

The University of Manchester Medal of Honour 2026

Citation for University Challenge 2026 team

Distinguished guests, it is with great pleasure that I present the Manchester team that won University Challenge this year. Tonight, we celebrate a landmark achievement in the long and formidable history of University Challenge. By winning the 2025–26 series, The University of Manchester claimed its fifth title and drew level as one of the most successful institutions the competition has ever seen. In a contest that rewards speed, nerve, teamwork, and the ability to know almost everything about almost anything, this was a fantastic triumph.

This year's winning team - Ray Power, Kirsty Dickson, Rob Faulkner, captain Kai Madgwick, and reserve player Argyro Olympitis - guided Manchester through a tough field of competitors and, in the Grand Final on 20 April 2026, defeated the University of Edinburgh by 145 points to 105.

Captain Kai Madgwick, studying a PhD in Artificial Intelligence and Astrophysics, brought strength in data, physics, and technology; Ray Power, who studied Film Studies and English Literature, anchored the humanities; Kirsty Dickson, a Medicine student, covered biological sciences; Rob Faulkner, a Physics with Astrophysics graduate added depth in maths and classical physics; and reserve player Argyro Olympitis, a PhD researcher in Immunology, strengthened the team's scientific range.

The victory required extraordinary preparation. Behind the calm faces and impossibly fast buzzers that we saw on TV lay a formidable training regime of written tests, live buzzer tests, targeted revision, and long evenings spent testing themselves against archived episodes.

This is not a common or garden pub team, but a highly disciplined academic unit- one that proved the road to University Challenge glory is paved with scholarship, stamina, and an almost heroic willingness to spend Tuesday nights revising everything and anything that could appear on the quizmaster's cards!

The team had two "serenity songs", which were "Push the Button" by the Sugababes and "Man I Feel Like a Woman!" By Shania Twain (which they sang before all their games!)

Their run to the title was memorable. Having previously lost to Edinburgh in the quarter-finals, Manchester returned when it mattered most and reversed the result on the biggest stage. It was, in every sense, the perfect final chapter, particularly as it satisfied those who like their academic contests with a hint of revenge.

And what, after all, does greatness on University Challenge actually look like? Sometimes it's recognising the Charles Mingus track "*Fables of Faubus*". Sometimes it's knowing that the substance which speeds a chemical reaction without being permanently changed is a catalyst. And sometimes it's knowing that *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound* were written by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Most of the rest of us, if we are honest, would still be working out how to use the buzzer.

But beyond the facts, the scores, and the astonishing speed at which they answered questions, this team embodied something even more impressive – and distinctly Manchester. They showed that success, as in university life itself, is not simply about individual brilliance, but about trust, collaboration, confidence, friendship, and supporting one another when the pressure is highest.

So tonight, we recognise The University of Manchester team not only for what they won, but for how they won it: with distinction, with composure, and with the enviable ability to make impossibly difficult knowledge look almost unfairly easy. We congratulate Ray Power, Kirsty Dickson, Rob Faulkner, Kai Madgwick and Argyro Olympitis on an historic achievement - and on setting a standard that is likely to make future opponents both inspired and slightly nervous.

I am so delighted and proud to present this year's phenomenal winning University Challenge team, Kai, Kirsty, Ray, Rob and Argyro for the University of Manchester's Medal of Honour.