

Some Restricted and Confidential content

Council Minutes: 20 March 2026

PRESENT: Rt. Hon. Alistair J. H. Burt (Pro-Chancellor) (in the Chair); Professor Stephen P. Decent (Vice-Chancellor); Wendy Barnes (lay member); 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); Jill Gallard (lay member); Adrian M. Jonas (lay member); Claire M. Leitch (Senate representative); Professor Rebecca J. Lingwood (Deputy Vice-Chancellor); Rory F. O’Ceallaigh (Students’ Union President); Professor Wyn Morgan (lay member); Alison M. Mullan (Senate representative); Dame June M. Raine (lay member); Professor Jo Rycroft-Malone (Senate representative); Maureen A. Whilby (lay member) (*online*).

IN ATTENDANCE: Claire L. Geddes (Committee Clerk); Susan V. Mitchell (Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer); Sarah J. Randall-Paley (Chief Financial Officer); Dr Michael C. Wykes (Director of Strategic Planning and Governance).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: None.

PART 1: STANDING ITEMS

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 1.1 No apologies for absence were received for this meeting.
- 1.2 New lay members Professor Wyn Morgan and Wendy Barnes were welcomed to their first meeting.
- 1.3 The Chair recorded thanks on behalf of the Council to Gary Rycroft whose resignation had been received on 24 February 2026 due to a change in personal circumstances.
- 1.4 The Chair outlined the context for and purpose of the UA92 presentation by Gary Neville at the end of the meeting and that a small number of Council members would hold a follow-up meeting to address issues and requests in detail.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 The Pro-Chancellor confirmed that there were a number of members who had interests in Item 7: Vice-Chancellor’s Proposal to Change the Executive Team but advised Council that it would be helpful for all members to be present for the discussion.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2026

PAPER A

- 3.1 Council approved the minutes from the meeting held on 23 January 2026.

4. MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 From the actions of the meeting held on 23 January 2026, the following was confirmed.

Item 8: Financial Forecast Scenarios Including Stress Testing: Council noted the request for additional scenarios testing was addressed in the Out-turn Paper and had been received and discussed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC) on 5 March 2026.

Item 11: LU Future: Council noted its Oversight Group had met on 5 February 2026, and subsequently on 17 February 2026 where it had received a paper from the Vice-Chancellor setting out the approach to conclude LU Future which had achieved its savings target.

- 4.2 Council noted its approval by correspondence the appointments of Professor Wyn Morgan and Wendy Barnes as lay members from 1 March 2026 for 3-year terms, whose nominations were circulated on 16 February 2026.

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

ORAL UPDATE

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- 5.1 Council noted a written report from the Executive circulated on 13 March 2026. The Vice-Chancellor reported on the following.
- (i) The tragic deaths of three students since the last meeting of Council, which meant there had been five student deaths in 2025/26. He drew attention to the support being offered by the University to affected friends and family, and the Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer's commissioning of an independent review into related matters which would report by Summer 2026.
 - (ii) His work to start to enhance University culture, staff morale and the student experience caveating that it would take time to build trust and transparency.
 - (iii) The successful conclusion of LU Future.
 - (iv) The challenging outlook for the University student recruitment and achieving targeted income for admissions in 2026-27. He drew attention to the contributing factors to this including unintended consequences of the Curriculum Transformation Programme's streamlining of joint honours programmes. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that conversion activity was the key focus for the Executive in the coming period given the significant financial consequences of missing admissions targets and that progress was being made to partially recover the University's position but with the final position unknown until October/November 2026.

- (v) His response to date to UCU's request for the University to rule out any compulsory redundancies until August 2027 and that this was outside of his delegated authority.
 - (vi) The steps being taken to safely land curriculum change for 2026-27 with Senate endorsing the proposals to deliver the new curriculum within the existing three-term structure and reconsideration to be given to the case of two examination periods. The Board noted the reintroduction of 117 joint degree programmes for 2026-27 entry and that the Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor would be co-chairing a new Curriculum Delivery Board.
 - (vii) Preparations for the Research Excellence Framework (REF2029).
- 5.2 Council discussed the impact of the Curriculum Transformation Programme (CTP) on student recruitment and why key risks had not been identified and evaluated earlier within the programme. It was noted that the Audit and Risk Committee would be sponsoring a lessons learned exercise to scrutinise the effectiveness of the programme including hearing the staff and student voice, the approach to risk and any indicators of concern and project oversight.
- 5.3 ***Restricted and Confidential***
- 5.4 Members requested and received information regarding the University's support for students in light of the unprecedented meningitis outbreak at the University of Kent.
- 5.5 Council noted the report by the Vice-Chancellor.

PART 2: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 6. STUDENTS' UNION PRESIDENT REPORT: MARCH 2026** **PAPER B**
- 6.1 The report of the Students' Union President highlighted strong engagement with the Full Time Officer Elections and the common themes emerging from candidate manifestos including campus safety, cost of living issues, student leadership role recognition and student voice in curriculum delivery changes. In addition, the following points were raised.
- (i) The impact of the National Union of Students (NUS) Student Loan National Lobby Day (which the Officers had been involved with) and the Treasury Committee subsequent pledge to hold an enquiry into the system.
- Council noted that the Vice-Chancellor would be raising the student loan system and wider student funding issues with the MP for Lancaster and Fleetwood imminently.

- (ii) The President's ongoing concerns regarding campus accommodation costs and his view of the risks that the current contractual arrangement with UPP posed to the University.
 - (iii) Effective partnership working between the Student Officers and Executive regarding the Postgraduate Research Student Hub.
- 6.2 The Students' Union Welfare Officer, Leah Buttery, highlighted the Officer Team's desire to work in closer partnership with the University on sexual misconduct matters and to see a change in the University's current consent training model which it viewed as too passive in approach. Members noted benchmarking work being undertaken to understand how the sector was responding to Office for Students Condition E6 and how the University intended to hear student voice in its training review.
- 6.3 ***Restricted and Confidential***
- 6.4 Council noted the report and the invitation to attend the 60th Annual Roses Tournament, May Bank Holiday 2026.
- 6.5 The Pro-Chancellor drew to Council's attention the Union of Jewish Students' Time for Change Report on the rise of anti-Semitism on university campuses and the potential implications of war in the Middle East on numerous student communities' abilities to feel safe.

7. PROPOSAL ON CHANGES TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM

PAPER D

- 7.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced his proposals and rationale to revise a number of roles within the Executive Team. He emphasised his objectives of strengthening and consolidating Student Experience leadership, enhancing student and staff voice in decision-making, bringing Executive decision-making and disciplinary leadership closer together to encourage innovation and agility, enhancing matrix working at the Executive level and to build trust and confidence across the faculties.
- 7.2 Professor Decent highlighted the variation in internal faculty arrangements and given this context, his expectation that respective Pro-Vice-Chancellors for the Faculties would work closely with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Heads of Department/Schools to carefully consider further faculty redesign to create optimal arrangements. Some faculties were likely to experience more change than others. He verified that an equality impact assessment had been conducted.
- 7.3 Council noted Senate's views on the matter, including unanimous support from its non-Executive members and with majority support from its Executive members.

- 7.4 Assurance was sought that the proposals would not cloud the distinctiveness of parts of the University such as the Medical School and Management School (LUMS) externally, and that removing existing roles would not lead to duplication of effort (communicating directly with multiple departments). The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that LUMS was already a cohesive academic structure which would not be disrupted and proposals were intended to remove duplication and additional management layers, where assessed as unnecessary, however there would need to be clear delegations of authority.
- 7.5 Members encouraged the further quantification of realised change benefits on organisational culture and risk mitigation at a future point. Given significant existing levels of change and a development of a new strategy, Council questioned if the risks created by the proposals had been identified and mitigated, particularly in relation to delegation of authority and limitations on autonomy. It advised of the need for compliance-related matters to be governed by policy agreed at Executive level and institutional approaches to systemic issues such as the awarding gap and assessment and feedback. Council reinforced the need for clarity as to where responsibilities and ownership of strategic activity lay from an assurance and accountability perspective.
- 7.6 The appropriateness of timing and pace of change was also tested by members and if due consideration had been given to any unintended consequences on a disciplinary level of the changes plus how proposals could enhance innovation. Members raised that greater clarity was required as to what agility and innovation looked like at a departmental level.
- 7.7 In response, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed the Executive would need a dynamic approach to risk management and that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellors for the Faculties would work through the delegations to set clear boundaries and expectations but also a supportive structure for Heads of Department to successfully perform within. It had been anticipated that the proposals could potentially create uncertainty for some smaller departments and these would receive greater support from the relevant Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors. With regards to innovation, it was critical for academic departments and schools to have agility to work in different ways as it was recognised that they were responding to different challenges and markets and would have differing priorities but aligned with the University strategy.
- 7.8 With regards to timing of change, the Vice-Chancellor reflected that he considered there was greater risk in not changing current arrangements and assured Council that significant preparatory work was underway including relating to communications which would, if approved, be launched at the end of March.
- 7.9 Council was supportive of the changes proposed and approved the changes to the Executive Team roles as set out in the paper.

8. CAPITAL PROJECT UPDATE

PAPER E

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9. ORAL UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE (FGPC), OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 MARCH 2026

9.1 The Chair of FGPC, Alun Branigan, provided an overview of the key items discussed at its meeting held on 5 March 2026 noting that a number such as the out-turn were covered on the agenda. He drew attention to the following.

- (i) The Committee's approvals of two IT capital projects relating to Customer Relationship Management and Identity Management, with the Committee commending the clarity and detail of the business cases.
- (ii) Discussions regarding strategy and how greater agility could be built into planning and modelling to scale quickly to opportunities, and how to ensure greater resilience in the volatile recruitment market.
- (iii) Its assessment of LU Future's achievements (savings targets met ahead of time) and the residue of work which was required to determine the academic size and shape of the University, with rebalancing to be informed by student recruitment. The Committee had discussed the problems which had arisen in the Curriculum Transformation Project and welcomed Audit and Risk Committee's review to identify lessons learned.
- (iv) Its receipt of a presentation on the University's commercialisation activity, spin outs and approach to protecting and exploiting intellectual property. In terms of performance, the Committee had been assured by relevant metrics, that the University was high performing in terms of spin out activity.
- (v) Work being undertaken to secure a replacement revolving credit facility with five banks expected to submit proposals.

9.2 Council noted the oral report from the Chair of FGPC.

10. OUT-TURN REVIEW 2025-26

PAPER F

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10.1 The Chief Financial Officer introduced the paper which outlined the financial position in the current financial year (2025-26) compared with both the original approved budget and the November 2025 Financial Review exercise. *Some Restricted and Commercial in Confidence*

10.2 Council noted the out-turn Review for 2025-26.

11. UNIVERSITIES SUPERANNUATION SCHEME (USS) PAPER G
VALUATION CONSULTATION

11.1 The Chief Financial Officer introduced the key questions and themes from the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) survey on employer priorities for the 31 March 2026 USS valuation. She recommended to the Council that the University's proposed responses should reflect a long-term approach more likely to achieve fund stability. Members noted that some universities under acute financial pressures could seek potentially changes to alleviate this and that current global instability had the capacity to significantly impact the projected fund valuation position.

11.2 Council noted and endorsed the proposed responses to the consultation.

12. REQUEST FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF FOR-PROFIT LEGAL ENTITY IN INDIA PAPER H

12.1 The Chief Financial Officer introduced the proposal to establish a for-profit legal entity in India to support efforts to develop a branch campus in Bengaluru. She emphasized this was a technical preparatory step to enable effective implementation of the operation if Council were to give its final approval to the partnership later in the year.

12.2 Council noted the recommendations from KPMG and from the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 5 March in favour of the proposal and approved the establishment of a for-profit legal entity in India. Members noted for clarity that this approval did not imply a recommendation for approval of the overall partnership.

13. IT STRATEGY PROGRAMME PAPER I

13.1 The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer introduced the IT Strategy Programme report, caveating that plan implementation had been affected by resource deployment against CTP, but that the impacts of this had been minimised.

13.2 The Chief Information Officer presented headline IT strategy progress with key activity assessed as on track, but with plan implementation remaining adaptable and attuned to university priorities.

He drew attention to the incorporation of new team capabilities to support an enterprise architecture approach, initiatives focused on student experience and the introduction of new systems to enhance and integrate data as a strategic asset and SAIL (Safe Artificial Intelligence at Lancaster) to enable the University to build its AI capabilities, balancing experimentation with mitigation of risk.

- 13.3 It was noted that strategy implementation was a standing item at Estates Committee and FGPC had also considered progress at a recent meeting and the Committees had confidence in the programme, its oversight and its focus on meeting student and staff needs.
- 13.4 Members discussed the impacts of the revised Curriculum Delivery model, focused on curriculum content. Council noted the collaborative approach to the safe delivery of changes, more robust tests for change to ensure clarity of requirements and ability to successfully deliver the project.
- 13.5 Council discussed the progress report and commented on the following.
- (i) That it was encouraged that in a highly competitive market, the University had been able to attract the workforce talent it required to deliver the plan.
 - (ii) That security (both physical and digital) should be a golden thread in every business case due to the ever-changing threat profile.
 - (iii) That it welcomed the approach to integrating cost benefit analysis into the project discovery phase and life cycle. Council noted that further evaluation of strategic benefits realised would be available in due course. Members advised that there would be benefit in considering an impact analysis of changes on people for each major project.
- 13.6 Council reviewed the progress made to date and was content with the assurance that the programme remained aligned to the business case objectives, and endorsed the ongoing support for the programme.

14. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs): MID-YEAR REPORT FOR 2025-26 PAPER J

- 14.1 The Vice-Chancellor presented the report regarding the University's performance against the agreed key performance indicators.
- 14.2 Council discussed progress against the indicators and advised that whilst it welcomed the Executive's transparent approach, it wished the Audit and Risk Committee to consider in more detail the actions being taken to remediate the persistent red indicators as these related to core university activity.
- 14.3 Council noted that key performance indicators would be reconsidered as part the development of a new University Strategy.

15. DEVELOPING OUR NEW INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

PAPER K

- 15.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the proposed approach for the development of a new University strategy: its features; engagement plan; and timeframe for creation. He suggested the types of themes which could emerge through the process, how a new strategy would be supported and delivered by enabling plans and sub-strategies including at a disciplinary level.
- 15.2 Council reflected that the context for strategy setting remained challenging and expressed its appreciation for the breath of planned engagement activity. Members commented on the following.
- (i) That further opportunities for Council members to contribute to plan development outside of Council-specific sessions would be welcomed, noting that some of the big strategic questions would be themes for the May Council Away Day.
 - (ii) The ability to use digital tools for engagement.
 - (iii) Ensuring the inclusion of innovation as a powerful opportunity for Lancaster.
 - (iv) Unpacking what strategic resilience and agility would look like.
 - (v) Placing emphasis on positively framing the strategy and giving careful consideration to semantics to set the right tone and perceptions.
 - (v) That the inclusion of student experience and culture within Section 9 were welcome, care was required to not bundle matters together e.g. financial sustainability, high quality and compliance.
- 15.3 Members noted the Pro-Chancellor's proposal to hold a lay member campus engagement day proximate to an autumn Council meeting to enable staff and students to have increased interaction with lay members and understand better their role within university governance.
- 15.4 Council confirmed its satisfaction with the outline structure for the strategy as outlined in paragraph 10 and endorsed the indicative timeline for the strategy development emphasising that the strategy needed to articulate the University's distinctiveness and special qualities.

16. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT (GPG) 2025

PAPER L

- 16.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2025. She highlighted the inclusion of benchmark data, the gradual improvement in the mean and median GPG and further analysis conducted as to the of the drivers of the gap and overlap with the Athena Swan submission and action plan.

- 16.2 Council discussed the factors causing the gap and the changes which could create most positive impact. The University's workforce profile with a greater proportion of women working in part-time roles in the lower pay quartiles for significant tenures (+10 years) was noted as a significant factor and that benchmark data from similar institutions suggested that this could be linked to geographical location.
- 16.3 Members challenged the Executive as to a realistic target for future GPG reduction. The Executive confirmed that there was confidence that the gap could be closed over time by several percentage points. However, changes to processes were required to speed up progress. This included increasing the number of women in higher paid academic roles and improving academic promotion pathways for all contract types as there were a greater percentage of women on teaching and scholarly research contracts.
- 16.4 Members noted the intention to bring forward future reports earlier in the academic year and to produce an Ethnicity Pay Gap Report.
- 16.5 Council approved the publication of the Gender Pay Gap Report 2025 on the Government's Gender Pay Gap Portal and University website by 30 March 2026.

17. ANNUAL REPORT ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY, 2024-25 PAPER M
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- 17.1 The Head of Social Mobility and Student Success, Martin Walker, presented the annual assurance report on the University's widening participation activity 2024-25. Confirmation was given that all access and participation activity included in the plan submitted to the Office for Students was now live and on track, with support from across the University including the new reciprocal mentoring programme, for which Council members were invited to be involved.
- 17.2 Members noted and discussed the challenges relating to the Ethnicity Awarding Gap and emergent evidence that involvement in the Lancaster Success Programme (LSP) had closed the gap for the majority of its black student participants (90% achieving 2:1 or above).
- 17.3 ***Restricted and Confidential***
- 17.4 Council discussed the report and was satisfied with the evidence-based assurance it provided regarding progress against the Access and Participation Plan and was supportive of the direction of travel to take a whole institution, student-centred life cycle approach.

18. NOMINATIONS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT **PAPER 1**

18.1 Upon the recommendation of the Nominations and Governance Committee, Council approved the following appointments.

- Kirsty Armer as a lay member of Council from 1 April 2026 for a term of 3 years.
- Wendy Barnes as a member of the Audit and Risk Committee with immediate effect to run concurrently with her lay membership.

18.2 Council noted the appointment of Jill Gallard to a Senate Sub-Committee, the Honorary Degrees Committee.

18.3 Members noted that further recommendations for appointments of lay members and for appointments to serve on Council Committees would be circulated by correspondence in due course and that it was intended to hold an internal call for names for co-opted members of a small number of committees.

18.4 Council note the report.

19. CUSTOMER RELATIONS MANAGEMENT (CRM) PLATFORM AND IMPLEMENTATION SERVICES: BUSINESS CASE **PAPER 2**

19.1 Council noted the rationale for, and approval of, a new Customer Relations Management Platform by Finance and General Purposes Committee under the committee's delegated authority.

20. IDENTITY AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT (IDAM): BUSINESS CASE **PAPER 3**

20.1 Council noted the rationale for, and approval of, a new Identity Management System by Finance and General Purposes Committee under the committee's delegated authority.

21. REVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY FIRE SAFETY POLICY **PAPER 4**

21.1 Council approved the University's updated Fire Safety Policy and noted the intended next steps for its implementation and that some named roles would need to be updated to reflect its earlier approval of changes to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team.

22. WRITTEN REPORTS OF MEETINGS **PAPER 5**

22.1 Council noted the written reports of:

- Audit and Risk Committee, meeting of 12 January 2026
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, meeting of 30 January 2026
- Senate, meeting of 11 February 2026

PART 4: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

23. FORWARD SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL BUSINESS

PAPER N

23.1 Council noted the Forward Schedule.

24. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

24.1 There is no other business.

25. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

25.1 Council noted that its next scheduled meeting would be the Away Day, to be held from 12:00 on Thursday 14 May 2026, starting with lunch, followed by Away Day activity and dinner. Continuing with Away Day activity from 09:00 on Friday 15 May 2026, followed by a formal Council meeting. The event will be held at Hotel Football in Manchester.

PART 5

26. UA92 PRESENTATION

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