

# Unit M

## Head of Programme

### Delivery

Candidate brief  
May 2026



unit  
M.



**“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



## Introduction

Thank you for your interest in Unit M at The University of Manchester. This is an exciting time to be joining a growing, ambitious innovation unit at the heart of one of the UK's leading civic universities, as it enters a new phase of delivery, growth and impact.

The University of Manchester is proud to be the world's first modern civic university, with a long-standing commitment to harnessing knowledge for public good. With nearly 13,000 staff and 46,000 students, the University is deeply rooted in the city of Manchester and the wider region. Its Manchester 2035 strategy sets out a bold vision for the future, placing innovation at the heart of how the University delivers social, economic and global impact.

Unit M was created to do something genuinely different: to unlock the full innovation potential of the University and turn it into real-world outcomes for the city, the region and beyond. In a short period of time, the team has built strong momentum — launching new programmes and partnerships, testing new models, and reshaping how the University connects research, talent and ideas with industry, communities and place.

As Unit M moves from stand-up into delivery and scale-up, it is continuing to grow a diverse, multidisciplinary team that brings together strategic thinking, delivery expertise and a shared commitment to inclusive innovation. Working across academia, industry and the public sector, Unit M offers a fast-paced, collaborative environment with the opportunity to help build new platforms, partnerships and ways of working that deliver meaningful impact at scale.

We look forward to meeting you.



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# About Unit M

Unit M was established in Autumn 2024 to spearhead the University of Manchester's new approach to innovation. Its mission is to unlock the University's full potential as one of the North of England's largest innovation assets by making the University's world-class research, innovation capabilities and talent more accessible to all.

As the University's gateway to innovation, Unit M plays a central role in delivering the University's recently launched 10 year strategy: [From Manchester for the World](#). Its remit is to accelerate the development of a globally competitive, inclusive and impactful innovation ecosystem – from ideation and research translation, start-up and scale-up support, place-making, talent and skills, community building, and more — while systematically breaking down barriers to the flow of ideas between the University and its partners. Central to this remit is a clear commercial imperative: Unit M is expected to attract, generate and mobilise significant external funding – from industry, investors, philanthropy and public sources — to sustain and scale innovation activity and create new, sustainable funding streams.

Unit M forms a core part of the University's integrated innovation system. Alongside the dedicated Unit M core team, it brings together the [Turing Innovation Catalyst](#), the [Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Catalyst](#), the [Cambridge x Manchester Innovation Partnership team](#), and the AI skunkworks, and works in close collaboration with the [Innovation Factory](#) (the University's technology transfer office), the [Business Engagement and Knowledge Exchange Team](#), the [Masood Entrepreneurship Centre](#) (the University's focal point for student entrepreneurship), and the [Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre](#). Unit M acts as the primary interface with [Sister](#), the University's £1.7 billion innovation district joint venture with Bruntwood SciTech, and partners closely with a range of external capabilities, including the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), [Innovation GM](#), local councils, and other institutions and partnerships.

Unit M is deliberately unconventional in a university context. It was not designed as a new technology transfer office, research support function, innovation centre, or an add-on to existing structures, but as a unifying innovation platform with a whole of the University mandate operating across disciplinary, organisational and sectoral boundaries. Unit M is rethinking how the University maximises the economic and societal impact of its research, teaching and corporate activities. In doing so, it is intentionally empowered to challenge established ways of working, question assumptions and test new models — acting as a constructive disruptor that helps the University adapt, evolve and remain competitive in a rapidly changing global environment.

Agility sits at the heart of Unit M's design. Its growing, multidisciplinary team allows it to move dynamically as the most impactful opportunities emerge, both within the University and with regional and global partners. Unit M is driven to be future-positive — not just future-ready. It is designed to be fast, fierce, and to make things happen.

Find out more about [our story](#).



## Examples of some activities currently being delivered by Unit M include:

- **Filling gaps in the innovation ecosystem** by aligning existing support programmes across the University and the city region, and by launching new accelerator, incubator and award schemes that provide both financial and developmental support for startups and entrepreneurs, including the [Deep Tech Accelerator Programme](#) and the [Ideas with Impacts](#) awards.
- **Building and scaling inclusive, distinctive networks** for Manchester's startup and scale-up community, including through the development of a new [digital platform](#).
- **Working closely with the University's fundraising and volunteering campaign**, [Challenge Accepted](#), and with investors to create opportunities and increase support for our entrepreneurial community.
- **Piloting new models of academic-industry collaboration** through innovation partnerships rooted in our civic mission and aligned with our global ambitions – amplifying collective strengths, maximising student innovation, and energising Manchester's economy.
- **Developing industrial clusters to drive the region's productivity growth** through attracting new R&D intensive businesses and high value jobs to the region, such as the [Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre](#) in Atom Valley.
- **Creating new mechanisms for industry engagement in teaching and learning**, tackling regional skills challenges and ensuring Manchester's graduates are well equipped to lead the workforce of the future.
- **Building groundbreaking cross regional partnerships** to drive cross-UK innovation ecosystem, such as the [Cambridge x Manchester Innovation Partnership](#) and the [University of Manchester and the University of Liverpool partnership](#).

# Unit M

## Drivers



### **Be future positive**

Learn from history, champion social and economic innovation – future positive is the only way to be.



### **Be fierce**

We are fiercely committed to our collaborators, our colleagues, our place and to creating good growth.



### **Be fast**

The need for change is urgent – we operate with a start-up mindset – we take smart risks, learn and evolve.



### **Make things happen**

It won't be perfect every time – but standing still is the enemy of progress.

We get things done!



**“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, and most recently, Andre Geim and Kostya Novoselov.

## 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.

## University 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 Jen Hallam
- Vice-President for Social Responsibility, Professor Nalin Thakkar
- Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Professor Sarah Sharples
- 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 John Holden, 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.

# 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 Greater Manchester (formerly known as 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 and MediaCityUK at Salford Quays, The Bridgewater Hall, the refurbished Manchester 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

**Manchester 2035** is our bold new strategy, launched in October 2025, 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.

Over the next ten years we will become a great 21<sup>st</sup> century university. The world is changing, fast. Climate, tech, geopolitics – everything is shifting. But this isn't the first time Manchester has risen to the moment. We were born as an answer. The first modern civic university, built for an industrial age. Now, it's our turn to define what a great university looks like for the 21st century, creating knowledge for the public good, locally and globally.

The strategy is comprised of two elements:

**Building on our foundations** – core commitments that must be true in any future:

- **Outstanding teaching and research** – learning and discovery for a new world
- **Values-led and socially responsible** – driven by purpose
- **Of Manchester and for the world** – driving local growth and worldwide change
- **Organised for success: one university** – a shared way of working
- **A place where you matter** – an inclusive university, every view counts

**Making five big leaps** – the driving force to go further and faster, building a future only Manchester can imagine:

- **Flexible learning** – a new kind of student experience: flexible, personalised and digitally-enabled learning
- **Research impact** – we'll be known for discovery and challenge-led research, tackling society's hardest problems and delivering impact fast
- **A powerhouse of innovation** – we'll become Europe's most inclusive and impactful innovation ecosystem
- **The university to partner with, the partner of choice** – sharing a commitment to excellence and turning knowledge into impact for the public good
- **Digital inside and out** – we'll create inclusive, people-led digital environments and expand access locally and globally

# 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.



# The role

## About the team

Unit M is The University of Manchester's innovation unit. It exists to unlock the full innovation impact of our University on our region and the world around us. It does this by accelerating access to world-leading innovation talent and assets and inventing new ways to partner. This role is an exciting opportunity to be part of the Unit M team and to help shape the future of the University and the region.

Through its Manchester 2035 strategy, the University aims to become a powerhouse of innovation, within Europe's most impactful and inclusive innovation ecosystem. One of the delivery pillars is to 'Strengthen our partnership with the city and people of Greater Manchester' and place-based innovation partnerships are pivotal for this. Unit M will play a key role in delivering this ambition as The University anticipates developing, leading and delivering nationally significant, regionally centred projects of significant scale.

## Job purpose

The Head of Programme Delivery will play a critical role in the design, mobilisation, and operational delivery of these projects led by Unit M, within agreed Unit M and University strategic frameworks. The role operates with a high degree of autonomy in how work and programmes are delivered, while escalating significant strategic, financial, legal, operational or reputational issues to senior leadership as required.

## Responsibilities

### Design, Set-Up and Operational Readiness

- Manage the delivery of complex place-based projects from design through mobilisation and into early operation, within agreed strategic, financial, and governance parameters.
- Develop and maintain project plans, milestones, dependencies, risk registers, and reporting frameworks.
- Coordinate inputs from University teams (academic, professional services, e.g. estates, finance, legal) and external partners to ensure coherent and timely delivery.
- Monitor progress against agreed outputs and outcomes, escalating risks or material deviations to senior leadership where appropriate.
- Coordinate and support the operational design of regional innovation initiatives, including operating models, workflows, and partner interfaces.

- Support readiness activity relating to innovation fit-out, operational policies, access protocols, and health & safety requirements, working alongside relevant specialist teams.
- Contribute to transition planning from development into early operation, ensuring systems and processes are fit for purpose.
- Work closely with the relevant teams to support business engagement, pipeline development, and partner onboarding, ensuring operational arrangements enable delivery of impact.
- Act as a central coordination point between Unit M, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Rochdale Development Agency (RDA), and national partners during the mobilisation and early operational phases.

### **Operations, Governance and Assurance**

- Establish and maintain clear operational processes, documentation, and reporting mechanisms for Unit M-led place-based projects.
- Support the operation of appropriate governance structures, including boards, steering groups, and working groups.
- Be accountable for financial management across place-based innovation programmes in a complex, multi-stream funding environment, ensuring robust budgeting, forecasting, compliance, value for money, and clear reporting to senior stakeholders, with appropriate escalation of risks and variances.
- Ensure activity is delivered in line with University policies, partnership agreements, and funder requirements.
- Prepare high-quality briefings, papers, and progress reports for senior internal and external stakeholders.
- Provide line management and leadership to project or programme staff, fostering a high-performing, collaborative team environment and ensuring effective delivery across a complex portfolio.

### **Stakeholder and Partnership Management**

- Build and sustain effective working relationships with local, regional, and national partners, including public sector bodies, industry, and innovation organisations.
- Act as a trusted operational interface between the University and external partners, translating agreed strategic objectives into practical delivery.
- Support collaborative working across organisations with differing cultures, incentives, and operating models.
- Represent Unit M professionally in meetings, workshops, and external forums, as required.

### **Continuous Improvement and Capability Building**

- Capture learning from the projects to inform future place-based initiatives.
- Contribute to the development of repeatable operational models, templates, and delivery approaches for Unit M's portfolio.

- Identify opportunities to improve delivery efficiency, effectiveness, and impact within existing frameworks

## **Requirements – Knowledge, skills and experience**

### **Essential**

- Significant experience of project or programme delivery in complex, multi-stakeholder environments.
- Experience of designing, setting up, or supporting operations for programmes, facilities, or partnerships.
- Strong understanding of governance, risk management, and delivery assurance, with experience of escalation and reporting.
- Experience of working in complex funding environments, managing multiple income streams including research funding and commercial/business partnerships.
- Proven ability to manage and influence relationships across organisational boundaries.
- Excellent organisational, analytical, and problem-solving skills.
- Strong written and verbal communication skills, including experience producing reports and briefings for senior stakeholders.
- Ability to operate effectively in ambiguous or evolving contexts, exercising sound judgement.
- Experience of providing line management and leadership to staff, including setting objectives, supporting development, and fostering high-performing teams in complex delivery environments.

### **Desirable**

- Experience of place-based regeneration, innovation infrastructure, or economic development initiatives.
- Familiarity with university–industry collaboration or publicly funded innovation programmes.
- Experience working with capital projects, innovation centres, or scale-up facilities

# How to apply

**Please apply for this role via the job advert on the University website, reference PSX-031338.**

The closing date for applications will be midnight on **Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2026**.

In accordance with GDPR guidelines\*, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent.

For informal enquiries please contact Charlotte Jones: [charlotte.jones@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.jones@manchester.ac.uk)

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\*GDPR personal data notice – please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data, including the contact details of your chosen referees (without prior agreement), within your CV and covering letter. Your completed ‘equal opportunities monitoring and consent form’ will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. We are committed to further enhancing the diversity of our University Executive and particularly welcome applications from women, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority candidates, candidates with disabilities and candidates with other protected characteristics

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