



University of Exeter

COUNCIL STRATEGIC AWAY DAY MEETING

MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL

26 February 2025

12.45am-16.30pm

Masters Suite, Penryn Campus (Cornwall)

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

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MEMBERS PRESENT

Quentin Woodley	Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council
Sir Richard Atkins	Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair of Council
Sally Cabrini	Pro-Chancellor and Senior Independent Governor
Professor Lisa Roberts	President and Vice-Chancellor
Professor Dan Charman	Senior Vice-President and Provost
Professor Tim Quine	Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)
Rebecca Boomer-Clark	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Malcolm Skingle	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent Member
Sarah Matthews-DeMers	Independent Member
Dr Sarah Hodge	Senate Representative
Professor Karen Knapp	Senate Representative
Professor Sue Prince	Senate Representative

Elaine Cordy Professional Services Representative

Alex Martin Guild President, Exeter Students' Guild
 Connie Chilcott President Exeter, Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union

STANDING ATTENDEE

Professor Adrian Harris Chief Medical Officer (Royal NHS Devon)

SECRETARY

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

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

Dave Stacey Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services
 Imelda Rogers Deputy Registrar and Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources
 Dr Jeremy Diaper Assistant Director, Governance (minutes)

APOLOGIES

Damaris Anderson-Supple Independent Member
 Nicholas Cheffings Independent Member
 Salam Katbi Independent Member
 Glenn Woodcock Independent Member
 Karen Knapp Senate Representative
 Alison Chambers CEO, Exeter Students' Guild

IN ATTENDANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL AGENDA ITEMS

Minute Item 58 – Strategic Introduction to Penryn, Cornwall

Professor Martin Siegert Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Cornwall)

Minute Item 61 – Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Net Zero Target

Joanna Chamberlain Director of Sustainability
 Professor Peter Cox Professor of Climate System Dynamics in Mathematics and the Director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter

Minute Item 63 – Strategic Discussion of IP/Spin Out

Stuart Brocklehurst Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation)

57. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest

57.1 The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting and invited any declarations of interest. There were no new declarations of interest in relation to items on the agenda.

57.2 The Chair noted that apologies had been received from the following members of Council: Damaris Anderson Supple, Nicholas Cheffings, Salam Katbi, Karen Knapp and Glenn Woodcock. Apologies had also been received from the following standing attendees: Ali Chambers (CEO, Exeter Students' Guild);

57.3 Following a recent meeting of the Committee of University Chairs with Sir David Behan (interim Chair of the Office for Students), the Chair outlined a number of reflections that had been shared about governance across the Higher Education Sector and issues for Chairs of governing bodies to reflect and consider, including:

57.3.1 Whether governing bodies had spent sufficient time considering innovations in the educational offer that could be provided to prospective students and wider society, including shorter degree programmes to appeal to mature students;

57.3.2 The amount of time currently spent considering Value for Money and whether there had been sufficient scrutiny on delivering degree offerings at the lowest possible cost, rather than viewing the output of Universities in terms of wider economic contribution and societal value;

57.3.3 The current size and composition of University governing bodies and whether there was currently sufficient breadth and depth of skills, attributes and experiences to ensure effective governance and an optimal size of boards to make difficult decisions in an increasingly challenging sector-wide financial landscape;

57.4 The Chair noted the CUC would be undertaking a review of Higher Education governance with the findings of the report and associated recommendations anticipated to be published to inform continuous improvement and ensure that University governance remained robust and responsive to the changing landscape and needs of students, staff and wider stakeholders;

57.5 The CUC Higher Education Code of Governance (September 2020) was also scheduled to be updated this year and it was anticipated that this would be refreshed in alignment with any recommendations.

58. Strategic Introduction to Penryn, Cornwall

The Chair welcomed Professor Martin Siegert (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Cornwall) to deliver a strategic update presentation on Cornwall.

a) Cornwall Strategic Update (CNL/78a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

58.1 There was representation from across all 3 Faculties of the University at Penryn, Cornwall which incorporated the following:

58.1.1 Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy (including Earth and Environmental Science; Ecology and Conservation; Renewables; Sustainable Futures);

58.1.2 Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (including European Centre for Environment & Human Health);

58.1.3 Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (which included elements of Law, Politics, Geography, History, Education and the Institute of Cornish Studies);

58.2 Whilst there was representation from across all Faculties, approximately 80% of the Penryn campus was directly aligned with the Environment and Ecology and there was strong interdisciplinarity, especially in light of focus on Sustainable Futures;

58.3 In relation to the specific subject and programme offering at Penryn, Cornwall:

58.3.1 The University only offered a limited number of the same subjects at both the Penryn Campus and Streatham Campus (eg Undergraduate History, Politics and Geography). This was predominantly down to the fact these subjects had been part of the academic offering since the establishment of the campus 20 years ago;

58.3.2 In recent years, the University's approach had increasingly evolved towards the development of distinctive and innovative programmes that were tailored to the unique strengths and strategic opportunities in Penryn. This included a suite of undergraduate programmes, such as Zoology; Conservation Biology and Ecology; Environmental Science; Geology; Environmental Humanities; and Business and Environment. The development of new programmes was also aligned with regional priorities and key economic growth areas in Cornwall which included development of undergraduate programmes in Mining Engineering and Renewable Energy;

58.3.3 Strategic Decisions around what was taught on each campus were led by Faculties, to ensure appropriate alignment with research strengths, facilities, market demand and regional priorities and skills development needs;

58.4 In relation to the SWOT analysis of Penryn, Cornwall:

58.4.1 There were clear strengths in relation to the increasing alignment with key growth areas in Cornwall, excellent interdisciplinarity of research and teaching, and high NSS scores (particularly for teaching and student support). There was also a strong reputation in marine, critical minerals, environment and human health, with the University ranked in the top 15 in the world for Mineral & Mining Engineering and in the top 40 globally for Geology, Geography, Environmental Science, Earth and Marine Sciences according to the QS World University Subject Rankings 2024;

58.4.2 There remained strategic opportunities to maximise interest in environment and sustainability subject areas, particularly through growth of Postgraduate Taught student numbers via the Graduate School of Environment and Sustainability;

58.4.3 In terms of strategic weaknesses and threats, it was recognised that recruitment had been predominantly in the home market, with a reliance on clearing and alternative offers, alongside a lack of awareness amongst prospective students, and declining study broad interest from a number of international markets;

58.4.4 That another strategic threat was the complex interdependencies with campus partners (including FX Plus and Falmouth University), with shifts in student numbers impacting on shared costs and challenges for shared success;

58.5 An enhanced marketing plan was in the process of development to build on the unique strategic opportunities, priorities and strengths of Penryn, Cornwall to enhance campus brand and reputation in key strategic growth areas, including: Environment, Sustainability, Law and Business;

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58.9 The following was noted in discussion:

58.9.1 Offering certain programmes (eg Law, History and Politics) at both the Penryn and Streatham campuses had posed particular challenges in differentiating the student offerings

and recruiting students effectively. Whilst students could apply to study a number of individual programmes at either campus, these programmes had historically tended to struggle with student recruitment at Penryn as Streatham Campus tended to be a more popular option on basis it was more well-known. In instances where the student recruitment limit at Streatham campus had been reached for these programmes an alternative offer to study at Penryn was also made;

- 58.9.2 The strategic approach to growing Law was currently focused on environmental law. Faculties and Departments were currently in the process of reflecting on potential for diversifying into professional education, including executive education, CPD and online;
- 58.9.3 In order to strengthen the international student cohort mix there was a need to enhance the global brand presence of the University, promote awareness of the Penryn campus, and develop Cornwall's identity distinctive offering through building on environmental and sustainability focus and interdisciplinary course offerings;
- 58.9.4 The University had Cornwall campuses in Truro and Penryn. The Penryn Campus was shared with the Falmouth University, and the University of Plymouth's Peninsula Medical School facilities were also located at the Truro campus;
- 58.9.5 In relation to undergraduate degree outcomes Cornwall had scored 78.8% in the last survey (in comparison to 85.6% at Exeter). One area where there had been particularly strong performance was in mining, which was partly attributable to the fact that Camborne School of mines was the only mining school in the UK. Council recognised that it was important to look at graduate outcomes according to discipline as it varied significantly depending on the specific subject area and to disaggregate and look at specific tariff entry as well;
- 58.10 In terms of student recruitment in Cornwall, the University's immediate UK competitors institutions included: Bangor, Cardiff, Southampton, Plymouth and Portsmouth;
- 58.11 The University was particularly strong in Ecology, with a top 5 ranking in the world in the Shanghai Rankings for Global Ranking of Academic Subjects in 2024, which included c. 40% of market in UG entry.

b) Student Experience in Cornwall (CNL/78b/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair invited Connie Chilcott (President Exeter, Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union) to deliver a presentation on the Student Experience in Cornwall.

- 58.12 A number of students opted to study in Cornwall because of the unique student experience which was enhanced by the shared campus with Falmouth University and the diverse and distinctive mix of interdisciplinary students studying across a range of programmes in science, environment, business and the creative arts;
- 58.13 Students studying in Cornwall also benefited from a close-knit community through a wide-range of societies and sports club alongside access to diverse natural surroundings, coastal environment and vibrant town of Falmouth;
- 58.14 In light of the higher proportion of state school students studying at Cornwall a number of students had also indicated they found the environment to be a particularly accessible and welcoming environment in which to study.

The Chair thanked Professor Martin Siegert (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Cornwall) for their contribution to the meeting and indicated that he would be invited to the subsequent business meeting on 27th February 2025 to present the Penryn 2.0 Outline Business Case.

59. President and Vice-Chancellor's Introduction (CNL/78c/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair invited the President and Vice-Chancellor to deliver an introductory presentation to the Council Strategic briefing meeting. The tabled presentation (CNL/78c/24-25 Strictly Confidential) was tabled and has been filed with the record of the meeting.

- 59.1 There was a sustained focus on financial sustainability across the Higher Education sector in light of the continued challenges presented by the uncertain and increasingly competitive international recruitment landscape across UG, PGT International and TNE;
- 59.2 The small increase in UK domestic tuition fees had been largely negated by the increase in employer National Insurance contributions. Any further inflationary fee increase remained unconfirmed and there was also a potential risk of student number controls being introduced after the next student recruitment intake;
- 59.3 The domestic tuition fees of £9,250 were now worth less than £6,000 in real terms and the small increase linked to inflation would not resolve the financial challenges facing the sector. There was therefore a critical need to ensure a more efficient approach to educational delivery;
- 59.4 There was increasing competition across the sector in relation to conversion activity for undergraduate international students, with a number of institutions enhancing their scholarships, bursaries and fee discounts in an effort to secure additional students;
- 59.5 A number of institutions had made recent announcements regarding transnational education, including: Newcastle, Surrey, Southampton, Queen's University Belfast. An increasing number of institutions had identified TNE partnerships in India as an attractive strategic proposition;
- 59.6 The OfS continued to increase its focus and attention on the sector's Financial Sustainability. It was noted that c. 12 institutions had still not filed their financial accounts for the previous academic year and that the worsening cash position of some institutions was placing them under significant financial pressure;
- 59.7 Scottish Universities were also facing significant financial challenges. The University of Edinburgh had announced plans to seek savings of £140m, which was c. 10% of its annual turnover. Dundee University had indicated it was facing a £35m deficit and that it was anticipated compulsory redundancies would be required to address the financial gap. £15m had been made available to enable the Scottish Funding Council to support Dundee University through the immediate financial challenges it faced and to help shape and develop a recovery plan;
- 59.8 A UUK Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce was being chaired by Sir Nigel Carrington to consider how Universities could partner and collaborate together to deliver transformation and cost savings through new models and ways of working. A further update on this would be provided at the Joint Senate and Council meeting on 28 May 2025;

59.9 It was anticipated that more mergers and shared service models between HE providers in the UK were likely to materialise in response to challenges surrounding increasing financial pressures;

59.10 It would be critical for the University to continue to carefully manage increasing sector financial pressures, whilst also continuing to invest in key strategic growth areas to remain in a competitive position. The University had been ahead of other institutions in implementing Enabling Strategy 2030 workstreams to achieve cost-efficiencies across pay, non-pay, teaching, digital and research;

59.11 In response to the government's plans to reduce level 7 apprenticeship levy funding, UEB were considering options to pivot to protect income secured via Degree Apprenticeships;

59.12 The following was noted in relation to the current challenges facing the sector:

59.12.1 OfS had announced that they would be undertaking a UK-wide review of governance and Leadership across the sector in 2025;

59.12.2 It was recognised that the HE sector would be required to undergo major transformation in response to the significant financial pressures and that this could be a steep learning curve in light of the fact that there was no clear legislative framework or regulatory guidance in place to deal with the current situation. It was affirmed that it would be helpful for the Chair of Council, Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary, and Assistant Director (Governance) to be actively engaged and inputting into the sector-wide governance and leadership review being undertaken in 2025;

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59.15.2 Nearly 100 institutions had now announced workforce changes over the last 12 months. This included 13 Russell Group institutions announcing voluntary severance schemes;

59.15.3 The financial challenges facing the sector had seen a number of competitor institutions (including Edinburgh, Newcastle, Cardiff) seeking to take out 10% of their cost base;

59.16 In relation to the University's course ranking in key league tables:

59.16.1 It was recognised that the University's subject position in league table rankings continued to influence applicant behaviour and it was therefore important to retain a strong top 10 position in key strategic subjects. There was concern that in certain large subjects (eg Economics) the University had dropped out of the top 10;

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ACTION: That a paper would be scheduled for Council providing further analysis of how the University ranks in key strategic growth subjects in comparison to other high tariff competitor institutions across a range of league tables.

60. Review of Strategy 2030 – Update to KPIs and Strategy Delivery Plan (CNL/80/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

- 60.1 In light of the significant financial challenges facing the UK Higher Education, including the significant reduction in international student demand and decline in real terms value of UK home UG fees, there was a need for the University to review the approach to Strategy 2030 delivery;
- 60.2 Whilst there was a need to identify and deliver efficiencies and enhanced diversification of income generation it was also important for the University to retain a sustained focus on the overall aims and objectives of Strategy 2030 to make the world healthier, greener and fairer through the power of world leading education and research;
- 60.3 Within the various financial scenarios, it would be important to retain capacity for investment to further reshape the University and respond to research opportunities in alignment with Strategy 2030 to ensure the University retained its reputation as a research intensive University;
- 60.4 There remained significant levels of uncertainty and volatility surrounding the international student recruitment market but it was clear that there would be persistent financial challenges for UK Universities. The emerging changes in competitor institution strategies (both nationally and internationally) alongside significant variables in student applicant behaviour made it more challenging to accurately predict future recruitment forecasts;
- 60.5 the proposed income diversification activities had not yet been built into budgets or within later 5-year plans in order to avoid potential optimism bias or overreliance on ambitious plans and to provide an opportunity to reflect on strategic areas to develop at scale. This approach was also intended to ensure that there remained a continued institutional focus on enabling cost efficiencies and a strategic approach to workforce planning and ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the University. It was nevertheless recognised that the biggest potential for growth in online provision was in PGT;
- 60.6 Council noted and discussed the progress on Strategy 2030 Commitments and Priorities, the scenarios for the student numbers and implications for the approach to financial sustainability, associated financial KPIs and other Strategy 2030 KPIs;
- 60.7 Council noted that the changes in the financial strategy did not alter the overall aims and vision for Strategy 2030, but they did require reconsideration of the KPI targets on % international student and average fee/student. In order to reflect the changes in the student recruitment market whilst retaining ambition in the University's plans, it was recommended that the University set targets in the upper half of the range of scenarios as detailed in section 21 of the paper:

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60.10 The following was noted by Council in relation to the institutional KPI targets:

- 60.10.1 Whilst Council recognised the proposed rationale and drivers for the chosen range for the KPI targets for % international students (including TNE) and average fee per student, it was requested that a singular target was selected to provide clarity of focus and assist the governing body in clearly monitoring progress in delivery;

- 60.10.2 Selecting a range would not ensure that the target was sufficiently stretching as the bottom end of the range was not considered sufficiently ambitious;
- 60.10.3 In order to retain the University's institutional ambition a specific target at the top end of the range should be selected for both KPI for % international students (including TNE) and average fee per student;
- 60.10.4 The current KPI target for % international students would only be realistically achievable with TNE activity;
- 60.10.5 It would be important to ensure there was clarity in future reporting to Council regarding why specific targets had not been achieved;
- 60.10.6 That the Digital Engagement KPI was currently being reviewed under the leadership of the new Director of Digital Transformation. The aim was to develop a measure that more closely aligned with the University's institutional ambitions and work was expected to be finalised by March 2025;
- 60.11 In relation to further growth in student numbers through clearing and confirmation:
- 60.11.1 It would be important to ensure there were sufficient mitigations in place to avoid the potential for any negative impact on progress in achieving the Strategy 2030 KPI target associated with excellent academic experience (NSS) measure. It was recognised that this was particularly important in large Departments (eg Law, Economics and Management) as institutional performance in NSS could be significantly impacted by variation in these areas;
- 60.11.2 In terms of specific mitigations, it was noted that every department was required to produce a teaching excellence plan in alignment with planned recruitment numbers and that an institutional NSS Strategy Impact Group had been established to help co-ordinate medium and longer-term initiatives, including: enhancing wifi provision, power resilience and addressing issues experienced in the transition to the new online learning platform (ELE2). There had been a series of deep dives focused on Assessment and Feedback in order to identify a set of recommendations to deliver a step change in institutional performance;
- 60.12 in relation to student recruitment:
- Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential**
- 60.12.6 The importance of continuing to learn from sector-wide developments across Canada, Australia and America;
- 60.13 In relation to the Curriculum for Change programme:
- 60.13.1 It would be beneficial to develop clearer external marketing and communications to enhance awareness and understanding of the Curriculum for Change programme and distinctive elements of a University of Exeter degree amongst applicants and prospective students, especially the impact on enhancing student belonging and inclusiveness, alongside

improved graduate outcomes, employability skills and long-term career prospects and ambitions;

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AGREED: That further to the feedback from Council, the proposed changes to the Strategy 2030 KPI targets for % international, Average Fee and Gender Pay Gap would be finalised as a specific individual target at the top end of the current range to ensure these were suitably ambitious and presented to Council on 29 May 2025 in Part II for final approval.

AGREED: That the Digital Engagement KPI would continue to be reviewed and developed to ensure there was a measure that more clearly aligned with the University's institutional ambitions and presented to Council for approval in due course.

61. Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Net Zero Target (CNL/81/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair invited Joanna Chamberlain (Director of Sustainability) and Peter Cox (Professor of Climate System Dynamics in Mathematics and the Director of the Global Systems Institute) to join the meeting.

61.1 In two recent independent sustainability league tables the University had improved its ranking, including:

61.1.1 10th in the World in THE Impact Rankings 2024 (which compared to 18th in 2023 and 42nd in 2022);

61.1.2 32nd in the World in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2024 (which placed the University 19th in Europe and 11th in the UK;

61.2 The University had declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and published an Environment and Climate Emergency Policy Statement which had originally contained a net zero target by 2050 across all 3 scopes. In 2022, Council had previously approved a proposal to bring forward the strategic commitment to be carbon net zero across all scopes by 2030. This target was challenging to achieve and had been expected to involve a significant amount of carefully considered offsetting towards the latter years of the period. Additional components had also subsequently been added to the University's carbon footprint such as student travel from non-term time addresses (out of term time commuting) under the HE Standardised Carbon Emissions Framework (SCEF);

61.3 As previously discussed and agreed at Council, the approach to the net zero target and date for achieving this had been reviewed. The Offsetting Task and Finish Group had recommended that the University exclude carbon offsetting and the paper outlined several matters that needed to be agreed to reset the University's trajectory and develop a new Climate Strategy (including baseline, target, approach to insetting, internal carbon price, delivery plan and communications);

61.4 Council discussed the paper on 'Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Net Zero Target' (including associated appendices) and were strongly supportive of the recommendation to exclude carbon offsetting from the plans to reach net zero;

- 61.5 Council affirmed support for reviewing the date and approach to the net zero target, whilst recognising it would be necessary to ensure the University adopted a realistic plan with an achievable near-term target and prudent approach for carbon reduction (including scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions) to ensure that it was able to achieve significant impact over the next 5 years;
- 61.6 That it would be important to show clear leadership by being honest and transparent in communications around the proposed change to the Net Zero Target and highlight the key areas where the University could have most impact on carbon reduction (eg in relation to travel, procurement and the capital programme), whilst exploring all opportunities for maximising influence and impact with suppliers and stakeholders;
- 61.7 As part of wider University communications it would be important to:
- 61.7.1 Clearly showcasing how academic researchers and wider University community had been actively involved in shaping the proposals;
 - 61.7.2 Demonstrate the rationale for the proposed change in approach in an open and credible fashion;
 - 61.7.3 Provide clear examples of where the University had delivered impact in environmental sustainability and addressing climate emergency;
 - 61.7.4 Ensure the key drivers and primary rationale for change in approach were clearly intelligible to a non-specialist and to avoid any reputational risks surrounding a potential misperception of the University back-tracking on its commitment to sustainability;
 - 61.7.5 Protecting the University's academic reputation and competitive advantage in the sector as an institution with distinctive and world-leading expertise in the climate science;
 - 61.7.6 Developing a clear and comprehensive communications plan, including student communications, to ensure there were clear mitigations in place to minimize potential for negative publicity or reputational impact. It was recognised that further consideration may need to be given to utilising additional media and communications support to ensure the messaging was clearly communicated to internal and external audiences;
 - 61.7.7 Avoiding potential conflation of the financial challenges facing the University with the change in approach to Net Zero;
- 61.8 The following was noted in discussion:
- 61.8.1 Adoption of a science-based target and the principles set out by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) would enable the University to deliver on its Strategy 2030 commitment to 'lead meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis' and adopt an evidence-based approach informed by academic expertise and focused on delivering positive impact and real change;

61.8.3 In light of the fact the sustainability rankings contributed 5% to the overall QS sustainability Ranking and a closer net zero target date attracted more points, it would be important to model the potential impact on the University's QS ranking. The University had arranged a meeting with QS University league tables and its world-leading experts in climate science to highlight the flawed methodology and to help them potentially identify a more robust metric;

61.8.4 It would be important to explore opportunities to engage with the Students' Union and Guild of Students to influence student behaviours as international student travel was one of the significant contributors to the University's carbon emissions;

61.8.5 The need to continue to explore opportunities to engage with the Students' Union and Guild of Students to influence student behaviours as international student travel was one of the significant contribution of the University's carbon emissions;

61.8.6 In adopting the proposed approach of insetting the University could look to develop world-leading expertise in this area and explore opportunities to work with industry and business to assist them in developing credible and deliverable insetting programmes;

ENDORSED: The proposals and supporting rationale around the new Climate Strategy as detailed in the paper.

ENDORSED: The continued development of a draft Climate Strategy based on the proposals in the paper.

ENDORSED: Engagement with the University community on the draft Climate Strategy and submission to Finance and Investment Committee (20 June 2025) endorsement prior to Council approval (10 July 2025).

The Chair thanked Joanna Chamberlain (Director of Sustainability) and Professor Peter Cox (Professor of Climate System Dynamics in Mathematics and the Director of the Global Systems Institute) for their contribution and politely invited them to leave the meeting.

62. Enabling Strategy 2030 Update and Workforce Planning (CNL/82/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

62.1 The Chair invited the Senior Vice-President and Provost and Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary to deliver a presentation on Enabling Strategy 2030 Update and Workforce Planning. The presentation (CNL/82/24-25 Strictly Confidential) was tabled at the meeting and has been filed with the record of the meeting:

62.2 The Enabling Strategy 2030 oversight group provided an institutional level of focus on the delivery of efficiencies and consisted of four enabling workstreams to continue to support Faculty and Professional Services savings, including:

62.2.1 A Research Efficiencies workstream which continued to support improvement to research cost recovery to achieve an increase of 1%;

62.2.2 A Teaching Efficiencies workstream to rationalise undergraduate and postgraduate taught portfolios and streamline curriculum design to improve teaching margins;

62.2.3 A Non-Pay Savings workstream which was identifying savings through reduction in Faculty and Professional service budgets and institutional level policy change and contract negotiation;

62.1.3 A Work-Force Planning workstream.

62.4 Council discussed and considered the plans as outlined in the paper, including current mitigations and potential for additional savings and welcomed the level of transparency and detail within the documentation;

Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential

62.17 The importance of the following was noted in relation to University communications:

62.17.1 Carefully communicating the voluntary severance scheme in an open and transparent fashion with staff that made it clear these steps were required to maintain a sustainable position and avoid as far as possible the need to take more significant measures;

62.17.2 Maintaining a strong strategic narrative around commitment to delivery of Strategy 2030 and affirming continued focus on key areas of strategic growth to reduce overall staffing cost to minimize risks of world-leading researchers leaving the University and did significantly impact on education, student experience and research;

62.17.3 Continuing to co-create solutions to financial challenges facing the sector and providing regular updates to the wider community on implications for the University;

62.18 The following was noted in relation to the voluntary severance scheme:

62.18.1 The Exeter Release Scheme (TERS) was a voluntary scheme and colleagues applying would only be released where it was in the strategic, financial and operational interests of the University;

62.18.2 That the current terms of the voluntary severance scheme had been benchmarked against the rest of the sector and the University was currently one of the most generous in the UK Higher Education sector and in the top 5 of the Russell Group. Due to the ongoing financial challenges in the sector, the University would not be able to continue to sustain the enhanced terms of our current scheme and following the opening of TERS this academic year, the University would need to revert the terms of our voluntary severance scheme to pre-2020 levels;

62.18.3 Continued engagement had been undertaken with the Students' Union and Guild of Students to discuss and explore current risks, mitigations and decision making principles;

Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential

62.19 The following in discussion:

62.19.1 That lessons learned from the implementation organisational restructure in 2015/16 and Future Structures Programme would inform the approach to identifying efficiencies in Professional Services and evolving approaches towards process redesign, increased digitisation and continued focused on enhanced service delivery;

62.19.2 Further consideration could also be given to simplification and standardisation of key regulations, policies and processes to minimize complexity in these areas and reduce associated workload with reviewing and interpreting these.

APPROVED: The breadth and scale of efficiency activity in progress for 2024-25 and the plans for Workforce Planning.

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AGREED: That as part of the next update to Council on delivery of the People and Culture Strategy further consideration would be given to the recent results of the Culture Conversation to enable Council to reflect on potential impact on the current levels of change and wider engagement across the University.

Minute Closed – Strictly Confidential

63. Strategic Discussion of University Spin-out Activity (CNL/83/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation) to attend the meeting to deliver a strategic update presentation on University Spin-Out Activity. The presentation was tabled on the day and has been filed with the record of the meeting (CNL/83a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

63.1 The University had seen rapid growth in its portfolio of spin-out companies since 2008, but the absolute size of the University's spin-out portfolio remained at the lower end of Russell Group institutions;

63.2 Only a small proportion of the University's income from business engagement activity was generated through IP and spin outs, with more significant income generation achieved through Collaborative Research and Contract Research. By 2030/2031 it was anticipated that 0.5% of BEI income would be generated through IP (including spin out equity sales and IP licensing);

63.3 Across the HE sector more widely, spin outs had high political profile and broader benefits for society through job creation and stimulating the local economy. However, with the exception of a few institutions (such as Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial and UCL) spin outs had historically generated little income for UK Universities;

63.4 Since 2021 Exeter had ranked 21st in the UK and 17th in the Russell Group for the number of spin-outs created. Over the last 3 years of activity for which data is available, Exeter was now joint 11th in the Russell Group for the number of spinouts created. However, when factoring in relative size, resources and capacity the University was joint 5th in the Russell Group the number of spin-outs created per £50m per research income;

63.5 Council noted the most recent spin out success stories for the University, including:

63.5.1 Minviro Ltd which was founded in 2018 and was now a globally recognised provider of Life Cycle Analysis for global companies such as Rio Tinto and Tesla;

63.5.2 SENISCA Ltd which was founded in 2020 following the discovery of a new mechanism involved in cellular ageing whilst undertaking research on gene regulation and RNA splicing;

63.6 Council noted the important civic role of the University in helping to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation in order to help support the wider economic regeneration of the region.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation) for their contribution to the meeting and indicated that they would be invited to attend the discussion on Setsquared and QantX Investment Fund at the subsequent business meeting on 27th February.

64. Chair's Closing Remarks

64.1 The chair thanked members for their contribution to the strategic briefing meeting and noted that there would be a guided tour of the Penryn Campus which would provide an opportunity to see some of the laboratory and learning spaces that would be modified as part of the proposed Penryn 2.0 Business Case being considered on 27th February 2025.