

Some Restricted and Confidential content

Council Minutes: 10 October 2025

PRESENT: Rt. Hon. Alistair J. H. Burt (Pro-Chancellor) (in the Chair); Professor Rebecca J. Lingwood (Interim Vice-Chancellor); Tania L. Baumann (lay member) (*online*); Alun P. Branigan (Deputy Pro-Chancellor); Hanah Burgess (lay member) (*online*); Leah M. BATTERY (student Council member); Anthony Carey (lay member) (*online*); Jill Gallard (lay member); Adrian M. Jonas (lay member); Claire M. Leitch (Senate representative); Alison M. Mullan (Senate representative); Rory F. O’Ceallaigh (Students’ Union President); Dame June M. Raine (lay member); Marcia E. Reid Fotheringham (lay member) (*online*); Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone (Senate representative); Maureen A. Whilby (lay member).

IN ATTENDANCE: Professor Nigel A. J. Davies (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development)); Sue Davies (Associate Director Admissions, Marketing and Recruitment) (*for item 11*); Claire L. Geddes (Committee Clerk); Ben Matthews (Associate Director Global Engagement) (*for item 15*); Sarah J. Randall-Paley (Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer); Professor Wendy Robinson (Pro Vice-Chancellor Education) (*for item 13*); Dr Michael C. Wykes (Director of Strategic Planning and Governance and Interim University Secretary).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Rt. Hon. Hazel A. Blears (lay member).

PART 1: STANDING ITEMS

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 1.1 The apologies for absence received for this meeting were noted.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed Dame June Raine to her first meeting as a lay member and Professor Nigel Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development) who would be in attendance until January 2026.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 Council noted the following.
 - (i) That Professor Rebecca Lingwood had been appointed to the N8 Research Board of Directors.
 - (ii) In relation to item 10, Sarah Randall-Paley had been appointed to the UA92 Board (as one of the two University appointed directors).
 - (iii) Appointments for both June Raine and Hanah Burgess were to be considered under item 17 (Nominations Committee Report).

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS: 8 JULY and 22 JULY 2025

PAPER A

- 3.1 Council approved the minutes from the meeting held on 8 July 2025 and the extraordinary meeting held on 22 July 2025.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 The following matters arising were noted from 8 July 2025 Council.

- **Item 3: Notes of the Away Day:** from 22 July 2025: members fed back to the Chair reflections on Away Day discussions for future action.
- **Item 8:** a date had been set for the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Global) to meet with the SU President to discuss student representation in the partnerships.
- **Item 13: Global Lancaster**
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- **Item 17: EDI Report:** the Interim Deputy Director of People and Organisational Effectiveness would consider feedback relating to report commentary as part of the preparation of the next report.
- **Item 23: Terms of Reference Estates Committee:** the Chair of Estates Committee had discussed relevant changes with co-opted members prior to ToR finalisation and subsequent implementation.

4.2 Members noted the outcomes of matters considered by correspondence in September 2025 and Council's approval of the following.

- (i) The appointment of Dame June Raine as a lay member of Council from 1 October 2025 for a 3-year term.
- (ii) A Professional Services Voluntary Severance Scheme but for which the Student Officers wished to have their abstentions recorded.

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4.4 The Pro-Chancellor reported his receipt and acceptance of the Rt. Hon Hazel Blears' resignation from Council. He stated that Council would seek an opportunity to formally thank her potentially early in the new year.

Council conveyed its thanks and best wishes to Hazel Blears for all her service to Council and the University.

5. INTERIM VICE-CHANCELLOR'S UPDATE AND QUESTIONS ORAL UPDATE TO THE EXECUTIVE

5.1 Council noted a written report from the Executive circulated on 3 October 2025. In addition, the Interim Vice-Chancellor reported on the following.

- (i) Research activity: engagement with the University's Research Culture week, 8 of the University's academics being appointed to the Research Excellence Framework (REF)29 Panels including the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Medicine as a panel chair and 3 University academics securing UKRI Future Leader Fellowships.

- (ii) The success of Welcome Week as an introduction to new students to the University. The Interim Vice-Chancellor extended thanks to the Colleges and Students' Union for their work.
- (iii) Strong levels of engagement with the University's open days.
- (iv) The University's League table performance in the Guardian (11th to 14th) and the Times and Sunday Times (15th) with Lancaster named as University of the Year in the Northwest.
- (v) The outcomes of the Knowledge Exchange Framework exercise (KEF5) with the University's position reaffirmed as a high performing institution for business engagement, driving local growth and regeneration.
- (vi) The Office for Students' consultation regarding its development of teaching quality assurance to which the University would be responding.
- (vii) The commencement of the first cohort of students at Deakin Lancaster Indonesia on its initial five programmes.
- (viii) The University's recent reassessment by credit agency Standard and Poor's, and its retention of an A+ stable rating.
- (ix) The Government's proposals for international student fee levy income potentially from 2029 and its use to support means-tested maintenance grants for priority courses (aligned with the industrial strategy).
- (x) Ongoing communications with internal and external stakeholders and the trade unions relating to LU Future. She drew attention to weekly meetings with the trade unions, the Executive's response to over 250 questions and how a distributed model of sharing information was being adopted.

Members noted and discussed the further correspondence Council had received and the intended approach to this.

Assurance was sought regarding UCU's allegations relating to Standard and Poor's (S&P) having concerns about the UPP partnership and underpinning debt arrangements Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer confirmed that nothing had changed here since the partnership was established in 2003 and S&P had its own long-established methodology relating to the matter which acknowledged the close links to the University's student numbers. The University's financial reporting continued to meet required accounting standards.

Council reaffirmed its view (as highlighted in its 2022-23 Effectiveness Review and articulated to the trade unions) that management of trade union relations was primarily a matter for the Executive. However, members agreed that Council would address matters raised with it which concerned its duties and responsibilities and a response would be drafted by the Pro-Chancellor.

- (xi) The OfS's publication of its Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Prevalence Survey findings. Members noted University specific insights would be considered by the Student Experience Committee.
- (xii) Her meeting with the OfS Director of Free Speech and Academic Freedom regarding the University's approach to ensuring it was meeting its regulatory obligations to secure freedom of speech. She reported the meeting had focused on the OfS's view of high-risk international collaborative activity within the UK.

Council discussed the OfS's position with regards to what it considered to be the safest option to secure free speech in relation these partnerships and discussed related sensitivities and the wider implications. Council agreed that the University should continue to consider its position alongside universities with similar arrangements.

- (xiii) Recent meetings with the National Heritage Memorial Fund regarding the progress of the Ruskin Library and Museum project which had been constructive and positive.
- (xiv) The University's success in securing a £2M external capital grant for an area of strategic growth, with details currently under embargo.

5.2 Council questioned and noted the rationale for the University's choice not to engage in the new ResearchPlus collaboration.

5.3 Council discussed the impact on the Northwest, and on the University community of the recent controversial flag campaigns and a rise in nationalism. Members sought assurance as to how the University and Students' Union were monitoring and responding to the environment. The Executive confirmed that to date there had not been a significant increase in reports but there had been visible communications across campus and on its digital portals to reinforce no tolerance for harassment, reporting mechanisms and support services.

Council noted that the Pro-Chancellor had written on behalf of the Council to the University's Jewish Students Society on 7 October 2025.

6. STUDENTS' UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PAPER B

- 6.1 The President's report was taken as read but he highlighted the following.
- (i) Strong engagement with Students' Union activity in Welcome Week including 9k student visits to the two-day Freshers Fair. He recorded his thanks to the 400 student volunteers who had contributed to the week's success.
 - (ii) Changes in behaviour and circumstances for some students over recent years due to the challenges of the cost of living and student finance arrangements and the resultant impact on their student experience.
 - (iii) His desire to see the University do more to address student cost of living issues and his views regarding the University student accommodation offer's cost and competitiveness and that renegotiation of arrangements with UPP should be sought.
- 6.2 Members discussed the cost-of-living issues raised by the President noting that it continued to be a systemic issue for the Higher Education Sector. Existing levels of support of financial support available within the University were noted including significant scholarships and bursaries under the University's access and participation plan together with £350k of specific support funding, alongside other food related initiatives within the Colleges.
- 6.3 Council noted the options available to the University relating to its accommodation including stretching the rent ladder and that this was scheduled for discussion by the FGPC on 17 October.
- 6.4 Council noted the Students' Union President's report and encouraged the Students' Union Officers and Executive to continue to explore any further measures which could be taken through their joint meetings.

PART 2: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

7. ORAL REPORT OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING 19 SEPTEMBER 2025

ORAL UPDATE

- 7.1 ***Restricted and Commercial in Confidence***
- 7.2 Members congratulated Sarah Randall-Paley on her lifetime achievement award at the Northwest Finance Awards.
- 7.3 Council noted the Chair of FGPC's oral report.

8. DRAFT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR 2024/25 **PAPER C**

- 8.1 The Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer introduced the Draft Annual Accounts noting further work to finalise would be needed post the University's audit clearance meeting on 17 October 2025. She highlighted the reasons behind the better than projected end-of-year position and the University's strong liquidity position, both of which were useful given the scale of savings which needed to be achieved by 31 July 2026.
- 8.2 Council noted the draft accounts for 2024/25 and that the full statutory reporting pack would be considered by the FGPC on 17 October 2025.

9. COVENANT AMENDMENT RATIFICATION **PAPER D**
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10. UA92 UPDATE **PAPER E AND PRESENTATION**
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11. RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS UPDATE **PRESENTATION**

- 11.1 The Associate Director (Admissions, Marketing and Recruitment) gave a presentation regarding admissions performance to date for 2025/26 (as of 9 October 2025) and plans and tactics for recruitment activity for 2026/27 entry. She drew attention to the success of the introduction of a foundation programme with Cardinal Newman and changing trends relating to Confirmation and Clearing, and UCAS applications with the former seeing a substantial increase in Clearing accepts from higher tariff institutions.
- 11.2 Council noted the presentation and the changing markets for the University.

12. LU FUTURE UPDATE **ORAL UPDATE**

- 12.1 The Interim Vice-Chancellor provided the Council with a summary of recent progress with the implementation of the LU Future programme. She highlighted staff engagement with voluntary redundancy and severance programmes, the status of consultation and industrial relations, as well as planned stocktake activity in November to assess and rebase the current position against the savings targets.
- 12.2 Council received a precis of the work undertaken in the academic blueprint stream to explore with Departments and Schools their vision for the future including opportunities for teaching and research efficiencies together with income generation and growth. With regard to the Professional Services redesign process, members received an update on the progress of the thematic groups plus wider engagement activity to test options and thinking. Members' attention was drawn to the top five risks associated with LU Future Programme including lack of sufficient institutional bandwidth to deliver the change and failure to deliver the required savings and how these risks were being mitigated.

- 12.3 The importance of clear communication to staff, students and external stakeholders was considered and Council discussed if there was sufficient information available as blueprint reports had been redacted. The Executive emphasised that the pressures from the trade unions were to be expected as their aim was to have compulsory redundancy removed as an option. Engagement, support, and wellbeing plans were highlighted to members.
- 12.4 Council queried what other alternative propositions had been put forward through collective consultation. The Executive confirmed that proposals included continuing to run a deficit, additional borrowing, cutting capital investment, and exiting transnational partnerships. Members concurred that these were not prudent or feasible options.
- 12.5 Council welcomed the progress, noted the report, and encouraged the Executive to support staff to be able to see the future vision for the University and where its strengths would lie.

13. NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) 2024/25 PRESENTATION

- 13.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) gave a presentation regarding the in-depth analysis of the University's performance in the 2025 NSS. She summarised the University's improved student positivity scores in most measures in absolute terms, but its loss of position due to relative performance: with minor changes in performance transposing into significant movements in the rankings.
- 13.2 Members noted new approaches to quantitative and qualitative analysis, and how these enabled a more targeted and tactical approach to improvement. Concerns were voiced by Council regarding various aspects of continued NSS performance and their potential to negatively impact domestic league table position and recruitment activity. Furthermore, members considered and recognised the emergent risks to student satisfaction from industrial action and LU Future blueprint implementation.
- 13.3 Council discussed the inconsistencies in NSS performance. Notwithstanding the volatility in the data and Council's acceptance that systemic issues would take time to address through curriculum transformation, members viewed the position as less than satisfactory and confirmed its ongoing support for the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) in driving improvement and urged the Executive to reinforce the need to address hygiene related issues across the University.
- 13.4 Council noted the presentation.

PART 3: ITEMS FOR NOTING (NOT FOR DISCUSSION UNLESS REQUESTED IN ADVANCE)

18. CHAIR'S ACTIONS PAPER 1

18.1 Council noted and homologated the Chair's actions taken since the last meeting.

19. WRITTEN REPORTS OF MEETINGS PAPER 2

19.1 Council noted the following written reports of meetings:

- Estates Committee, meeting of 12 September 2025
- Finance and General Purposes Committee, meeting of 19 September 2025
- Senate, meeting of 24 September 2025

20. FORWARD SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL BUSINESS PAPER 3

20.1 Council noted the Forward Schedule of business.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

21.1 There was no other business.

22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22.1 The next meeting would be held from held at 09:00-13:00 on Friday 28 November 2025 in Training Suites 1, 2 and 3, POE Building. There will be lunch from 13:00 in the Private Dining Room, County College. There will be a Council dinner on Thursday 27 November 2025 from 18:00.