

Approved Minutes

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER
AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
8 February 2023 (by Video Conference)

Present: Deirdre Evans (Chair)
Ann Barnes

Apologies: Robin Phillips
Trevor Rees
Alice Webb

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO)
Prof Luke Georghiou (Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor)
Prof April McMahon (Vice-President Learning, Teaching and Students)
Prof Colette Fagan (Vice-President, Research)
Dr David Barker, Director of Compliance and Risk
Richard Young, Uniac

Secretary: Mark Rollinson, Deputy Secretary

1. Declarations of interest

Noted: there were no new declarations of interest.

2. Academic Governance Assurance Reports

Received: In accordance with the Academic Governance Protocol agreed between the Board of Governors and Senate, the Academic Governance Assurance reports for Teaching, Learning and Students and Research: both reports had been recommended for approval by Senate.

Reported:

- (1) The relationship of Annual Academic Assurance reporting to the Board scorecard.
- (2) The relationship to the strategic risk register,
- (3) This was the first year of the new annual cycle (earlier assurance reviews had been less consistent and comprehensive) and there would be reflection on it and potential enhancements for future years.
- (4) The reports represented a snapshot within a domain of continuous activity. There were many different events, actions and data sets during that annual cycle.

- (5) The cross-over in the reports and the underpinning data and analysis between assurance (e.g. demonstrating the University has reached threshold requirements of the Office for Students as regulator), and enhancement (i.e. the culture of continuous improvement). Whilst the primary focus of the Committee and Board is on assurance, the importance of enhancement was reflected in the reporting.

Noted:

- (1) In relation to Teaching, Learning and Students (TLS), the Committee noted that the Annual Academic Assurance Review Report (AAR) provided:
- a) Assurance that the academic standards and quality assurance of programmes meet and adhere to the internal procedures set out in the University Quality Framework and Regulations and subsequently comply with external regulatory requirements.
 - b) An overview of each performance review (TLS Deep Dive and Annual Review of Teaching and Learning).
 - c) An assessment of trends, good practices, and risks mapped to appropriate internal and external benchmarks, utilising a single data source in the areas of Student Experience, Student Outcomes, Access and Participation, and linking to relevant measures from the Board's balanced scorecard.
 - d) An update on the progress of the Teaching Excellence Framework participation.
 - e) An update on the Annual Review of Teaching and Learning and the Student Experience Action Plans.
- (2) There had been extensive discussion of the report both at the Senate Academic Quality and Standards Committee for TLS (AQSSC-TLS) and at Senate itself and it was agreed that it would be helpful to include relevant minutes from these bodies in future presentation of materials to Audit and Risk Committee. Detailed consideration of matters at Committee level had enabled Senate to take a more strategic role and discussion of the report at Senate had been challenging and constructive, with members demonstrating a greater sense of ownership for measures to improve, for example, National Student Survey performance.
- (3) Members raised a number of detailed points for clarification and it was noted that Student Experience Action Plans for 2023 were available and had been discussed at the Teaching and Learning Engagement Forum on 2 February 2023. Timing of approval of academic assurance action plans in January enabled student representatives to take a full part in consideration. In relation to outcomes for disabled students, the Committee noted that the awarding gap (compared with non-disabled students) had closed with the movement away from closed book exams during the pandemic and had widened again following their reintroduction. There would be further reflection on this as part of ongoing review of assessment,
- (4) As previously reported to the Board, Assessment and Feedback and Student Voice require significant improvement to address student satisfaction and this would be a key focus of activity over at least the next twelve months. In this context, a Uniac review of student feedback was included as part of the current internal audit programme (scheduled to report to the Committee in June 2023).
- (5) The Committee commended the rigour and quality of the TLS assurance process, noting the extensive amount of supporting material made available (for transparency) in the Diligent Reading Room (this would also be made available to the Board, again for reasons of transparency) and endorsed Senate's recommendation that the report be approved by the Board.
- (6) In relation to **Research**, the Committee noted that assurance of research strategy, standards and quality was provided through a suite of internal and external embedded, annual and periodic assurance mechanisms. These were

detailed in the report approved by Senate on the recommendation of the Academic Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (Research) (AQSSC-R). They encompass internal processes and regulations, as well as external compliance, audits and evaluations covering three related areas:

- a) Research quality enhancement
 - b) Postgraduate research
 - c) Research conduct
- (7) Key assurance reports come to the AQSSC-R as part of the annual schedule of agenda items, following development and adoption by the relevant University research strategy governance channels, and the report provided a summary of the assessment and agreed actions for research strategy following the Annual Performance Review (APR).
- (8) As with TLS, the Committee noted positive comments about the added value of the AQSSC-R and its contribution to Senate's work on assurance and enhancement. Timing of relevant assurance processes meant that the report was considered by the 1 February Senate (the TLS report had been considered by the 19 October Senate, with some supplementary material going to the later February meeting). Whilst discussion of the report at the February Senate had been less extensive than consideration of the parallel TLS report at the October Senate, Senate had recommended the report as drafted to the Board.
- (9) Detailed points raised by members included interdisciplinarity and the complexity of quantifying this into a single metric (for REF it was estimated that 43% of University researchers (R&T or R contracts) were engaged in meaningful interdisciplinary work).
- (10) Benchmarking data relating to the number of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students per academic staff member were included for transparency given it is presented in the Board's benchmarking report. It was noted by the Vice-President (Research) that the utility of this data (in terms of indicating the potential impact of teaching on research time and outputs) was limited given that the time allocated to teaching responsibilities is influenced by the organisation of teaching and assessment (method of teaching, frequency and format of assessment etc.).
- (11) Data relating to research funding and respective market share from different funders: a strong portfolio of funding and market share from UKRI and CRUK, but lower funding from Wellcome Trust and NIHR relative to other institutions (albeit in both the latter cases, there was a current upward trend).
- (12) Research contribution was the key financial sustainability target for research, recognising that the scope for action to improve contribution differed between Faculties due to different funding streams. In particular, industry funding can achieve a higher contribution rate than is possible from charity funding, with health charity funding being a significant funding stream in FBMH. (The QR allocation to support charity funded research provided a partial offset).
- (13) The Committee also commended the rigour and quality of the Research assurance process, again noting the extensive amount of supporting material made available (for transparency) in the Diligent Reading Room (also to be made available to the Board for reasons of transparency) and endorsed Senate's recommendation that the report be approved by the Board.

Agreed: that both reports be recommended for approval by the Board