

APPROVED

The University of Manchester

Senate

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research)

1 October 2025

Present: Professor Colette Fagan (Chair), Professor Lynne Bianchi, Professor Richard Curry, Professor Kieran Flanagan, Professor David Matthews, Rachel Miller, Professor James Pattison, Professor Tim Stallard, Professor Andy Trafford, Professor Arpana Verma, Dr Andrew Walsh, Professor Melissa Westwood, and Professor Anne White.

In Attendance for minute 11: Dr Alison Fairclough (Head of Business Intelligence) and Scott Taylor (Open Research Programme Lead).

In Attendance for minute 12: Professor Aline Miller (Professor in Biomolecular Engineering).

In Attendance for minute 15: April Lockyer (Head of Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity).

In Attendance for minute 17: Professor Caroline Bowsher (Academic Theme Lead, Flexible Learning Programme - Digital Learning Environment).

In Attendance for all items: Jane Holland (Governance Manager) (minutes).

Apologies: Professor Stephen Flint, Professor Maggie Gale, Professor Thomas Schmidt, and Professor Chris Taylor.

1 Welcome

Noted:

- a) the Chair welcomed members to the first Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) meeting of the academic year 2025-26;
- b) introductions were provided. The following new members were welcomed to their first meeting:
 - i. Professor Kieran Flanagan (Interim Faculty Vice-Dean for Research (FSE));
 - ii. Rachel Miller (University of Manchester Students' Union PGR Officer);
 - iii. Professor Tim Stallard (Elected member of Senate for the Faculty of Science and Engineering);
 - iv. Professor Anne White (Elected member of Senate for the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health).

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 14 May 2025.

4 Matters Arising

Noted: The Matters Arising update.

5 Forward Agenda: Schedule of Committee Business for 2025-26

Noted:

- a) the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) Forward Agenda;
- b) that policy-specific items would be allocated to individual meetings in academic year 2025-26. This would be coordinated with the Research Degrees and Researcher Development Office.

Action: Governance Manager

6 Governance-related matters: review of the Committee's ToRs and Membership

Noted: The terms of reference and membership of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) were reviewed. A number of job titles would require minor updates. **Action:**

Governance Manager

7 Chair's Update

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

- a) a delivery plan was being developed to support the contribution of research to the Manchester 2035 Strategy, which was scheduled for launch on 15 October. The delivery plan captured themes from the academic assurance review, and focused on a number of key areas of development including the platforms (Creative, Digital, Health, Sustainability);
- b) the UMRI pump priming would be refreshed for the new Strategy, and would be released early in 2026 subject to the development of a proposal which would be presented to the University Executive for approval;
- c) a member asked whether there would be interim funding for the pump-priming activity. Projects had been awarded for 2025-26, and the new call for 2026-27 was in development, subject to budget approval;
- d) the third element of the Strategy to support research included the University-wide enabling foundation work to improve internal systems which would help to improve the research environment. Other work to improve the research environment was planned through the Research, Culture and Environment Framework and for IT and infrastructure including the investment in the AI Strategy and the Research Lifecycle Project.

8 Update from the AVPs for Research and Innovation

Noted:

- a) the PGR Voice results had highlighted positive increases in all key question areas, including a 6.5% increase in overall experience. The results had been considered in relation to protected characteristics and had been shared with relevant colleagues. Such detail could be accessed via PowerBi. Areas to address included raising awareness of support services, and providing sufficient career discussions. University- and Faculty-level action plans were being developed to address these and other areas requiring improvement;
- b) the Research Staff Excellence Awards had been presented during Post-Doc Appreciation Week;
- c) seven of the 50+ projects submitted to the Enhancing Research Culture call had been funded and details had been published on StaffNet. From a diversity perspective, the results could be split by ethnicity and gender. Further discussion would be held around the diversity outcomes. **Action: AVP Research and Innovation & Vice-Dean for Social Responsibility & EDI (FSE).**

9 University of Manchester Students' Union Research Report

Note: There had been no UMSU Research Report during this period.

10 Annual Academic Assurance Review Research Report

Received: the Annual Academic Assurance Review Research report and supporting data. The report had changed in format to previous years' submissions, and included information about the enhanced focus on global rankings and a summary of the Manchester 2035 Strategy Leap.

Noted:

- a) there would be a transition between the previous Strategy and the new Strategy, which would include updated reporting and accountability. Work was being undertaken to identify activity to carry forward which would be included in a delivery plan for 2025-26 onwards;
- b) a member raised concern about future changes to the assurance reporting process and the continued provision of assurance. It was confirmed that the annual performance review was changing, and quarterly reports would be presented to the University Executive on one aspect of the portfolio, including a deep dive on postgraduate research. The annual academic assurance report to Senate would continue; **Action: Vice-President for Research**
- c) the reference to previous years in the report could be misleading and should refer to last year, i.e. the 2024-25 report;
- d) priorities to be taken forward had already been identified, and these would be included in the Manchester 2035 launch;
- e) there was discussion about the high increase in funding at another institution, due to their investment in infrastructure and around defence and security partnerships over the last five years, and whether the University had an opportunity to increase its funding streams in a similar way;
- f) actions are underway to improve research income against the growth target.

Agreed: to recommend the Annual Academic Assurance Review Research report to Senate.

11 Global Rankings and Citations: progress report from the Global Rankings Taskforce

Received: A report on the ongoing work of the Global Rankings Taskforce institutional approach, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation.

Noted:

- a) the taskforce had identified a set of actions where we can act to improve our rankings: cleaning and checking of records and our data submission, raising awareness and understanding of the rankings, supporting researchers to raise the profile and citation of their research (including a new 'researcher visibility checklist' developed by the Communications Team) and nominating academics and employers to participate in the QS reputation survey;
- b) the global rankings were very competitive, with small margins between the top ranked universities. The detailed analysis of the University's performance had identified the need to improve our institutional citation rates and performance in the QS academic and employer reputation surveys. We also have too few Highly Cited Researchers, which is an important component of the ARWU ranking (but not the QS or THE ranking);
- c) granular detail could be provided for the reputation data, which would include the areas of the world voters were from, and their type of role and institution. Work would be undertaken during 2025-26 to make this information available to colleagues.
- d) alumni could be nominated to receive surveys. However, consent would be required if names were to be provided to QS;
- e) faculty leadership teams had been briefed on the methodology for citations used by the different rankings, and the QS reputation surveys. They had been asked to make nominations for inclusion in the reputation surveys; to promote the new 'researcher visibility checklist' tool to all researchers as one means of raising citations; and to consider other support to enable researchers to raise their citation rates, including the subset who were highly cited, or nearly highly cited, in the particular metric used by the AWRU. The Committee members made helpful and practical suggestions for how to raise colleagues' understanding of how citation rates were calculated and what they might do to raise their citations;
- f) there was some misunderstanding about the submission process for open access for Nature and Science publications, and it was suggested that work should be undertaken to demystify the nature of the process. **Action: University Library**

12 PhD by Enterprise

Received: PhD by Enterprise Regulations.

Noted:

- a) the new PhD initiative would help to diversify the portfolio of PhD degree programmes offered by the University, and was in alignment with the Manchester 2035 Strategy;
- b) consideration would be given to the definition of 'entrepreneur examiner' and the criteria for examining the business plan component of the thesis. These details would be included in the policy, guidance and processes, which would be finalised prior to the start of the programme and would be presented to a future meeting; **Action: AVP Research and Innovation**
- c) an alternative award of standard PhD or MPhil would be available, as detailed in the Regulations.

Agreed: to recommend the new PhD by Enterprise Regulations to Senate for approval.

13 Updates to PGR Supervision Policy

Received: Proposed updates to PGR Supervision Policy.

Noted:

- a) following discussion at the last meeting, the PGR Supervision Policy had been further updated to ensure alignment with the Personal Relationships Policy;
- b) consistency with practice was highlighted in relation to ECRs being required to complete all relevant aspects of the New Academics Programme. It was confirmed that ECRs would be expected to engage with the aspects relating to PGR supervision before acting as primary supervisor.

Agreed: to approve the updates to the PGR Supervision Policy.

14

PhD by Published Papers Regulations

Received: Proposed updates to PhD by Published Papers Regulations.

Noted: The update consolidated the former regulations and associated guidance document into a consistent, streamlined framework.

Agreed: to approve the updates to the PhD by Published Papers Regulations.

15

Revised Process for the Investigation of Potential Research Misconduct

Received: Revised Process for the Investigation of Potential Research Misconduct.

Noted: A regular review of the process had been undertaken, which had undergone consultation across the faculties, via the Research Strategy Group.

Agreed: to approve the Revised Process for the Investigation of Potential Research Misconduct.

16 REF 2029 Update (including Code of Practice)

Received: REF 2029 Code of Practice.

Noted:

- a) an oral update on preparations for the REF 2029;
- b) Research England had announced a three month pause to the criteria-setting phase of REF 2029.

(Secretary's note: A REF 2029 update is available at the following link: [REF Update Sept 2025](#))

17 Awarding Official Digital Badges at the University of Manchester

Received: A position paper on Awarding Official Digital Badges at the University of Manchester.

Noted:

- a) it was confirmed that the official digital badges would be portable;
- b) the official digital badges would be available through Canvas. However, other providers would be considered as part of the process;
- c) the UoM Digital Badge Sub-committee needed broad representation, and could be relevant to PGRs, supervisors' CPD and the Researcher Development Team;
- d) a number of other institutions were currently using official digital badges.

18 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.

19 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 4 June Senate.