Public Engagement Framework
Sharing, listening, partnering

1. Context: Our Future, social responsibility and civic engagement

Our commitment to public engagement is reflected in our overarching institutional strategy Our Future and features prominently in our "Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement" 5-year plan.

Social responsibility and civic engagement are at the heart of our 'why', reflected in our institutional purpose to "advance education, knowledge and wisdom for the good of society." This public purpose is at the centre of everything we do. The contribution we make to society and the environment occurs through our four core functions of research, learning, engagement and operations.

Our public engagement work is enabled through our commitment to people, place and partnerships and is characterised by a commitment to listening, engaging, involving, partnering with and inspiring and being inspired by the public in our work.

2. What is 'public engagement'?

In the UK, public engagement is supported by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). We have adopted this overarching definition in our own strategy and practice:

"Public engagement describes the [many] different ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education, research [and teaching and learning] can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit."

2.1 Why does public engagement matter to us?

"*I believe universities exist for the public good. I am passionately committed to public engagement. We want to share our passion, research and knowledge. Equally we gain enormously from interactions with the public as they enable us to do better and more meaningful research, be better teachers and make a difference.*

Engagement includes every aspect of a university's work; our teaching, our research, our wider contribution to society and the national economy and our research which aims to solve the world's most pressing problems. We can only do this effectively if we are talking with, listening to, partnering with and learning from the public."

Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, President and Vice-Chancellor

2.2 What does 'public engagement' mean to us

Public engagement is how we meaningfully share ideas, knowledge and research, inspire discussion, debate and creativity, listen to, reflect on and work in partnership with diverse communities to address societal challenges.

As an engaged university, we're committed to embedding public engagement into all aspects of our work.

- **Engaged research**: We actively work with and involve the public in our research activity. We recognise that diverse forms of knowledge, expertise and skills alongside the value of sharing and building knowledge in partnership with different communities helps to make our research meaningful, relevant and impactful.
- **Engaged teaching:** We develop teaching and learning opportunities that both make a positive difference to our communities as well as enhance the educational practice and experience of our students.
- **Engaged places**: We connect our public engagement work to people and partners locally, nationally and globally through our research, teaching and social responsibility activities. Our cultural institutions provide distinctive places of belonging for our local communities.

Our approach to public engagement is supported by three enabling priorities:

- **Practice:** Providing an enabling, inclusive and supportive environment for our staff, students and community partners to undertake purposeful public engagement activity through research and teaching that is valued.
- **People:** Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the involvement of staff, students and community partners in public engagement activity.
- **Progress:** Adapting our systems and processes to further enhance the ways in which we develop a culture of continual improvement.

2.3 How do we engage?

Public engagement is not necessarily an end in and of itself: it contributes to our strategic goals to enhance our research and teaching and learning and enables us to work with our communities in achieving this. The breadth of our public engagement activities is as diverse as the communities we engage with. Engagement can range from information-giving to activities that are public-led and everything in between. We use different approaches that are most appropriate for the intended purpose, context and place for the engagement activities and the communities we work with.

Our research brings public engagement into research design, processes and outputs and includes festivals, working with schools, citizen science, participatory research, patient involvement in research, and policy engagement. We seek opportunities to align our work with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and our research beacons. Our research platforms including Creative Manchester, Sustainable Futures, Digital Futures and Policy@Manchester provide connections with a wide range of communities and interdisciplinary reach in Greater Manchester and beyond.

Our teaching and learning bring public engagement into the curriculum and supports our engagement with our students. For example, our Service Learning and University Living Lab programmes integrate community service with academic study to enrich learning, practical experience, teach civic responsibilities and strengthen communities whilst affecting change for sustainable development. Our University College for Interdisciplinary Learning (UCIL) offers co-curricular activities focussed on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, providing opportunities for applied research projects that are driven by the community organisation. We also have a thriving culture and practice of student volunteering and widening participation, which is linked to the student experience at Manchester. Our Stellify programme provides students with extra and intra-curricular opportunities to contribute to local and global communities, engaging with issues of real-world importance.

Our cultural institutions – Manchester Museum, the Whitworth, John Rylands Library and Research Institute and Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre draw on our distinct collections, inspirational spaces, ideas, events, exhibitions and convening power. They are key ways that we invest in and creatively engage with individuals, civil society organisations, educators, leaders, and employers to deliver social and environmental impact.

2.4 Engaging with purpose

This framework does not define how or who we may engage, but aims to support our ethos for meaningful engagement, as an engaged university, we are guided by three purposes:

- **Sharing:** Inspiring, informing and educating the public and making our work and communication more accessible. For example, public lectures, media and social media work, writing for the non-specialist, being the 'expert' at governmental committees, running activities at major festivals or working with young people, using our expertise to inform public policy and debate, exhibitions and performance and providing volunteering in the community.
- **Listening:** Actively listening to the public's views, concerns and insights and shaping our perspectives and priorities to better reflect public interests and needs. For example, stimulating awareness, discussion and debate, through the public's involvement in research and teaching, focus groups, consultation, citizen panels, interactive exhibits and policy forums.
- **Partnering:** Working in collaboration with local and global publics to solve problems together, drawing on each other's expertise to generate ideas to meet identified needs. For example, public and patient involvement in research, co-production of research, service learning, community involvement in delivery of teaching courses, citizen science and capacity building.

We particularly encourage public engagement that is mutually beneficial, fosters partnership approaches and considers our strategic priorities in the development and delivery of public engagement activity. In addition to our principles for public engagement, we can draw on the following to help shape purpose and guide our practice including:

- Our **Social Responsibility priorities**: social inclusion, prosperous communities, better health, environmental sustainability, and cultural engagement – locally, nationally and internationally
- The **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**: 17 global challenges, partnership working and knowledge exchange practices
- **Greater Manchester Civic University Agreement** priorities: education and skills, reducing inequalities, jobs and growth, the digital economy, net zero and the creative and cultural economy;
- **Civic stakeholder mapping and perception analysis**: part of our civic engagement work to enable a better understanding of our communities around Greater Manchester;
- Working with our strategic partner **Citizens UK** and/or with our **Greater Manchester Universities Civic Panel**, representing citizens from across the region who represent a diverse range of demographics and lived experience;
- Working with our **Cultural Institutions**, who lead in their approaches to engaging with diverse, often under-represented groups, creative methods of co-production and civic engagement.

2.5 Who do we engage with?

We recognise that the communities we work and partner with are diverse and have different needs and that to engage effectively it is important to identify and prioritise specific publics whether that's based on their identity, where they live or work, or their specific needs and interests.

As an engaged university, we work with a wide range of communities and organisations including:

- **Publics:** communities of place and interest as well as groups and citizens;
- **Civil society:** charities and informal associations, volunteer networks and grass roots activist groups;
- **Professionals and practitioners:** organisations in different domains providing products and services including education, media, health and social care, creative, culture and informal learning;
- **Policy sector:** policy influencers, policy makers, local councils, regulators and civil servants;
- **Business and industry:** including SMEs, entrepreneurs and social enterprises.

3. Vision and principles

Purposeful public engagement is essential to realising our research, teaching and social responsibility ambitions. It is only by *sharing*, *listening* and *partnering* with diverse communities that we can co-create knowledge and learning and embed a culture of inclusive, dynamic and high-quality engagement practice across all areas of our work in order to make positive societal differences.

Our approach to public engagement is underpinned by our guiding principles:

- **Listen:** We will embed a culture of active listening and mutual learning, creating opportunities for reflection both inspiring and being inspired by the communities we work with.
- **Respect:** We will work together to create and sustain respectful relationships for effective engagement, creating ethical, safe and accessible environments and valuing different viewpoints.
- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:** We will acknowledge and challenge inequity; support and promote inclusive practice; ensure that diverse voices and perspectives of staff, student and communities are involved in our work and nurture leadership in all forms.
- **Collaboration:** We will enhance our approaches to partnerships; enable opportunities for co-creation and co-production of ideas, knowledge, and impacts, encouraging staff, students and community partners to be agents of change.
- **Creativity:** We will encourage and support a sense of experimental, innovative, curiosity-led approaches to our work, foster shared learning and celebrate the unexpected.
- **Integrity:** We will act ethically, consistently and honestly about our capabilities and limitations ensuring that transparency and openness sit at the heart of our communication practices.

4. Priorities

Our work to embed a culture for purposeful public engagement is organised through:

- three enabling **Priorities** – Practice, People, and Progress – that will focus our plans for developing support and involving our staff, students and communities in enhancing our approach to public engagement.
- a set of high-level **Objectives** that will guide our actions, measures and the implementation of our work during the next four academic years.

Following our completion of the Watermark process in the summer of 2023 with the NCCPE we will develop a detailed Public Engagement Action Plan containing specific actions/measures and timeframes within these Priorities and Objectives (see Appendix 2 for more information).

4.1 Priority 1: Practice: Providing an enabling, inclusive and supportive environment for our staff, students and community partners to undertake purposeful public engagement activity through research and teaching.

We will achieve this through the following objectives:
a) *Embedding*: Ensuring public engagement is further embedded across our institutional strategic goals and annual performance review processes to learn from and enhance operational processes to support public engagement as a core activity of the university.
b) *Support:* Providing coordinated opportunities, resources, training and networks that develop confidence, capability and capacity to maximise our impact and remove barriers to engagement.
c) *Innovation*: Encouraging and enabling experimentation, creative and diverse approaches to public engagement.
d) *Recognition*: Strengthening the value and recognition of public engagement practice in institutional reward and recognition policy and processes.

4.2 Priority 2: People: Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusivity in the involvement of staff, students and community partners in public engagement.

We will achieve this through the following objectives:
a) *Partnerships*: Enhancing local, national and international collaborations and partnerships.
b) *Inclusivity:* Ensuring our work with staff, students and communities listens to and champions a diversity of people and perspectives.
c) *Leadership*: Nurturing leadership for public engagement at all levels.

4.3 Priority 3: Progress: Adapting our systems and processes to further enhance the ways in which we develop a culture of continual improvement.

We will achieve this through the following objectives:
a) *Impact*: Improving our internal processes for monitoring, aligning to existing metrics, evaluating and evidencing public engagement impact.
b) *Measuring*: Taking part in a range of external metrics, measures and benchmarking assessments.
c) *Learning*: Reflecting on, sharing and communicating our learning and practice across the University and beyond.

5. Measures of success

The objectives above – and the set of actions we agree with the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) as part of our quality watermark process – ultimately contribute to our overall objective to be recognised nationally as a leader in public engagement. We measure this at the highest level within the University's eight overall measures of success that are monitored in our Annual Performance Reviews and accountability processes with our Board of Governors. One of these eight measures relates to social responsibility where we set out to:

- perform in the highest, top quintile in UKRI/Research England's Knowledge Exchange Framework for Public and Community Engagement. (Demonstrating evidence for strategy, support, activity, enhancing practice and building on success).
- perform in the top 2% of universities globally for impact in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings (Demonstrating evidence across the 17 UN SDGs for research impact, learning and students, public engagement and professional services operations)

6. Appendix

6.1 Academic leadership and governance

Leadership

The *Vice-President for Social Responsibility* has overall academic responsibility for our social responsibility goal, which includes our public engagement impact regionally, nationally and internationally.

The *Vice-President for Regional innovation and Civic Engagement* which encompasses our strategic commitment to Greater Manchester and supports the way we develop and champion public engagement activity specifically across our city region.

Reporting to them are the *Academic Lead for Public Engagement with Research* who takes overall responsibility for developing strategy and direction of work and the *Academic Lead for Sustainability Teaching and Learning*, who oversees a framework for undergraduate students and public engagement opportunities, with a specific focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Public engagement is included in the responsibilities of each *Faculty Vice-Dean for Social Responsibility*. These individuals sit on their Faculty Senior Leadership teams. Each faculty is supported in their delivery of social responsibility and civic engagement by a range of other academic and professional staff.

Governance

Public engagement sits under the auspices of the **Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement Governance (SRCEG) Group**, co-chaired by the Vice-President for Social Responsibility and the Vice-President for Regional Innovation and Civic Engagement, who are both members of the University's Senior Leadership Team.

SRCEG meets five times a year and provides strategic leadership and high-level focus to the University's social responsibility agenda, as well as monitoring and reporting progress on achieving agreed key strategic and operational priorities, which include our approach to public engagement. SRCEG oversees the University's framework for public engagement, the monitoring of activities, the submission of external assessments such as the public and community engagement section of the KEF and interconnectedness of our public engagement with other key agendas to ensure synergy and complementarity.

SRCEG reports to the University's Planning and Resources Committee (PRC) through the circulation of a briefing report and specific papers where a significant policy or resource decision requires approval.

Each of our three faculties also have Social Responsibility and civic engagement committees, which incorporate oversight for Faculty and School-specific public engagement strategy and operations.

Our established institutional strategic planning process ensures public engagement is cascaded through Faculty strategies, operational priorities and the annual performance review process. This ensures that we are constantly looking for and implementing operational changes that further embed public engagement into the core activities of the university.

6.2 Public Engagement Action Plan

The [Engage Watermark](#) is an award granted by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) to higher education institutions to recognise their strategic support for public engagement and their commitment to improve the support offered. The University of Manchester is committed to undertaking this voluntary and detailed assessment as part of our process of continual improvement.

The Watermark is a rigorous and independent six-month process that takes place every four years. It involves the completion of an application form; a survey of staff, students and partners; assessed site visits; and the development of a shared and agreed detailed action plan for the next three years.

Following our completion of the Watermark process in the summer of 2023 we will develop a detailed **Public Engagement Action Plan** that takes the three Priorities (Practice, People, Progress) and ten Objectives outlined in Section 4 and supplements this with an agreed set of actions/measures and timeframes for implementation.