The University of Manchester

BOARD

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Present: Philippa Hird (Chair), Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair, except item 8), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), Kerris Bright, David Buckley (except item 8), Lexie Baynes, Anna Dawe, Guy Grainger (except item 8), Dr Reinmar Hager, Tom Jirat, Prof Paul Mativenga, Sarah Munby, Jatin Patel (via videoconference), Prof Hema Radhakrishnan, Matthew Scullion, Prof Fiona Smyth, Rachel Studd, Paul Thwaite, Prof Soumhya Venkatesan, Emma Wade-Smith and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member) (20 members).

Apologies: Amrit Dhillon, Deirdre Evans, Tony Raven and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member)

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, Prof Jenn Hallam, Vice-President, Learning, Teaching and Students, Prof Sarah Sharples, Vice-President and Dean of Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE) and members of the FSE Executive (item 1), Dr Simon Merrywest, Executive Director for the Student Experience (item 7), Kate Cambden, Executive Director of Development and Alumni Relations (item 9), Prof Mike Brockhurst, Chair in Evolutionary Biology (item 10) and Mark Rollinson (Deputy Secretary).

1. Engagement session with the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE)

Reported: the Chair invited members to reflect on the engagement session with colleagues and students from FSE. Members of the FSE Executive attended for this discussion.

. **Noted:**

(1) The importance of ensuring consistency of student experience, building on areas of excellent practice. There was recognition of the challenges in managing the expectations of a large and diverse student body. Several members commented on the positive view of the faculty from students, noting some frustration about the efficacy of supporting systems. In a specific example, there was praise for the work of the Access, Student Development and Success Team.

(2) In relation to student voice, encouragement from some students for management to articulate more clearly the rationale for decisions.

(3) Comments about the importance of student societies to the overall student experience and their role in encouraging a sense of belonging and community and reflection on how this be enhanced in the future (noting their complementary role to the more formal curriculum).

(4) Reflections on diversity, including providing space for discussion, and the extent to which the composition of the student body was reflected in the make-up of colleagues within the faculty. On specifics, there was also discussion about male domination in some STEM areas and encouraging efforts to remove barriers. There was discussion about the value of scholarships as an effective tool to promote diversity.

(5) Given increased scrutiny of the value proposition of higher education, recognition of the importance of demonstrating value and quality.

(6) Reported student anxiety about potential for academic malpractice in relation to use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the importance of supporting productive, proportionate and ethical use of AI.

(7) The Maker Space was seen as a valuable resource by students but there were some reported difficulties in ensuring access.

(8) Numerous examples of colleague engagement with strategy development and implementation had emerged during discussion, which was encouraging.

(9) Graduate Internships were welcomed by students although there was some variation in experience.

(10) In relation to research, examples of the impact of discovery-based research, the benefits of inter-disciplinary research and effective commercialisation (noting some discussion about the potential tension between this and pure, "blue skies" research). There were numerous examples of effective and value adding partnerships both with industry and other universities.

(11) The importance of continuity of funding for research and in this context, examples of resilience where colleagues had successfully adapted to a change of funding environment. There was recognition of the importance of cost recovery and consistent and effective workload management.

(12) The Vice-President and Dean welcomed the engagement and feedback from the Board on the session which had demonstrated the breadth of the faculty's academic activity (there were some specific operational issues which emerged during discussion that would be pursued).

(13) The Chair thanked the Vice-President and Dean for an excellent session which had enhanced Board understanding of the work of the faculty and emphasised the Board's pride in the work of colleagues and students.

2. Declarations of Interest

Noted: there were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2026 subject to the following addition:

Item 12, Noted (2): (additional text in italics):

"The importance of ensuring a range of voices at Senate meetings and that language used in meetings was appropriate. *The Union Affairs Officer commented that that Senate was a particularly challenging environment for student voice".*

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, a confidential update on implications arising from the settlement of the University College London (UCL) case. The Board would be kept apprised of developments and given the pace at which developments might occur, members interested in more regular briefings were advised to contact the Chair or Deputy Secretary to enable arrangements to be made.

(2) The Board's engagement session on AI had been brought forward to July: the deep dive on Innovation would now take place at the May meeting, alongside consideration of research rankings.

(3) The Evolve Programme remained a good exemplar of an effective change initiative and a Board session on it would still be valuable.

Action: Deputy Secretary (to coordinate)

5. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

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

- Recent visit to China
- International conflict and impact on campus
- Government and broader sector developments
- AI
- Accountability for delivery of the strategy including the Accountability Framework

. **Reported:**

(1) The ambition and pace of development of Chinese higher education institutions, exemplified by the record number of transnational education arrangements signed. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore were also increasingly competitive in the HE market.

(2) The Challenge Accepted campaign (see also item 9 below) had landed well with alumni and events organised had been very successful.

(3) The University had strengthened its position in the QS World University rankings.

Noted:

(1) Wider reshaping of the operating environment for international higher education included government guidance on international collaboration (especially in relation to perceived foreign interference) but this should not preclude responsible engagement with China.

(2) The Board would welcome an update on the plan for strategic international collaboration, as part of the delivery of *Manchester 2035*.

Action: Deputy Secretary (to coordinate)

(3) In relation to the war in the Middle East, there was ongoing liaison and communication with impacted student communities and societies on campus. In the region, focus had been on supporting colleagues and students including those at the international centre in Dubai and the staff and students who have been working in affected countries.

(4) Concern about the government's decision to apply a 'brake' to issuing student visas from four countries that are the source of a large increase in asylum claims from people in the UK on study visas. The impact of this was felt largely outside the Russell Group (the University had approximately 70 students from these countries, many on

humanitarian scholarships). There was a potential precedent for new countries being added in future, and the decision excluded outstanding students from some of the poorest and more conflict-ridden countries in the world.

6. Student context- Key issues for student experience

Received: the latest student context report from the two student Board members which focused on student leadership.

Noted:

(1) The report focused on the importance and value of generating student leadership opportunities and the complementary roles of the curriculum and the Students' Union in facilitating this, recognising the barriers to this experience for some members of the student community.

(2) In the recent Students' Union EducateMCR 2025/26 survey, students were asked if their programme had helped them to advance key employability skills, i.e. adaptability, analytical skills, emotional resilience, time management, leadership skills, social and relational skills. Of these the response to the leadership skills question was the least positive, with 29% of respondents disagreeing with the statement that their programme had helped to develop such skills. However, the Student Leader Survey also revealed that, of students in leadership roles, 91% felt very satisfied or satisfied with being a student leader, with 85% agreeing that their student leader experience enabled them to become employable, and similarly, to build connections and networks.

(3) As set out in the student experience and employability deep dive paper (see item 7 below) embedding employability and career readiness opportunities was one of five intervention packages identified to address priority Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (TLSE) areas. The Students' Union was working in conjunction with the Directorate for Student Experience to develop a student voice toolkit consolidating existing relevant resources.

(4) The report emphasised the importance of student involvement in decision making across the institution. Recent surveys indicated an increase in the proportion of students who felt their voice was being heard and it was important to establish consistent processes across the institution to counter the perception of a lack of action from student consultation

(5) The comment that whilst working in partnership with students was essential, this was a reciprocal relationship with obligations and expectations on both sides.

7. Deep Dive: Student Experience and Employability (Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (TLSE)

Received:

(1) The deep dive report into student experience and employability which was the first of the planned Board reports on key areas of strategy delivery.

(2) A supplementary report from the Students' Union providing further insight into the current student context by examining the intersectional, lived, and diverse experiences of the student body.

Reported: the following key messages from the review.

(1) As evidenced by positive signals from the overall data story, there were signs of improvement in student experience but there was more to do to achieve ambition. In

relation to employability, there was recognition of an increasingly challenging environment.

(2) There were still major risks to address, given that the value proposition of higher education was increasingly under scrutiny and recognition that, notwithstanding the ambition of Manchester 2035, improvement was required to current supporting technology, processes and data.

(3) The number of actions has been reduced and prioritised, with clear ownership and accountability (e.g. three-year work package to deliver the change required). immediate priority elements were:

- Assessment and progression
- Enhancing employability readiness as part of the broader value proposition
- Diversifying the opportunities for learners via Manchester Online

Noted:

(1) Further to the report from Audit and Risk Committee to the February 2026 Board meeting, early, informal feedback from the General Dental Council re-inspection of the Division of Dentistry were positive, with recognition of enhancements previously reported to the Board including the reinstatement of periodic programme review

(2) The remit of Teaching, Learning and Students Committee (TLSC) covered the full student experience across living and learning. However, the deep dive report focused on the teaching and learning aspects of student experience, from access through to graduate outcomes. The supplementary report from the Students' Union covered the broader student lived experience.

(3) The report outlined a purposeful shift from distributed activity to a single, disciplined improvement system and this was welcomed by the Board. Key elements of this included:

- Fewer, clearer intervention packages, each owned by a named leader and linked to specific NSS and employability outcomes.
- Explicit and more consistent minimum expectations and process standards
- A strengthened academic and Professional Services Operating Model
- A single performance cadence through TLSC and Faculty action plans,
- A proactive external policy posture: building core working relationships with national bodies

(4) Intervention packages to address priority areas within the Leaps element of the delivery plan covered curriculum, assessment and feedback reform, student voice and student experience, Partner Enabled Learning (PEL), employability and career readiness and partnerships and AI-enabled innovation.

(5) The five-year plan included investment in small-scale TLSE strategic initiatives aligned to the priorities, funding for Manchester Online, and significant investment in bursaries and scholarships. Some unallocated funding remained, to be directed to areas that will generate the greatest benefit to student experience and employability initiatives (e.g. processes and system investment)

(6) The launch of the Campaign also provided an opportunity for alignment with student experience and employability ambitions.

(7) The operating model across academic leadership and professional services had been strengthened with clearer responsibilities for the student experience and employability agenda at all layers.

(8) The report set out the approach to evaluation of progress, using a balanced set of measures, both externally visible outcomes (NSS and Graduate Outcomes) and internal leading indicators that can be tracked more frequently and at programme level. Relatively small improvements in key areas had the ability to drive significant improvements in external indicators, creating a positive feedback loop.

(9) As noted above, the importance of embedding employability and career readiness skills across the entirety of the student experience.

(10) National and international rankings demonstrated the University's strong reputation for graduate employability and Manchester remained the most visited University campus for graduate employers. However, the Graduate Outcomes Survey showed that the University performed relatively poorly in response to the question, 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity/activities'. To address this lack of understanding of skills gain, a pilot framework, including a self-reflection tool and a personalised report to discuss with academic advisors was in development.

(11) Development and enhancement of partnership with employers would be a key contributory factor to the success of PEL.

(12) The importance of a consistent and coherent approach to delivery across academic and Professional Services colleagues: the Delivery Handbook provided the framework for leading and delivering improvement across the University. The Handbook set our core expectations of leaders, including acting as champions for the success of initiatives, communicating the rationale for change, active listening and role modelling behaviours.

Agreed:

(1) To note the Data Story including baseline performance and external positioning in the two University Dashboard metrics owned through TLSC and the ambitions to 2035, and the signals from analysis of subject-level data and leading indicators

(2) To endorse the 2025/26 to 2026/27 priority intervention packages, including the linked investments, policy/process changes and expected outcomes.

(3) To note the strengthened operating model (academic and PS) and the repositioning of Manchester's external policy engagement with key sector bodies

(4) To receive a short update (timed to coincide with NSS 2026 and the annual dashboard refresh in July) summarising progress, impact measures and any changes to the risk profile **Action: Deputy Secretary (to coordinate)**

8. Report from Nominations and Governance Committee (4 March 2026)

Received: a report from the meeting of Nominations and Governance Committee held on 4 March 2026.

Agreed that**:**

(1) Ann Barnes be appointed for a final term of one year, as Deputy Chair, until 31 August 2027.

(2) Guy Grainger be appointed for an additional term of three years until 31 August 2029.

(3) David Buckley be appointed as co-Deputy Chair of the Board in 2026-27, assuming sole occupancy of the role in 2027-28

(Members named above recused themselves from consideration of this item.)

9. Campaign Update

Received: an update on the *Challenge Accepted* campaign, which was now in the public phase.

Reported:

(1) *Challenge Accepted* was an early flagship initiative of *From Manchester for the world*, and activity under its purview was crucial to strategic priority areas. The campaign was aligned with and a crucial contributor to objectives across the first *From Manchester for the world* three-year work package.

(2) Early launch activity had been well received, with visibility and momentum building following events and marketing, communications, and engagement activity. Progress was being made in key areas, but sustainable advancements were not always easy nor straightforward. Realising ambitions will require sustained commitment and time.

(3) Campaign financial and volunteering targets remained on track, although the 2025/26 financial target depends on the timing of a lead gift.

Noted:

(1) The Board had an important role to play in supporting the delivery of the campaign and maximising strategic impact.

(2) The campaign had the potential to impact across the full range of the University's strategic ambitions. Maximising opportunities for positive media stories would help raise the University's profile (especially amongst non-alumni) and create a healthy fundraising environment.

(3) It was relatively unusual for an institution to embark on a major philanthropic campaign at the same time as the launch of a new strategy and the University could benefit from the synergy and sense of momentum created by this.

(4) Further updates (including detailed financial analysis) would be provided to the meetings of Finance Committee and the Board in the autumn.

Action: Deputy Secretary (to coordinate)

10. Research Presentation

Received: a presentation from Prof Mike Brockhurst, Chair in Evolutionary Biology (Within Patient Emergence of Antibiotic Resistance in the Clinic)

11. Report from Finance Committee (20 March 2026)

Received: a report noting that Finance Committee had met on 20 March 2026, after circulation of papers for the Board meeting. Items for consideration by the Committee (update on Residences Redevelopment Programme (RRP) and recommended disposal of Wythenshawe Playing Fields) had been appended to the report (updated Financial Thresholds were included elsewhere on the agenda, see item 14). The report provided the basis for a verbal update from the Chair of the Committee.

Reported:

[redacted]

[redacted]

Redacted – restricted information

Agreed: to approve the disposal of Wythenshawe Playing Fields

Action: Chief Financial Officer

12. Update on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

Received: a report outlining activity to operationalise the Policy and Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom (approved by the Board in July 2025) this academic year as well as providing wider public policy and discourse context.

Noted:

(1) The Board welcomed the evident thorough review and audit of relevant institutional policy and procedure and related documentation. Given the focus on international partnerships from the OfS, further review of relevant documentation referred to in the audit tracker was encouraged to ensure compliance. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

(2) The Board would keep this matter under active review, scheduling time for updates and consideration of broader context. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

13. Update on Governance Effectiveness Review

[redacted] ***Redacted – restricted information***

14. Updated Scheme of Delegation

Received: a revised Scheme of Delegation, including revised Financial Thresholds matrix.

Reported:

(1) The current Scheme of Delegation was initially approved by the Board in July 2022 and had been adopted by the Board on annual basis (each October) since then.

(2) The current scheme had been subject to a light touch review coordinated by the Governance Office to ensure that it reflects recent governance and other operational changes. The Financial Thresholds had been updated to reflect changes agreed by the Board and delegations for the University Executive, Infrastructure Committee and Primary budget holders.

(3) The Financial Thresholds report included, for information, an Infrastructure Projects decision tree.

Agreed: to approve the revised Scheme of Delegation and Financial Thresholds subject to the addition of the following as a caveat to the Financial Thresholds:

“Regardless of delegated financial authority levels, expenditure on matters which are novel and/or contentious and/or repercussive should be referred to the Board before approval.”

Action: Chief Financial Officer

15. University Executive (16 February-16 March 2026)

Received: a summary report of University Executive meetings held between 16 February and 16 March 2026

16. Secretary’s report

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

17. 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 20 May 2026
Wednesday 15 July 2026 (all day)
Thursday 16 July 2026 (9am-12pm)