

The University of Manchester

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Thursday 23 May 2024

Present: Philippa Hird (Chair), President and Vice-Chancellor, Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair), David Buckley, Gary Buxton, Anna Dawe, Deirdre Evans, Prof Danielle George, Guy Grainger, Dr Reinmar Hager, Tom Jirat, Caroline Johnstone, Prof Paul Mativenga, Hannah Mortimer, Jatin Patel, Robin Phillips, Dr Hema Radhakrishnan, Tony Raven, Tesnime Safraou and Prof Fiona Smyth (20 members)

Apologies: Nick Hillman and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member)

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Prof Luke Georghiou, Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Craig Best, Head of Student and Academic Services (item 8 only) and Mark Rollinson, Deputy Secretary.

1. Declarations of Interest and welcome

Noted: there were no new declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2024.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

Received: an updated report on ongoing issues that had been raised at previous meetings.

Noted:

(1) The potential for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify universities as public sector bodies was being kept under review. The outcome of the current review in Scotland was expected between July and September 2024 and (notwithstanding the difference between the Scottish and English models) the outcome in England (expected in 2025) was likely to be influenced by this.

(2) As discussed at the Board Strategy Day, the need to be mindful of unintended consequences of actions which may have an impact on the ONS decision (for example, the potential for closer collaboration with the further education sector, given that this was already deemed to be part of the public sector)

(3) As agreed at the previous meeting, the Deputy Chair of the Board had conducted an exit interview with the Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

4. Initial reflections on the Board Strategy Day

Noted: actions arising from the Board Strategy Day, held on the previous day (22 May 2024) included:

- (1) Possible consideration of the [REDACTED] **Redacted – restricted information** international student recruitment diversification target at a later board meeting.

(2) Seeking a further update on home postgraduate taught recruitment, noting the current challenges in this market (and the potential to improve conversion from undergraduate programmes).

(3) The potential need to review the content in the supporting material on international students to ensure consistency and alignment with other reporting.

Action (1-3 above): Chief Financial Officer, Interim Director of Student Marketing and Recruitment, Director of International Development

5. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

Received: a verbal update from the President and Vice-Chancellor, supplementing the presentation to the Strategy Day (the latest Performance Report was provided to members under this item).

Reported:

(1) The latest position on sector pay negotiations, which were ongoing

(2) Examinations and assessments were underway, finishing in early June

(3) The President and Vice-Chancellor had met with Caroline Simpson, incoming Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and currently Chief Executive of Stockport Council.

Noted:

(1) The reputational damage to the sector that had arisen from previous industrial action.

(2) Notwithstanding the national pay framework, there was scope to consider targeted local action in relation to pay as part of decision making around investment (alongside for example investment in student bursaries as discussed at the Strategy Day).

(3) There was continued underspend on pay as a result of vacancies: this was more acute in some areas where comparative salaries were an issue.

6. Student Context - Issues Challenging the Student Experience

Received: a report summarising key long-term and immediate issues affecting the student experience.

Reported:

(1) The outcomes from the recent "Build your Mcr" survey which indicated concerns about availability and affordability of food on campus and student mental health.

(2) The latest position on the ongoing student protest and encampment, which-following earlier discussion at the Strategy Day on 22 May-would be considered later on the agenda (see item 16 below).

Noted:

(1) The importance of good, affordable food to student mental health and wellbeing. In this context, take-up of the 20% food on campus discount was currently low and the Board encouraged joint University/Students' Union action to promote this (commercial outlets on University Green were not covered by the discount).

Action: Students' Union/Head of Campus Services

(2) The [cosy campus](#) initiative was popular and well-received, with regular free breakfast events and meal kit giveaways (there were seven locations across campus).

(3) There had been an in-depth review of the issue of student mental health at the Strategy Day, which had covered the national context, an examination of the University's current offer and key future strategic considerations.

(4) The potential for future reports to highlight any significant differences in the experience of international and home students.

7. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (23 April 2024)

Received: a report on the matters considered and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 23 April 2024 meeting.

Reported:

(1) In relation to the development of new student residences, tender evaluation was about to commence, and contingency planning had taken place to enable additional Finance Committee and Board meetings if required, noting that this was a crucial decision for the future student experience and financial sustainability.

(2) Finance Committee considered an overview of the status of the Strategic Change portfolio, which had been streamlined to cover just three major projects, Student Experience Programme (SEP), Flexible Learning, and Evolve, with the total number of projects reduced by circa 10 from the previous 36. The simplification of the portfolio was welcome, noting the need to consider the level of future 'no regret' spending given potential for different strategic decisions and priorities in the future. The bulk of the 2023/24 spend was on the three major projects and associated "catch up" technology investments which were needed to underpin a wide range of future scenarios.

(3) Approval was sought for spend on the [Evolve Programme](#) and the remaining works to the Chemistry Building (see below).

(4) Utilisation analysis (the pilot phase of which was referred to in the report) would inform the development of a future infrastructure strategy, integrating future space and technology requirements.

Noted:

(1) A briefing on the Evolve Programme would be organized for a future Board meeting.

Action: Chief Information Officer

(2) A briefing on the Residences Programme would take place before the July Board meeting, regardless of whether final approval was being sought at that meeting, or was being deferred to a meeting in August (a correction to the report was made noting that the length of tenancies was 43 weeks).

Action: Chief Financial Officer, Director of Estates and Facilities, Director for the Student Experience

(3) In relation to the Strategic Change Portfolio, the respective roles of Audit and Risk and Finance Committees (with ARC providing overall assurance). It was important that reports articulated clearly how actual benefits realisation mapped against benefits planned at the outset of projects.

Agreed:

(1) To approve the full Business Case for the Evolve Programme [REDACTED] **Redacted – restricted information**

(2) To approve a further request for [REDACTED] funding for the Chemistry building phases 4 and 5, bringing total funding for the Chemistry building to date to [REDACTED] (excluding any Radiochemistry space funding). **Redacted – restricted information**

(3) To note other matters considered and approved by the Committee including a temporary amendment to the Treasury Management Policy ahead of a review in the Autumn.

8. Access and Participation Plan 2025 - 26 to 2028 - 2029

Received: a report on the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) for 2025-26 to 2028-29, focusing on the identified Risks to Equality of Opportunities Risk Register and the University's objectives and targets.

Reported:

(1) The plan prioritised eight targets across twelve areas of significant risk, organised into four specific groups: racially minoritised students, disabled students, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and care experienced. These targets, spanning a five-year period from 2025/26 to 2028/29 and compared to a baseline year of 2021/22, were mapped across each stage of the student lifecycle (Access and Success).

(2) Financial and resource commitments remained consistent with previous plans, with ongoing discussions aimed at refining funding models in the coming year. Evaluation efforts will emphasise robustness, transparency, and effectiveness, integrating targets into governance structures and establishing an annual self-assessment cycle.

(3) Student consultation and engagement, in collaboration with the Students' Union had and would continue to ensure diverse student voices shape the plan's development and implementation. A set of appendices was included to provide further detailed information, including an overview of the APP preparation, intervention activity themes and targets.

(4) Targets were based on a review of performance (at institutional, Faculty and School level), a comparison with other Russell Group institutions, a review of previous targets, and learning from institutions that have had targets approved by OfS in the first wave of plan submissions. OfS required targets to be stretching and could push back if they were deemed to be insufficiently challenging.

(5) Targets focused on access, completion and attainment gaps for specific underrepresented groups, but there was also recognition of intersections of characteristics, for entrants with multiple barriers to higher education.

Noted:

(1) The potential to enhance further existing coordination and liaison with local schools and colleges (for example through GM Higher) to ensure that entry to the university was perceived as an achievable and realistic target for students from underrepresented groups. The importance of academic support in this context, particularly for students entering with alternative qualifications to A levels, was recognized.

(2) Access to Postgraduate programmes (both taught and research) was a priority but the APP did not cover this (submission of the APP was a requirement to fulfil Condition A in the [OfS Conditions of Registration](#)).

(3) The 5% per annum target increase for care experienced students was stretching but realistic: current numbers were relatively low, and the University would continue to build appropriate supporting architecture to enable further expansion.

(4) Reducing the awarding gap between black and white students from the current 12.5% to 5.8% by 2029 was amongst the challenging targets and would be achieved by focusing on leveraging data, inclusive teaching and learning practices, mutual support and skills development, with the aim of creating a more equitable environment and sense of belonging.

(5) The expectation was that the new plan will continue to follow the same level of financial commitment as previously set for the 2019 plan, and that new activities will be established through pausing or stopping activity that do not contribute to the APP targets. Further discussions will continue over the next 12 months to establish a clear and appropriate financial plan modelled using the established c25% of [higher fee income](#) (of which 17.6% is currently allocated to financial support).

(6) If an institution failed to achieve its APP targets and could not demonstrate reasonable steps to seek to comply, it would be asked to address areas of underperformance, with the ultimate sanction that the OfS could refuse permission to charge more than the basic fee threshold (£6,165).

Agreed: to endorse the approach taken in the development of the plan (noting that the full plan would be circulated to members after submission to OfS).

Action: Head of Student and Academic Services

9. Appointments to the Board: role specifications

Received: a report proposing the role specification for recruitment to the three current and imminent lay member vacancies and a consolidated list of skills and experience sought by the Board.

Noted: several detailed and specific comments on both the role specification and the consolidated list of skills and experience.

Agreed: subject to inclusion of comments discussed at the meeting, with the final versions to be approved by the Chair, that the role specification and consolidated list of skills and experience be approved (Secretary's note: the agreed, final versions are attached to the Matters Arising report submitted to the July 2024 Board).

Action: Deputy Secretary

10. Chair's report

Received: a verbal report from the Chair of the Board.

Noted:

(1) The Chair would meet with the RSCOO, the Director of Planning and the Deputy Secretary to plan the 2024-25 Board forward agenda, aligning this with the timetable for the planned strategic review process and potentially repurposing time allotted for the Accountability Review.

(2) Member evaluation surveys would be circulated supporting one to one meetings with the Chair to take place over the summer.

Action: Deputy Secretary

11. Secretary's report

Received: a report from the Secretary.

Noted:

(1) A report on the Exercise of Delegations covering the recent award of Emeritus Professorships, the use of the Seal and the appointment of Directors of the University of Manchester Superannuation Scheme.

(2) A report summarising the key aspects of the new Freedom of Speech legislation for Universities in England, and how the University is responding to those changes. This includes development of an overarching policy and a revised Code of Practice to ensure consistency with the new legislation, which will be brought to the Board for approval at its July 2024 meeting.

12. Board Committee reports

i) Audit and Risk Committee (17 April 2024)

Received: a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 17 April 2024.

Reported: key areas of focus were:

(1) Use of international agents: the Committee drew assurance from the report setting out the robust nature of current arrangements and agreed that a Uniac review be commissioned given lapse of time since the previous review.

(2) Risk of failure of Operating Model: the Committee agreed that work should proceed on the development of a risk appetite framework, and that there should also be further investigation into the potential use of Artificial Intelligence in assessment of risk to inform judgement and decision making. It also agreed that, building on discussion at the Committee, in the forthcoming few months, a workshop be organised for the Committee to enable further consideration of risk appetite and potential mitigating measures.

(3) Uniac reviews, particularly noting management responses in response to significant findings from reviews of Competition and Markets Authority Compliance and the Construction Works Framework

ii) People Committee (1 May 2024)

Received: a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 1 May 2024.

Reported:

(1) The Committee had recommended approval of the Workforce Performance Metrics as set out in the report.

(2) The People and Organisational Development Transformation Programme had been closed: this related to technological elements, and a project to deliver short-term service improvements remained within the Strategic Change portfolio. An Enterprise Resource Planning solution, incorporating finance and human resource elements was being scoped.

Noted: the importance of an employee opinion survey being scheduled in Autumn 2024-25 (the response rate to the recent Wellbeing pulse survey had been just over 40%).

Action: Interim Director of People and Organisational Development

Agreed:

(1) To approve the Workforce Performance Metrics.

(2)

Redacted – restricted information

(3) That the University continues to take all steps outlined in the report to avoid the need for redundancy and, in particular, to support the use of the University's Voluntary Severance Scheme in the affected area;

(4) That the People Committee should continue to oversee these proposals in accordance with Part II of Ordinance XXIII.

(5) To proceed with the process outlined in the Contracts Procedure to deal with those staff considered to be at risk on open ended contracts linked to finite funding for the period from 1 January 2025 to 30 June 2025.

(6) That the University continues to take all steps outlined in the report to avoid the need for redundancy wherever this is possible.

Action: Interim Director of People and Organisational Development

iii) Nominations and Governance Committee (8 May 2024)

Received: a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 8 May 2024.

Agreed:

(1) To reappoint Jatin Patel to the Board for a further three-year term, until August 2027

(2) To reappoint Natasha Traynor as an Associate Member for a further one-year term until August 2025.

(3) To appoint David Buckley as Chair of Finance Committee with effect from 1 September 2024

(4) To note the update on General Assembly including the summary of the recent review of members.

Action: Deputy Secretary

iv) Remuneration Committee (16 April 2024)

Received: a report from the meeting of the Committee held on 16 April 2024.

13. Senate

Received: a report from the meeting of Senate held on 17 April 2024

14. Planning and Resources Committee (16 April 2024)

Received: the report from the meeting of the Committee held on 16 April 2024.

15. Briefing on Innovation, including Regional innovation Review

Noted: the briefing was deferred to a future meeting.

16. Ongoing student protest and encampment

Received: further to discussion at the Board Strategy Day, a further update on the current protests on campus, noting the [latest position](#) as published on Staffnet, including the [response](#) to an [open letter](#) from protest groups. (NB protestors had prevented access to the venue for the Board meeting for some members. As a result, some members attended an alternative venue with connection between the venues made via video conference.)

Noted:

(1) As discussed at the Strategy Day, the Board's reflections on the University's current position included:

- (a) The University's legal and charitable obligations.
- (b) The centrality of academic freedom and freedom of speech
- (c) The importance of accepting views that may be diametrically opposed provided that they are not illegal or disrespectful of others: this included protecting the right to lawful, peaceful and respectful protest and taking action when protest was not peaceful or respectful and when normal activities were significantly disrupted.
- (d) The implications of the University stepping away from a neutral role, noting and completely respecting the rights of individuals to take personal actions.
- (e) Awareness that all university alliances and research collaborations were compliant with applicable national and international statutory and regulatory requirements.

(2) The Board's recognition of the tragic events that had affected so many innocent people in Israel and Gaza: many people across the University community (and the sector more widely) had been profoundly affected by the loss of life and violence, and every Board member shared the resulting distress and concern.

(3) The existence of a multiplicity of views and recognition that this was a matter on which some would continue to disagree passionately.

(4) An overview of protest activities to date and established plans to mitigate the impact of further protests on staff and students: the current period was a critical examination period and maintaining security and safety on campus was very important for all members of the University community. (Secretary's note: the Board meeting took place shortly before the occupation of Whitworth Hall which resulted in the [activation of contingency plans](#) for the organisation of examinations.)

Agreed:

(1) After full consideration, the Board agreed to endorse the University's position as set out on in [the Open Letter response](#). In this endorsement, the Board stressed the importance of continuing to discuss all matters through the Students' Union officers, as the representative body of all our students and of listening carefully to concerns.

(2) To support continuation of processes to enable the University community to come together in a regular, programmed and accessible way to discuss and debate controversial topics in a constructive and respectful manner. This builds on the model of recent open meetings on [freedom of speech issues](#) (including issues following the establishment of a Students' Union Pro Life Society), university finances and innovative work on animal research.

(3) That the University should re-emphasise the direct support it is providing via its leading [humanitarian conflict student scholarship programme](#).

17. Dates of remaining meetings in 2023-24 and meetings in 2024-25

Noted:

(1) the remaining meeting date in 2023-24 as below:

- Wednesday 24 July

(2) dates in 2024-25 (unless stated, lunch from 12pm, briefing 12.30-2.30pm, meeting 3-6pm, supper 6-c7.30pm (all meetings in person)

- Thursday 10 October 2024
- Wednesday 20 November 2024 (Accountability Review 9am-2.30pm: meeting 3-6pm)
- Wednesday 11 December 2024 (joint meeting with Senate 4-5pm)
- Wednesday 19 February 2025
- Wednesday 19 March 2025
- Wednesday 21 May 2025 (Board Strategy Day: all day, from 9am)
- Thursday 22 May 2025 (meeting 9am-12pm)
- Wednesday 23 July 2025