

## ITEM 3

The University of Manchester

### BOARD

Wednesday 25 February 2026

*Present:* Philippa Hird (Chair), Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair, via videoconference), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), David Buckley (via videoconference, until item 7), Lexie Baynes, Anna Dawe, 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 (until item 2), Emma Wade-Smith and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member) (21 members).

*Apologies:* Kerris Bright and Prof Soumhya Venkatesan.

*In attendance:* Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Prof Ashley Blom, Vice-President and Dean of Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health (FBMH) (item 1), Prof Allan Pacey, Deputy Dean of FBMH (item 1), Dr Beth Micakovic, Executive Director of Faculty Operations, FBMH (item 1), Prof Jenn Hallam, Vice-President, Learning, Teaching and Students (item 1), Matt Atkin, Executive Director of Planning (item 5), Dr Alison Fairclough, Head of Business Intelligence (item 5), Prof Colette Fagan, Vice-President, Research (item 2 until item 8). Dr Mauricio Alvarez, Reader in Machine Learning (item 8) and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

#### 1. Engagement session with the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health (FBMH)

**Reported:** the Chair invited members to reflect on the engagement session with colleagues and students from FBMH, which included presentations from the Vice-President and Dean of Faculty, and the Students Union Executive Officer for the Faculty, and small group discussions with colleagues and students from the Faculty.

**Noted:**

(1) Student concerns about cost of living and value for money (the latter particularly for international students) had been a consistent theme: members commented on the potential to enhance guidance in this area, helping students to navigate an increasingly complex environment, including, for example, enhancing financial literacy. This was in the context of greater national discussion of the issue of value for money, given prominence of discussion on student loan repayments.

(2) Several student comments had reflected the importance of quality student accommodation and its positive impact on the overall experience and sense of community.

(3) Developing a consistent sense of belonging for all students continued to provide a challenge given the diversity of the student community (in this context, the different experience of, for example, commuter students, was mentioned). There was potential to facilitate opportunities for greater inter-cultural engagement in the faculty student community.

(4) It was evident, particularly for international students, that the academic standing and reputation of the University continued to be a significant draw.

(5) There was reflection on the inconsistency of the student experience: this was evidenced by a wide variation in faculty NSS scores and highlighted by the tour of facilities undertaken by one of the discussion groups. In this context for example, there had been some cited examples of sub-optimal experience in relation to both assessment and feedback, and timetabling.

(6) Students had provided some examples of constructive engagement with Artificial Intelligence (AI), although it was evident that this was still an area in development (with some students less engaged)

(7) The Research group sessions had providing compelling evidence of the international, real-world impact of the faculty's research activity, exemplifying the strategic intention of positive impact on global challenges.

(8) The group session on innovation had been well-received, and several members commented on the scope for further development, to enhance commercialisation activity.

(9) There was comment on the efficacy of the long-standing cross-institutional partnership with Boots and the potential for this to be an exemplar to encourage other similar developments.

(10) The Vice-President and Dean welcomed the engagement and feedback from the Board and noted that had the make-up of the student groups been different (and included more medical students) it was likely that more issues relating to placements would have arisen. The Vice-President and Dean also commented on the imperative of increasing faculty research income which was a clear faculty priority.

(11) The Students Union Executive Officer for the Faculty reflected that the students that Board members had met were at the more engaged end of the scale, with a significant number of students lacking the opportunity and/or capacity to engage.

(12) The Chair thanked the Vice-President and Dean for an excellent session which had enhanced Board understanding of the work of the faculty.

## 2. Declarations of Interest

**Noted:** there were no new declarations of interest.

## 3. Minutes

**Agreed:** the minutes of the following meetings:

- i) Board meeting- 19 November 2025.
- ii) Joint-Board Senate meeting- 10 December 2025

**Noted:**

(1) The minutes of the joint Board-Senate meeting reflected the breadth of Senate member views on the use of AI, and the engagement of the wider University community was also reflected in the attendance at the recent Town Hall event led by the President and Vice-Chancellor (over 1,700 in attendance).

(2) A dedicated Board session on AI was planned for October, and the Chair would contact members before then to gauge the extent of individual knowledge and understanding of the AI landscape to ensure that the planned session landed well.

**Action: Chair of Board**

#### **4. Matters arising from the minutes**

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

**Noted:**

(1) In relation to the potential student group litigation, University College London (UCL) had settled the “test case” before the matter went to court. UCL’s subsequent statement explained that the confidential settlement was without admission of liability and enabled them to move forward without further expense and diversion of valuable resources away from teaching, research, and supporting their students.

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(3) A further update would be provided to the March Board meeting.

**Action: General Counsel/RSCOO**

#### **5. Manchester 2035: Dashboard metrics**

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

**Reported:**

(1) The paper included contents of the released versions of the dashboard gauges for each of the eight measures, noting that measures for innovation and brand were still in development. The dashboards include ambitions for the ten years of the strategy, which range from specific absolute numbers to relative positioning targets. They also included baseline RAG ratings based on a qualitative assessment made by the University Executive.

(2) From March onwards, reporting would include updates on measures that had changed since the previous meeting (as part of the President and Vice Chancellor’s report) along with separate deep dives on selected parts of the strategy and their associated measures. During the rest of 2025-26, updates would include final proposals for measures currently in development.

**Noted:**

(1) For transparency, the full dashboard would be made available to Board members although they would not be required to access the data as performance would be reported through circulated papers to each meeting.

(2) The innovation metric was one of those in development and it was important that measures chosen appropriately reflected the range of imperatives, e.g. impact, engagement (including from students) and income.

(3) The brand/reputation metric was also in development. The importance of considering a range of qualitative and quantitative factors that go beyond sentiment and awareness (i.e. the fulfilment of the brand promise) was recognised

(4) Generally, across all indicators, the importance of monitoring trend data over time (patterns) alongside early indicators in areas where the formal measurement/benchmark may only be available infrequently.

(5) Recognition of the importance of ensuring transparency for the Board regarding how performance relates to best ever achievement.

(6) Discussion of the Financial Sustainability metric was deferred until consideration of the Finance Committee report (item 7 below).

(7) A broader view of performance was being built for each of the Executive Committees, linked to strategic priorities within the work-packages. The deep dives would provide an opportunity to explore each of the eight areas in more detail, including an assessment of progress towards interim achievement of longer-term targets. The first deep dive on Teaching, Learning and Students was scheduled for the March meeting, followed by Brand/Reputation in May and Innovation in July: the Research deep dive would take place in the first meeting of the next academic year, in October.

(8) In relation to the carbon emissions metric, the potential to learn from good practice in the sector and beyond, reinforcing commitment to long-term ambition whilst developing complementary methods of tracking and communicating progress. Some Board members with relevant experience offered to contribute to developments in this area,

(9) Across all areas, University Executive had close and regular focus on achievement by national and global competitors

**Agreed:** whilst noting ongoing work to finalise definitions and data capture for a small number of measures, to approve the University Dashboard measures, ten-year ambitions as currently defined, and initial RAG ratings. **Action: Executive Director of Planning**

## 6. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

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

- The current broader HE policy environment
- Focus on delivery of the strategy
- Development of the Integrated Infrastructure Plan
- Partnerships: i) Microsoft and AI and ii) Manchester–GSK Institute for Small Vessel Disease of the Brain
- Brand and Reputation

### **Noted:**

(1) Increased media and public focus on the student loan system, particularly the structure and repayment terms of “Plan 2” loans and concerns that the system left many graduates carrying a disproportionate burden compared to those who studied before and after them.

(2) In addition, concerns about cost of living, limited wage growth and a challenging labour market meant that there was now a persuasive argument about intergenerational fairness, with potential implications on perceived value of a university degree. In relation to the latter, it was important to ensure that prospective students realised that “Plan 2” terms no longer applied.

(3) The Manchester 2035 strategy placed emphasis on partner enabled learning, with students working with employers, public bodies and community organisations as part of their programme and the current wider public debate about the value of degrees (including attention on the durability of the graduate earnings premium in the labour

market) made this even more relevant. Enabling student engagement with the Careers Service before arrival would also help to increase focus on employability, and it was important to note that, as demonstrated in a recent Financial Times article (circulated separately to members) graduate earnings premiums have held up or increased in the face of expanded HE enrolment in many other economies including the USA. The worsening position in the UK reflected weak productivity growth and poor economic performance more broadly.

(4) The current HE policy environment could be perceived as the result of a series of incremental changes which had failed to address the longer-term fundamental challenge of the optimal approach to funding the HE sector, noting that the UK was an OECD outlier, with students bearing most of the cost of their degree.

(5) There continued to be broad engagement across the political spectrum to ensure understanding of the full political landscape. At governmental level, the University continued to engage effectively (noting that in some policy areas there was not always a consistent message across departments).

(6) In recent media articles, the President and Vice-Chancellor had opened discussion about the future of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Whilst aspects of REF's utility were open to question, the linkage to QR funding (which represented a better return on investment than funds from other sources) and the lack of a current viable alternative meant that replacement was unlikely in the short to medium term (and aspects of its evolution over time had been constructive).

(7) As noted above in item 3, the University community was highly engaged about the development of AI, including potential impact on and implications for academic integrity, wider societal impact and ethical questions, and impact on the future of the graduate labour market (which linked to discussion in (3) above). A dedicated team of relevant Professional Services colleagues and academic subject experts was leading the University's work in this area ensuring that the University's approach remained current. The importance of developing international partnerships at scale to provide up to the minute insight and knowledge was recognised as was the importance of the right current and strategic input to "war gaming" likely impacts and opportunities and threats. Board members were keen to understand the University's assessment and approach at the earliest appropriate stage.

(8) Undergraduate applications were healthy, showing significant year on year improvement in both home and international markets and a strong position in relation to competitors. In common with the rest of the sector, the postgraduate taught market was more challenging (particularly for international students). The report recognised the need to improve integration of student marketing, communications, and internal processes which were currently too fragmented and transactional in nature.

(9) The planned development of the University's Transnational Education offer was an element of broader plans to develop and enhance flexible learning opportunities, building on existing strong foundations with the [International Centres](#) and developing strategic partnerships.

## **7. Finance matters: report from Finance Committee (4 February 2026)**

**Received:** a report on matters considered and recommendations and decisions made by Finance Committee at its 4 February 2026 meeting.

**Reported:**

(1) Finance Committee had recommended the 2026-27 capital budget and five-year plan for approval. This rolled forward the previous year's budget with further review planned when the Integrated Infrastructure Plan (IIP) was in place. It was important to be assured that the IIP was a comprehensive summary of all commitments, including the Residences Redevelopment Programme

(2) In relation to the Financial Sustainability metric (Operating Cash as a percentage of income) the Committee had recently agreed that this should match statutory reporting requirements and thus include strategic investments and working capital movements.

(3) Final determination of the target metric would await approval of the IIP in the autumn, and this would confirm the extent of ambition to meet strategic objectives (including prioritisation). The IIP would include both capital and revenue expenditure and, for example, the level of agreed revenue spend on digital infrastructure would potentially impact on available Operating Cash (and thus might require other compensating measures in relation to income generation and/or optimising the operating model). Other than the Residences Redevelopment Programme, seeking further external funding was not envisaged as an option.

(4) The Committee had recommended the approval of the strategic case for investment in the student residences. The potential for delay to financial close was noted and this had been accounted for in scenario planning.

**Agreed:** to approve the following:

- (1) Update to Capital Budget and Plan for 2026-27 Planning Cycle
- (2) Endowment Investment Portfolio Climate Change Report.
- (3) Residences Redevelopment Programme: Strategic Case for Investment
- (4) Updated Financial Regulations

**Action: Chief Financial Officer**

**8. Research Presentation**

**Received:** following brief context setting from the Vice-President (Research) on the Postgraduate Research environment, a presentation from Dr Mauricio Alvarez, Reader in Machine Learning on the Centre for Doctoral Training in Decision Making for Complex Systems.

**9. Student context- Key issues for student experience**

**Received:** the latest student context report from the two student Board members which focused on what was required for Manchester to become a more student-centred university.

**Noted:**

(1) In late November 2025, the Students' Union had launched its student basic needs centre, Essentials, a "one-stop shop" for students needing support, guidance or intervention to meet basic needs. At the time of drafting the report, over 2.600 students had visited Essentials, and this number had increased since then (the majority accessing were international and/or postgraduate students).

(2) The International Health Surcharge was a possible deterrent for international students and the potential to learn from practice in other universities which had sought to mitigate the impact of the levy.

(3) The importance of ensuring student voice in work currently being led by the Vice-President for Learning, Teaching and Students: student members confirmed that they were engaged in relevant strategic work packages.

(4). In response to questions about which measures would be most impactful in amplifying student voice, actions to increase sense of belonging, address cost of living issues and mitigate mental health concerns were all cited. Recent survey data indicated that only 46% of students believe that they can influence decisions at university level, and it was important to enhance this figure.

(5) The importance of addressing the currently fragmented approach to student communications, currently issued from multiple sources: despite good intentions this resulted in messages being confused or lost. Fixing this to ensure a One University approach was essential.

## **10. Other Board Committee reports**

### **i) Audit and Risk Committee (28 January 2026)**

**Received:** the report from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 28 January 2026.

**Noted:**

(1) The summary of the Committee's discussion of the review of governance arrangements in the Dentistry Division which had been informed by constructive discussion with the Vice-President and Dean of FBMH and senior colleagues. The Committee would receive regular updates to provide assurance on effective implementation of agreed management action.

(2) The Committee had received a further update on Information Security from the Chief Information Security Officer and had endorsed the supportive mandate provided by University Executive, including the short-term tactical plan (noting the intention to submit the master plan to the Committee in June).

(3) The Committee had met with three firms bidding for the external audit tender (with effect from financial year 2026-27) and had made a clear recommendation. Given the University's status as a Public Interest Entity, alternative options were presented to the Board.

**Agreed:** the appointment of BDO as external auditors (for three years, beginning with financial year ending 31 July 2027).

**Action: Chief Financial Officer**

### **ii) Nominations and Governance Committee (10 December 2025)**

**Received:** a report from the Nominations and Governance Committee meeting held on 10 December 2025.

**Agreed:** an amendment to Ordinance II regarding membership of the Nominations and Governance Committee, enabling addition of one of the two student Board members.

**Action: Deputy Secretary**

## **11. Governance Effectiveness Review: award of tender**

**Received:** a report summarising the tender process to select a company to carry out the external Governance Effectiveness Review

**Reported:** members of the Board had met with three firms bidding to carry out the external Governance Effectiveness Review and this had produced a clear recommendation. References had been taken up, and these were satisfactory,

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**Action: Deputy Secretary**

## 12. Senate

**Received:** a report from the meeting of Senate held on 11 February 2026

**Noted:**

(1) Exceptionally, and following considered discussion at the Senate meeting, Senate was recommending rescission of a degree to the Board for the reasons outlined in the report.

(2) The importance of ensuring a range of voices at Senate meetings and that language used in meetings was appropriate.

**Agreed:** on the recommendation of Senate, the rescission of a degree award as outlined in the report.

**Action: Deputy Secretary**

## 13. Proposed Change to Statute XIII and related Ordinances

**Received:** a report proposing the formal establishment of an Independent External Chair (IEC) function for employment relations panels, replacing the current involvement of lay Board members.

**Reported:**

(1) The aim of the change was to strengthen governance, impartiality and procedural rigour in grievance, disciplinary and appeals hearings.

(2) The change required amendments to Statute XIII (and supporting Ordinances). In accordance with the requirements of the University Charter, Senate and General Assembly had been provided with an opportunity to express an opinion on changes to Statute. The changes to Statutes and Ordinances had been negotiated with UCU as the appropriate recognised trade union.

**Noted:** Nominations and Governance Committee would select IECs following a shortlisting process involving UCU as the appropriate recognised trade union and ensuring a capable and diverse range of IECs was crucial.

**Agreed:**

(1) To recommend approval of the changes to Statute XIII to Privy Council

(2) To approve the changes to Ordinance II and Ordinance XXII.

**Action: Deputy Secretary**

**14. Chair's report**

**Noted:**

(1) The update on progress on the review of the Committee of University Chairs Code

(2) The latest Board forward look

**15. Secretary's report**

**Received:** the report on Exercise of Delegations covering the recent award of Emeritus Professorships, reappointment of the Chair of Manchester University press and the use of the Seal.

**16. Dates of remaining 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 March 2026

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Wednesday 15 July 2026 (all day)

Thursday 16 July 2026 (9am-12pm)