The University of Manchester

BOARD

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Present: Philippa Hird (Chair), Prof Duncan Ivison (President and Vice-Chancellor), Kerris Bright, David Buckley, Lexie Baynes, 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 (via videoconference), Prof Soumhya Venkatesan, Emma Wade-Smith and Natasha Traynor (Associate Member) (21 members).

Apologies: Ann Barnes, Anna Dawe

In attendance: Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), Carol Prokopyszyn, Chief Financial Officer, John Holden, Vice-President, Civic Engagement and Innovation (item 6), Prof Aline Miller, Associate Vice-President, Enterprise (Item 6), Prof Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, Executive Director and Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (item 8), Prof Colette Fagan, Vice-President, Research (from item 8) and Mark Rollinson, Deputy Secretary.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

   Noted: [redacted]

   Redacted – restricted information

2. **Minutes**

   Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2026.

3. **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 Faculty of Science and Engineering engagement session, the minutes referred to specific operational issues which would be pursued. Confirmation was received that a specific health and safety issue referred to had been addressed.

   (2) In relation to the potential student group litigation, a further confidential update on implications arising from the settlement of the University College London case. An Executive level group had been established, and Board members who had expressed interest were being kept apprised (any other interested members could be added). There was recognition of the importance of internal communications and messaging

4. **President and Vice-Chancellor's report**

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

- Tackling antisemitism
- Freedom of Speech and the Office for Students following the recent High Court judgment in the case brought by University of Sussex against the Office for Students (OfS)
- Delivery of the strategy, including progress on the delivery of the first set of strategic work packages
- Managing risk, including development of the new Strategic Risk Register (see item 10 below)
- Listening to colleagues (reflections on visits to Schools and cultural institutions)
- Campaign and alumni engagement, including the launch of "Challenge Accepted" in Toronto and New York.

. **Reported:**

(1) An update on concerns about sexual harassment, initially raised in an open letter to the President and Vice-Chancellor by a student in the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health. Further concerns had been raised, and all of these were being followed up systematically.

(2) The University was providing support to the initial complainant (including in relation to media engagement) and listening exercises were being held with students and academic colleagues. The reports had attracted some media attention. A further update would be provided to the Board at its next meeting.

Noted:

(1) In relation to references in the President and Vice-Chancellor's report about the professional services model and service delivery, questions from members about the potential impact of application of AI. A specific group was evaluating institutional opportunities, and the University was committed to a purposeful approach, aligned to strategy and focused on improvements to service and student and colleague experience.

(2) It was important that sequencing and prioritisation of the approach was optimal. This entailed removing complexity and addressing foundational issues (e.g. core systems and data) which would underpin subsequent delivery of leaps in the strategy. Notwithstanding this, the University's historical deficit in some areas (e.g. lack of an integrated CRM) might enable technological leaps to current, cutting-edge solutions.

(3) The Board endorsed the systematic service by service approach to improvement, noting that this would have implications for overall staffing levels and skills mix: for example, effective use of technology to automate and enable self-service for routine matters would enable increased focus on roles which are primarily face-to-face, where these enhance student and colleague experience,

(4) The scale of early adopter sign-up to Microsoft Copilot (over 2,000 colleagues) was an indication of the appetite for adoption of AI to improve efficiency.

(5) Reference to the recent UE simulation exercise which focused on a significant disruption to the China recruitment market and short- and medium-term responses. Further UE simulation exercises were planned.

(6) Reflections on the current political situation and the potential national and regional implications of plausible different scenarios.

(7) In relation to Manchester Online, assessment of market reaction and the scale of demand were key elements of the business case, and the appointment of a flex partner would inform future market positioning. The start-up phase would enable sustained and longer-term delivery of flexible, digitally enabled education at scale, and delivery of new income streams, noting the consequent impact on desired academic skills mix (e.g. increased proportion of academic colleagues recruited for teaching skills and capability).

5. Student context- Key issues for student experience

Received: the latest student context report from the two student Board members which focused on brand value proposition and the importance of ensuring that brand, reputation, and student experience match student expectations and lived realities (noting that students are an integral part of the brand).

Noted:

(1) The report focused on the variability and inconsistency of the student experience and members discussed how this might best be addressed. Improvements to foundational systems as outlined above and consequential improvements in quality and reliability of data would help to unpack issues and enable targeted action.

(2) The introduction of Future Foundations would embed greater visibility of line management and targeted related work would help to establish a more standard approach to management span of control.

(3) A recent report to Remuneration and People Committee considered the relationship between the colleague and student experience with further work planned to support delivery of the strategy.

(4) Student perception of brand began very early in the recruitment and application cycle.

(5) Student responses highlighted in the report did not highlight innovation or entrepreneurship as a significant factor contributing to the university brand.

(6) Students had been involved in the work to develop and mature the brand proposition, and the Union Affairs Officer had led on this for the Students' Union.

(7) In response to a question, from a student perspective, meaningful co-creation included active and ongoing consultation and understanding the rationale for proposals and changes.

(8) The potential impact of changes in the political landscape on current and prospective future international students.

(9) The survey indicated a disparity of student views on the use of AI. An integral element of the Microsoft Copilot partnership was building AI literacy for future employability, and it was important to encourage a developed and critical understanding of AI amongst students.

6. Deep Dive: Innovation

Received: the deep dive report providing an overview of the University's innovation agenda. The report set out draft ten-year performance indicators and targets, alongside a three-year innovation action plan, designed to deliver a step change in the University's innovation performance.

Reported: the following key messages from the review

(1) The need to raise ambition and the scale of operation, becoming more agile and responsive to the needs of colleagues, students, and commercial and funding partners, developing a more integrated “One University” innovation system

(2) Positioning innovation at the heart of the student experience, including through entrepreneurship education and partner enabled learning,

(3) Contributing to building the regional innovation ecosystem, playing a leading role in regional partnerships to shape policy, funding and future devolution. Sister was central to this ambition, and the meeting had been preceded by a visit to the Renold Innovation Hub (a deep dive on Sister was scheduled for the July Finance Committee).

(4) Five key performance indicators (KPIs) and targets were proposed to monitor progress to 2035 and drive performance improvement, in summary:

- a three-fold increase in innovation income
- ensuring student participation in entrepreneurship education or training and/or Partner enabled learning
- creating ten high-quality spinouts each year
- developing meaningful, contractual relationships with 150 firms located on Sister
- rank in the top 2% globally for UN Sustainable Development Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) in the THE Impact rankings.

Noted:

(1) The potential for the proposed KPIs to be more stretching, particularly in relation to innovation income. In this context, this metric had been static for a decade and there was recognition that agreed targets should be both aspirational and achievable. The Board encouraged further reflection on the innovation income metric including the potential to incorporate both intermediate measures over the life of the strategy and comparator data with major competitors. Ensuring current and future accountability for delivery was also essential.

(2) The innovation income metric reflected the University’s contribution to both civic and societal benefit and institutional financial resilience.

(3) The report referenced the importance of mobilising and continuously developing the University’s “full stack” portfolio of innovation capabilities and the Board encouraged reflection on whether the proposed KPIs fully captured that. Members posited the potential for a relative ranking of KPIs to facilitate prioritisation. Members also reflected that there was further work to do to better integrate the University’s innovation services and capabilities to realise the full potential of the “full stack” offer internally and externally.

(4) Quantitative indicators as outlined above would be complemented by the systematic collection of case studies (with a target to support more 4*REF impact case studies) and qualitative impact evidence, alongside jobs and GVA data to assess wider economic benefit for the region and the UK. Routine monitoring of inclusion measures, including EDI, would also be undertaken to understand who participates in, and benefits from, the University’s innovation activity.

(5) There was reflection on the cultural change needed to drive the agenda forward, including promotions criteria process and outcomes, relevant policy change (e.g relating to secondments) and effective and meaningful incentives, noting that insufficient progress would be made through reliance on goodwill, given other imperatives.

(6) Notwithstanding the student context report referenced above, there was evidence of growing student demand for and engagement in entrepreneurship (e.g increase in student start-ups from 28 in 2020/21 to 64 in 2024/25, second best in the Russell Group) with potential to develop this further. Purposeful student innovation would place the University in a distinctive place in the Russell Group and there was confirmation that innovation is a foundational contributor to the overall brand proposition.

(8) The report noted the potential to improve Intellectual Property performance, and it was important to develop the necessary infrastructure and supporting framework to encourage opportunity. Development of major 'blockbuster' licences or spinouts were significant contributors to competitor performance.

(9) Income from philanthropy had increased significantly since the launch of the Campaign. Confirmed and expected new funds of £5.25m had been raised for 2025/26 to support innovation activity - [redacted] ***Redacted – restricted information***

The Board encouraged strategic and tactical efforts to enhance this further.

(10) There was recognition of the importance of activity securing long-term and sustained benefits for local communities.

Agreed:

(1) To endorse the proposed direction and three-year priorities as set out in the report, noting the University's steady starting position relative to UK peers and the case for a step-change in innovation performance.

(2) To provide broad support for the proposed KPI framework and as noted above to encourage further reflection on detail and particularly, the level of ambition.

(3) To note that final action plan would be published in September 2026.

Action: Vice President Civic Engagement and Innovation and Associate Vice President (Enterprise).

7. Report from Finance Committee (5 May 2026 (meeting) and 20 May 2026 (briefing))

Received: a report from the meeting of Finance Committee on 5 May 2026 and a verbal report on the briefing for Finance Committee members held earlier on 20 May 2026. The report from the 5 May meeting included the full presentation made to that committee on the Residences Redevelopment Programme covering legal and commercial structure, financial position, key risks and mitigations and the path to financial close. The report from Finance Committee also included a Frequently Asked Questions document which addressed deliverability and risk, including residual risk after financial close.

Reported:

(1) Members were reminded that the programme would deliver over 3,300 en-suite bedrooms and would address the current position whereby only 43% of current accommodation met the good condition standard compared to a Russell Group average of 75%. The scheme was the biggest in the sector and would help to shape the future identity of the University.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Redacted – restricted information

Action: Deputy Secretary (to organise)

8. Research Presentation

Received: a presentation from Prof Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, Executive Director and Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute.

Noted: philanthropic ambitions as outlined in the report were welcomed, noting the need to ensure this was appropriately aligned and integrated with other activity at institutional level.

9. University Dashboard Performance Update

Received: a report setting out updates on specific performance metrics refreshed since the previous meeting.

Reported: the following updates

(1) *Research – Increasing the number of QS subjects in the top 10 and top 25 globally*. The RAG status of this measure was Amber as, although there had been a

slight improvement in the KPI, the results were mixed and remain behind peer institutions. Further details on actions will be provided to the Board in the deep-dive scheduled for October 2026.

(2) *Colleague engagement – achieving year on year improvement in colleague engagement scores from the Your Voice Matters survey*. The RAG was Green as both response rates and engagement scores improved, and the University was ahead of higher education benchmarks.

(3) The following would shortly be announced (currently embargoed):

- 1st in the World in THE Impact rankings (based on achievement against UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2nd in 2025)
- 40th in the QS World University Rankings (35th in 2025)

Noted:

(1) Whilst the University performed well in some contributory QS ranking measures (e.g. reputation), it was essential to improve citations, an area where Manchester's performance had lagged competitors for some time. Addressing this required a combination of sustained and targeted recruitment and encouraging in-house improvement.

(2) Recent improvement in QS performance of Chinese universities had potential implications for international recruitment. The University was aware of shifts in the market, hence increased focus on partnership arrangements (e.g. 2+2, 3+1 degrees with study in both countries).

(3) There was recognition of the positive impact of marginal gains in performance on QS ranking outcomes and this was the focus of the work of the Rankings Task Force.

(4) The improvement in colleague engagement was welcomed, noting the interaction between positive student and colleague experience as referenced above in a recent report to Remuneration and People Committee. As the sophistication of data analysis increased, it would be possible to track the correlation between staff engagement, student satisfaction and research performance.

Agreed: to approve the updates and RAG status, noting actions underway to improve performance and plans for future reports on the Dashboard.

10. Report from Audit and Risk Committee (22 April 2026)

Received: a report from the meeting of Audit and Risk Committee held on 22 April 2026.

Reported:

(1) The latest iteration of the Strategic Risk Register (SRR) represented a significant step forward in the maturity of strategic risk management at the University. The next iteration of the SRR would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee incorporating input from and reflection on further planned workshops.

(2) The Uniac update included a review of expenses which contained some high-risk findings and a companion report from the CFO noted the need for all parties in the process to be reminded of their roles and responsibilities, to strengthen approval controls.

(3) The Committee had received confirmation of the appointment of two new co-opted members.

11. Report from Nominations and Governance Committee (22 April and 7 May 2026)

Received: a report from the meeting of Nominations and Governance Committee held on 22 April and 7 May 2026.

Agreed:

(1) To approve the recommendation that Sarah Munby be appointed as Chair of Audit and Risk Committee from 1 September 2026 (Sarah Munby recused herself from the meeting for this item).

(2) Following the decision to pause the Governance Effectiveness Review, to endorse the proposal that KPMG be approached to ascertain continued interest in the contract for the work. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

12. Report from Remuneration and People Committee (29 April 2026)

Received: a report from the meeting of Remuneration and People Committee held on 29 April 2026.

Agreed:

(1) To approve amended Terms of Reference

(2) To approve the Remuneration Policy.

(3) To proceed with the process outlined in the Contracts Procedure to deal with those colleagues considered to be at risk on open ended contracts linked to finite funding for the period from 1 January 2027 to 30 June 2027 and that the University continues to take all steps outlined in the report to avoid the need for redundancy wherever this is possible.

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

13. Report from Senate (22 April 2026)

Received: a report from the meeting of Senate held on 22 April 2026.

Noted:

(1) The importance of encouraging engagement and a plurality of voices at Senate.

(2) The above issue and developing understanding of the role of Senate could usefully be addressed in the forthcoming Effectiveness Review.

14. University Executive (23 March-5 May 2026)

Received: a summary report of University Executive meetings held between 23 March and 5 May 2026.

15. Chair's Report

Received: the latest iteration of the Board forward look.

16. Secretary's report

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

17. Any other business

Noted:

(1) To encourage Board reflection, at future Board meetings, the Chair would nominate two members to provide immediate feedback on the conduct of the meeting. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

(2) Immediate thoughts from members on the current meeting included:

- the importance of further reflection on how best to address inconsistency of experience and ensure accountability. Improvements in data and process in train would begin to address this and it was suggested that this would be a helpful item for a future Board meeting.
- encouraging continued attention on the size and content of Board packs.

17. Dates of meetings

Noted: the following:

Remaining Dates in 2025-26

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

Dates in 2026-27 (all 12pm-6pm unless stated: selected Board meetings to be followed by a dinner

Tuesday 6 October 2026
Wednesday 18 November 2026
Wednesday 24 February 2027
Wednesday 24 May 2027
Wednesday 19 May 2027
Wednesday 14 July 2027 (all day) and Thursday 15 July 2027 (9am-12pm)