



University of Exeter
COUNCIL

MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL

19 October 2023

9.30am-1.45pm

Council Chamber, Northcote House

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

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Council Meeting

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23.19	Global Strategy – Progress Report for 2022/23 Academic Year
23.20	Partnership Principles
23.21	Chair’s closing remarks and Part II ‘For Decision’

Attendees:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Class I – Officers

Quentin Woodley	Pro-Chancellor and Chair
Professor Lisa Roberts	President and Vice-Chancellor
Sir Richard Atkins	Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair of Council
Sally Cabrini	Pro-Chancellor and Senior Independent Governor
Professor Dan Charman	Senior Vice-President and Provost
Professor Tim Quine	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and

Student Experience)

Class II – Members Appointed by Council

Damaris Anderson-Supple	Independent Member
Nicholas Cheffings	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Salam Katbi	Independent Member
Sarah Matthews De-Mers	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Malcom Skingle	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	Independent Member

Class III – Members Appointed by Senate

Professor Barrie Cooper	Senate Representative
Professor Karen Knapp	Senate Representative
Professor Sue Prince	Senate Representative

Class IV – Members of Staff other than Academic Staff

Shades Chaudhary	Professional Services Representative
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Class V – Student Members

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

SECRETARY

Mike Shore-Nye	Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary
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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
Dr Jeremy Diaper	Assistant Director, Governance (minutes)
Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) (Minute Item 15)
Dr Michael Wykes	Divisional Director of University Corporate Services (Minute Item 16)
Joe Wall	Assistant Director, Finance (Minute item 17)
Professor Richard Follett	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) (Minute Item 18, 19 and 20)

8. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest

8.1 The Chair welcomed Council members to the Council meeting.

8.2 Professor Barrie Cooper declared a conflict of interest as a Branch Officer and member of the University of Exeter's University and College Union Committee in relation to the agenda item on Industrial Action.

9. Minutes: Council (6 July 2023) and Council Standing Committee (26 July 2023) (CNL/11/23-24 Strictly Confidential and CNL/12/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

9.1 the minutes of the meeting of Council (6 July 2023) and the Council Standing Committee (26 July 2023) were **APPROVED** by Council.

10. Action Log (CNL/13/23-24 and CNL/13a/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

10.1 the Council action log was received for information and noted by the Committee.

11. Council Business Schedule 2023/24 (CNL/14/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

11.1 the Council Business Schedule 2023/24 had been introduced as a standing information item to provide enhanced visibility to Council surrounding the forward plan of business for each Academic Year and an overview of provisionally scheduled items.

12. Matters arising

12.1 the Chair provided a verbal update on the following matters arising:

a) USS Employers Consultation:

12.2 the University had been invited by Universities UK (UUK), as a sponsoring employer, to respond to a consultation on the USS Trustee's proposed assumptions of the scheme's technical provisions in relation to the 2023 valuation;

12.3 following input from the Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair and Independent Lead for Dual Assurance (Finance) via email, the Chair of Council formally signed-off on the submission of the consultation responses to the USS by the deadline of Friday 22nd September 2023;

12.4 the consultation response was entirely consistent with the University's long-term strategic position on USS and reaffirmed that we value long-term stability in contributions and benefits above all else.

b) INTO Student Lease

12.5 on 26 July 2023, Council Standing Committee had approved an extension to the delegated authority for the Senior Vice-President and Registrar and Secretary to execute all relevant legal documentation for the University to grant a financial guarantee to Legal & General for a 40-year term on existing INTO student residences located on campus. The Chair of Council confirmed that this had been completed on 24th August 2023.

c) Council Communications

12.6 the Chair of Council advised that an email announcement surrounding the newly appointed Independent Members of Council had recently been circulated to all staff and students and would also be included in the University's weekly bulletin on Monday 23rd October 2023. In the Academic Year 2023-24, more regular communications would be circulated following Council meetings to provide increased visibility surrounding issues discussed, considered and approved by Council to the wider community in a weekly bulletin ahead of wider circulation of Council minutes.

d) Council Financial Review Sub-committee

12.7 further to endorsement by Council Nominations Committee via e-circulation, the Chair of Council outlined the proposal for the Council Financial Review Sub-committee to be reconstituted in the Academic Year 2023-24 with a revised membership as a mechanism to review and endorse key financial items of business and ensure that there was detailed scrutiny and assurance prior to Council consideration.

APPROVED: the reconstitution of the Council Financial Review Sub-committee in the Academic Year 2023-24 and revised membership of the group.

13. President and Vice-Chancellor's Briefing (CNL/15/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

13.1 Council received the Vice-Chancellor's briefing report which provided a summary of recent developments at the University and in the Higher Education sector. The following was noted in discussion:

13.2 an offer had been made to a candidate for the position of Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Culture) and an email would be circulated to Senate and Council to formally approve the appointment in due course;

13.4 in relation to the recent events in Israel, Palestine and Middle East:

13.4.1 the University had published an initial joint statement with the Exeter Student's Guild and remained deeply concerned and distressed by the escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza;

13.4.2 the University would continue to foster a community where those from all ethnic and religious backgrounds feel safe, valued and included and to stand against all forms of intolerance;

13.4.3 a vigil had been held last Tuesday for all victims of the conflict and the University would work with Exeter City Council to co-ordinate wider activity in Exeter;

13.4.4 the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences), Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) and Deputy Registrar had been with a number of student societies to highlight the University's approach to respecting different student perspectives and providing a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for all;

13.4.5 the levels of campus security had been increased with additional security patrols in an effort to ensure students felt safe on campus. In addition, Devon and Cornwall Police had indicated they remained committed to supporting the University and provided rapid

assistance during an unplanned demonstration on 18th October 2023;

- 13.4.6 additional guidance and support was also being developed for Heads of Department and educational leads to ensure an appropriate balance was maintained in the manner in which information was presented within courses, whilst also ensuring the fundamental principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech were maintained;
- 13.5 a continued area of focus was on increasing revenue and margin growth and maintaining an appropriate balance on enabling efficiencies;
- 13.6 that the Chief Digital Officer had recently decided to leave the University. Since joining the University in February 2022, Council noted that the Chief Digital Officer had developed a strong and compelling strategy around digital transformation and built a very talented Digital Team;
- 13.6.1 it was recognised that it would be important to maintain momentum in the delivery of the Digital Strategy and that a progress update would be provided to Council.

AGREED: to schedule a progress update on the delivery of the Digital Strategy for Council in the Academic Year 2023/24.

Closed Minute

14. Industrial Action 2022/23 – Marking and Assessment Boycott (CNL/16/23-24 Strictly Confidential)

- 14.1 the paper provided assurance to Council regarding the University's approach during the 2022/23 Academic Year towards the management of the employee relations dispute between the UCU and University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), including strike action and Marking Assessment Boycott;
- 14.2 the University had been impacted by Industrial Action over the previous academic year, which had included fifteen days of strike action between November 2022 and March 2023. Following a renewal of the strike mandate in April 2023, a Marking and Assessment Boycott had run continuously from 20 April until 6 September 2023;
- 14.3 the University had endeavoured to mitigate and replace the lost learning due to strike days and actively reallocated marking that was delayed due to the Marking and Assessment Boycott. All marking for finalists had been completed by 15 September 2023 and there were currently no outstanding marks from the 2022/23 Academic Year;
- 14.4 during the Marking and Assessment Boycott period, the University had reached several agreements with the Exeter UCU Branch regarding pay withholding in an effort to see staff return to marking as quickly as possible. These respectful negotiations and collaborative and transparent engagement with colleagues had helped to enable the University to return marks to students as soon as possible and had avoided two additional weeks of strike action;
- 14.5 the overarching principle agreed for students progressing to the next academic stage was that as many students as possible be enabled to progress to the next stage of study, whilst protecting academic standards and minimizing risk to individuals;

- 14.6 for finalist students, it was agreed that the University would provide an interim transcript including all marks available alongside a letter to provide to employers and further study institutions;
- 14.7 following the conclusion of the 2022/23 Academic Year, there were twelve students who were trailing failed modules into the 2023/24 Academic Year because of delayed marking due to Marking and Assessment Boycott meaning that they were not able to take referral or deferral assessments in the normal period;
- 14.8 in relation to the Industrial Action Compensation Scheme:
- 14.8.1 in recognition of the impact that had resulted from the Industrial Action and/or the Marking and Assessment Boycott on some students the University had launched a Compensation Scheme to recognise specific instances where there had been disruption to students' learning experience or delay in receipt of marks which not been reasonably mitigated through actions taken by the University. The Compensation scheme opened at the end of August and over 1,600 applications had been received as of the week commencing 9 October 2023;
- 14.8.2 it was highlighted that it would be helpful to issue further guidance to students to help provide enhanced visibility surrounding accessing the scheme, the assessment process and criteria for determining eligibility for compensation;
- 14.9 the UEB Industrial Action Gold Group had kept the consideration of a Reportable Event under continuous review throughout the Marking and Assessment Boycott, but concluded that the threshold for a reportable event had not been reached and the University's engagement with the OfS was sufficient;
- 14.10 as part of the University's internal audit process led by PwC, a review would be undertaken of the University's management of the Industrial Action and Marking and Assessment Boycott during the 2022/23 academic year;
- 14.11 in discussion, the importance of the following: ensuring that lessons learned from the Marking and Assessment Boycott informed the wider review of assessment feedback and curriculum for change; exploring further opportunities for maintaining appropriate efficiency in module design and delivery alongside enhanced utilisation of digital resources to mitigate impact of any future industrial action; maintaining the constructive and collaborative relationship with the UCU branch in the event of any further industrial action; continuing to maintain good progress in addressing agreed priority areas as identified in the joint University and Exeter UCU statement issued on 30 January 2023; ensuring timely updates were provided to Council on a regular basis in relation to any future Industrial Action or Marking and Assessment Boycotts.

15. Research Performance 2022/23 (CNL-17-23-24)

The Chair invited Professor Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova to introduce the paper on research performance.

- 15.1 the paper provided an overview of research performance in 2022/23, including an overview of research achievements and areas for potential growth and improvement;
- 15.2 the University had achieved significant success in securing research awards, with 42.5% of funding sought in the 2021/22 period resulting in successful awards. The University would

continue to build on this awards success and look to further increase the percentage of successful awards;

15.3 there had been a number of notable award successes, including a prestigious National Institutes for Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centre award and a substantial framework research grant from Shell dedicated to CASPER (Carbon Storage in Pasture through Ecological Restoration program);

15.4 whilst the University was on an upward trajectory in terms of research income generation, it remained well below the median in the Russell Group, and was ranked 20th in relation to research income and income per FTE;

Closed Minute

AGREED: to schedule a paper for Council outlining the pipeline and forward forecast of research income and potential opportunities for research income generation by Faculty and Department.

16. Institutional Performance Report: National and Global League Tables (CNL-18-23-24 Strictly

Confidential)

16.1 the report provided to Council focused on an analysis of the latest national and global league table rankings published since July 2023, including: Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide; Guardian; Daily Mail and THE World University rankings;

16.2 research performance continued to improve with the University ranked in the top 50 globally in THE World University rankings for the first time;

16.3 the University had risen to 11th in the Times Good University Guide which was up 2 places in comparison to last year and now placed the University above Edinburgh and Lancaster;

16.4 as detailed in section 1.3 of the report there were a number of actions being undertaken to sustain and improve performance in national and global league table performance;

16.5 Council noted that The Daily Mail had published its first UK University rankings in September 2023 and that unlike the Times and Guardian league table publications did not utilise the 2023 NSS results;

16.6 whilst the complexities surrounding improving access and participation were acknowledged, Council noted concerns surrounding the University's ranking of 119th in the 'First Generation Students' metric, which was defined as the proportion of UK domiciled undergraduate students whose parents did not attend University. In relation to this, further concerns were also highlighted surrounding the University's current ranking of 92nd out of 101 Universities in the Social Mobility Index for Universities in England published by HEPI, in comparison to other peer institutions (including Southampton, Bristol and Bath) who were ranked in the 50s;

16.7 in response to the concerns raised it was reinforced that the University was committed to increasing the proportion of students from disadvantaged areas in the UK studying at the University and that a new recruitment strategy was being developed to support this and that there were a number of wider strategic initiatives, including Social Mobility Commission, to enable the University to increase number of students from state

schools;

16.8 that as part of the University's approach to the confirmation and clearing process, a contextual set of lower offers had been offered to students in particular state schools in an effort to make University education more accessible and attract students from quintile 1 and 2 and lower participation neighbourhoods. Further consideration could be given to offering contextual offers to all students from state schools which was an approach which been adopted by other peer institutions and had the potential to result in a more diverse student population;

16.9 that the ability to attract state school students varied according to specific subjects, programmes and Departments. Evidence from across the sector indicated that it was easier to enable widening participation in certain subjects with excellent employability rates, such as Medicine. However, in Liberal Arts and Social Sciences it had historically proved harder to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds, which indicated that some of the challenges experienced by the University was in part attributable to the particular portfolio and subject mix;

16.10 the planned growth in Computer, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence would be likely to attract a more greater proportion of state school students;

16.11 that further consideration could be given to challenging underlying cultural and psychological behaviours in Departmental recruitment practices in an effort to adopt more inclusive practices;

16.12 there were also opportunities to look in more detail at the Schools which individual Departments interface and communicate with;

16.13 that multiple options should be explored to enhance the approach Access and Widening Participation, including enhanced branding and marketing strategies, improving recruitment policies and practices, and applying best practice from the Centre for Social Mobility within internal admissions and recruitment practices,

16.14 in relation to Student Staff Ratio metric:

16.14.1 it was noted that the University was ranked 72nd in the SSR metric and 23rd out of 23 Russell Group institutions included in the rankings;

16.14.2 that whilst the University's Student Staff Ratio was currently c. 20 to 1, modest improvements to 15 to 1 would have a material impact on rankings and result in a drop down to c. 14th;

Closed Minute

AGREED: to schedule a deep-dive discussion on the University's strategic approach to Access and Widening Participation, including the short and medium term actions plans to improve state school admissions.

AGREED: that as part of the Council Assurance Review further consideration should be given to the mechanisms for providing Council with assurance on the strategic approach to access and widening participation.

17. 2022/23 Financial Outturn (Subject to External Audit) (CNL-19-23-24)

The Chair of Council invited the Assistant Director, Finance to attend for the 2022/23 Financial Outturn

- 17.1 the 2022/23 financial outturn was in the process of being completed and audited and there were no further material movements anticipated, except for the surplus and deficit from joint ventures with INTO and FXPlus;
- 17.2 the University's cash generation (EBITDA) was up by c. £3m on the June financial forecast;
- 17.3 research grant and contract income was 11% above the prior year and there had also been a strong performance in philanthropy.

18. Admissions Update and Preliminary 2023 Enrolments (CNL-20-23-24)

- 18.1 as a result of a series of factors affecting the wider Higher Education sector, including a significant impact on international student recruitment, the planned pace for cohort rebalancing had not been achieved;
- 18.2 whilst the University had registered fewer international students in September than the previous year, it remained the second highest international intake in the University's history;
- 18.3 in relation to international student recruitment:
- 18.3.1 that the UK Higher Education sector had experienced a challenging year for international student recruitment, with a 20-25% drop in Postgraduate Taught international students.
- 18.3.2 the latest sector intelligence indicated that both the cost of living crisis and UK government's new immigration policy had had negatively impacted international student recruitment across the sector;
- 18.3.3 the most recent sector wider admissions data indicated that the UK has lost market share to Australia, Canada and America. Australia in particular had experienced a resurgence post-Covid and was also increasingly attractive to students as a result of the extended post-study work rights for graduate visa holders from 1 July 2023;
- 18.3.4 it was understood that the greatest impact on international student recruitment across the sector had been experienced in Business Schools. It was too early to determine whether the down turn in international recruitment experienced in the UK Higher Education Sector was a short-term dip or an indication of a long-term shift;

Closed minute

AGREED: that the international student number targets would be reprofiled and scheduled for Council approval to ensure the planned growth was appropriately phased and sequenced up to Strategy 2030.

AGREED: to schedule a Business Case for substantial additional investment to enable increased development of the University's global brand and reputation to help grow and diversify the international student population and increase the overall international market share.

AGREED: that Council would return to a strategic discussion surrounding global opportunities for development of TNE partnerships.

19. Global Strategy Progress Report for the 2022/23 Academic Year (CNL/21/23-24)

19.1 Council noted the Global Strategy Progress Report for the 2022/23 Academic Year which outlined the key activities undertaken against each of the five pillars of the 2018-2022 Global Strategy, including: Global Partnerships; Global Reputation; Global Student Recruitment; Global Experiences and Global Enhancement.

AGREED: that the updated Global Strategy would be scheduled for approval by Council in the Academic Year 2023-24.

20. Partnership Principles (CNL/22/23-24 Open)

20.1 as previously agreed by Council, a Task and Finish Group had been established with representation from across the University to develop a set of principles to guide all of the University's partnerships and ensure alignment with the University's values and objectives, to promote the mutual benefit of partnerships and consider potential risks and reputational impact;

20.2 the proposed principles would be applicable to new partnerships and the renewal of existing partnerships from the date of publication;

20.3 a risk matrix framework had been developed to enable a consistent risk-based approach to decision making based on a red, amber, yellow, green scale which was in alignment with the proposed partnership principles and due diligent checklist;

20.4 that there been a wide-range of consultation and input into the development of the principles from a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of Senate, the Students' Guild and Students' Union;

20.5 the principles had been developed with consideration of academic freedom, diversity, equity, inclusion and to ensure that there would uphold and enhance the University's reputation as an academic institution;

20.6 in discussion:

20.6.1 as the governing body, Council retained overall responsibility for all decisions that might have significant reputational implications for the institution's sustainability (including partnerships or collaborations) and so there should therefore be a clear mechanism for escalating any projects classified 'red' on the risk matrix framework scale to Council for final approval;

20.6.2 whilst the development of a clear set of principles and due diligence process for making decisions on partnerships was welcomed, it was highlighted that further consideration could be given to developing the principles further to reaffirm the University's institutional values and differentiate from others in the sector by affirming ethical standpoint of the University;

Closed Minute

AGREED: that any 'red' risks would be progressed to UEB for endorsement to proceed and then

consultation would be undertaken with the Chair of Council who would make an informed decision as to whether final Council approval was required on a case-by-case basis.

AGREED: that a report on all partnerships that had been progressed and rejected would be provided to Council on an annual basis to ensure there was a sufficiently robust due diligence process in place and to ensure continued alignment with the University's values and objectives.

21. Audit, Risk and Assurance (Verbal Update)

21.1 the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee provided a verbal update following the meeting on 29 September 2023, including the following:

21.1.1 that it had been agreed that the General Counsel would attend on a regular basis as a standing attendee;

21.1.2 that a review of Terms of Reference and gap analysis against the CUC HE Audit Code had been undertaken which had indicated a high-level of compliance with the Code;

21.1.3 a presentation on the developing an inclusive and welcoming community for international students had been delivered to the Committee by the Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Global Engagement and Director of Education Services and Student Experience;

21.1.4 that the Committee had agreed to enhance its approach to enable greater oversight and scrutiny of risk management. A series of deep dives on red and amber risks would be scheduled in the Academic Year 2023-24;

21.1.5 the Committee had also agreed that there would be a further update progress report provided to the committee on mandatory training compliance, including actions to increase compliance;

22. Chair's closing remarks

23.1 the Chair confirmed that the following items in 'Part II – For Decision' had been formally **APPROVED** by Council, including:

23.1.1 Updated Financial Regulations (CNL/23/23-24);

23.1.2 Primary Statement of Responsibilities and Code of Conduct (CNL/23/23-24), subject to minor amendments to remove duplication in some of the wording;

23.2 it was confirmed that the Primary Statement of Responsibilities outlined in the University's annual report would also be updated to reflect the revised and updated version.

23.3 Council noted the following items included in Part II for information:

23.3.1 Draft Financial Statements (CNL/25/23-24)

23.3.2 Annual Report on Investments (CNL/26/23-24)

23.3.3 Academic Assurance Plan (CNL/27/23-24)

23.3.4 Register of Interests for Council Members (CNL/28/23-24)

23.3.5 Annual Assurance Report – Information Governance (CNL/29/23-24)

23.3.6 Minutes: Audit and Risk Committee - June 2023 (CNL/30-23-24); Capital Management Group Minutes (CNL/31/23-24)

23.3.7 Affixing the Seal (CNL/32/23-24)