

The University of Manchester

Executive summary

Brand 2020

Creative Concern
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Premier international universities have potent reputations that make them destinations of choice for many of the best students, teachers, scholars and researchers in the world. They are iconic institutions and their "brands" are synonymous with excellence.

The University of Manchester has established a powerful reputation since its establishment in 2004, but the higher education scene is changing dramatically and the attention and momentum created by the "merger" in 2004 is now fading.

In response to this changing environment, the University undertook a wide-ranging consultation in 2011 to produce a new Strategic Vision for 2020. Alongside this, the University also established a Working Group under the leadership of Deputy President Professor Rod Coombs to explore the University's reputation and brand.

The Working Group was informed by extensive surveys and desk research, a marketplace and competitor analysis and a series of interviews with senior staff and external partners. It also worked with Manchester-based communications agency Creative Concern to explore and develop a new narrative and key messages for the University, which were then tested with prospective students, external stakeholders and alumni.

This brief document contains a summary of the findings from that project and outlines some of the actions that will be taken to build a powerful and distinctive reputation for the University over the next decade.

1. Background: Building on Strong Foundations

In 2004, Professor Alan Gilbert set out the *'Manchester 2015 Agenda'*, which not only established an ambitious vision for the future of The University of Manchester, but also provided a bold and distinctive narrative to accompany the new visual identity and shape external perceptions of the new University.

The goals and key performance indicators contained in Manchester 2015 were clear: to take our place in the top 25 universities in the world (as measured by the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities), to improve our research and teaching performance and to employ more Nobel prize-winners on our staff.

Our bold ambition garnered a lot of attention and the mission was successful in many areas, with a significant move up the SHJT rankings (from 78th to 38th position) and a powerful performance in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

We now need to build on these strong foundations to bolster our reputation and to improve the way we communicate our success. We need a new narrative that reflects the changes in the higher education environment and helps to deliver distinctiveness, student appeal and a reputation for excellence. We also need a new proposition that recognises our effort to improve the student experience.

2. Context: University 'brands' are generic

One of the most striking findings of the research is the extent to which universities in the UK and overseas offer very little differentiation – aims, attributes and words are often interchangeable.

'A world-class university' – Leicester

'A pioneering university in a world-class city' – Liverpool

'The university of world-class professionals' – MMU

'A world-class civic university' – Newcastle

'World-class university' – ETH Zurich

"Universities are not very good at creating any sense of uniqueness. Descriptors are 'samey'... words such as international, world-class, research-intensive, engagement and excellence are scattered across the public pages of all" (The Knowledge Partnership).

There is an opportunity for progressive institutions to stand out – but it is not easy. The brand review exercise set out to establish and test our points of distinction in pursuit of this goal.

3. Points of distinction

Eight points of distinction were identified for further investigation:

- (Making a) Difference
- Ambition
- The city of Manchester (original modern)
- Size (the advantages size brings)
- *'Manchester made me'*
- Global reach
- Progressive
- Breaking down barriers

These were tested:

- with a focus groups of prospective students
- through a panel of senior external stakeholders representing the private sector, graduate employers, city partners, funders
- through an international piece of 'perception-based' research

Not surprisingly, being an integral part of the city of Manchester is perceived to be a major strength. *Size* – and crucially, the advantages that size brings – is also very positively considered.

'Manchester made me' – referring to the holistic student experience offered by The University of Manchester in the wider context of the city and how that helps to shape well-rounded, highly-employable individuals was very well-received by prospective students and by internal stakeholders in Careers and Alumni Relations.

Everyone likes the idea that the University 'makes a difference, makes things happen', but the important point is that we must be able to demonstrate our relevance and impact with practical and topical examples.

Being ambitious and progressive is not considered to be distinctive in the University environment. Furthermore, it is noted the Manchester 2015 Agenda was full of ambition; our emphasis should now be on providing evidence of our success and demonstrating our determination never to stand still.

Testing helped us shape our final four points of distinction as follows:

- The city of Manchester (original modern)
- Size (the advantages size brings)
- Global reach
- *'Manchester made me'*

We are now developing a compelling proposition around these points that is easy for staff across the University to deploy in their own communications to and for external audiences to understand.

Our overarching theme will focus on 'making things happen, making a difference' (note this is not a 'routine' strap-line) and we will substantiate every claim we make with evidence of impact and achievement.

Safeguarding our reputation by tackling the NSS

We want to be excellent in all respects, but this review provided further evidence that our performance in the National Student Satisfaction (NSS) survey is critically undermining our reputation, not only in the undergraduate recruitment sphere, but also amongst other important external audiences due in part to its impact on our position in UK newspaper league tables. If we do not improve our institutional NSS score and stem the tide, the negative impact will continue to compound over time.

Corporate social responsibility

Universities are expected to be moral, ethical and socially responsible – we need to find compelling evidence that we go beyond the norm, if we are to deploy this as a distinctive feature on The University of Manchester.

4. Actions

We should routinely consider how high profile activities can promote a reputation for excellence, how they reflect and enhance the notion of 'Making things happen, making a difference' and our four points of distinction.

A number of current projects naturally support our evolving proposition. These include: the Alan Gilbert Learning Commons, University College and the Graphene Innovation Institute.

The report highlights other potential reputation-enhancing projects for consideration and prioritisation by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT):

Mission: Reputation, North America

International research tells us that although we enjoy a relatively high profile in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, we are relatively unknown in the USA. Building our reputation in the USA must be a priority because:

"over half the world's academic research is conducted there..." and
"reputations of 'world-class' universities are made and broken in the USA".

Our aim is therefore to create influence, profile and opportunities in North America, perhaps focusing on specific geographic regions.

Mission: Influence, London

Likewise, research indicates that in national policy debates we have not yet fully broken into the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, Cambridge and London, and that we need to enhance our profile in London and the South East in order to have a rightful share of influence in shaping government policy etc.

"It's the South East – that's where the power is, the department of health, other leading universities; even people in the street. We need to let them know something's happening up here."

Our aim is to target key decision-makers across government and government agencies, FTSE 500 boards, Media and funding partners.

5. People

University first

While staff identify strongly with their academic field or school, loyalty to the University is under-exploited – we need to nurture a 'whole university' sense of belonging and ensure that staff understand the University's vision and know about success stories beyond their own discipline.

Ambassadors

People-stories are the most compelling. We will present evidence of our success in the most human, engaging way - we will identify and celebrate star staff, students and alumni as ambassadors.

Ambassadors should epitomise our over-arching theme 'Making things happen, making a difference' and be readily able to talk about our four points of distinction as well as represent key topics or areas of expertise for which we wish to be best known.

6. Visualisation

The research clearly demonstrated that all universities are far too reliant on "words" to describe their mission and activities, and that many of those words and phrases are interchangeable between universities. If words are not the answer, a vital part of our approach must be to create a visual language, which becomes so distinctive that it is almost instantly recognisable as ours.

Photography

Powerful photography will be fundamental. Photographic resources and budgets are currently thinly-spread and inefficient. Through the breadth of our research and our global impact, we will create an unprecedented visual gallery for which we will become known.

Graphics

We will develop a distinctive suite of information graphics - film, maps, charts, schematics, illustrations – to visually describe the scale, reach and impact of our activities.

Campus

"We're good at putting up boards around a construction project which tell a compelling story but, when they come down, there is nothing left."

We will 'animate the campus' via displays, exhibitions and events, telling of our rich history as well as our powerful contemporary impact.

We will turn buildings inside out - telling the story of what's happening within on the outside - to intrigue passers-by, break down barriers between disciplines and engage local communities.

7. Guidance and support

- Series of presentations to SLT, Faculties and Schools Conference, PSS, Board of Governors Conference
- Series of marketing workshops with marketing / associated staff from across the University
- Visual brand - new, easy reference guidelines being produced (including extended use of the limited-use logo)
- Tone of voice – easy reference guide to developing a distinctive tone, writing in an impactful way
- Web presence – project to refine and redevelop the University's web presence including design and content guidance for Schools
- All review papers and documentation, tools and reference material to feature on a University 'brand' micro-site
- Easy reference pocket guide including best practice branding advice to be distributed via Uni Life
- Reorganisation of central marketing staff to best support colleagues to deliver against our enabling goal 'A reputation for excellence'.

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