

The University of Manchester

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday, 17 June 2020 (by videoconference)

Present: The Chancellor, Mr Lemn Sesay (in the Chair), The President and Vice-Chancellor, the Chair of the Board of Governors, the Pro-Chancellor, Mrs Gillian Easson, Professor Luke Georghiou, Professor Martin Schroder, Mrs Ann Barnes, Mr Gary Buxton, Mr Michael Crick, Dr Reinmar Hager, Mr Nick Hillman, Mr Robert E Hough, Mr Anil Ruia, Dr Delia Vaquez, Professor April McMahon, Professor Colette Fagan, Professor Nalin Thakkar, Mr Adrian Bull, Mr Paul Foley, Ms Brenda McMahon, Mr Tim Turvey, Dr Emyr Benbow, Professor John R Helliwell, Ms Helen Watts, Mr Steven Speakman, Mr Matthew Taylor, Ms Lily Barton, Dr Ronald E Catlow, Dr Thurai Rahulan, Ms Katharine Sullivan, Cllr Sandra Collins, Cllr Colin Foster, Cllr Kieran Heakin, Mr Tony BK Aggarwal, Mr Carl Austin-Behan, Mr John Schultz, Mr Michael Taylor, Mrs Janet Valentine, Mr Andrew Watson, Dr Janet Webster, Mr Nicholas Bent, Mr Steve Connor, Mr Asrar Ul-Haq, Mr Berrisford Edwards, Professor Mahesh Nirmalan, Mr Mark Scoular, Ms Roz Webster, Miss Marie Wright, Ms Gillian Adams, Dr William Hamilton Craig, Mr Jim Hancock, Dr Simon Hayward, Dr Alastair Holt, Dr George Neisser, Dr Raj Patel, Ms Helen C Stevens, Ms Janine Cottingham, Mr Isaka Yakubu, Professor John Garside, Dr John Pannone, Ms Susan Baines, Ms Susan Lipton (64)

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, the Interim Director of Finance, the Deputy Dean for the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health and the Deputy Secretary.

**1. Introductory Remarks**

**Reported:** The Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting, which was the first to take place via videoconference.

**2. Minutes**

**Resolved:** The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020 were approved.

**3. Matters arising**

**Reported:** matters arising were dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

**4. Membership of the General Assembly**

**Noted:** details of current membership of the General Assembly.

**5. Report from Nominations Committee**

**Received:** a report from the Nominations Committee, covering the following areas.

**i) Reconstitution of General Assembly**

**Reported:**

(1) There had been a pause in the process of reconstituting General Assembly. It had been planned to bring names of new members to General Assembly at this meeting, but the resources required to engage with new members had been otherwise engaged during the response to Covid-19 and prospective new members were themselves also otherwise engaged.

(2) The revised plan was for Nominations Committee to bring names of new members to the meeting in January 2021 or, failing that, June 2020.

**Noted:**

- (1) Members' support for the more engaged membership that would emerge after the process of reconstitution was completed.
- (2) Current members would serve until the end of their current term of office before stepping down (unless part of the reconstituted General Assembly).

**ii) Appointment of Pro-Chancellor**

**Reported:**

- (1) There had also been a delay in the process of identifying and recruiting a new Pro-Chancellor. The process had been about to launch in mid-late March 2020, when lockdown began.
- (2) The plan was to relaunch the process at a time when all stakeholders, including staff and students were able to engage meaningfully in the nominations process.
- (3) The expectation was that a recommendation would be brought to the meeting in January 2021. The current Pro-Chancellor, Gillian Easson, had generously agreed to stay in office until a replacement was recruited.

**Resolved:** that the current Pro-Chancellor, Gillian Easson, be reappointed as Pro-Chancellor from 1 September 2020 until a replacement was appointed.

**iii) Appointment of member of General Assembly to Nominations Committee**

**Reported:**

- (1) One of the members of General Assembly currently serving on Nominations Committee was Jim Hancock who stood down from General Assembly at the end of the current academic year.
- (2) Nominations Committee had prepared an outline role descriptor to enable eligible General Assembly members to express interest in the vacancy.

**Noted:** the role descriptor was intended as a guide, and was not intended to preclude suitably experienced members without direct experience of the higher education sector (other than through General Assembly membership) from expressing interest.

**Resolved:** that eligible members of General Assembly be contacted and invited to express interest in the vacancy.

**iv) Potential changes to Statutes**

**Reported:**

- (1) The report gave advance notice of potential changes to Statutes, particularly the current Statute (and related Ordinance) relating to the Chancellor. This would enable an appointment process, rather than the current electoral process.
- (2) Nominations Committee had carefully weighed up the respective merits of the two approaches and had noted the advantages of an appointments process including a wider pool of potential candidates and a process enabling engagement from all stakeholders, including students, who were currently excluded.
- (3) General Assembly would be afforded an opportunity to comment formally on the proposed change to Statutes later in the year.

## **6. Update on the work of the University**

### **Received:**

- (1) The University's 2018-19 Stocktake Report.
- (2) A verbal update from the President and Vice-Chancellor on strategic developments since the previous meeting. This was supplemented by presentations from the Vice-President for Learning, Teaching and Students and the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health.

### **Reported (by the President and Vice-Chancellor):**

- (1) The University had quickly moved to remote work and study in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. Contingency planning to mitigate the impact was proceeding on the basis of a potential 50% decline in international students in 2020-21 and a smaller (10%) decline in Home/EU student numbers (worst case scenario planning was predicated on an 80% fall in international students). When other financial impact was aggregated (e.g. decline in income from research, commercial income and residences) there was a potential gap of £160 million.
- (2) Whilst there had been an immediate decline in some sources of income after lockdown (e.g. commercial and residential income), cost saving measures had been initiated and there had been a natural reduction in some expenditure (e.g. travel). Cost saving measures included a freeze on non-essential recruitment and expenditure and on capital and long-term maintenance expenditure except where the University was contractually committed. The Senior Leadership Team had taken a 20% reduction in salary and other staff voluntary measures had been introduced including a Voluntary Severance Scheme. The University had also used the government furlough scheme for eligible staff (approx. 1,800) and had paid its 20% contribution to salaries of such staff. Alumni and other donations had been extremely generous and resulted in over £1 million contribution to the Student Hardship Fund.
- (3) The above measures meant that the University was likely to achieve a slightly better than forecast position in 2019-20, but there was significant uncertainty in relation to the position in 2020-21. Key influencing factors were the depth and duration of global recession as a result of the pandemic, the final impact on student recruitment, the take-up of staff voluntary measures and the extent and scope of any government funding to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.
- (4) The position in relation to student undergraduate recruitment would become clearer after Confirmation and Clearing (mid-August) and indications were that applications were comparable to the previous year (although it was unclear how many students might decide subsequently to defer entry). A student number cap had been imposed (overall target recruitment plus 5%) and the details of how this would be implemented were being clarified. Measures were being taken (institutionally, sector-wide and regionally) to reassure international students about safety and security and there had been discussions with airlines to ensure flights would be available from key market areas.
- (5) Government support for the sector was likely to be conditional (e.g. in relation to contribution to regional economic recovery or application of research). Within government, the University and other Russell Group institutions were emphasising the historic and long-standing underfunding of research.
- (6) The University was taking a cautious approach to campus reopening, taking into account government guidance. Covid-19 related research had continued throughout lockdown and a small number of other laboratories had opened in the past few weeks.
- (7) On non-Covid related matters:
  - the University had retained its place as the best University in the UK in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (eighth in the world) and had been ranked 27<sup>th</sup> in the world QS University table (same position as the previous year).
  - The Vice-President for Social Responsibility had issued a [statement](#) in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. This included reference to the University's current activities to progress race equality and its commitment to develop this work.

### **Reported (by the Vice-President for Learning, Teaching and Students)**

(1) The University's movement to online learning had been guided by four principles:

- speed (the need to establish a robust online learning environment for all students as quickly as possible);
- inclusivity and accessibility (including support for students who needed more support in moving to online);
- quality of online experience: and
- community (a mutually supportive environment, supported by specialist input from the Institute for Teaching and Learning).

(2) The *Our Future* document articulated the University's strong commitment to blended learning and delivery, pre-Covid, and this approach was popular with students.

(3) There had been investment in e-technology specialists to support the acceleration of online learning.

(4) The adoption of a no detriment policy ensured that no student would be unfairly disadvantaged by the impact of the pandemic on their learning.

(5) Senate had approved the plan for the academic year 2020-21. Given the difficulty in providing lectures in a socially distanced way, they would be provided on line and would be interactive and synchronous (with the ability to capture and replay later). The intention was for smaller group teaching (seminars, tutorials, practical sessions etc) to be delivered face to face whilst respecting social distancing guidance in force at the time. There would be enhanced and extended induction opportunities for both new and returning students.

### **Reported by the Deputy Dean, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health**

(1) The University had established a Covid-19 Research Response Group (RRG) to work with partners on the pandemic. This work involved partnership with NHS colleagues from the Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and the Northern Care Alliance NHS group, supported by Health innovation Manchester. This involved using the University's experimental and translational research expertise through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Manchester Biomedical Research Centre and the NIHR Manchester Clinical Research Facility.

(2) This activity brought together the research and innovation strengths of partnerships to focus on the crisis with the aims of minimising the loss of life (regionally, nationally and globally) and reducing the impact of the pandemic on Greater Manchester's health and social care system and the wider community. The University had accelerated the graduation of year 5 medical students to enable them to take part in the front-line response to Covid-19.

(3) The RRG was focusing on a number of key priority areas including:

- New treatments. The University was playing a full part in leadership, coordination and execution of clinical trials, focusing on new therapies aimed at improving clinical outcomes. The University's partnership approach was seeking new opportunities to find additional trials and develop protocols for new therapies.
- Disease mechanisms. The University's world leading virology and inflammation and immunology teams were working actively to study patients in real-time in order to understand the mechanisms by which the virus causes severe reactions, thus suggesting new treatment approaches to be tested.
- Patient assessment. Expertise in data science, mathematics and computer modelling was being harnessed to identify and track patients with symptoms to identify those who are deteriorating and need more intensive, earlier interventions.
- Social care impact. Public health and applied health researchers were working on developing and evaluating ways to relieve pressure on NHS and social care impacts. This would enable lessons to be drawn for future outbreaks and more efficient deployment of health and social care facilities.
- Patients with existing health conditions. Work focused on patients with pre-existing diseases on immuno-suppression treatments who were more vulnerable to Covid-19. This encompassed the impact of Covid-19 on people with mental health conditions.
- Rapid diagnosis. The University partnership was working closely with major industry partners to develop and deploy rapid diagnosis testing platforms to scale up for mass, widespread testing.

- Prevention/vaccination. There were discussions with manufacturers who were developing vaccines. The partnership had experience of deploying clinical trials at large scale and the approach and population-based tracking of patients will help support rapid recruitment and interpretation of results for any future vaccination trials. Colleagues in the Faculty of Science and Engineering had utilised 3D printer technology to manufacture Personal Protective Equipment.
- Organisational development and decision-making. Expertise in the Faculty of Humanities in strategic management, behavioural science, organisational psychology, data science, mathematics, and computer modelling was being harnessed to enhance organisational decision-making processes. This included work on coordinating the power of volunteers to deal with the Covid-19 crisis.

## **7. Question and Answer Session**

**Reported:** This item provided an opportunity for members to ask questions on any aspect of the University's work. Some questions were submitted and answered before the meeting. The questions and answers provided (either before or at the meeting) were made available to members in a separate report.

## **8. Date of next meeting of the General Assembly**

**Reported:** That the next meeting of the General Assembly would be held on Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 3.00pm

## **9. Summation and close**

**Reported:** The Pro-Chancellor expressed thanks to all the presenters and to the General Assembly members in attendance for the contribution they had made to the meeting.

CLOSE.