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working
together

Communications and
Marketing Conference 2016

**A global challenge, a Manchester solution – how the beacons have transformed
our research communications**

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Overview

- A global challenge
- A Manchester solution?



Regardless of where you work, we think that this is a story that will resonate with you.

We're going to look at a global challenge – the challenge all universities face, of making sure your message gets through.

And we'll look at a Manchester solution – how we recognised that we had a problem, how we set out to solve it, and some of the challenges we had along the way.



Background: 2020 vision

- Research one of three core goals
- Unique?
- Refreshed in 2015



So, just to give you an idea of where this all started, it'd be good to roll back the years to 2011.

It was around then that our president and vice-chancellor, Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell – as I'm sure you all know, that's her on the right! – set out her vision for the University's future: the 2020 vision.

In this she described three core goals, one of which was excellence in research.

Now I'm sure we'll all agree, the higher education sector has changed a lot since 2011. Now more than ever, it's an international marketplace. We're competing for many of the same students. The same research staff. The same opportunities for funding and collaboration.

And a lot of universities will be making the same type of claims.

As you'll remember, Dame Nancy refreshed the 2020 vision last year. It wasn't a big surprise that in it, there was a shift in focus. She made a greater call for the University to become better known for the things that we do best.



Background: size and scale

- The UK's largest single-site university
- Breadth of knowledge that enables a unique cross-pollination of skills and disciplines



Of course, we're a huge university – and that has pros and cons. One of the big benefits, from a research point of view, is the opportunity it allows for interdisciplinary research.

But it can also have the opposite effect, of people working in silos.

Does anyone in the room ever work with academics who represent the university or Faculty on national or international business?

Could they talk about the latest cancer research? Or our range of business collaborations in engineering? Or our research in global development? Maybe. But with far less authority.



Background: our brand

- Prospective students – most applicants and most international students
- School leavers – 3rd most popular
- Academics (world) – 50th in the world, 8th in UK
- Staff – 92% proud to work here (2nd in UK)
- General public – 3rd best university in UK

People might say: Manchester's got a good reputation. And that's true. In terms of our brand, we're in a very good place. The university is consistently shown to be recognisable and popular.

So we clearly have a **good name** – but people find it harder to say what it is we're **good at**.

The University of Manchester isn't alone in this – it's a challenge for universities across the world.



A global challenge



- 6,500+ academic and research staff
- 3,500+ postgraduate researchers
- 3 Faculties
- 19 Schools
- 20+ Institutes
- 60+ Research Centres

So why do we need to bring further focus and distinctiveness to our research marketing?

Well at Manchester we have:

- Lots of researchers
- Working across a range of subject areas
- and who are all affiliated to different schools, institutes, and centres.

These numbers, give just a sense of the scale of this activity, and the sheer volume of the great research stories we have to tell.

But for those of us that work in marketing, it can be difficult to know.

- What ground breaking research we're doing,
- Where we're world leaders in a field and;
- Where our real points of distinctiveness lie.

And how can we build reputation and differentiate ourselves from the competition of we can't articulate what makes us special.



A global challenge (cont.)

- A global research audience
- Several audience segments
- Various channel types
- Multiple channel owners
- 100+ Marcomms professionals



On top of this, In today's higher education sector we're competing globally and we're also dealing with various different domestic and international audience segments.

For example, we increasingly want to communicate the impact of our research to policy-makers and funding bodies, but that's not necessarily the same research message that we're looking to convey to academics and other institutions around the world, or to businesses and industry for that matter. For each group we need convey a research message that is relevant to them.

On top of that we've more channels at our disposal than ever, and with all those Schools, Centres, and Institutes owning their own channels we're collectively communicating about numerous topics and issues with lots of different audience groups, via several different mediums. All at the same time.

In many ways this is all part of being a university, however, by bringing focus and distinctiveness to our communications we can cut through the noise.



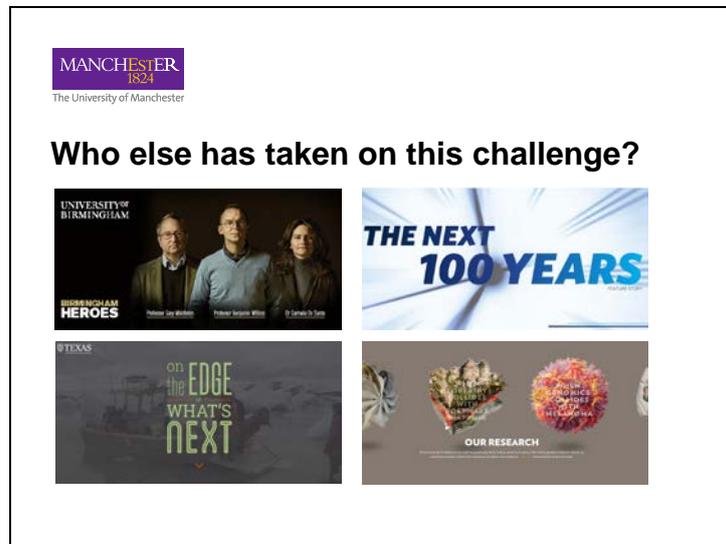
Reality check...

- We're a great University...
- Our research is excellent...
- We have world-class facilities...
- We do cutting-edge research...
- We make ground-breaking discoveries...
- We're a truly global institution...

I want you to put your hands up if any of this language is familiar, now keep your hands up if you think this language is a good way to make our university feel distinctive.

The statements up on the screen may well be true, but the reality is that in today's crowded media and marketplace, an organisation that doesn't have something particular to say about itself will usually be one that is thought of as mediocre – or worse not thought about at all.

That doesn't mean you can't use these phrases, sometimes they're the right words, but we need to evidence them with proof points.



Here are just a few examples of universities that we think are using focus to highlight their distinctiveness and promote their research.

Top left, the University of Birmingham launched a campaign called Birmingham Heroes last year. Through it they've used striking and dramatic visuals to put a face to eight areas of research that they want to be known for.

Bottom left, a good example from the States, The University of Texas at Austin have launched "On the edge of what's next", where they look at five different areas of research at the University and explore potential future applications they're working on.

Top right, The University of British Columbia put together some very engaging content around the centennial where their researchers imagine what their fields will look like in a 100 years and discuss the direction of their research.

Bottom, The University of Melbourne have use their Collison campaign to highlight the interdisciplinary nature of their work and how they provide a space for disciplines to come together to changing the world.

Let's bring it back to Manchester though, and how we've defined our distinctiveness.



External Stakeholders' Survey

"Leaders know that Manchester wants to be a top 25 university, and that's great, but every university says that these days. They say, we are busy, and bombarded with news every second of our day. We are probably talking to 100 universities in the UK, and maybe the same number across the world. And we don't know what Manchester stands for, or why it's different. Please tell us!"

— Collective feedback from the External Stakeholders' Survey 2013

For Manchester this challenge really crystalized with the results of our 2013 External Stakeholders' Survey.

This is a qualitative survey we conduct every two years and in successive surveys many respondents have said that Manchester has a very good reputation, but that it needs to be more specific and focused on its points of excellence.

This means get to grips with and articulating what we stand for, and crucially what makes us different. It's not just about saying we're good. It's about saying, clearly what we're good at.

So let's take a closer look at what our external stakeholders perceived to be our strengths.



Here we have a word cloud of the results from our 2013 survey. As you can see there are some stand out subjects like Physics that our external stakeholders strongly associate with the University.

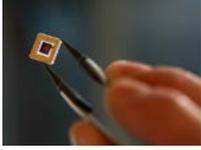
But by and large most of the terms we can see business, science, engineering, medicine aren't really unique to Manchester. What research University wouldn't claim to be good at science?

However, the eagle eyed here will have already spotted that there is one word up on the screen that is arguably unique to Manchester. Let's look at why this word is so important to the story of what we wanted to achieve and how we've defined our distinctiveness.


The University of Manchester

What we wanted to achieve

- What are we good at?
- How do we tell the story?
- 'Home of Graphene'

So, hands up: who's heard of graphene?

I'm just joking: you'll all know very well about graphene and its world-changing potential.

In our eyes, it had an additional type of potential: the potential for promoting the university. You'll remember that the University built a campaign all around graphene. Among other things, we started to talk about Manchester as the 'home of graphene'.

Few would argue that this hasn't been a success.

So, if lots of people know about graphene – could we get to a point where lots of people know about other things at Manchester too?



Defining our distinctiveness

- “Discoveries”,
“breakthroughs”,
“world-changing”
- Strong leaders
- A small number
 - 78
 - 19
 - 5



This was discussed at the highest possible level at our University. Defining our distinctiveness in research was on the agenda at every meeting of our Senior Leadership Team for a year.

In these discussions, they sought to identify those areas of research that were truly unique.

They should highlight areas where we can show “discoveries” or “breakthroughs” – it wasn’t enough to just highlight “interesting” research.

For each topic or theme, there would need to be strong leaders, who can be visible and articulate about the whole area of research.

And there had to be a small number. Just enough to offer a shop window to the University’s research. But broad enough to cover the main disciplines at the University.

So the senior officers were asked to consider what areas might best fit the bill.

How many do you think they came up with initially?

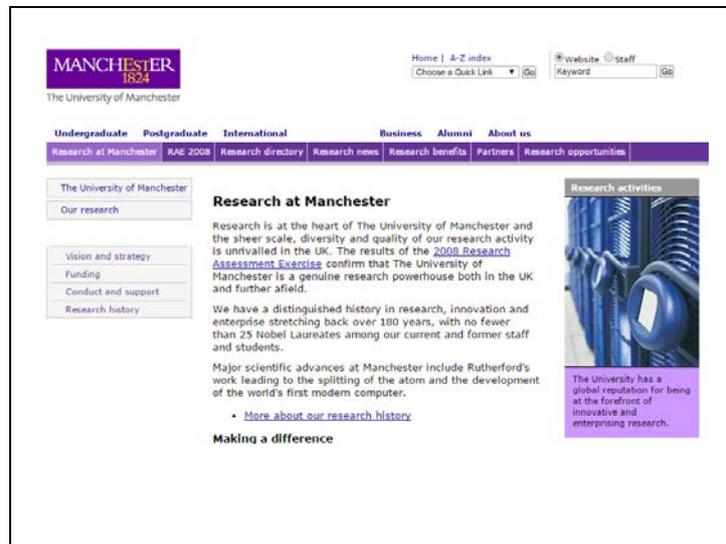
78. So much for focus and distinctiveness!

Eventually that was whittled down to 19...

and ultimately to 5 areas. But even then, the areas that were chosen were incredibly broad: ‘arts’, ‘sciences’, etc. It was a bit of an impasse.

The breakthrough came by looking outside. Nancy, working with Alan Ferns, the Director of Communications and Marketing, tested a concept similar to the research beacons with people on our board of governors – most of whom are business people, rather than academics. Their feedback really opened people's eyes to how we should be communicating about our research, and helped push them on to choose five distinct areas.

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This is how we used to talk about research at Manchester. We talk about our size and scale, and our history, but lots of universities can say similar things.

We had to start thinking about the things only we can say.



Understanding our beacons

- Academic sponsors
- Workshops
- Continuing consultation



Of course, it was vital that we had our academics on board. You might remember what I said earlier about having strong leaders in place.

So five leading academics – people like Ian Cotton and Nigel Scrutton – were brought into the fold at an early stage to help us map out the journey we needed to go on.

We also arranged a number of workshops that gathered key academics and Faculty staff together. At these, we outlined the:

- Origins of the beacons
- What we hope to achieve
- What we needed from them to make it happen – we asked them questions such as:
 - Who are the big stars?
 - What are the big stories?
 - What might the key messages be?

As you'd expect, it wasn't always straightforward getting buy-in from our academics. It's sometimes hard for them to see the benefits of good communications and marketing – it can feel like a distraction, or a dumbing down.

Fortunately in these instances we had a ready-made example of a success story in graphene. We also made sure that we had senior people at these meetings who were already on board and were aware of the back story, which enabled us to show the academics just how important their work is in representing the University.

We've continued to work closely with these academic sponsors. They've helped us to ensure accuracy of content we've produced and often streamline the sign-off process in production. I'm sure you'll agree that this can make things a whole lot easier!


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Implementation – Getting the creative right

“All universities do research”
“Academics sit in libraries and laboratories”
“Ground-breaking, state-of-the-art, interdisciplinary research (yawn)”

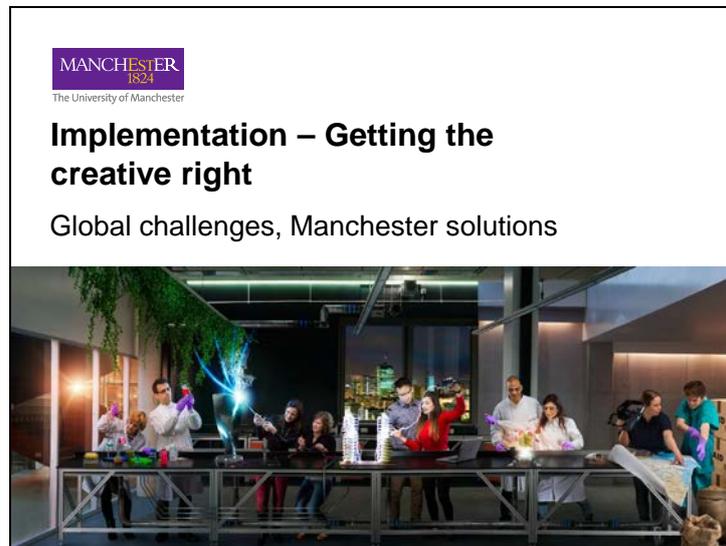
  

Once we knew what the messages were, we were able to begin thinking more broadly about the look and tone of our research beacons marketing.

We organised a creative workshop with representatives from across marketing and communications at the University.

At the workshop, we asked groups to consider three accusations that could be levelled at how universities market their research. The statements were designed to move us away from the same old stories, language and imagery – test tubes, microscopes, the academic ivory tower.

We wanted to at the very least, come up with a memorable strapline and visual identity for the beacons. And this is what we came up with...



For a strapline, we chose: Global challenges, Manchester solutions. This neatly encapsulates the idea of real-world issues and the fact that the examples we use are of things that are unique to Manchester.

For the visuals, we took a big step outside our comfort zone.

We had the idea of a Manchester lab, where researchers come together to work on real-world problems.

It's a huge step away from the more literal imagery that we were used to working with.

And we started to implement these straight away.



As part of our first phase of activity, we ran a series of features in our staff magazine.

This was reinforced with a series of features with richer content on StaffNet.



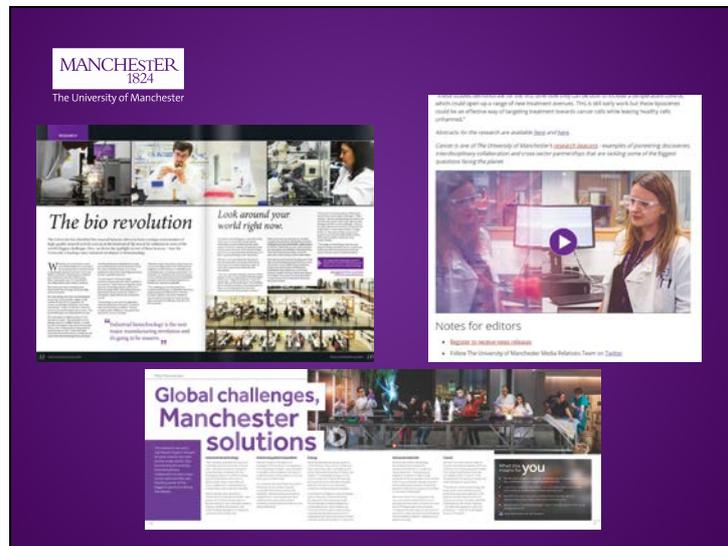
To reach external audiences, one of the first things we did was to develop of a hub of online content on the main University website.

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We produced a brochure that features long-form articles and made this available to those areas that deal with external partners.

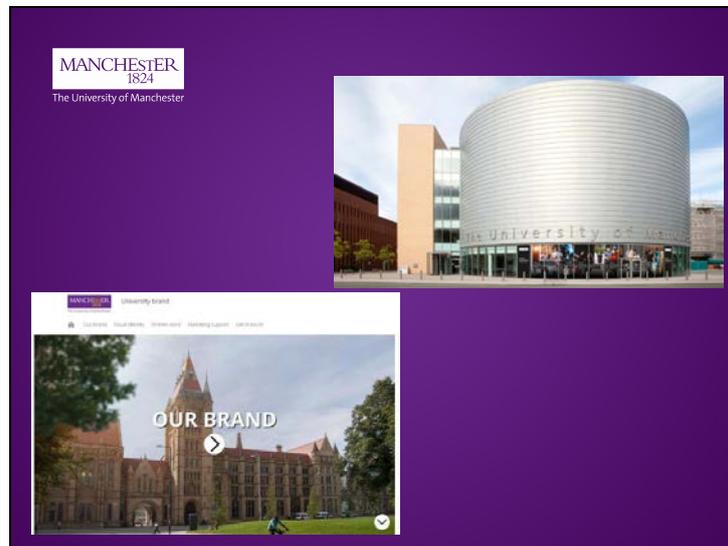
We also directly targeted our full list of external stakeholders with a pack of five postcards.



We began to integrate the research beacons into marketing for other audiences.

For example, we now use the beacons as the means of talking about our research to prospective students in our prospectuses, we use them in our alumni communications and in media relations activity.

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We've also used the our physical campus to promote the beacons, like at University Place, and we have a range of beacons information in our brand toolkit for use by University staff.

Which brings us up to the second phase.



Implementation: Phase 2

- Established a dedicated team
- Working in partnership with academics
- Greater research communications capacity



For phase two the University has established a dedicated team to promote our research beacons.

This team of coordinators based in our Faculties, coordinated by myself in the Division of Communications and Marketing.

By embedding dedicated comms professionals within the relevant Faculties we're able to work closer than ever with our leading academics and this is allowing us to identify both new communications opportunities and content ideas earlier and easier than before, but also build and sustain academic buy-in across the university.

We are already seeing a step change in our capacity, for instance we were able to put together a really a distinctive Manchester presence based around our research beacons at this year's EuroScience Open Forum.



For those of you not familiar with ESOF, it is a major biennial, pan-European, general science conference. This year's ESOF was held in Manchester last July, and it brought over thousands of delegates from across Europe right to our doorstep.

Well with the research beacons team in place we had a clear device to bring focus to how communicated with delegates about the University's research strengths.

We were able to pull together interactive exhibits and content from across our beacons all under a single powerful visual theme, and where appropriate we we're able to incorporate other areas of the University such as business engagement using the beacons as a content framework and through beacons related examples and content.

With our beacons team in place we've also started to expand and develop the content and narrative developed in phase one.


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New ways of working

- A central team that is plugged into the Faculties
- Opportunity for in-depth academic engagement
- Grassroots level knowledge and insight
- Beacon-specific campaigns

We now have a team of individual marketing leads with responsibility for just one beacon in its own right.

This means a new, brave approach for the University where we now have marketing leads sitting out in various areas of the University who are “on the ground” and working at a “grassroots” level to gather local knowledge and content ideas which can be fed back to the central team.

Thus supports centralised cross beacon campaigns as well as enabling each of us to create and manage individual campaigns which further strengthen the impact and awareness of each specific beacon with its own, unique audience groups.

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Beacon-specific campaigns

- B!RTH
- The Divide
- UN Habitat 3

Addressing global inequalities

The Divide
Screening
#TheDivideJoin

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Habitat 3: will it deliver?
Insight and commentary from
The University of Manchester

What do we mean beacon-specific campaigns? Well, since starting in June there have been a number of campaigns comprising of video, social media and events activity for the Royal Exchange's B!RTH festival, a screening of The Divide at the John Rylands Library and the UN's Habitat 3 conference.

I will go into more detail on Habitat 3 in particular. However it is worth noting that each of these other campaigns was also an opportunity to raise awareness of Addressing Global Inequalities specifically – yet it meant we had access to quite humanitarian audiences and opportunities and we were still able to reference and raise awareness of other more scientific beacons.

For example, the Royal Exchange Theatre hosted a week of plays on childbirth inequalities and we had presence at their Saturday 'open doors' event where we had research beacon material on display and our academics answered questions from the public about childbirth inequalities and the public wrote in speech bubbles what they felt were key issues and the images were published to social media.

An example of how this links back in to the central marketing team can be seen in coming weeks where you will see our involvement in the festival feature as a long form feature article in Manchester Magazine.

Similarly, The Divide was a film screening that we hosted at the John Rylands Library in order to engage members of the public in the centre of town with a film about income inequalities

and, again, it was badged as part of our research beacons activity with a research beacons banner and materials on every chair for attendees.

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UN Habitat 3 campaign

GDI Global Development Institute
October 22 at 9:35am · 6

Last week, Armando Barrientos and Diana Nishi attended the UN's Habitat3 conference. Miss any of their posts? You can easily see all commentary from our researchers in one place at <http://bit.ly/h-lab3round>

Habitat 3: will it deliver?
Around 50,000 delegates met in Quito, Ecuador, in October for the Habitat 3 conference which set out the United Nations' New Urban Agenda – a guide to policies and approaches for the sustainable development and planning of cities and towns across the globe for the next 20 years.

As part of The University of Manchester's [research](#) [response to education global challenges](#), we brought you a special series of blogs from some of our leading researchers.

Habitat 3 is an example of the largest campaign to date. It was a recent UN conference on the future of cities and our Global Development Institute researchers provided comment which used the external and topical Habitat 3 hook to shine a spotlight on their expertise in urban inequalities and to ensure commentary on urban inequalities was seen by policymakers attending the conference in Ecuador.

Academics attended the conference and provided video diaries, blogs and you can see snapshots of the type of Facebook posts we issued and the social shorthand blog material which we created (and which people really engaged with)

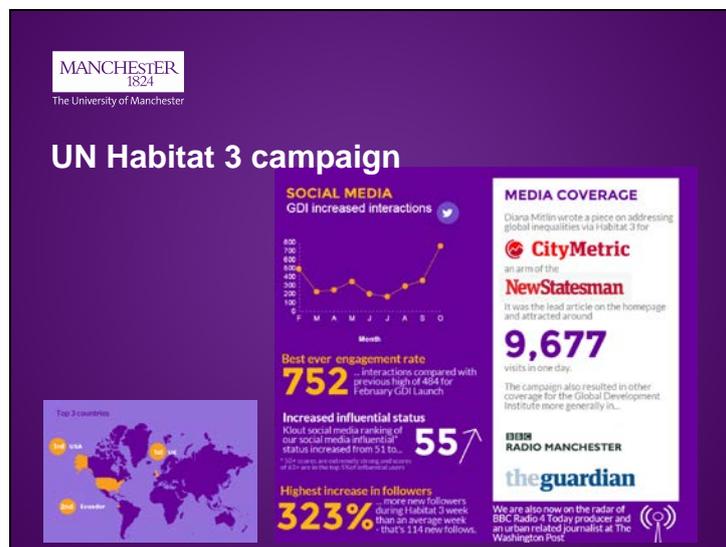


What was the benefit of this campaign as part of our research beacons activity?

Well, it enabled us to pitch our research experts to CityMetric – an arms of the New Statesman – where we got coverage and even a very neat reference at the bottom of the article which stated...

Professor Diana Mitlin is the managing director of the University of Manchester's Global Development Institute and is academic lead for the University's Addressing Global Inequalities research beacon. Follow at @GlobalDevInst for updates on her live tweets from Habitat 3 between 17 and 20 October.

...even with a hyperlink to our beacons pages! And this is an article which targets a very specific audience of urban policymakers, urban enthusiasts and academics – this campaign enabled us to reach this group who we may not reach with targeted commentary in some of our wider cross-beacon campaigns. It enables us to really evidence our expertise through detailed thought leadership pieces.



And as you can see here – it is anticipated that this particular City Metric article attracted 9,677 viewers in just one day alone. The campaign also featured on Policy at Manchester blogs reaching policymaker audiences there and it helped to grow the social media followers of the recently launched Global Development Institute.

Campaigns such as this will take place across each beacon area and when all of us as beacon marketing leads meet with Adam as a team on a monthly basis we report back to the central team and also coordinate cross-beacon campaigns (such as ESOF), share best practice and ensure our individual campaigns complement one another and take place at staggered times to ensure a critical mass of broad and niche coverage for all beacons and specific beacons too.

This slide and the ones that follow are pages taken from a new A6 booklet created centrally to cover all of our beacons.

As you can see, firstly we have the detail of the Global Challenges we're tackling in each beacon. By making the challenge sound as daunting, urgent and important as possible we can quickly establish why our research matters.

This allows us to create an emotional connection with audiences that don't necessarily have a related research background and don't necessarily have a connection to the topic.

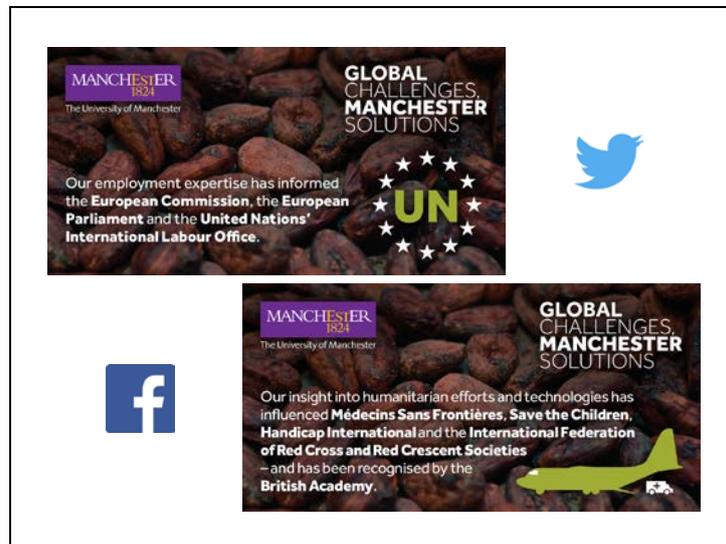


All beacons campaigns – whether cross beacon or specific – continually draw on the Global Challenges, Manchester Solutions tagline and we focus on explaining Why Manchester.

This allows us to show that we're not only having a major impact but that our Manchester research is particularly notable for being at the cutting edge of these fields. Why would a potential partner, funding body or researcher want to think of any other University for this challenge? Manchester clearly states its credentials and the various reasons we are the University of choice to tackle this challenge.

Of course we now live in an age where content isn't exclusively consumed in print and so, as is hopefully obvious, this booklet isn't just a piece of print collateral. It is also available online as a slide deck that our academics and senior staff can use when they need to talk about our research.

We've also deconstructed this content into shareable and related infographics for social media.



These have been deployed across the University’s social media channels and have proved a useful way to pull various audiences in to a discussion on our research. They also ensure that our campaigns are integrated across multiple channels and what we’re saying in print is reflected in what we’re saying online.

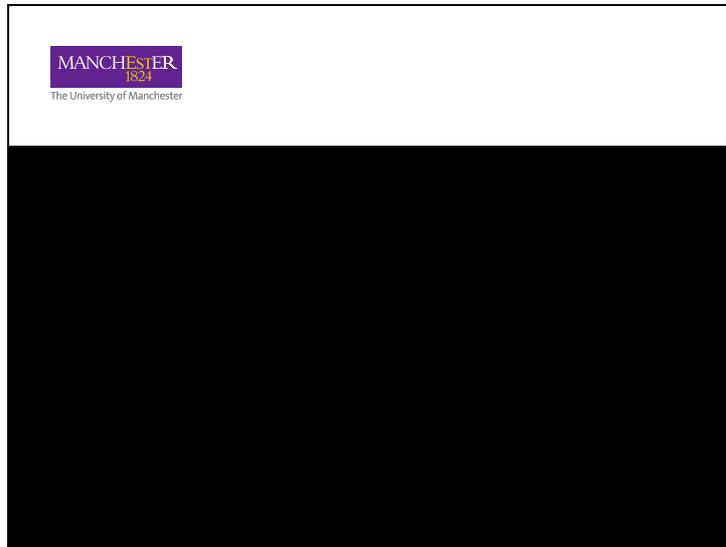
We’ve taken this formula built around flexible content and the tag line Global challenges, Manchester solutions so that it can be implemented in many ways.



So what has been a success to date? Well, if we compare word cloud visualisations of our 2013 with those of the 2015 survey we can see a really clear shift in the perceptions our respondents have about Manchester’s research.

In just two years we managed to get all five of our beacons mentioned enough by our respondents that they all feature as the most used words. What’s more, alongside Advanced materials, which is quite clearly visible, it is easy to pick out and identify our cancer, energy and industrial biotechnology and global inequalities research beacons as the phrases that our external stakeholders most associate with Manchester.

A clear success and one that we have a team to build on further with a wider selection of audience groups and specific as well as cross-beacon campaigns as we move into a third phase for the research beacons.



This video features many of the academic sponsors for the research beacons that Neil mentioned earlier. They really have been crucial to our success:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bb8NJvDaH4>

From the start these academics have been highly involved in helping refine our messaging for the beacons and securing buy-in from our wider academic community. As such they make the perfect external facing ambassadors for the beacons and by having a central beacons co-ordinator as well as roles such as mine where I have the opportunity to get to know these academics more closely and can become a trusted colleague on a day by day basis, we are in a strong position moving forward to develop beacon specific marketing strategies which sit under and support a central beacons strategy.



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