

Council Away Day

MEETING HELD: Thursday 25 September 2025, 9:30 AM — 4:30 PM BST

Hulme Conservatory, Ness Botanic Gardens, Wirral, CH64 4AY

Present:

Carmel Booth, President (Chair); Hans van Mourik Broekman, Vice-President; Professor Tim Jones, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Richard Black, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Dr Alison Campbell; Fiona Cullen; Lucy Everest, Chief Operating Officer; Dr Kashmir Gill; Othman Ibrahim, President of the Liverpool Guild of Students; Mark Proctor; Matthew Reed; and Holly Thompson, Deputy-President of the Liverpool Guild of Students.

Apologies:

Cilla Ankrah-Lucas; Professor Julia Balogun; Dr Mark Carawan; Barry Flynn; and Vanessa Griffiths.

In attendance:

Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global Engagement and Partnerships, Professor Tariq Ali; Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, Professor Gavin Brown; Chief Financial Officer, Nicola Davies; Professor Alison Fell (incoming Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences); Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Professor Laura Harkness; Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact, Professor Anthony Hollander; Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Professor Louise Kenny; University Secretary and General Counsel, Kevan Ryan; Mike Edge, Governance, Compliance & Regulatory Manager; Professor Bruce Gibson (incoming Council member); Verity Foster (incoming Council member); and Sachin Date, co-opted member of the Audit Committee.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Holly Thompson was welcomed to her first meeting of Council.

Both Professor Bruce Gibson and Verity Foster were welcomed to the away day and would shortly be formally appointed to Council. The University had also recently gone through a successful round of recruitment to appoint a number of new lay members, and it was hoped to be able to announce these appointments shortly once due diligence had concluded.

2. Disclosures of Interest

Members were asked to disclose any interest that could give rise to conflict in relation to any item on the agenda. No such interests were disclosed

3. President's Introduction

The President welcomed those present and gave an overview of the day, which would involve a number of key sessions.

The first part of the away day would be outward facing, with a look at the sector and the changing environment within which the University operated. Later sessions would include a spotlight on research and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) which was fast approaching, plus a focus on the University's strategic performance, progress & priorities, and strategic risks.

The President reflected on the importance of good governance and the role of Council, specifically around how our governing body had a key role in:

- Monitoring strategy and ensuring accountability
- Maintaining an appropriate balance between short-term versus long-term focus towards our strategic objectives in Liverpool 2031
- Establishing a culture to enable an effective board to thrive
- Placing students and staff at the core of its decision making.

In accordance with standard practice for Council Away Days, all members of the Senior Leadership Team were in attendance, as was co-opted member of the Audit Committee, Sachin Date.

4. Higher Education Policy: the Lie of the Land

[Nick Hillman, OBE, Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), attended for this item.]

Members received an overview of the role of HEPI in providing analysis, research and commentary to inform higher education policy, as well as a summary of some of the key issues, challenges and opportunities faced by the sector.

Council welcomed the opportunity to have a rich discussion and thanked Mr Hillman for the insightful overview.

5. Vice-Chancellor's Update

Members received a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor covering: recent positive trajectory in both home and global league table rankings; NSS performance; provisional University financial results for 2024/25; latest student recruitment position; financial budget for 2025/26; an overview of the University's draft five year plan; key institutional priorities to support the delivery of strategic ambitions; and challenges and opportunities.

6. No Objection Certificate for use of University Name

Council approved a resolution to authorise the University Secretary to sign a No Objection Certificate for use of the University name by the new Joint Venture company in India. Once signed by the University, this Certificate would be submitted to the Registrar of Companies at the Ministry of Corporate Affairs in India.

7. Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF) and Research Priorities

[Sarah Jackson, Director of Research, Partnerships & Innovation, attended for this item.]

This session was broken into two main areas:

- An overview of what REF is, why it's pivotal to realising the University's strategic objectives in Liverpool 2031, and how the University was preparing. The session provided an opportunity for Council to develop a common understanding of the University's plans and progress to date, including both the challenges and opportunities presented by REF.
- An overview of the University's research income targets for Liverpool 2031, priorities for the forthcoming year, progress to date and opportunities presented by the Industrial Strategy, were also discussed.

8. Liverpool 2031: Strategy & Prioritisation

[The Director of Strategic Planning, Phil Hopwood, attended for this item.]

This session updated members on the University's recent positive performance in both Global and UK league tables compared to the trajectory to top 100 and top 20 respectively. Council also discussed what further activities had been undertaken and what activities were needed to pivot towards maintaining the improvement in league tables, both from an Education and Research focus.

The session also included an overview of the University's strategic priorities for 2025/26 in supporting the delivery of Liverpool 2031.

Council sought assurance that the University had in place appropriate resources to accommodate the increased student numbers without impacting the overall student experience. Council also discussed what challenges and opportunities existed that could impact on the positive trajectory towards achieving the University's strategic objectives.

9. Strategic Risk Register & Strategic Risk Framework

[The Director of Strategic Planning, Phil Hopwood, attended for this item.]

This session explored the level of risk and changes in exposure within each of the Liverpool 2031 strategic risks.

Council approved the Strategic Risk Register, in particular noting the high-risk scores assigned to E2 Cyber Security and S2 Student Recruitment, despite the mitigations in place. For Cyber Security, the mitigations in place would have an impact on elements of the risk but could not necessarily reduce the score as the risk environment was constantly changing. With Student Recruitment, the risk had numerous controls and mitigations in place, but parts of the risk were externally driven and included factors outside of the University's control.

A more detailed review of the Strategic Risk Register would be undertaken in the spring, and Council agreed that it should have a deeper dive on the Cyber Security risk.

10. Closing Remarks

All those present were thanked for their valuable input, scrutiny, and challenge that would help inform future decisions.

It was clear that

- Whilst significant challenges remained, the University was on a positive trajectory in a range of strategically important areas, and Council wished to thank both the Senior Leadership Team and wider University staff for their part in this.
- A concerted effort was required to maintain this positive momentum, harness opportunities, as well as to continue to navigate challenges posed within the sector and beyond.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next ordinary Council meeting would be held at 9.30am on Wednesday 26 November 2025.