

The University of Manchester

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Present: Nazir Afzal (Chancellor, in the chair), Raheel Ansari, Jim Hancock (Pro-Chancellor), Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell (President and Vice-Chancellor), Carl Austin-Behan, Tamzin Bond (via video conference), Ian Brake, Colin Brown (via video conference), Gary Buxton, Karina Carter, Steve Connor, Amanda Corcoran, Bill Craig, Lucy Danger, Stuart Dunne, Fatema El-Wakeel, Zeb Farooq (via video conference), Laura Flynn (via video conference), Simeon Gill, Professor Simon Harper, Matt Haworth, Susan Hilton, Tom A Jirat, Andrew Koh, Jamilla Kossar, Martin Lax, Lisa Maynard-Atem (via video conference), Mel McMahon (via video conference), Rodger Pannone, Zoe Papageorgiou, Vicky Rosin, Ian Rutherford, Jonny Sadler, David Schultz, Mark Scoular, Abigail Shapiro, Paul Sutherland, Jess Thompson, Niels Walet, Gill Webber, and George Whalley. (41 members)

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Social Responsibility, the Head of Bicentenary Planning and Delivery, the Deputy Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Vice-President for Research, the Deputy Secretary and the Governance Manager (minutes).

1. Introductory Remarks

Reported: The Chancellor welcomed attendees to the meeting. Members were invited to stay after the meeting for the Light Up event, which had been organised to mark the start of the University's Bicentenary celebrations.

A number of University members had been recognised in the King's 2024 New Year Honours List; Professor Danielle George, awarded CBE for services to Engineering; Professor Joyce Ann Tyldesley, awarded OBE for services to Egyptology and Heritage; and Professor Philip Diamond, awarded CBE for services to Global Radio Astronomy. The Chancellor offered congratulations to everyone who had been recognised in the New Year Honours List.

2. Minutes

Resolved: The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2023 were approved.

3. Matters arising

Received: there were no outstanding matters arising from the previous meeting.

4. Membership of the General Assembly

Noted: the membership of the General Assembly had been circulated prior to the meeting.

5. Update on relevant matters from Nominations Committee

Received: a verbal update from the Governance Office supporting the circulated report which advised two items:

- (1) Careful thought was being given to ways in which to engage most effectively with members of the General Assembly outside the two scheduled formal meetings per year. Feedback from members would be welcomed.
- (2) It was proposed that the effectiveness of the General Assembly meetings would be evaluated, via a questionnaire. Changes had previously been made to the General Assembly membership in order to increase the number of individual members, with a view to supporting engagement and dialogue, and effective information sharing. Suggestions for questions to be included in the questionnaire could be submitted to the Deputy Secretary. The questionnaire would be circulated to members later in the year.

6. Annual Report on the work of the University

Received: a presentation from the President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, providing an update on key developments during 2022-23. The presentation would be made available to members after the meeting, and included the following headlines:

- Challenges facing the University
- Financial challenges and the current position
- The University's Strategic Plan
- Overall performance in 2022-23: Year 3 of the Strategic Plan
- Research Awards and Achievements
- Research Beacons and Platforms
- Postgraduate researchers
- Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023 – Final ratings
- Marking and assessment boycott
- Social responsibility & civic engagement
- University News
- Supporting business
- Innovation
- Spinouts launched since 1997
- Priorities and opportunities

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

- (1) As a direct consequence of the marking and assessment boycott, there had been a delay in a number of students (2.3%) receiving their final degree classification. These students had since received their results, and had been offered a place at the winter graduation ceremonies. The boycott had also caused some difficulties for a minority of students in their second and third years, who required grade notification for progression to their next stage of study.
- (2) The University's goal to achieve zero carbon status by 2038 was currently behind schedule, with current cost estimates indicating the scale of the challenge. (noting that new opportunities and initiatives could arise). There would be a significant reduction in the University's carbon emissions over the next ten years, particularly once the benefits from emptying the North Campus were achieved.
- (3) The implications of using artificial intelligence (AI) for teaching were being explored and it was agreed that Professor Chris Taylor would be invited to a future General Assembly meeting to talk to this subject. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

- (4) It was acknowledged that recent government changes to student visas could result in a decline in the number of international students applying to study in the UK. The University would continue to encourage applications from overseas students, and there would be additional focus on assurance and conversion work.
- (5) There had been a slight decline in home undergraduate student recruitment, equating to £7 million in fee income. This situation was replicated across the higher education sector.
- (6) There was recognition that the current funding model for Higher Education was unsustainable with representations made to government individually and collectively, through the Russell Group. In the short term at least, given competing priorities and lack of political appetite, the position was unlikely to change. Consideration would be given to the provision of a brief information sheet setting out the difficulties posed by the current financial model, for potential use by members in an ambassadorial capacity.
Action: Deputy Secretary
- (7) It was acknowledged that the General Assembly members provided a wide range of expertise and important influence in the sector. The University continued to demonstrate the wider positive attributes of higher education, for example creating employment opportunities, and working with local schools and colleges. The Vice-President for Regional Innovation and Civic Engagement had an upcoming meeting with the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation to highlight the University's contributions towards Innovation Manchester.

7. Annual Financial Statements 2022-23

Received: a presentation from the Chief Financial Officer, Carol Prokopyszyn, providing an overview of the University's [Financial Statements for 2022-23](#). The presentation would be made available to members after the meeting, and included the following headlines:

- Financial performance 2022-23
- Income £1.3 billion/Expenditure £1.2 billion
- Key activity spend
- Investing in the student experience
- University reserves £1.9 billion
- Capital spending plans

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

- (1) Through its Responsible Investment Policy, the University had divested from fossil fuels and significantly reduced the carbon intensity of its investment portfolio.
- (2) Cost of living payments had been offered to staff (except senior staff), and all students during 2022-23. Students had been consulted prior to allocation, and had been able to claim the £170 payment via the 'Pay It' process. Additional funding had been allocated to student support.
- (3) Investment was being made in long-term maintenance. Work was in progress to develop an infrastructure for the next 20 years and to reimagine the estate for the long-term.
- (4) Recruitment continued to be a challenge across the higher education sector, although there had been some recent improvement. The University was currently running 11%

staff vacancies. Staff pay was negotiated at 5-8% nationally. There was pressure on the University's operating expenditure due to income not increasing to align with the rising costs. It was confirmed that the University was in a better position than other institutions in the sector.

8. Bicentenary

Received: a presentation from Kim Graakjaer, Head of Bicentenary Planning and Delivery, providing an overview of the programme to mark the University's Bicentenary. The presentation would be made available to members after the meeting, and included the following headlines:

- History overview 1824-2024
- Planned Bicentenary events
- Four pillars of the Bicentenary
- Light up event details
- Lecture and podcast series
- Flagship Festival 6-9 June 2024
- THE World Academic Summit 7-9 October 2024
- Team 200 www.manchester.ac.uk/200

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

- (1) The legacy plan included new hexagon stones for Bicentenary Way, with featured names chosen through an open nomination process. Over 100 stones would be laid during the spring/summer 2024, and further stones would be laid in the future.
- (2) The history overview was welcomed and it was noted that this would be published online, with consideration given to providing a printed version.
- (3) Historic campus tours, along with tours of residencies, could be provided as part of the Bicentenary celebrations. These were currently undertaken for year groups of University alumni, on request.
- (4) The role of alumni in supporting the Bicentenary celebrations was discussed. The second part of the year would include volunteering and fundraising opportunities, and University alumni would be welcomed to become involved in the events.
- (5) The Bicentenary opening event would include global collaboration, and over the course of the year would include international activity, to maximise impact globally. Further work would be undertaken with colleagues in the global centres to involve them in the Flagship Festival taking place in June 2024.
- (6) The launch of Talk 200, the bicentenary lecture and podcast series, would feature a lecture by Professor Sir Chris Whitty on 13 February 2024.
- (7) Engagement with local schools and colleges was being undertaken to encourage young people to become involved in the Bicentenary events and activities. Work was also taking place with local partnerships and wider community connections.

9. Any other business

- (1) In response to a question, there was discussion of current risks on the University Risk Register which included cyber and recruitment and retention of students and staff (particularly Professional Services staff).
- (2) The Chancellor paid tribute to MP Sir Tony Lloyd, who had passed away on 17 January 2024, and was recognised for his contributions both locally and nationwide.

10. Date of next meeting of the General Assembly

Wednesday 19 June 2024 at 2.30pm in the Whitworth Art Gallery (building 84 on the [Campus Map](#)).

General Assembly Actions from 17 January 2024

Minute	Action	Update
6 (3)	Deputy Secretary To invite Professor Chris Taylor to a future General Assembly meeting for a discussion on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching.	Completed.
6 (6)	Deputy Secretary To ensure consideration is given to providing a brief information sheet setting out the difficulties posed by the current financial model, for potential use by members in an ambassadorial capacity.	Completed