

The University of Manchester

BOARD

Wednesday 19 November 2025

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

Apologies: Anna Dawe and Prof Soumhya Venkatesan.

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), George Whalley, Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Matt Atkin, Executive Director of Planning (item 5), Dr Alison Fairclough, Head of Business Intelligence (item 5), Osama Bhutta, Executive Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment (item 6), Prof Sarah Cartmell, Vice-Dean and Head of School of Engineering (item 8), Dr Jessica Boland, Senior Lecturer in Functional Materials and Devices (item 8), Prof Jenn Hallam, Vice-President, Teaching, Learning and Students (item 12), Dr Andrew Walsh, Executive Director for Research and Business Engagement (item 12), Luke Taylor, Head of the Office of President and Vice-Chancellor, and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

1. Declarations of Interest

Noted: there were no new declarations of interest. Matthew Scullion was welcomed to his first Board meeting.

2. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2025.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

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

Noted:

(1) Potential extension of delegated financial thresholds had been discussed with the Chairs of Audit and Risk and Finance Committee.

(2) There had been subsequent engagement and discussion with the Chair of the Board.

Agreed: the extension of financial threshold limits as below, subject to review by Finance Committee at the end of the current financial year:

- From £5 to below £25 million Infrastructure Committee/University Executive (senior office holders below £5 million)
- From £25 to below £50 million Finance Committee
- £50 million and above Board

Action: Deputy Secretary and Deputy CFO

4. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

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

- Government Relations
- Global Rankings
- Strategy: from launch to delivery
- "Challenge Accepted": launch of the fundraising Campaign

Reported:

(1). The University had been recognised among the world's most sustainability-driven institutions, retaining a global top 10 position in the QS World University Sustainability Rankings. Manchester was now ranked 10th globally and 5th in the UK in recognition of its ability to tackle the world's greatest environmental, social and governance challenges (both improvements on the previous year). The University remained the only university in the world to feature in the top 10 of both the QS rankings and the Times Higher Education (THE) impact rankings.

(2) It now appeared almost certain that the government would announce the introduction of an international fee levy as part of the Budget statement on 26 November. Discussion about the nature of the proposed levy continued with the University (alongside other Russell Group institutions) favouring a flat fee rather than a percentage levy. Whilst initial planning had taken place, full assessment of the impact of the levy would take place once detail had been confirmed.

(3) The soft launch of the University's first global fundraising campaign, "Challenge Accepted" had taken place on 12 November and was at the heart of the University's ambition to become a more self-sustaining and resilient institution.

Noted:

(1) The University was very unlikely to be able to pass on the full impact of the proposed international levy as the market would not bear this. The University was engaged in constructive discussions about options and practicalities of implementation in order to heighten understanding of implications and consequences. This included lobbying at local and national (including ministerial) level. The levy had the potential to damage the UK's reputation as a global HE destination, especially given relative decline in international recruitment in other major markets such as US, Canada and Australia, and was not consistent with the pro-growth ambitions of the government.

(2) In response to questions about the [recently publicised events at Sheffield Hallam University](#), confirmation that academic freedom remained a fundamental and core principle. The University had rigorous research protocols and due diligence processes consistent with regulatory and compliance obligations. Given the complexity of the current geopolitical situation, relationships between UK universities and China would continue to receive heightened scrutiny.

(3) In response to questions, there was a need for greater collaboration within the sector as reflected in the University's burgeoning relationships with Cambridge and Liverpool, and emerging discussions with Manchester Metropolitan University about cross-institutional activities.

(4) Professor Colette Fagan, Vice-President for Research and International was leading a taskforce to ensure the University had a structured approach to improving its position

across the range of rankings, including the QS World University Rankings, the THE World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities.

5. Manchester 2035: University Strategy-measures of success

Received: a report updating the Board on development of the eight measures of success building on the eight strategic outcomes highlighted in the Manchester 2035 strategy.

Reported:

(1) Further Board engagement this academic year will provide both a demonstration of the University Dashboard (February), an annual evaluation of performance across the Dashboard in year one of the strategy (July), and two specific deep dives (one of which will be in relation to Teaching, Learning and Students) in which the Executive will present a more substantive and rounded qualitative and quantitative assessment of the latest available patterns and trends in relation to the strategy.

(2) The underlying technology and data landscape remained immature and the external context, for example in relation to reliable flow of sector data, was increasingly volatile. To deliver the greater access to performance information and the associated shift to new ways of working envisaged without delay, there was a need to proceed tactically in the short term and strengthen the reporting proposition as technology deployment and data maturity becomes more sophisticated.

Noted:

(1) The importance of ensuring visibility of, and accountability for, delivery of metrics across the institution (it was particularly important to ensure ownership of cross-cutting metrics). In this context, to ensure common understanding, it was also important to avoid over-complexity: effective distributed leadership (including, but not restricted to, The 200) was essential.

(2) On the reputation metric, the potential to reference brand equity/brand power.

(3) On the student experience metric, consideration was being given to inclusion of a broader range of indicators (beyond the National Student Survey), including measures related to the postgraduate experience.

(4) The financial sustainability metric referenced generation of sufficient operating cash (rather than a specific target), which enabled some flexibility over the life of the strategy.

(5) Visibility of metrics for students (and their comprehensibility) was an important element, and in this context there was ongoing liaison with the Students' Union regarding use of their Data Insight Reports.

(6) There had been discussion of research metrics at the recent Audit and Risk Committee meeting (see item 12 Noted (8) below). The President and Vice-Chancellor's report referred to the work of the rankings taskforce which included focus on academic reputation and citations to drive improvement.

(7) As noted above, there were opportunities to assess delivery at the end of the academic year and in-year (the latter via deep dives).

6. Update on Brand refresh

Received: an update on the brand review commissioned by the President and Vice-Chancellor. The review assessed how audiences experienced the current brand, how the

University is positioned and perceived, reviewed visual identity, and identified opportunities for improvement.

Reported:

(1) While the brand continued to perform well, the report identified a clear imperative for improvement in the context of an increasingly competitive sector.

(2) Detailed recommendations fell into four broad categories: brand strategy, visual identity, governance and measurement.

(3) The next phase of the work involved partnership with an agency to deliver two of the recommended categories – brand strategy and visual identity – where improvements were most fundamental to delivery of major strategic ambitions, including student recruitment; flexible learning; accelerating research impact; innovation; partnership; philanthropy and digital transformation.

Noted:

(1) Initial focus was on areas which would deliver the greatest focus, including digital transformation.

(2) Planned delivery of the next phase over the next nine months recognised the importance of colleague engagement, although the timetable appeared very extended.

(3) The importance of a sense of place and belonging and the University's location in the city-region.

(4) Board members were willing to provide experience from different sectors, including optimal articulation of brand at different levels of organisations.

(5) Team capacity had recently been enhanced and there was confidence in delivery, noting planned external partnership work.

(6) A comment about lack of overt reference to social responsibility in the summary report and whether this needed to be more explicit.

(7) Recognition that the effectiveness of a brand was dependent on delivery and the importance of clear measurement of brand fulfilment.

7. Student context- Key issues for student experience

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

Reported:

(1) The report focused on the delicate balance between long-term delivery of the Strategy (with delivery over a ten-year timespan) and the need for shorter-term and more immediate improvements to the student experience

(2) The report explored how this balance was beginning to be shaped through initial work, focusing on [Foundations](#) and one of the [Leaps](#) (Flexible. Personalised and Digitally Enabled learning).

Noted:

(1) The report included focus on the importance of achieving an accessible digital environment for all students. In this context, [Canvas](#) had been very well-received, although there were some issues regarding recognition of agreed deadline extensions.

(2) The session held with Humanities colleagues and students in the earlier part of the Board Day had revealed some local variation in local application of Canvas. Whilst there may be valid reasons for this in the early stages of implementation, as approaches were piloted, it was important to minimise variation to ensure a consistent, high-quality student experience.

(3) The report also focused on the negative impact of concentration of coursework deadlines (although anecdotal evidence from the Humanities session suggested a possible variety of lived experience)

(4) The importance of constructive and open discussion about the impact on the overall student experience in those programme areas with a large concentration of international students.

(5) The diagram in the report was helpful in developing understanding of the intersectionality of living and learning conditions for both staff and students.

8. Research Presentation

Received: a presentation from Prof Sarah Cartmell, Vice-Dean and Head of School of Engineering and Dr Jessica Boland, Senior Lecturer in Functional Materials and Devices. The presentations covered Biomechanics, 3D co-cultures and medical devices: and nanotechnology and device application.

9. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (5 November 2025)

Received: a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 5 November 2025 meeting.

Reported:

(1) The report provided an update on the Residences Redevelopment Programme (RRP) outlining the structure of the proposed new financial deal.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Redacted – restricted information

(4) The Committee had considered a helpful report on the financial targets related to the Campaign and would continue to receive regular updates.

Noted:

[REDACTED]

Redacted – restricted information

(2) Financial Statements and the Office for Students (OfS) annual return were being considered under later agenda items.

Agreed: to approve entering into a contract (with details as outlined in the report) for the Zochonis Building Long Term Maintenance and Zero Carbon Management project.

10. Other Board Committee reports

i) Audit and Risk Committee (5 November 2025)

Received: the report from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 5 November 2025.

Noted:

(1) The Committee's recommended approval of Financial Statements and the Academic Governance Assurance reports were dealt with under later agenda items.

(2) The Committee had noted the importance of a consistent approach to scoring and categorisation of risk and in relation to Operational Risk, the Committee agreed that regular focus should be on areas of both high likelihood and high impact.

(3) In relation to the cyber update, the Committee noted continued focus on the unmanaged estate, given potential risk and it would continue to receive updates.

(4) The University's approach to benefits realisation continued to mature and the delivery handbook which would accompany strategy implementation would provide a standard approach to review.

Agreed:

(1) Revised Committee terms of reference.

(2) The Annual Report (2024-25) from the Committee.

(3) The Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement for publication

Action: Deputy Secretary

ii) Remuneration and People Committee (4 November 2025)

Received: the report from the Remuneration and People Committee meeting held on 4 November 2025.

Noted: the report included an update on progress towards the development of a Remuneration Policy which was expected to be brought to the February 2026 Board meeting for approval.

Agreed: to proceed with the process outlined in the Contracts Procedure to deal with those staff considered to be at risk on open ended contracts linked to finite funding for the period from 1 July 2026 to 31 December 2026, noting that that the University will

continue to take all steps outlined in the report to avoid the need for redundancy wherever possible.

iii) Nominations and Governance Committee (8 October and 4 November 2025)

Received: a report from the Nominations and Governance Committee meetings held earlier on 8 October and 4 November 2025 (a verbal report on the former has been submitted to the October Board meeting, and this had included approval of recommendations for appointment to committees).

Noted: the Committee had considered a revised draft Effectiveness Review specification, incorporating comments made at the October Board.

Agreed: terms of reference for the 2026 External Governance Effectiveness Review

11. Financial Statements and return to the Office for Students 2024-25

Received: the following documents:

- (1) The report to the Audit and Risk Committee from the external auditors, PKF Littlejohn (the letter of representation in relation to the audit was included as an appendix).
- (2) Summary of key points from the Financial Statements
- (3) Going Concern report
- (4) The Financial Statements for the year ending 31 July 2025.
- (5) The OfS Annual Financial Return for 2024-25

Reported:

(1) The Financial Statements and accompanying external audit report and the Going Concern report had been scrutinised in a joint session of Audit and Risk and Finance Committees and the Chairs of both committees confirmed satisfaction with the documents presented to the Board. PKF Littlejohn had provided a clean audit opinion, with no significant deficiencies.

(2) As the University has bonds admitted to the Official List of the UK Financial Conduct Authority and traded on the Regulated Market of the London Stock Exchange, it was required to comply with various rules, regulations and standards. This imposed specific responsibilities upon the University and its employees, particularly regarding the handling of information, which could potentially affect the trading price of the bond. This information must be kept confidential and not disclosed to anyone without the prior authorisation of the Chief Financial Officer.

(3) The University had achieved a good financial performance in the twelve months to 31 July 2025. Underlying surplus had doubled to £84.3m: total income had increased by 4.2% with expenditure increased by 1.1% on 2023/24. Potential challenges included the international student levy, and the narrative reflected the continued scale of financial challenge for the university and the sector more widely.

(4) The Going Concern report demonstrated that the University had significant headroom for the liquidity target through to July 2027 (the period under review).

Noted:

(1) Non-significant deficiencies highlighted in the report from PKF Littlejohn included an inconsistent approach to provision of signed employment contracts and unallocated

debtors' receipts (noting some improvement in the position regarding the latter from the previous year). Recognising some current system limitation issues, the Board hoped to see improvements in both these areas in 2025-26.

(2) The Going Concern report would be amended to ensure full consistency with the key financial risk analysis as set out in the Financial Statements.

Action: Deputy CFO

Agreed:

(1) That it was appropriate for the Financial Statements to be prepared on a going concern basis and following a meeting of Audit and Risk Committee (in joint session with Finance Committee) and on the recommendation of Audit and Risk Committee to approve the Financial Statements for the year ending 31 July 2025, for submission to the OfS, the London Stock Exchange and publication.

(2) To note the status of the OfS Annual Financial Return workbook 2024-25 and to approve the process for verification of the Return.

(3) To delegate authority to the Accountable Officer (the President and Vice-Chancellor) to finalise submission of the Annual Financial Return Workbook to the OfS.

Action: Deputy CFO

12. Academic Governance Annual Assurance Reports

Received: the annual Academic Governance Assurance Reviews (AAR) for Teaching, Learning and Students (TLS) and Research.

Reported:

(1) The Academic Governance Protocol agreed by the Board of Governors and Senate enabled the Board to test, with Senate, that academic governance is robust, adequate, and effective, as required by the sector regulator, the OfS.

(2) At its meeting on 22 October 2025, Senate noting the endorsement of the Academic Quality and Standards Committees (AQSCs) for TLS and Research, recommended approval of the reports to the Board. Audit and Risk Committee endorsed Senate's recommendation for approval at its meeting of 5 November 2025.

(3) Following consideration by the Board, there would be a joint meeting of the Board and Senate on 10 December 2025, as the final element of the agreed annual academic governance assurance review.

Noted:

(1) There was significant supporting material available in the Diligent Reading Room.

(2). The approach to the TLS AAR was more action-based and solution-focused and directly referenced the 2023-24 report for comparison. The AAR set out evidence of progress including in relation to the National Student Survey, 2025 (positivity up by 5.1pp to 80.1%), strengthening continuation (95.0% vs 92.4% Office for Students (OfS) benchmark), and enhanced systems. Challenges had included concerns raised by the relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSBB) (in this case, the

General Dental Council (GDC)) about quality assurance of Dentistry programmes. Whilst issues had been resolved satisfactorily, this had required significant engagement with the GDC, OfS and the Department for Education.

(3) ARC had received assurance that following the Dentistry issue, there were currently no similar concerns regarding programmes regulated by PSRBs. There was oversight of quality assurance of these programmes at faculty level, and ongoing enhanced monitoring for Dentistry. Building on this, the Board was keen to confirm assurance of quality of non-PSRB programmes.

(4) Lack of accountability and failure to escalate matters appropriately were primary reasons for the Dentistry concerns. Restoration of a more regular rhythm of periodic review and peer review of teaching would help to avoid a repeat, along with availability of real time relevant data (e.g. attendance monitoring) emerging from the use of Canvas. Ensuring effective and robust quality assurance of all programmes whether regulated or non-regulated was essential.

(5) Departmental and School leadership had a key role to play in ensuring that all academic colleagues were accountable for quality of provision. The role of Senate and its AQSCs in assurance of quality was also important and it was vital that, amongst other matters it considered, Senate devoted sufficient time for robust consideration of this, supported by provision of relevant information. There was reflection on the potential for other factors (e.g. poor research performance and colleague engagement) to be indicators of teaching quality challenges.

(6) ARC had noted disappointment that the Student Voice Implementation Group had made limited progress and had been advised that there were plans to reinforce work in this area in co-creation with the Students' Union, ensuring that student voice was embedded into business-as-usual activity and feedback loops were closed.

(7) On the Research AAR, discussion at ARC had focused on achievement against performance targets and measures of success set out in the previous "Our Futures" research and discovery strategy, noting that only one of five headline targets had been met

(8) ARC noted that research targets were deliberately stretching and welcomed the ambition, but noted that in some cases, year-on-year trend was negative. Performance metrics for the new strategy were in development, and the Committee encouraged reflection to ensure that whilst not inhibiting ambition, and recognising potential future investment, they were capable of achievement over the lifetime of the strategy.

(9) There was no room for complacency in relation to research performance and recognition of the effort needed to improve both local and national comparative performance.

(10) Reflection on the balance of time allocated to specific matters during Senate meetings, (noting the role and delegated authority of the AQSCs) including academic quality assurance challenges and potential programme withdrawals.

Agreed: to approve the academic governance assurance reports, noting that this approval would be conveyed to the joint meeting with Senate on 10 December 2025, which provided an opportunity for further engagement with Senate.

Action: Deputy Secretary

13. Prevent Annual Report

Received: the Prevent Annual Report, which described the University's approach to fulfilling the Prevent Duty, for the period 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025.

Reported: the Chair was asked to sign the document on behalf of the Board in the form of a Declaration (for the purpose of the Office for Students (OfS) submission), included as an appendix to the report. The purpose of the main body of this report was to provide the assurance and evidence for the Chair to be able to sign the Declaration on behalf of the Board.

Reported:

(1) A Training Needs Analysis group was currently reviewing mandatory training across the University and this included assessment of Prevent related training (both general and more detailed, the latter for colleagues most likely to be regularly engaged in related activity).

(2) The potential to adopt a more granular and nuanced approach to internet screening (in a culturally sensitive way avoiding undue restriction on academic freedom) was being considered as part of ongoing work to renew the University firewall.

Agreed: that the report be noted and the Chair sign the declaration for return to OfS.

Action: Executive Director of Compliance and Risk

14. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee Annual Report

Received: the annual report from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee, recommended for approval by Audit and Risk Committee.

Reported:

(1) The timely and comprehensive response to inspection and audit outcomes, including any required remedial actions and continued progress with work to support wellbeing.

(2) Areas for development and attention in 2025-26 included ensuring a consistent approach to management of risk, improvements to document control and ensuring lessons learnt from incidents were fully embedded.

(3) The Director of Safety Services, Attia Ramzan, was new in post and working with colleagues to develop a more consistent and strategic approach to safety management.

Agreed: to approve the annual report from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

Action: Executive Director of Compliance and Risk

15. Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice

Received: a report updating the Board on engagement with UCU and Senate since approval of the Policy on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom and the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech by the Board at the July 2025 meeting.

Reported: engagement with UCU had been constructive and union members recognised the calendar constraints which had necessitated engagement after initial Board approval.

Discussion at Senate had also been constructive and the report set out details of matters raised.

Agreed: To confirm approval of the Policy and Code, noting that no changes were being proposed because of the consultation and that a further review will take place at the end of the current academic year.

16. Senate

Noted: a report from the meeting of Senate held on 22 October 2025 (the review of the the Academic Governance Assurance reports had been dealt with under earlier agenda items).

17. University Executive

Noted: the report from the meetings of University Executive (UE) held between 29 September and 3 November 2025.

18. Emerging sector risks

Noted: a letter from the Chair of the OfS on emerging sector risks which reinforced the Board's view that financial sustainability and self-sufficiency were essential prerequisites.

(Secretary's note: the letter referred to the risk of third party and off campus delivery and this was the subject of a question in the meeting. Whilst the University were not major players in this market, an explanatory, supplementary note was issued to the Board after the meeting.)

19. Chair's report (Board forward look)

Noted: the latest Board forward look

20. Secretary's report

Received: the report on Exercise of Delegations covering the recent award of Emeritus Professorships, and the use of the Seal.

21. Any other business

i) Committee of University Chairs-Code of Governance, consultation

Reported: the Chair, RSCOO and Deputy Secretary were working on a response to the consultation on the CUC Code of Governance (members had been notified about this previously, by correspondence). Deadline for response was 28 November, and any members interested in reviewing the response were asked to contact the Deputy Secretary.

ii) Engagement session with students and colleagues from the Faculty of Humanities

Reported: the more formal part of the Board Day had been preceded by an engagement session with students and colleagues from the Faculty of Humanities

Noted:

(1) Members agreed that the session had been insightful and thought-provoking.

(2) Key takeaways and aspects of discussion which most resonated with members are set out below:

- a) The diversity of the student experience, and the challenge of responding effectively to the range of perspectives.
- b) The opportunities presented by mission-based research and how we deliver this.
- c) The evident, continued power of the Manchester brand internationally: and allied to this, the attractiveness of the city and potential to develop further, city-university relations.
- d) Evident student pride in inclusivity, with further opportunities for interaction between different student communities welcomed.
- e) The challenge in preparing students for employability in a fast-moving and volatile labour market.
- f) Canvass as an example of a well-executed change programme, resulting in improvements to the student experience.
- g) The need for consistent practice regarding the sharing of University guidance on the use of AI to all students.
- h) Numerous examples of relatively small changes resulting in significant improvements in the student experience (for example the use of voice notes as an effective student feedback mechanism).
- i) The impact of transport and ancillary costs on the student experience.
- j) The need for reflection on the most appropriate and effective communication mechanisms to engage with the student community.
- k) The need effectively and accurately to communicate the whole offer (including but not limited to education, skills development, place, values, research engagement and employability) from the University to potential students.

22. 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 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 (4-5.30pm, followed by social event 5.30-6.30pm).)