

# Towards a new relationship between The University of Manchester and Africa

## Preamble and context

Africa already plays a significant role within and across the University of Manchester's core areas of teaching, research and social responsibility. This is clear in the strategic relevance of Africa to student recruitment and diversification, the longstanding and growing importance of Africa to major research activities across all three faculties and the relevance of Africa to UoM's social responsibility agenda and its contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This significance is set to grow considerably through the coming years and decades of this century: demographic trends mean that Africa will be the world's leading producer of university-aged candidates, whilst geopolitical tensions and the need for green energy solutions are already placing Africa at the heart of the new global political economy. The University of Manchester would therefore benefit from developing a coherent strategy towards Africa, one that is aligned with each of its core objectives on teaching, research and social responsibility.

Manchester has longstanding historical links to Africa, including through its role in the slave trade and as host of the fifth Pan-African Congress, held just north of the University along Oxford Road in 1945. Given UoM's strong commitment to social responsibility and to revisiting its historical links to slavery, any such strategy needs to avoid the limits and short-sightedness of an exploitative approach – based solely on extracting value from Africa via student fees – and instead seeks to co-create a new range of equitable and sustainable collaborations with African students, researchers and educational institutions.

The Africa Strategy group has developed such a strategy, with a view to this guiding its own work and to informing the next version of the University's overall Global Influence strategy, the current version of which expires in 2025. The aim is to place Africa at the heart of UoM's move into its third century across all key functional areas.

The institutional context for this work is that the University currently occupies a somewhat ambiguous stance towards Africa. Our academics undertake world-leading research across much of Africa, often with a strong focus and impact on reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, mitigating the impacts of climate change and advancing the conditions for sustainable development. The Global Inequalities Beacon aligns with many of the critical challenges facing African countries as does the University's impressive record on addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The University has trained many African researchers who have become world leaders in their field, and recognised some with honorary degrees. Each year it offers Equity and Merit Scholarships for academically excellent students from Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, including on degree programmes that focus directly on Africa. These engagements with one of the world's most vital regions enrich our students' experience and organisational life in multiple ways and across multiple domains, offering a critical source of learning that emphasises the inter-connectedness of the global social challenges we face and of the central importance of education and research to meeting these.

On the other hand, the University's research and teaching on Africa is rarely strongly informed by African perspectives and voices, collaborations are short-lived and potentially extractive and we score poorly on metrics that measure co-authorship with scholars from the global south. Our current Global Influence strategy considers Africa only insofar as it can help reduce its reliance on students from

China, without reference to our research or social responsibility objectives. The numbers of African students on our courses remains limited, despite huge demographic potential, not least because international fees are prohibitively high for applicants from lower-income backgrounds. Targeted scholarships help to some extent but tend not to have the same crowding-in effects as in other contexts. The result, however unintentional, is that both the University and most other UK universities are helping to deepen inequalities both within African countries (by offering opportunities that only wealthy candidates can afford) as well as between African scholars and those based in the global north.

This document sets out an alternative strategy to guide the University's relationship with Africa. It is informed by African perspectives, drawn both from African colleagues within the University and those based in Africa.

The document sets out **core** and then **operational principles** that shape and drive the strategy before indicating the potential range and types of **activities** that these might lead to in each core functional area (teaching, research, social responsibility).

## Core principles

- *Equitable relationships built around mutual interests*  
We are committed to identifying areas of mutual interest with African partners and to developing more equitable and durable relationships across our core areas of research, teaching and social responsibility, with a focus on capacity-sharing. This is aligned with and will contribute to the current move towards generating a more equitable global research ecosystem.
- *Co-creation and co-production*  
We are committed to ensuring that our strategic approach to Africa and the engagements that flow from these are co-created and co-produced with African partners in ways that challenges current inequities. This extends from jointly establishing the focus of our shared research, teaching and social responsibility activities through to the outputs (e.g. joint research bids, shared supervision, co-authorship). The guiding principle here is that the University should not be teaching, researching or advising about Africa without Africans and African perspectives.
- *Accessibility and inclusion*  
We are committed to ensuring that our teaching, research and social responsibility activities are strongly informed by the principles of accessibility and inclusion.

These core principles help suggest a new and extended menu of operational approaches and activities within each of the University's key strategic areas.

## Operational Principles

From an operational perspective, our three key guiding principles are:

- *To build outwards from what we have already established*  
We already have numerous points of engagement with African students, scholars and academic/research institutions, many of which can inform future activities. This includes alumni and diaspora groups. The Africa Strategy Group has collated most of these activities and is in a good position to draw out good practices and partnerships that can be extended further in line with the principles identified here.

- *To start with the establishment of more equitable and durable relationships with key African partner organisations in strategic locations.*

This provides a way of putting the above principles into action across multiple functional areas (e.g. teaching, research, PGR supervision, student recruitment), achieving economies of scale, trialling the principles identified above and establishing good practice and associated benchmarks that could be extended more broadly. Key strategic partners in Africa for the University should not be limited to large research-intensive universities in capital cities but also extend to universities in more peripheral locations where the need for engagement is higher, the research questions being asked are more pressing for developmental purposes and our engagement can have an even larger impact.

- *Safety and safeguarding*

We are committed to ensuring the safety of our staff and African partners in all partnership activities, e.g. with regards to the locations and activities involved, within the context of realistic and grounded risk assessments. This should include ensuring provisions within research partnerships that offer protection to African partners working in fragile/conflict-affected contexts.

## Potential activities by functional area

What kinds of activities might flow from the above principles, within each core functional area?

### Teaching

- Accessible provision: any move to recruit higher numbers of African students to the University, particularly from the lowest income groups, will require the expansion of current scholarship schemes (Equity and Merit); extension of bursaries and, potentially, the introduction of fee waivers across a wider range of core programmes for certain countries/groups. This should be done in collaboration with strategic partners and will likely be more achievable at postgraduate rather than undergraduate level.
- Outreach: a significant extension of the University's activities across a range of forms is required to help meet the growing demand from Africans for transnational education. To be delivered in collaboration with partners via various means, including distance learning, blended learning, online platforms etc., including on a not-for-profit basis. This could include our staff contributing to lectures and designing or developing a curriculum based on local priorities and needs. Some relevant programmes (e.g. Transformative Oncology) are already online and could be extended with strategic partners.
- Student exchanges: establishment and expansion of semester/year-long periods of study abroad in Africa within existing and new degree programmes, as part of two-way exchanges of students with African universities. Student electives and volunteering opportunities could be further extended.
- Inclusion of African scholars and voices on relevant teaching programmes, via extended external teaching budgets, to build on and extend current efforts to pluralise curricula at Manchester.
- Overseas field courses in African countries to be extended across a broader range of programmes and undertaken in conjunction with strategic partners

### Research

- Establishing durable and equitable partnerships with higher education networks and institutes in Africa (e.g. from ARUA to specific universities and departments) via memorandums of understanding and shared projects around mutual interests and in areas of greatest mutual synergy.

- Co-production and co-creation: extending the role of African researchers in shaping research agendas (e.g. through staff exchanges, joint research bids).
- Co-authorship: establish targets for increased level of co-authorship with African scholars and set in place measures to enable this.
- Co-supervision: shared commitment to co-constructing the next generation of African scholars via jointly run PhD programmes and jointly supervised PhDs with strategic partners in Africa. This form of capacity-sharing and -strengthening will ensure that PGR students benefit from the best of both systems, that supervision remains contextualised and will enable 'brain recirculation' rather than brain-drain. It will require a significant investment in targeted PGR scholarships.
- A key strategy here would be to create opportunities for top African researchers at all career levels to spend extended periods of time in Manchester to develop their research agendas and advance African-led research collaborations with our staff.

### Social responsibility

Social responsibility is central to the University's Africa Strategy in two main ways. First, our new approach to engaging with African partners across multiple functional areas will help the University to fulfil its social responsibility objectives. Second, many of our social responsibility activities could be usefully extended to be more active in and on Africa and more inclusive of the perspectives and priorities of African partners. Potential activities could include:

- Support for Africa-based initiatives aimed at building the capacity of universities in Africa, including inter-continental collaborations
- Support for African-led research on priorities identified on the continent
- Advocacy for the interests of African universities and scholars within the current research infrastructure, e.g. participation in research bids, contesting unfair and restrictive policies on visas etc.
- Showcasing of and support for impact work undertaken by our staff in Africa with African counterparts
- Showcasing of and support for south-north and south-south learning around research and research-to-policy/practice lessons
- Supporting national, regional and African Union development plans
- Enabling and promoting global partnerships for sustainable development, including with some of our existing strategic partners

The University and its counterparts in Africa have much to gain from refining and applying the principles devised above and in resourcing and undertaking the activities that flow from these.

### Philanthropic support

The Africa Strategy Group will work with the Division of Development and Alumni Relations to identify components of the Africa strategy which may be appropriate for philanthropic support.

*Africa Strategy Group, co-chaired by Prof Nalin Thakker, Vice- President Social Responsibility and Prof Steve Flint, Associate Vice-President for Internationalisation. Strategy development led by Prof Sam Hickey, Global Development Institute.*

## Appendix One: Existing initiatives to learn from/partner with/seek co-funding from

- Perivoli Africa Research Centre ([PARC](#)), University of Bristol
- African Research Universities Alliance ([ARUA](#))
- African Leadership Programmes at [KCL](#) and [LSE](#)
- [ACU Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit](#)
- World Bank-supported [Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence Project](#) (ACE).
- FCDO Research and Evidence Division
- IDRC Think Tank Initiative
- Mastercard Foundation initiatives
- Ford Foundation funding for staff and student exchanges
- Various Scandinavian government funding programmes for joint ventures with African universities
- DDAR, UoM
- [SOAS-Wits joint PhD programme](#)