

The University of Manchester

BOARD

Wednesday 8 October 2025

Present: Philippa Hird (Chair), Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), David Buckley, Lexie Baynes, Kerris Bright, Anna Dawe, Amrit Dhillon, Deirdre Evans, Dr Reinmar Hager, Tom Jirat, Prof Paul Mativenga, Sarah Munby, Jatin Patel, Prof Hema Radhakrishnan, Tony Raven, Prof Fiona Smyth, Rachel Studd, Paul Thwaite, Prof Soumhya Venkatesan, and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member). (20 members)

Apologies: Guy Grainger, Matthew Scullion and Emma Wade-Smith

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Matt Atkin, Executive Director of Planning (item 4-5), Kate Cambden, Executive Director of Development and Alumni Relations (items 7 and 10), Prof Anthony Green, Director of Manchester Institute of Biotechnology (item 8), Prof Nalin Thakkar, Vice-President, Social Responsibility (item 10), Sinead Hesp, General Counsel (item 10), Dr Andrew Walsh, Executive Director for Research and Business Engagement (item 10) and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

(To ensure the requirement for a lay majority of members was fulfilled, the President and Vice-Chancellor did not participate in decision making on items where Board approval was required.)

1. Declarations of Interest

Noted: there were no new declarations of interest. Amrit Dhillon, Sarah Munby and Rachel Studd were welcomed to their first Board meeting.

2. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2025.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

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

i) Potential Student Group Litigation

Noted:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Information

Redacted – restricted

(4) A further update would be provided to the November Board meeting.

Action: Deputy Secretary

ii) School Boards

Noted:

(1) Reflections on lay members' mixed experience of attendance at School Boards (noting the important role played by the chairs of School Boards).

(2) The role of School Boards was advisory to the Head of School and members' experience suggested that meetings provided an avenue for issues and concerns emerging at local level to be aired. Perception of lack of feedback on issues raised was a reported cause of frustration at local level.

(3) Agendas were set at local level, although meetings of the School Boards Chairs Forum enabled identification of common themes (e.g. focus on the student voice). School Boards had been used, in some instances, as a vehicle to collect comments and feedback on the draft strategy, supporting the co-creation process. However, this was not a consistent process, and it was not clear that School Boards functioned as part of a cohering, problem solving or solutions generating function within the University.

(4) There was potential to establish a clearer line of sight with and focus on University Strategy (and its interpretation at local level) at School Boards.

Agreed: there was merit in retaining the facility for lay members to attend School Boards in 2025-26 and members would be circulated about potential availability to attend scheduled meetings.

Action: Deputy Secretary

iii) Lay Member membership of employment related panels

Noted:

(1) Following UCU notification of a formal "failure to agree" on proposed delegation of lay Board member membership of employment related panel membership, negotiation on potential resolution (required by Statute) was ongoing.

(2) Discussions with UCU about processing of current outstanding cases had been constructive and further workshops on potential solutions (retaining an external, independent element) were planned in the next month. A further update would be provided at the next meeting.

Action: Deputy Secretary

4. Manchester 2035: University Strategy

Received:

(1) The final draft of the Manchester 2035 strategy, *From Manchester for the world*, complemented by a supporting pack including key metrics and potential derailers.

(2) A brief report setting out progress on measures of success and how updates from University Executive (UE) would be brought to the Board.

i) Strategy and supporting pack

Noted:

(1) The supporting pack summarised the choices which adoption of the strategy entailed, including a decision not to expand on-campus student numbers and to focus growth on flexible, online and lifelong learning.

(2) The University's staffing profile would evolve over time to reflect this diversification into new student markets and modes of delivery.

(3) There would be choices on timing: the strategy represented a ten-year ambition, split into three-year work packages, with purposeful sequencing to manage load and risk. The challenge of working at pace in an integrated way in a volatile environment (and avoiding fragmentation) was recognised, as was the need to avoid institutional overload. Adoption of the strategy could not just be additive and there was a need to prioritise, and insufficient resource/capacity was a potential derailer.

(4) Partner enabled learning was a distinctive element of the strategy which had strong resonance with external stakeholders, and an appetite from partners to engage. The concept would develop and evolve over the life of the strategy.

(5) In response to a question, confirmation that the strategy was aligned with the current five-year plan, and this alignment would be reviewed again in the forthcoming planning and budgeting cycle.

(6) Over time, the adoption of a "one university" approach would reduce complexity and variation in processes and procedures (e.g. the implementation of the Future Foundations programme (replacement of existing Finance and People systems). This is a key agenda that prevents the strategy being net additive to the university (e.g. "what will we stop doing?")

(7) As noted above the strategy provided an overall sense of ambition, direction of travel and priority (to be broken down into work packages of greater specificity) which enabled agility and flexibility as and when required.

(8) It was imperative that the University was high performing in both teaching and learning and research to maintain and enhance its position and reputation amongst other large, publicly funded, research intensive civic universities, nationally and internationally.

(9) Global and local volatility was a significant potential derailer of the strategy (in addition to those named in the supporting pack).

(10) Historically, successful implementation of major digital change programmes had proved challenging with significant failure rates. It was important that this area remained at the forefront of Board focus and that lay members brought the benefit of any parallel experience and expertise in different settings to bear. Given shortcomings of current systems and processes, the University had no option but to move forward, taking measures to anticipate and mitigate risk.

(11) Expansion into emerging student markets, continuing to develop a shared culture of innovation, strengthening links with industry partners and scaling up philanthropic ambition (aligned to strategic priorities) were all distinctive elements of the strategy. Ensuring that the strategy was sufficiently distinctive was important and work on the digital look and feel of the strategy once launched, alongside the parallel refresh of the current brand proposition would support this (the Board would receive further detail on the latter at its next meeting).

Action: Deputy Secretary

(12) As outlined in the supporting pack, building an effective guiding coalition of support for the strategy and thus a compelling leadership narrative was essential. This included engaging and empowering senior leadership through initiatives like [The 200](#). An important part of the narrative was the degree to which the University had choice and agency given its relatively strong position in the sector.

(13) The importance of "quick wins" as early indicators of success, whilst avoiding local, bespoke solutions which would lead to further fragmentation.

(14) There was significant teaching, students and learning capacity within the university and repurposing of some of this capacity was an important enabler of delivery for the strategy.

(15) Digital ambitions and embedding of tools and skills would boost student employability in a rapidly evolving labour market.

(16) The potential to expand on some of the exemplar community personas outlined in the strategy with further examples in related communications.

(17) The potential impact of the proposed international fee levy on the five-year plan.

ii) Measures of success

Reported

(1) The UE had agreed eight areas to be measured to capture the ambition set out in the strategy and together to indicate whether it was working. The areas were: student experience, research, social responsibility, innovation, enhancing employability, colleague engagement, financial sustainability and reputation.

(2) Indicators would be outcome oriented, with positive trends and improvement in relative sector position expected over time.

(3) The final UE dashboard will be presented to the Board meeting in February 2026, and the measures will include the preferred measure for innovation which was still in development and would be confirmed by the new Vice-President for Civic Engagement and Innovation.

(4) Following the February 2026 meeting, a performance discussion would be scheduled at each Board meeting, focusing on one or two measures noting timings of updates of measures were skewed towards the end the academic year. Whilst there would still be an annual meeting to review progress, the Board will be able to access the dashboard at any time. The Forward Look will allow Board Committees to assess details as appropriate.

(5) At the level below the UE dashboard, a new approach was being implemented with regular and responsive tracking of performance taking place by UE and Executive Committees throughout the academic year, using a comprehensive set of new dashboards built out from the UE dashboard. The data will be more readily available to UE and the extended leadership group to support decision-making and action planning.

(6) Once key outcomes were agreed, there would be variance over time in the suitability and availability of data sources. There would be opportunities to amend the dashboard as new measures and delivery priorities emerge.

Noted:

(1) There was potential to develop and enhance some metrics. The challenge of establishing measures for the “one university” ambition was acknowledged.

(2) With the full and final dashboard to come to the February 2026 meeting, the Board requested an update on progress at the November 2025 meeting.

Action: Executive Director of Planning

(3) The exemplary support provided by the Executive Director of Planning and other colleagues in the development of the strategy document: the Board asked that its thanks be recorded and conveyed.

Agreed: to approve the Manchester 2035 strategy, *From Manchester for the world*, which would be launched formally at an event on 15 October 2025.

5. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

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

- Revitalising University brand and digital landscape
- Streamlining Government Relations
- Engaging the University community with the Manchester 2035 Strategy
- Launching the fundraising Campaign

Noted:

(1) The likely detrimental impact of the government's proposed levy on international student tuition fees (albeit full detail was still to be revealed). In response to questions, different financial scenarios, post-introduction of the levy were being considered, and whilst it was not anticipated that the levy would be a significant derailer of the strategy, it was likely to impact on the pace of planned investment.

(2). The University has been well represented at the recent Labour and Conservative Party conferences and there were plans to enhance further the University's public affairs and government relations function and capacity.

(3) Migration continued to be a dominant theme in the current political narrative.

(4) The importance of demonstrating and reiterating the relevance of the University's offer and contribution to addressing local, national and global challenges. As a region, Manchester was well placed to benefit from government focus on mayoralities as a driver of economic development and growth, given the maturity of its devolution model and the well-established and supportive links between key regional institutions, including universities and colleges.

(5) In response to questions, the recent Prime Ministerial announcement of the abolition of the 50% University participation target and its replacement by a target of two-thirds of young people gaining higher-level skills by the age of 25 represented a potential opportunity and served to reinforce the point that delivering an excellent experience for all students was imperative.

(6) As noted above, further detail of the brand refresh would be provided to the next meeting.

6. Student context- Key issues for student experience

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

Reported:

(1) The report noted that the Students Union had reframed the traditional 'welcome, induction, and transition' narrative from focus on the first few weeks to a longer timeframe of the first 100 days.

(2) The report noted the importance of developing a clear sense of belonging for all students within those first 100 days, with exemplar personas and interaction at curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular levels.

(3) The report also emphasised the importance of connection between students and academics (and detrimental impact where this did not happen) which clearly resonated with the *Manchester 2035* strategy.

Noted:

(1) The operational issues relating to timetabling referred to in the report had been identified quickly and resolved during Welcome Week.

(2) Curriculum organisation and structure was a potential barrier to students wanting to experience content outside that relevant to their programme.

(3) Discussion about the establishment of the curriculum, including students' role as active partners and legitimate student expectations of expertise and organisational efficiency and competence.

(4) The importance of ensuring that there were measures in place to ensure the quality of teaching and learning and to develop excellent pedagogic practice. Clear lines of accountability for delivery and consequences for underperformance were essential.

(5) At meetings in the previous academic year, the Board had been advised of a project (under the Institute of Teaching and Learning) to develop understanding of the impact of the research environment on students on taught programmes and the Board asked to be updated on progress. **Action: Deputy Secretary (to co-ordinate)**

(6) The [Student Basic Needs Centre](#) provided support to help mitigate the cost of student life, both on arrival and for more established students.

7. Update on Campaign

Received: a slide deck providing an update on the University's major philanthropic Campaign which was about to enter the public phase with a launch in November 2025.

Reported:

(1) A reminder that the planning and quiet phase of the Campaign had begun in 2018. This had enabled the establishment of a culture of philanthropy and an increase in global engagement and building of donor relationships.

(2) The focus in the public phase that was about to launch was on an increase in giving from high-net-worth individuals, along with an increase in mass giving and legacy gifts

(3) The fundraising propositions as outlined in the presentation were aligned to the strategy: it was unusual for the launch of a major Campaign to align with the initiation of a new strategy, and this presented a major opportunity to leverage philanthropy.

(4) Overall ambition for the Campaign was to raise more than £400 million and increase annual giving to £40 million.

Noted:

(1) In response to questions, fundraising activity continued and was not being paused to await the November launch, which would be a public statement of intent that the University was expanding the scope of its philanthropic ambition.

(2) To ensure full understanding and transparency of the current financial position and to monitor the next (public) phase going forward, a report covering the above would be prepared for the next meeting of Finance Committee.

Action: Executive Director of Development and Alumni Relations (DDAR)

(3) The importance of an intentional approach to fundraising with clear focus on delivery against strategic ambition.

(4) Board members had an important advocacy and networking role to raise awareness of the Campaign and the compelling narrative surrounding it. It was suggested that it would be helpful to provide a script to aid members in this role and to ensure consistency of message.

Action: Executive Director of DDAR

8. Research Presentation

Received: a presentation from Prof Anthony Green, Director of Manchester Institute of Biotechnology (MIB) on the work of MIB, its research missions, its research impact and translation, academic-industry partnerships, its role in relation to philanthropy and social responsibility, and its facilities and infrastructure.

Noted:

(1) The impressive and comprehensive presentation demonstrated clear alignment between the Institute's work and the new strategy. In response to questions, there was discussion of the potential to scale up to meet future challenges.

(2) Investment to expand the utilisation of Artificial Intelligence was also a future ambition. The strategic ambition to optimise and streamline decision making processes would have clear benefits for the Institute.

(3) The Institute's multi-disciplinarity and scale and subject adjacency enable access to joint grants and complementary appointments between faculties. The Institute's well-established interface with industry blurred the divide between foundational and translational research, enabling a mutually supportive relationship.

(4) The partnership with the Gates Foundation extended the impact and influence of the Institute's work in the philanthropy and social responsibility space.

(5) In response to a question, all members of MIB taught and the Institute encouraged applications for scholarships, research placements etc from interested students.

9. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (24 September 2025)

Received: a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 24 September 2025 meeting.

Reported:

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

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Redacted – restricted information

(4) Several amendments to the current funding package had been approved by the Committee and would be taken forward if they remained appropriate in the context of any future agreed package.

(5) As part of ongoing due diligence, the Committee would focus on risk and the impact of any broader changes in the external financial environment. Lay members of the Committee were engaging with the Executive between meetings to ensure that their understanding was up to date and to provide advice and support.

(6) In other business the Committee had also recommended the adoption of a total return approach for all new permanent endowments received in the financial year 2024-25.

Noted:

Redacted – restricted information

(2) There were potentially significant adverse implications of any decision to pause and restart the programme (e.g. impact on supply chain and loss of momentum).

(3) It was important to review and assess the final residences proposal in the context of broader ambitions to improve the student experience as set out in the strategy.

(4) The need to assess any potential interim, ameliorative measures in the event of a delay to completion.

Agreed: to approve the adoption of a total return approach for all new permanent endowments received in the financial year 2024-25 (see attached, Appendix A).

10. **Research Relationships Oversight Group and Gift Oversight Group-Annual Reports**

Received: the annual reports from the Research Relationships Oversight Group (RROG) and Gift Oversight Group (GOG), which included a record of decisions made by each Group. The *modus operandi* of the Groups was analogous, and they had the same membership.

Reported:

(1) The objective of RROG was to review and provide an assessment of the suitability of higher-risk research funders and (more rarely) research partners, collaborators, or sub-contractors. It provided assurance that research relationships were consistent with the University's guiding principles, values, mission, and goals, including that of academic freedom, and mitigated potential negative reputational impact.

(2) A Gold List of highly trusted funders had been agreed, for which RROG approval was not required regardless of the value or frequency of research funding (for example UK Research Councils and UK sector funding bodies). There was also a Silver List of organisations for which RROG approval had been given on a long- or medium-term basis, subject to periodic review. For other funders, RROG approval was required for any

proposed research funding of £1m or more (or £100,000 or more from a few nominated sensitive countries).

(3) GOG was responsible for ensuring that philanthropic donations to the University, and the purposes to which such donations were applied, were consistent with the University's principles, values, mission and goals, and did not undermine its standing as an institution pursuing open and unbiased enquiry. Any donor giving £100,000 or more to the University (including cumulative giving), must be considered by the GOG (gifts below this level could also be referred to GOG at the discretion of the Director of Development and Alumni Relations, and gifts over £10 million required Board scrutiny and approval).

Noted:

(1) The foundational importance of social responsibility, academic freedom and the provision of societal benefit: there were no limits to the scope of academic inquiry within the law.

(2) Before potential partnerships were brought to RROG, there was a standard process of due diligence which included identification of any potential issues related to compliance with export control regulation and the National Security and Investment Act. The Audit and Risk Committee may want to consider a future information update on this process given the sensitivities.

(3) Discussion about some specific cases, not on the RROG Gold and Silver lists, considered by RROG in 2024-25.

(4) Along with many other Universities, Manchester did not accept funding from the tobacco industry on ethical and reputational grounds and to protect other sources of funding (e.g. Cancer Research UK).

(5) In 2025-26, RROG and GOG would be combined into a broader Partnerships Oversight Group.

11. Other Board Committee reports

i) Audit and Risk Committee (17 September 2025)

Received: the report from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 17 September 2025.

Noted:

(1) Planned further review of the Committee terms of reference to ensure comprehensiveness and currency and cohesion and synergy with the terms of reference for Finance Committee

(2) The Committee had also given in principle approval to extension of financial delegation to University Executive and the new Infrastructure Committee subject to discussion on detail and practicalities between the Chair of the Board and the Chairs of Finance and Audit and Risk Committee.

ii) Nominations and Governance Committee (25 June 2025)

Received: a verbal report from the Nominations and Governance Committee held earlier on 8 October 2025 (a written report would be submitted to the November Board meeting).

Reported: the Committee had considered appointments to Committees and the draft specification for the Governance Effectiveness Review to take part in the first half of 2026.

Noted:

(1) The draft Effectiveness Review specification had been broadly welcomed, subject to consideration of potential both to add consideration of specific additional risks (e.g. cyber) and to provide greater specificity regarding expectations of the review of governing instruments.

(2) The potential to add evaluation of effectiveness of stakeholder listening and engagement to the specification.

(3) The review was taking place in the context of increased focus on higher education governance as exemplified by critical comments from the Secretary of State for Education to the House of Commons Education Select Committee earlier in the year. The publication of the [Gillies report](#) highlighted institutional governance failings at the University of Dundee, and Advance HE has also published a [report on the future of HE governance](#).

(4) The Committee of University Chairs had also embarked on a review of its own Code of Governance which could help to inform and shape the parameters of the University's review. The Chair of the Board was a member of the Steering Group overseeing the review (scheduled to complete early in 2026).

(5) Following a further review of the specification by the Committee, the Board would receive a final version for approval at its November meeting.

Action: Deputy Secretary

Agreed:

(1) To appoint Sarah Munby to Audit and Risk Committee.

(2) To appoint Soumhya Venkatesan to Nominations and Governance Committee.

Action: Deputy Secretary

12. Review of 2024-25 performance and focus for 2025-26

i) Outcomes of Board evaluation 2024-25

Received: a report summarising the outcomes of the 2024-25 Board evaluation.

Noted: the report was generally very positive with some areas highlighted for attention in 2025-26 (including the potential opportunity for a Board development event).

ii) Outcomes of President and Vice-Chancellor performance review 2024-25

Received: a report summarising the outcomes of the 2024-25 evaluation of the President and Vice-Chancellor's performance based on questionnaires completed by Board members, confidential interviews with members of the Executive, self-reflection from the President and Vice-Chancellor and a discussion between the Chair and the President and Vice-Chancellor.

Reported:

(1) The report focused on achievement against the ten objectives for 2024-25 as summarised below:

- development and delivery of the 2035 strategy following an extensive and robust consultation process:
- development of strong relationships internally and externally, including key stakeholders:
- establishment of the University Executive [UE] from the former Senior Leadership Team, including an effective suite of executive committees:
- progressing delivery of five-year financial plan, adapting in light of the emerging strategy:
- refreshment and revision of communications approach internally and externally:
- launch of the major philanthropic campaign:
- prioritisation of improvement in National Student Survey results and teaching and learning more generally:
- work on continuous improvement in EDI goals and ensuring these are reflected in the strategy:
- Implementation of the recommendations of the Innovation Review, including the establishment of Unit M: and
- Internal office organisational improvements

(2) The report was very positive across all areas noted above, with development and delivery of the strategy, the refreshed approach to communications, development of strong internal and external relationships, implementation of the Innovation Review and strong financial delivery of particular note.

(3) A summary of the review would be published in due course.

Action: Head of President's Office and Deputy Secretary

iii) Board focus areas- 2025-26

Agreed: Board focus areas for 2025-26

iv) Board forward look- 2025-26

Noted: the Board focus look for 2025-26

v) President and Vice-Chancellor's objectives- 2025-26

Noted: the President and Vice-Chancellor's objectives for 2025-26

vi) Chair's objectives- 2025-26

Noted: the Chair's objectives for 2025-26 (represented from the July 2025 meeting for completeness)

13. University Executive

Received: the report from the meetings of University Executive (UE) held between 15 July and 22 September 2025.

Noted:

(1) There had been significant recent changes to the membership of the UE, and the new committee structure was being embedded. Externally led development sessions had evolved UE culture and ways of working.

(2) On a quarterly basis, the UE met with the SU Union Affairs Officer and a Senate member in an extended leadership session. Proposals to extend the delegated financial authority of UE were in development (see 11 i) above).

(3) The critical importance of the wider leadership community (both The 200 and the management layer below that) to the delivery of the strategy.

18. The role of the Board of Governors

Received:

- (1) The Statement of Board Primary Responsibilities
- (2) Standing Orders of the Board
- (3) Scheme of Delegation
- (4) Membership of the Board from 1 September 2025

Noted:

- (1) The need to remove the now obsolete reference to Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor in the Standing Orders. **Action: Deputy Secretary**
- (2) The Scheme of Delegation would be reviewed in 2025-26 and the review of delegated financial authority referred to above was the first stage in this work.

19. Annual update on members' legal obligations

Received: an annual update on members' legal obligations.

Reported: the report reminded members of the University's charitable status, set out members' fiduciary duties, compliance obligations to the regulator (the Office for Students) and the expectations of the Nolan Principles and the Committee of University Chairs Code of Governance. It also set out the Board's responsibility for strategic direction and risk management, its ultimate accountability for academic governance, and emphasised the Board's stewardship role, and its responsibility to ensure the University thrives.

20. Secretary's report

Received:

- (1) Board attendance report for 2024-25
- (2) The report on Exercise of Delegations covering the recent award of Emeritus Professorships, and the use of the Seal.
- (3) Confirmation of a Reportable Event to the Office for Students in July 2025 (closure of Spurgeon's College with whom the University had a historic validation agreement). The report set out action to support the small number of students remaining on University validated pathways and noted that the OfS was very satisfied with the overall outcome and the University's handling of the situation.

21. Dates of meetings in 2025-26

Noted: the remaining in 2025-26 as below.

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

Wednesday 19 November 2025

Wednesday 25 February 2026

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Wednesday 20 May 2026
Wednesday 15 July 2026 (all day)
Thursday 16 July 2026 (9am-12pm)

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

22. Evaluation of Chair of the Board

Received: a report setting out the outcomes from the 2024-25 anonymised evaluation questionnaire on the performance of the Chair of the Board.

Noted:

(1) Responses were extremely positive and demonstrated a high degree of confidence and respect for the Chair in performance of her duties. The report, including learning points and suggestions for consideration, had been discussed with the Chair, who was fully supportive.

(2) Some members had commented on the size of the Board and the potential to inhibit Board discussion. However, there was recognition of the skilful way in which the Chair enabled and encouraged contributions across Board membership (optimal Board size was an issue which was likely to feature in the imminent CUC Code review).

(3) The Chair had a key representational role (on and off campus) to demonstrate the independence and authority of the Board to staff and students and wider stakeholders, and this formed a new objective for 2025-26.