

APPROVED

The University of Manchester

Senate

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research)

15 May 2024

Present: Professor Melissa Westwood (Chair), Professor Maggie Gale (from minute 6), Professor Nigel Hooper, Professor David Matthews, Professor Mahesan Nirmalan, Professor James Pattison, Professor Thomas Schmidt, Professor Chris Taylor, Professor Andy Trafford (for minutes 1-5 and 9-14), Professor Arpana Verma, and Professor Richard Winpenny.

In Attendance for all items: Clare McCauley (Uniac) (attending as an observer), Dr Julian Skyrme (Director of Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement), Dr Andrew Walsh (Director of Research and Business Engagement Services), and Jane Holland (minutes).

In Attendance for item 8: Dr David Barker (Director of Compliance and Risk).

Apologies: Professor Philippa Browning and Professor Colette Fagan.

1 Welcome

Noted: the Chair welcomed Clare McCauley (Uniac) who was attending the meeting as an observer. The Uniac review of academic governance formed part of the Audit and Risk Committee's 2023-24 Audit Plan.

2 Thanks to Departing Members

Noted: the Chair thanked departing members for their contributions to the work of the Committee. Members approaching the end of their term of membership were:

- a) Professor Philippa Browning (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2024);
- b) Professor Richard Winpenny (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2024);
- c) Ansab Ali (outgoing SU Officer for Postgraduate Research).

3 Declarations of Interest

Noted: That there were no declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Agreed: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2024.

5 Matters Arising

Noted:

- a) the Matters Arising update;

- b) the schedule of policies for review during the academic cycle had been further developed to include the non-PGR policies;
- c) the Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) had finalised a package of training in relation to the updated Supervision Policy for postgraduate research degrees. Communication of the updates was in progress;
- d) the update to the Presentation of Theses Policy, which had been approved at the last meeting of the Committee, had been further discussed at the 17 April Senate meeting. A number of Senate members had requested that the text be further refined in relation to content that could be considered offensive or triggering. Work was being undertaken with colleagues in the School of Arts, Languages and Culture (SALC) to redefine the text, which would be re-presented to the Committee for review in 2024-25.

6 Forward Agenda: Schedule of Committee Business for 2023-24

Noted:

- a) the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) Forward Agenda;
- b) that the Schedule for 2024-25 was under development. Members were encouraged to suggest briefings for inclusion on the Forward Agenda for the next academic year.

7 Chair's Update

Noted:

- a) there were no update items from the Chair;
- b) the Associate Vice-Presidents for Research would be invited to provide input for future meetings.

8 University Risk Register – Research-related items

Noted: A presentation by the Director of Compliance and Risk providing the research-related elements of the University Strategic Risk Register.

- a) the Strategic Risk Register was reviewed in June and December each year. The December 2023 version would be shared with members. The iteration for June 2024 was currently in the process of being summarised and would be shared when completed; **Action: Director of Compliance and Risk/Governance Manager**
- b) for research-related items on the Strategic Risk Register, the Vice-President for Research was the risk owner, and the Director for Research and Business Engagement Services was the risk manager. The Board of Governors provided scrutiny of the Strategic Risk Register;
- c) particular challenges for the University currently included carbon risk and cyber-related risks. Information security and data protection were also significant risks. Research-specific risks included international partnerships and geo-political risks;
- d) there were a number of emerging risks which included artificial intelligence (AI) and climate change risk. It was suggested that there could be a major risk of not investing in an infrastructure which would allow the University to apply AI effectively in research, as leading international research often involved an element of AI;
- e) risks relating to pandemic and conflict were not considered to be catastrophic risks, due to the robust processes in place, and the University had significant buffering capacity to deal with these risks;
- f) distribution of the risks within the matrix was important. The Board of Governors' focus related to the high risks of cyber, data protection and carbon risks;
- g) a forward plan relating to the government review of research bureaucracy was under development. The associated statement would be provided to the Director of Compliance and Risk; **Action: Director of Research and Business Engagement Services**
- h) the PowerPoint presentation would be circulated after the meeting; **Action: Director of Compliance and Risk/Governance Manager**

9 Briefing on Recent Research Degrees & Researcher Development (RDRD) activity

Noted: a presentation by the Chair, providing details of recent activity on research degrees and researcher development.

- a) the University's PGR community comprised of 4,000 students registered on programmes at any one time. There was a 50:50 split of home and international students, of which the ethnicity profile was 50% white and 50% other ethnicities. A breakdown of the data would be provided by faculty, department or school-level, to enable interdisciplinary data to be determined; **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research (MDC and Staff)**
- b) PGR student funding was mainly sourced from the UKRI. A number of students were funded by the University, were self-funded or had other funding sources;
- c) the training breakdown included seven doctoral training partnerships, one collaborative training partnership and 14 centres for doctoral training;
- d) there was interest, from the incoming President and Vice-Chancellor, regarding strategic consideration of funded programmes, including interdisciplinary outputs relating to PGR funding. For most PGRs on funded programmes, their supervisors were not on Beacons or platforms;
- e) the MDC had considered each of the eight areas initiated by the UKRI which included:
 - i. Funding: there had been an increase of 20% in stipends awarded to UKRI students. As the University matched the stipends, this would have an impact on the budget;
 - ii. Flexibility: the University was considering modes of study (offering modular PGR degrees) and modes of delivery;
 - iii. Accessibility and Outreach: the University was aiming to increase the diversity of the PG population by offering UG provision to EDI groups, to enhance their experience and opportunities for progression. Recruitment processes were being reviewed to identify additional ways to recruit to doctoral study;
 - iv. Supervision: a framework for supervisor provision was being developed, and the University was working in partnership with MMU and the University of Salford;
 - v. Boosting Support: a PGR Voice survey had been developed and a partnership had since been created with the University of Sheffield, with interest from other universities. Additional support included training and mental health support. Progression would continue to be tracked by eProg;
 - vi. International Students: 30% of international students were on UKRI-funded programmes. Impacts on these students included visa restrictions and NHS surcharge;
 - vii. Preparing Students for the Future: researcher development was being progressed, including PGR Prosper and the Biobridges project;
 - viii. PGR Students: consideration was being given to the identity of PGR students;
- f) the University had held the HR Excellence in Research Award for 12 years. This supported the career development of research staff and had enabled the University to enhance reward and recognition, career development, and contract provision;
- g) a new talent bench would be trialled for 2023-26 with a view to improving PDRA job security. It was acknowledged that there was a cost-related recovery to the grant increases each year which was an increasing expense for the funding body and could become an issue as the workforce matured. Staff progression was supported, and a promotions reward was available. Grade 6, 7 and 8 research staff were expected to fulfil different remits relative to their grade;
- h) additional support for PGRs included the establishment of a Fellow Strategy Group to develop 1) a 'Manchester Package' of support, 2) the roll-out of 'Prosper' to support careers beyond academia, 3) development of a toolkit for PIs to support their research staff, and 4) enhanced provision for BAME and disabled colleagues;
- i) it was acknowledged that a number of areas, including physics and chemistry, may not require additional fellows. It was confirmed that the Fellow Strategy Group were not replicating existing functions, and that there would be benefits of coordination and widely sharing of intelligence;

- j) it was confirmed that prospective fellows would have a discussion about their expectations in relation to access to equipment and other resources and support required to fulfil their research obligations;
- k) subsequent updates on RDRD activity could be provided, by the Associate Vice-President for Research (MDC and Staff), to future meetings.

10 Updated Policy Schedule

Received and Noted: the combined Research and Business Engagement Policy Schedule, which had been updated to include non-PGR policies from the Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team and the Research Strategy Team. The document provided an overview of the policy review cycle across the Directorate.

11 Student Disciplinary Matters: Student Suspensions

Received: the report on Student Disciplinary Matters – proposed revisions to General Regulation XVII and the Support to Study Procedure.

Noted:

- a) that the proposal detailed a move to a single route for student suspensions, and included wording changes to General Regulation XVII and the Support to Study Procedure;
- b) the University's Legal Team had reviewed the proposal;
- c) relating to General Regulation XVII point 5.1, a question arose around the reason why an arrest may not be sufficient grounds for suspension, or whether an arrest leading to a charge. Further advice would be sought on this point. **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research (MDC and Staff)** (*Secretary's note: The Advice and Response Team advise that the University considers suspensions on a case-by-case basis. An arrest could be sufficient reason for a suspension, although consideration would be given to a number of factors including the accused offence, the circumstances of the arrest, bail conditions, the associated risk, and representations made by the student. Ongoing criminal proceedings could instigate the process and may be enough grounds to suspend.*)

Agreed:

- i. to approve the insertion of the Vice-President for Research at paragraph 9.9 within the Support to Study Procedure for suspension appeals;
- ii. to recommend to Senate that the following amendments be made to Regulation XVII:
 - o reference to the President and Vice-Chancellor (i.e. suspension approvals) to instead refer to the Director for the Student Experience (or delegated nominee);
 - o reference to the Chair of the Board of Governors (i.e. suspension appeals) to refer to both the Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students and the Vice-President for Research (or delegated nominees);
 - o wording updates within Section 5.

12 REF 2029 Update

Noted: an oral update on the REF 2029, which included a number of recent announcements.

- a) Open Access Consultation
 - i. the policy consultation would be open until 17 June 2024. The Research Strategy Group was currently reviewing the consultation;
 - ii. since REF 2021, there had been a change to the impact element, which would mainly affect areas of humanities and social sciences;
 - iii. a number of staff had expressed an interest in attending a workshop on the development of indicators. The workshop had been capped at 40 attendees.
- b) REF PCE Developments
 - i. the PCE pilot exercise had been delayed from July to November 2024. The University would be entering submissions;
 - ii. there would be a call for membership to the pilot panels over the next two months;

iii. final results from the exercise would be published during the summer 2025.

13 Assurance of Quality and Standards in Research – recent reports received by the Planning and Resources Committee

Noted: That there had been no associated report items to the Planning and Resources Committee during this period.

14 Information Items

Noted:

- a) [Research and Impact @ Manchester](#) – providing details of the University’s research and impact activities and associated events;
- b) Social Responsibility Update: report to 17 April Senate;
- c) no requests for agenda items had been received. Any such requests should be made to the Governance Office at the earliest opportunity;
- d) the Chair thanked members for their contributions to the work of the committee over the 2023-24 academic year;
- e) the meeting dates for 2024-25 would be finalised and communicated in due course.