University of Exeter
COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING

MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL

27 February 2025
10.00am-14.10pm
Masters Suite, Penryn Campus (Cornwall)

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

CONTENTS:

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)
Damaris Anderson-Supple	Independent Member
Rebecca Boomer-Clark	Independent Member

Nicholas Cheffings	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Malcolm Skingle	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	Independent Member *(online)*
Sarah Matthews-DeMers	Independent Member
Dr Sarah Hodge	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 ATTENDENCE

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

APOLOGIES

Professor Karen Knapp	Senate Representative
Professor Sue Prince	Senate Representative
Salam Katbi	Independent Member

IN ATTENDANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL AGENDA ITEMS

Minute Item 71 – Admissions Update Stage 2: Late Acquisition and Early Conversion

Professor Richard Follet	Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Global Engagement)
Alicia O'Grady	Executive Divisional Director, External Engagement and Global

Minute Item 72 – TNE China: Full Business Case

Professor Richard Follet	Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Global Engagement)
Alicia O'Grady	Executive Divisional Director, External Engagement and Global
Peter Clack	Director of Global Engagement

Minute Item 74 – Penryn 2.0: Outline Business Case

Professor Martin Siegert Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation)

Minute Item 77 – Update on SETsquared and QantX Investment Fund

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

65. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest

65.1 The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Sue Prince and Karen Knapp;

65.2 The Chair invited any declarations of interest and noted that Glenn Woodcock (who was joining the meeting online via Microsoft Teams) had declared an interest in relation to the following items:

65.2.1 Minute item 75 (Heat Decarbonisation – Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme) on the basis that one of his companies was advising on the procurement of this scheme;

65.2.2 Minute item 77 (Update on SETsquared and QantX Investment Fund) on the basis that one of his companies was a cornerstone investor in QantX.

66. Minutes from the Meetings held on 10 December 2024 (CNL/84/24-25, CNL/84a/24-25 and CNL/84b/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

66.1 Council **APPROVED** the minutes of the meetings of 10 December 2024.

67. Action Log 2024-25 (CNL/85/24-25 and CNL/85a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

67.1 Council received the Action Log for information which had been updated to incorporate the most recent actions from the Council meetings held on 10 December 2024. The current status of the actions were noted.

68. Business Schedule 2024-25 (CNL/86/24-25 and CNL/86a/24-25 Confidential)

68.1 Council received for information the Business Schedule for the Academic Year 2024-25.

69. Chair's Business and Matters Arising

69.1 The Chair provided a verbal update on the following Chair's Business and Matters Arising:

a) Council Meeting: Tuesday 29 April 2025

69.2 The Chair noted that the tentatively scheduled meeting of Council on Tuesday 29th April 2025 would no longer be taking place and provisional holds in diaries could be released. Final approval of a number of time critical items on the agenda would be transacted either via Chair's Action, Email circulation or the Council Standing Committee;

69.3 Council approval of the University's Internal Auditors would also be confirmed via email in April 2025 circulation following completion of the tender process and endorsement by the of the preferred provider by Audit and Risk Committee (27 March 2025). The current contract for the Internal Audit Service was due to expire in July 2025 and a tender process was being undertaken to appoint an Internal Auditor for the next 4 years in compliance with the CUC Higher Education Code of Governance.

Secretary's Note: *Following the completion of a robust tender process and unanimous endorsement by Audit and Risk Committee on 27 March 2025, Council were notified via email on 3 April 2025 of the recommendation to approve PwC as the internal auditors of the University for the next 4 years in accordance with the University's Statutes (Section 10 – Powers of Council). This email correspondence has been filed with the record of the meeting and was also verbally reported to Council on 29 May 2025 under 'Matters Arising'.*

70. President and Vice-Chancellor's Report (CNL/87/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

70.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor advised Council that Professor Tim Quine would be stepping down from his current role as Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) at the end of December 2025 to commence a period of research leave. Council commended Professor Tim Quine for his exceptional contribution to the University which had included: development of the Education Strategy 2019-2025; outstanding leadership in the continued enhancement of education and student experience and collaboration with 10 cohorts of student leaders; championing Degree Apprenticeships and Success for All; establishing the Education Incubator to support development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning; launching the Future17 Sustainable Development Goals Challenge Program; and helping the University to secure TEF Gold 2017 and 2023;

70.2 The recruitment process to appoint a new Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) would commence shortly with final interviews scheduled to be held in June 2025. Rebecca Boomer-Clark would be on the interview panel and Sir Richard Atkins would also be engaged in focus group discussions;

70.3 The leading-edge work undertaken by experts at the University of Exeter's Defence, Security & Resilience network had recently been celebrated at a prestigious event with more than 40 attendees in attendance from across the Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces, Home Office, NCA, Cabinet Office and the Intelligence Community and Defence Industry;

70.4 According to *The Times*, an immigration white paper was expected to be published proposing that students from overseas would be required to secure a 'graduate level' job in order to qualify for the graduate visa, which currently entitled students below PhD level to stay in the UK for two years;

70.5 As part of the University's Arts and Culture Strategy work was being undertaken to broaden engagement with the region, including the development of a cultural passport for students in Cornwall and Exeter to provide them with better links to a wider range of Arts, Theatre and Culture and presented an excellent opportunity for students to be more involved in wider cultural activities across the region;

Closed Minute – Confidential

71. Admissions Update – Stage 2 (Late Acquisition and Early Conversion (CNL/88/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair invited the Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement) and Executive Divisional Director, External Engagement and Global to join the meeting and briefly introduce the Admissions Update Report.

71.1 Whilst it was still too early in the admissions cycle to draw any clear conclusions on the Postgraduate Taught home cycle, there had been a decline in applications from key markets which had resulted in an extremely challenging international recruitment landscape;

71.2 There had been a pronounced decline in applications from China which was unprecedented and was currently impacting the entire sector, albeit the University was less exposed to declines in recruitment from China than other peer institutions;

71.3 A number of external factors outside of the immediate control of the University were impacting on the international student recruitment market (especially PGT students), including: a downturn in the global economic outlook, demographic shifts, currency variations, and increasing concerns surrounding graduate employability and perception of return on investment of a UK qualification;

71.4 There continued to be increased competition both within the UK and other popular study abroad destinations such as Australia, alongside increasingly attractive markets for China (including Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia);

71.5 The level of risk concerning PGT international recruitment was currently considered very high and strategies were being implemented to tackle PG application and conversion challenges as detailed in the paper;

71.6 UEB had approved the expansion of UG targets as one of the measures being deployed to offset major contractions in PGT international. Other counter measures being deployed were the expansion to the online provision, executive education and TNE agreements;

71.7 In the context of a downward international recruitment trends across the sector, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that University had performed relatively positively and had not been impacted as significantly as other peer institutions and held on to a proportional section of the market;

71.8 As the University was the 12th largest home undergraduate recruiter in the UK and the 6th largest in the Russell Group, there were strategic opportunities to capitalise on this strong position;

Closed Minute – Confidential

AGREED: An update on the rationale for the current comparator set of peer institutions that had been identified for wider benchmarking would be brought to Council for discussion and approval in the Academic Year 2025-26.

AGREED: Analysis of how the University ranked in key strategic growth subjects in comparison to other high tariff competitors across a range of league tables would be presented to Council to consider key emerging trends.

AGREED: That the Draft Budget and later year plans would include cost of sale analysis in a separate table or appendix in order to show the average estimate of cost of sales for international students, including a clear breakdown in relation to discounts, fee waivers and agent fees.

AGREED: That long term modelling and trend analysis over time would be undertaken on cost of sale to enable Council to continue to reflect on this on an annual basis and review changes in wider sector trends, including increasing competitiveness in the international student recruitment market and impact on financial margin.

72. TNE China: Full Business Case (CNL/89/24-25 Confidential)

72.1 Council had previously approved in October 2024 the Outline Business Case for a proposal to establish a Joint Education Institute (JEI) in China. The proposed JEI would help to achieve the University's ambition to deliver transnational education (TNE) provision, develop its global brand presence and reputation in China, and diversify international student recruitment activities;

72.2 Five dual degree programmes would be taught under the theme of 'Digital Futures' in areas of strength and alignment with Ministry of Education priorities in Engineering, Digital Communications and Green Technologies;

72.3 In relation to engagement with the staff community:

72.3.1 There had been strong levels of engagement and support for the TNE China initiative from across the wider University and academic community and recognition of the strategic benefits for enhancing the University of Exeter's global visibility, international reputation, and QS World University Ranking position;

72.3.2 Departments and Faculties had been closely involved in the development of the academic plans in alignment with the partnership principles;

72.3.3 Training, development and support would be provided to staff to ensure they had sufficient guidance before working in China. A series of workshops had already been delivered to over c. 600 staff across the University raising awareness and understanding implications of delivering TNE overseas;

72.3.4 A University-wide internal sharepoint site would be developed with a series of FAQs to respond to specific questions. Operating handbooks and additional guidance would also be produced to ensure staff were fully supported and able to navigate any potential issues;

72.3.5 Meetings were being held with Trade Unions in the week commencing 24th February 2025 to inform the development of a policy to support staff whilst delivering TNE overseas;

Closed Minute – Confidential

APPROVED: The Full Business Case for the TNE China Proposal.

Closed Minute – Confidential

73. Second Forecast 2024/25 (CNL/90/24-25 Confidential Commercial in Confidence)

73.1 The Finance and Investment Committee noted the second financial forecast for 2024/25, which projected -£0.47m to the revised budget operating surplus (EBIT) of £6.2m, materially in line with the first forecast.

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

74. Penryn 2.0: Outline Business Case (CNL/91/24-25 and CNL/91a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

74.1 The Penryn 2.0 Capital Investment was aligned with the University's Greener, Healthier and Fairer strategic ambitions and would build on areas of research excellence, enable student numbers to efficiency expanded in Cornwall in key strategic and high margin areas, and support infrastructure investment in the key pillars of microbiology and life science, environment and sustainability, and law and business;

74.2 A review of the strategic delivery approach to Penryn 2.0 was undertaken and presented to UEB in September 2024. The initiative had now been reimagined to embrace learnings from recent capital projects (including ADA developments in Innovation Centres 1 and 2 on the Streatham campus) to achieve original commercial and strategic aims with a significantly reduced financial and carbon cost;

74.3 That the approach towards remodelling the existing estate was materially less environmentally impactful than creating a new structure and would use only a third of the carbon required to develop new buildings;

74.4 The Penryn 2.0 investment would be utilised to modify existing office, laboratory and learning spaces on the campus in Penryn, Cornwall. It would enable the following:

74.4.1 Improvement and expansion of research facilities for microbiology and life sciences to support in plan growth in research income;

74.4.2 Development of the Graduate School of Environment and Sustainability alongside the growth of sustainability focused Undergraduate education;

74.4.3 Enhancement of Business and Law space to underpin efficient in-plan growth in student numbers and improvements to student and staff experience;

74.4.4 Support growth of our institutional reputation and help drive improvements to our league table performance.

Close Minute – Commercial in Confidence

74.6 The following was noted in discussion:

Closed Minute – Confidential

74.6.3 As part of the investment the café in environment and sustainability institute would be refurbished to provide a hub space and improve the wider food offering and facilities available. Further opportunities to improve food production facilities on the Penryn campus would be explored to enhance student health and wellbeing and ensure students were aware of the importance of sustainable management and production of food to protecting the environment and making efficient use of natural resources;

74.6.4 It would be important as part of the Penryn 2.0 project to adopt an innovative approach to remodelling spaces and to identify opportunities to maximise efficient use of space and explore what could be achieved through shared facilities;

74.6.5 The Penryn 2.0 project should be utilised as a leading example to illustrate the importance of aligning with wider University strategic objectives and to showcase the importance of exploring opportunities to achieve overarching ambitions within a significantly reduced financial and carbon cost.

APPROVED: The revised Outline Business Case for Penryn 2.0 to enable further design of the project.

Closed Minute – Confidential

75. Heat Decarbonisation – Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant (CNL/92/24-25 Confidential)

75.1 The University had submitted an application to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) Phase 4 which would provide an opportunity to secure a grant of £8.6m towards the heart decarbonisation programme;

75.2 In July 2024, Council had endorsed an Outline Business Case for the heart decarbonisation programme which had recommended a heat network solution. The University was in the process of progressing the design, costing and procurement of the preferred option with the expectation of presenting the Full Business Case to Council in October 2025;

75.3 The project included building-side heat circuit modifications for 8 buildings to operate at lower heat operating temperatures than existing design parameters and heat network connection fees for the buildings. The scope of the project would enable c. 17.5% of heating contribution saved annually to scope 1 & 2 emissions;

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75.5 The project would be dependent on the 1 Energy heat network being successful, which would required a significant number of city-wide partners signing up to the energy network across the region, including: NHS, Exeter City Council, Exeter College; the University;

75.6 University Council was strongly supportive of continuing to progress the heat decarbonisation network and endorsed the proposed direction of travel, whilst acknowledging the potential risks of accepting the grant and that there would still be an element of uncertainty surrounding the commercial viability of the scheme;

75.7 The following was noted in discussion:

75.7.1 The implementation of the heat network decarbonisation would be challenging and would be one of only a few successful schemes in the Country;

75.7.2 That if successful the scheme could serve as an exemplar of decarbonisation of University estates to the rest of the sector and clearly signal the University's commitment to carbon reduction;

75.7.3 That the grant would provide an excellent strategic opportunity to address current boiler obsolescence and decarbonise buildings that was clearly in alignment with Strategy 2030 ambitions to lead meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis;

75.7.4 The importance of demonstrating leadership by trying to foster strong levels of engagement from wider regional community and city partners;

75.7.5 That the University was in regular dialogue and communication with the legal and project teams in other UK Cities that had successfully implemented a heat decarbonisation network, including: Bristol and Bradford. It was noted that Hull and Milton Keynes were also launching district heating networks;

75.7.6 That it would be helpful to reflect further on the potential longevity of more long-standing heat network schemes in Europe and outside UK to consider longer-term lessons learned;

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75.9 If successful, it was anticipated that an award would be expected by May 2025. As the University would have two weeks to accept the grant ahead of full business case end financial case delegated authority was sought to accept the grant and approve the University's commitment.

AGREED: To Provide Delegated Authority to the Chair of Council (in consultation with the Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary and Chief Financial Officer) to accept £8.6m grant and approve £5.5m University of Exeter commitment if successfully awarded the grant.

Secretary's Note: *The University was successfully awarded a £8.6m grant and the Chair of Council* *approved acceptance of this via Chair's Delegated Authority on 4 April 2025 in consultation with the Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary and the Chief Financial Officer.*

76. Long Term Maintenance Programme Outturn (CNL/93/24-25 Confidential)

76.1 In response to the ongoing financial pressures and following a risk-based assessment of proposed works, a revised Long-Term maintenance budget of c. £6.7m was established for the 2023/24 budget;

76.2 The programme assessment for 2024/25 included items deferred from 2023/24, together with new projects identified in-year, either through feedback from Direct Works or relevant surveys;

76.3 In addition to the Long-Term Maintenance programme, the University also invested c. £20-£30m of pre-emptive work of replacement and refurbishment programmes to the existing estate to minimize level of long-term maintenance;

76.4 The following was noted in discussion:

76.4.1 In spite of the continuing financial pressures facing the sector it would be important to continue to focus on addressing long-term maintenance to avoid accumulating a big programme of back-log maintenance work;

76.4.2 It was important to adopt a holistic approach to long-term maintenance in the context of the University's budget and capital plan and to continue to explore opportunities to refurbish and refresh spaces rather than investing in new buildings;

76.4.3 The last campus wide RICS survey had been undertaken in 2022 which informed the ongoing approach to the long-term maintenance plan;

76.5 It was recognised the maintenance repairs required for the Great Hall would be complex and challenging to deliver a return on investment as it was unlikely to drive step change in the overall value or commercial return. Opportunities to secure third party funding would be explored for this in due course.

77. SETsquared and QantX Fund Update (CNL/94/24-25 Confidential)

The Chair invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation) to join the meeting and briefly introduce the update paper.

77.1 The SETsquared partner universities had been continuing to explore opportunities to develop a collaborative investment fund to support spinouts and innovative businesses with regional venture capital firm QantX;

77.2 The initiative would be a collaboration bringing together the investment industry expertise of regional Venture Capital Firm QantX, with the innovation pipeline and support expertise of the SETsquared Partnership;

77.3 The new investment vehicle would help drive a step change in the capital, expertise and support available to University spin-outs and start-up companies in the region and catalyse the creation and growth of science and technology companies to address global challenges in areas aligned with Strategy 2030, such as sustainability, clean energy and transformative healthcare;

77.4 The ambition for the fund was that it would be of similar scale to the investment vehicles announced by Northern Gritstone and Midlands Mindforge (c. £300m) and support businesses at all stages of maturity from pre-seed to growth. However, the proposed fund had the advantage of not requiring the universities to surrender any proportion of their equity in the spinout companies to the fund;

77.5 The paper set out progress made towards securing a full contractual agreement since signing Heads of Terms between QantX and the SETsquared universities. Council remained strongly supportive of the proposed partnership between SETsquared and Qantx and reaffirmed that it was an important strategic initiative that was clearly aligned with the ambitions of Strategy 2030 would help to drive innovation, regional growth and productivity in the South-West and regional ecosystem;

77.6 The following was noted in discussion:

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77.6.3 It was understood QantX were interested in the opportunity to partner with SETsquared universities as it provided a highly sought-after opportunity to engage with research-intensive universities and provided them with right of first sight in identifying early-stage commercial spin-out opportunities to drive innovation;

77.6.4 It would be important to foster a culture of entrepreneurialism amongst the academic community and to identify individuals who had potential ideas for a spin out and ensure they were actively encouraged and provided with sufficient guidance and support;

77.6.5 In addition to spin out opportunities, the University should continue to explore wider commercialisation opportunities including enabling access to University's strategic advice and expertise;

77.6.6 Whilst the University had c. 34 live spin-outs at the moment it was not possible to place an accurate value on the overall value of the spin-out portfolio as this was at an early stage;

ENDORSED: Council endorsed continued engagement with QantX and direction of travel towards establishing a fund, whilst noting that further scrutiny and endorsement of the full legal framework agreement by Finance and Investment Committee and Council (or Council Standing Committee) would be required prior to being approved and signed by all Parties.

78. University Terms and Academic Calendar 2025-26 (CNL/95/24-25 Confidential)

78.1 The University Terms and Academic Calendar 2025-26 was close to being finalised, subject to a few dates and times of meetings being updated following further consultation with Chairs;

78.2 The Committee Secretariat had circulated diary invites to all members of Council for the provisional dates and times of meetings which would be updated with any final changes ahead of the new academic year 2025-26;

ENDORSED: The proposed University Terms and Academic Calendar 2025-26 to Senate (12 March 2025) prior to final circulation to Council via e-circulation for final approval.

79. Chair's Closing Remarks

79.1 The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the meeting and indicated that the next meetings of Council would be held on the 26th and 27th February 2025.

80. Part II – Items For Approval

80.1 In accordance with the previously agreed practice, the Chair confirmed that the following items in Part II (For Decision) had been formally **APPROVED** by Council, including:

80.1.1 Draft Student Guild and Financial Accounts (CNL/96/24-25)

80.1.2 Baring Crescent Garden – St Luke's Title Rectification (CNL/97/24-25)

80.1.3 Updated Delegation Framework (CNL/98/24-25)

80.1.4 Updated Financial Regulations (CNL/99/24-25)

80. Part II – Items (For Approval)

The following items were received in Part II by Council for information:

80.1.1 Arts and Culture Annual Report (CNL/100/24-25)

80.1.2 Affixing the Seal (CNL/101/24-25)

80.1.3 Capital Management Group Report (CNL/102/24-25)

80.1.4 Strategic Investment Committee Report (CNL/103/24-25)