

The University of Manchester

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 23 June 2022

Present: Lemn Sissay (Chancellor, in the chair), Jim Hancock (Pro-Chancellor), Edward Astle (Chair of the Board of Governors), Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell (President and Vice-Chancellor), Catherine Alnuamaani, Sharon Amesu, Carl Austin-Behan, Nathan Baroda, Lily Barton, Erimna Bell, Emily Bennett, Wayne Bennett, Tamzin Bond (via video conference), Ian Brake, Chris Brookes, Colin Brown (via video conference), Cllr Craig Browne, Sandra Collins, Marilyn Comrie, Steve Connor (via video conference), Kathy Cowell, Bill Craig, Stuart Dunne (via video conference), Fatima El-Wakeel (via video conference), Zeb Farooq, Simeon Gill, Simon Harper (via video conference), Susan Hilton, Andrew Koh (via video conference), Anusarin Lowe, Lisa Maynard-Atem, Mel McMahon, Zoe Papageorgiou, Barinur Rashid, Vicky Rosin, David Schultz (via video conference), Gill Webber (via video conference) and Ishaka Yukubu (via video conference) (38 members)

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, the Vice-President for Research, the Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students, and the Deputy Secretary.

1. Introductory Remarks

Reported: the Chancellor welcomed members to the first in-person General Assembly in 30 months and the final meeting he would chair, as his seven-year term ended on 31 July 2022. A celebratory dinner marking the Chancellor's contribution and achievements would take place after the meeting.

2. Minutes

Resolved: The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2022 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. Update on relevant matters from Nominations Committee

Received: a report from the Governance Office which, amongst other matters, confirmed the appointment of Nazir Afzal as the next Chancellor (from 1 August 2022) and provided an opportunity for General Assembly (as required by the Charter) to comment on changes to Statutes (these were consequential on implementation of the Halpin Governance Effectiveness Review). The report also confirmed the appointment of Marilyn Comrie and Zeb Farooq to Nominations Committee and noted that processes were in train to appoint a new Chair of the Board (as Edward Astle's term of office expired on 31 August 2022) and two new lay members of the Board

Agreed: To confirm that General Assembly had no comments on the proposed amendments to the Statutes, which would be put to the Board of Governors on 20th July 2022 and then submitted to the Privy Council for formal approval.

6. Update on the University

Received:

A presentation from the President and Vice-Chancellor covering the following (slides were made available to members):

- Response to the war in Ukraine and support for students affected by conflict and disaster
- Ongoing response to Covid 19
- Financial matters and challenge
- Performance snapshot for 2021-22 (including Global Standing, Research Excellence Framework, Widening Access for Students and Social Responsibility)
- Progress on the Strategic Plan, including confirmation that ambitions, vision, core goals and themes remain unchanged (although some priorities had taken on greater significance)
- University news, including appointment of Lemn Sissay to an Honorary Chair in Creative Writing
- Major new awards
- Developments through the University's Research Platforms
- The first on campus graduation ceremonies for over two years, held in April 2022 (61 separate ceremonies for students graduating in 2020 and 2021)
- Sector wide consultation in a number of areas
- Feedback from students on the optimal approach to flexible learning
- Social responsibility and civic engagement
- Support for business and forecast performance in this area in 2021-22 (including the work of [Northern Gritstone](#))
- Priorities and opportunities

The following questions and comments from members were **noted**:

(1) The uncertain future for [Horizon Europe](#), the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation and the increased likelihood that a Plan B would be required to compensate for reduction in funding.

(2) The University's approach to flexible learning was designed to ensure the best of both face to face and on line learning, for example, by providing more value added interactive content face to face and traditional lectures on-line (potentially asynchronously, to provide more flexibility). The importance of providing sufficient opportunity for students to interact was recognised.

(3) The University had [made £5 million available to students impacted by conflict and disaster](#) across the world to assist with direct costs and waiving of fees.

(4) The University had a variety of stakeholder feedback mechanisms, including the National Student Survey (latest results were due in two weeks), the Staff Survey (which had been delayed and would now take place in the autumn) and the External Stakeholder Survey, a qualitative, biennial survey which seeks to understand stakeholder perception of the University's reputation and status. The University had also recently surveyed local residents (who had commented on the importance of the University's role in training professionals for the region) and was recruiting a 100-person civic panel.

(5) The focus of the Reshaping Professional Services programme was on enhancing operations and improving systems: the programme was inclusive, engaging with colleagues across the institution.

(6) It was important to ensure that the University's measures of success were inclusive, reflective of the diversity of the University community, and highlighted where improvements were required. The need for inclusive curricula and teaching materials was also recognised (noting that some issues were sector wide and required change at professional regulatory body level).

(7) There was acknowledgement that the past two years had been challenging for staff wellbeing and morale: the staff survey would provide a comprehensive picture of staff opinion, and there were a variety of open meeting settings enabling staff to express views and concerns. Key staff concerns included workload (driven for example by the unplanned increase in student numbers arising from the 2021 recruitment round and higher than anticipated A level grades), inflation and the rising cost of living, and frustrations arising from sub-optimal processes. Staff recruitment and retention was an issue in areas of high demand (eg IT). The Professional Services experiment with hybrid working had gone well and there was currently reflection on best practice.

(8) In relation to ID Manchester, the importance of engagement with the local community with space for local residents to use. The intention was for the development to be as vibrant and inclusive as possible and the potential for a dedicated community outreach team was raised by members. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the University retained site ownership until agreement to lease parcels of land to the joint venture partnership established to deliver the ID Manchester vision.

(9) The University recognised the importance of inclusivity and engagement with and outreach to communities where there was little engagement with the University, to encourage feelings of belonging. This was an area in which the University had academic specialism (for example in relation to health inequalities) and the potential to develop activities which supported a sense of belonging as part of the University's bicentenary celebrations was noted by members. The potentially transformative impact of educational technology was also noted.

(10) In response to a question about the University's response to anti-Semitism, and ensuring the confidence of the Jewish community in its response to such reports, the University's commitment to [the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) definition](#) was confirmed. There was also a commitment to dialogue with the Students' Union Jewish Society and local Jewish community groups and schools. As with all reports of alleged discriminatory activity, the University treated reports of anti-Semitism extremely seriously, although it was not apparent that there has been an increase in such reports recently.

8. Research Excellence Framework 2021 results

Received: A presentation from the Vice-President (Research) on the successful outcome of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise. The presentation included the following: (slides were made available to members).

- The reputational and recognition benefits of REF
- The University had retained fifth place for Research Power and eight place for Research Quality and overall 93% of the University's submission was assessed as either world leading (4 star) or internationally excellent (3 star)

- The University was one of the best places in the country to build a research career (99% either 4 star or 3 star)
- 21 of the 31 units submitted improved on quality (Grade Point Average) from the 2014 exercise
- In nine of the 31 subjects, the University was in the top three nationally, and in another 14 was ranked in the top ten nationally
- An explanation of the concept of research impact (e.g. research which results in beneficial changes to quality of life, environment, economy, public policy, culture, wellbeing etc). 160 impact case studies had been submitted (96% at either 3 star or 4 star) and the University was ranked eighth on impact in the UK (up from 25th in 2014) and in the top three for seven subjects
- Specific examples of types of research impact, as illustrated through the University's [Research Impact Showcase](#)

Noted: (in response to questions)

(1) The potential for greater regional and international profile for the University's research impact, especially for example in relation to climate change (the suggestion to pursue this with Marketing Manchester was noted). There was scope to engage with wider networks: there has been a recent presentation to the Local Enterprise Partnership from all Greater Manchester universities on respective research strengths.

(2) The importance of creating an environment conducive to research excellence. There was no direct correlation between increased investment and improved performance (and some subjects where the University had performed well were relatively inexpensive). In areas requiring significant investment (eg Biomedical Sciences) the funding landscape was very competitive with institutions in London and the South East at a significant comparative advantage.

9. The Chancellor

Noted: before the meeting closed and members joined the dinner celebrating the Chancellor's achievements in his term of office, the Chair of the Board (who was also attending his final General Assembly as his term as Chair ended on 31 August 2022) thanked the Chancellor for his chairing of, and commitment and contribution, to General Assembly.

10. Meetings of the General Assembly in 2022-23

Wednesday 18 January 2023

Wednesday 21 June 2023