

Candidate brief

# AI Skills Lead

September 2025



**The University of Manchester is committed to creating an environment where diversity is celebrated and everyone is treated fairly, regardless of sex, gender identity, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or transgender status, age, or nationality.**



## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this role at Unit M, The University of Manchester's new innovation unit. With a mandate to drive the University's new approach to innovation, Unit M exists to connect the University with, and catalyse, the innovation ecosystem in Manchester and beyond to accelerate inclusive growth.

Unit M aims to unlock the full innovation impact of the University on the world around us by making the University's world-class research, innovation assets and talent more accessible to all, and developing new capabilities to help solve real world challenges. It addresses key regional and national challenges in productivity, sustainability, and inclusion by working with partners to tackle all parts of the innovation challenge – from R&D to innovation adoption to talent and skills.

The University has a rich heritage of discovery, social change and a pioneering spirit, which has been at the heart of what we do since 1824. The University was established to make a positive impact on the community we serve, and over the past 200 years, we have consistently delivered on the vision of our founders. Unit M is the latest chapter in this tradition of pioneering innovation and social impact.

Today the University is one of the UK's largest single-site higher education institutions, with more than 13,000 members of staff and 46,000 students. This is a truly diverse global community collectively recognised across the world for excellence in teaching, research and impact. This scale brings with it enormous potential, and also a responsibility to act to address some of the most pressing challenges facing humanity.

This responsibility is what motivates us to continue pushing boundaries. It is what drives the Unit M mission.

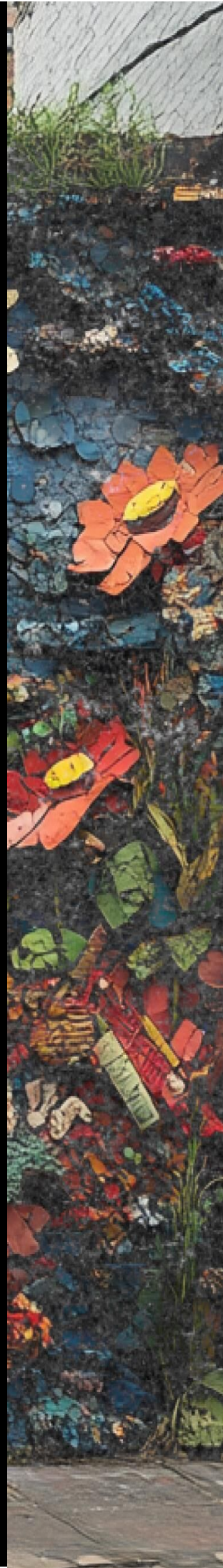
This is a tremendously exciting time to join the University, with a new President and Vice-Chancellor in place and a new 10 year strategic plan about to be launched.

We are looking to the future with optimism, reflecting on our proud history but also looking ahead with ambition – thinking about how we can enhance our impact and reach in a rapidly changing world.

This role is an exciting opportunity to be part of the Unit M team and to help us shape the future of the organisation, the University, our region, and the world.

We look forward to meeting you.

John Holden and Lou Cordwell



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# About Unit M



[WATCH OUR LAUNCH VIDEO](#)

In October 2024, **The University of Manchester** launched a new capability, **Unit M**, to rethink how it supports the region's innovation economy. With a mandate to drive the University's new approach to innovation, Unit M aims to connect and catalyse the innovation ecosystem in Manchester and the wider region to accelerate inclusive growth.

The UK faces a myriad of interlinked urgent economic and social challenges which require faster and more inclusive growth across all parts of the country. Cities like Manchester, as the UK's second largest city, are critical to rebalancing growth - but lower productivity, R&D spend, and startup activity currently hinder the region in achieving its full potential.

Unit M is designed to address all aspects of the innovation challenge - from R&D through to innovation adoption through to talent and skills - by making the world leading innovation assets and talents of the University more accessible to all. Unit M will drive a new strategy, combined with an agile and dynamic delivery capability, for the University to create a globally leading innovation ecosystem. This will include powering the startup and scale up community, catalysing industry clusters, supporting future skills provision, strengthening the University's partnerships within the region, and telling Manchester's innovation story.

**“The transformative potential of fully embracing innovation cannot be understated, both for the region and for the UK more widely. Unit M lies at the heart of the University's ambition to power an inclusive economy, positioning Manchester as a central player on the global stage to accelerate growth for all in society.”**

— President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Duncan Ivison



## Examples of some of the activities that Unit M will undertake include:

- Creating accelerator and incubator programmes and building investor networks for the startup and scale up community;
- Developing regional innovation clusters and innovation partnerships to attract new innovation-intensive businesses to the region;
- A new lifelong approach to skills - from expanding scientific/technological skills provision for students, to training executive leaders on innovation adoption.
- Rethinking the University's approach to R&D to be more flexible and responsive to industry demand

Unit M will have the agility to operate dynamically in response to the most impactful opportunities as they emerge - whether that's connecting students into the ecosystem or drawing on expertise from across the whole University to help solve real world challenges from industry. Unit M will be rapidly scaling over the coming months.

**“Manchester has experienced major change over the past 30 years, but not everyone has benefited from rising prosperity. Now, more than ever, we need to pioneer a new model of regional collaboration that harnesses our industrial strengths and innovation capabilities. Unit M will not only foster inclusive growth throughout Greater Manchester but contribute to the broader prosperity of the UK.”**

— Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham



Unit M is aligned with, and complements, existing innovation capabilities across the University, including the University's tech transfer office, The Innovation Factory, and its sector leading business engagement, student entrepreneurship, and flexible learning teams.

It acts as the University's interface into the region's investment zone and innovation districts, including the University's recently launched joint venture, Sister and the Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone, along with other place-based partnerships.

Unit M also partners closely with external organisations, including the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), local councils and other institutions.

By convening existing innovation services across the University and with key strategic partners, Unit M accelerates and drives the development of new opportunities to build a strong innovation economy throughout the region.

**“Manchester has always been a hotbed of innovation. Building on our existing strengths is vital to Manchester, and Greater Manchester, accelerating our growth at scale to generate more jobs and investment. With Unit M, The University of Manchester is doing exactly that - doubling down on innovation while encouraging even more collaboration with our business community. Further strengthening the city's innovation ecosystem will help create jobs, investment and growth that works for everyone.”**

— Cllr Bev Craig, Leader of Manchester City Council

# About The University

The University of Manchester is recognised globally for its pioneering research, breadth of teaching and learning and for our commitment to social responsibility. The world's big challenges demand urgent action – we're working across boundaries and disciplines to create healthier, more equal futures; helping to eradicate poverty; ensuring energy supply for future generations; and protecting our planet for the years to come.

In 2024, we celebrated our bicentenary: 200 years of education and innovation. This milestone event was an exciting time to reflect on the past, recognising our key discoveries, pioneering ideas and world firsts while looking forward to what our third century could bring.

## Our history

The University of Manchester was the first and most eminent of England's civic universities. Our earliest roots can be traced back to 1824 with the formation of the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, founded as part of a national movement for the education of working men, and with the creation of the Manchester Royal School of Medicine.

The University of Manchester, in its present form, was created in 2004 by the amalgamation of the Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

We have a rich history of attracting brilliant minds to the University, with 26 Nobel laureates among our current and former staff and students, including Ernest Rutherford, Arthur Lewis, Andre Geim and Kostya Novoselov, and most recently, Simon Johnson in 2024.

## The present

Part of the prestigious Russell Group of UK universities, The University of Manchester is one of the UK's largest single-site higher education institutions with a broad disciplinary base across STEM and the arts and social sciences. We operate at scale with an annual turnover of £1.35 billion, a significant ongoing capital investment programme and more than 500,000 alumni.

The University is a truly global institution, with a reputation for education and innovation that resonates across the world. We are consistently ranked among the top universities in the world across all significant international rankings.

We are the most popular university in the UK for UCAS applications and have around 17,000 international students in our total student community. Our students come to live and study in Manchester and learn to be global citizens. They are attracted by our powerful sense of place, our academic ranking, the diversity of our courses, the impact of our social responsibility and by the city's rich cultural and sporting heritage.

## **The city of Manchester and the region**

Manchester is the original modern city, responsible for pioneering events and movements that shaped the past and continue to influence the world as we know it today. The Industrial Revolution powered by canals and steam had its origins here – alongside it came fundamental societal developments such as trade unionism, the cooperative movement and the suffragettes.

The University is a proud Manchester institution – inspired by its revolutionary history, we act courageously and challenge assumptions to create the exceptional. We are an anchor institution: critical to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the city and our region. The University is committed to its local community, and we recognise the importance of our civic role. In collaboration with Manchester Metropolitan University, Royal Northern College of Music, University of Bolton and the University of Salford, we have developed a joint Civic University Agreement with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and its ten local authorities to drive social and economic change in the city-region.

We make a significant contribution to the city and region's cultural credentials, with our own Manchester Museum, John Rylands Research Institute and Library and the Whitworth among the city's cultural landmarks, and the iconic Lovell Telescope just a short drive away at our Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre.

Manchester has been ranked as the top UK city to live in (The Economist's Global Liveability Index 2022) and in 2021, the city was ranked in the top three of Time Out's World's Best Cities.

It's a cosmopolitan city, and its cultural life is internationally renowned. There are three outstanding professional theatre companies, the concert halls of the Hallé and BBC Philharmonic orchestras, HOME, and Europe's fastest-growing Chinatown.

Among developments enriching the area's cultural life are the Lowry Centre and MediaCityUK at Salford Quays, the Bridgewater Concert Hall, the refurbished City Art Gallery, and the Imperial War Museum North, designed by Daniel Libeskind, in Trafford.

## Global rankings and reputation

The University is a truly global institution, with a reputation for education and innovation that resonates across the world:

- Our research ranks 34th in the world (QS World University Rankings 2025). 93% of the University's research activity was assessed as 'world-leading' (4\*) or 'internationally excellent' (3\*) (Research Excellence Framework 2021).
- We rank 1st in the UK and Europe and 2nd in the world for social and environmental impact (Times Higher Education Impact Ranking). We are the only university to consistently rank in the global top 10 since the ranking's inception

International businesses, charities, governments, and universities turn to Manchester for its expertise – from leading the European renaissance in industrial biotechnology to broadening access to cancer services in India.

More than 170 student nationalities come together on campus, making Manchester one of the world's most international universities.

Learn more about our [rankings and reputation](#).



# Vision and strategic plan

Our vision is to be recognised globally for the excellence of our people, research, learning and innovation, and for the benefits we bring to society and the environment.

In 2019 we launched Our future which affirmed our core purpose to advance education, knowledge and wisdom for the good of society and set out ambitious targets for the next five years. As set out when we launched our strategic plan, as we enter our third century we will review and update the strategy which has guided us over the past five years.

Our future established three core goals which are encapsulated in our motto: knowledge, wisdom, and humanity:

key goals themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b><u>1. Research and discovery</u></b></li><li><b><u>2. Teaching and learning</u></b></li><li><b><u>3. Social responsibility</u></b></li></ol>	and four themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Our people, our values</li><li>2. Innovation</li><li>3. Civic engagement</li><li>4. Global influence</li></ol>
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Our future set an ambitious agenda to build on the University's distinctive strengths, with a commitment to make a difference to society and the environment and protect our unique status as an open place of enquiry and challenge.

It looked to a future where we expand our world-leading research to address the most challenging global questions and exploit our capability for interdisciplinary research; transform the way our students learn to make them the most employable graduates and truly global citizens; and ensure that all our activities make a positive difference to society.

The strategic plan reinforces what already makes The University of Manchester distinctive: our excellence, openness and inclusivity, our longstanding commitment to social responsibility, our scale and breadth, our tradition of innovation, and our very close bonds with, and location at the heart of, Manchester.

Universities such as ours are ideally positioned to help address many of the world's major challenges, finding new means to deliver environmental sustainability, close the gap of societal inequalities, improve health, inform and empower citizens, and create the leaders of the future.

Find more about **Our future**

# Manchester 2035

**Manchester 2035** is a bold new strategy that will shape our direction for the next decade. It's about all of us – students, staff, alumni and partners – coming together to shape our ambitions and take on the challenges of the future.

Through collaboration, we'll consider who we want to be and how we get there, creating a joint plan that reflects our aspirations and benefits the communities we serve.

We are currently in the final phase of the process to develop Manchester 2035. We will publish the final strategy in October 2025.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

From our beginnings nearly 200 years ago as England's first civic university, we've sought to break down barriers and improve lives. At The University of Manchester, we celebrate our diversity and the diversity of the communities we serve.

Our ambition is to be an inclusive place to work and study, one that is characterised by equity, diversity, and a sense of belonging for our community.

Our vision is to be recognised by staff, students, alumni, and our partners as an inclusive organisation. We will do this by creating an outstandingly inclusive place to work and study that is characterised by equality, seeing the value of diversity and where all have a sense of belonging.

We are committed to meeting and exceeding our obligations under current legislation and by doing more, we build on Manchester's existing reputation for its rich diversity and ensure we equip all our staff and students with the knowledge to sustain and enjoy a fully inclusive study and work environment.

Recognising, embracing and valuing difference leads to improvements for all.

We recently appointed a new Executive Director of EDI to lead our work in this area. We are proud to employ a workforce that reflects the diverse community we serve.

Download our **[Equality Information Report 2024](#)**.

Watch **[We Belong](#)**, a short film about our commitment to international and local inclusivity and diversity, featuring our students and staff.



# University Leadership

## Leadership

- President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Duncan Ivison
- Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer, Patrick Hackett
- Vice-President for Research, Professor Colette Fagan
- Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students, Professor Jenn Hallam
- Vice-President for Social Responsibility, Professor Nalin Thakkar
- Acting Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Professor Peter Green
- Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Fiona Devine
- Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, Professor Ashley Blom
- Professor Richard Jones, Vice-President, Regional Innovation and Civic Engagement
- Chief Financial Officer, Carol Prokopyszyn
- Executive Director of People, Eleanor Morrissey

The senior officers are supported by a number of associate vice-presidents, who are responsible for leading on cross-cutting, thematic priorities.

Our Chancellor, Nazir Afzal OBE, is the ceremonial head of the University and presides over meetings of the General Assembly and over degree congregations.

Detailed biographies of the **University's senior officers**.

### Governance

The University of Manchester's governance structure and constitution have been developed so that they hold true to the ethos, principles and requirements of good governance in higher education.

Governance is the responsibility of the following authoritative bodies:

### Board of Governors

The Board of Governors is the University's governing body. Chaired by Philippa Hird, and with 23 (mostly Lay) members, it has ultimate responsibility for the University's overall strategic direction and for the management of its finances.

### General Assembly

A two-way channel of communication through which the University presents its achievements to its broader constituencies and receives feedback and advice on matters relating to University business. It has around 100 members.

### Senate

The University's principal academic authority. The Senate is responsible to the Board of Governors for the promotion of research and for monitoring standards in teaching.

# Unit M Values



## **Inherently open**

We pride ourselves on our ability to partner, collaborate and co-create. We welcome input from a broad spectrum of communities, colleagues and stakeholders. We strive to share the benefits of our innovation activities with our neighbours across the region. We aim to remove the barriers to productive participation in our innovation community. We are open to new ideas. We operate transparently and with integrity at all times. We believe that innovation is for everyone and that everyone can innovate.



## **Relentlessly Ambitious**

We are unashamedly ambitious, on behalf of our own institution as well as our community and our region. Our aim is to put Manchester on the global innovation map. We understand that delivering meaningful advancement requires enthusiasm and tenacity. We approach each day with a determination to drive progress for the region's economy and society



## **Unmistakably Manchester**

Manchester is a city of trendsetters and change makers and we are shaped by the city we call home. Bold. Authentic. Creative. Cool. A powerhouse of invention and entrepreneurialism. We will continue to be Manchester's innovation engine, with greater impact than ever before.

## The role

### Job purpose

The AI Skills Lead will play a crucial role for the University in driving the adoption and effective use of artificial intelligence. The post holder will help to align AI learning and development initiatives with the University's long-term goals, ensuring that AI projects and programmes contribute to organisational growth and innovation. They will oversee the development of AI skills within the University, providing training and resources to help colleagues understand and leverage AI technologies.

The post holder will design a learning strategy that champions and is underpinned by responsible AI practices, ensuring fairness, transparency and accountability in how the technology is utilised across the institution. The AI Skills Lead will collaborate with academic colleagues, researchers, professional services staff, and students to cultivate a culture of experimentation and learning, encouraging teams to explore new AI applications and solutions. They will also promote data literacy to ensure that the University is equipped to interpret AI-driven insights, understand the quality of the data behind them and make informed decisions based on this business intelligence. The AI Skills Lead will be essential for integrating AI into operations, driving strategic initiatives and ensuring ethical and effective use of AI technologies.

### About the team

The University is committed to leveraging the opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to transform its teaching, learning, research, and operations. This role will be a crucial part of an agile 'Skunkworks' team, which includes a Director of AI Innovation, a Senior AI Innovation Analyst, a Project Manager, and Software Engineers. The team reports directly to the University Executive and engages with the University AI Strategy Group and its subgroups. It collaborates closely with the Director of AI and Ideas Adoption (University Library), the Director of Digital and Innovation (IT Services), Manchester Online, and the Communications and Marketing team to drive AI adoption.

### Responsibilities

- **Developing and implementing an AI and data literacy learning strategy for the University to achieve its business goals and long-term ambitions**
  - Providing consultancy on university-wide AI initiatives related to learning and development, ensuring that skills related to data literacy, data protection and AI ethics and sustainability are considered.
  - Leading the creation and management of AI learning content for the University drawing on internal and external sources of expertise.
  - Establishing AI-centred staff and student development plans that utilise networks/communities of practice that allow for learning through a combination of knowledge sharing and formal training.

- **Engaging with stakeholders to identify and deliver AI feasibility projects**
  - Building relationships with the wider University community to understand AI and data literacy requirements to help shape future AI learning strategies.
  - Understanding challenges in teaching, learning, research, and operations to identify AI training opportunities.
  - Prioritising AI-enabled projects that align with institutional goals and provide significant organisational impact.
  - Identifying opportunities to engage with external AI expertise (e.g. partnering with other HEIs, research organisations, Government agencies, consulting firms, non-profits, etc.) to bring new knowledge and understanding into the University.
  
- **Monitoring AI trends and ensuring the University remains at the forefront of innovation**
  - Keeping abreast of emerging AI technologies and assessing their potential for higher education applications.
  - Tracking AI adoption trends in the sector and drawing insights from successful case studies.
  - Developing relationships with AI partners to anticipate and gain access to cutting-edge innovations.
  - Working closely with colleagues in IT Services to leverage existing partnerships with leading technology companies to provide training and other forms of learning support for university staff.
  - Promoting a culture of AI and data awareness within the University community.
  
- **Providing strategic reporting and communication on AI training and innovation progress**
  - Collaborating with the University AI Strategy Group and subgroups to align initiatives with institutional goals.
  - Communicating AI developments across the University to foster engagement and knowledge-sharing.
  - Evaluating the effectiveness of AI and data literacy learning initiatives and reports back to key stakeholders on the outcomes. Identifying areas for improvement with the AI skills strategy and implements changes to address any learning and development gaps.

- Collaborating with the AI Security Lead and colleagues in the IGO to ensure that AI security best practices are embedded within all training initiatives.

## Requirements

### KNOWLEDGE

- Have deep expertise in AI technologies, applications, and their potential for transformation in across all the functions of the University
  - Have a deep understanding of ethical, legal, and regulatory considerations in AI adoption.
  - Knowledge of current and emerging AI and data analytic concepts and/or practical applications in sufficient depth to develop and conduct learning interventions covering the topics.
  - Undertakes ongoing personal subject-related upskilling to ensure knowledge of subject matter remains current.
  - Knowledgeable of adult learning theory and best practices with respect to application in the design and delivery of L&D initiatives.
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### EXPERIENCE

- Proven experience of delivering large-scale initiatives to build digital skills and drive a culture that encourages an AI and data driven organisation.
  - Extensive experience of designing, developing and implementing training programmes for a large and diverse organisation, preferably with a focus on digital literacy.
  - Experience of adopting a consultative mindset and assessing capability gaps and designing tailored solutions.
  - Experience of working within a university context, specifically supporting skills development for academic and research staff.
  - Experience of leading matrix teams made up of internal and external resource to deliver projects/outcomes.
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### SKILLS

- Possess excellent communication skills, with the ability to articulate complex AI concepts clearly.
  - Be skilled in managing projects effectively, balancing multiple initiatives and ensuring timely delivery.
  - Skills in establishing relationships, analysing perspectives and managing stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Adapting stakeholder engagement style to meet the needs of different audiences. Identifying key business stakeholders and assessing their level of power
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and interests, and their perspectives, to inform the way(s) in which they should be considered and managed.

- Expertise in methods and techniques for delivering effective and accessible presentations, either face-to-face or online, within various contexts and to a variety of audiences.
- Expertise in methods and techniques for creating and delivering effective, accessible learning and development, and to support learners post-delivery to reinforce effective learning.
- Ability to engage and influence senior stakeholders, with the credibility to embed AI and data literacy into wider business priorities.

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QUALIFICATION

- Hold a higher degree in AI, computer science, or a related field, or have equivalent industry experience.
  - Desirable qualifications: CIPD, TAP
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## Process and how to apply

**Please apply for this vacancy via the job advert on the University of Manchester website, reference PSX-029672.**

The closing date for applications will be midnight on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

We anticipate shortlisting will take place week commencing 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 with interviews taking place on the **13<sup>th</sup> October 2025**.

For informal enquiries please contact Michael Platt, Talent Partner for Unit M – [Michael.Platt@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.Platt@manchester.ac.uk)

For more information, please contact Michael Platt  
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