devonshire were provided to highlight the positive impact this had on the student experience;

34. Student Panel Sessions

34.1 a series of question and answer sessions were held with a series of student panels focused on the experience of different student demographics, including: international students, State School / Widening Participation Students and inclusive communities;

34.2 a number of opportunities to continue to improve the student experience were highlighted, including: enhancing levels of pre-arrival and induction support, such as induction videos and introductory workshops to enable students to adjust to cultural changes and prepare them with key life skills such as cooking, budgeting and time management; when arriving in the UK; enhancing the affordability of food options on campus and expanding the £2 lunch meal deal to dinner options; providing international students with additional support with accommodation challenges.

35. Strategic Update from the Exeter Student's Guild (CNL/42/23-24)

35.1 that the current Guild of Student Priorities had been developed in response to over 2,000 pieces of student feedback and were focused on the following: Job Prospects; Living Costs; Campaigns, Initiatives and Activism; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion; Events and Activities; Health and Wellbeing.