HUMANITIES FACULTY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 October 2026

Present:	Fiona Smyth (Chair), James Evans, Alvin Birdi, Khalid Nadvi, Claire Alexander, Stuart Hyde, Chloe Nahum-Claudel, Paul Armstrong, Sofia Yasmin, Roddy Hawkins, Roaa Ali, Marion Vannier, Tatiana Martinez, Paul Smith, Ransford Antwi Acheampong, Louise Cain
Apologies:	Fiona Devine, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Alec Severs, Ken McPhail (Stuart Hyde in attendance), Maggie Gale, Sofia Parker
In attendance:	Gemma Keaveney (note-taker), Victoria Roberts, Clare Northen, Kathryn Howard, Amanda Grimshaw for item 3

1 Welcome, introductions, apologies, and Terms of Reference

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Members introduced themselves and the Terms of Reference were approved.

2 Minutes and actions of previous meeting

The outstanding action from the previous meeting had been completed and the minutes of the July 2026 meeting were approved as an accurate record.

3 Student recruitment

The Committee received an update on student recruitment. Postgraduate taught recruitment remained challenging for a third consecutive year. Home PGT applications and offers were reported as 2% higher overall, although performance varied by School, with AMBS and SoSS expected to meet their home PGT targets.

Overseas postgraduate taught applications had fallen by 16% in the year and by 27% over three years. Registrations were forecast to be approximately 300 below target. China continued to account for around two-thirds of overseas postgraduate taught applications, with applications from China down by approximately 20%.

Undergraduate recruitment was stronger. All Schools had exceeded their home targets, and the Faculty was forecasting approximately 264 registrations above the home target and 165 above the international target. Members noted that this improvement would not offset the income from the postgraduate taught shortfall.

Discussion covered visa delays, increased scrutiny of higher-risk markets and the operational pressure created by qualification verification. Members also considered the perceived value of a UK master's degree in China, graduate employment prospects, institutional and subject rankings (especially QS rankings for international students), and the need to communicate career outcomes more clearly.

The Committee supported maintaining a strong focus on China while developing smaller and more speculative markets, widening the programme portfolio, expanding home recruitment where viable and considering online provision. Careers support for international postgraduate taught students, links with Chinese employers, scholarship partnerships in Africa and the use of Lightcast labour-market data were also discussed.

HFC061026-03-01	Kathryn Howard's team to share the Faculty paper setting out the tiered approach to international marketing, including continued activity in China and diversification into other markets.
HFC061026-03-02	Kathryn Howard's team to explore the use of Lightcast data and bring broader market and employability insights to a future meeting. Colleagues may request more specific analysis where required.

4 National Student Survey and the Student Experience

The Committee received an update on the University's Excellence in Student Experience 2035 approach and its five priorities: excellent teaching and challenging learning; assessment and feedback that support learning; student voice with visible impact; a consistent and well-organised experience; and evidence-led continuous improvement.

NSS scores were improving in most areas, but the Faculty's position relative to the Russell Group remained weak. Assessment and feedback was identified as the principal concern, with several measures below Office for Students sector benchmarks.

Members supported sharing effective practice, improving the balance and purpose of formative and summative assessment, increasing co-creation with students, and improving consistency and organisation, particularly on joint programmes. Immediate priorities included assessment screencasts, explicit links to employability and skills, mid-unit check-ins, stronger student-staff dialogue, timely feedback, and consistent provision of core course information.

Discussion also covered discipline-specific marking criteria, programme-level assessment design, formative work, workload implications, group projects, and the need to avoid duplicated or excessive assessment. It was noted that unit surveys and NSS results do not always correlate directly because of survey timing, response rates and the broader programme experience reflected in NSS responses.

Members agreed that feedback should be timely, specific, forward-looking, personalised and written in language that students, including international students, can readily understand.

Faculty and School Teaching, Learning and Students leads and the Teaching Academy will continue to identify, celebrate, and share effective practice in assessment, feedback, and student engagement across Schools.

5 Research Support Allowance

Members asked whether academic staff could access a simple, up-to-date view of their remaining Research Support Allowance balance. The current My Project Finance facility was noted, although expenditure may sit within departmental codes and therefore may not be visible at individual level.

An automated email response developed within AMBS was identified as a possible interim model. Future Foundations may offer improved task-level visibility, but detailed approval and access arrangements were still being developed.

Further information on how to access information can be found at appendix B.

HFC061026-05-01	Clare Northern to follow up with Darren Cunningham in AMBS to understand the automated Research Support Allowance balance process and assess whether it can be shared more widely as an interim solution.
HFC061026-05-02	Clare Northen to raise individual Research Support Allowance visibility and access at the forthcoming Future Foundations projects meeting and report back when the design is clearer.

6 Use of AI tools

Members asked whether Research Support Allowance funds could be used for AI tools other than Microsoft Copilot where another product was better suited to a specific task.

Copilot is one of our approved tools (including Nebula One, AWS), that may be used with sensitive data. NebulaOne is open for use across the University and has a number of different AI models (including openAI, meta) available, along with the ability to create Agents. Through the Research, Professional Services and TLS AI groups other tools are being explored depending on use cases - please do raise tools and uses to these groups https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/ai-hub/transformation-programme/"

7 Faculty response to AI in assessment, module selection, and degree standards

The Committee discussed the risk of fragmented responses to generative AI, uneven effects on degree standards and the workload involved in redesigning and approving assessments. The University's AI in Teaching and Learning policy was described as a good starting point rather than a final answer, with policy and practice needing to remain iterative as technology develops.

A wholesale return to traditional examinations was not considered a sustainable solution. Examinations may have a role, but can reinforce inequalities, encourage short-term memorisation, and fail to test the skills graduates will need. Other approaches to assuring learning could include vivas, supervised or staged work, short tests, presentations and observation of work in progress, selected according to learning outcomes, discipline, and student group.

Fortnightly meetings of School Directors of Teaching and Learning and digital learning leads are supporting coordination, pooled resources, and the sharing of emerging practice. Work is also under way on resilient assessment, assessment security, use of computer clusters and a possible bring-your-own-device trial.

Members emphasised critical AI literacy, including ethical, environmental, employment and disciplinary perspectives. A consistent introductory session for students on critical and responsible use of AI was suggested, drawing on existing work in Sociology and planned pilots in History and Education.

Faculty and School Teaching, Learning and Students leads will continue to coordinate School responses to AI through the established fortnightly meetings and to share effective, discipline-appropriate approaches to resilient assessment.

HFC061026-07-01	Explore the potential for a consistent introductory offer for students on critical and responsible engagement with AI, drawing on existing Faculty practice and current pilots.

8 Meeting format and close

Members welcomed the level of discussion and engagement.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

APPENDIX A - ACTIONS

Meeting	Action	Responsible	Context
HFC061026-03-01	Share the Faculty paper setting out the tiered approach to international marketing.	Kathryn Howard	**Item 3: Student recruitment** The paper should cover continued activity in China and diversification into other markets.
HFC061026-03-02	Explore the use of Lightcast data and bring broader market and employability insights to a future meeting.	Kathryn Howard	**Item 3: Student recruitment** More specific analysis may be requested where required.
HFC061026-05-01	Follow up on the automated Research Support Allowance balance process and assess whether it can be shared more widely.	Clare Northen	**Item 5: Research Support Allowance** Contact Darren Cunningham in AMBS and consider the process as an interim solution.
HFC061026-05-02	Raise individual Research Support Allowance visibility and access at the forthcoming Future Foundations projects meeting and report back.	Clare Northen	**Item 5: Research Support Allowance** Report back when the design is clearer.
HFC061026-07-01	Explore a consistent introductory offer for students on critical and responsible engagement with AI.	Alvin Birdi	**Item 7: Faculty response to AI** Draw on existing Faculty practice and current pilots.

Appendix B

All RSA accounts sit on Project codes which the budget holder has access to run reports via My Project Finance. Below is how to access if this is helpful to the requestor.

To access your project information:

1. Log into My Project Finance through StaffNet.
2. Use the project search facility to locate your P code.
3. Open the project to view:
    a. Current budget
    b. Expenditure to date
    c. Commitments
    d. Remaining balance
    e. Transaction-level detail
4. Reports can be exported directly from the system if required.

Please note that My Project Finance only displays P and R codes. If you require information relating to AA or CA, BA codes, these are not available through My Project Finance and should still be requested from us

Don't have access?

If you cannot view the project, this is likely because you do not currently have the appropriate permissions.

To request access:

- Speak to the Project Principal Investigator, Project Manager, or Budget Holder to confirm that access is required for your role.
- Forward this approval to Humanities Finance (Humanities.Finance@Manchester.ac.uk)
- Once approved and actioned, the relevant permissions will be applied, and the project will become visible within My Project Finance within 24 hours.

If you are unsure who should authorise access, please contact us, providing:

- Your Name
- The P code(s) you need access to
- The reason access is required