

The University of Manchester

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday, 15 January 2025

Present: Nazir Afzal (Chancellor, in the chair), Jim Hancock (Pro-Chancellor), Professor Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), Cesare Ardito, William Aughton, Carl Austin-Behan, JS Bamrah, Ann Barnes (remotely), Elliot Briffa, Gary Buxton, Fiona Campbell (remotely), Karina Carter (remotely), Amanda Corcoran, Ed Cremin, Lucy Danger, Will Day-English, Fatema El-Wakeel (remotely), Zeb Farooq, Nahid Farzalizadeh, Laura Flynn (remotely), Simeon Gill, Russell Gill, Kim Graakjaer, Helen Gunter, Matt Haworth, Susan Hilton, Venice Irving (remotely), Tom Jirat, Sam Kalubowila, Jamilla Kossar, Martin Lax, Josie Lyon, Louise Marix-Evans, Calum McGowan, Isabel Monteiro dos Santos Pires, Furqan Naeem, George Obolo, Rodger Pannone (Founder), Zoe Papageorgiou, Sameed Rezayan, Vicky Rosin, Ian Rutherford, Mark Scoular, Abigail Shapiro, Vicky Sharples, Deborah Streatfield, Niels Walet, Rhys Whalley, Mike Wilton, Helen Woodcock, Jonathan Yates, Jiawei Yu (remotely), Ishaka Yukubu (remotely), Jiani Zhou (remotely). (54 members)

In attendance: Vice-President for Research, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, Chief Finance Officer, Director of Social Responsibility, Head of Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement, Project Management Officer (Strategic Change Office), Future Leader (Eleanor Seed) Deputy Secretary and Governance Projects and Protocols Officer (minutes). (9 in attendance)

### **1. Introductory Remarks**

**Reported:** The Chancellor welcomed attendees, including the President and Vice-Chancellor whose first meeting it was, and a number of new members (as listed at item 5). The new members were invited to introduce themselves.

All were invited to stay after the meeting for the networking event which would provide an opportunity to further discuss Manchester 2035, the University's next strategic plan (item 7), and ask any questions about the review of Bicentenary Events (item 8) with the Head of Bicentenary Events and General Assembly member, Kim Graakjaer.

A member of University staff had been recognised in the King's New Year's Honours List, Professor Yaojun Li, Professor of Sociology who has been awarded an OBE for his exceptional services to the Advancement of Knowledge in Social Mobility and to Ethnic Integration. The Chancellor offered congratulations to him and to University alumni and supporters who had also been recognised in the Honours List.

A small number of written questions have been received from members and responses to these had been sent directly to them.

### **2. Minutes**

**Resolved:** The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2024 were approved.

### 3. Matters arising

**Resolved:** there were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

### 4. \*Membership of the General Assembly

**Noted:** [The current membership of the Assembly.](#)

### 5. Report from Nominations and Governance Committee

**Received:** an update from Nominations and Governance Committee which included confirmation of new members appointed to the Assembly, an update on the survey of the effectiveness of it completed by some members, and a recommendation to re-appoint Jim Hancock for a second and final term as Pro-Chancellor from 1 March 2025. In addition, as referred to at the last meeting, it was reported that this committee has a vacancy for a lay member of General Assembly and, now that the new round of members had been recruited, expressions of interest to join would be sought.

**Resolved:**

1. In order to explore the themes emerging from the survey referred to above, a session would be proposed for interested members, including new members who had not had the opportunity to respond, to discuss how we can further enhance the effectiveness of the Assembly. Members would be asked to express their interest and thereafter a date for the session would be identified. **Action: Deputy Secretary.**
2. Jim Hancock's reappointment as Pro-Chancellor from 1 March 2025.
3. More information about the work of the Nominations and Governance Committee, including its terms of reference and the skill set required of its members, would be circulated in order that lay members could determine whether they wished to express an interest to join. **Action: Deputy Secretary.**

### 6. Annual Financial Statements and Report 2023-24

**Received:**

1. The [Annual Financial Statements and Report for 2023-24](#) and summary infographic.
2. For information: the [2024 Review of the Year](#).

**Reported:** The Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Carol Prokopyszyn, drew attention to the following:

1. Amid the ongoing challenges facing the UK Higher Education sector, financial stability has never been more important. It serves as the foundation for the University's long-term success, enabling us to invest in our students, staff, and wider strategic priorities, and position ourselves to address future challenges more effectively. We recognise

there is significant turmoil across all areas of UK Higher Education as institutions grapple with their financial sustainability, with some in real distress.

2. Against this backdrop, the University achieved a good financial performance in the 12 months to 31 July 2024, with £1.4 billion income, and an adjusted operating surplus of £42 million. The 23/24 surplus was down £65 million from the previous year and, at 3% of income, is relatively small in the context of our overall operational scale. As an example of how small this is, losing 10% of our international student income would lead us close to deficit.
3. Expenditure was up by 7% (primarily due to increased staff numbers and higher inflation) but our income only rose by 1.5% and, in relative terms, our surplus is small. If we were to allow the same equation of costs growing faster than income in the current year we would report a deficit of £29m in 24/25. Clearly, to avoid this, we need to improve our ability to diversify and increase our income sources while holding down our cost base.
4. As an exempt charity, the University operates on a not-for-profit basis and reinvests all surpluses into activities that align with our values and core goals. Over the next 10 years, we need to spend at least £2.3bn on long term assets (or capital) such as residences and building maintenance, IT infrastructure and on our mission to attain zero carbon. We only have funds for about a third of this in our current plans. The fact that we cannot currently identify funding for the remainder is therefore a huge challenge for the University which must be addressed. In a difficult funding and geo-political environment it is obviously harder to do this but we must deliver a healthy cash surplus each year so we can use this for our investment ambitions and continue to build our university into its third century.

The following issues arising from questions and comments from members were **noted**:

- i. The ambition to have an increased margin of operating cash over the next 5 years is viewed as critical to our ability to invest in improvements across all areas. This increase needs to be attained by income diversification and being more effective in how we use our financial resources.
- ii. In order to not further erode the attractiveness of the UK to international students, concerted lobbying efforts to change the negative narrative around the granting of visas to international students would continue, as would our efforts to recruit suitably qualified international students and ensure they have a good student experience, drawing on University and Students' Union resources. The role of our international alumni, via their Alumni Associations and working directly with the Division of Development and Alumni Relations, especially related to the campaign, would continue to be highly beneficial and greatly welcomed as the wealth of benefits brought by having an international student body were highly valued.
- iii. The rise in employers' National Insurance contributions would result in an extra, unexpected cost of £11m. This money would not be found at the expense of any student-related activities or forms of support.
- iv. We will continue to work in civic and other partnerships for the benefit of the city and region, as well as the institution. These partnerships include working with

many organisations represented on the General Assembly and we would welcome more of these where they could be mutually beneficial.

- v. It would be helpful if members of the Assembly could raise the issue of there needing to be a sustainable funding model for Higher Education within their networks, wherever the opportunity arises.
- vi. Although still early in the cycle for the 2025/26 intake, undergraduate applications are looking strong. Postgraduate numbers are down on this time last year but it is very early for postgraduate applications. However, looking at the global picture, we are likely to be operating in a challenging market. Diversifying what we offer and how it is delivered to ensure we retain our attractiveness would be key in the near term and beyond.
- vii. The CFO would address the question about what will happen to the now no longer needed USS pension provision in the budget directly with the questioner outside of the meeting.
- viii. Any further questions relating to the University's finances should be sent to [deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk)

## 7. University Strategy: Manchester 2035

**Received:** a [presentation](#) from the President and Vice-Chancellor on the development of the University's Strategy for the next ten years, [Manchester 2035](#).

To get conversations started during this 'ideation' phase, the President and Vice-Chancellor, while recognising the extraordinary challenges ahead, posed the following questions, with some suggested responses, with the aim of trying to steer us to where we would like and need to be by 2035:

- What do we want to be by 2035?
- What do we need to be by 2035?
  - More impactful, engaged and innovative
  - How do we sustain ourselves over the next 10 year?
- What will our contribution be to change the UK, taking into account the fluctuations in student demand and the requirements of our workforce?
  - How do we lift people's educational aspirations and produce more medical professionals and teachers?
  - Meet the need to reach into new communities and equip graduates to take on essential roles?
  - Help workforce to adapt to new skills?
- Case for change in Manchester
  - Build on connectivity between institutions which already exists (e.g.GMCA)
  - Improve social mobility
  - Invest in innovation and growth
- What we shouldn't change
  - Truth seeking

- Academic freedom and inclusion
- Teaching and research excellence
- What is HE becoming and how do we position ourselves?
  - More unbundled (digital, stackable, in person and online)
  - More distributed (more partners – local, regional ,global). We have to partner to tackle big challenges
  - More focused on durable skills (critical thinking, communication, qualitative and quantitative, cultural competence)
  - More experiential – where learning is enhanced by doing – every student to be given this opportunity as part of their studies (internships/ volunteering/ exchanges)
  - More flexible (more personalised, portable, extended)
- What will a great University look like in 21<sup>st</sup> century?
  - There will be no trade off between teaching and research
  - Engines for inclusive growth and innovation
  - Place based but with global aspiration
  - The gap between discovery and impact will be smaller
  - Multidisciplinary in all we do
  - Deep and diverse long-term partnerships
  - Technologically adept
  - Socially responsible
  - Philanthropically ambitious
  - Manchesterness – will be synonymous with collaboration, connectivity, creativity
- Manchester 2035 – should we have the following five main themes:
  - Advancing social responsibility
  - Accelerating research impact
  - Reimagining the student experience
  - Funding a world class university of the future
  - Becoming one University – cross cutting and more efficient.

The floor was then opened up to members for feedback and discussion from which the following was **noted**:

1. While implicit given some of the emerging themes and ambitions, it should be made clear that affordability/financial support and welfare provision would be key factors in ensuring we recruit and retain students from not only our existing pools but also to expand access and reach new cohorts of students not currently represented. To help us to achieve this, we will need to engage with those 16–24-year-olds who don't currently choose to go onto further or higher education. Both sectors will need to work together more closely and make it easier for students to move between the two. Technology should help enable this, as would the potential use of models deployed by institutions such as the University of California (higher education for all).
2. Consideration should be given to providing all students with business skills no matter what they study. This would not only empower graduates but could also benefit their communities, wherever they are in the world, as alumni could not only use the skills themselves but also share them.
3. The rationale for creating One University is not driven by a desire to dispense with specialisms, rather it is to make it as easy as possible for specialisms to come

together to solve problems and for potential partners to identify them. That said, it is neither cost nor time effective to have multiple different processes to get to the same end point so some simplification will be needed.

4. The aspiration for all students to have access to experiential learning which is credit bearing and embedded in the curriculum would be challenging to achieve but hugely beneficial if it proves possible.
5. The University will continue to invest in mental health services for students (and staff) but it also needs to ensure that we have other vitally important resources like good accommodation at a range of prices and bursaries available for those who need them. The ultimate goal is to achieve a position where the student experience has a positive impact on mental health.
6. There is no intention to commit to significant growth on campus, rather we need to focus on creating more resilience in the way that we are organised and funded and teach and conduct research. How we build in this resilience will be developed further and made explicit in the strategy.

**Resolved:** i. Any further feedback should be sent to: [deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk).

ii. Details of a follow-up session in the autumn would be circulated in due course. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

iii. [The President and Vice-Chancellor's inaugural address](#) at the 2024 Foundation Day should be circulated for information. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

## 8. \*Bicentenary Review of the Year

**Received:** For information, a review of Bicentenary events

## 9. \*Date of next meeting of the General Assembly

Wednesday 25 June 3-5pm, followed by a reception.

## General Assembly Actions from 15 January 2025

Minute	Action	Update
5.1	<b>Deputy Secretary</b> To invite expressions of interest from all members to participate in a session to explore the themes emerging from the General Assembly effectiveness survey. Members would be asked to express their interest by Monday 3 February and thereafter a date for the session would be identified.	Invitation sent on 17 January.

<b>5.4</b>	<b>Deputy Secretary</b> To send information about the work of the Nominations and Governance Committee, in order that lay members could determine whether they wished to express an interest to join by 17 February.	Invitation sent on 17 January
<b>6. viii</b>	<b>All members</b> Any further questions relating to the University's finances should be sent to <a href="mailto:deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk">deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk</a>	On-going
<b>7. i.</b>	<b>All members</b> Any further feedback on Manchester 2035 should be sent to: <a href="mailto:deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk">deputysecretary@manchester.ac.uk</a> .	On-going
<b>7. ii</b>	<b>Deputy Secretary</b> Details of a follow-up session in the autumn would be circulated in due course.	Exact date of circulation to be determined in due course.
<b>7. iii</b>	<b>Deputy Secretary</b> <a href="#">The President and Vice-Chancellor's inaugural address</a> at the 2024 Foundation Day should be circulated for information.	The link was circulated on 17 January