

APPROVED

The University of Manchester

Senate

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research)

20 March 2025

Present: Professor Colette Fagan (Chair), Adil Ashraf, Professor Lynne Bianchi, Professor Richard Curry, Professor Maggie Gale (from minute 7), Professor David Matthews, Professor James Pattison, Professor Thomas Schmidt, Professor Andy Trafford, Professor Niels Walet, Dr Andrew Walsh, and Professor Melissa Westwood.

In Attendance for items 1-7: Louise Bates (Interim Director of Business Engagement and Knowledge Exchange).

In Attendance for item 8: Julia Cheung (Acting Director of Safety Services).

In Attendance for all items: Professor Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor) (observing), Dr Julian Skyrme (Executive Director of Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement), and Jane Holland (Governance Manager) (minutes).

1 Welcome and Apologies

Noted: apologies had been received from Professor Stephen Flint, Professor Nigel Hooper, Professor Mahesan Nirmalan, Professor Chris Taylor, and Professor Arpana Verma.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Noted: That a minor clarification was required to minute 9c) to remove 'open access'.

Agreed: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2025, following minor amendment.

4 Matters Arising

Noted:

- a) the Matters Arising update;
- b) that arising from minute 4 of the 22 January 2025 meeting, and minute 9 of the 17 October 2024 meeting; a method of obtaining data relating to the final outcomes of PGR students who re-submitted their year one report had been established. Obtaining this information had proved difficult due to the data systems (Campus Solutions and eProg). Of the 2017, 2018 & 2019 cohorts, approximately 10% of PGRs, across all faculties, re-submitted their year one report. These students were more likely to discontinue, be withdrawn or obtain an alternative award. The Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) would consider how best to support these students. Further breakdown of the data, e.g., by minority groupings, was not currently available. The data would be discussed at the next meeting of MDC and a short paragraph

to summarise the findings would be produced for dissemination to the faculties. **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research (Manchester Doctoral College and Staff)**

- c) that arising from minute 4 of the 22 January 2025 meeting; a School Research Directors' forum focussed on 'Upholding responsible and ethical research' was planned for the end of the current academic year

5 Forward Agenda: Schedule of Committee Business for 2024-25

Noted:

- a) the Senate Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) Forward Agenda;
- b) that citations would be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Committee;
Action: Governance Manager
- c) a discussion with the comms team on the use of social media to promote research (in connection with the Global Rankings Taskforce action to raise citations) would be added to the Forward Agenda. **Action: Governance Manager**

6 a) Chair's Update

Noted: an oral update on research and general University matters.

- i. that external funding pressures could be expected over the next academic year, due to potential cuts to quality-related (QR) research funding, which would have an impact on higher education institutions in the UK;
- ii. a recent government report had indicated that Horizon funding for the UK had been favourable. ERC grants had been provided to a number of research projects. The UK had also experienced upturns in commercial and industry funding;
- iii. the closure of NHS England National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funding arrangement had been announced;
- iv. the Manchester 2025 Sprint groups were continuing through the consultation phase, with the development of the propositions and workflows, which would run until the end of April 2025. Alongside the development of the Sprints, there would be a focus on research platforms and re-positioning of research beacons. The Chair thanked colleagues for their work to support the development of the strategy and encouraged their continuing engagement in the process;
- v. the Vice-President for Research, who had recently undertaken the International/Global Strategy Portfolio, was contributing to the development of an international strategy, and broad engagement on this would take place. The international strategy would be added to the Committee's Forward Agenda. **Action: Governance Manager**

b) Updates from the AVPs for Research

Noted: oral updates from the AVPs for Research.

- i. the Executive Director for Research and Business Engagement (RBE) informed the Committee that the USA government had recently announced spending cuts which would affect higher education, including; 1) that it would target diversity, equality and inclusion initiatives and policies, and 2) that it would freeze federal funded projects. Across the UK sector, USA-funded research collaborations had received direct communications from the funder to principal investigators (PIs) to implement these changes. Our RBE Directorate has contacted all PIs in receipt of USA federal funding, are undertaking practical checks and are supporting PIs with responses with the aim of minimising project disruption and other risks; and are in close contact with relevant sources of advice in the UK sector;
- ii. genuine opportunities could arise for the University to recruit high quality researchers due to a freeze on hiring in the USA to be borne in mind as part of our recruitment strategy;
- iii. colleagues were asked to encourage participation in the upcoming PGR showcase, and to support the research staff awards, which were now open.

c) Global Rankings Task Force Update

Noted: that clear advice was needed to support colleagues, include using the correct institutional affiliation for authorship and support for effective social media communication to promote research outputs. Raising citations would be added to the Committee's Forward Agenda. **Action: Governance Manager**

7 Business Engagement Strategy Briefing

Noted:

- a) a PowerPoint presentation by the Interim Director of Business Engagement and Knowledge Exchange providing an overview of the Business Engagement (BE) Strategy, including knowledge exchange, and outlining opportunities for collaboration;
- b) the University had very ambitious industry funding targets and was positioned in the top 5 of UK higher education institutions, with ambition to improve further;
- c) the University was the recipient of significant philanthropic support; also with ambition to grow this support through the new campaign;
- d) there was an opportunity for students to access enterprise and training through Unit M, the University's innovation academy;
- e) our Business Engagement Strategy aligned with the Civic Engagement Strategy, and the University was collaborating with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Salford on several projects, and developing further relationships in the region. This included joint funding opportunities in particular areas of expertise. The University was collaborating with the GM Business Growth Hub to support SMEs, also working with local authorities, such as Rochdale Development Agency, to develop relationships and collaborations with regional SMEs;
- f) the point of contract renewal with our strategic partners were used to renegotiate price to support the financial sustainability of our research, in line with our costing and pricing policy.

8 Update on Health and Safety (H&S) in Research Laboratories

Noted:

- a) a report providing a background to the H&S incident which had occurred in a research laboratory, and an update of the issues identified in the Uniac internal audit (H&S extract);
- b) a PowerPoint presentation by the Acting Director of Safety Services providing an update on policies and procedures in research laboratories, clarity on roles and responsibilities, mechanisms to update PIs on H&S support and training, accidents and incidents reported, and Uniac audit findings and progress on recommendations. Headline messages were:
 - i. it was confirmed that through the Compliance Committee and the University Executive, H&S incidents were monitored and evaluated, including progress on the implementation of the Uniac recommendations and other actions to raise H&S standards;
 - ii. in order to reduce injuries it was important that senior leaders sent a clear and consistent message to colleagues to demonstrate the serious commitment to H&S at the University. It was important that mid-level management, PIs and academics take responsibility for H&S, and currently roles and responsibilities were being clarified to reinforce this;
 - iii. clarification on responsibilities for undertaking risk assessments were being developed by Safety Services;
 - iv. clarification around the responsibility for shared work spaces needed to be established, particularly in instances where H&S was undertaken in a team context. Complications relating to responsibility arose due to teams working within faculty and cross-faculty. Clarity on accountability would include academic staff. Example case studies for cross-faculty working would be established and would include Manchester Interdisciplinary Biocentre (MIB), Royce, and the Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre (GEIC). The latter provided an example of University and industry collaboration.
 - v. it was agreed that the Committee would receive an annual report on Health and Safety as part of its assurance of research compliance standards (the annual report of the

Research Compliance Committee was already received as part of the annual business cycle). **Action: Governance Manager/Acting Director of Health and Safety**

9 REF 2029 Update

Noted: An update on preparations for the REF 2029 would be circulated to committee members, and was also contained in the Vice-President for Research report to Senate. **Action: Governance Manager**

10 Policy Review

Received: Update to Presentation of Theses Policy and Presentation of Dissertations Policy.

Noted: That a change was proposed to the policies to remove 'Dissertations/Theses should not be submitted with tracked changes or highlighted text'.

Agreed: to approve the proposed change to the Presentation of Theses Policy and Presentation of Dissertations Policy.

11 University of Manchester Students' Union Report

Received: University of Manchester Students' Union Report.

Noted:

- a) that it was a mandatory requirement to undertake a year one review in order to register for year two. Further discussion around potential other requirements for progression would be held; **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research (Manchester Doctoral College and Staff)/UMSU PGR Research Officer**
- b) a number of international PGR students had encountered difficulty in locating reputable private accommodation. Consideration would be given to students facing these situations, and existing support was available through the University's accommodation services, and the Students' Union.

12 Assurance of Quality and Standards in Research – recent reports received by the University Executive

Noted: That there had been no associated report items to the University Executive during this period.

13 Information Items

Noted:

- a) Research and Impact @ Manchester Newsletter - providing details of the University's research and impact activities and associated events;
- b) Social Responsibility Update: report to 12 February Senate;
- c) no requests for agenda items had been received. Any such requests should be made to the Governance Office at the earliest opportunity.