

The University of Manchester

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Thursday 22 May 2025

Present: Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair, in the Chair), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), David Buckley (via videoconference), Lexie Baynes, Anna Dawe, Deirdre Evans, Guy Grainger, Dr Reinmar Hager, Nick Hillman, Katie Jackson, Tom Jirat, Jatin Patel, Dr Hema Radhakrishnan, Tony Raven, Prof Fiona Smyth, Paul Thwaite, Prof Soumhya Venkatesan, Emma Wade-Smith and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member). (18 members)

Apologies: Philippa Hird (Chair), Kerris Bright, Prof Danielle George, Prof Paul Mativenga, and Robin Phillips.

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Professor Coskun Kocabas, National Graphene Institute (item 8), and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

1. Initial feedback from and reflections on Board Strategy Day (21 May 2025)

Reported: the Acting Chair invited members to reflect on the Strategy Day which had taken place on the preceding day, noting the insights on strategy development and implementation offered by the visiting speaker, Chris Oglesby in his pre-dinner remarks. A separate report on the Strategy Day was prepared, and the following further observations were offered by members.

Noted:

(1) The importance of agility and speed of decision making where necessary to adapt to changing circumstances.

(2) The unpredictable nature of the current policy environment, which made forecasting difficult.

(3) The importance of culture and behaviour and buy-in to the strategy from the University's distributed leadership. This was critical to execution and delivery, and in this context there was a need to ensure sufficient investment and support for leadership development.

(4) The need to reflect on current leadership capability and skills, noting the complexity of a multi-year, interdisciplinary strategy. In this context, it was important to guard against change fatigue and reflect on the experience of previous change initiatives.

(5) Recognition that universities were environments where a diversity of views was welcome: in that context, mutual understanding and recognition of areas where alignment was required and other areas where there was room for difference was essential to the success of the strategy.

(6) In a sector environment where there was potential structural change and market failure, the strategy provided a sound basis for the university to maintain control over its

own destiny. It was important to ensure that the strategy was both future proofed and provided sufficient differentiation from the university's peers.

(7) The planned investment in data and student analytics was a potential game changer for the university.

(8) The emphases on employability and encouraging student resilience were welcomed.

(9) The importance of explicit agreement on what the strategy would not include (ie what we choose not to do).

(10) Delivering foundational improvements was an essential pre-requisite to successful delivery of the strategy: this would provide tangible evidence of change and galvanise support for the leaps which are an integral part of the strategy.

(11) The challenge of delivering the strategy whilst maintaining business as usual activity.

(12) Confirmation of the importance of curriculum reform and ensuring that it meets the needs of future students.

(13) The importance of effective communication about the strategy (reiterating the process of engagement), including clarity of language to support collective understanding of key messages. The strategy should encapsulate the university's value proposition, enabling prospective students and colleagues to understand why they should choose the university.

(14) Successful implementation of the strategy required the Board to reflect on its own processes, skills and experience: for example, in navigating potential need to change course because of changing circumstances.

(15) Development of the digital campus should be seen as complementary to the on-campus experience, and part of a holistic learning environment.

(16) The importance of understanding both the university's competitive landscape and the significance of brand, both of which could form the basis for future Board briefings.

Action: Deputy Secretary

2. Declarations of Interest

Noted: Tony Raven had recently been appointed to the Council of Research England and, as a non-executive member of the Henry Royce Institute, also declared an interest in the report from Audit and Risk Committee (item 9 i) below).

3. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2025.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

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

Noted: the potential for the proposed levy on international student fee income to impact on any decision by the Office for National Statistics on the reclassification of universities. This matter would be kept under review.

5. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

Received: a report from the President and Vice-Chancellor. The report covered the following:

- Confirmation of completion of Phase 2 of the Manchester 2035 development
- Strategic risks
- Laying the financial groundwork for Manchester 2035
- Updates to University Executive and Governance committees

Reported:

(1) The Immigration White Paper proposed a potential levy on international student fee income (to be reinvested in the sector and 'skills'), and reducing post study work rights (for undergraduates and postgraduate taught students) from 24 months to 18 months.

(2) Both of the above would have potentially negative effects on the desirability of the UK as a place to study among key international student markets.

(3) There was already evidence of a negative media reaction to the announcement in some countries (for example, India).

(4) Ongoing work to reset the University's approach to government relations, included bringing [Policy@Manchester](#) into closer engagement with the President and Vice-Chancellor's Office and setting up a government relations contact group to help coordinate activity.

(5) The above included the recent recruitment of a new Executive Director for Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment to oversee this work, and actively map and engage with stakeholders in local and national government. This work would develop capacity to achieve the ambition of becoming a thought leader in national debates around higher education policy.

(6) Continued concerns about the conflict in Gaza and the impact on the campus and University community. There was active engagement with the Students' Union and student societies, and local community leaders in an effort to combat any antisemitic or Islamophobic behaviour.

Noted:

(1) The intention of the international levy appeared to be suppression of overall international student numbers (as part of downward pressure on immigration) and raising money for the broader skills agenda (although it was unclear how and when funds would be reinvested). There was also a view in government that, compared to the financial position in other parts of the education and wider public sector, higher education had fared relatively well over the past 10-15 years, hence the scope for the proposed levy. If implemented, there was a likely disproportionate negative impact on universities (like Manchester) which were successful international recruiters.

(2) The University would actively engage in the consultation process about the proposed international fee levy, using local networks to help shape the debate and draw attention to the potential detrimental impact. Members were encouraged to use relevant networks to draw attention to the issue.

(3) In response to questions about the Indian market, current focus was on establishing 2+2 partnerships with prestigious institutions to develop a pipeline of good quality

students. The University was taking a long-term view of the Indian market, with consideration being given to a multifunctional site presence in country.

(4) In response to questions about the UK Supreme Court's recent ruling on the legal definition of biological sex, the University had acted quickly to issue a [statement](#) confirming its commitment to equality and inclusion. There was a commitment to listening to the community and ongoing dialogue, recognising that this was an issue where there was a diversity of opinions.

6. Student context- Key issues for the student experience

Received: the latest student context report from the two student Board members.

Reported: the paper reflected issues raised in student reports to the Board over the past year and how these had progressed.

Noted:

(1) The [EducateMCR](#) undergraduate insight report was a rich source of qualitative and quantitative data.

(2) In response to questions about developing a sense of belonging, both the [PASS](#) (Peer Assisted Study Session) and the [Peer Mentor](#) schemes were valuable initiatives, although experience at local level could vary. There was potential to learn from exemplar schemes nationally and internationally.

(3) The potential for closer liaison with the city-region to enhance relationships between students and the local community.

(4) Ongoing efforts to improve the international student experience and develop a sense of belonging. The Students' Union was working on an Internationalisation Strategy, with the research phase now complete. This work had identified key gaps in service provision and support and work to address this was in train.

(5) In the United States, a significant number of innovation and start-up businesses were founded by recent international graduates, and this was an important message to highlight in the current debate about the impact and benefits from international students.

(5) Cost of living issues were particularly acute for students at induction and in the early stages of University life as financial pressures could inhibit their ability to develop friendship groups and networks. On a related matter, the importance of early guidance on budget management was acknowledged.

(6) As noted at the Strategy Day, service learning was not an obvious fit for all disciplines and in some areas, other authentic, partner based engaged learning opportunities were a better option.

(7) Resource constraints permitting, the potential for further early Students' Union engagement at local level induction events.

(8) Work on collaboration with other students' unions had gathered pace, with shared financial services now in place with Manchester Metropolitan and Salford universities, with the service fully operational from the start of the next financial year.

7. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (30 April 2025)

Received: a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 30 April 2025 meeting.

Reported:

(1) The Committee had recommended approval of the Future Foundations Business Case and related funding and contractual arrangements. The programme would enable the transformation of the University's People and Finance processes, creating improved, efficient and data-driven services through the provision of a single strong foundational Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform. The Committee recognised the importance of clearly demonstrating the lessons learned from both the Finance Transformation Programme and the Student Experience Programme.

(2) The Committee had considered the student financial context, focusing on the widening gap between the maintenance loan and rent prices. Discussion at the committee had focused on the importance of providing a range of accommodation types and rent prices.

Noted:

(1) The Future Foundations programme will directly deliver a range of efficiency benefits because of improving processes, reducing waste, and increasing automation. The scale of those benefits would crystallise as the programme developed but a minimum level of efficiency savings of £3.1m per annum had been identified.

(2) Benefits would also emerge from the wider transformation arising from the emerging Manchester 2035 strategy, driven by the provision of quality data from a single source of truth for better reporting, insights and decision-making and freeing up people to do their best work.

(3) Some key systems would fall out of support within the next two years, so added to the benefits outlined above, doing nothing was not an option.

(4) The programme included the appointment of a Transformation Partner, and it was important that contractual arrangements for such a partner included incentives for successful delivery.

(5) Successful delivery and implementation of such a major programme was challenging, especially in an organisation of the university's scale with distributed leadership, and academic leaders in time-limited roles. Strong programme governance and leadership at all levels would be required to ensure that the programme stayed on course, and avoided unnecessary local customisation and adaptation

(6) Notwithstanding the importance of absorbing lessons learned from other recent major change initiatives, the successful progress of the [Evolve Programme](#) was an exemplar (and should form the basis of a future presentation to the Board).

Action: Deputy Secretary

Agreed:

(1) To approve the first iteration of the Future Foundations business case.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Redacted – restricted information

(5) To confirm approval of the 250-year lease for the Renold Building to the Sister Joint Venture (previously approved via Chair's action because of time sensitivity).

8. Research Presentation

Received: a presentation from Professor Coskun Kocabas, Professor of 2D Materials on graphene based smart materials and applications. The Board noted that the graphene ecosystem was a strategic asset for the university with significant commercial potential for space and defence applications. The Board thanked Prof Kocabas for a stimulating and accessible presentation.

8. Other Board Committee reports

i) Audit and Risk Committee (16 April 2025)

Received: the report from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 16 April 2025.

Reported:

(1) The Committee had received an update in response to the Uniac Procurement Review, following the interim response circulated in March and an update on the Annual Procurement Control and Value for Money report submitted to the Committee in November 2024.

(2) As an appendix to the committee report, the Board also received a report providing further background and lessons learned.

(3) A further deep dive into relevant issues was also planned for the June meeting of the Committee.

Noted:

(1) The importance of ensuring that the Committee received sufficient assurance that there would be no repeat of the circumstances which had resulted in the findings of the audit. This included ensuring adequate coverage in the internal audit plan.

(2) There had been open and frank discussion about the report at University Executive, including the need for the Executive and wider leadership to drive the necessary culture and behavioural change. The new Chief Property Officer had met with key senior leaders in Estates and Facilities to reinforce the importance of adherence to agreed policy and procedure.

(3) Clearer articulation and precise definition around the limits of delegated authority would be welcome. Work was planned to review and revise the current scheme, and the Committee had asked that it be given the opportunity to review this before submission to the Board for formal approval.

Action: Deputy Secretary

ii) People Committee (30 April 2025)

Received: the report from the People Committee meeting held on 30 April 2025.

Noted: the work of the Task and Finish Group on Casualisation.

Agreed:

[Redacted]
Redacted – restricted information

(2) In relation to fixed term employees and finite funded contracts:

- i) 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 2026 to 30 June 2026.
- ii) that the University continued to take all steps outlined in the report to avoid the need for redundancy wherever this is possible.

iii) Nominations and Governance Committee (8 May 2025)

Received: the report from the Nominations and Governance Committee meeting held on 8 May 2025.

Agreed:

(1) Professor Fiona Smyth be appointed to the Remuneration and People Committee from 1 September 2025.

(2) Naa Acquah be appointed as Chair of the Alumni Association from 1 June 2025 until 31 July 2028.

(3) Amendments to Ordinance IX as set out in the report.

Action: Deputy Secretary

iv) Remuneration Committee (16 April 2025)

Noted: the report from the meeting, which included confirmation of the operation of the merged Remuneration and People Committee from 2025-26, with a workshop to confirm modus operandi in early September 2025. Since the meeting, the Committee had also confirmed salary arrangements for the incoming Vice-President and Dean of Faculty of Science and Engineering, which were within the parameters previously agreed by the Committee.

10. Senate

Received: a report from the meeting of Senate held on 8 April 2025

Agreed: to approve the dissolution of University-Student Unions Relations Committee, which was now duplicative of other effective mechanisms for liaison between the University and the Students' Union, and the consequential amendment of University Ordinance XVII.5.

Action: Deputy Secretary

11. University Executive

Noted: the report from the meetings of University Executive held between 11 March and 6 May 2025.

12. Chair's Report

Received: the Chair's report, including the latest Board forward look.

13. Secretary's report

Received: the latest report from the Secretary which included Exercise of Delegations, covering the use of the Seal and appointment of Emeritus Professors.

Noted: the report also formally advised the Board of submission of a reportable event to the Office for Students (OfS) following concerns raised following an inspection (by the General Dental Council (GDC) Education Quality Assurance team. OfS expectations and GDC requirements were on track for delivery in accordance with agreed timeframes and further follow up meetings with the GDC had taken place.

14. Any other business

Noted: there was discussion about the student protest that had disrupted the Board dinner the previous evening. The University's position in relation to international partnerships had been aired extensively, including at previous Board meetings, at meetings of Senate and at open meetings with students. There was also constructive dialogue between the University Executive and the Students' Union.

15. Dates of meetings in 2024-25

Noted: the remaining meeting in 2024-25 was on Wednesday 23 July.