INTRODUCTION

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 The Chair of Council welcomed everyone to the joint meeting of Council and Senate, noting that this would be his last formal meeting as Pro-Chancellor and introducing his successor the Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt.

1.2 The meeting noted apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.
3. **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR OF COUNCIL**

3.1 The Pro-Chancellor reflected on the many accomplishments of the University during his time as Pro-Chancellor as well as the challenging external environment in which all universities now found themselves, and the importance of strategy in such circumstances.

4. **STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY AND BACKGROUND**

4.1 The Vice-Chancellor recorded his thanks to the Pro-Chancellor for his support for and commitment to the University.

4.2 The Vice-Chancellor noted the importance of the opportunity the meeting provided in bringing together Council and Senate to consider the future strategy of the University. As with the Pro-Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor identified the sectoral challenges for the University. Professor Schofield went on to note that the strategy would provide the compass to guide the University’s broad direction and set out the work and consultation on the strategy to date as well as the next steps aiming to culminate to a completed document with accompanying KPIs and targets in the winter months.

4.3 The meeting then split into six discussion groups, each focusing on a different aspect of the strategy.

**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

5. **STRATEGY DISCUSSION GROUPS**

5.1 **Group A: Engagement**

(Chaired by Professor Dame Sue Black/Rapporteur: Professor Paul Connolly)

- The key discussion themes from this group centred on the proposed three engagement priorities. The group discussed the ‘golden thread’ of engagement throughout the University’s history beginning with the founding pillar of ‘the example of its corporate life’ through to engagement which was now widely regarded as a distinctive element of the University’s work and, which the group viewed as intrinsically connected to teaching and research. The group discussed the need for engagement activity to be flexible and avoid siloes in order to capitalise on the possibilities it offered.

- Regarding the proposed priority of concentrating on high-value and high-impact projects, participants discussed:
  - the diverse range of existing engagement activity including Eden and HIC but also UA92. Group members noted the University’s role as an innovator and in the development of non-traditional learner pathways;
  - the role of Lancaster as an anchor institution/’north star’ and how it could lever inward investment and interest and into the region including how research excellence could act as a catalyst for regional growth;
that a diversity of engagement work was of value: larger and smaller projects were not mutually exclusive, with smaller projects propagating larger scale activity and flagship projects creating smaller spin off engagement; and
- the need for an engagement strategy to harness resources and experience and focus on building capacity and understanding of engagement. The group considered the potential to creating a distinctive ‘Lancaster Way’ through use of mentors and ambassadors which could aid understanding of the University’s work in the wider community.

- In considering the second proposed priority enhancing the connection between engagement and teaching (building and strengthening local and regional partnerships) the group discussed:
  - how its status as a research-intensive University should not prevent the institution from being innovative;
  - how educational programmes could become more integrated and diverse through partnerships and alignment with stakeholders, to enhance participation through creating ‘ladders of opportunity’. The group considered the HIC and Morecambe Bay curriculum as both providing opportunities for in this area; and
  - whether the University could become a beacon regionally, nationally and globally with regards to widening participation? The group considered this to be an existing part of Lancaster’s ‘DNA’.

- The third and final proposed engagement priority was capitalising on international campuses to enhance global engagement. The group reflected on how the University could reach out through its international campuses and partnerships to engage with other stakeholders in country and regionally in order that campuses might become platforms for engagement.

5.2 **Group B: Teaching, Learning and the Curriculum**  
(Chaired by Professor Peter Atkinson/Rapporteur: Heather Knight)

- Four guiding statements based on emergent strategic themes were posed by the Chair at the beginning of the session. These were:
  1. clarify the distinctiveness and essence of the Lancaster signature offer;
  2. develop and implement a more streamlined and simplified curriculum offer;
  3. explore curriculum boundaries and build on Lancaster’s capacity and propensity for interdisciplinary working that spans subject boundaries;
  4. maximize opportunities from greater synergies and learning at and across our partners.

- The group explored of some possible solutions to the tensions between the value of the University’s distinctiveness in this area and the challenge of finding efficiencies. Members identified the following elements as those which were in their view important to the University and students:
The group highlighted the need to correctly define the desired attributes of a Lancaster Graduate reflecting their student experience and curriculum; embedding sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion and employability across the curriculum was strongly supported; retaining a focus on the future blend of subjects, pedagogy and digital support required to meet the needs of the next generations of students; partnership working with students; and the distinctiveness of Lancaster’s undergraduate curriculum, in particular, the flexibility (Part 1) and how it enabled students to build social capital.

- Participants considered how this appeal and value could be maintained and enhanced whilst finding efficiencies; how value could be added to the curriculum without adding increased, costs, complexity and congestion.

- The group discussed the need to enhance cross-faculty interaction and more effectively join up synergies between departments, faculties and professional services, as well as, to explore the most effective structures to support delivery of the curriculum. In developing a more streamlined and simplified offer, the University could consider the volume of assessment, the mixed credit structures, reforming the module and related credit values, and bringing a greater focus on the programme. Participants reflected on:

  - where in the curriculum should choice and flexibility should be offered;
  - how blended delivery opportunities and non-credit bearing activity could create a richer student experience;
  - how quality would be maintained if the breadth of choice were reduced, by ensuring a greater focus on the programme.

5.3 Group C: Research
(Chaired by Professor Louise Heathwaite/Rapporteur: Professor Angus Laing)

- The Chair provided the group an overview of the strategic foci in this area and the context of significant public funding for research and development, the Government’s expectation that the focus of research was likely to be on research that was ‘applicable’ in the medium term rather than applied and short-term. This ‘applicability’ was likely to be focused on the creations of wealth, health and social welfare. The key discussion themes from this discussion group were as follows.

- There was a view that there would be very significant funding opportunities available in particular for ‘blue skies’ research with the suggestion that this would be ‘a golden age for research councils’ and the recent £300M EPSRC call relating to mathematics, NERC intelligence and ARPA were cited as examples of this.
• The group noted the opportunities for the north and northwest of England in light of the UK government commitment to ‘levelling up’. The importance of senior management’s ability to influence government and the need for Lancaster to play a prominent role in partnerships given its relative scale as a research intensive were also noted.

• The group discussed whether the centrality of publications/outputs should be more prominent in the draft strategy. This led to discussion of the role of monographs in some subjects, the institution’s approach to ‘open research’ and the potential relationship of this initiative to the University’s motto of ‘truth lies open to all’.

• There was strong support from all members of the group for the strategy to emphasise linkages between the three pillars of the strategy and avoid ‘silged thinking’ around these, with some suggesting such links needed to be explicit and supported by appropriate organisational structures. The group also suggested that the purpose and benefit of research activities should be given greater prominence in the strategy alongside income. There was broad support for the pursuit of bigger grants, provided this recognised the career continuum and provided scope for early career researchers to gain grant capture experience. There was a suggestion that the University was poor at mid-sized grants and the support for e.g. teaching buyouts flowing back to successful departments may need to be considered in this regard.

• The discussion considered the extent to which the University’s overall aspirations, aims and KPIs should apply uniformly to all faculties and departments or whether, in its implementation the reliance on different individuals and subject areas to deliver, for example tuition fee income and research income, needed to be better emphasised. This notion of the University as a team led on to further discussion of the role of teamwork and the fact that, whilst a grant could only have one named PI, larger grants in many subjects now typically had several professors playing a leading role.

• The culture necessary to support grant capture was discussed and the need to create ‘serendipity’, opportunities and ‘space’ for people to win income was emphasised. In this context, the need for a vibrant community that capitalised on Lancaster’s relative size and interdisciplinary tradition was seen to be important. The group suggest a culture of conversations would engender interdisciplinary thinking in a way that ‘forced marriages’ would not.

• PGR students’ role in the research endeavour was discussed and the student representative voiced strong support for opportunities to meet and collaborate with other students beyond the supervising department(s). It was noted that, in some ways, the online environment had made building connections beyond departments easier.
• The group indicated they would be supportive of opportunities to generate a greater number of cross-disciplinary conversations and observed that there was scope to take advantage of interdisciplinary work in terms of the PGT portfolio but supporting structures and resource allocation/attribution would need to support this.

• The group perceived that the University’s research reputation lagged behind its actual performance and there was a need to better promote research impact and outcomes.

5.4 Group D: Lancaster’s Future Profile and Reputation
(Chaired by Professor Nigel Davis/Rapporteur: Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone)

The key themes and discussion from this discussion group were as follows:

• the group discussed the inherent tension of Lancaster currently punching above its weight in terms of performance, but being a relatively small institution, in a context which favours scale. The group considered how therefore it could use all its campuses, ‘the Lancaster University Family’, as leverage;

• whether the University needed to consider becoming more specialist within its research, teaching and engagement activity. The group considered whether it would be advantageous to have a clearer focus or core themes, to respond to grand or wicked challenges;

• the group also perceived that there was an underlying tension between the widening participation agenda and striving for a higher tariff and league table position;

• interdisciplinarity was across departments and faculties was viewed by the group as another way to respond to the scale issue. The group highlighted the role institutes and expanding the institutes’ concept, could have in this area: potentially the institutes diversifying their work from primarily research based into the teaching and learning activity;

• participants considered that the Bailrigg campus remained the anchor campus for the wider Lancaster Team but reflected upon how networks from other campuses might be better capitalised on, how could existing partnerships be extended to include a greater research dimension or new partnerships with campuses be created; and

• the group believed Lancaster has star quality academics but there was a need to better communicate who they are and the impact they were having.

5.5 Group E: A Sustainable Lancaster
(Chaired by Professor Simon Guy/Rapporteur: Sarah Randall-Paley)

• The key themes from this discussion group focused on four aspects of sustainability: financial, environmental, social and organisational. The group viewed that financial sustainability underpinned everything but should facilitate activity (finances as the 'servant not master) and that care had to be taken to maintain this balance.
Participants considered the role of environmental sustainability and that this activity had to be meaningful and authentic. The group viewed the University as having a deep and genuine commitment to environmental sustainability and strong track record in it, but that it was not sufficiently well-recognised for its work.

The group agreed that the campus’ physical environment and landscape presented a significant advantage and opportunities to reach out and engage with the wider region on sustainability issues in innovative ways. Participants also noted the current trend of movement from cities to rural locations as a response to Covid-19 which could play to Lancaster’s advantage.

The group moved onto identifying how this recognition gap could be addressed by exploring the possibilities of incorporating sustainability into the curriculum (a module for all students) and through the role of the Lancaster Award. This was viewed as having the potential further add value through interdisciplinarity and student employability.

In terms of social sustainability, the group discussed the role the Colleges could play especially around community cohesion. This was seen as an area of distinctiveness for Lancaster and one which could be enhanced.

The group considered organisational sustainability to present the area of greatest challenge as the University does not operate a single model across its international teaching partner campuses. Participants reflected upon how colleagues at these campuses could feel closer through a ‘genuine, multi-nodal approach’.

The group finally contemplated organisational preparedness for the future, particularly within the staff base. The group questioned whether existing opportunities had been maximised such as whether the ‘test bed’ of UA92 been fully exploited and, how could the rapid, positive changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic could be sustained and developed. Participants acknowledged the tensions and conflicts in area around international travel, a flexible curriculum and the need for efficiencies and the role of big and small positive behaviour changes. The group were in support of sustainability being cohesive force running through all three strategic pillars.

5.6 Group F: Values
(Chaired by Professor Steve Bradley/Rapporteur: Stuart Franklin)

The key themes and discussion from this discussion group were as follows.

- Participants viewed the role of Council and Senate as critical in embedding, legitimising and monitoring whether Lancaster was living its values and using them to influence decision-making. The group considered how these roles could be achieved in meaningful way.
Reflecting on the need to monitor values over a five-year period, the group considered that there had to be a collective sense of responsibility for the values, which needed to be visible to the University community, understood and owned by it. Clarity and crispness of articulation of the values were viewed as key to this being achieved.

The group viewed the barriers to fully embedding the values such as community buy-in and how these barriers could be lowered through communication and involvement. Cultural diversity was also highlighted as a potential barrier by the group in that there was not a homogeneous view within the University community.

Participants contemplated the role and validity of targets, which the group were supportive of in areas such as sustainability where realistic but ambitious targets could be set, however, regarding ‘softer’ aspects, such as values, it was acknowledged that this was more challenging to measure.

The group also considered the role of ‘safe spaces’ where staff and students could voice concerns if values were not being adhered to and the work which was needed to consider how values would be considered in key processes for example promotions and recruitment.

The Group considered whether Council and Senate should communicate more often and whether both bodies could be made more visible within the University community.

6. **PLENARY DISCUSSION ON GROUP FEEDBACK AND STRATEGY**

6.1 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the richness of discussion and the value that members of the Council and the Senate appeared to have taken from the breakout discussions. Professor Schofield opened the floor for questions and comments. The Joint meeting discussion considered:

(i) how tensions between our values could be managed when there were potential polarities, for example excellence and inclusion. Members noted there was no easy resolution and that openness regarding such issues was important;

(ii) the need to work as a ‘Lancaster Team’: a community of staff and students working together with the University’s best interests as the shared objective;

(iii) the power and importance of networks and connectivity as a measure of performance given the prevalence and reach of social media;

(iv) the critical role of equality, diversity and inclusion in underpinning the achievement of the strategy;

(v) the notion of Lancaster as a beacon and what it could mean including consideration of what a beacon for the higher education sector would be; and
how the critical mass at Lancaster could be achieved by cross institutional working around themes and topics rather than by growth in individual subject areas, and how this inter-disciplinarity could be created through the PhD environment, the colleges and staff and students.

7. CLOSING REMARKS

7.1 The Vice-Chancellor summarised the key points which he had heard from the discussions remarking on the power of bringing the Council and Senate together. He highlighted the importance of the ‘Lancaster team’, underpinned by a strong culture of inclusivity and values in tackling wicked societal problems.

7.2 Noting that this was Lord Liddle’s last official duty, the Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to the Pro-Chancellor and the impact which he had had since taking up office in July 2013. The Pro-Chancellor closed the meeting by thanking members for the rich discussion and by sharing highlights of his term in office. Lord Liddle encouraged the members to remember the role Lancaster had as an educational innovator, remarking that he considered Lancaster to be ‘an institution of great capacity’. The Pro-Chancellor drew attention to the regional inequalities in higher education and the role the University could play in the government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda. He urged the University to continue to pursue excellence in research, as well as working to address the regional inequality challenge.