COVER SHEET

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Author:	Jacqueline Hodges
Sponsor:	Mike Shore-Nye
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Summary of paper:

Council undertakes an annual self-evaluation at the end of each academic year. Members were asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire in August 2020 to provide feedback on their experience of how Council operates and performs.   Due to a technical issue, some members were not able to complete the form electronically this year so a low level of responses were received. Of the feedback received, scores for the year were largely positive and consistent with last year, with small improvements to the scores for effective succession planning, the Chair, satisfactory material being presented to Council (including the clarity and accuracy of information presented by the Executive) and the balance between presentation and debate. There was a drop of one point for the question of whether all members were able to contribute to meetings and whether members are kept across governance best practice.

This paper provides a summary of the feedback received. Following the changes to how Council conducts its business due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chair has proposed that Council take the opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of the current virtual ways of working in order to inform any changes of approach in how Council convenes and manages its business cycle.

The key themes for discussion are –

- The timing and frequency of Council meetings
- Paper length and presentation material
- The effectiveness of virtual Council meetings
- Any governance issues arising from the newly published CUC Code of HE Governance 2020 (available within the part ii papers)

Council is asked to

- Discuss the feedback and key themes and agree a set of next step recommendations.

1. Executive Summary

In line with governance best practice, Council members were asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire to evaluate how Council operates and performs.

The questionnaire asked a series of 55 questions under seven category headings with the option to provide additional comments under each heading.

Council members were asked to provide a score of between 1-7 (7 being highest) for each question. Results have been illustrated as RAG ratings based on the average score from all 5 respondents. **Scores are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.**

1-3 (Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Disagree Somewhat)	4-5 (Undecided/Somewhat Agree)	6-7 (Agree/Strongly Agree)

2. Results

2.1 Role and Performance of Council

	19/20	20/21
Council has the required experience and expertise to support the University in achieving its strategy	6	6
Matters reserved for Council are appropriate and adequate	6	6
Financial performance is reviewed incisively	6	6
Quality of debate is high: facts surfaced and confronted, Executive Team proposals considered critically	6	6
The split of accountabilities between Council and VCEG is clear and correct	6	6
There is clarity over the role of the Senate within the University and its relationship to Council	5	5
Independent members understand the nature of the role well including duties, obligations and responsibilities	6	6
Council is always well prepared and has read the material provided ahead of the Council meetings	6	6
There is sufficient contribution from all members	6	5

Members' Comments:

- I feel that Council discussions are generally very constructive and add value. However, ideally I'd like to see fewer/much shorter papers, to be presented more explicitly with the problems/challenges the university is faced and be asked to help the executive develop answers to them (seeing good news and highlighting strong performance is useful too, of course, but it is rather harder to act on that), and to elevate the discussion to considering overall institutional strategy as much as possible.
- The Council needs more experienced and heavy weight members
- I think there is much to commend. Sometimes discussion overruns and some items get rushed but that has been inevitable in currently challenging times.
- The Council has broad expertise that is complementary and suitable for the needs of the University - there is always room for more and better! It is diverse in age and gender but minority groups are not well represented, and needs to reflect the staff and student population more closely. Debate is high level and contributions are usually appropriate - therefore some are more vocal than others (understandably). papers are distributed on time

and there does seem to be preparedness by all.

2.2 Development, Selection, Recruitment & Induction

	19/20	20/21
Council succession is managed effectively	5	6
Members are inducted well	6	6
Training available for members is adequate and appropriate	5	5
There is adequate developmental interaction between Independent members and the Executive outside the Council Chamber	5	5
Each member gives adequate input into their own development aims	5	5

Members' Comments:
- I feel Exeter has done a good job on bringing together a diverse Council, in terms of visible diversity and intellectual perspective. It has also balanced continuity and change very well.
- Diversity is improving but the journey needs to continue.
- Previous answer re diversity. Good relationships across tea board - but there is also openness regarding perceived deficiencies.

2.3 Operating Process

	19/20	20/21
The University Secretariat team supports Council well to be able to discharge its duties	6	6
The order of agenda items is appropriate and ensures that key issues are dealt with adequately	6	6
Agenda setting is appropriate with adequate opportunity for members to influence the agenda	5	5
Council material is satisfactory in terms of content and timing	5	6
The decision-making process is constructive and conducive to better performance	6	6
The frequency and logistics of Council and Committee meetings are appropriate	6	6
Members are kept aware of governance best practices	6	5
The Dual Assurance and Committee structure is appropriate	6	6
Dual Assurance and Committees improve the overall effectiveness of Council	6	6
The role of Dual Assurance and its contribution to the effectiveness of Council is understood and appreciated	6	6
Boardpacks has improved the effectiveness of the meeting	6	6

Members' Comments
- Dual Assurance is a very valuable structure. I would expect the new VC may wish to consider how the DA roles are cut in future, as I suspect there's some reorganisation or realignment that might be helpful. I'd welcome that, but would also be keen to ensure those kinds of relationships between independent members and university leaders are maintained.
- There is still quite a lot of duplication but some of that is inevitable. Papers are getting better. Use of Teams has aided discussion and informed debate by allowing sidebar contributions without disrupting the agenda. I would wish to see this continue in live meetings.
- The agendas are long! No easy answer as to how this can effectively be changed as the knowledge of the University and time spent discussing pertinent issues are required. There is not a specific opportunity for council members to offer agenda items - probably not required but it does not exist. Boardpacks is one of several similar tools I use - they are all good but

take time to download or need available internet to access.		

2.4 Culture of the Board

	19/20	20/21
There is a healthy chemistry during deliberations	6	7
Council always acts ethically and with integrity	7	7
Conflicts of interest are handled appropriately	6	7
Independent members are encouraged to raise questions and challenge proposals	7	7
The Executive Team value Council's contribution	6	7
Council is attentive to the University's reputation	7	7
Council has an inclusive team based culture	6	7
The balance between presentation and debate is appropriate	5	7

Members' Comments:
- I think the culture of Council is excellent, and as a relatively new member, have found it both impressive and welcoming.
- Collegiate and collaborative, smart, good diversity of thought, no egos on display, focussed on doing the best it can to help make the university the best it can be.
- This aspect of council activity is very strong.

2.5 Council Contribution to Strategy & Relationship with Management

	19/20	20/21
Council understands and assesses key risks comprehensively and contingency plans are appropriate	6	6
Council is well informed about external trends, threats, opportunities	6	6
Council dedicates enough time to analysing the strategic environment	5	5
Council has sufficient insight and input into the University's strategy	5	5
Contact and communication between Council members and members of VCEG outside the Council meetings is effective and at the right level	5	5
The Executive team leverages the expertise of Council effectively	5	5
The Executive team provides clear, adequate and accurate information to Council	5	6
The interface between Council and the Vice-Chancellor is effective	6	7
The relationship between Council and the Vice-Chancellor is effective	7	7

Members' Comments:
- I feel this is perhaps patchier - Council arguably spends too much time on the tactical and operational versus the strategic. I suspect it is also variable according to topic. Overall, I'd suggest the contribution is strong on risk identification and mitigation, and the more pragmatic/opportunistic thinking, but weaker on vision setting.
- Founded upon mutual respect and a clear understanding of respective roles.
- Generally the opportunities to contribute are available between and at meetings. Communications are good. The relationships between the VC and all members of Council including the Chair have been exemplary

2.6 The Chair

	19/20	20/21
Council is well chaired	7	7

The Chair encourages feedback on her performance	6	7
Council challenge the Chair when necessary	6	7

Members' Comments:
- The Chair is excellent, and a huge part of what makes Council effective.
- Excellent. Have noted an improvement in time/agenda management, which was the only area that previously caused any concern.
- It is unusual for the Chair to be challenged but that is because she is effective and open - however if it is required it takes place.

2.7 Virtual Meetings

	20/21
Council is able to operate effectively whilst meeting virtually	6
Microsoft Teams has been an effective platform through which to conduct virtual meetings	6
Council meetings should be conducted via a different video conferencing platform	3
Microsoft Teams is simple to use and adequate support is provided for technical issues	6
All members are able to contribute to debate during virtual meetings	5
The duration of meetings conducted via Teams is appropriate	5
There are sufficient breaks during meetings held via Teams	5
The Chat function within Teams adds value to discussions	6
Council and its Committees should continue to meet virtually when appropriate and effective or on a hybrid basis going forward	6

Members' Comments:
- I have my issues with Teams - I'm strongly of the view that Zoom is a superior platform (not least because it is much easier to see everyone simultaneously which makes a real difference). That said, Teams has been adequate, and the chat function valuable. I have fewer issues with teams than I do Boardpacks, which is mildly infuriating. I'm strongly of the view that Exeter should encourage hybrid/virtual meetings - for environmental and inclusivity reasons as much as anything to do with Covid-19. I would commit to making at least some meetings fully virtual. Necessity has without question raised Exeter's game on technology; we should not slip back into thinking 'business as usual' can or will return.
- See above comment re use of Teams when meeting in person.
- Teams has worked well and, as in many other situations, it is an effective way to conduct meetings. It has many plus points - including travel time and immediate availability, but meeting up is essential as is visiting the University sites.

2.8 Any further comments
- Unclear about the process for succession.
- We are entering a new phase in many ways following Covid and with Lisa's arrival. Undoubtedly things will change. Feedback and communications are going to be vital and we may need more time to consider these fully.