APPROVED

The University of Manchester

Senate
Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research)

13 May 2026

Present: Professor Colette Fagan (Chair) (minutes 1 & 4-14), Professor Sarah Haigh, Professor David Matthews, Dr Rachel Miller (to minute 9), Professor James Pattison, Professor Tim Stallard, Professor Arpana Verma, Dr Andrew Walsh, Professor Melissa Westwood, and Professor Anne White.
In Attendance for all items: Jane Holland (Governance Manager) (minutes).
In attendance for minutes 1-5: Sarah Albutt (Head of Research Strategy Team) and Claire Faichnie (Research Strategy Projects Manager).
In attendance for minute 11c: Aline Miller (Associate Vice-President - Enterprise).

Apologies: Professor Lynne Bianchi, Professor Richard Curry, Professor Maggie Gale, Professor Thomas Schmidt, Professor Chris Taylor, Professor Andy Trafford, and Professor Angelia Wilson.

1 Welcome and Declarations of Interest
Noted:
a) the Chair welcomed the Faculty Vice-Dean for Research and Innovation (FSE) to her first AQSC Research meeting;
b) that there were no declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Agreed: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2026.

3 Action Log
Noted: the Action Log.

4 Matters Arising
Noted:
a) that the Action Log for Senate and its sub-committees was available for review via a link to the Senate SharePoint page;
b) the actions for AQSC Research would be separately defined for Committee members for future meetings. **Action: Governance Manager**

5 Preview of M2035 Delivery Plan
Received: the draft M2035 Delivery Plan.

Noted:
a) the Research Delivery Plan development was informed by the consultation and engagement for the design of the M2035 strategy and the annual research away day in September informed by the annual assurance cycle. The detail has been developed by the Research

Committee with input from Faculty leadership teams and School Research Directors. The seven priorities will remain for phase 1 of the delivery, setting the frame for the more detailed work packages designed and led by Research Committee and its sub-groups. A member commented that the document did not explicitly reflect activity already under way. The Plan was the working document of the Research Committee and its sub-groups and was not intended to be shared more widely; it was brought to the Committee for comment and discussion. The comms launch would detail the priorities and new activity in a clear format for the wider audience;

b) a member raised concern around the potential impact on the REF cycle. It was confirmed that Phase 1 of the Plan aligned with the REF. The University's REF team and Units of Assessment (UoA) Leads were well placed to support the REF preparations and it was emphasised that REF remained a significant priority; this will be made clear when the delivery plan is launched
c) A member asked about the visibility of research-led teaching. The Vice-President for Research and the Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students are co-sponsoring a project through the Institute of Teaching and Learning which includes a review of the pedagogic literature on research-led teaching. The Vice-President for Research would also attend an engagement with the new Teaching, Learning and Students Leadership Team which would focus on developing a clear picture of existing activity in this area as part of the Delivery Plan for the Platforms which will be reflected in the Teaching and Learning Delivery Plan when that is launched;
d) the comms summary would be updated to make reference to; 1) research-led teaching, and 2) the REF, and would be circulated to Committee members in advance of the June launch. **Action: Head of Research Strategy Team/Research Strategy Projects Manager**

6 Forward Agenda: Schedule of Committee Business for 2025-26

Noted:

a) the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (Research) Forward Agenda;
b) members were invited to contribute items for the Forward Agenda for 2026-27.

7 Chair's Update

Noted: an oral update on research and general University matters.

a) the Vice-President for Research report to Senate had been included in the Committee papers to provide an opportunity for members to discuss and comment on any matters;
b) the 2035 Delivery Plan was scheduled for launch in June, in a reader-friendly format;
c) UKRI's messaging and delivery had stabilised, with forward announcement of funding calls and streamlined processes; however, we will continue to watch closely and escalate any concerns via the Russell Group
d) the REF remained a sector-wide priority, with continued work on the Strategy, People, Culture and Environment element of reporting;
e) there had been ongoing developments in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom, including the Office for Students case against the University of Sussex, and broader geopolitical concerns affecting international students, international research and partnerships.

8 University Risk Register (research-related items)

Noted:

a) that work to develop the new format for the Strategic Risk Register was progressing and, following dedicated risk workshops, a new template risk register formulated to specifically capture research risk. As this work was in progress, it was suggested that the Executive Director for Compliance and Risk would be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an overview of the new format; **Action: Governance Manager**
b) the Committee considered whether the risk register would capture potential political developments. While not explicitly highlighted, national and international geopolitical risks were incorporated within the revised framework;

c) the updated approach strengthened the strategic focus of the register, emphasising interconnected risks, including geopolitical instability and crisis scenarios, and supporting substantive mitigation. Risks relating to infectious diseases, organisational resilience, and health and safety were captured within existing categories;
d) the risk of attracting and retaining world-leading talent in a changing global context was highlighted, reflecting a forward-looking and strategic approach to risk management.

9 Briefing on Research Degrees & Researcher Development (RDRD) Activity
Received: RDRD Activity Report

Noted:
a) there had been continued focus on supporting PGR and Research staff development to provide a consistent experience University-wide, and support long-term progression;
b) in relation to supervisors and PIs, the emphasis had been on sustaining good supervision and outcomes for early career researchers;
c) the PGR Voice survey response rate had declined from 36% in 2024-25 to 19% in 2025-26. Specific engagement events had been convened to encourage PGRs to participate in the survey. Broader challenges of engagement were recognised, including duplication of feedback mechanisms and demands on time. Alignment of the PGR survey with other surveys would be considered, to reduce duplication and survey fatigue; **Action: Manchester Doctoral College/UMSU PGR Representative**
d) Information on the size of the PGR and Research Staff would be included in future RDRD Activity reports. This would provide context and scale to any issues, and would include trends to support the interpretation of metrics; **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research and Innovation**
e) information detailing support for PGRs to successful completion was shared by the Manchester Doctoral College. The Associate Deans PGR would be aware of areas requiring additional support, which would also be indicated by the outcomes of the year end reviews. Opportunities would be explored to share and promote best practice in supporting PGRs to completion across the faculties. **Action: Associate Vice-President for Research and Innovation and Manchester Doctoral College**

10 REF 2019 Update
Noted:
a) the REF Code of Practice had been submitted to Research England following consultation through Senate and University Executive. A response was expected within three months, with activity continuing as planned;
b) the research review exercise had concluded and will be reported to the REF Project Board in June, it is anticipated that we will need to continue to progress raising the quality of outputs so that there are more 4* in the submission ;
c) progress on impact case studies was on track, with a review concluding in June ahead of a summer stocktake;
d) preparatory work for the Strategy, People and Research Environment element was complete, pending final guidance expected in the autumn term;
e) UoA leads had been updated, and drafting of statements would commence after the guidance had been issued;
f) a draft version of the Code of Practice had been published on StaffNet and would be corrected. **Action: Vice-President for Research/Research Culture and Assessment Project Manager**

(Secretary's note: Update provided by the Research Culture and Assessment Project Manager.)

11 Policy Review
Received: Updates to the Visiting Postgraduate Researcher Policy and the Posthumous and Aegrotat Award of Postgraduate Research Policy. The draft PhD by Enterprise Programme Handbook.

Noted:

a) the Visiting Postgraduate Researcher Policy had undergone comprehensive review and consultation. The Policy had been updated to improve clarity around scope, expectations and responsibilities, and to ensure alignment with current regulatory and immigration requirements;
b) A minor update to the Posthumous and Aegrotat Policy had similarly undergone comprehensive review and consultation focussing on clarity and consistency rather than a change in approach. Points 2.4 and 2.5 contained conflicting information and would be revised;
c) the Committee raised a number of comments on the draft PhD by Enterprise Programme Handbook, particularly:
    i. regarding the specification of the first-year review and examination arrangements, it was noted that requiring two independent assessors was appropriate. Specifying a time duration was considered overly prescriptive and would be removed. The timing of the first-year review was clarified as occurring at nine months, and this would be clearly articulated in the documentation to manage expectations; **Action: Associate Vice-President – Enterprise**
    ii. there would need to be clear delineation of examiner roles, distinguishing academic and enterprise elements, and the inclusion of defined criteria for appointing entrepreneurs as external examiners; **Action: Associate Vice-President – Enterprise**

Agreed: to approve the minor updates to:

a) Visiting Postgraduate Researcher Policy;
b) Posthumous and Aegrotat Award of Postgraduate Research Policy, subject to clarification of points 2.4 & 2.5.

12 Updates to Committee's Terms of Reference: Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

Received: proposed updates to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Noted: a proposed minor amendment to the Committee's terms of reference to include reference to the University's responsibilities to Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

Agreed: to recommend to Senate the update to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

13 Thanks to Members

Noted:

a) the Chair thanked members for their continued contributions to the work of the Committee. Departing members approaching the end of their term were:
    i. Professor David Matthews (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2026);
    ii. Professor James Pattison (Elected member of Senate: term ending on 31 August 2026);
    iii. Rachel Miller (outgoing UMSU PGR Officer);
b) that Professor Lynne Bianchi had been re-elected to Senate;
c) dates for the 2026-27 Committee meetings would be confirmed. **Action: Governance Manager**

14 Information Items

Noted:

a) the Vice-President for Research report to 22 April Senate;
b) Research and Impact @ Manchester Newsletter - providing details of the University's research and impact activities and associated events;

c) Social Responsibility Update: report to 22 April Senate.