UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

COUNCIL

Meeting was held on Tuesday 3 March 2026 at 2.00pm
in the Council Room, First Floor, Fielding Johnson Building

MINUTES

Attendees: Neil Goulden, Nishan Canagarajah, Henrietta O'Connor, Kerry Law, Sophie Dale-Black, Richard Tapp, Hilary Coyle, Kevin Nagle, Alison Snape, Rishi Madlani, Cathy Ellis, Liz Blyth, Stewart Fishwick, Matt Schofield, Lauren Bartlett, Mary Curnock-Cook, Martin Cullen, Edith Malemba, George Acquah, and Jack Chambers

Apologies: James Fitchett and Glynis Wright

In attendance: Geoff Green, Paul Gowdridge, Sally Priddle, and Emma Stevens (Item 12)

PART 1- PROCEDURAL MATTERS

INTRODUCTORY BUSINESS

1. **Welcomes and Declarations of interest**

1.1 No interests were raised in advance.

2. **Minutes**

2.1 Council considered the minutes from the previous meeting.

2.2 Council considered the matters arising from the minutes. It was noted that the four actions relating to university policies had been completed. An overview of the University's approach to major change programmes and the current suite of programmes would be reported to the June Audit and Assurance Committee meeting. Two actions relating to revisions to the risk management policy and appetite statements had been implemented and would be considered at the next meeting of the University Risk Committee.

Resolved:

2.3 Council **APPROVED** the minutes of the Meeting held on 3 December 2025.

3. **Chair's Business**

3.1 Council considered a verbal update from the Chair of Council and including action taken on behalf of Council. It was reported that in December 2025, the Secretary of State for Education wrote to all Higher Education institutions affirming the ambitious vision for the Higher Education Sector set out in the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, reaffirming the shared responsibility for maintaining the sector's reputation and providing assurance to students and taxpayers that money was well spent.

The letter asked institutions to consider the robustness and effectiveness of controls for management and governance, admissions and recruitment, and attendance monitoring expectations, with particular concerns expressed about franchise arrangements. The University had reviewed the letter and provided an overview of the arrangements in place. Council received assurance on the effectiveness of the arrangements in place.

3.2 Council noted that the Chair, on behalf of Council, had appointed an independent investigator to review a complaint about the Students Union's procedures. The complaint had now concluded and the outcome was being worked through by the Students Union.

4. **President and Vice-Chancellor's Business**

4.1 Council considered an update on Developments in the Higher Education Sector and at Leicester. It was reported that there had been positive Graduation ceremonies in January and the annual Court meeting provided an opportunity to celebrate a number of student focused initiatives. The Government had published its International Strategy which did not include a specific target for international student recruitment, however, it set out ambitions for institutions to increase Transnational Education and overseas campuses. The Employment Rights Act had become law and the University was working through the implications of this.

4.2 Council noted a student safeguarding incident, it was reported that the University was supporting affected students and proactively addressing potential impacts on recruitment and perceptions of safety within the city. The University was working with other institutions, the police and appropriate third parties to ensure the community had the necessary support.

4.3 Council congratulated Sir Professor Nishan Canagarajah on his knighthood.

4.4 Council welcomed the 100hour employment initiative and the increased research rewards, although it was suggested that it would be beneficial to understand any additional institutional costs as a result of the rewards.

4.5 Council discussed the recruitment update, including the current 7% reduction in domestic Undergraduate applications. It was reported that the Executive was looking at the future risk of the demographic downturn in the next 3-4 years, whilst considering that the negative media focus on student loans and graduate employment could result in a more imminent reduced interest in a Higher Education. The Executive was actively managing these risks, including increased engagement with Further Education Colleges, a focus on converting student applications, and setting prudent recruitment targets. It was reported that reduced applications from London had had the biggest impact on the University's position.

REPORTED BUSINESS

5. **Senate**

5.1 Council considered a summary of the meeting of Senate held on 25 February 2026, including noting the withdrawal of programmes and the student protection arrangements. Council had received a development session on academic assurance providing an overview of the arrangements in place to ensure the University was maintaining quality and standards and had the necessary controls in place to ensure risks were identified. Council welcomed the development session and believed it provided additional assurance as to the University's active controls to manage quality and standards, and supporting students' needs.

5.2 Council discussed how it could receive ongoing academic assurance throughout the academic year.

5.3 Council received assurance that due diligence was undertaken on all honorary degree nominees ahead of submission to Senate and Council to ensure any potential risks are identified and managed. A query relating to one nomination was discussed by Council. *[Secretary's Note: subsequent to the Council meeting it was further discussed and agreed with the Chair of Honorary Degrees Board and Chair of Council to defer this nomination by 12 months.]*

Resolved:

5.4 Council **APPROVED** the Annual Academic Assurance Report.

5.5 Council **APPROVED** the Student Protection Plan 2026-27.

5.6 Council **APPROVED** Degree Outcomes Statement for 2024.

5.7 Council **APPROVED** 13 Honorary Degree and Distinguished Honorary Fellowships recommendations. *[Subject to the Secretary's Note above]*

6. **Financial Update [RESERVED]**

6.1 Council considered an update on the University's financial position including that operating cash was £32.8m (8% of income) a c. £3.2m adverse variance to budget and year-end cash was £27.2m (6.6% of income) a c.£1.7m favourable variance to budget. Council noted a post property sales deficit of £2.4m and a pre property sales deficit of £5.8m. Council also noted ongoing covenant compliance. Council noted that the University's had not utilised its Revolving Credit Facility this academic year and no use was forecast for the remainder of the academic year which demonstrated sustained improvement in financial position. This was welcomed by Council.

6.2 Council noted that the University was actively managing disposals taking account of the property market. Council discussed the potential unforeseen longer-term consequences of reduced capex spending as it could impact the maintenance of an aging estate. It was reported that the University was maintaining a cautious and prudent approach to financial forecasting.

7. **Finance and Infrastructure Committee**

7.1 Council considered a summary of business from the meeting held on 12 February 2026, noting that the Committee had scrutinised the sector benchmarking and financial performance report, and the 2025/26 financial performance and student recruitment update. It was noted that under-performance in Home UG recruitment would directly impact tuition fee income assumptions in the medium-term financial plan. The Committee received an update on estates, capital programme and disposals.

7.2 The Committee had reviewed the Digital Masterplan noting that of the total budget £22.565m, £2.972m had been spent to date, the network modernisation and other projects within the masterplan aligned to strategic risk mitigation. Council discussed concerns about the pace of implementation of the Masterplan as a series of the projects were business critical and would drive institutional innovation.

7.3 Council discussed the UoL Food and Drink financial position, noting it currently received a £800k subsidy but was targeted to receive zero subsidy next year which would require a significant improvement. Council discussed students' perceptions about the University's offer and price increases over time. It was reported that ensuring the offer was attractive and financially viable was a priority for the University.

8. **Strategic Risk Update**

8.1 Council considered an update on the University's Strategic Risk Register, including that the previous two education related risks had been merged into a single risk and 10 of the 20 proposed actions had been implemented over the term. No risks had seen a reduction in their current and projected risk levels. The University's Risk Committee had undertaken deep dives into 7 of the strategic risks, this had provided the Committee with greater assurance on the steps being taken to actively manage the risks, implement and evaluate mitigations. The Committee had challenged risk owners on delayed implementation of actions, especially when delays related to limited resource or funding, as risk owners were asked to re-evaluate spend in their areas to ensure mitigations were prioritised. Council discussed the current risk position, concerns the risks had not improved and were not forecast to improve, it was suggested that the risk appetite may need to be reassessed. Council noted that the Strategic Review was having an impact on capacity to focus on risk mitigation in some areas and all risks were currently outside of appetite, and this needed to be addressed and plans were in place to bring risks back into appetite.

8.2 Council welcomed the emerging risk register that had been developed in response to a risk management internal audit. The next step was to articulate the relationship between the emerging risk register and the Strategic Risk Register and ensuring there was clarity on when risks had sufficiently crystallised to move into from emerging to active risk management.

8.3 Council discussed the Student Recruitment risk and that the content focused on international students, it was reported that the University Risk Committee had asked the risk owner to update the risk to reflect the domestic student recruitment risks and mitigations.

8.4 Council discussed the content of the strategic risks and it was suggested that a series of the mitigations and controls were operational update, not strategic. The Executive was asked to consider how it could articulate its theory of change to support colleagues in understanding the extent to which risks could be managed or mitigated.

Action:

8.5 Consider how the theory of change could be articulated to support colleagues in understanding the extent to which risks could be managed or mitigated. **[Owner: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Professional Services)]**

9. **Audit and Assurance Committee**

9.1 Council considered a summary of business from the meeting held on 17 February 2026, including noting the annual Health and Safety Report, and the three institutional policies recommended for Council approval. The Committee considered progress against the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan noting that there were no overdue actions. Six internal audit action extensions had been requested and approved; the delays were linked to dependency on wider organisational changes (e.g., cyber policy approval, international recruitment restructuring). The Committee had considered two completed internal audits- Financial Controls (Expenses) which received an overall medium risk, highlighting some weaknesses in monitoring expenses and cardholder reviews; and Financial Forecasting (Non-Pay) which received an overall low risk, with one medium finding relating to audit trail over forecast approvals.

9.2 Council discussed potential assurance risks posed by budgetary constraints which had been highlighted in academic assurance and health and safety reports. It was reported that financial investment was required to ensure the University was operating best practice but overall assurance arrangements were in place and improving.

9.3 Council discussed the Cyber Security Policy and welcomed the articulation of how the Policy responded to the cyber security internal audit recommendations. A question was raised about the external input and scrutiny received into the University's approach; how much assurance Council could receive on the arrangements in place. It was reported that a new University Compliance Board had been established to provide dedicated oversight of compliance areas.

9.4 Council discussed the revised Safeguarding Policy that had been updated to the reflect the new Freedom of Speech obligations and the University's position of use of images of children. A question was raised about how the University could ensure compliance with Free Speech obligations when operating internationally and in different cultural contexts. It was reported that the University was working through how to ensure the necessary controls and procedures were in place to respond to the new duties; an update on how the duties would operate in international contexts would be provided to the next meeting of Council.

9.5 Council noted the annual Health and Safety Report.

Resolved:

9.6 Council **APPROVED** the Philanthropic Gift Acceptance Policy.

9.7 Council **APPROVED** the Safeguarding Policy, noting that further assurance was required in relation to transnational education partnerships.

9.8 Council **APPROVED** the Cyber Security Policy, noting that external insight would be sought to inform future Council decision-making and assurance in this complex area.

9.9 Council **APPROVED** that procedural or regulatory changes of the above three policies are delegated to the Registrar and Secretary, with any changes to be reported at the subsequent meeting of Audit and Assurance Committee and Council

Action:

9.10 Provide an update to Council on the University's arrangements for free speech compliance in the international context. **[Owner: Registrar and Secretary]**

10. **Nominations Committee**

8.6 Council considered a summary of business from the meeting held on 5 February 2026, including noting that the Committee had review Council member succession and strategies to ensure continuity of oversight, noting the approval of a £1.95m donation from the Chellaram Foundation, and the proposal to review the role and purpose of Court.

8.7 Council considered the proposal for the appointment of Lay Member of Council, who would also act Chair designate for Audit and Assurance Committee to enable a handover from the interim Chair.

Resolved:

10.2 Council **APPROVED** the appointment of Owen Woodley a Lay Member of Council and Chair of Audit and Assurance Committee for an initial three-year term.

11. **Students Union Priorities Update**

11.1 Council considered the Students Union Priorities, which provided an update on the Students' Union Strategic Plan, priorities for 2025/26, and progress against elected officer priorities. The Students' Union had launched a new Strategic Plan (2025–2028), centred on effective representation, advocacy and community building, with a focus on supporting students to *Thrive, Belong and Succeed*. Annual priorities were informed by student feedback and insight, alongside elected officer plan.

11.2 It was reported that key priorities included reducing the belonging gap for under-represented groups (including LGBT+, disabled, mature, international and postgraduate students), expanding peer mentoring, increasing meaningful student engagement, improving postgraduate engagement, working towards top-quartile NSS performance, and establishing benchmarks for student confidence and resilience. The Union would continue advocacy relating to the Strategic Review and industrial action, monitor the impact of any new UCU mandate, undertake national lobbying on student finance, and progress plans to refresh social spaces within the Percy Gee building.

11.3 Council welcomed the update on the range of initiatives delivered by the Students Union.

PART 2- STRATEGIC BUSINESS

12. **Strategic Review [RESERVED]**

12.1 Council considered the Strategic Review update which provided an update on progress with the University's Strategic Review programme, including financial forecasts, staff impacts, and the status of consultations. The Strategic Review aimed to restore long-term financial sustainability by improving operating cash to 15% of income by 2030 and reducing pay costs to 53.2% of income. The University set a target of £14m in pay savings by 2029/30, to be achieved through a combination of voluntary severance schemes and restructuring across academic and Professional Services areas.

12.2 It was noted that current forecasts indicated total pay savings of £13.2m, which was slightly below the original target but within the agreed contingency. These savings remained subject to consultation outcomes and settlement of Voluntary Severance Scheme (VSS) agreements and were associated with a forecast permanent staffing reduction of approximately 127 FTE in total. Council noted a progress update on the individual cases for change, including that History had been taken out of formal Strategic Review following sufficient voluntary severance to meet savings targets and would now be moved into the action plan process to support the delivery of the necessary curriculum changes. In Education, sufficient pay savings had been achieved to mitigate compulsory, however, new delivery model proposals would be subject to a 30-day consultation; the outcomes of this consultation and aligned governance decisions would be progressed over the summer term. In the College of Science and Engineering, consultation was ongoing with staff's research being assessed in light of the new School's proposed research priorities. The ongoing research alignment meant that the final numbers could not be confirmed at this point. In Professional Services (College Operations and Technical and Research Infrastructure Services), consultations were ongoing, with significant uptake of VSS mitigating the risk of compulsory redundancies.

12.3 Council discussed whether there would be any unforeseen reduction in income as a result of the Strategic Review. It was noted that the timelines for the College of Science and Engineering cases had been revised, this had resulted in a longer period of uncertainty for staff and students. A member of Council set out that existing and prospective students were expressing concerns about the future of subject areas and the options that would be available to them.

12.4 Council discussed the reputational risks around the Strategic Review, it was reported that different communications had been developed to respond to a range of scenarios. It was further reported that the Pro Vice-Chancellors for Education and Research were meeting with the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor weekly to scenario plan and minimise the impact on students as much as possible. Student communication was continuing to evolve, there was a tension between the University's duties to staff and staff change processes, and when the University could offer certainty to students on the outcomes of the review.

12.5 Council noted that the latest forecast demonstrated that the University would achieve pay costs of 53% as a percentage of income by 2029/30 and considered whether these savings would be sufficient in 5 years' time. It was reported that the Strategic Review was only one of the strategies to secure financial sustainability. It was important that all academic areas and options within the University were delivering change through action plans by driving income growth and securing efficiencies. It was noted that if income fell then the University would have to take further action to reduce the pay bill. The University was aiming to secure a more sustainable financial model that could sustain shocks, if required.

12.6 The Students' Union representative on Council confirmed that the Union was continuing to work with the University to support students, provide feedback on students' experiences and signpost concerned students to up to date information. It was reported that Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) students were continuing to express concerns about continuity of their support, and whether they would receive the specialist guidance they were expecting to receive when they applied. Some students had expressed concerns that they were not feeling protected from the impact of the Strategic Review. It was noted that PGR student listening events were being held, supervision arrangements for individual PGR students had been mapped to identify potential areas of risk but outcomes could not be confirmed until staffing processes had concluded. The University was also actively mitigating the impact of industrial action on affected areas and students.

12.7 The University-wide Voluntary Severance Scheme closed in January 2026, with strong levels of interest across academic and Professional Services areas. While not all applications could be approved, the Executive expressed confidence that the £2m non-Strategic Review VSS savings target would be achieved.

12.8 Council noted the associated risks, including workforce stability, consultation timelines, and the potential impact of industrial action. It was reported that equality impact assessments had been undertaken at the outset of consultations, with further assessments planned at the conclusion of the programme.

12.9 Council noted the progress of the Strategic Review programme and the continued focus on mitigating compulsory redundancies, maintaining regulatory compliance, and delivering financial sustainability.

12.10 Council considered the proposal to close Modern Languages and Film Studies which set out the final cases for change for Modern Languages and Film Studies as part of the University's Strategic Review. The report proposed the full withdrawal of teaching and research in both subject areas on the grounds of sustained low student recruitment, ongoing financial deficits, and limited alignment with the University's strategic priorities. Council noted that recruitment to all undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes in Modern Languages and Film Studies would be ceased with immediate effect. Teaching would be taught out by the end of the 2029/30 academic year, and research activity would cease from 1 July 2026, with some affected staff moving to teaching-focused contracts to support the teach-out period.

12.11 Council noted that comprehensive arrangements were in place to support students through programme completion, in line with the Student Protection Plan and the Office for Students' conditions of registration. Senate considered the academic implications of the proposals on 25 February 2026 and confirmed that appropriate academic processes had been followed, that quality and standards would be maintained during teach-out, and that the closures constitute a reportable event to the Office for Students.

12.12 Council noted the impact on staff and confirmed that voluntary severance uptake had mitigated the need for compulsory redundancies. The closures were forecast to deliver pay savings of £1.2m in Modern Languages and £0.5m in Film Studies by the completion of teach-out.

12.13 Council discussed the challenging national picture around Modern Languages. It was noted that the University had tried to identify alternative ways to maintain the subject including collaboration with other institutions and seeking support from the government, unfortunately these had not been realised.

12.14 A member of Council expressed concerns about the different positions of Film Studies and Modern Languages, it was unclear whether the closure of Film Studies would secure significant financial savings, there were a high number of fee-paying PGR students and, relative to their size, it had strong REF outputs. It was reported that the market interest was in applied film studies and to change the University's offer would require significant investment to build the necessary facilities.

12.15 Council discussed the timeline for governance decisions and the need to bring clarity to staff and students on the outcomes of the different aspects of the review as soon as possible.

12.16 Following the discussion about the proposals, the Chair asked for any concerns with approving the recommendations. One member of Council expressed that they did not believe that there was sufficient information on the financial benefit of closure of Film Studies. The Students' Union President felt they were unable to support the recommendations but they understood the bigger picture surrounding the University's finances and the wider Higher Education market.

Resolved:

12.3 Council **APPROVED** that as a consequence of the above actions, the closure of the subject areas of Modern Languages and Film Studies would be completed by 2029/30.

12.4 Council **APPROVED** the submission of a reportable event to the Office for Students that the University would be closing the subject areas of Modern Languages (HECOS Code 100329) and Film Studies (HECOS Code 100058).

13. **Apollo Partnership [RESERVED]**

13.1 Council considered the Apollo Partnership report which set out a proposal for the University to pursue the establishment of a University of Leicester campus at Apollo Knowledge City, Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, India, subject to regulatory and governance approvals. It was reported that the strategic rationale for the proposal was to build on the existing partnership with the Apollo Hospitals Group, including joint research activity, transnational education pathways and postgraduate programme collaborations. Council noted that regulatory changes in India now permitted foreign universities to operate in-country and that a PwC-commissioned report provided supportive analysis of the market opportunity, partner suitability and regulatory environment.

13.2 Council noted that the proposed approach would involve an application to the University Grants Commission (UGC) to establish a University of Leicester campus at Chittoor at the earliest opportunity, with an initial focus on a small number of industry-aligned, healthcare-related postgraduate taught programmes as a low-risk entry model. Teaching would remain under full University of Leicester academic governance, with Apollo providing campus infrastructure, operational support and recruitment. The Indian government was prompting investment in Tier 2 and Tier 3 parts of the country and Chittoor was within Tier 3.

13.3 Council noted that the UGC application would be conditional on Apollo's commitment to support a second-phase University of Leicester campus at a future Apollo development in Hyderabad. Council also noted the proposed operating and financial principles, including minimising capital investment by the University, managing financial and regulatory risks, and aimed to achieve positive contribution over the medium term. The proposal did not provide the detail of the operating model but this would be presented to Council as part of the full business case ahead of progression.

13.4 Council noted that, in line with Office for Students (OfS) regulatory requirements, the consideration of the proposal constituted the first contemplation of an international campus and would therefore require submission of a reportable event notification to the OfS.

13.5 Council welcomed the opportunity but discussed how the partnership, or similar partnerships, would operate in times of global conflict and uncertainty.

13.6 Council discussed the assurances required as part of the business case including the extent of financial exposure, what the investment costs were, student number projections, percentage share of the income and legal liabilities. It was reported that the full business case would be reported to Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Audit and Assurance Committee, Senate and Council in the summer term for consideration, prior to submission to the UGC.

13.7 Council noted that the University currently had separate legal agreements for each aspect of the partnership, the University would need to clarify exclusivity on the different aspects as Apollo did have existing partnerships with other institutions.

13.8 Council discussed how the proposal sat within the broader University international strategy and how it aligned with other opportunities.

Resolved:

13.9 Council **APPROVED** the recommendation to indicate to Apollo that the University of Leicester intended to make an application to the University Grants Commission for a University of Leicester Campus operating from Chittoor at the earliest opportunity, and that the University Grants Commission application for a University of Leicester Campus at Chittoor was dependent on full Apollo support to establish a second phase University of Leicester Campus at the Apollo Hyderabad development.

13.10 Council APPROVED the submission of a reportable event to the Office for Students that the University would be making an application to open a campus in India, to the UGC, noting that this was the initial contemplation of the matter by the Council.

Action:

13.11 Report the Chittoor campus Apollo Partnership business case to the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Audit and Assurance Committee, Senate and Council in the summer term for consideration. **[Owner: Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor]**

14. **Citizens of Change Strategy Refresh**

14.1 Council considered the Citizens of Change Strategy Refresh which set out the proposed approach, scope and timeframe for refreshing the University's Citizens of Change Strategy. It was reported that the current strategy (2021–2031) had reached its mid-point and that a refresh was timely to reflect achievements to date, respond to changes in the external higher education policy environment, and incorporate emerging institutional priorities including internationalisation, enterprise, further education links and artificial intelligence. It was noted that the University's vision and values would remain the same.

14.2 Council noted that the refresh would review and update the University's strategic themes, aims and institutional KPIs, while retaining the existing Citizens of Change mission, vision, values and branding. It was proposed that the refreshed strategy would comprise six strategic themes: three existing themes (Research Inspired Education, World Changing Research, and Our Citizens) and three new themes covering Sustainability (operational, environmental and financial), International, and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

14.3 The proposed timeframe for the refresh spanned 13 months (February 2026 to March 2027), with a refreshed strategy launched in March 2027 and intended to run until 2031/32, maintaining a rolling ten-year strategic horizon reviewed every five years. Council noted the proposed approach to stakeholder engagement, including structured involvement of staff, students, alumni, external partners and Council members, led by strategic theme leads and supported by a task-and-finish group to oversee delivery.

14.4 Council discussed how the refresh could be an opportunity to elevate the work within the community, and engage staff with the ambitions of the strategy. It was agreed that the Autumn away day would be an opportunity for Council to shape and engage with the proposed refresh and the agenda should be structured to enable this.

14.5 Council discussed how AI was articulated and it was suggested it should be reframed as a context rather than a theme; the University needed to consider what students wanted and needed, and this required a rethink of the business model.

14.6 Council discussed the financial constraints of delivering the strategy, at present, the University could not afford to deliver the strategy as proposed and therefore, financial resources and capacity needed to be considered from the outset.

Resolved:

14.7 Council APPROVED the proposed scope and timeframe for the Citizens of Change Strategy refresh and noted the proposed approach to stakeholder engagement.

Action:

14.8 Include Strategy refresh on the Council away day agenda. **[Owner: Registrar and Secretary]**

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

15. **Use of Seal**

15.1 Council noted the use of University's Seal since last meeting.

16. **Dates and times of future meetings***

16.1 Council noted the dates of remaining meetings in 2025-2026, all at 2pm, Wednesday 6 May 2026 and Tuesday 30 June 2026.

17. **Any Other Business***

17.1 No additional business was raised.