

## Lemn Sissay – Q&A

### What aspects of the role of Chancellor of the University particularly appeal to you?

Whomever I meet in my travels around the world, whether royalty in Dubai or ‘hard to reach’ teenagers in Derry/Londonderry – both of whom I have met in the past two months – I will uphold the name of The University of Manchester as the beating heart of England. In doing so, I will be your advocate and ambassador, your ally, championing your achievements and aspirations.

### How do you think your skills and experience will help you in the role of Chancellor?

Having received an MBE from the Queen in recognition for my services to literature and as the motivation for The Lemn Sissay PhD Scholarship at the University of Huddersfield, my role is to inspire and be inspired. I will bring positive attention to The University of Manchester including the thousands who read my landmark poems each week throughout the city. They will know that the man who wrote the poems that are tattooed on the city is their Chancellor and be proud of what we can achieve together. Because of my place on the world stage, I will be a beacon, attracting people to The University of Manchester and connect them to our vision of being one of the top 25 research institutions of the world by 2020.

### What do the University and city of Manchester mean to you?

I came to Manchester barefoot in my teenage years with nothing but a birth certificate, a handful of poems and the will to learn. It is from here – this great city – that I grew and grew and grew. I’m about five foot ten now. Manchester is my surrogate family. On May 12, on BBC Radio 4, I proclaimed: “Manchester is the greatest place on Earth.” I didn’t do this to curry favour for the candidacy – it had been pre-recorded before student representatives and members of the University community asked if I would accept their nomination as Chancellor. But it does encapsulate how I feel about this city and the University that is an intrinsic part of it.

### If you were Chancellor, how would you use your ambassadorial role to promote the University and its interests?

I would lead by example, and show how The University of Manchester is the 21<sup>st</sup> century face of learning through my own story – one that reflects who we are as a society. Working in the creative industries on an international basis, I will bring the world to The University of Manchester and The University of Manchester to the world

### What do you think will be the main opportunities and challenges facing The University of Manchester over the term of office of the next Chancellor?

The University of Manchester has the opportunity to become one of the best universities in broadening access to higher education and as a centre for research. But we face the challenge of remaining an attractive institution for international students, dependent as this is on government policy on the post-study work visa, and the ongoing conversation about Britain staying in the European Union. Changes in higher education funding and fees will require careful attention, as well as changes to the curriculum as learning becomes increasingly market driven. Amidst all of this is the potential to work together to liberate the curriculum and empower students to ask for a diverse and broad education.