

# Guidance on applying to academic positions

This information is intended to help potential applicants understand job opportunities within the School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures, to provide general explanations and background information, and to give some helpful advice. It does not cover the specifics of all jobs and there are likely to be things about the position you are interested in that are not covered here. There is a lot of advice online about how to present your CV and write cover letters, and it is always helpful to do some research or see if you can get hold of examples from friends and colleagues as you prepare your applications.

## Why do our ads refer to race and gender?

While the picture is varied, within British universities generally people of colour are under-represented and women are frequently under-represented too. At senior levels, the situation is especially striking. Many job ads recognise this with a statement about equalities and the desire to recruit new colleagues in a way that doesn't simply reinforce existing imbalances. These statements may appear a little formulaic, but they are part of a wider campaign for equality and representation. In recruitment terms, they reflect the School's desire to have more diverse and gender-balanced shortlists. We believe that it is only by attracting talented people from many different backgrounds and communities in the UK and overseas that we will make our campus the best possible place to work and study.

We hope that this commentary will also encourage individuals who do not have established contacts or networks at Manchester to engage more with us as you prepare the application. One of the major, although often unstated, obstacles to more inclusive recruitment is that some applicants do not have as much access to – or the confidence to ask for – information about the process and the position. Below are some of the things that you might need to know.

## Preparing an application

For many jobs, the main documents you will need to prepare are a CV and a cover letter. Some jobs may ask you for other things, such as a research statement or a project proposal.

- The cover letter should address how your skills, attributes, knowledge and qualifications address the criteria in the position description. It should make clear what you can contribute within the specific context – that is, what will you bring to the position and how will your profile complement existing research and teaching areas in the department? If the position is to join a team working on a funded project, or to cover teaching in a specific field, you should say how your previous experience equips you to do this.
- For lectureships, including fixed-term positions, you will be competing with many people who have a PhD and perhaps some additional experience. Think about what makes your CV stand out. Shortlisted candidates for Senior Lecturer positions are likely to all have strong records of publication, research income, teaching experience, and leadership in their current and/or previous roles – so the same consideration applies.

- Listing previous duties or describing your attributes is not as effective as explaining them, giving evidence to support your claims, and showing what you achieved or why the work matters. Rather than saying 'I am committed to high-quality teaching', for example, be specific: 'My commitment to high-quality teaching can be seen in ...'. Make sure you read the language in the criteria closely and address the nuances appropriately – some ask for previous 'experience', while others may ask you to demonstrate 'potential' or 'willingness'; some require specific knowledge, others focus on skills.
- When outlining future plans, it is good to connect them clearly with what you have already done. This will show that they are realistic goals and will help the selection committee understand how you are building a career pathway not just moving between different things. Keep in mind, too, that you will not necessarily be addressing people with the same field of expertise, so you should avoid using too much jargon and make sure you explain key indicators of profile in your field (such as which journals or publishers are seen as influential or high quality).

# The interview process

If you are invited to an interview, we recommend that you get in touch with the person named as the contact on the advertisement (if you haven't already) to help build up a good understanding of what the department is looking for and ask any preparatory questions. When you come to the interview you should be able to talk concretely about the teaching and research specialisms of the department or institute, potential links with other departments, Schools or Faculties (before the interview it's good to have a sense of what these terms mean at the University of Manchester), and the kinds of courses that the role would require you to teach, if applicable.

## What to expect:

- Different departments will have different processes, but in general there tends to be at least two parts to the interview process, and sometimes three. All positions will require an interview in a panel format. They often also require either one or two presentations: if there are two, it is likely that there is one focused on teaching and one focused on research (potentially including public engagement); if only one, you might be asked to present something that combines these areas. These presentations are usually open to department (and other interested) staff and may also be open to or involve students.
- Typically, the interview panel at this level will have several members, with some of them coming from the department or institute to which you are applying, one or more senior managers from the School or Faculty (one of them will be the chair of the panel), and an external panel member from another part of the School. Usually, the questions that panel members ask you reflect some aspect of their role or their relationship to the position being advertised; for example, the research director might ask you about your publication strategy. All applicants are asked the same set of questions, though you might be asked follow-up questions based on your response.

## What to prepare for:

- You should be prepared to discuss in depth the things that you highlighted in your application, as well as other aspects of your background or the role that you didn't focus on. Especially during the presentations, you should remember that the majority of the people listening to you will not have read your application (these are restricted to the shortlisting committee) and they may not be familiar with your work.
- One really essential question to prepare for is: why here? That is, what is it about the University of Manchester and the particular department that makes it the right place for you? This is very often the first question and if you can give a precise and enthusiastic response instead of a vague one it can help set the tone for the rest of the interview.
- You might also want to think about what you would bring to the University in a wider sense, such as through well-established links with other scholars in academic networks (domestic and international). Some reading about the University of Manchester's strategic vision could inform how you articulate the value of these links in the Manchester context.
- Further, since 'impact' is of rising importance, you might discuss your links with people and organisations outside of an academic environment, and how you have pursued meaningful engagement with the public or practitioners to maximise the wider contribution of your research. If you have used these links to inform your teaching you could mention this too.
- If you finished your PhD recently and have not yet had a chance to build up a lot of additional experience, think about how your studies and other activities have given you the basis for taking on a new position. For instance, you may not have been responsible for a major administrative or service role such as a programme director, but you may have shown leadership and service to your community by being a student representative, starting a reading group, or organising a workshop.
- Remember that there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions of the panel – while there is often not time for a lengthy discussion, this is a chance to gain insights into the position or the working environment.

**With thanks for your interest and best wishes for your search, from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee on behalf of colleagues and students in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.**