The University of Manchester

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Wednesday 23 July 2025

Present: Philippa Hird (Chair), Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), David Buckley (via videoconference), Lexie Baynes, Kerris Bright, Prof Danielle George (via videoconference), Guy Grainger, Dr Reinmar Hager, Nick Hillman, Tom Jirat, Prof Paul Mativenga (via videoconference), Jatin Patel, Robin Phillips, Dr Hema Radhakrishnan, Tony Raven, Prof Soumhya Venkatesan, Emma Wade-Smith and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member, via videoconference, items 1-8 i)). (18 members)

Apologies: Anna Dawe, Deirdre Evans, Katie Jackson, Prof Fiona Smyth and Paul Thwaite,

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Ben Ward, Chief Executive, Students' Union, (items 5-6), Matt Atkin, Executive Director of Planning (item 8), Jules Maclachlan, Communications and Engagement Manager (item 8), Kate Cambden, Executive Director of Development and Alumni Relations (item 17) and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

1. **Thanks to retiring members**

   Noted: sincere thanks to Dan George, Nick Hillman, Katie Jackson and Robin Phillips for their contribution to the work of the Board.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

   Noted: there were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Agreed: the report from the Board Strategy Day held on 21 May 2025 and the Board meeting held on 22 May 2025.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Received: an updated report on ongoing issues that had been raised at previous meetings. The Chair would review and refine this before the next meeting.

Action: Deputy Secretary

5. Student context- Key issues for the student experience

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

Reported:

(1) The paper reflected on the definition of the student experience and its place in the Manchester 2035 strategy.

(2) The report framed the student experience into three categories, curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular and reflected on potential measures to improve the experience across those three perspectives.

(3) The report proposed a joint University-Students' Union Task Force to create an action plan linked to the Manchester 2035 strategy.

Noted:

(1) The report recognised the limitations of current systems, and it was important to optimise the experience for students whilst planned enhancements were in train.

(2) The opportunity to learn from best practice in the sector and develop a more consistent, seamless and integrated experience.

(3) The previous strategy had not delivered improvement in the student experience, and it was important to reflect on the reasons for this and build on that understanding in finalising the new strategic plan.

(4) The Students' Union Educate MCR research provided a helpful supplement to National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes to provide a holistic picture of the student experience (enabling focus, for example, beyond the undergraduate experience). More work was being done effectively to create an integrated approach to the Students' Union research capability and the NSS work.

(5) The potential to develop further the role of student societies in enhancing the student experience.

(6) Whilst recognising that the student experience could not be framed solely as one as consumer, there was potential to learn lessons from the primacy of the customer experience in other sectors.

(7) Excellent student experience was foundational to the success of the Manchester 2035 strategy and effective and insightful measures to track this were essential.

6. Annual Report from the Chief Executive of the Students' Union

Received: the annual report of the University of Manchester Students' Union, provided to the Board to exercise its duties as the responsible body under the Education Act, 1994. The report enabled the Board to fulfil its oversight function (including oversight of the block grant provided by the University), providing assurance of overall effective monitoring and control of the Students' Union as the official representative body of students of the University.

Noted:

(1) Excellent partnership working between the University and the Students' Union, including an integral role for the Union in the development of the Manchester 2035 strategy.

(2) Educational engagement and enhancement work (including insight and research) was at the heart of the Union's activity, and the Union had driven strategies to help understand and amplify the voice of students at all levels of the institution.

(3) The funding agreement with the University provided for a three-year settlement ensuring stability and certainty: the latest agreement (until 2028) was nearing conclusion.

(4) The report outlined comprehensive student course and programme level representation: experience suggested that the model was most effective where there were effective and thriving complementary academic societies.

(5) Between the University and the Union there was now a well-developed understanding of areas impacting negatively on the student experience and as noted in item 5 above, systemic, technological improvements were needed to drive improvement.

(6) Student Welcome, Induction and Transition was a comprehensive, staged 100-day programme which avoided over-concentration of resource and activity in the first week of arrival.

(7) The annual student-led teaching awards, recognising excellent teaching and support practice across the University (recognition via the awards was increasingly used as a factor in assessing promotion for academic staff).

(8) The effectiveness of student community work as outlined in the report, and the importance of robust data and metrics to help differentiate the University from its peers.

(9) In relation to individual casework, the potential for early intervention to resolve issues which develop into complex, multi-faceted concerns.

(10) Current geopolitical issues and increasing polarisation meant that encouraging dialogue across difference and open debate continued to be challenging and the Students' Union had ambitions to continue to develop the impact of this work.

(11) Future ambitions included fully personalising the student experience, including personal development plans for all students.

(12) The importance of developing a clear evidence base and transparent process to ensure optimal investment in the student experience.

Agreed: to approve the Annual Report.

7. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

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

- Performance (including NSS results and an update on accountability processes and metrics)
- Philanthropy and Campaign Progress
- Colleague Engagement Survey and Staff Sentiment
- Higher Education Policy and Government Relations
- Update on Manchester 2035 Strategy Development (see also item 8 below)

. **Noted:**

(1) The University has not received any support from the government's Global Talent Fund to attract world leading researchers: other potential sources of funding remained available, including from the Royal Society and the University continued to be actively engaged in the market for global research talent, including from the USA.

(2) Improved and encouraging outcomes from both the NSS and the Colleague Engagement Survey, noting remaining challenges and areas to address in both metrics.

(3) The slight and gradual decline in global rankings (e.g. QS World University Rankings and Academic Ranking of World Universities) represented a reputational risk and (notwithstanding the idiosyncrasies of individual metric rankings) required a more

strategic approach to optimise performance in both the short and longer term (for example, reflecting on current citations performance and how this could be improved).

(4) A Rankings Task Force had been established to ensure that the University was more purposeful in its future approach to rankings: discussion continued about the desirability of either a specific numerical target or a more general trend of improvement (in the context of the evolving strategy and the University's current position in the top ten of global institutions for impact and the top fifty for research quality and reputation across a basket of global rankings).

(5) The University continued to draw attention to the potential negative consequences of the proposed international levy, noting other positive elements of government higher education policy.

8. Manchester 2035: University Strategy

i) Current version of the Strategy

Received: the latest version of the draft Manchester 2035 Strategy.

Reported:

(1) The version presented to the Board was for content review only: the final version of the document would be modular, accessible and interactive, designed for exploration and following best practice design and accessibility principles.

(2) An innovative microsite would be developed to bring the strategy to life.

Noted:

(1) Several specific, detailed comments on the text, including the "North Star", which would be reviewed and considered for inclusion in the next iteration. Feedback from University Executive review had been incorporated in the version before the Board.

(2) The "North Star" will inform priorities and choices and would act as an anchor point in navigating the challenges that would inevitably occur in implementation.

(3) Whilst an early decision had been taken in the strategy development process not to amend existing University Values, it was important that the Values followed the Strategy and there was merit in exploring whether some adjustment was necessary to ensure optimal fit. **Action: Executive Director of Planning**

(4) Comments about delivery (noting the 10-year timeframe) and the importance of clear accountability (see also 8 ii) and 8 iii) below).

(5) The importance of an effective communications approach to ensure that the strategy lands well and is readily understood across the institution.

(6) There would be further review and reflection on a post-Board iteration of the strategy, incorporating comments and suggestions. **Action: Executive Director of Planning**

ii) High level implementation considerations for the draft strategy

Received: a report summarising the Executive's high-level thinking about strategy implementation, noting that granular consideration had not yet commenced. The report covered:

- Progression of the strategy from a persona perspective over the ten-year life span
- Illustrative ten-year sequencing and phasing

- The five-year financial envelope for the strategy
- The emerging delivery work package for the first three years
- Relative cost, difficulty and revenue potential within the first three-year delivery package
- Strategy engagement opportunities between the Board and the Executive
- Emerging measures of success and potential derailers

Noted:

(1) Some detailed, specific comments on language, particularly in relation to the personas, ensuring that these were as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.

(2) The need to ensure broad buy-in to, and accountability for, the strategy (for example by inclusion in performance objectives). Clear milestones to gauge effectiveness of delivery was essential,

(3) The importance of agility in delivery noting that it was not possible to anticipate all potential blockers or derailers. This included the potential to adjust metrics if subsequent developments meant that these were no longer useful or meaningful

(4) The integrated, “One Manchester” approach was embedded throughout, for example in the Future Foundations work, enhancement of the Professional Services Operating Model and plans for colleague development.

(5) Noting the likely pace of change to job roles over the life of the strategy, colleague development, and in particular leadership development, was a critical and foundational element (in the same way as enhancements to digital infrastructure).

(6) it was essential that institutional structure followed the strategy rather than vice-versa.

(7) Plans for enhancement to the Animal Facility would be brought to a future Board.

iii) Manchester 2035 Measures

Received: a report summarising some initial ideas for Manchester 2035 measures of success and their presentation, following review of 40 international and UK strategies available online, and initial discussion at University Executive.

Reported: The setting of final ambitions was complex and potentially challenging where factors outside of the University’s control impacted on competitive positioning. A key choice to be made was whether to describe ambitions in words or define numerical targets for the end point.

Noted:

(1) The measures, once agreed, should be a tool for the Executive and subsequent review and scrutiny by the Board (with an agreed subset reportable externally, e.g. via the narrative element of the annual Financial Statements). Agreed measures should also be available at more local, granular level to maximise colleague engagement. As noted above, measures should be capable of adjustment, to ensure agility, and it was important to avoid a plethora of metrics.

(2) There were differing views on the respective merits of specific numerical targets as opposed to narrative describing trends. Most members who spoke expressed a preference for a numerical target as the default option, subject to further discussion on feasibility and utility of this approach in relation to specific topics.

(3) On specific measures, discussion about the efficacy of the engagement measure.

(4) Discussion about the optimal approach to measurement of success in relation to digital: feedback from members engaged in other sectors suggested that this should be an experiential measure, related to use of digital solutions and impact on stakeholder experience.

(5) Comments on other measures included ensuring that the student experience measure captured the full range of students, that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion measure provided sufficient coverage of inclusion and that the Innovation metric highlighted impact.

(6) The potential for scale and pace of change to have a negative impact on soft metrics, noting that effective and skilful leadership could mitigate risk and make management of change a positive experience.

(7) The potential to consider application of external frameworks (e.g. EFQM)

9. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (2 July 2025)

Received: a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 2 July 2025 meeting.

Reported:

(1) The report provided an update on the residences redevelopment programme.

[redacted]

[redacted] ***Redacted – restricted information***

(4) Finance Committee had requested a deeper look at scenario planning and risk mitigation to ensure that the Committee and the Board was fully apprised of potential implications of the range of options and risk mitigation (including impact of any further adverse market conditions).

(5) Holding an equity stake in the Residences Special Purpose Vehicle as proposed in the report was strategically important, to ensure an active voice for the University, with the investment also expected to generate a financial return for the University.

(6) Finance Committee had also considered an update on the Sister Joint Venture. The Committee had requested scenario planning to assess financial and reputational issues and potential risk. The Board agreed that it was important to assess and understand the full range of potential positive and negative scenarios.

(7) The report recommended continuation of the current position that the University remains categorised as outside the scope of the public sector procurement regime.

Noted:

(1) In response to a question regarding the residences programme, the University had step-in rights in the event of failure of a contracting party, but inevitably there would be risks associated with such an eventuality. Financial due diligence on the contractor had been completed and remained under regular review.

(2) A briefing session on the residences programme had been scheduled for the Chair of the Board and the Chair of Finance Committee on 8 September and it was suggested that an invitation to attend the session be extended to other members of the Board.

Action: Deputy Secretary

Agreed:

[redacted] ***Redacted – restricted information***

(2) That the University remains categorised as outside the scope of the public sector procurement regime.

Action (for both): Chief Financial Officer

10. Approval of Budget and Plan

Received: a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 2 July 2025 meeting.

Received:

(1) A report proposing the budget for 2025-26 and five-year plan to 2029-30.

(2) A separate, complementary report setting out the context, risks and opportunities for the budget and five-year plan.

Reported:

(1) The budget and plan had been prepared in recognition of the high level of sector risk and evidence of significant financial sustainability challenges for many institutions.

(2) The University started the plan in a relatively strong position, given reported historical surpluses and strong cash balances, and its global reputation and scale.

(3) Student demand remained relatively strong but there was no room for complacency. The plan relied on continued investment to provide the support necessary to retain the University's strong academic reputation, to prepare for and realise future opportunities, and to ensure financial prudence.

(4) The complementary paper set out financial modelling of both risk and opportunity scenarios to understand the impact that these would have on the University's financial position. This included potential tactical mitigations that could be deployed to limit the impact should adverse scenarios be realised. Key risks considered included geopolitical context, UK Government policy, sector financial sustainability, capacity and capability to deliver, and reputation.

[redacted] ***Redacted – restricted information***

(6) The plan had been developed alongside the Manchester 2035 Strategy and had targeted additional funds for development: a key constraint was lack of current full awareness of investment requirements for the Strategy and supporting infrastructure plan.

Noted:

[redacted]

[redacted] The proposed levy on international fees represented a risk to the plan which would need to be kept under review.

(3) Given the above, it was essential to ensure continued investment to enhance the student experience.

(4) [redacted] ***edacted – restricted information***

(5) The planned growth in research income was supplemented by steadily improving contribution rates across the plan. Whilst there was risk associated (particularly in the first years of the Plan) there were tangible actions and plans in place within faculties to support this.

(6) New revenue streams (for example in relation to innovation, commercialisation, philanthropy) were not yet scaled up in the revenue projections within the plan, although the enabling activities (e.g. Unit M, Campaign) were funded and recognised within the plan.

(7) The complementary paper included scenario modelling and stress testing.

(8) The plan will form the basis of the OfS financial return in December, updated for the changes in opening balances from the 2024/25 financial statements.

Agreed: to approve the budget for 2025-26 and five-year plan to 2029-30.

Action: Chief Financial Officer

11. Research Presentation

Noted: materials prepared by Professor Tracy Hussell, Director of the Lydia Becker Institute (Prof Hussell was unable to make a presentation to the Board as she was unwell).

12. Other Board Committee reports

i) Audit and Risk Committee (11 June 2025)

Received: the report from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 11 June 2025 (which referenced scrutiny of the Research Compliance Committee report and the Research Integrity Statement).

ii) People Committee (25 June 2025)

Received: the report from the People Committee meeting held on 25 June 2025.

Noted: in relation to the potential use of the redundancy process for the role in the Association of Higher Education Professionals (AHEP) this was no longer required as agreement had been reached on Voluntary Severance.

Agreed: to move to the next phase of the People Directorate Operating model, including the initiation of a formal redundancy process to manage the change required and movement to a period of formal consultation.

iii) Nominations and Governance Committee (27 June 2025)

Received: the report from the Nominations and Governance Committee meeting held on 27 June 2025.

Noted: the appointment of Sarah Munby and Matthew Scullion as lay members of the Board for an initial term of three years from 2025-26, as previously approved by circulation to the Board.

13. Chair's Report

Received: the Chair's report.

Noted: the Chair's objectives for 2025-26 and the summary of lay Board member engagement with School Boards (it was agreed to return to consideration of the latter at the next meeting). **Action: Deputy Secretary**

14. Senate

Received: a report from the meeting of Senate held on 4 June 2025 which included as an appendix, a briefing note on the General Dental Council's inspection of dental programmes at the University

Agreed: to approve the Awards and Honours Group's recommendations for the award of honorary doctorates and Medals of Honour. (NB the Chair declared an interest in one recommendation and played no part in discussion or approval of that matter.

Action: Deputy Secretary

15. **Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice**

Received: proposed revisions to the Policy on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom and the accompanying Code of Practice, previously approved by the Board in July 2024. Implementation of the previously approved Policy and Code had been put on hold, given the pause in legislation that had arisen following the election of the new government in July 2024.

Reported: the documents had been revised following changes to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and publication by the Office for Students of its related regulatory advice.

Noted: the OfS guidance had been published on 19 June 2025 and consequently, there had been limited time for consultation on the revised Policy and Code (noting previous extensive consultation on the earlier versions).

Agreed: to approve the Policy and Code, subject to consultation with Senate and the campus trade unions in the autumn, with any proposed revisions presented back to the Board at its meeting in November 2025. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

16. **University Executive**

Noted: the report from the meetings of University Executive held between 13 May and 8 July 2025.

17. **Lead Gift-approval in principle**

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Redacted – restricted information

18. **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.

19. Dates of meetings in 2025-26

Noted: the schedule of meetings for 2025-26 as below, noting that the July Board dates were under review.

(Unless stated meetings 12-6pm, selected meetings followed by a dinner 6-8pm)

Wednesday 8 October 2025
Wednesday 19 November 2025
Wednesday 25 February 2026
Wednesday 25 March 2026
Wednesday 20 May 2026
Wednesday 22 July 2026 (all day)
Thursday 23 July 2026 (9am-12pm)

(The Board's annual joint meeting with Senate is on Wednesday 10 December 2025 (4-5pm, followed by social event 5-6.30pm).)