

APPROVED

The University of Manchester

Senate

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research)

14 May 2025

Present: Professor Melissa Westwood (Chair), Adil Ashraf, Professor Lynne Bianchi, Professor David Matthews, Professor Mahesh Nirmalan, Professor James Pattison, Professor Arpana Verma, Professor Niels Walet, and Dr Andrew Walsh.

In Attendance for item 7: Dr David Barker (Executive Director of Compliance and Risk).

In Attendance for item 11: April Lockyer (Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity).

In Attendance for all items: Patrick Hackett (Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer) (observing), Dr Alex Hinchliffe (Research Degrees and Researcher Development Officer (Policy)), 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 Colette Fagan, Professor Maggie Gale, Professor Nigel Hooper, and Professor Thomas Schmidt.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Agreed: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025.

4 Matters Arising

Noted:

- a) the Matters Arising update;
- b) that arising from minute 4 of the 20 March 2025 meeting, data relating to the final outcomes of PGR students who re-submitted their first year report had been discussed by the Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group (MDCSG). It was concluded that the purpose of the annual review should be made clearer for academic staff, and that there may be benefits in adopting a more nuanced approach to review outcomes. MDCSG would consider progression processes, including guidance, at the next annual monitoring meeting in September 2025;
- c) that arising from minute 11 of the 20 March 2025 meeting, regarding the requirements for progression, it was noted that MDCSG held regular discussions about this topic, which would feed into the annual monitoring process.

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

Noted:

- a) the Senate Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) Forward Agenda;
- b) that the use of social media in relation to research would be added to the Forward Agenda.

Action: Governance Manager

6 Chair's Update

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

- i. Research-related items considered by the University Executive (UE):
 - i. the proposed new UE sub-structure included a number of executive committees. The current, informal advisory group, Research Strategy Group (RSG) would be superseded by a formal Research Committee, and a paper to this effect would be presented to RSG in May 2025. The Research Committee would work closely with other UE committees, including the International Committee and the Innovation Committee;
 - ii. the new Organisational Effectiveness and Culture Team, in the People Directorate, had two main strategic priorities; 1) creating an inspiring leadership culture, and 2) fostering a culture of high performance. The Team would work with the Research Committee to continue the development of academic leadership for research;
 - iii. there had been discussion about consolidating funds for strategic investment funds in preparation for the Manchester 2035 Strategy. Once agreed, detailed implementation and communications plans would follow;
 - iv. the current methodology for the allocation of QR funding would continue. However, this would be visible as a separate entry in School budgets, and School Leadership teams would be expected to account for its allocation, in anticipation of new Research England reporting requirements;
 - v. the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee Quarter 2 report included an update on a student who had been injured while undertaking work at a partner institute in Bangalore. Learnings would be discussed at a future UE;
 - vi. the annual update from Northern Gritstone highlighted that the University had an opportunity to develop relationships and build a pipeline towards the funding stream;
 - vii. UE received a report on Strategic Partnerships to date. A dossier presented by students on the collaboration with Tel Aviv University would be reviewed. The University's strategic partnerships were listed on StaffNet.
- ii. Manchester 2035 Strategy:
 - i. platform directors were preparing a refresh of the description and purpose of a platform as well as formulating research challenges(s) for their respective areas. This would be presented to the Board of Governors, along with a report on Manchester 2035 phase two and the leaps;
 - ii. the Vice-President for Research had held meetings with the directors of research institutes to provide context and an update on the 'accelerating the path from research excellence to impact' proposition. Further discussion of the challenge areas, proposed enablers, gaps, priorities and opportunities for connecting with global strategic partners would take place at a workshop with Platform and Research Institute Directors and Vice Deans for Research and Innovation (VDRIs) in June 2025. The Strategic Plan was scheduled for publication in Autumn 2025.
- iii. US Federal Funding:
 - i. direct communication was awaited from the US in relation to the stop notices on US Federal Funding;
 - ii. a recent announcement from the National Institute of Health had indicated that the current approach to foreign sub-contractors would be ceased. The new approach would not curtail existing sub-awards, but would pause new awards.
- iv. Updates from AVPs for Research:

- i. the PGR Voice Survey had recently launched. Colleagues were asked to encourage PGRs to contribute to the survey. An analysis would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee;
- ii. the final of the Three Minute Thesis would take place in June 2025. Colleagues were encouraged to support the event;
- iii. the PGR showcase incorporating a celebration of the MDC Excellence Award winners, would take place in June 2025;
- iv. the MDC were working with the Disability Advisory Support Service (DASS) to enhance support for disabled PGRs, and comply with the UK Research Institute (UKRI) terms effective from 2025-26. Reasonable adjustments would be identified at the point of offer, rather than on enrolment, to allow adjustments to be made in a timely manner, and the University's commitment to considering reasonable adjustments would be included in advertisements and offer letters. Work to explore potential reasonable adjustments for the viva examination process was underway.

7 University Risk Register – Research-related items

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

- a) the Strategic Risk Register had been reviewed in December 2024, and the current iteration had been recommended by UE on 8 April 2025 for presentation to Audit and Risk Committee;
- b) there had been no significant changes in the risk scorings since June 2024. The current University Risk Register would move to a Risk Appetite Framework, which would include key areas that would shape the University's approach to risk moving forward;
- c) the Manchester 2035 Strategy would provide opportunities to consider emerging risks before and after implementation of the Strategy. There would be risks associated with failure to deliver the Strategy;
- d) the main research-related risks included international partnerships and geo-political risks. A new risk, 7.1, related to failure to realise the opportunities of artificial intelligence (AI). It was acknowledged that this was a complex and broad area of risk, and further discussion would be held with the Vice-President for Research and the Associate Vice-President (Digital Strategy and Innovation) around the wording of this risk; **Action: Executive Director of Compliance and Risk**
- e) the presentation would be circulated after the meeting. **Action: Governance Manager**

8 Briefing on Research Degrees & Researcher Development (RDRD) Activity

Received: Briefing on RDRD Activity.

Noted: The breadth of RDRD activity was noted and it was confirmed that the Researcher Development Team were considering how to package programmes to enable straightforward navigation on the new site.

9 REF 2029 Update

Noted: An oral update on preparations for the REF 2029.

- a) the policy revisions from Research England had included minimal updates. Guidance regarding the removal of maximum and minimum outputs was expected. Details about the portability of REF 2029 was awaited, and full guidance would be received in 2026;
- b) the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) exercise was underway. Institutions had made submissions in March 2025. The University had members on six of the eight panels. Findings would be shared when available;
- c) applications for recruitment to panels had closed in April 2025. The outcome would be communicated when finalised. The University's Research Culture and Assessment Manager had been appointed to the secretariat;

- d) the Research Review Exercise (RRE) was in progress. The scores would be available in June 2025;
- e) the University was waiting for the final rules for the REF returns to be published.
(Secretary's note: Subsequent to the meeting, the Research Culture and Assessment Manager, confirmed that current indications are that 'Outputs produced by individuals employed on academic contracts with no expectation of research (e.g. those on teaching-only contracts) will not be eligible for submission. This does not apply to those on non-academic contracts where the individual contributes to the unit's research (e.g. technicians). An institution's pool of submissions is therefore likely to predominantly reflect those individuals with significant responsibility for research.')

10 Policy Review

Received: PGR Policy Update Report.

Noted:

- a) that, in line with the policy review schedule and, in response to UKRI updates to terms and conditions, a comprehensive review and streamlining of the Change of Circumstances suite of policies and procedures had been undertaken, including a period of University-wide consultation;
- b) that a streamlined Change of Circumstances Policy now focused solely on changes requiring an Interruption, Change to Mode of Attendance, or an Extension. The policy clarifies roles/responsibilities, emphasises early PGR engagement, and signposts key implications (e.g. visas, funding). Non-relevant areas had moved into standalone or existing policies, including new policies on Submission Pending, Annual Leave, and updated guidance across Examination and Progress & Review procedures. Supporting procedures had been restructured into four UKRI-aligned categories: Family Leave, Medical Leave, Research and Work Away, and Additional Leave.
- c) that religious observance was not currently listed as a mitigating circumstance for a change of circumstance request, in accordance with UKRI guidance. However, it was agreed that this could be reconsidered in future revisions of the documentation;
- d) that following discussion on the proposed updates to the Supervision Policy, further consideration and revisions would be made and presented to MDCSG, including:
 - i. the proposed update to 7.3, relating to members of the supervisory team who were in a personal relationship, and whether appointment of an additional co-supervisor would be practical in these instances;
 - ii. the complaints process at 10.3 would be further reviewed, with a view to identifying an alternative member of staff responsible for confirming the mechanisms in place by which PGRs were able to make complaints;
 - iii. the wording at 15.3 detailing supervisors who were leaving the University to join another institution, and whether it would be practical to obtain a statement from the new institution providing permission for the supervisor to complete their supervisory duties at the University of Manchester;

Action: Associate Vice-President for Research (MDC and Research Staff)

- e) that the additional disability leave allowance outlined in the new Additional Leave Procedure was intended for cases where a PGR's progress has been delayed due to a delay in implementing agreed reasonable adjustments;
- f) that the amendment to the PhD Regulations permitting study at less than 50% intensity as a reasonable adjustment for disabled PGRs could only be applied to programmes that were eligible for part-time study, as specified in the funders' terms and conditions.

Agreed:

- a) to approve, subject to correction of minor typographical and grammatical errors, the following updates to existing policies, procedures and regulation:
 - i. updates to the PGR Change of Circumstance Policy;
 - ii. updates to the PGR Interruption to Programme Procedure;

- iii. updates to the PGR Extension to Programme Procedure;
 - iv. updates to the PGR Submission and Examination Policy;
 - v. updates to the PGR Re-Submission and Examination Policy;
 - vi. updates to the PGR Termination and Self-Withdrawal Procedure;
 - vii. updates to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree Regulation.
- b) to recommend to Senate, subject to correction of minor typographical and grammatical errors, for approval the following new policy and procedures:
- i. the PGR Change in Mode of Attendance Procedure;
 - ii. the PGR Family Leave Procedure;
 - iii. the PGR Medical Leave Procedure;
 - iv. the PGR Research and Work Away from the University Procedure;
 - v. the PGR Additional Leave Procedure;
 - vi. the PGR Submission Pending Policy;
 - vii. the PGR Annual Leave Policy.
- c) that further revisions would be undertaken to the Supervision Policy which would be discussed at MDCSG and re-presented to the Committee at a later date.

11 Publications Policy

Received: Proposed updates to the Publications Policy.

Noted: The Publications Policy had previously focused on open access without reference to other elements of the publication process, including authorship and research integrity. The proposed updates to the Policy had undergone wide consultation.

Agreed: to approve the updates to the Publications Policy.

12 University of Manchester Students' Union Report

Received: University of Manchester Students' Union Report.

Noted:

- a) that a number of items raised in the report were not PGR specific and referred to researchers in general. MDC would inform the appropriate directorates of PGRS' concerns; **Action:** **Associate Vice-President for Research (MDC and Research Staff)** a mechanism for informally reporting supervisor relationships was already established. However, without specific detail, it would be difficult for action to be taken.

13 Thanks to Departing Members

Noted:

- a) The Chair thanked departing members for their contributions to the work of the Committee. Members approaching the end of their term of membership were:
- i. Professor Mahesh Nirmalan (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2025);
 - ii. Professor Niels Walet (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2025);
 - iii. Adil Ashraf (outgoing SU Officer for Postgraduate Research).
- b) A number of members would reach three years' of service on the sub-committee by 31 August 2025 and would be contacted separately to ascertain if they wished to continue, or whether they would prefer to stand down. **Action: Governance Manager**

14 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.

15 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.