

Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) Excellence Awards 2025

The Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) takes pride in the efforts and successes of its postgraduate research students. Annually, MDC celebrates exceptional performances from students by hosting its Excellence Awards alongside the Postgraduate Summer Research Showcase.

The award winners for 2025 are:

Best Contribution to Internationalisation

This award recognises efforts to build global links and foster international collaboration and understanding.

FBMH – Accadius Lunayo

Accadius's research into throat cancer in Eastern Africa is delivering cutting-edge insights into cancer genomics. He has gone far beyond expectations in building research capacity across continents and championing inclusion in global health.

FSE – Farzaneh Nazari

Farzaneh has driven international collaborations in sustainable energy, linking institutions and industry across Europe. Her secondment in Stuttgart and industry engagement with Shell and BP have advanced both science and international knowledge-sharing.

Humanities – Luman Zhou

Luman created the Global PhD Network in Education, connecting hundreds of students across 25 countries. Her events and partnerships with top institutions have fostered meaningful global academic exchange.

Best Contribution to the PGR Environment

This award celebrates those who have worked to enhance the PGR community and research environment.

FBMH – Victoria Woof

During the pandemic, Vicky founded a qualitative research seminar group which has grown into a hugely valued academic hub. For over four years, she's supported hundreds of peers through her leadership and mentorship.

FSE – Akinloluwa Babalola

Akin's inclusive leadership, open research training tools, and mentoring have transformed the PGR culture across departments. His work supports transparency, accessibility, and student success at all levels.

Humanities – Caroline Cornier

Caroline has led the development of an inclusive, intellectually rich PGR community. From writing groups to book clubs and interdisciplinary networks, her work has created lasting connections among students.

Best Contribution to Society – Local Community

This award honours research and initiatives that have made a positive impact at the local level.

FBMH – Jennifer Davies

Jennifer's groundbreaking work on urine HPV testing offers a low-carbon, accessible alternative to cervical screening. Her findings have global implications, from NHS practice to cancer prevention in Kenya and support for LGBTQ+ communities.

Humanities – Megan Hadfield

Megan launched the Booth Centre Volunteer Translators Programme, helping people facing homelessness access services by breaking down language barriers. It's already had a powerful local impact, involving 50 students and 22 languages.

Best Contribution to Society – Research Impact

This award recognises research that demonstrates clear and meaningful impact beyond academia.

FBMH – Jennifer Davies

Jennifer is a double award winner for her work on urine HPV testing.

FSE – Adil Ashraf

Adil's research, particularly on energy transitions in Africa, is already shaping high-impact academic discourse. His collaborative spirit and leadership as a student rep make him a role model across the faculty.

Humanities – Niamh Cashell

Niamh's research, rooted in a prestigious BBC internship, tackles the mental health impacts of online content on researchers. Her leadership in the Political Studies Association supports early career academics across the UK.

Best Outstanding Research Output

This award is for exceptional research outputs that demonstrate originality, rigour, and contribution to the field.

FBMH – Adam O'Neill

Adam led a major publication series on ageing in the criminal justice system, now informing national policy. His collaborative work has brought visibility and evidence to a previously overlooked population.

FSE – Xuezheng Cao

Xuezheng's novel materials, developed in partnership with Rolls-Royce, have led to three patents and may soon feature in next-generation engines. This is research with real-world, industrial impact.

Humanities – Hayato Koga

Hayato's work on energy governance in Japan has earned publication in leading journals and reflects deep theoretical and methodological sophistication. He is a rising voice in environmental and geographical research.

Supervisor of the Year

This award celebrates exceptional supervision – those who go above and beyond in supporting, guiding, and inspiring their PGRs.

FBMH – Dr Debbie Smith

Debbie is an exceptional supervisor who has built a thriving, interdisciplinary research community. She's known for championing wellbeing, widening participation, and guiding PGRs toward careers that make a difference.

FSE – Dr David Polya

David is a world-renowned researcher in environmental science and a dedicated mentor. He's known for offering not just academic guidance but also emotional and professional support that helps students thrive.

Humanities – Dr Joseph McGonagle

Joseph is known for his exceptional guidance in Modern Languages, mentoring a diverse cohort of PGRs and supporting them through challenges, publications, and career transitions. His dedication has enabled many to reach their full potential.

Showcase Awards

These awards celebrate excellence across our postgraduate researcher community as displayed at the Showcase event.

Best Showcase Presentation Awards

FBMH – Anthony Wilby

FSE – Faisal Bala

Research in Action Image Competition

This competition celebrates creativity in communicating research through powerful visuals.

Winner – Fandita Tonyka Maharani for Wax and Wisdom: the hidden cost of heritage.



Time slows down in a Javanese house's still areas. Women come here to empower one another as much as to work. Their hands steady from years of expertise move molten wax across striking cloth. Every sentence tells a story; every theme carries legacy. Considered as an intangible cultural legacy by UNESCO, these home-based batik workers are the living champions of Indonesian history.

Women preserve the community more than they follow trends. They pass on knowledge over generations, combining creative and financial resilience.

Still, under the beauty, there is a quiet weight.

The last cloth reflects not the perfumed smoke of wax, the subdued sting of colours, or the silence of long hours, but rather their skin and lungs. Although their jobs help preserve Indonesia's traditional character and support the national economy, sometimes the occupational hazards they encounter go unspoken.

This image captures one of three worker groups in our study on occupational health in the batik industry: home-based batik artists, workshop-based workers, and batik sellers. Their work is steeped in history, and our studies will help us preserve this life-sustaining breath.

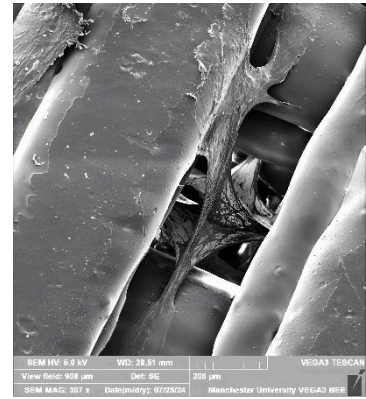
Let preservation also apply to protection.

Let none of beauty cost a life.

Runner up – Fatih Eroglu for Reducing animal testing: building bones

This Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) image shows bone marrow stem mesenchymal cells, a type of cell that can develop into any other cell, growing on a special polymer scaffold.

Cells grown on scaffolds like this allow scientists to create 3D tissue models that can replace animals in medical testing while giving a more precise understanding of how the medicines will work in humans.



In the future, work like this could be applied to breast cancer metastasis, which will help scientists to understand the cancer's underlying mechanisms and develop more effective treatments.

PGR of the Year – Dr Jennifer Davies

Dr Jennifer Davies has made groundbreaking contributions to cervical cancer screening. Her pioneering research demonstrated that urine HPV testing is not only a clinically effective alternative to traditional screening but also more accessible and environmentally sustainable.

Her work has shown that urine self-sampling can reduce carbon emissions from screening programs, increase screening uptake among LGBTQ+ and ethnically diverse communities, and even help reduce cervical cancer deaths in countries like Kenya.

Dr Davies' research has already led to a large-scale NHS evaluation and holds the potential to transform clinical practice worldwide.