

EXETER COLLEGE STRATEGY: 2025-2035¹

‘Floreat Exon’

Context

An age-old axiom reminds us that change is the only constant. An ability to adapt to a continuously evolving environment is not just valuable but essential in today’s world. Over its 700 years of history, Exeter College has consistently demonstrated that agility. Yet amidst such change, it has also shown that it is equally important to remain anchored in enduring principles. This strategy document is an articulation of both of those imperatives. It serves two core purposes. First, in stating Exeter’s mission and vision, it sets out the College’s ambition and direction of travel for the next decade, elements that can be monitored and measured through our Strategic Planning framework.² Second, it underscores the fundamental values, culture, and core activities that define and shape the College. This short document is, therefore, not only helpful for future decision making, but also a clear statement of the College’s collective ethos, approach, priorities, and philosophy.

Its development has been a collaborative effort, shaped through consultation with students, alumni, and friends, all of whom are vital to bringing this strategy to life. Progress towards our stated objectives and goals will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body, with an interim review in 2027. Further details regarding plans and delivery mechanisms for different parts of the strategy will be set out in subsidiary documentation.

Headwinds and Realities

Exeter will embrace a series of headwinds over the next decade, which shape this strategy. These include but are not limited to: (1) a historic estate in urgent need of sympathetic renewal that retains its character while ensuring energy efficiency and reducing waste; (2) the necessity to offset dwindling government undergraduate funding by endowing more tutorial fellowships; and (3) the need to support access to study and the professions through funding additional postgraduate scholarships. We must also respond to the challenges of (4) meeting the evolving expectations and learning needs of an ever-changing and more diverse student population, while supporting their wellbeing in partnership with the University and the NHS, and (5) responding to the development of new, destabilising, and novel technologies.

What Makes Exeter Different?

The true character of Exeter College is found in its heart – in its welcome, its warmth, and its community. Located in the historic centre of the city, the college may be known for its iconic view of Radcliffe Square, but more important is its open-minded curiosity, its nurturing of the imagination, and its quiet but fierce commitment to send its students into the world with purpose, confidence, and a desire to make a difference. It is a college that encourages its community to live life to the full, to work hard and play hard. It is rooted in tradition and has an illustrious history rich in political, academic, creative, and sporting achievements, but it lives fully in the present, and looks to the future with genuine optimism. It is serious when it matters, irreverent when it helps, and its idealism is powered by pragmatism. Exeter stands proudly among Oxford’s colleges – not defined by grandeur or history alone, but by the richness of the experience it offers to all who study, teach, research, and work here.

¹ This strategy is nested with the *University Strategic Priorities 2025-30: The Role of the Colleges* document.

² For example, applications for undergraduate and graduate places and for academic posts; Exeter’s contribution to the University’s progress in meeting its access targets; feedback from school pupils and teachers; commentary from alumni and friends etc.

Exeter College Mission

Set within the vibrant ecosystem of the wider university, and contributing actively to its world-leading vision, Exeter College enables a community of scholars, students, and staff to interact creatively across disciplinary silos and to achieve the highest standards of education through teaching and research. We are proud to be a self-governing academic community unapologetically committed to scholarship, intellectual freedom, and the conviction that true advances in knowledge depend on the freedom to question, explore, and think independently. Such progress is best fostered in environments that support both individual excellence and collective achievement. Fundamental to our mission is attracting and retaining exceptionally talented students, academics, and staff – all of whom feel that they belong to the Exeter family – and creating an environment in which they can thrive.

Exeter College Vision

We envision a thriving, vibrant, lively, and forward-looking academic community that is open to all. We aim to ensure that its infrastructure is fiscally resilient, with at least 65% of its tutorial fellowship posts endowed, and all undergraduates offered college accommodation and personalised student support³. We are committed to delivering our single charitable mission – the advancement of education within the University of Oxford – with imagination and integrity. At the heart of this vision are the people who make Exeter what it is: its students, academics, staff, alumni, and friends. We are proud to be a community rooted in learning, defined by belonging, and animated by the transformative power of education, intellectual inquiry, and the enduring bonds of friendship and exchange that will continue to shape our future.

Values and Commitments

- We value our 700-year heritage and are committed to innovating for the future.
- We are dedicated to excellence in all that we do.
- We value authenticity and aim to create meaningful impact.
- We are committed to a culture of respect, kindness, and celebration.
- We take pride in our achievements but remain humble and self-aware.
- We commit to fostering a high-performing, happy, and confident academic community.
- We value inclusion and diversity and are committed to being open and welcoming to all.
- We uphold freedom of speech, open-mindedness, and constructive engagement.

Fundraising Priorities

- Investing in sustainable and accessible infrastructure that honours our historic estate.
- Endowing academic posts (65%+) to safeguard the future of the tutorial system.
- Providing full accommodation for undergraduates in all years of study.⁴
- Enhancing student support and experience, including well-being on course and transition from education to employment.
- Doubling the endowment for long-term resilience.⁵
- Enhancing access to post-graduate degrees.

³ The target is to double the endowment by 2035.

⁴ A goal that has yet to be achieved from the last fundraising campaign. Accommodation will be guaranteed for all undergraduates on 3- or 4-year courses.

⁵ This is separate, but complementary, from the £50M fundraising campaign highlighted below.

Infrastructure Priorities

- Refurbishment of accommodation and office spaces; modernise facilities and improve accessibility, whilst respecting the historical heritage of our estate.
- Replacing the mechanical and electrical infrastructure and improve the environmental performance of our buildings creating a more sustainable, resilient, and efficient estate.
- Developing flexible and financially sustainable catering, conference, and sporting facilities that augment the student experience and complement the College operations.

Culture

Limitless possibilities, where everyone is encouraged and supported to realise, and indeed expand, their potential. Forging a thriving, vibrant, and fun academic and research community, where every person acts responsibly, kindly, and collegiately, in a progressive environment that is inclusive, safe, and encouraging. We promote choice, innovation, experimentation, and excellence, and seek to build our reputation and reach, nationally and internationally. Freedom of speech fortifies our approach: it is fundamental to intellectual inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge (and nowhere is this truer than at Exeter College, where it is held up and protected as a cherished value). And we care deeply about all our people and listen to their concerns – encouraging them to seize opportunities at Oxford and beyond.

Our Student Aspiration

To release aspirational graduates into the world who are well-informed, connected, resilient, infused with the skills and joys of intellectual pursuits, determined to change the world for the better, and who wish to continue contributing to Exeter, securing the College's legacy and future.

Integrated Lines of Work

'The Fundamentals'

Education: Teaching and Research (Main Effort):

Academic excellence is at the core of everything we do at Exeter. We aim to inspire every student to be curious, confident, and skilled in their intellectual pursuit, and we are proud to support this through world-class teaching and research. A key commitment therefore is safeguarding the future of the tutorial system, unique to Oxford and central to student success, by endowing at least 65% (and ideally 100%) of our tutorial Fellowship posts by 2035. We also recognise that postgraduate degrees are becoming increasingly important for success in business and industry as well as the academy. That is why we are making access-based scholarships a central fundraising priority, so that we can ensure that the most aspiring and able students, regardless of background, can succeed at Exeter. In addition to that, by looking out for opportunities to create funded Junior Research Fellowships in the areas of the College's existing expertise, we will support those in the earliest stages of their independent academic career. We will continue to develop the College's international programmes, sharing the unique strengths of the tutorial system with students around the world, including those who do not come to Oxford for a full degree programme. At its heart, our aim is simple: to offer an outstanding, transformational educational experience that prepares our students not just to navigate a fast-changing world, but to flourish in it, and shape it for the better.

People:

Exeter College is an institution, but it is its people who make it feel like a home-from-home and a community. As we look towards the future, we will continue to strive to attract and retain outstanding academics and staff – people who share our passion, who have the drive to make things happen, and want to grow alongside the College. Offering fair and competitive remuneration packages that can adapt to economic activity, social change, and individual circumstances will be a key part of this, but just as important are the opportunities we can offer for personal and professional development. We want all members of college to feel proud of what they do, have a sense of purpose, and nurture a culture that values and respects every individual for who they are. Supporting wellbeing remains a top priority, and the College will continue to review and develop policies that provide employee support and promote inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion:

Exeter College is a vibrant, inclusive community where we want each student and member of staff to feel they truly belong. Our commitment to diversity and equality is more than just a statement or a box to tick: we want to ensure that it is woven through every aspect of college life and strategy. As we continue to build and nurture an environment where everyone has the support they need to thrive and to succeed, we will listen carefully, learn continually, and work closely with disability advisory services, equality networks, and outreach teams to make real, lasting change.

‘Right Sizing’***Estates:***

Ensuring that we preserve the historic buildings for future generations, whilst bringing accommodation and facilities up-to-date and improving sustainability, is a pressing challenge that Exeter looks forward to achieving by 2035. Refreshing and upgrading all residential, office, and workspace, replacing ageing mechanical and electrical infrastructure, and improving disability access across the College are Estate priorities. Over the next ten years, we will look to enhance our conference and sporting facilities, which both augment the student experience and contribute to the financial resilience of the College through diverse revenue streams. By the end of this strategy period, the acquisition of additional residential space will allow all undergraduates to be offered accommodation for their full duration of study⁶.

Governance:

The College recognises that good governance is key to achieving our charitable purposes. We will strive continually to optimise effective governance; ensuring transparency, accountability, integrity, equity, and effective decision making remain, while retaining academic self-governance, which has been key to the success of the College over the centuries. College Statutes and Bylaws are clear that Governing Body (an empowered board of trustees) is where all important decisions are made and that its membership, a combination of Fellows and Professional Officers, debate and determine all issues in a democratic manner. All Governing Body members are, therefore, charity trustees of the College and are responsible for all decisions taken.

Religion:

The College is committed to supporting all its members, irrespective of their faith. We will continue to develop resources to support spiritual life and contemplation in all its forms. With appropriate

⁶ A goal that has yet to be achieved from the last fundraising campaign. Accommodation will be guaranteed for all undergraduates on 3- or 4-year courses.

resourcing, the Chapel will continue to flourish as a place of welcome, theological discussion, and care, rooted in the College's liberal, inclusive, High-Church (Anglican) tradition⁷. Our student-led Choir, one of the finest student ensembles in the United Kingdom, will remain a cherished constant within the Exeter community, and will continue to unite people with outstanding choral music. We will also continue to use our standing in the wider musical world to promote, develop, and encourage choral music both across the United Kingdom and abroad.

'Commitment and Horizon Scanning'

Sustainability:

Exeter is committed to creating a sustainable future by setting ambitious evidence-based goals to reduce our carbon emissions and become a nature-positive institution⁸. We aim to improve the environmental performance of our historic buildings while transforming our operations to reflect these values. We are committed to collaborating across the collegiate University and beyond to share, develop, and implement best practices in environmental sustainability. In doing so, we will demonstrate Exeter's commitment to the environment and biodiversity, setting a new standard for sustainability in higher education.

Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Artificial Intelligence is quickly becoming a major driving force for profound technological and societal transformation. Exeter is well placed to engage with this fast-changing landscape, with experts engaged at the forefront of AI research among its fellowship.

By 2035, Exeter aims to exemplify how a historic institution can embrace technological innovation while staying true to its core values. This goal will be achieved through a series of well-defined steps, helping college members build strong digital skills, offering training in AI tools that can support research (like automating routine tasks or managing large datasets) where needed, while managing the costs and resources involved with care.

We also take seriously the need to use AI responsibly. Exeter will set clear policies to guide the use of AI both in education and research. We will carefully monitor the risk that excessive reliance on AI could undermine the critical thinking and independent problem-solving skills that we seek to nurture in our students. We will also make sure that all users are aware of the risks of errors and biases perpetuated through AI use, as well as emerging ethical and environmental considerations. Just as importantly, we will encourage a balanced approach, where digital tools support – but never replace – human connection, creativity, and wellbeing.

'Confidence to Succeed'

Outreach:

Many young people with the academic potential to thrive in the Oxford tutorial system still face barriers to realising their full potential. That is why Exeter remains committed to forging ahead in its work in enabling access to higher education. Our dedicated Access and Outreach team will continue to build strong relationships with schools and teachers in the College's historic South-West link area, helping us better understand the challenges faced by students in this region, while also expanding our

⁷ High-Church refers to the Oxford Movement, which sought to revitalise ecclesiastical practice in public worship through ritual and tradition. Exeter was a leading College in the Oxford Movement.

⁸ Carbon emissions refers to our Scope 1 and 2 emissions which we publish on a yearly basis. We will continue to gather data to determine our Scope 3 emissions (including air travel) whilst actively aiming to reduce all scopes across our operations.

reach to new communities. We will look to ways to improve the transitional and on-course support we give to our students, to ensure that they thrive in their studies at Exeter. By investing in outreach and inclusion, we will continue to foster a diverse undergraduate body at the heart of our flourishing College community.

Resilience:

Resilience enables us to recover from, adapt, and thrive in the face of challenging situations. We aim to ensure our students are equipped to face such challenges in the present and future, by providing students with the skills and confidence to succeed and to remain ‘anchored’ in an ever-changing world. Our failures do not define us, but they do help shape us as individuals. We will foster an environment where students embrace setbacks and recognise that ‘failure’ – perceived or actual – is not an endpoint, but a stepping stone to personal and professional growth. It is not the failures that are important, but the ability to learn from them whilst practising self-compassion. Building and encouraging resilience will continue to be a priority as we move forward in an increasingly fast-paced society.

Career Transition:

Achieving academic success in a chosen discipline is a vital part of each student’s journey, but it is only the beginning. Working closely with the University Careers Service, we are committed to improving the support we offer as our students prepare for life after Exeter. We will draw on our vibrant alumni network to assist us in delivering practical support in the form of career advice and insight, mentoring, coaching, and internships. By connecting students with alumni in their chosen field of interest, the College aims to help students to step confidently into their future careers.

‘Enabling Activities’

Alumni and Friends:

With over 700 years of history, Exeter’s alumni and friends have helped shape the world, and continue to do so today. They remain an integral part of the global Exeter community and will continue to be so as we look to the future. We want all our alumni and friends to be proud of their lifelong connection with the College. All should be assured of a warm welcome whenever they return, whether for a brief visit to the Fellows’ Garden or to exercise their dining rights in Hall. We will strive to offer a varied event programme that is fresh and interesting to different alumni and friends, who include audiences both in the UK and in overseas locations. We will communicate regularly through varied media with content that is both relevant and of interest to our alumni and friends, including, where appropriate, linking them with Fellows. We benefit enormously from the expertise and skills of those alumni and friends who volunteer to sit on committees or help our students with careers advice. We will expand our alumni and friends’ network, enlarging the grid of individuals invested in the success of the College, bringing them into the Exeter community; all of whom can play a part in ensuring Exeter continues to provide a first-in-class experience as we look to the future.

Fundraising and Giving:

A successful fundraising campaign will be vital to achieving our strategic priorities for 2025–2035 and help us to advance our charitable object. Energising our global alumni and friends’ network to support us in these aims is also crucial. We are fortunate to have many alumni and friends who wish to help us, but we must develop a compelling narrative to convince them why they should give to Exeter College. Securing significant donation income will enable us to improve the College’s infrastructure, ensuring it is fit for generations to come. Increasing the proportion of endowed tutorial Fellowships

will secure the academic future of the College and preserve the tutorial system of teaching which is at the heart of what we do. We will expand financial support for our post-graduate students through increased scholarship provision. We will make a step change in financial, mental resilience, and wellbeing support to enable our students to thrive while they are with us, and to help the transition to a life and career beyond College. We need at least £50m to deliver these outcomes and we will seek donations from our alumni and friends to achieve this goal.

More broadly, we take a thoughtful, responsible approach to managing the College's investments. As long-term investors, we aim to grow the endowment steadily while keeping enough diversity and liquidity to meet short-term needs. We are also exploring imaginative ways to realise the maximum value to the endowment from the College's land and property assets, and to encourage support through blended and legacy giving. Our long-term goal is to double the endowment, securing the College's future for generations to come.

Communications:

The College has a unique and very special identity that is cherished by those who are part of the Exeter community. Articulating this identity and sense of belonging to people beyond the boundaries of the College is part of our core mission. The way we communicate has changed significantly over the past ten years, and the College will continue to adapt communication to share its values and goals and amplify the voices of members of its community.