

Council Minutes: 28 November 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); Alun P. Branigan (Deputy Pro-Chancellor); Hanah Burgess (lay member); Leah M. Buttery (student Council member); Anthony Carey (lay member) (*online from item 15*); Jill Gallard (lay member); Adrian M. Jonas (lay member); Alison M. Mullan (Senate representative); Rory F. O’Ceallaigh (Students’ Union President); Dame June M. Raine (lay member); Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone (Senate representative); Maureen A. Whilby (lay member) (*online*).

IN ATTENDANCE: Professor Nigel A. J. Davies (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development)); Claire L. Geddes (Committee Clerk); Sarah J. Randall-Paley (Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer); Dr Michael C. Wykes (Director of Strategic Planning and Governance and Interim University Secretary); Professor Steve Decent (Designate Vice-Chancellor (observer)); and Susan Mitchell (Designate Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (observer)).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Claire M. Leitch (Senate representative); Marcia E. Reid Fotheringham (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 thanked Marcia Reid Fotheringham in her absence for all her services to the Council and University as she was due to finish her term on 31 December 2025.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed the Designate Vice-Chancellor and the Designate Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer to the meeting.
- 1.4 On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked the Interim Vice-Chancellor and other officers who had been undertaking interim roles over the period.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interests.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2025

PAPER A

- 3.1 Council approved the minutes from the meeting held on 10 October 2025.

4. MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2025 PAPER B

- 4.1 Council approved the minutes from the extraordinary meeting held on 17 October 2025.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence

5.1 From the actions of the 10 October, the following was confirmed.

- **Item 5: Interim Vice-Chancellor's update:** LUCU Correspondence to Council regarding governance concerns. Council had agreed and sent its response to LUCU on 31 October 2025. The Pro-Chancellor confirmed his intention to meet with the President of LUCU after recent developments.
- **Item 9: Santander Revolving Credit Facility:** post Council's ratification of the covenant revision, arrangements with Santander had been finalised by the Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer.
- **Item 10: *Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence***
- **Item 15: QS World Rankings:** further information was circulated to Council and co-opted committee members, and a small number of nominations had been received.

5.2 From the actions of the 17 October, the following was confirmed.

- **Item 3: Bahrain:** the graduate numbers contained within the report had been verified and teaching quality assurance mechanisms discussed at Audit and Risk Committee as part of its discussion regarding the Annual Teaching Quality Assurance Review.

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

ORAL UPDATE/
PAPER O

Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence

6.1 Council noted a written report from the Executive circulated on 21 November 2025. In addition, the Interim Vice-Chancellor reported on the following.

- (i) The potential implications for the University arising from the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper.
- (ii) Pertinent headlines from the Government's budget of the 26 November 2025 including confirmation of the flat international student levy fee from 2028/29, the regulated fee levels for 2026-2028 and salary sacrifice changes from April 2029.
- (iii) Protection in real-terms for the UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) investment in core quality-related QR block grant and Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) over the Spending Review period, which represented a £425 million cumulative increase. The position regarding Research and Development funding and UKRI budgets were expected to be published in December 2025.

- (iv) The publication of the Office for Students' Strategy 2025-2030 and the four 'attitudes' it was intending to adopt, as well as an update to its May 2025 Financial Sustainability of Higher Education Report.
- (v) Industrial relations including LUCU's withdrawal of local industrial action but that there continued to be an escalation in communications to Council and external stakeholders regarding the management and governance of the University.

Members noted that Council's comprehensive response to UCU's concerns regarding its oversight had been sent on the 31 October 2025, nevertheless, UCU had secured a vote of no confidence in the Chair of Council.

- (vi) Succession planning for the Chief Executive Officer role at UA92, as the current role holder would be leaving in Summer 2026. It was confirmed that academic strength would be a key characteristic being sought and the University would be fully involved in the process.
- (vii) The rationale for the University's decision to amicably dissolve its partnership with 2U and to deliver the LU Online Cyber Security programme from January 2026 in its own right. Options would be reconsidered regarding if, and how, to deliver the four other identified programmes.
- (viii) Ongoing constructive discussions with the Students' Union Officers particularly regarding sport and the future design of the Colleges. The Interim Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the University had provided additional resource for a sports access fund with ongoing conversation regarding a sustainable model and had also funded the refurbishment of the Students' Union A-Floor space.
- (ix) Continuing positive engagement with the major donors, the Fort and Fort Vale Foundation trustees, regarding the University's sustainable soils activity.
- (ix) A number of recent successes and awards for the University including: a £2 million capital grant by the OfS for the creation of a new nuclear facility control room simulator (LUNAR), its achievement of a Queen Elizabeth Prize for Education for its development of core technology for the BBC micro:bit, a pocket-sized programmable computer, the Knowledge Exchange Initiative of the Year 2025 and a Green Gown Award for 2030 Climate Action.

6.2 Members discussed industrial relations and allegations from LUCU that the health, safety and wellbeing of staff had not been sufficiently considered and safeguarded through the FHASS Envision Project. Council received an oral report from the Chair of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee from its meeting of 18 November 2025. The Chair confirmed that the matter had been scrutinised in detail and that the Committee had been assured that the University had met its legal obligations in relation to health and safety. There was however, in its view, lessons to be taken regarding some aspects of change management of the project.

6.3 *Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence*

6.4

7. STUDENTS' UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT: NOVEMBER 2025 PAPER C

7.1 The President's report was taken as read but he highlighted the following.

- (i) Increased student engagement with Students' Union's elections.
- (ii) Officer engagement with the LU Future Professional Services Redesign processes to date, but that the Student Union would like even greater involvement.
- (iii) The positive impact for the student experience of LUCU's withdrawal of strike action, however he cautioned that there remained unresolved issues and he drew attention to a planned student rally in support of academic staff.

Action: the Students' Union and Executive to consider cost of living initiatives in section 2.4 of the President' Report.

7.1 The Students' Union Wellbeing Officer, Leah Buttery, summarised officer concerns regarding some aspects of the Student Facing Services Professional Services redesign proposals, challenging the appropriateness of potential self-service approaches.

7.2 Members received a précis of the proposed intended use of self-service functionality within the Student Mental Health Services. Council noted the adoption of a risk-based approach with triaging used to ensure students with the highest level of need would be prioritised for in-person sessions.

Members noted the reduction in waiting times for mental health support and the preventative activity being undertaken, but that communications and awareness of the service offer remained the greatest challenge. It was noted that the annual report on all student mental health activities would be coming forward shortly and would be developed further to include additional information regarding preventative activity in light of the discussion.

Action: the Associate Director Wellbeing and Inclusion to include additional information regarding preventative activity in forthcoming Student Mental Health Services Annual Report.

- 7.3 Members noted the report and welcomed the increase in students' engagement with the Students' Union's elections.

PART 2: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

8. AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL AND THE VICE-CHANCELLOR 2025 **PAPER D**

- 8.1 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Hanah Burgess, introduced the Committee's Report for 2024/25 with an account of the breadth and depth of the business it had considered including internal audit outcomes, with no critical findings and a single high risk finding. Though there had been changes in membership over the period, she emphasised that the committee retained a strong complementarity of skills sets.
- 8.2 The Chair underlined the Committee's confidence in the accuracy and completeness of financial reporting, and that the unadjusted items cited in the Letter of Representation (one related to a technical matter regarding UA92) would have no impact on the University's consolidated accounts.
- 8.3 Members noted the Audit and Risk Committee's satisfaction with the work of the current auditors (PwC and BDO), and the Executive's response to this work, and that relationships were felt to be satisfactory. Council noted its approval of the appointment of Deloitte as the University's new external auditors with PwC reappointed.
- 8.4 Council noted the Audit and Risk Committee's opinion, that based on all its work, arrangements for risk management and control, value for money and the management of regulatory data, returns were adequate and effective.
- 8.5 Whilst accepting the Audit and Risk Committee Chair's caveat that assurance could never be absolute, members noted the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, including the Internal Audit Annual Report and the latest draft of the External Audit Annual Report as received by Audit and Risk Committee. Council confirmed its satisfaction with the Letter of Representation.

9. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2025 PAPER E

- 9.1 The Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer gave a brief overview of the Financial Statements, recommended for approval by both the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC) and the Audit and Risk Committee. She highlighted the fulsomeness of the final external audit conducted by BDO and the likely delayed arrangements for final sign-off of the Statements and Letter of Representation due to the External Audit Partner's commitments outside of the UK.
- 9.2 Members discussed the report and welcomed the additional context provided through the Chair's foreword. Council noted that the University had ended the year in a solid financial position which was helpful given the scale of change required in 2025/26 and approved Financial Statements for the year ending 31 July 2025.
- 9.3 The Finance Team was commended for its work in the Statements' preparation.

10. CHAIR OF THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS (OFS) LETTER TO CHAIRS OF COUNCILS REGARDING EMERGENT RISKS TO THE SECTOR PAPER F

- 10.1 The Pro-Chancellor introduced the OfS Chair's letter regarding emergent risks to the sector. Drawing members' attention to the regulator's concerns regarding some providers' reliance on 3rd party and off campus delivery and joint funding arrangements with foreign states/entities which could create risks of legal and regulatory non-compliance in relation to free speech and academic freedom.
- 10.2 Members discussed the letter and the Government's position regarding risks arising from activities involving certain foreign states and how this allied with both the OfS' view of risk and the University's own strategy. Council advised it would appreciate further opportunities to give more in-depth consideration to a number of the risks, and that a watching brief should be maintained regarding the issues raised.
- 10.3 Council noted the letter and the Executive's forthcoming discussion of it to inform the quarterly risk register review.

11. FINANCIAL FORECAST INFORMATION FOR THE ANNUAL FINANCIAL RETURN 2025 TO THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS PAPER G

- 11.1 The Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer introduced the Return and Forecasts highlighting their interim nature given their awkward timing and continued new inputs e.g. the UK budget announcements. She drew attention to continuing work to stress test the figures, and that Council would have an opportunity to discuss these at its January 2026 meeting after previous scrutiny by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

- 11.2 Members discussed the University's five key risks identified within the commentary, their potential to create negative consequences for the student experience and how this could be mitigated. Consideration was given as to how National Student Survey performance could be maintained and improved over the period, given the potential impact of LU Future (including Curriculum Transformation). Council noted the Executive's view that the avoidance of industrial action would have somewhat reduced this risk, but that the University would still be navigating a turbulent period.

Action: the Chief Financial Officer and Interim Chief Operating Officer to amend AFR commentary to reflect Council discussion relating to the student experience.

- 11.3 FGPC's recommendation for approval of the Financial Return from its meeting of 17 November 2025 was received. Council approved the University's financial forecast data to 2029/30 and commentary for submission as part of its Annual Financial Return to the Office for Students.

12. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD 27 NOVEMBER 2025 **ORAL UPDATE**

- 12.1 The Chair of the FGPC, Alun Branigan, reported on the Committee's discussions of the outcomes of the LU Future Financial Review. He reported that FGPC had been satisfied with the rigour and scope of the Review and was encouraged by its results. However, the Committee remained cognisant that student recruitment was a key driver of the University's financial sustainability and there remained significant challenges related to overseas student recruitment and issues to be solved.
- 12.2 Council noted the oral report.

13. LU FUTURE FINANCIAL REVIEW UPDATE **PAPER H AND PRESENTATIONS**

- 13.1 The Interim Vice-Chancellor provided the Council with a summary of recent progress with the implementation of the LU Future programme. She highlighted the range of staff responses to the withdrawal of academic compulsory redundancies to July 2026 voluntary redundancy and severance programme implementation progress, as well as the headline implications of the government's budget. With regards to the latter, it was highlighted that the international levy could create changes in competitors' approaches to unregulated tuition fee setting and this in turn could give rise to opportunities for competitive advantage.
- 13.2 Council received a précis of the academic blueprint work being undertaken to secure the desired shape, as well as size of institution. Members noted that further targeted voluntary measures would be required to reach the planned staffing complements across the disciplines. Further to this, it was noted that tight vacancy control would be necessary and potentially redeployment of resource to support areas of growth.

- 13.3 With regard to the Professional Services redesign process, members received an update on the progress of service redesigns and staff engagement opportunities, programme milestones and voluntary severance processes. Members' attention was drawn to the anticipated lower approval rates for Professional Services VSS cases (compared with the academic voluntary schemes) due to interdependencies and complexities and the need to retain sufficient expertise. However, the PS service designs thinking to date had allowed for a greater proportion of acceptances than had previously been possible for professional services staff during previous schemes.
- 13.4 Council members emphasised the criticality of staff having sufficient line of sight on the vision for the future. Council discussed the importance of ensuring effective staff engagement and taking a people-centred approach to the change programme, to enable staff to better understand required future behaviours and how they would need to work differently. Members challenged the Executive as to whether the current approach was sufficiently people-focused and offered their expertise to support and advise.
- 13.5 Council noted the report.

Action: members of the Executive (or delegates) to meet with Maureen Whilby to explore optimal, people-centred approaches to transformational change.

14. ANNUAL TEACHING QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT (ATQAR) 2024-2025 PAPER I
Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence

- 14.1 The University Academic Dean introduced the ATQAR highlighting the dynamic regulatory environment including the potential consequences of the OfS's consultation to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and its increased focus on franchise provision. He drew attention to the report's assessment of compliance with Office for Students (OfS) B conditions at Lancaster and across its regional teaching partnerships in the UK, as well as priorities for quality assurance activity in 2025/26.
- 14.2 Council noted and discussed the potentially heightened risks associated with partnership arrangements (both franchise arrangements and international activity) if proposed TEF changes were introduced. It was noted that the University was submitting a robust response to the consultation and the unintended consequences of proposals.
- 14.3 ***Restricted and Commercial in Confidence***

- 14.4 Council reiterated its desire to holistically and comprehensively consider the University's strategy for, and governance of major partnerships, as part of visioning activity in the new year.
- 14.5 With regards to the future direction of travel for academic assurance monitoring and increased data use and a risk-based approach, members were supportive of this. However, Council emphasised its ongoing concern with performance regarding assessment and feedback and some aspects of quality assurance regarding the Postgraduate Research Student experience, (noting the latter if unchecked could also have the potential to affect the University's ability securing research grant income). Members challenged the Executive as to how these issues were being tackled and noted the range of planned measures including the appointment of a cross-faculty associate Dean for Postgraduate Research Students to focus on PGR policies, practices and support.
- 14.6 Council received the Senate and Audit and Risk Committee's assurance and recommendations regarding their confidence in the academic standards of the University's provision.
- 14.7 After its own careful consideration of the report, Council was satisfied it had received sufficient assurance that academic risks within the University were being effectively managed through its key mechanisms for quality assurance. Council confirmed its confidence in the University having mechanisms in place to assure it of the academic standards and quality of the University's academic awards.

15. ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING ASSURANCE REPORT 2024-25

PAPER J

- 15.1 The Head of Student Support and Wellbeing Services presented a summary of activity to ensure a robust safeguarding culture at the University, case numbers, changes to Designated Safeguarding Lead structures and Council sub-committee oversight arrangements.
- 15.2 Council noted that detailed oversight and approval of the policy had been undertaken by its Audit and Risk Committee and that the Committee had been satisfied with arrangements and advised of further enhancements it wished to see to reporting.
- 15.3 Council reviewed the updated versions of the Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk Policy, Procedures and Guidance documents and noted the annual assurance report regarding the safeguarding culture at Lancaster University.

16. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs): END-YEAR REPORT FOR 2024-25 **PAPER K**

- 16.1 The Director of Strategic Planning and Governance and Interim Secretary gave an overview of the end of year performance against the University KPIs. He drew attention to the unfavourable changes in status of 4 KPIs over 2024/25 (Research Field Citations (red), NSS average scores (amber), UG Entrant qualifications (red) and International League Table Rankings (red)) and the contributing factors causing this. He highlighted actions which could help secure pathways to green but cautioned that focused effort would be required to achieve this.
- 16.2 Council discussed the indicators whilst remaining mindful that reconsideration would be given to the KPIs as part of the visioning for the new strategy. Members advised that research income data at a discipline level, and benchmarking data (specifically rankings relative to EU universities) would be useful to better understand how the University could enhance its performance in this area. Regarding League Table performance Council recommended that there would be value in a thorough review of research field citations performance.
- 16.3 With regards to KPI 9 diversity of the staff profile, members sought assurance that LU Future changes would not negatively impact the metrics. The Executive confirmed consideration was being given to this.
- 16.4 Council noted the report and was supportive of the candid and transparent approach being taken to performance challenges.

17. NOMINATIONS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT **PAPER L**

- 17.1 Council received the recommendation of the Nominations and Governance Committee and approved the appointment Gary Rycroft as a lay member of Council from 1 January 2026 until 31 December 2028.
- 17.2 Members received a progress report regarding the external search for lay members and noted that there had been encouraging levels of engagement with the opportunity, and it was anticipated that there would be a strong shortlist with interviews scheduled for early in the new year.
- 17.3 With regards to co-opted member vacancies on sub-committees, it was noted by Council that these would be considered after the lay member search.

18. DRAFT PREVENT ANNUAL REPORT INCORPORATING THE OFS PREVENT MONITORING: ACCOUNTABILITY AND DATA RETURN 2025 **PAPER M**

- 18.1 Council noted the content of the papers and approved the annual accountability and data return for Prevent for submission to the Office for Students.

Action: Annual Return to be submitted to the Office for Students.

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

19. ANNUAL MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT 2025 PAPER 1

- 19.1 Council approved the University's Modern Slavery Statement for 2024/25 ahead of its publication on the University website.

20. STRATEGIC REWARD COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT (2025) PAPER 2

- 20.1 Council noted the report.

21. REMUNERATION COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT (2025) PAPER 3

- 21.1 Council noted the report of its Remuneration Committee for 2024/2025 and its Remuneration Committee Annual Governance Statement 2024/25.

22. DRAFT UNIVERSITY POLICY FRAMEWORK PAPER 4

- 22.1 Council approved the University's Policy Framework.

23. REPORT ON THE USE OF THE SEAL PAPER 5

- 23.1 Council noted the report.

24. WRITTEN REPORTS OF MEETINGS PAPER 6

- 24.1 Council noted the following written reports of meetings:

- Audit and Risk Committee, meeting of 10 November 2025
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, meeting of 7 October 2025
- Finance and General Purposes Committee, meeting of 17 October 2025
- Senate, meeting of 5 November 2025
- Student Experience Committee, meeting of 15 October 2025

PART 4: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

25. FORWARD SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL BUSINESS PAPER N

- 25.1 Council noted the Forward Schedule of business.

26. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 26.1 There was no other business.

27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 27.1 The next meeting will be held from 13:00 on Friday 23 January 2026 in the Training Suites 1, 2, and 3, POE Building.