



Head of Learning and Participation

Recruitment pack

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MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester



Vacancy reference
CIX-029414

Closing date
19 September 2025

Interview date
Friday 3 October



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Contact

If you are keen to find out more about the vacancy or have questions that aren't answered within the job description, there will be opportunities to speak with Manchester Museum Director Esme Ward between 27 and 29 August.

Please contact Judith Fabian at judith.fabian@manchester.ac.uk to discuss.

Job Description and person specification

Job title:	Head of Learning and Participation, Manchester Museum
Vacancy reference:	CIX-029414
Grade:	8
Hours Per week:	Full-time (we are happy to discuss hybrid, flexible and non-standard working patterns)
Employment type:	Permanent
Based at:	Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester
Reporting to:	Director, Manchester Museum

Context

Driven by an unparalleled commitment to building understanding between cultures and a more sustainable world, Manchester Museum, part of the University of Manchester, was recently awarded European Museum of the Year 2025.

It aspires to be the most imaginative, inclusive and caring museum you will ever visit and nearly 2 million people have visited the Museum since it reopened after a major values-led, co-created capital transformation in February 2023.

Our team of 99 staff help to care for around 4.5 million objects across the collections we hold.

A commitment to learning and research is foundational to our work. We believe that in caring for and interpreting the past, we are staking a claim on what really matters in the future.

We have one of the UK's oldest museum education services and, every year, we work with thousands of school pupils, students and educators. There are longstanding volunteering programmes, and an exceptional Visitor Team welcomes thousands of visitors every week.

Today, the museum is leading and supporting more diverse, collaborative, participatory and interdisciplinary research and teaching than ever before and we are keen to extend academic and other relevant partnerships. In recent years, we have developed strong relationships and growing expertise in neurodivergent learning, decolonial and Indigenising practices, social justice and environmental, carbon and climate literacy.

Job purpose

This is a senior role focused on realising the potential of Manchester Museum, providing strategic leadership and support to learning, participation, access and inclusion, research, digital futures and wider policy development, programmes and resources. These include academic and cross-sector collaborations, volunteering, visitor team development, health and wellbeing, age friendly and creative programmes, and resources for diverse audiences.

The postholder will be committed to inspiring and building a culture of distinctive ethical, values-based learning programmes, policies and partnerships. Put simply, they will live the values of the Museum and lead the professional development and management of the Learning and Participation Team, taking an inclusive, environmentally conscious and care-centred approach. They will build upon existing strengths and embrace new opportunities, for even greater impact.

As a permanent senior management position, they will also deputise for the Director and play a key role in the leadership team of Manchester Museum, and a key role in the Manchester Museums Partnership NPO (Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation: Manchester Museum, the Whitworth and Manchester City Galleries).

Responsible for:

Direct Line Management:

- Curator of Learning (oversees Learning team, 4 strong)
- Volunteer Manager (oversees Volunteer Assistant and approx. 200 volunteers)
- Visitor Team Manager (oversees Visitor Team, 25-40 strong).
- Cultural Health and Wellbeing Assistant
- Age Friendly Culture Champions Coordinator
- Learning and Participation Assistant (currently Civic Engagement and Education Assistant)

You will also work closely with the Head of Partnerships and Engagement to shape the future management and development of the Museum's work with families and young people and to build plans for the Top Floor Environmental Action and Social Justice hub.

Strategic leadership

Working closely with the Director and senior colleagues, the post-holder will undertake a range of activities commensurate with the grading and responsibility of the post;

- Develop and manage key strategic partnerships and relationships with funders and organisations and a wide range of Trusts and Foundations.
- Lead new approaches, partnerships and models, including the preparation of grant applications and major projects and programmes.
- Lead on or have oversight of the recruitment and selection of staff at appropriate levels of the organisation, particularly for the Learning, Participation and Visitor teams.
- Lead and have strategic oversight of the development, implementation and evaluation of Learning and Participation programmes for the Manchester Museum, ensuring that the programmes reflect need, advances and changes in local and national learning strategies.
- Play a key role in the leadership of Manchester Museum and Manchester Museums Partnership, shaping formulation and implementation of strategy, advocating for audiences, providing leadership and sharing responsibility for effective delivery of programmes.
- Lead strategic and operational reviews of learning, digital, participation and inclusion policies and strategies (e.g. child protection, social media policy, vulnerable adults policy, volunteering guidelines, health & safety, access, interpretation, research), acting as the responsible officer to ensure relevance and effectiveness.

Management

- Lead the professional development and management of the Learning and Participation Team.
- Champion co-creation and ethical practice and work collaboratively with colleagues to ensure the development of a holistic and purposeful programme of activities, events and exhibitions across the Manchester Museum, University and city in line with the mission and vision of the Manchester Museum.
- Oversee implementation of plans through the oversight of operational plans and accompanying budgets, and carrying forward organisational priorities.
- Take an intelligent and entrepreneurial approach in the context of changing priorities and performance to achieve the aims and objectives.
- Support training programmes, staff development and the talent pipeline across volunteers, Visitor team and wider Learning team.

Research and development

- Forge new strategic partnerships and models that position the Manchester Museum at the forefront of practice – including co-creation methodologies, decolonial pedagogies, digital futures and neurodivergent learning, including strong alignment with the University's Learning and Innovation agendas.

- Strategic development, leadership and management of a programme of continuous action research and evaluation of educational and socio-cultural trends within the sector. This should be both broad based and specific to inform the development and planning of formal learning, programmes and partnerships and informal engagement programmes.
- Build participatory research and digital partnerships and provide strategic leadership on key projects with internal and external stakeholders.
- Create approaches that encourage participation, experimentation and reflection, embedding current research and innovation and engaging with contemporary culture, learning futures and policy developments.

Finance and administration

- Take overall responsibility for management of relevant budgets (internal and external funding).
- Ensure delivery of cost-effective programmes, set against defined outputs and agreed budgets.
- Work closely with colleagues to develop and monitor charging structure for key programmes.
- Lead on the management and growth of learning-related income, ensuring pricing, promotion, and delivery support financial targets.
- Have oversight of bookings procedures and systems.
- Support the development and delivery of visitor donations and visitor experiences to maximise income generation.

Marketing and development

- Actively seek opportunities to attract funding and lead plans to support programmes, including grant applications, earned income, philanthropy and sponsorship in collaboration with relevant staff.
- Ensure there is close collaboration with the Communications Team to produce content for publicity and identify appropriate media for promotion, visitor engagement and participation through the use of social and digital media and networks
- Oversight of all Learning communications, respecting the distinctive visual identities of the Manchester Museum.

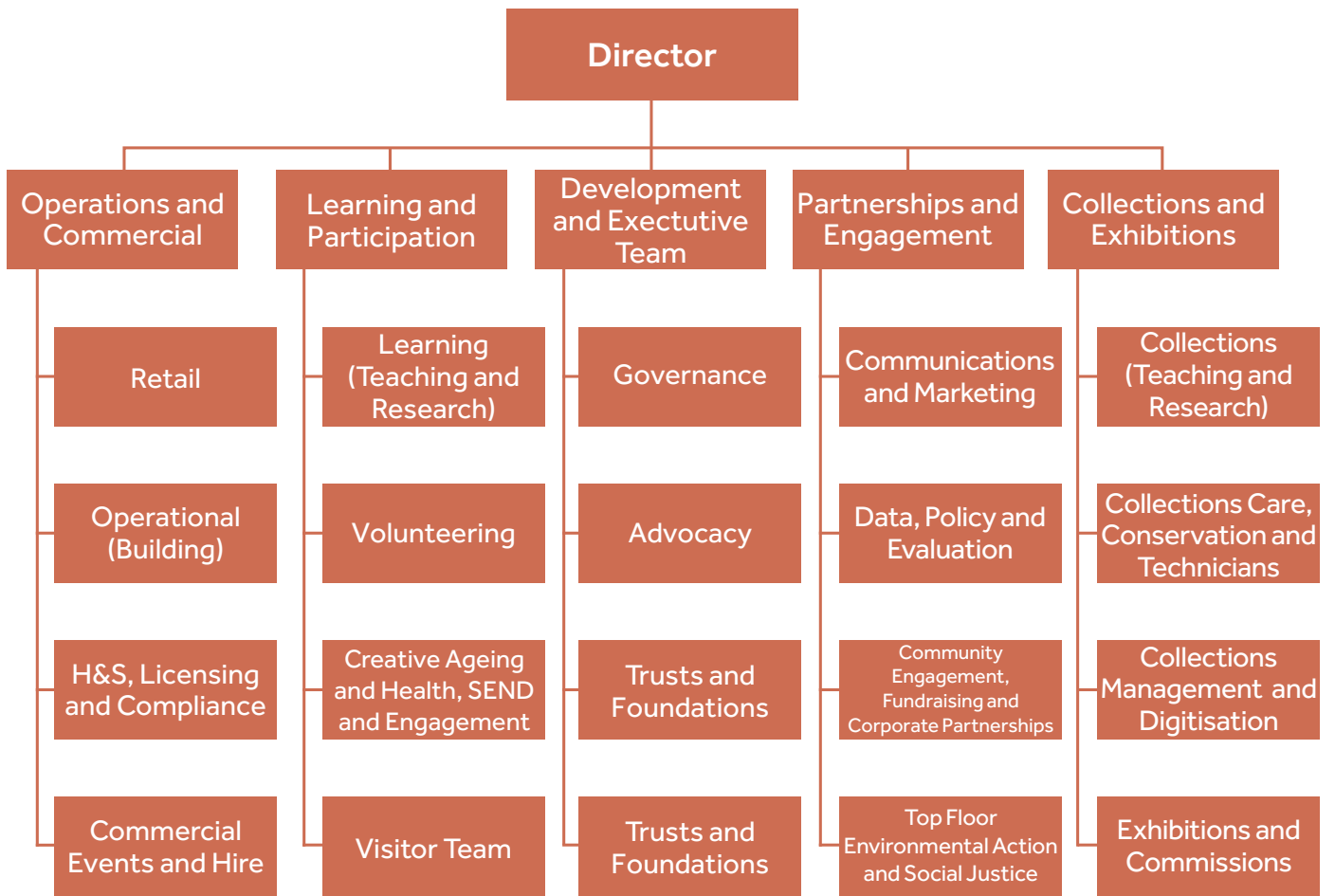
As a member of the Manchester Museum Senior Team

1. Deputise for the Director when required and represent the Manchester Museum at regional, national and international level on steering groups, policy-making bodies, symposia and public programmes.
2. Represent the interests of the museum, prepare submissions and take responsibility for University-wide strategy groups and committees, as agreed with the Director.
3. Work collaboratively with all colleagues in order to embed philanthropy, policy and impact engagement across the whole University and beyond - ensuring this is part of an integrated strategy to connect with our key audiences and other constituents in a meaningful lifelong relationship for the benefit of the Museum.

Desirable Knowledge, Skills and Experience

<i>Experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A leadership position in the cultural education or arts sector.• Experience delivering demonstrable impact through cultural learning.• Experience working with volunteers• Experience working with collections and/or artists• Experience raising funds and managing large external grants• Proven experience of senior management and of successful influence beyond areas of immediate line management.• Proven experience of delivering continuous improvement by embedding research findings into educational practice and driving innovation through championing participatory research and practice.• Substantial experience of effectively building, leading and managing teams through change, delivering against key strategic objectives.
<i>Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Value and awareness of collections-based learning• Engagement with learning futures, including how digital and AI will shape landscape and create new opportunities and challenges• Understanding of the financial, cultural and political landscape that museums currently operate within and an ability to forecast future trends• Knowledge of best practice access and inclusion priorities and strategies• Experience developing research programmes and/or working closely with research teams
<i>Skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent communication skills, both in writing and face to face, with an ability to sensitively match communication style to varying audiences.• Exceptional organisational and planning skills, with the ability to focus on the things that matter and to empower others to do the same.• Commercially astute; with a level of numeracy that enables effective analysis, modelling and forecasting of income and expenditure.
<i>Attributes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstration of a personal commitment to, and belief in, the values (inclusion, imagination and care) and vision of the museum to build understanding between cultures and a more sustainable world.• Deeply held commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.• Works collaboratively; builds and maintains productive relationships with others. Committed to achieving shared goals, gains satisfaction from a team result.• Perceptive, excellent judgement, highly developed emotional intelligence.• Solutions-focused with strong analytical and problem-solving skills.• A creative thinker, with a keen interest in trying new things and innovation to bring about positive change.• Willingness to work outside normal hours when required.

Organogram



Manchester Museum

Driven by its mission to create understanding between cultures and a more sustainable world, Manchester Museum is aiming to become the most inclusive, imaginative and caring museum you'll ever visit. Part of the University of Manchester, it's one of the largest university museums in the country, so research and learning is in the DNA, but now we're aiming to build stronger emotional connections with visitors too, creating a space where everyone feels they belong. This focus on values-driven practice is why Manchester Museum was named European Museum of the Year 2025.

Established more than 130 years ago, the Museum is home to around 4.5 million objects spanning a range of natural sciences and human cultures. Unusually, our collections even include live amphibians and lizards - it's the only place in the world outside Central America where you'll find the extraordinarily beautiful and critically-endangered harlequin toad.

These collections underpin more diverse, interdisciplinary research and co-research than ever before. In fact, it is embedded throughout our galleries. The Dinosaur Gallery, for example, encourages visitors to think like a palaeontologist, drawing on the expertise and experience of staff and students to provide a flavour of the lessons you might learn if you studied at the University of Manchester.

We are also reimagining what it means to be a museum at the heart of its community, while putting community at the heart of what we do. In February 2023, the Museum completed a major, values-led redevelopment that created new gallery spaces and visitor facilities with collaboration and co-creation at their heart. You'll find a beautiful picnic area, a spacious prayer room for all, a quiet room and Changing Places toilet.

As part of this, we believe it's important to confront our past with honesty and transparency. Although Manchester Museum was built from a sense of civic pride, it was also borne of Empire, so we continue to grapple with these colonial roots, opening all our collections to the possibility of return to communities of origin. By foregrounding diaspora voices, Global Majority partnerships and Indigenous perspectives, we hope to connect communities locally and globally to forge a more inclusive, hopeful future.

Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation: Manchester Museums Partnership

Manchester Museum acts in formal partnership with Manchester City Galleries (run by Manchester City Council) and the Whitworth (run by The University of Manchester) to form Manchester Museums Partnership - a National Portfolio Organisation funded by Arts Council England.

Funding currently provides £1.62m p.a., shared across the Partnership, aimed at maximising the contribution that partners collectively deliver towards ACE's key Investment Principles. The current funding period for this vital source of revenue funding for Manchester Museum runs from 2023 – 2027, with applications to be invited for an additional year's funding extension.

This distinctive, University-Council collaboration is central to Manchester Museum's civic mission and socially engaged ethos. Our Partnership activity is governed by a formal Oversight Group - comprising senior representatives from both partners and other key stakeholders in the city-region – with quarterly reporting to ACE.

Learning and participation at Manchester Museum

We have always been a university museum with a deep commitment to teaching, learning and research which underpins everything we do. Our Learning and Participation work plays a vital role in connecting communities, learners, and visitors with our collections through innovative, inclusive, and impactful programmes. In 2024/25, the Museum welcomed 28,174 formal learners. 78% of our formal learners were from settings across Greater Manchester and 39% learners were from Widening Participation schools.

We have close relationships across the University of Manchester in relation to learning and participatory research. For example, collaboration with the Institute of Education (Elective Home Education Research and the Exploring Identity, Heritage and Belonging in the Museum projects). We are keen that the successful candidate builds on these relationships and further extends and embeds learning and participatory research.

Key learning and engagement programmes

- **School Programmes:** Our creative, object-based and skills-based learning approach supports learners to develop empathy, curiosity, and belonging. We offer both self-guided and facilitated sessions, with 53% of taught sessions paid for and 30% of self-guided learners using our free Big Question resources to support their visit.
- **Home Educators:** instAcademy® is a FREE app that you can use in the museum to help connect the learning opportunities you encounter in the museum with curriculum concepts, from the Early Years Development Framework, through KS1- KS4. This was developed by researchers at the University of Manchester.
- **Volunteer Programme:** Our well-established volunteer programme brings together people from all walks of life to play an invaluable role in supporting the museum's work. Over 150 volunteers contributed 14,000+ hours, making this one of Greater Manchester's leading heritage volunteering schemes.
- **Age friendly programme:** From Age Friendly Climate Cafe, Tai Chi classes, tours, projects and Culture Monday takeovers, there is a dedicated age friendly programme (over 50s).
- **Creative health:** Supported visits and partnerships with a range of health settings and practitioners, including art therapy residency and mental health partnerships.
- **Public engagement:** The Visitor Team leads daily tours and facilitates programmes like Collection Bites, bringing objects to life for diverse audiences.

The emerging Young People's Programme, existing Student Engagement programme and Family programme currently sit with the Head of Partnerships and Engagement. The expectation is the successful candidate will work closely with the Head of Partnerships and Engagement to determine future support, management and scope of this work, aligned with the strategic plan and University of Manchester's M2035 vision.

Flagship learning and participation projects

- **The Big Question:** A free, skills-based primary learning package supporting learning before, during and after a visit, including digital curator livestream sessions.
- **Time Odyssey:** An augmented reality programme for non-visiting schools, supported by Art Explora who offer travel funding for primary schools. Part of a national programme.
- **British Science Week:** An annual event in partnership with the University of Manchester's Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, reaching 1,160+ secondary and post-16 students and featuring 45 researchers.
- **Pinc College Partnership:** The museum is founding partner. Hosts a neurodiverse arts college on-site, creating educational pathways for over 75 students since 2019.
- **Inspiring Futures & Multilingual Museum:** Examples of recent award-winning volunteering initiatives boosting confidence, employability, and inclusion.

- Culture Mondays are our seasonal age friendly museum takeovers for older people, working in partnership with organisations and older creative practitioners to reflect the diversity of Manchester.
- Elder and Wiser, age friendly project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, used our Botany collections to amplify older people's voices on climate and ecological issues.
<https://youtu.be/cwBCGvsasjE?si=TQgdnmMS0111znNq>

Facilities

Learning takes place across the whole museum, using all of our galleries and including the quiet room and picnic area. Dedicated learning spaces also include the Basement Education Suite, with a classroom, lab, lunch space and breakout room, and on the Top Floor, our workshop and therapy room as well as the Foyle Education Suite comprising a classroom and seminar room.

Fundraising and development for learning and participation

Fundraising and development at Manchester Museum is a shared responsibility between in-house Museum activity, and The University of Manchester's Division of Development and Alumni Relations (DDAR) - with both receiving wide-ranging support from colleagues across the Museum's teams.

In-house fundraising is co-ordinated by the Museum's Head of Development, and has a primary focus on grant funding opportunities. This includes statutory and academic sources, lottery funding and a full breadth of charitable trusts and foundations.

Managed by DDAR, but embedded fully within the operations of the Museum, the role of Philanthropy Manager, Manchester Museum is dedicated to unlocking new income streams by maximising DDAR's philanthropic fundraising with individuals (major gifts, patrons' schemes, in-venue/online giving) and corporate sponsorships.

Our multiple funding strands align closely with the Museum's priorities around learning and participation, especially with regards to:

- New facilities and resources to support the Museum's learning programmes, most recently including the creation of our exceptional Foyle Education Suite (Seminar Room, Classroom, Lounge and Greenhouse) as part of our hello future transformation.
- New project development, with current fundraising priorities including new environmental and social justice activity through the Museum's Top Floor community-centred hub; volunteering and adult learning; and enhanced provision for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Research, teaching and student experiences – both within and beyond The University of Manchester. The Museum's largest single funding stream is Research England's Museums, Galleries and Collections Fund (currently worth £1.77million p.a.), focused primarily upon the Museum's support for the wider Higher Education sector. The Museum's distinctive contribution to research and scholarship includes an increasing focus on its practice-based expertise, including innovation in learning pedagogy; co-production and participatory practice; social justice and environmental action; creative health, wellbeing and ageing.

The fundraising function entails significant collaboration with the Learning and Participation team in all aspects of funding needs analysis, project development, preparation of funder proposals, donor relationship management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

A year in numbers

Reach:

- In 2024/25, Manchester Museum welcomed **628,526** visitors. This represents an increase of 77% on footfall pre-capital development.
- Peaks in footfall took place in February with Party for the People celebrations; March with the Iftar, Student Social Golden Night and British Science week; April with the last chance to see Golden Mummies of Egypt and Vaisakhi Celebration; August with the summer programme and October with Diwali at the Museum, Wild family programming.
- We engaged **28,174 learners** via our formal education programme and over **43,000** people took part in our **public programme**.
- In terms of digital engagement, Manchester Museum **posts reached 1,818,058 people**, an increase of 44.1% (despite the reopening leap of 2023).
- We grew our **follower base by 15%** in total, despite leaving the X platform, and received 423,789 video views, up 138%
- We achieved **92.8% more engagements** on posts and our content was shared 87% more frequently.

Audience profile:

- Almost half (47%) of visitors to Manchester Museum are **new audiences engaging** for the first time. Over 1 in 5 (22%) are recent repeat visitors, last engaging less than 6 months ago.
- Just over half of Manchester Museum visitors live in Greater Manchester (56%), with 37% living in Manchester. Just over a third (34%) of visitors are UK based but live outside of Greater Manchester. One in ten visitors to the museum live outside of the UK (10% international visits).
- The **top Manchester wards** in terms of numbers of visits to Manchester Museum are:
 - Deansgate– 17,905 visits
 - Ardwick – 16,354 visits
 - Hulme – 14,009 visits
 - Piccadilly – 12,447 visits
 - Rusholme - 9,187 visits
- **Students** in higher and further education account for **27% of self-led visits** (12% UofM UG and 11% UofM PG).
- **Families** account for almost half of visits (**49%**). Of child visitors, over half (59%) are key stages 1 and 2 aged 5 to 11 years, followed by 22% early years under 4 and 18% aged 12-15.
- We have 192 active **volunteers** who collectively delivered over 14,000 hours of support to the Museum.

Visit Experience:

- **98%** positive visitor ratings of **exhibitions**
- **98%** positive visitor ratings of **overall experience**
- **96%** of visitors **learned something new** during their visit (74% strongly agree)
- **97%** of visitors feel **welcome and comfortable** during their visit (75% strongly agree)

Social Value:

- 69% of visitors use public **transport or active travel** to reach the Museum.
- 78% of visitors agree that Manchester Museum is delivering on its mission to **build a sustainable world**.
- 93% of visitors agree that Manchester Museum is delivering on its mission to **build understanding between cultures** (58% strongly agree).

Inclusion:

- 53% of visitors identify as female, 35% as male and 5% as non-binary.
- 6% identify their gender as different from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- 35% of visitors are from the Global Majority.
- 9% identify as d/Deaf, disabled or have a long-term health condition.
- 20% identify as neurodivergent.

The University of Manchester

The University of Manchester is a centre of teaching excellence, world-class research, outstanding student experience, and social responsibility. Part of the prestigious Russell Group of universities, it's institutions like ours that have the greatest responsibility to act as the world faces big challenges. Together, we face this head on.

Founded in 1824 for the advancement of education, we've since been home to 26 Nobel Prize winners and worked across disciplinary and geographic boundaries to give the world new ideas, discoveries and innovations.

Inspired by and connected with our city – the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, home to an iconic arts, music and culture scene, and now the driving force of the Northern Powerhouse scheme – Manchester remains at the heart of everything we do.

Manchester Museum is one of four cultural institutions at the University of Manchester, alongside Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, The John Rylands Library and The Whitworth.

Social responsibility

We're committed to social responsibility and strive to make a positive difference to both society and the environment through our teaching, research, public engagement and day-to-day operations.

We're unique in British higher education in having social responsibility as one of our three core strategic goals, sitting equally alongside our commitments to research and discovery and teaching and learning in our vision and strategic plan.

Award-winning impact

Our social responsibility activities mirror our unique Manchester spirit, motivating communities to research, teach and share their ideas, and students to study with us. The power of our social and environmental impact has been recognised on a global scale:

We are the only university in the top 10 in the world in both the QS World University Sustainability Rankings and Times Higher Education Impact Rankings.

We aim to establish ourselves as the sector's leader for social impact and through the delivery of our five-year plan.

We also hold a Platinum Watermark award from the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) for the effective ways in which we work to engage society with our research, teaching and culture. Winning a Platinum Engage Watermark is the highest honour that can be bestowed upon an institution, and recognises 'exceptional strategic leadership of public engagement; high standards of professional support; and excellence in partnership working'.