



University of Exeter

COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING

MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL

29 May 2025

10.30am-3.15pm

Council Chamber, Northcote House

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

CONTENTS:

No: Item:

- 24.99 Chair's Welcome, Introduction and Declarations of Interest
- 24.100 Minutes from the meetings of Council on 26th and 27th February 2025
- 24.101 Action Log 2024-25
- 24.102 Chair's Business and Council Matters Arising
 - a) Council Member Recruitment 2024-25
 - b) University Trustees
 - c) Internal Audit Services Appointment
 - d) TNE China
 - e) Heat Decarbonisation – Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant
 - f) Council Committee dates 2026-27
- 24.103 Chair's Business Schedule AY 2024-25
- 24.104 President and Vice-Chancellor's Report
- 24.105 Curriculum for Change: Termly Progress Report
- 24.106 Assessment and Feedback: Key Findings and Recommendations
- 24.107 Academic Performance Management
- 24.108 Verbal Update from the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee
- 24.109 Third Financial Forecast
- 24.110 Draft Budget 2025-26 and Later Year Plans
- 24.111 INTO Financial Recovery Plan
- 24.112 Engineering 2030: Full Business Case
- 24.113 Chair's Closing Remarks
- 24.114 Part II – Items (For Approval)
- 24.115 Part II – Items (For Information)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Quentin Woodley

Sir Richard Atkins

Sally Cabrini

Professor Lisa Roberts

Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council

Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair of Council

Pro-Chancellor and Senior Independent Governor

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
Nicholas Cheffings	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Salam Katbi	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Malcolm Skingle	Independent Member
Tim Weller	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	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
Ali Chambers	Chief Executive Officer, Exeter Students' Guild
Dr Jeremy Diaper	Director of Governance Services (minutes)
Imelda Rogers	Deputy Registrar and Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources
APOLOGIES	
Sarah Matthews-DeMers	Independent Member
Rebecca Boomer-Clark	Independent Member

99. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest

99.1 The Chair welcomed Council members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Rebecca Boomer-Clark and Sarah Matthews De-Mers.

99.2 The Chair invited any declarations of interest and noted that no new declarations of interest had been received in relation to items on the agenda.

100. Minutes from the Meetings held on 26 February and 27 February 2025 (CNL/112/24-25, CNL/112a/24-25, CNL/113/24-25, CNL/113a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

100.1 Council **APPROVED** the minutes of the meetings held on 26 February and 27 February 2025.

101. Action Log 2024-25 (CNL/113/24-25 and CNL/113a/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

101.1 Council received the Action Log for information which had been updated to incorporate the most recent actions from the Council meetings held on 26 and 27 February 2025. The current status of the actions were noted.

102. Chair's Business and Matters Arising

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

a) Council Member Recruitment 2024-25

102.2 Following a rigorous recruitment search supported by Odgers Berndtson and final due diligence process as detailed in the Part II Paper on Council Member Recruitment (CNL/125/24-25), Governance and Nominations Committee unanimously endorsed to Council via e-circulation the recommended nominations to appoint the following individuals as Independent Members of Council (Class II) for a first term of office from 1 August 2025 – 31 July 2028;

102.2.1 **Gareth Mostyn** (Former Chief Executive, Church Commissioners for England (2020-25) and current Non-Executive Director of South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust)

102.2.2 **Nigel Cain** (Former Global Vice-President and Senior Partner, Hybrid Cloud Services – Azure IBM Consulting)

102.2.3 **Lauren Aste** (Currently Executive Vice-President, Chief Legal Officer and Company Secretary for CWT - formerly Carlson Wagonlit Travel)

APPROVED: The appointment of Gareth Mostyn as an Independent Member of Council (Class II) for a first term of office from 1 August 2025 – 31 August 2028;

APPROVED: The appointment of Nigel Cain as an Independent Member of Council (Class II) for a first term of office from 1 August 2025 – 31 August 2028;

APPROVED: The appointment of Lauren Aste as an Independent Member of Council (Class II) for a first term of office from 1 August 2025 – 31 August 2028;

102.3 Whilst Council was strongly supportive of the nominated candidates and recognised the exceptional high-calibre of individuals that continued to be recruited to the University's

Council, a query was raised in relation to the approaches being undertaken to enhance the visible BAME diversity on Council;

- 102.4 The Chair of Council affirmed that Odgers had been provided with a clear steer that identifying a pool of diverse candidates had been a key requirement of both the Digital Transformation and Legal searches. The Chair of Council and Director of Governance Services had monitored this carefully in their fortnightly briefing calls and for both the Legal and Digital recruitment searches diverse candidates were shortlisted;
- 102.5 In relation to the legal search, 6 diverse candidates proposed by Nicholas Cheffings had been put forward to Odgers for consideration, along with 2 candidates identified by the Assistant Director (Culture and Inclusion) all of whom were either alumni or graduates within the Law School.
- 102.6 Odgers had advised that the geography of the University and lack of remuneration for Independent Council member roles had made it challenging to engage diverse candidates. It was also recognised that the increasing challenges facing the Higher Education sector had also made it harder to attract prospective candidates;
- 102.7 The Chair of Council and Director of Governance Services continued to proactively explore opportunities to diversify the membership of the University Council and continue to reflect on innovative approaches to engage diverse candidates with appropriate board level experience, professional expertise and highlight the exciting opportunity that joining Council presented;
- 102.8 Whilst it remained common practice within the Russell Group not to remunerate Independent Members for their roles on Council, it was noted that it was becoming increasingly common for non-Russell Group institutions to do so in order to attract high-calibre Independent members and this would also continue to be reflected upon moving forwards.

b) University Trustees

St Luke's College Foundation Trustee Board

- 102.9 Following endorsement by Governance and Nominations Committee via e-circulation, Council was asked to approve the nominated appointment of Dr Tom Begbie (Director of Faculty Operations, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences) to succeed Dr Michael Wykes as one of the University's nominated trustees on the St Luke's College Foundation Trustee Board for a five-year term of office.

APPROVED: Tom Begbie (Director of Faculty Operations, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences) as a University nominated trustee on St Luke's College Foundation Trustee Board for a five-year term-of office, from 1 June 2025 – 31 May 2030.

Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust

- 102.10 The Chair notified Council that he had approved via Chair's action the nomination for the appointment of Shades Chaudhary (Assistant Director, Culture and Inclusion and former Council Member - Class IV) to become a member of the Ted Wragg Multi Academy Trust Board of Trustees, which had resulted in their formal appointment under their scheme of

delegation in February 2025.

Additional University Trustee Vacancies

- 102.11 The Chair noted that following Governance and Nominations Committee recommended nomination of other University Trustees on 29 May 2025, a paper would be presented to Council (10 July 2025) to formally endorse these appointments.

c) Internal Auditors Appointment

- 102.12 In accordance with the University's Statutes (Section 10 – Powers of Council) and following the completion of a robust tender process and unanimous endorsement by Audit and Risk Committee on 27 March 2025, Council approved via email (3 April 2025) the recommendation to re-appoint PwC as the internal auditors of the University for the next 4 years once the current contract for had expired in July 2025. The email correspondence has been filed with the record the meeting;

d) TNE China Update

- 102.13 Further to endorsement of the Outline Business Case in October 2024 (CNL/23/24-25) and approval of the Full Business Case in February 2025 (CNL/89c/24-25), the Council Standing Committee subsequently met on 2nd April 2025 and 8th April 2025 as previously discussed and agreed to review and endorse the legal agreements for TNE China;
- 102.14 Council would receive a progress update on the TNE Egypt proposal at the forthcoming meeting in July and lessons learned from TNE China would feed into the approval process for future TNE projects;
- 102.15 The approval of the TNE China Outline Business Case followed additional discussion, assurance from Mills and Reeve and confirmation that:
- 102.15.1 outstanding matters in the Negotiation Areas Tracker had been addressed,
- 102.15.2 external assurance had been undertaken on legal documentation by a full-licensed Law firm in the People's Republic of China (including Co-Operation Agreement, JEI Charter, and Programme Fee Agreement);

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

e) Heat Decarbonisation – Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant

- 102.15.4 Further to Finance and Investment Committee and Council endorsement in February 2025, the Chair advised that he had approved via Chair's action on 4 April 2025 the signing of the successful grant award letter for the £8.6m Heat Decarbonisation Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) funding to support our infrastructure decarbonisation work. On behalf of Council, the Chair congratulated The Chief Financial Officer and colleagues in Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services for this excellent achievement;

Closed Minute – Commercial Services

f) Council Committee dates 2026-27

102.15.6 The Chair advised that Council committee dates for 2025-26 were approved and circulated to Council for information. All diary invitations will be updated according to the final dates and Governance Services colleagues would be in touch shortly with provisional dates for the following Academic Year 2026-27 to help members plan other diary commitments.

103. Business Schedule 2024-25 (CNL/115/24-25 and CNL/115a/24-25 Confidential)

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

104. President and Vice-Chancellor's Report (CNL/116/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

104.1 The University would be hosting the next Worldwide Universities Network (WUN) Annual General Meeting, which was scheduled to take place in June 2026. This would present an excellent opportunity to welcome the President and Vice-Chancellor-led delegations from 24 global partner universities;

104.2 The University had formalised its commitment to deeper academic engagement by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Pretoria (UP) during the World University Network (WUN) General Meeting in Hong Kong. The Memorandum of Understanding established a strong foundation for future collaboration in areas of mutual Interest;

104.3 The University had recently hosted a number of high-profile ministerial visits, including:

104.3.1 The Rt Hon Baroness Smith, Minister of State (Minister for Skills) in the Department of Education;

104.3.2 Lord Vallance, Minister of State (Minister for Science), who had announced during his visit the University's MetaHub, a pioneering new research collective designed to spearhead the UK's world-leading and cutting-edge 3D nanoscale metamaterials science. Metahub would be supported by £19.6m in public and private funding;

104.4 The UPP Foundation had announced that the winner of the inaugural Student Sustainability Fund was 'Stitch by Stitch', a fashion project led by students at the University of Exeter to make Exeter's fashion eco-system more circular and sustainable;

104.5 The Department for Education's National Review of Higher Education Student Suicide Deaths had been published in May 2025, including findings from an examination of serious incident reports of suspected suicide deaths and incidents of non-fatal self harms submitted by higher education providers for the academic year 2023 – 2024. The review had been examined to identify any elements of sector best practice or lessons learned. The majority of the recommendations were already embedded within institutional approaches;

Commercial in Confidence – Strictly Confidential

105. Curriculum for Change Update (CNL/117/24-25 Strictly Confidential)

The Chair welcomed Professor Beverley Hawkins (Dean of Taught Students) and Clare Wydell (Divisional Director of Education and Academic Services) to the meeting and invited the Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) to introduce the update on Curriculum for Change.

- 105.1 Curriculum for Change (C4C) was a significant, institution-wide curriculum transformation programme focused on undergraduate portfolio, with three core objectives:
 - 105.1.1 Delivering a distinctive model of education at Exeter that improves equity and enhances the employability of graduates;
 - 105.1.2 Creating a sustainable model that allows the University to deliver programmes within the constraints of UG Home fees;
 - 105.1.3 Optimising the use of the University's infrastructure and ensure readiness for the future;
- 105.2 There were five components to Curriculum for Change that were being progressed across the institution in relation to the Programme Review; Belonging and Transition; Minors; Skills Framework; and Employability Opportunities;
- 105.3 The Curriculum for Change programme would enable a holistic approach to the development of a distinctive education portfolio that was highly attractive to prospective international and home students and could be delivered efficiently and sustainably with sufficient margin to sustain the University's research portfolio (demonstrated by an improved level of teaching cost recovery);
- 105.4 The success of the Curriculum for Change programme would also be reflected across Graduate Outcomes (including continuation, completion and progression), and student experience (via the National Student Survey) placing us in the best position to retain our TEF triple Gold status;
- 105.5 A critical area of focus would be in relation to improving Graduate Outcomes, driving down awarding gaps and improving the market attractiveness of our portfolio especially to underserved and international students;
- 105.6 Council recognised the strategic importance of the C4C programme and welcomed the enhanced clarity surrounding the programme objectives and additional levels of information included in the C4C roadmap (Appendix A);
- 105.7 Through the 2024/25 Teaching Excellence Monitoring meetings (TEMs), Departments were systematically working through the design principles with every department to establish readiness, opportunities and challenges;
- 105.8 In relation to the Skills Framework:
 - 105.8.1 Students would be able to study future careers focused 'minors' alongside their major subject area, an enhanced suite of employability opportunities and placements and,

through the Exeter Skills Framework, would be aware of how their programmes build desirable skills and experiences;

- 105.8.2 The Exeter Skills Framework would be embedded across Departments to assist students with skills-mapping to boost graduate employment and career success. The Skills Framework had initially launched earlier this year and a number of Departments were already undertaking skills mapping,
- 105.8.3 Whilst it was recognised that some elements of Curriculum for Change were already being implemented across certain Departments (eg Physics and Law), the totality of the programme had not yet been implemented and the explicit application of the skills framework more widely would enable Departments to better articulate graduate prospects and ensure broader readiness across the institution in changing modes of teaching delivery;
- 105.8.4 A suite of 'with proficiency' opportunities were already being offered to some current students, including the 'with proficiency in Data Science' which was launched to students in 2024/25 following the ADA investment. This portfolio of 'with proficiency' opportunities was being revised and repackaged as minors, and along with a new set of minors in leadership management, sustainable solutions, law, and entrepreneurship would be launched and promoted in 2025/26;
- 105.8.5 In relation to the physics curriculum redesign it would be important to encourage conversations on the development of softer skills and ensuring that students were developing a wider set of employability skills and behaviours beyond a technical skillset;
- 105.8.6 That it would be important to seek feedback from employers on the development of the Skills Framework to ensure this was closely aligned with the requirements of the modern workplace and development of soft skills;
- 105.8.7 The Skills Framework would be mapped to module learning outcomes to ensure the development of soft skills were embedded within the design and assessment of core modules and ensure students were developing appropriate employability skills;
- 105.8.8 The Skills Framework had been developed by the Business School and piloted over the last 5 years. Its development had been informed by wider stakeholder engagement and feedback from employers, alumni, and statutory and regulatory bodies;
- 105.8.9 There had also been an opportunity to elicit feedback from school and further education leaders on the Skills Framework and potential skills gaps as part of a series of roundtable panel discussions;
- 105.8.10 That it would be important to consider how the development of the Skills Framework could be integrated into the development of Degree Apprenticeships, Executive Education and Lifelong Learning and be embedded for students who may want to gain employability experience internationally. The focus within the C4C programme on inclusion, belonging and transition to University was particularly important for the international student cohort. Further consideration would be given to developing the resources and materials to enable students studying on INTO Pathways to benefit and enhance their transition to the University;

105.8.11 Further opportunities could also be given to embedding the Skills Framework and skills mapping tool within the postgraduate portfolio once the curriculum management system had been successfully implemented;

105.8.12 That it would be important to continue to undertake a review of lessons learned of the early pilots undertaken in Departments to develop a clear understanding of the benefits of skills required to succeed in the workplace, the latest market demand and industry need. Continue engagement and dialogue with alumni would also be valuable to gain a detailed understanding of the skills and experiences required from employers;

105.9 In relation to the Curriculum Management System:

105.9.1 The Curriculum Management System was an important enabling project that would enhance the pace of implementation of curriculum changes and provide the necessary workflows and reporting to enable the University to amend programmes and modules;

105.9.2 A number of C4C components were already being made available to students and a small number of programmes were making earlier progress in implementing the elements of the new model;

105.10 In relation to financial sustainability:

105.10.1 The financial efficiencies associated with the C4C programme had not yet been built into the budget and financial planning progress, but there was an opportunity to embed this within future years;

Closed Minute - Confidential

105.11 The following was noted in discussion:

105.11.1 In relation to the physics curriculum redesign it would be important to encourage conversations on the development of softer skills and ensuring that students were developing a wider set of employability skills and behaviours beyond the technical to enhance their employability;

105.11.2 That being able to facilitate placement opportunities for students as part of the Curriculum for Change would be particularly important in helping students develop their employability skills, as there was increasing evidence to indicate employers were providing less of these opportunities in light of enhanced focus on cost efficiencies and need to maintain fast-paced business operations in a challenging external landscape. Whilst it would not be possible to guarantee work placements for all students a portfolio offer would be offered to expand the equity of opportunity and help students build confidence and experience for their future careers. A Year in industry had started to be rolled out as part of certain postgraduate taught programmes in the Business School;

105.11.3 In a series of stakeholder engagement activities with further education and sixth form leaders it was highlighted that there was an increasing need for students to develop their wider employability and soft skills, including: punctuality; organisational skills; professionalism; managing competing priorities; and customer facing skills;

- 105.11.4 The Curriculum for Change programme would embed a diverse and holistic portfolio of elements, including: live organisational challenges, volunteering opportunities, and a work experience workstream to broaden placements which would aim to build up students' confidence to embark on their work journey;
- 105.11.5 The C4C Programme had continued to be shaped by the student and academic community through a series of deep-dives and wider consultation and engagement activities to ensure would continue to be evolved and shaped by the needs of students;
- 105.11.6 It would be important to encourage students to understand and recognise the value of undertaking junior part time roles alongside their study in developing their work experience, wider professional development, and employability skills;
- 105.11.7 That the Curriculum for Change programme would be particularly beneficial to students from underrepresented backgrounds and to provide them with a broad set of different experiences to enrich their perspectives and enable development of relevant experiences to enter the working world and enhance their CV;
- 105.11.8 Whilst careful consideration had been given to the possibility of enabling students to gain accreditation for evidential skills developed in paid roles, it had been decided it was better to ensure there was the opportunity for students to develop employability skills within the Curriculum for Change programme and embed a direct link back to learning outcomes. This would ensure the University's degrees were still seen to deliver value for money alongside additional opportunities;
- 105.11.9 It was recognised that had been some concern raised in the academic community about the Curriculum for Change programme, especially around the workload involved in making changes, cadence of the academic year, module uncapping and requests for clarity on how the minors will run. Following detailed consultation and engagement the tone of discussions had moved away from a focus on the rationale for change towards timescales, implementation and approach to delivery. It was recognised that there remained a small number of individuals who were not fully supportive of the proposals, but they nevertheless understood the wider rationale for curriculum reform. There remained continued opportunity to facilitate more detailed discussion, thereby enabling Departments to engage in meaningful co-creation in the iterative design and development the programme in partnership with students, staff in academic and professional services, and informed by continued consultation with wider stakeholders;
- 105.12 In relation to relation to wider communications and messaging:
- 105.12.1 That developing clear and consistent communications over the next 12-18 months would be important to highlight continued strategic impetus and ensure the University's staff community remained bought into the wider strategic change required across the institution;
- 105.12.2 Communications were being developed in consultation with the Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global to ensure expert insight into the development of University-wide communications on wider ethos, strategic intention and

broader benefits to academic staff to secure strong engagement and buy in across the wider University community prior to full implementation of the programme;

- 105.12.3 Discussions were ongoing with admissions and recruitment colleagues and an extensive piece of work was underway to inform how Curriculum for Change would be presented to prospective students. A large communications campaign around the launch of Curriculum for Change was due to be brought to schools and colleges and would be incorporated as part of the recruitment activities in the next academic year.

ACTION: To schedule the Curriculum for Change Communications Plan for review and input from Council in Academic Year 2025-26.

ENDORSED: The approach and plan to deliver the Curriculum for Change Programme.

NOTED: The further engagement that would be undertaken with Senate (18 June 2025) and Departments.

The Chair thanked Professor Beverley Hawkins (Dean of Taught Students) and Clare Wydell (Divisional Director of Education and Academic Services) for their contribution to the meeting and invited them to leave.

106. Assessment and Feedback: Key Findings and Recommendations (CNL/118/24-25 Confidential)

- 106.1 The Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) introduced the paper to Council. Following a series of three deep dives chaired by Sir Richard Atkins exploring Assessment and Feedback conducted during the Autumn Term in 2024, the paper outlined the key recommendations in relation to assessment and feedback which were focused on four thematic areas:

106.1.1 Improved monitoring and implementation of current and ongoing practice;

106.1.2 Embedding best-practice assessment design and efficiency;

106.1.3 Ensuring systems supporting assessment are fit for purpose;

106.1.4 Communication

- 106.2 Given the continued institutional focus on improving Assessment and Feedback that had been sustained over several years, Council sought further assurance as to how the recommendations would successfully be implemented and what would be undertaken differently to the previous approach to secure widespread-institutional buy-in from the academic community and consistency applications from the recommendations. The following was noted in response:

- 106.2.1 That historically the performance-related discussions had not received the level of focus required, but that there was now a renewed commitment to holding Head of Departments to account through more structured and consistent oversight;

- 106.2.2 UEB would be ensuring that there was a clear institutional focus on assessment and feedback and embedding this as a clear institution-wide priority;
- 106.2.3 It was recognised that there had previously been inconsistent application of the 3 week turnaround as in some areas of the University there had been a tacit assumption that as a result of high workloads there may be occasions when deadlines may be missed. Institutional processes would also be refined and enhanced to ensure that any Departmental variation or inconsistency was clearly identified and addressed;
- 106.2.4 There would be a greater emphasis on Heads of Department setting clearer expectations and taking greater ownership and accountability for ensuring these were followed through;
- 106.2.5 That there was a clearer understanding of current performance across Departments and programmes and particular areas where improvement in assessment and feedback was required to enable sustained improvement in NSS performance;
- 106.2.6 Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors would also be working closely with Heads of Department to ensure that there was a clear and consistent institution-wide focus on improving assessment and feedback across Faculties and Departments;
- 106.2.7 Faculty Executive Boards would provide an additional mechanism for enhanced monitoring and scrutiny of assessment and feedback performance in specific Departments;
- 106.2.8 In providing a clear steer to Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Heads of Department of the strategic significance and institutional focus on assessment and feedback this would help ensure issues were clearly prioritised and addressed as part of PDRs;
- 106.2.9 It was anticipated that the recent appointment of a suite of new Heads of Departments over the last 18-24 months would help to successfully embed institutional performance;
- 106.3 Council acknowledged that addressing the issues in relation to assessment and feedback across the University would require increased staff training and support, enhanced digital processes and systems for staff. In particular, the Committee highlighted the importance of reflecting further on the specific training and digital upskilling which could be provided to assist staff with more efficient module design and any technological enhancements that could be utilised to improve assessment and feedback turnaround times;
- 106.4 One of the key challenges included the level of inconsistency in approach across Departments and the lack of consistent compliance with institutional policy and previously agreed recommendations;
- 106.5 Ineffective co-ordination of communications between academic staff, student hub and students had sometimes resulted in a lack of clarity for students about assessment deadlines and timeframes for receipt of feedback;
- 106.6 The Guild and Students' Union representatives affirmed that there had been positive student input and engagement and that the key recommendations within the report had captured the most significant student issues and concerns that had been raised;

- 106.7 Encouraging students to adopt a holistic approach to assessment and feedback and ensure that feedback from earlier modules continued to inform approach to future assessments at the University and
- 106.8 In relation to Generative AI and Assessment:
- 106.8.1 the University utilised Turnitin plagiarism software to help protect against plagiarism and student collusion and safeguard the institution's reputation and detect of instances of academic misconduct. The University had adopted AI categorisation for module leaders to choose the most applicable approach to AI in their modules based on assessment design, which ranged from 'AI prohibited' through to 'AI supported' and 'AI integrated'.
 - 106.8.2 Initially a lot of assessments had been classified as 'AI prohibited' because they had been designed before the advent of AI. Students were required to submit an 'AI declaration form' to indicate whether they had made use of AI in their assessments;
 - 106.8.3 The University's New AI Policy and Capability had been developed with input from PwC and academic experts to enable AI to be utilised and included sustainability recommendations, actions to follow and provided support pathways and options for AI applications as well as guidance on data classifications;
 - 106.8.4 Design of assessment would be focused in future on enabling an AI augmented and to encourage students to utilise AI to be able to develop digital skills and future-proofed expertise;
 - 106.8.5 While AI technology presented many opportunities to educators, it was also recognised it posed a risk to academic integrity and that it therefore remained vital that the University provided sufficient guidance to students about how to use Gen AI tools critically, ethically and responsibly;
 - 106.8.6 The Taught programmes handbook both for the 23/24 and 24/25 Academic Years had been updated to make it clear to students that the use of text or ideas obtained from an AI tool should be acknowledged in the same way as those taken from human authors. Concerns about the misuse of AI were addressed via the same processes as alleged Academic Misconduct;
 - 106.8.7 Developing a series of assessment norms and embedding this within all induction materials for academic staff, including refreshed training at the outset of the academic year to instil clear expectations on the type of assessment to set and examples of how to develop this type of assessment;
- 106.9 Council noted the critical importance of ensuring the recommendations enabled significant improvement in institutional performance in NSS 2026 and TEF 2027. They questioned whether the recommended changes would deliver a measurable improvement in NSS scores in 2026, and if there were any additional recommendations or interventions that would potentially need to be introduced if there was a further drop in institutional performance in NSS 2025. It was noted that a focus on assessment and feedback would help improve student learning

106.10 It was also noted that as larger departments were disproportionately affected by the three-week turnaround due to the increased volume of marking, it would be helpful to develop more targeted interventions for particularly large departments (eg Psychology / Law / Management) to help accelerate the necessary improvements.

106.11 The following was noted in discussion:

106.11.1 That it would be important as part of the development of students' employability skills they were also provided with guidance on how to process more negative feedback and deal with the uncertainty of assignment questions that may have an element of uncertainty to help enhance their soft skills for the workplace including resilience, self agency and ability to manage tight deadlines;

106.11.2 Additional institutional resources and information were in the process of being developed to support Heads of Department. Further consideration would also be given to any additional training and development that could be provided to Heads of Department to provide them with additional support, help and guidance to help embed institutional improvement in relation to assessment and feedback.

106.11.3 The Student Guild Survey Superheroes survey on feedback had contributed to the findings within the paper and there was clarity around key issues to be addressed but it would be critical to embed tangible improvements through effective implementation of the recommendations.

106.11.4 That it would be important as part of the enhanced approach to assessment and feedback to encourage students to students to critically reflect on the mark they would give themselves and the rationale;

106.11.5 That staff should be encouraged to engage in proactive communications to mitigate the potential impact of any late feedback submitted through unforeseen and unavoidable issues.

106.12 As larger departments were disproportionately affected by the three-week turnaround due to the increased volume of marking, it would be helpful to develop more targeted interventions for particularly large departments (eg Psychology / Law / Management) to help accelerate the necessary improvements. Furthermore, it was proposed by the Senate representative that it would be helpful to distinguish in large Departments where there were longstanding performance issues with meeting the 3 week turnaround, versus any recent issues related to individual staff sickness which had impacted on the ability to complete marking in sufficient time. Similarly, it was indicated that it would be important to ensure there were appropriate mechanisms to identify staff to undertake marking in an agile fashion and cover for staff on sick leave;

106.13 The Student Representatives affirmed that student belonging within individual Departments was a key driver for enhancing the sense of community across the wider University community and would help to improve NSS scores and overall institutional performance. It was recognised that whilst the NSS focused on a specific set of questions across core areas, the results often captured a broader strength of feeling around inclusion and belonging and

that this informed student responses.

APPROVED: The implementation of the recommendations from the assessment and feedback deep dives and implementation of these through Departments and Faculties.

APPROVED: The Education and Student Experience Executive Committee (EdSEEC) acting as the responsible body for overseeing the recommendations and accountability to UEB for providing regular updates.

ACTION: Further consideration would be given to embedding short engagement surveys at the end of specific modules within the virtual learning environment to encourage students to critically reflect on their knowledge, understanding development as part of the module and reflect on how feedback has helped to improve their work;

ACTION: Further consideration would be given to the development of standardised Assessment and Feedback templates for all staff, including prompts for markers to highlight 3 things to improve on for future assessments, an estimated word length for summary of feedback, and positive academic practice to continue to embed in future assessment.

107. Academic Performance Management (CNL/119/24-25 Confidential Commercial in Confidence)

107.1 The paper set out how Faculties and Departments monitored, reviewed and managed individual academic performance in line with the University's Exeter Academic framework and operational and strategic priorities. This included an outline of the University's expected performance criteria by academic job family and grade, along with how this performance was monitored and reviewed by line managers via the annual Performance and Development Review Process

107.2 The paper also detailed the formal and informal stages of the performance management process and example of how individual academic performance was managed in relation to education and student experience;

107.3 The following was noted in discussion:

107.3.1 Managing individual academic performance presented distinctive challenges in comparison to the corporate sector in light of the breadth of specific responsibilities across education, research, business engagement and leadership and the fact that the balance of performance across these areas could vary according to their academic job family, specific role and particular stage of career progression;

107.3.2 As Heads of Department and Directors of Education and Student Experience played a key role in monitoring and managing performance in relation to student academic experience, quality of teaching and assessment, awarding gaps and graduate outcomes, it would be important to ensure that there was a continued focus on training and development to ensure staff had appropriate skills to address any areas of underperformance and deal with this effectively through informal mechanisms;

107.3.3 That it was recognised the approach to line management varied according to the size of the Department. In a small number of larger Departments, academic line management would sit

with Deputy Head of Department in some instances, but the Head of Department and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor would still continue to be consulted and engaged with in relation to academic performance management issues in an advisory capacity;

107.3.4 As part of the delivery of the Future Structures Programme, line management had been carefully addressed and considered. Historically, there had been up to 40 Heads of Department in larger departments, but with the introduction of greater consistency surrounding Heads of Department, Deputy Heads of Department and Senior Academic Leads, this had reduced the spans of control to no more than c. 8-10 per individual.

107.3.5 Whilst it was recognised that some academic leaders across the institution may have greater spans of control and higher levels of staff to manage, this was partly attributable to the fact that there was an issue with senior staff they would be highly independent and self-sufficient, whereas more junior staff may have greater challenges with line management. It was also highlighted that academic staff also had access to wider mentoring and support from across their Department and Faculty with a number of senior colleagues who could provide operational or professional advice, including Directors of Education and Student Experience and Directors of Research and Impact;

107.3.6 Line managers were encouraged to instil a supportive process which encouraged early interventions into performance management concerns via 1-2-1 or PDR discussions and to adopt a coaching style to regularly review performance alongside professional and personal development;

107.3.7 The PDR process was a supportive process, which was not just focused on performance, but also wider issues of development, wellbeing and support. All staff were asked to confirm that they had received a PDF and to indicate if they had found it helpful;

107.3.8 A programme of upskilling line managers to enhance performance management during University-wide change management processes was underway to help ensure adherence to Curriculum for Change principles and implementation of the programme across Departments and Faculties;

107.3.9 It was recognised that a dedicated developmental programme and bespoke performance management training would need to be designed as the University evolved the educational provision and specific skills were increasingly required for new staff recruited to deliver online education, TNE, CPD/Executive Education, Microcredentials and Degree Apprenticeships;

107.3.10 That the dynamic between academic staff and line managers was occasionally more challenging to manage with particularly senior academic members of staff who may have been recognised as world-leading in their field and perceived to have achieved level of individual autonomy;

107.3.11 In recognition that there had only been 8 non-confirmation of probation cases brought forward under the formal procedure in 3 academic years, it was highlighted that this was partly attributable to the fact that the probation period for academic staff on education and research contracts was 3 years

- 107.3.12 That there are exciting digital opportunities and potential to enhance learning and development provision across Academic and Professional Services to integrate the latest advances in technology within teaching design and delivery. Opportunities were being explored to enhance the integration of the Digital Skills team with the Learning Academy to ensure that staff were provided with specialist educational development and digital skillset to incorporate AI and latest technological innovations within their teaching, which was especially important with the increasing focus on diversification of the educational portfolio and delivering executive education and CPD;
- 107.3.13 As part of the implementation of the Curriculum for Change programme, it would be useful to review and monitor how effectively Individual Learning Plans for students had been implemented to ensure academic engagement, oversight and proportionate adoption across the institution. Consideration could also be given to how effectively colleagues were embedding the C4C principles to enhance belonging, inclusion and transition.

108. Verbal Update from the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee

- 108.1 The Chair of Audit and Risk Committee provided a verbal update on key points emerging from the most recent meeting of the Committee held on 27 March 2025.
- 108.2 The following was noted in relation to the Internal Audit Progress Report 2023-24
- 108.2.1 The Committee noted the 2 outstanding reports from 2023-24 had been finalised. These related to Sustainability and also IT Systems and Platforms: Estates and Commercial;
- 108.3 The following was noted in relation to the Internal Audit Progress Report 2024-25
- 108.3.1 PwC had reported there continued to be high levels of cooperation from the University in supporting the internal audit programme and good progress had been achieved in closing actions from previous reports. Fieldwork for 7 of the 13 planned internal audits had now been completed;
- 108.3.2 *Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) return:* The TRAC review provided assurance that the University's processes were well-managed and compared favourably to other HE institutions. Three low risk findings were identified to further refine and strengthen the compliance and reporting arrangements in alignment with sector best practice;
- 108.3.3 *Health and Safety:* Following the internal audit of Fire Safety carried out in 2022/23, which had resulted in a High-Risk report, a new Low Risk report received by the Committee identified notable improvements had taken place in relation to the tracking and oversight of Fire Risk Assessment actions and outlined an increased robustness of controls in place. The Committee commended the team for establishing a formalised and structured monitoring process to ensure fire safety compliance checks, due diligence and planned preventative maintenance was undertaken effectively.
- 108.4 An update on the key lessons learned from the light touch effectiveness review of the external audit process. The Chief Financial Officer indicated that it had been a positive process with a healthy level of challenge provided by the external auditors (KPMG) and that the continued areas of focus in the forthcoming external audit would be on research; high staff pay disclosure; and going concern assessment, which had been more complex than in previous

years as a result of increasing sector-wide financial challenge;

108.5 The University's Annual Report and Financial Statement 2023-24 had affirmed that the University was currently in a strong position relative to the rest of the Higher Education sector. It was nevertheless recognised that there remained financial challenges (including issues facing INTO and the Falmouth Exeter Plus Joint Venture Partnership between the University of Exeter and Falmouth University) which the University would need to address in order to ensure its long-term financial resilience and sustainability;

108.6 In relation to Business Continuity:

108.6.1 Audit and Risk Committee received a report that provided an overview of the University's business continuity arrangements, this included a summary of plans, exercises and incidents, to provide assurance that Business Continuity Planning was up-to-date and reviewed regularly;

108.6.2 National, regional and sector experience was used to identify tests and drive business continuity planning;

108.6.3 The continued professionalism to ensure the University adopted a robust approach to business continuity planning;

108.6.4 That the Chair of Audit of Audit and Risk Committee would be observing the annual Gold Command exercise in September 2025 to provide independent insight and feedback;

108.6.5 The Business Continuity process followed the ISO22301 standard and there were currently 58 plans in place which was refreshed and reviewed over a 3 year cycle;

108.6.6 The importance of continuing to learn from organisations outside of the sector (the recent Heathrow airport closure was provided as an example)

108.6.7 The focus for 2024-25 included tests on TNE and confirmation and clearing.

108.7 In relation to Risk Reporting:

108.7.1 Audit and Risk Committee had received and discussed the second risk report of the 2024/25 risk management reporting cycle. The report had been reviewed by Compliance Committee (7 February 2025) and UEB (20 February 2025). Three risks had increased in score since the last report:

108.7.1.1 Financial sustainability (increased score, remains rated high);

108.7.1.2 Global Employment Law (rating increased from moderate to high);

108.7.1.3 Diversity of Undergraduate (UG) intake (rating increased from low to moderate)

108.7.2 Three new corporate risks have been identified and further information on these new risks at the next meeting on 27 June 2025, including:

108.7.2.1 Generative AI usage (rated high);

108.7.2.2 Transnational Education (rated moderate);

108.7.2.3 Industrial Action (rated moderate).

108.7.3 In addition, two new risks were identified (financial risks relating to INTO partnerships and regional devolution of power).

108.8 Audit and Risk Committee had held three dive deep dives on the following areas: Information Governance (CR3), Information Security (CR1) and CR33 (Generative AI). The deep dive on Generative AI had included an overview of the University's draft AI Strategy and AI Policy. Audit and Risk Committee had recognised this was a fast-moving area and presented a combination of opportunity and risk that needed to be balanced appropriately. PwC had provided external support and additional insight and expert into the development of the AI Policy and wide-ranging consultation had been taken across the University;

108.9 Council noted the following in discussion:

108.9.1 In relation to the emerging risks in relation to the wider political environment, it was noted that UUK had commissioned a piece of work to address some of the negative perceptions surrounding Higher Education and enhance public understanding and awareness of the wider contribution of Universities including impact on the national and regional economy, life-changing research and civic mission.

109. Third Financial Forecast (CNL/120/24-25 Confidential – Commercial in Confidence)

109.1 The Finance and Investment Committee noted the third financial forecast for 2024/25, which projected an operating surplus (EBIT) forecast of £6.1m, and was within £100k of budget predictions.

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

ACTION: That future financial forecasts in the Academic Year 2025-26 would include an additional table on cash flow, including an overview of cash generated versus cash spent and alignment with current covenant requirements to provide assurance on longer-term sustainability of cash flow and potential strategic implications.

110. Draft Budget 2025-26 and Later Year Plans (CNL/121/24-25 Confidential – Commercial in Confidence)

110.1 Council discussed the draft budget 2025-26 which presented a 1% operating surplus (EBIT). It was noted that achieving a 1% operating surplus (EBIT) in 2025-26 would be demanding, and that delivering a balanced budget in 2026/27 and the out years of the budget reflected an increasing challenge;

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

ENDORSED: The plan for the initial draft Budget 2025-26 and proposed actions to deliver the financial plan, noting that the final draft Budget 2025-26 would be presented to Council for endorsement on 10 July 2025).

111. INTO Financial Recovery Plan (CNL/122/24-25 and CNL/122a/24-25 Confidential – Legally Privileged)

111.1 The Joint Venture between the University and INTO University Partnerships had been a long term and highly successful partnership since 2007. It had generated over £205m of gross tuition income for the University from students progressing from the Joint Venture, over £16m in dividends and a £20m capital receipt;

Closed Minute – Legally Privileged

APPROVED: The INTO Financial Recovery Plan, subject to the short-term funding provision being provided to the Joint Venture on the basis this would be a one-off agreement and there would be no subsequent arrangements provided.

123. Engineering 2030: Full Business Case (CNL/123/24-25 Confidential – Commercial in Confidence)

123.1 The vision for Exeter Engineering 2030 was to harness the power of engineering and innovation to create a sustainable and healthier future. Engineering was an area of strategic strength and presented significant opportunities to enable delivery of Strategy 2030 ambitions to create a greener, healthier and fairer future;

123.2 The Full Business Case had been revised in response to shifts in the political and external environment, including the sector-wide drop in international postgraduate taught recruitment. Whilst the current Business Case was largely predicated on sustained levels of home undergraduate student growth and continued demand, additional growth had also been targeted through PGT January starters, the Degree Apprenticeship portfolio, and Transnational Education;

123.3 The Research Strategy for Exeter Engineering 2030 was aligned to industry and government interests and underpinned by Exeter's recognized strengths in Advanced Materials, Water and Biomedical Engineering. It was also rooted in key interdisciplinary areas, including water research and areas studies in HASS and clinical links in HLS to Biomedical Engineering;

123.4 The Exeter Engineering 2030 Business Case aimed to deliver the next stage of investment to enable 4 improvements to the Harrison building, including: a new Structures and Building Materials Applied Teaching Facility, a new Electrical Engineering Facility, a new Chemical-Hydrogen Facility; and the improved presentation and brand position of the Harrison Building;

123.5 The investment would enable reconfigured, refurbished and enhanced teaching and research space within Harrison to facilitate student number growth and strategic research activity. The spaces had been designed to be flexible and future proofed,

including cutting edge equipment that could deliver a high-quality staff and student experience and utilized in a sufficiently agile manner to pivot to teaching and research growth;

123.6 Council recognized that Engineering was one of the key strategic growth areas within Strategy 2030 and that the investment would contribute strongly to the Education Strategy, Research Strategy and income diversification plans;

123.7 It was also acknowledged that enabling teaching on new undergraduate programmes in Electric & Electronic Engineering was aligned with increasing student demand and the need for enhanced employability skills in this area;

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

APPROVED: The Full Business Case for Exeter Engineering 2030.

NOTED: The progress and updates since the OBC had been approved in May 2024, as detailed in section 4c.

Closed Minute – Commercial in Confidence

124. Chair's Closing Remarks

124.1 The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the meeting and indicated that the final meeting of Council would be held on the 10th July 2025.

125. Part II – Items (For Approval)

125.1 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:

125.1.1 Updated Strategy 2030 KPIs and Delivery Plan (CNL/124/24-25)

125.1.2 Nominations for Independent Council Memberships (1 August 2025) (CNL/125/24-25)

125.1.3 Exeter Foundation Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023-24 (CNL/126/24-25)

125.1.4 Modern Slavery Transparency Statements (CNL/127/24-25)

125.1.5 Bill Douglas Museum Annual Report (CNL/128/24-25)

126 Part II – Items (For Information)

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

126.1.6 Updated Council Register of Interests (CNL/129/24-25)

126.1.7 Affixing the Seal (CNL/130/24-25)

126.1.8 OfS Compliance – Outcome of the Prevent Accountability and Data Return (CNL/131/24-25)

126.1.9 Audit and Risk Committee Minutes – November 2024 (CNL/132/24-25)

126.1.10 Capital Management Group Report (CNL/133/24-25)

126.1.10 Strategic Investment Committee Report (CNL/134/24-25)