# **HUMANITIES FACULTY COMMITTEE**

## Wednesday 5 February 2025

**Present:** Fiona Devine (Chair), Fiona Smyth, Emma Rose (Secretary), Mabel Sanchez-Barrioluengo, Ken McPhail, Roz Webster, Richard Whalley, Claire Alexander, Chloe Nahum-Claudel, Georgina Lewis-Vasco, Sofia Parker, Thomas Schmidt, Rachel Walton, Maggie Gale, Patricia Perlman-Dee, Vicky Skinner

**Apologies:** Charles Insley, Umit Kemal Yildiz, Claire Goulsbra, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Jon Shute, Juup Stelma, Fiona Keenan, Katie Jackson, Kate McNamee

**In attendance:** Gemma Keaveney (note-taker), Victoria Roberts (Business Support Manager)

## 1 Welcome, introduction and apologies

Professor Fiona Devine welcomed the group to the meeting.

## 2 Minutes and actions of previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved. One outstanding action item relating to authorised absences within SEAtS was confirmed as completed.

The Chair updated on an issue raised at a previous meeting as to whether the Martin Harris Centre could or should be considered as a cultural asset within the University. A request had been put to the CIGC (Cultural Institutions Governance Committee) for consideration. The four main cultural institutions (WAG, Museum, Jodrell Bank, JRRI Library) are University-wide whereas the Martin Harris Centre and other smaller activities are attached to a particular department or School. There was a suggestion therefore that these smaller activities be combined to create a group and relevant parties will consider this further.

It is noted that whilst our cultural institutions add value to both the university and the city more generally, the Martin Harris Centre is not externally funded and was created predominantly as a teaching facility. There are current facilities issues within the MHC and Emma Rose has agreed to pick these up with relevant colleagues.

It was agreed that more could be done on promoting the MHC and that Kathryn Howard would be asked to liaise with colleagues on doing this.

## 3 Canvas update

An update was provided by Stuart Phillipson and Sarah Dyer and the presentation will be shared with members of this Committee. Firstly, there was an overview of what the changes are and why the project has been undertaken then further detail of the system, how it works, what it can and can’t be used for etc. Ultimately, the aim is to provide an inclusive online learning environment, with explicit expectations and which it is hoped, will help to close the attainment gap. Publication is soon, orientation for students is planned with clarity on feedback processes, predictability of key information, and meeting legal requirements.

To note that templates will be available online and full training is available for staff to assist in understanding the system and are aware of the changes that are ahead. Things will also need to be transferred across, and the E-Learning team will be available throughout to support this process. It is agreed that further messaging is required to promote this. Training take-up is currently being monitored and staff are being actively encouraged to undertake the training.

## 4 Research update

An update was provided by Maggie Gale and Admos Chimhowu and the presentation will be shared with members of this Committee. To note that RRE is live and colleagues should be encouraged to submit, even if they have a nil return. This is considered an important exercise to gauge the direction of travel for REF 2029 and tools are available to assist the process.

A question was raised in relation to portability as under the current regulations, it suggests one can’t transfer research to another job. Colleagues believe these rules to be unfair and that they mitigate against early career researchers in particular, making them in effect, potentially unemployable. It is noted that this is currently under consideration within the UKRI and that a more open process for panel membership is underway. Further information should be available on sub-panel members by June.

It is also noted that there has been a shift towards more diversity in panel membership.

It is agreed that robust discussions within schools about REF and output expectations is required and that we should encourage researchers to work on larger, substantive items rather than smaller pieces of work. Colleagues agreed that it would be useful to have the results of the last RRE for reference and this will be followed up by Maggie Gale and Elaine Edwards.

An update on the profile of PGR in Humanities was provided and this information has been used as a basis for the 2024-2027 strategy, with the aim to reverse the dynamic and start to raise completion rates across all schools by the end of the plan period.

To note that not all PGRs will work in academia therefore a number of compulsory skills programmes to be undertaken prior to graduation. Further discussion is planned between Maggie, Admos and Mabel Sanchez Barrioluengo to address this.

It was agreed that the deep dive information would be useful for Heads of School to view and should be circulated to inform further discussions between Heads of School, Admos Chimhowu and School PGR Directors.

## 5 Finance update

Vicky Skinner presented an update to the group and the presentation will be shared with members of this Committee.

Key points to note are that overall, the forecast is £4m favourable and the context for budget and planning this year is slightly different. Manchester has performed well from a market perspective, however we are not immune to market pressures and should not be complacent. We need to approach things differently this year and there are some main principles we will follow. The University will look across all three Faculties plus PS for the budget and planning cycle, Humanities will also adopt this process for the Faculty budget and planning cycle.

It is noted that we need to generate more cash and increase our investment growth from 10% to 15%. We need strategic alignment and focus and we need simplification of funds and how to deliver the strategy. We also need to work on unlocking additional cash to support Manchester 2035 and University strategy.

It was confirmed that Faculty colleagues had met with the President and CFO recently to discuss the process and where things currently are in terms of process.

## 6 Removal of cap on student numbers in electives

This item was raised by colleagues and presented by Patricia Perlman-Dee.

It was confirmed that the decision to remove caps was taken by Faculty and it is up to Schools to progress. There is no plan to put caps back in place at the current time. Some of the issues previously had been raised as EDI concerns therefore a different approach was required. Schools should take the opportunity to reduce the level of assessment. It is noted that we need to be agile and that further discussions are required within Schools on how best to support this. Teaching should not be the responsibility of just one person, and we should think more about team teaching as well as assessment. Agreed that this could provide a challenge however we need to be flexible, students are our stakeholders, and we should ensure that the student experience is not impacted by this change.

Members agreed that further discussions would be required within Schools to understand demand and the resources required to ensure equity across the board. Noted that financial pressures also impact on the decision to do things in a different way, making things much more agile.

## 7 Course Unit Survey concerns

This item was raised by colleagues and presented by Richard Whalley.

The main issue is around factually incorrect information included in surveys, who will see this information and the impact comments may have on individuals. There is also the issue of redactions.

It was confirmed that AI is used to look at issues and concerns and redactions are made on the grounds of breaches of dignity at work. Noted that feedback from one student would not raise a concern if other students did not mention the same thing. Common themes are discussed and considered by the team with unit leads and course directors making appropriate judgements. They are not required to give justification. Comments will be de-anonymised if students are likely to be at risk however quite often it is the wording that has been used, rather than something more serious, and colleagues are expected to sensible and balanced when reading comments.

It is noted that the aim now is to focus questions on the lessons rather than individuals which should address some of the issues outlined previously.

It is understood that a move towards mid-semester surveys will help explain to students what is happening and provide opportunities to address any concerns that students may have. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss what students like, don’t like and what they would like to do more or less of.

Agreed that colleagues with any concerns relating to course unit surveys should talk with their Head of School and Director of Teaching & Learning.

## 8 Any other business

The Chair opened the floor for any other business and encouraged everyone to complete the essential training. It was agreed that it is a reasonable expectation, if not a legal requirement, for an organisation of this size and complexity to have its staff undertake this training exercise. The outcome of non-completion will mean the removal of access to IT services.

Discussions are ongoing relating to external staff (TAs) being paid to undertake compulsory training. Martin Banks will be liaising with Schools directly on this prior to a full announcement being made.

**Actions arising from meeting 5 February 2025**

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| **Meeting** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Context** | **Update** |
| HFC05022025-02-01 | Enhanced promotion of the Martin Harris Centre | Victoria Roberts | It was agreed that more could be done on promoting the Martin Harris Centre and that Kathryn Howard would be asked to liaise with relevant colleagues on doing this. |  |
| HFC05022025-04-01 | Provision of last RRE data to relevant colleagues | Maggie Gale | It is agreed that robust discussions within schools about REF and output expectations is required and that we should encourage researchers to work on larger, substantive items rather than smaller pieces of work. Colleagues agreed that it would be useful to have the results of the last RRE for reference and this will be followed up by Maggie Gale and Elaine Edwards. |  |