



University of Exeter  
**COUNCIL STRATEGIC AWAY DAY**

**MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

22 October 2025

10.30am-5.30pm

Streatham Campus, Exeter

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Council Meeting

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- 25.06 Estates and Capital: Streatham Campus Tour
- 25.07 Transnational Education (TNE): Strategic Update
- 25.08 Strategic Response to Industrial Strategy and Skills Agenda (including diversification of The educational portfolio)
- 25.09 The Future Students of Exeter
- 25.10 Council Performance and Effectiveness, including progress with Council Assurance review, and an overview of the timeline and scope for forthcoming Council Effectiveness Review
- 25.11 Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS): Strategic Away Day
  - a) Introduction to HASS and Faculty Performance
  - b) HASS Faculty Roadmap and Strategic Priorities for 2030
  - c) Spotlight on Research
- 25.12 Chair's Closing Remarks

**Attendees:**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Quentin Woodley (Chair)	Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council
Professor Lisa Roberts	President and Vice-Chancellor
Professor Dan Charman	Senior Vice-President and Provost
Professor Tim Quine	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)
Professor Malcolm Skingle	Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair of Council
Sally Cabrini	Pro-Chancellor and Senior Independent Governor
Lauren Aste	Independent Member
Damaris Anderson-Supple	Independent Member
Rebecca Boomer-Clark	Independent Member

Nigel Cain	Independent Member
Dr Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Salam Katbi	Independent Member
Sarah Matthews-DeMers	Independent Member
Gareth Mostyn	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent
Member	
Dr Sarah Hodge	Senate Representative
Professor Maisha Raiza	Senate Representative
Professor Karen Knapp	Senate Representative
Elaine Cordy	Professional Services Representative
Izzy Brinkley	President Exeter, Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union
Seb Racisz	Guild President, Exeter Students' Guild

**SECRETARY**

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

Professor Adrian Harris	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	Independent Member

**STANDING ATTENDEES**

Imelda Rogers	Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources, Assurance and Culture
Dave Stacey	Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services
Dr Jeremy Diaper	Director of Governance Services ( <i>minutes</i> )
Alison Chambers	Chief Executive Officer, University of Exeter Guild of Students

**IN ATTENDANCE****All Items**

Professor Liz Jones	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) Elect
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**Minute Item 7 – Transnational Education (TNE) Strategic Update**

Professor Richard Follet	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Engagement
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**Minute Item 11 – Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS)**

Professor Gareth Stansfield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean)

Cathy Durston (Director of Faculty Operations)

**01. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest**

- 01.01 The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received in advance from Adrian Harris and Glenn Woodcock for the duration of the Council Strategic Away Day;
- 01.02 The Chair issued a warm welcome to the new incoming members of Council and invited all members and standing attendees to briefly introduce themselves;
- 01.03 Congratulations were extended to Sarah Matthews-DeMers for being appointed Group Chief Executive Officer of AB Dynamics PLC from 1 December 2025; and to Lauren Aste for being appointed as Executive Vice-President and Chief Legal Officer at Sirva.

**02. External Context and Strategic Priorities for 2025-26 (CNL/15/25-26 Strictly Confidential and additional slides CNL/15a/25-26 which has been filed with record of the meeting);**

- 02.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor delivered a presentation on the External Context and Strategic Priorities for 2025-26, including additional slides on the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper following its publication on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2025;
- 02.2 It was highlighted that the current operating context presented a number of opportunities and challenges, including: national policy and domestic politics, international competition and reputation, regional devolution, research funding, future skills sector-wide transformation, and efficiency;
- 02.3 The Government had recently published the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper which was designed to help make the sector better aligned with the needs of the economy and more sustainable, specialised, collaborative and efficient;
- 02.4 In relation to the White Paper the following was noted:
  - 02.4.1 As anticipated, there had been an increase to the Undergraduate Home tuition fee cap in line with the forecast inflation for the next two academic years. However, it was highlighted that as forecast inflation did not normally equate to actual inflation this would not close the current financial gap and there was a need to generate further margin on the home tuition fee to ensure the University's long-term financial sustainability;
  - 02.4.2 Universities had been asked to focus on their own unique strengths and to specialise accordingly. The White Paper had also signalled an intent to reform research funding to support more strategic distribution of funds (with lower volume but better cost recovery), stronger alignment with government priorities, and incentives for institutions to share research grants. Reforms of the Strategic Priorities Grant, the Higher Education Innovation Fund and the Research Excellence Framework were also intended to drive greater specialisation in the sector and support for the Industrial Strategy eight growth sectors;
  - 02.4.3 There was a commitment to run the upcoming REF on the 2029 timetable, with an indication that institutions would be rewarded through REF and associated QR funding for demonstrating clarity of purpose and alignment with government priorities and measurable impact;
  - 02.4.4 The government had proposed a 6% levy on university income from international student fee

income, but there was concern that this would have significant consequences for sector-wide finances and cancel out any increase to undergraduate home tuition in line with forecast inflation. Further details on the International Student Levy would be set out in the Autumn Budget in November 2025;

02.4.5 There was also a clear focus on tackling poor quality provision and strengthening regulation with the intention to legislate for the OfS to impose recruitment limits on Universities offering poor quality courses;

02.4.6 In relation to Widening Participation, Skills and the Economy, there had been a restatement of the participation target for two-thirds of young people to participate in higher-level training by age 25, whether through universities, colleges, or apprenticeships. There was also a greater focus on level 4 and level 5 provision that aligned with employer needs;

02.4.7 In relation to access and participation there had been a promise of less bureaucracy and burden for high-level providers, but 'sharper' regulatory intervention for those that needed to improve;

02.4.8 The Government had highlighted the intention to strengthen the UK's AI talent pipeline, with a further plan scheduled to be published in autumn 2025;

02.4.9 The White Paper had not included any further information or guidelines about University closures, market exit or liquidation of institutions;

02.5 Key priority areas of activity for 2025-26 included: a continued focus on enhancing student experience, educational quality and NSS performance; implementation of Curriculum for Change; Diversifying the University's Partnerships, Educational Portfolio and income; TNE and global reputation; research excellence, including a focus on alignment with Industrial Strategy and government priorities; ensuring long-term financial sustainability by driving greater operational, education and research efficiency; and developing the AI@Exeter Strategy;

02.6 In relation to Educational Portfolio Diversification:

02.6.1 The focus on portfolio diversification would include online education, executive education, and continued professional development. It was also recognised that it would be important that the University's workforce was designed to meet the educational needs of the future and address skills needs and employability agendas;

02.7 In relation to Portfolio Diversification:

02.7.1 In relation to AI it was noted that the application of generative AI was being utilised to support colleagues, including: creation of AI agents in embedding C4C design principles within the UG curriculum and assisting with the transferring related elements to online education.

### **03. Professional Services Transformation (CNL/16/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

*The Chair invited the Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary to deliver a presentation on Professional Services Transformation.*

03.1 Professional Services had developed an organisational agility to help support the University's strategic aims, which was founded upon clear organisational characteristics, enhanced structures and governance, internal change capabilities, benchmarking and data

insights;

03.2 In relation to enabling organisational change, transformation and enhanced efficiency:

03.2.1 That there was a need to retain organisational agility and capacity to respond to a complex and changing landscape, whilst ensuring progress against delivery of Strategy 2030. The Enabling Strategy 2030 workstreams on education, research, workforce planning and pay had enabled the University to reshape in alignment with the aims of Strategy 2030;

03.3 In relation to the University's internal change capabilities:

03.3.1 The University's Strategic Delivery Unit had a breadth and depth of project management, programme management and strategic change expertise which was utilised to support and enable strategic transformation projects across the institution, including service and process redesign, automation and estates transformation;

03.3.2 The Digital Services Division was sector-leading and continued to play a key role in enabling the delivery of Strategy 2030. The Digital Hub, Digital Skills initiative, and an AI catalogue had been launched by the Digital Team to upskill staff and students across the University and support the ongoing development of digital capabilities;

03.3.3 PS Connect had been formed in 2023 and continued to utilise data insights and new technology to enable service redesign, process optimisation and automation to improve service experience and underpin continuous improvement across Professional Services;

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03.5 Cross-divisional initiatives had been identified as a mechanism for driving process enhancements and institutional efficiencies through co-creation and redesign of processes, including: Creating a new Learning Academy; Business Operations and Support; Travel; Data and Insight Service; Evolving the Faculty Partner model; Pre-award and post-award functions;

03.6 Council recognised that there continued to be a significant volume of strategic change activity being delivered across Professional Services, including: digital enhancements and innovation, process redesign, and improvement;

03.6 In relation to the overall levels of staff wellbeing:

03.6.1 That it would be helpful for Council to have further insight into the impact on the Voluntary Severance Scheme run in 2023-24 and 2024-25 on staff morale and engagement;

03.6.2 That there had only been a small drop in the overall levels of engagement across Professional Services in the most recent Colleague Experience Survey staff. There continued to be strong attendance and consistent levels of engagement at the Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary all staff talks with an average of c. 1000 colleagues joining these online talks;

03.6.3 It was noted that whilst there had been continued to be a series of shared successes across Professional Services, there had nevertheless been some indications of change fatigue in certain Divisions;

03.6.4 That it would be helpful for Council to have further insight into the overall sense of the

current levels of staff morale and engagement, readiness for further strategic change, and commitment to Strategy 2030, especially in light of the levels of organisational change over the last two years.

**ACTION:** To schedule an update for Council on 9 December 2025 on the latest results of the Colleague Experience Survey (June 2025), including key findings, current areas of focus and actions.

**ACTION:** To incorporate an annual update to Council on the results of the Colleague Experience Survey and wider HR issues (including staff turnover and grievances) to help provide strategic oversight of long-term trends in relation to workplace culture, staff morale and productivity.

#### **4. Enabling Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy (CNL/17/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

04.1 The AI@Exeter Strategy would enable generative AI utilisation and innovation to help further embed process improvements across Research, Education and Operations. The Strategy was designed to augment, accelerate and integrate with Strategy 2030 whilst providing flexibility to adapt to new opportunities;

04.2 A range of resources had been produced to guide responsible AI use and support staff, students and researchers to explore AI utilisation, including: Exeter's Enabling AI Strategy, AI Policy, Information Classification Scheme, and AI Catalogue;

04.3 Further Enabling AI content would be developed throughout the Academic Year 2025-26, with a phased communication in Term 1 on the current AI support. There was also a continued focus on engaging the wider community in the development and delivery of the institutional AI Strategy through training, guidance and Communities of Practice;

04.4 An Advisory Group had been established to provide strategic guidance and advice on the University's adoption and implementation of AI, including alignment with Strategy 2030 and consideration of the emerging opportunities, risks and trends. The Advisory Group would be chaired by the Divisional Director of Digital Transformation and Director of Education Innovation and include academic representation from across the Faculties, which would enable consideration of the impacts on education, research and operation;

04.5 A prioritised AI roadmap had been produced to provide clarity of focus around key initiatives across education, research and Professional Services, the key benefits and status update on development and delivery;

04.6 The importance of AI in enhancing education and the student experience was highlighted, including reimagining assessment, developing personalised learning opportunities and re-imaging assessment to ensure students develop AI fluency to enhance their key competencies and employability skills;

04.7 An overarching Data Strategy and Roadmap had been produced prior to the launch of the central data platform to help enhance data sharing; data protection and security, which would enable continued collaboration, co-design and transformation across Professional Services in alignment with a consistent standard;

04.8 The Digital Research Infrastructure project was designed to integrate high-performance computing, research data storage, and secure research environments into a resilient and

suitable eco-system. There was a c. £10m placeholder for the Digital Research Infrastructure project within the capital plan and a business case would be presented to Council in the Academic Year 2025-26 to enable further investment to enable AI ambitions in research;

04.9 In relation to the University's new partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS):

04.9.1 The partnership was designed to transform digital education, enhance skills literacy, and drive sustainability innovation with lasting regional impact;

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04.10 Council was supportive of the institutional approach to Enabling AI and embracing digital solutions and recognised that it was important to not lose a competitive advantage in comparison to other peer institutions adopting AI utilisation. However, it was acknowledged that there were a number of risks and challenges surrounding the use of Artificial Intelligence which would need to be carefully considered, including: financial costs of implementation and challenges surrounding return on investment; cyber security risks (including loss of IP and data loss); ethical and reputational risks around loss of intellectual rigour; AI large language models leading to potentially erroneous conclusions and flawed research results; black box AI systems perpetuating inherent biases, leading to unfair bias, discrimination or concerns about fairness; challenges surrounding parity in the use and application of AI; sustainability concerns resulting from the substantial increase in energy consumption associated with the use of AI;

04.11 The importance of the following was noted in relation to AI: ensuring that the Enabling AI Strategy continued to inform the implementation of the AI Policy across the institution; exploring opportunities for AI to enhance wider research into health care, NHS partnerships, and spinouts; ensuring that AI was used ethically and responsibly and to help minimize carbon impact in alignment with the University's commitment to sustainability; leveraging AI to gain a competitive advantage over peer institutions and to enhance efficiency and process automation; ensuring there was careful consideration given to development of the data strategy to ensure monitoring regulations on using data responsibly; keeping apprised of the latest regulation in relation to AI following the Interim AI measures introduced in China, which was the first specific administrative regulation introduced on the management of generative AI services;

04.12 In relation to Agentive AI:

04.12.1 Council noted that Agentive AI (or AI agents) was another powerful form of AI that could operate independently and autonomously to provide a new mechanism for systems to automate processes and solve complex operations. A Business Case was being presented to the Strategic Investment Committee to consider a proposal for investment into Agentive AI.

**5. Academic Size, Shape and Performance (CNL/18/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

05.1 The Senior Vice-President and Provost tabled a presentation on Academic Size, Shape and Performance which has been filed with the record of the meeting (CNL/18a/25-26);

05.2 The paper provided an overview of the academic size, shape and strategic emphasis and performance across the University's subject areas, drawing on data from KPI dashboards and other key data sets including student numbers, staff numbers and TRAC data on teaching cost recovery;

05.3 The University retained a strong interdisciplinary emphasis, particularly in research to face onto the opportunities and challenges, but this was also an increasing area of focus in education to enhance student outcomes and efficiency;

05.4 Council noted the overall summary of the relative strengths, opportunities and financial resilience across departments as provided in Table 1 with detailed data provided in five sections within the appendices;

05.5 The summary of performance by department across indicators aligned with the institutional Strategy 2030 KPIs, which alongside the information on size, helped to provide an understanding of how subject performance combined to determine the overall University performance;

05.6 In relation to the analysis of Undergraduate Graduating Cohort Size, NSS Performance and League Table Performance:

- 05.6.1 The comparative data on undergraduate cohort size, NSS performance and UK League Table ranking highlighted the potential impacts of increased cohort size and illustrated that there was no clear association between growth in undergraduate cohort size and performance in NSS or league tables;
- 05.6.2 NSS sector ranking showed more substantial fluctuation year on year than NSS KPI score, especially in subject areas with smaller numbers of institutions. Whereas NSS KPI score and league table ranking were more stable. Both NSS ranking and league table rankings were affected by the changing performance of other institutions and league table rank was further influenced by factors other than NSS;
- 05.6.3 There had been a general decline in NSS sector rankings in the past two years for Exeter subjects due to faster institutional improvement by competitors;
- 05.6.4 That it would be critical to draw on best practice from areas that had succeeded in teaching large cohorts whilst retaining strong NSS performance to enhance the quality of the student experience;
- 05.6.5 In relation to the significant variance in Departmental performance in NSS it was not straightforward to precisely identify the drivers behind this. It was noted that short term issues could significantly impact on Departmental performance and student feedback. It was nevertheless recognised that assessment and feedback was a key area of focus to improve NSS performance across the institution;

05.7 The differential growth in academic job families and greater rate of increase in teaching focused staff reflected an increase in specialisation of academic roles (particularly in areas of education diversification in degree apprenticeships and on-line programmes) and support roles (such as pastoral mentors). The data also illustrated the need for continued strategic change towards a greater growth in STEMM, especially in light of the fact that larger STEMM departments generated the majority of research income and that research cost recovery was generally higher in STEMM subjects because grant income funded a greater proportion of research activity;

05.8 Whilst there had continued to be percentage growth over the last 3 years in the majority of the main academic roles in the Faculties of HLS and ESE, there had been a reduction in research only staff in HASS and no growth in education and research staff;

05.9 That overall teaching costs were driven by programme design, faculty staff profile, professional services and estates costs;

05.10 Research cost recovery was still significantly below 100% (average 72%), reflecting the sector wide UK HE model that teaching activity cross subsidised research;

05.11 The overall complexity of data categorisation across the University was noted, with some grouped by Departments, some by a single subject (e.g Law) and others composed of subject groupings (e.g. Classics, Ancient History and Theology). It was also recognised there was a range of KPI dashboard and other data sets across research, teaching, NSS and finance which all had to be factored into strategic consideration of the academic size, shape and performance;

05.12 Data dashboards were now made available to Heads of Department and all staff to deepen awareness and understanding of where Departments and subject groups were positioned across the wider institution. The University of Exeter's Research and Impact Management Environment (RIME) also provided a comprehensive platform and live database that supported researchers in various areas, including: funding support, bid development and other key resources;

05.13 The mid-term module review provided a mechanism for real-time feedback and information to inform any enhancements, but it was more challenging to produce real-time data, especially in relation to comparator data which was time-lagged by several years. The Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) data which was used in the UK HE sector to provide information on the costs of teaching, research and other data (including income and expenditure data) provided a mechanism for benchmarking but was unavailable in-year and so could not be utilised to provide real-time insights;

05.14 The development of education diversification activities was being focused in specific areas where there was strong market demand. There was clear alignment with the government priorities outlined in the recent Post-16 Education and Skills White paper, but there was also scope to identify further strategic opportunities in this area.

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**ACTION:** That the paperwork on Academic Size, Shape and Performance would be added to the Council Knowledge area to enable it to continue to provide a helpful reference point and information resource for members.

#### **6. Estates and Capital: Campus Tour**

*Council was provided with a tour and showcase of recent investments on the Streatham campus, including the new and inclusive Sarah Turvill Multifaith Centre, and the remodelled Innovation Centres 1 and 2, which had successfully utilised flexible workplace principles to efficiently increase Data Science and AI teaching and research spaces within existing buildings.*

**07. Transnational Education (TNE) Strategic Update (CNL/19/25/26 Strictly Confidential, with additional information made available in advance on the Council Knowledge Area also filed with the record of the meeting, CNL/19a/25-26).**

*The Chair welcomed Professor Richard Follett (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Engagement) to the meeting and invited him to deliver a TNE Strategic update presentation.*

07.1 Transnational Education (the delivery of UK qualifications in an offshore location) was one of the fastest growing areas of UK Higher Education and provided a critical strategic opportunity to diversify income, build brand and reputation in emerging markets while delivering real value for students at home and abroad;

07.2 There were currently c. 653,570 students studying for a UK degree in an overseas location, with the annual growth rate of TNE approximately 9.6% over the past 5 years and delivered by 173 UK HE providers;

07.3 The University was now developing a TNE portfolio at pace with Council oversight. Exeter's first major TNE project was a Joint Education Institute with Zhejiang University of Technology in Hangzhou, China. In 2026, teaching would commence, including c. 1,200 students across 5 undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses.

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**APPROVED:** The proposed approach towards the creation of global TNE Hubs as regional anchors for education, research, recruitment, business engagement and civic engagement.

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*The Chair thanked Professor Richard Follett (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Engagement) for his contribution and politely invited him to leave the meeting.*

**08. Strategic Response to the Industrial Strategy and Skills Agenda (CNL/20/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

08.01 UK Universities had a critical role to play in delivering the government's Industrial Strategy by contributing to skills development, research and innovation, which were critical to driving economic growth;

08.02 The Industrial Strategy had confirmed significant increases in R&D initiatives and innovation spending, to continue to support universities to work with business, charities and the wider community for economic and social benefit;

08.03 Enhancing skills, productivity and innovation were central to the Industrial Strategy's vision for economic renewal and growth;

08.04 The Strategy had identified eight priority sectors that were considered crucial for driving future economic health, including: Clean Energy, Advanced Manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Life Sciences, Creative Industries, Digital and Technology, Financial Services, and Defence. A mapping exercise had been undertaken to evaluate the alignment of Exeter's capabilities against the 8 priority areas and to explore the significant opportunities that extended to creative industries, financial services, professional and business services, and the alignment with research strengths and expertise;

08.05 The University had strong and distinctive research and innovation in many of the eight priority sectors, but there was particularly strong alignment in Defence and Security; Advanced Manufacturing; Climate, Environment and Sustainability. Priority areas and actions were being

finalised by UEB to ensure institutional readiness and clear UEB sponsorship and academic leadership in the 2-3 identified priority areas;

08.06 Alongside identifying areas of institutional strength, the areas where the University would not feasibly be able to compete relative to other competitor institutions was also being considered;

08.07 The importance of the following was noted in discussion: developing a clear communications plan to help enhance reputation in key areas of strength and expertise (including metamaterials, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals); building on regional partnerships in defence and security (including Leonardo and Babcock); proactively identifying research areas where government funding would be likely to become available to ensure proposals were developed in advance to enable the University to be able to respond to emerging opportunities in a timely fashion;

08.08 Educational diversification was being embedded into core plans and operations to anticipate market opportunities and enable lifelong learners from all backgrounds to gain the experiences and qualifications in flexible ways;

08.09 Diversified education programmes were anticipated to make up a significant proportion of all education-related income by 2030/31, including: online, degree apprenticeships, Executive education and CPD. The margins for diversified education activity was typically higher than for on-campus Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught programmes.

#### **Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential Commercial in Confidence**

#### **09. The Future Students of Exeter (CNL/21/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

09.01 The Chair invited Rebecca Boomer-Clark (Independent Council Member) to deliver a presentation on the Future Students of Exeter and drawing upon her unique insights as Chief Executive of Lift Schools (one of the largest multi-academy trusts in the country);

09.02 That the challenges being faced by the current cohort of school students would foreshadow the first-year University experience and highlighted some of the issues which the HE sector would have to contend with. There was a critical need to ensure the University future-proofed its curriculum for the needs of the students of the future;

09.03 Across 21,000 students studying at Lift Schools, there had been a drop in belonging, trust and engagement during early adolescence;

09.04 Following the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of patterns had deepened in learning behaviours: including: delayed social development; lack of engagement and attendance; heightened anxiety and perfectionism, fragmented attention as a result of digital multitasking;

09.05 In Year 11, the average attendance across c. 3,000 students in 23 schools was only 86% (with an attendance rate of 85-90% representing between 20-30 days of absence from classes);

09.06 Student's had seen 'belonging' in the sense of being valued and respected in the classroom and having a sense of connection and purposes. It would be important to reflect on how the University could embed this same sense of belonging as equity through the Curriculum for Change programme and enhance student perception and use NSS data to inform enhancements to student experience;

09.07 Three forces would shape the next decade of student experience including: prolonged adolescence, technological acceleration (especially AI and automation), and socio-economic volatility;

09.08 The covid-19 pandemic had significantly reset educational expectations, including:

09.8.1 Flexibility in learning design and delivery;

09.8.2 Mental health seen as a core entitlement;

09.8.3 Strong social purpose and authenticity being aligned closely with subject of study and social Change and increasingly considered more important than personal prestige;

09.9 That 9 in 10 students now had a mobile phone in secondary school which had accelerated access to tech from an early age and resulted in unparalleled levels of disruption;

09.10 Students were frequently signalling that they wanted more flexibility in learning design and Delivery. Key consideration should be given to the structure of the day, the use of space, personalisation through assessment and feedback, and use of digitisation to enhance the learning environment;

09.11 Approximately 31% of children now lived in poverty and it was therefore vital to remove all of identifiable barriers to success to enable students from all different backgrounds to achieve their full potential and connect to lived experience of students;

09.12 The Exeter Students' Guild "Your Way, Your Say" report echoed the key themes emerging from Culture and Climate data from Lift Schools and had reaffirmed the importance of focusing on enhancing engagement and belonging. The Guild Survey had highlighted that c. 46% struggle to balance academic and social life and c. 75% indicated they did not feel they belonged. It would be critical to harness the data insights from the NSS and Guild surveys to help future-proof the University's curriculum and to ensure universities acted as the next stage of youth development;

09.13 The importance of ensuring the core design principles within Curriculum for Change Embedded continuous innovation and improvement with a sustained focus on learning & Technology (including AI-enhanced education) and Inclusion, Wellbeing and Life-long learning to enable equity with engagement;

09.14 There were five key design principles for Universities to focus on:

09.14.1 Ensuring belonging was at the heart of social mobility;

09.14.2 Rebuilding engagement around agency & purpose;

09.14.3 Treating AI as a relational technology;

09.14.4 Designing learning ecosystems rather than siloed courses;

09.14.5 Recognising that adolescence would continue into University education;

**ACTION:** That a recording of the presentation would be made available to staff across the academic

community to highlight the importance of Curriculum for Change and the changes in student learning behaviours and expectations.

**10. Chair's Update on Council Performance and Effectiveness (CNL/22/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

10.01 The Chair of Council highlighted the good progress that had been made on implementing the Council Assurance Review Recommendations, with 28 actions completed and 29 in progress and on track for completion by the end of the Academic Year 2025-26;

10.02 That the Gillies report published in June 2025 had investigated financial oversight and decision making at the University of Dundee and identified clear failings in financial monitoring, management and governance. The University was fully compliant with the majority of the recommendations set out in both the Gillies Report and in subsequent discussions with the CUC but highlighted that there a couple of further areas of continued enhancement and focus as detailed in the presentation circulated in advance;

10.03 The forthcoming external Council Effectiveness Review would commence in the Academic Year 2025-26, including observation of Council and Council committee meetings. Two firms had been shortlisted to lead on the review and a provisional set of 18 questions had been developed and informed by Council members' feedback. They key areas of focus included: Council Processes; Board Structure & Skills, Council member recruitment and on-boarding.

**11. Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS): Strategic Away Day (CNL/23/25-26 Strictly Confidential)**

*The Chair welcome Professor Gareth Stansfield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean) to the meeting and invited him to deliver a presentation on the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS).*

a) Introduction to HASS and Faculty Performance

11.01 The vision of the Faculty of HASS was to be leaders in knowing the past, understanding the present, and defining the future of humankind through outstanding disciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching and research;

11.02 Consistently high QS and REF performance in HASS had ensured top 100 status for Humanities subjects and contributed significantly to the University's reputation;

11.03 The Faculty of HASS was constituted of 10 Departments and also included a number of major Centres, Institutes and interdisciplinary programmes (including Liberal Arts and Language Centre);

11.04 A number of the Centres and Institutes had a strong interdisciplinary focus, with the Centre for Computational Social Sciences (C2S2) and Strategy and Security Institute (SSI) working across all 3 Faculties and aligned with the Government's Industrial Strategy growth-driving sectors;

11.05 The Size and Shape of Departments varied across HASS, with a range of larger Departments (such as Social and Political Sciences, Philosophy and Anthropology and Law), alongside smaller Departments (such as Classics, Ancient History, Religion and Theology and the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies). The bigger Departments secured a larger volume of income across the Faculty, but the smaller Departments had historically performed well in REF and produced high research quality;

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11.07 In relation to the Faculty of HASS in Cornwall:

11.07.1 The Faculty taught History, Law, Politics, Modern Languages and Environmental Humanities at the Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

11.07.2 A new Cornwall marketing strategy had been developed to highlight the exceptional campus experience and to encourage students to explore lesser-known paths (eg Environmental Humanities or combined honours programmes);

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b) HASS Faculty Roadmap and Strategic Priorities

11.08 In relation to the HASS SWOT Analysis:

11.08.1 Key strengths included: the direct alignment with Strategy 2030 and engagement with all pillars of the Industrial Strategy; strong performance in QS World Ranking, with 6 HASS subjects in the QS World Top 100, including 3 in the Top 50 (Archaeology (45), Classics & Ancient History (45) and English Language & Literature (47)); strong demand from high tariff home students; strong track record in philanthropic donations;

11.08.2 Key opportunities included: the scope for growth in reputation, research income and student numbers in the Law School and Social Sciences; realisation of teaching efficiencies and improvement to margin position through Curriculum for Change; further strategic growth within Creative Industries sector linked to the Industrial Strategy; diversification of income through bilateral partnerships;

11.08.3 The main weaknesses were as follows: That a number of Departments made a financial Deficit including all PS and central overheads; that there was inconsistency in NSS performance which impacted on the student experience, with the Faculty ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the Russell Group in NSS, and Law and Politics below the UoE average;

11.08.4 The key threats facing the Faculty were as follows: that some student disciplines and markets were static or in decline, with the University close to dropping out of the Top 200 in the QS international league table rankings; the increasingly aggressive competition for international HASS students; government and political party policies potentially discouraging HASS applicants; the public perception of limited opportunities for HASS graduates that did not align with a particular “profession;”

**Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential**

11.13 In relation to Global Philanthropy

11.13.1 The Faculty had a strong track record of recent philanthropic donations, including a number of significant donations from the University's most generous benefactor, the Ruler of Sharjah (His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasami).

11.13.2 The University had also secured a significant donation from the Canadian philanthropist Sajjad Ebrahim which had enabled the University to establish the Imam Sajjad Chair in Shi'i Studies based in the University's Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies;

11.14 In relation to research partnerships:

11.14.1 The University's partnership with Tsinghua University had been expanded to an Institute of Global Humanities which had been launched at Exeter as part of a presidential delegation in November 2024;

11.14.2 In partnership with Duke University, Exeter was contributing to the development of digital infrastructure for a major ERC Advanced project (submitted in August 2025 for c. €2.5M);

11.15 In relation to research applications, awards and performance:

**Closed minute – Commercial in Confidence**

11.15.2 The growth in large grant activity had seen a shift towards applied interdisciplinary research in collaboration with the other 2 Faculties. This had necessitated a significant culture shift in HASS to ensure there was sufficient focus on securing higher margins, working with teams of academics, and co-authorship;

11.15.3 It was critical to instil a greater focus on enhancing research quality over volume of outputs in order to improve REF performance;

11.15.4 In relation to research cost recovery, this had increased up to c. 42-43%;

11.15.5 Research income per FTE was at the bottom of quartile 1 of the Russell Group, but this was still significantly higher than a number of other competitor Russell Group HASS Departments (including Bristol and Durham);

11.15.6 That there were opportunities to build on interdisciplinary research opportunities such as the Centre for Computational Social Sciences (C2S2) where HASS colleagues were working in close collaboration with Computer Scientists. It would be important for the Faculty to clearly work to its unique strengths and research areas differentiated from other institutions;

11.15.7 In relation to staff resourcing, it was noted that there had been a significant reduction in the percentage of research only staff in HASS over the last 3 years;

c) Research Spotlight

11.16 Council Members were invited to attend immersive research showcases on Critical Minerals and Creative Industries. A research poster exhibition was also available to showcase the research undertaken across the Faculty.

**12. Chair's Closing Remarks**

12.1 The Chair extended a sincere thank you to the Professor Gareth Stansfield and the Faculty of HASS for holding an engaging and informative strategic faculty away day meeting.