

The University of Manchester

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 18 January 2023

Present: Nazir Afzal (Chancellor, in the chair), Jim Hancock (Pro-Chancellor), Philippa Hird (Chair of the Board of Governors), Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell (President and Vice-Chancellor), Catherine Alnuamaani. Sharon Amesu (via video conference), Carl Austin-Behan, Ann Barnes, Lily Barton (via video conference), Emma Bilsbury (via video conference), Ian Brake, Sam Bronheim, Colin Brown, Adrian Bull, Gary Buxton, Fiona Campbell, Amanda Corcoran, Kathy Cowell, Bill Craig, Fatema El-Wakeel, Simeon Gill, Matt Haworth, Susan Hilton (via video conference), Andrew Koh, Lisa Maynard-Atem, Mel McMahon (via video conference), Zoe Papageorgiou, Barinur Rashid, Vicky Rosin, Tesnime Safrdou, Mark Scoular, Abigail Shapiro, Paul Sutherland, Carl Sweeney (via video conference), Jess Thompson, Gill Webber, David Westbury (via video conference), George Whalley, Rhys Whalley, Ishaka Yukubu (via video conference). (40 members)

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, the Vice-President for Social Responsibility, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of People and Organisational Development, the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Deputy Secretary and Robert Beale.

### 1. Introductory Remarks

**Reported:** The Chancellor welcomed members to his first meeting of General Assembly, having taken on the role of Chancellor from August 2022. General Assembly joined the Chancellor in congratulating members of the University community who had recently received national honours

### 2. Minutes

**Resolved:** The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 were approved, with the addition of two names to the list of those present.

### 3. Matters arising

**Received:** a report updating members on matters arising, including responses to questions raised by members in response to the Chancellor's introductory letter in September 2022.

### 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, noted that the process for electing a staff member to the Board of Governors involved General Assembly members electing interested, eligible staff members of the Assembly.

## 6. Annual Report on the work of the University

### Received:

- (1) A presentation from the President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, on key developments over 2021-22, making reference to the 'Review of the Year' contained within the [Financial Statements](#) (see item 7 below). As provided for in Statutes, the Assembly was invited, on reference from the Board of Governors, to discuss, comment and express an opinion on the annual report on the work of the University and the Financial Statements. The Media Relations team had also compiled a [2022 review of the year](#).
- (2) The presentation from the President and Vice-Chancellor covered the following and slides were made available to members
  - Challenges facing the University
  - The student recruitment position
  - Ongoing response to Covid 19 as life returned to near normal
  - Overview of the financial position, with more detail provided under item 7 below
  - Overall Performance in 2021-22 against the Strategic Plan
  - [Staff Survey outcomes](#)
  - Major new awards
  - Developments through the University's Research Platforms
  - Student cost of living support and the University's comprehensive wellbeing offer
  - The two key student priorities (assessment and feedback and student voice)
  - Social responsibility and civic engagement
  - University news including the appointments of a new Chancellor and new Chair of Board of Governors (and recipients of national honours)
  - Support for business and forecast performance in this area in 2021-22
  - Priorities and opportunities

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

- (1) The University's work to address [regional health inequalities](#) including disparities in life expectancy and quality of life. Recent studies noted that 30% of the productivity gap between the south-east and the north-west could be attributed to poor health. More detailed presentation of the University's work in this area could form a topic for discussion at a future meeting.
- (2) The University's response to [National Student Survey outcomes](#) was focused on improvements to assessment and feedback and student voice and ensuring that consideration of impact on the student experience underpinned all aspects of University decision making. Data could be disaggregated to analyse results for students with protected characteristics and there was already awareness of [attainment gaps](#) (the gap in degree attainment between, for example White and Black students and White and Asian students, disabled and non-disabled students and between those from the most and least disadvantaged backgrounds) and the under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff in senior positions at the University.
- (3) Action to address key messages emerging from the staff survey (e.g. relating to systems, process, change, communication and leadership) would take place over the coming months with particular emphasis on ensuring communications and engagement with colleagues was

optimal. Comments about the need for cultural change were noted, with programmes organised through Learning and Organisational Development helping to facilitate this.

(4) There were no plans to significantly increase student numbers over the next few years: recent increases had been unplanned and the result of an unexpected increase in the number of students satisfying offer requirements because of teacher assessed A level grades during the pandemic.

(5) Programmes offered through the University College for Interdisciplinary Learning ([UCIL](#)) were helping students to improve digital capability and address regional skills gaps.

(6) An example of a local issue (relating to the Travel Desk and Sustainable Travel) which illustrated systems and communications issues highlighted in the staff survey.

(7) The importance of outreach work in local schools, and in this context student role models who could encourage and inspire students to engage with the University and higher education in general.

(8) Ongoing industrial relations issues, with further [UCU strikes](#) planned in February and March as part of the ongoing dispute relating to pay, pensions and working conditions.

(9) Sector concern about the recent announcement that student maintenance loans in 2023-24 will only increase by 2.8% (alongside an additional £15 million hardship funding in 2022-23), significantly below the level of inflation with potential impact on student wellbeing, increase in drop-out rates and thus ability to address the underlying skills gap.

## **7. Annual Financial Statements, 2021-22**

**Received:** the University's Annual Financial Statements and a presentation from the Chief Financial Officer (slides were made available to members). The presentation summarized the current income and expenditure position and included the following headlines:

- Operating cash generation was healthy (13.6%) and liquidity much improved
- Strong and resilient levels of student recruitment demand
- High vacancy levels were creating operational pressure
- Surplus generated (9.8%) was ploughed back into the University to fund investment
- However, cash generated was not sufficient to fund investment ambitions and risks to the operating model included inflation, geopolitical instability, the concentration of students from specific countries (notably China), the real terms decline in undergraduate home fees and the persistent and long-term underfunding of research

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

(1) Finance Key Performance Indicators were on target.

(2) The balance between home and international recruitment: international and home postgraduate taught fees were not capped and reflected demand and market position. There was emphasis on diversification of students (both in terms of country of origin and subject/discipline areas, the latter to avoid over-concentration of international students on specific programmes).

(3) Income from residences would increase in proportion to any future provision of additional bed spaces and the commitment to investment to enhance the student experience was reiterated. Rent levels reflected market conditions, but were positioned below comparable private sector accommodation.

(4) The slight decrease in postgraduate applications was a reflection of the strong jobs market (conversely, applications increased during periods of relatively high unemployment),

## **8. People and Organisational Development and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies**

**Received:** presentations from the Director of People and Organisational Development and the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion respectively on the recently launched on the recently launched [People and Organisational Development Strategy](#) and [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#)

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

(1) A question about gender identity was included in the questionnaire used to compile [equality data](#) and there would be effort to improve the response rate (currently 67%): the University had guidance and policies on trans people and gender reassignment.

(2) The University was about to become a signatory to the [Armed Service Covenant](#), as confirmation of commitment to fair treatment to those who had served in the armed forces (and their families).

(3) The University had an annual performance and development review process and work was underway to refresh to ensure it was as engaging and meaningful as possible.

(4) There was acknowledgement that addressing areas where there was significant under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff was a priority.

(5) The University benefitted from active and vibrant staff networks.

(6) Whilst staff survey results were not as positive as those from the previous survey in 2018 (and the response rate of 50% was disappointing), 75% of respondents had stated that they were proud to work for the University. As noted above there would be action to address key themes emerging from the survey.

## **9. Next meeting of the General Assembly**

Wednesday 21 June 2023