

The University of Manchester

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 3 March 2021 (by videoconference)

Present: The Chair of the Board of Governors (in the Chair), the President and Vice-Chancellor, Mrs Ann Barnes, Mr Michael Crick, Mr Junior Usina, Mrs Daniele Atkinson, Mr Berrisford Edwards, Dr Vanessa May, Mr Mark Scoular, Mrs Sandra Taylor, Mr Christopher J Boyes, Dr William Hamilton Craig, Dr Alastair Holt, Dr Alison Newby, Mr Ishaka Yakubu, Councillor Colin Foster, Councillor Kieran Heakin, Councillor Shoab Akhtar, Ms Kathy Cowell, Dr Chris Brookes, Mr Roger Spencer, Ms Lily Barton, Dr Susan Hilton, Mr Adrian Bull, Ms Abigail Shapiro, Mr Roger P Milburn, Mr John Schultz, Mr Michael Taylor, Dr Janet Webster and Dr Rodger Pannone (30).

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, the Vice-President for Social Responsibility and the Deputy Secretary.

1. Introductory Remarks

Reported:

- (1) The Chair of the Board of Governors, would chair the meeting in the absence of the Chancellor who was unable to attend. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.
- (2) The award of national honours to the following members of staff: Professor Rachel Griffith (Dame of the British Empire): Dr Heather Williams (MBE), Professor Michael Wood (OBE).

2. Minutes

Resolved: The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 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) Appointment of Pro-Chancellor

Agreed: on the recommendation of Nominations Committee, to confirm the appointment of Jim Hancock as Pro-Chancellor for an initial four year period (ie until 2 March 2025).

ii) Reconstitution of General Assembly

Noted: a general update on progress. The report set out changes that came into effect from 1 September 2020 and noted that approaches to prospective new members were planned shortly to enable a report to be made to the June 2021 meeting.

iii) Potential changes to Statutes

Reported:

- (1) A summary of previous consideration of potential changes to Statutes (and Ordinances) in relation to the appointment of the Chancellor and the Board of Governors as previously reported to General Assembly.
- (2) Recent engagement with Senate on the detail of proposed changes had resulted in the Board of Governors agreeing at its meeting on 24 February 2021 to pause further consideration of proposed changes to enable further time for reflection.
- (3) The Nominations Committee would reconsider this matter at its meeting on 17 March 2021. Any further proposals to change to Statutes would be brought to General Assembly so that it could express an opinion.

5. Annual report on the work of the University

Received: The President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, reported on the key developments over the year, making reference to the Review of the Year contained within the Financial Statements. The presentation covered the following and slides were made available to members:

- University's response to Covid 19
- challenges over the past year
- financial implications and impact (see item 6 below)
- performance over the past year (including a summary of progress against key performance indicators as contained in the Stocktake Report)
- the University's Covid-19 Rapid Research response (see item 8 below)
- Highlights from the work of the Research Beacons
- Major new research awards
- Support for students provided through the Emergency Hardship Fund and other uses for funding made available through donations
- The movement to designed blended and flexible learning
- Progress against Social Responsibility goals
- Movements in University rankings and league tables and other external measures of success
- Recent key appointments and staff successes
- Ongoing University support for business and global engagement
- Future plans (including opportunities arising from the pandemic eg flexible and blended teaching and new ways of working, consideration of optimal future size and shape, contribution to Covid recovery and "building back better" and the University's bicentenary in 2024)

Noted:

- (1) The following questions and comments were raised after the President and Vice-Chancellor's presentation:

(a) from Berrisford Edwards:

- i) Breakdown of voluntary severance applications by ethnicity
- ii) Lessons learned from recent adverse publicity

(b) from Roger Milburn: relations with the City Council and wider city-region

(c) from Alison Newby:

- i) potential use of technology to address communications issues
- ii) value of coaching

(d) from Ishaka Yakubu: a question relating to visas and alumni (because of communication connection problems, it was not possible to determine the precise nature of the question and it was agreed that this be clarified outside the meeting).

(2) The following responses were provided:

(a) (i) Detail to be obtained and provided outside the meeting (see Appendix A). A full impact assessment of the programme had been carried out.

(a) (ii) An inquiry into the erection of fences at the Fallowfield Halls of Residence in November had been carried out led by former Vice-President, Prof Clive Agnew and involving a former Students' Union General Secretary, Fatima Abid. As a result a Task and Finish Group had been established and would report to the Board of Governors. The inquiry had highlighted issues relating to internal communications, clarity of decision making and communications with students. A separate investigation into allegations of racial profiling by a student was still ongoing. The Vice-President for Social Responsibility was providing a separate presentation which covered recent developments in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (item 9) and included structural and governance changes. There was a commitment to working in partnership with the Students' Union to improve communications and reflect on lessons learned from recent events.

(b) Relations were very good and the movement to online meetings had enabled greater flexibility and engagement. There were now regular scheduled meetings with Vice-Chancellors of other Greater Manchester universities and with Further Education College heads as well as local MPs and the Mayor of Greater Manchester. The response to the pandemic had definitely strengthened partnership working.

(c) (i) The movement to online meetings had enabled engagement with larger numbers of staff and students at one time than would have been possible on campus. Going forward, there was scope to build on this experience as part of a wider communications approach once more regular face-to-face contact was permissible again.

(c) (ii) The University fully recognised the importance of coaching and this was an approach valued and used by the Staff Learning and Development Unit.

(d) This question was followed up outside the meeting.

6. Annual Financial Statements 2019-20

Received: for information, the University's Annual Financial Statements and a presentation from the Chief Financial Officer. The presentation covered the following and slides were made available to members:

- A recap on the University's financial objectives which were to enable delivery of academic objectives in a financially sustainable way. This required sufficient operating cash to meet day to day requirements, fund investment and infrastructure capacity and repay borrowing as it was due.
- Key highlights for year end 31 July 2020 (including Statutory Accounts surplus of £5.2 million (£135.2 million after pension adjustments))
- The Operating Cash position (including cash from operations of c£50 million in 2019-20)
- 2019-20 income split (including 47% from tuition fees and education contracts)
- Trends for total income and tuition fees (noting that apart from international fee income, other sources of income were static or diminishing in relative terms)
- Staff cost relative to income (this had increased to c58% in 2019-20 from 53% in 2016-17)
- Research income and contribution (showing a reduction in both in 2019-20: ratio of contribution to income had reduced from 20% in 2018-19 to 18.9% in 2019-20: reduction in income from £271.4 million to £243.1 million)
- Pensions adjustments (volatile position but this was not cash: USS deficit had continued to grow and costs were becoming unaffordable for employees and employers)
- Impact of inflation, including cumulative impact, given limited scope for income improvement to offset 3% annual cost inflation
- Risks and uncertainties (including sustainability of the current funding model, growth in salaries, volatile pensions position, potential uncertainties with international student recruitment, Brexit, the research funding model and the ongoing Covid situation)
- Opportunities included: potential to diversify international income, bursaries and discounts for specific purposes, improving research cost recovery and obtaining higher levels of income for research, ID Manchester, service redesign and remodelling and online and blended learning.

Noted:

(1) The following question was asked after the Chief Financial Officer's presentation:

(a) From Alistair Holt

Risks arising from ID Manchester development

(2) The following response was provided:

The University's commitment to the development was its land and buildings; it was in the process of sourcing a partner to fund the development through a joint venture.

7. Question and Answer Session

Reported: This item provided an opportunity for members to ask questions on any aspect of the University's work. Questions arising from the presentations are referred to above and below. A question was submitted and answered before the meeting (and is attached as Appendix B). The following question was raised in the meeting by John Schultz:

"Following on from Jim Hancock's question at the last meeting of the General Assembly about the University's dependence on students from China, and in the light of the University's long-standing (and laudable, in my view) links with China and the local Chinese community, has the University so far perceived any pressure (whether overt, implied, or assumed) to avoid negative comment by University academics on the current policies or practices of the People's Republic of China or any

other state? If so, how has this perceived pressure been addressed, with the important principle of academic freedom in mind?"

Noted:

The following response:

"The University is not aware of any pressure on the University generally or on any individuals to desist from negative comments about the People's Republic of China or any other state."

8. University research response to Covid

Received: a presentation from the Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health. The presentation covered the following and slides were made available to members:

- Interdisciplinary, cross-Faculty research
- The University Rapid Research Rapid Response Group established to enable partnership working with the NHS, Health Innovation Manchester and the National Institute for Health Research
- Areas of research focus included: New treatments and clinical trials: Disease mechanisms: Disease modelling and health informatics: Epidemiology, mental health, social care and public health: Patients with existing health conditions: Diagnostics: Prevention and vaccination: Organisational development and decision-making: and Global health
- Research had focused on biology (understanding the mechanism of the disease), treatment and societal impact
- Examples of research with impact in each of the above areas including: understanding how the virus behaves: the impact of social distancing on mental health: discovery of targets for Covid vaccines: isolation wellbeing guide for older people: investigating the links between COVID and hearing loss: and Sepsis and Covid-19

Noted:

(1) The following questions and comments were raised after the presentation:

(a) from John Schultz

Did the switch to Covid related research entail breaking existing contracts?

(b) from Alison Newby

Comment and question about the importance of good communication and information dissemination in a clinical and health setting and the crucial role played by experts in ensuring this.

(2) The following responses were provided:

(a) This had not been a significant issue as all relevant publicly funded research had been paused to enable focus on the pandemic. The result, unfortunately, was that some work, including chemical trials could not be retrieved or restarted. Restarting non-Covid research was now a priority nationally and would present challenges.

(b) Clear and effective communication was essential and this was borne out by the success of large scale clinical trials and the very effective roll out of the vaccination programme. The importance of a nuanced and sophisticated approach to communication addressing the needs of specific groups was emphasised.

9. Briefing on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Received: a presentation from the Vice-President for Social Responsibility on equality, diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The presentation covered the following and slides were made available to members:

- Detailed staff ethnicity and gender data by seniority and job type
- In relation to both the Gender Pay Gap and the Ethnicity Pay Gap, there had been little change in recent years (Gender Pay Gap Mean: ~17% and Median: ~11% : Ethnicity Pay Gap Mean: ~17% and Median: ~10%)
- Black and Minority Ethnic staff were still under-represented in leadership roles at institutional and faculty level
- An assessment of the current University position had confirmed the need to move away from the current largely reactive approach so that EDI was embedded with clear lines of accountability and responsibility
- The roadmap for the future included acknowledging what had not worked well previously, more visible, accountable and responsive leadership, a partnership approach with staff and students, more effective, transparent and trusted processes, alignment with University strategy and development of SMART objectives and KPIs.
- This would include appointment of a new Director of EDI reporting direct to the RSCOO, confirmation of an executive lead for EDI (the Vice-President for Social Responsibility) and academic leads for EDI (Race, Ethnicity and Religion, Gender and Sexual Orientation and Disabilities). The EDI Committee would now report direct to Planning and Resources Committee.
- There was recognition of the need to acknowledge the shared and individual 'lived experiences' of our students. Creating a safe environment for our students would include establishing a 'Zero Tolerance' message and policy and code of conduct and student and staff training (for example on unconscious bias, micro-aggression, challenging unacceptable behaviours).

Noted:

(1) The following questions and comments were raised after the presentation:

(a) from Berrisford Edwards

Timeframe for implementation of roadmap outlined

(b) from Bill Craig

Need to reflect on diversity of General Assembly and Board membership.

(c) From Councillor Shoab Akhtar

The need for the Board to set the tone in relation to the importance of EDI

(2) The following responses were provided:

(a) The appointment of a new Director would take place later in the year, but work to implement the roadmap would continue in anticipation of the new appointment.

(b) and (c) The reconstitution of General Assembly provided an opportunity to enhance diversity (long standing members noted that earlier advertising campaigns for new members had attempted to diversify membership with limited success). The Board recognized its responsibilities in relation to EDI and in its own recent recruitment had striven to ensure consideration and appointment of a diverse range of candidates. The University was a member of the Board Apprenticeship scheme which provided opportunities for BAME staff to gain boardroom experience and was open to academic and Professional Services staff.

10. Date of next meeting of the General Assembly

Reported: That the next meeting of the General Assembly would be held on Wednesday 23 June 2021 at 3.00pm and it was hoped that it might be possible for this to be a face to face meeting on campus, government restrictions permitting (Chris Boyes had raised a pre-submitted question about this).

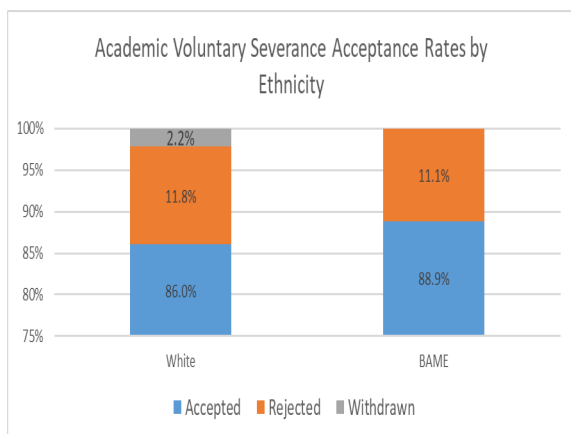
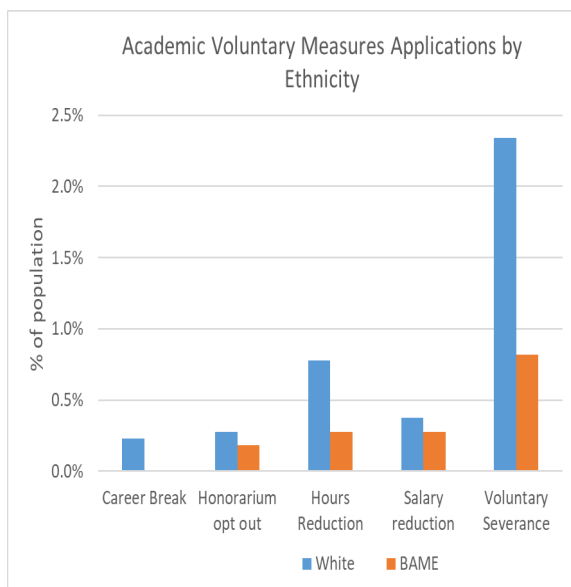
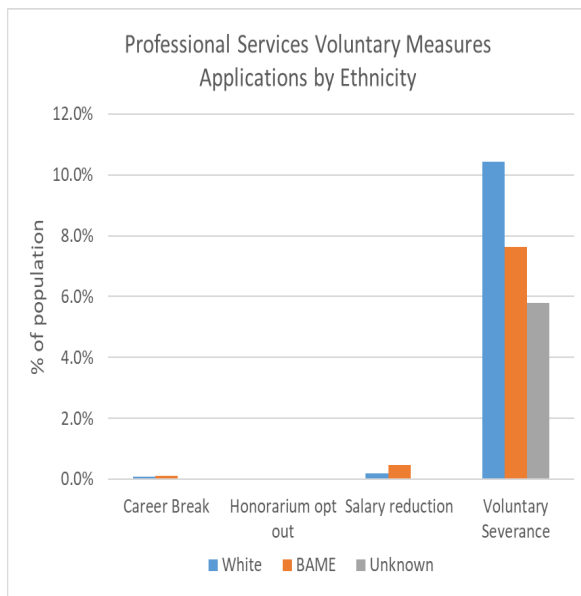
11. Summation and close

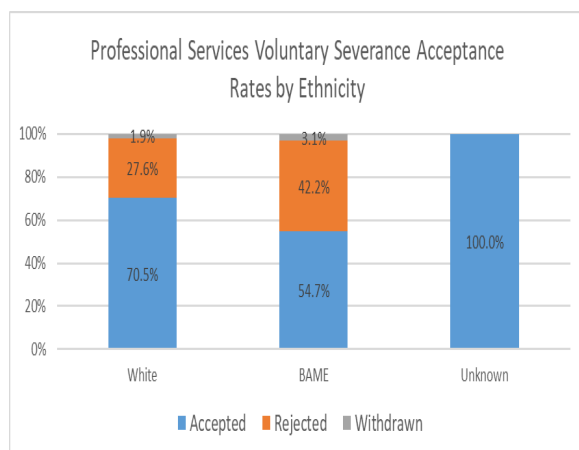
Reported: The Chair expressed thanks to all the presenters and to the General Assembly members in attendance for the contribution they had made to the meeting.

CLOSE.

APPENDIX A

Data provided by HR for Berrisford Edward's question about a breakdown of Voluntary measures data by ethnicity.





APPENDIX B

Question submitted by Chris Boyes (answer supplied by Dr Simon Merrywest, Director for the Student Experience)

- 1. How many UNDERGRADUATE students are registered for the 2020-2021 Academic Year**

28,559 full time undergraduate students

- 2. How many are living in University owned accommodation?**

As of 22nd February, 5880 students are in university operated accommodation (the University does not own all of the accommodation that it operates)

- 3. Is there an intention to consider refunding any proportion of rentals paid for University owned accommodation which has not been used due to Covid 19 regulations and restrictions**

On the 5 January following government guidance we told students that unless they are studying one of the exempt programmes defined in that guidance or have particular personal circumstances which require them to be on campus, they should not return. Following further government announcements at the end of January it was then confirmed that most teaching will remain online until at least 8 March.

At this time we also advised that students living in University accommodation who had not returned since the national lockdown announcement on 5 January would not pay any rent until the end of the current restrictions or the date that they return to their accommodation in Manchester. Students in our accommodation are also still able to break their licence agreement, clear their room and hand back their keys once during term time in the 2020/21 academic year without financial penalty.