MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

From Manchester for the world



Candidate brief

Head of Media Relations

November 2026

This document may not be fully accessible to all users. Some content, features, or formatting may not be compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers or keyboard navigation tools. If you require this information in an alternative accessible format, please contact the hiring partner for assistance.



Executive Director of Communications, Marketing & Engagement

Directorate	Communications, Marketing & Engagement
Reports to	Interim Director of External Engagement
Duration	Permanent
Location	Oxford Road, Manchester

Enquiries about vacancy shortlisting and interviews
Email: talent.attraction@manchester.ac.uk

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this role at The University of Manchester.

Since 1824, our University has been defined by discovery, social change and a pioneering spirit. Today we are one of the UK's largest single site universities, recognised globally for excellence in teaching, research and impact.

In 2025 we launched our new strategy, *From Manchester for the world*, setting out what it means to be a great civic university in the 21st century, creating knowledge for the public good, locally and globally.

We look forward to meeting you.

Patrick Hackett
Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer





Contents

4 About the University

4 Our history

5 The present

5 Manchester and the region

6 Global rankings and reputation

6 *From Manchester for the world*

7 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

8 University leadership

9 About Professional Services

10 Overall Purpose

12 Key accountabilities

13 Person specification

14 Key behaviours

15 How to apply

About the University

The University of Manchester is recognised globally for our pioneering research, breadth of teaching and learning and for our commitment to social responsibility.

The world's big challenges demand urgent action – we're working across boundaries and disciplines to create healthier, more equal futures; helping to eradicate poverty; ensuring energy supply for future generations; and protecting our planet for the years to come.





Our history

The University of Manchester was England's first civic university, built for an industrial age. We trace our roots to 1824 with the Manchester Mechanics' Institution and the Manchester Royal School of Medicine. The modern university was formed in 2004 through the merger of the Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST.

We have a rich history of attracting brilliant minds, with 26 Nobel laureates among our current and former staff and students, including Ernest Rutherford, Arthur Lewis and most recently, Andre Geim, Kostya Novoselov and Simon Johnson.



The present

Part of the Russell Group, The University of Manchester is one of the UK's largest single site universities, spanning STEM, the arts and social sciences. With a £1.4bn turnover, major capital investment and more than 500,000 alumni, we are a global institution recognised for excellence in education and innovation.

Our strategy to 2035, launched in 2025, focuses on five areas to go further and faster, driving innovation, skills and good jobs in the region and country, while addressing global challenges. These priorities build on our firm foundations of teaching and research excellence, values-led social responsibility, deep civic roots with global reach, and a culture with equity, diversity and inclusion at its heart.

Manchester and the region

Manchester is the original modern city, birthplace of industrial and social movements that shaped the world. The University is a proud civic institution, central to the region's economic, social and cultural life, and a partner in Greater Manchester's Civic University Agreement.

We contribute to the city's rich cultural landscape through institutions such as Manchester Museum, the Whitworth and Jodrell Bank.

Manchester, ranked in the top three of *Time Out*'s World's Best Cities, is a cosmopolitan, globally recognised cultural centre, home to leading theatres, orchestras and major developments like MediaCityUK, Aviva Studios and HOME.



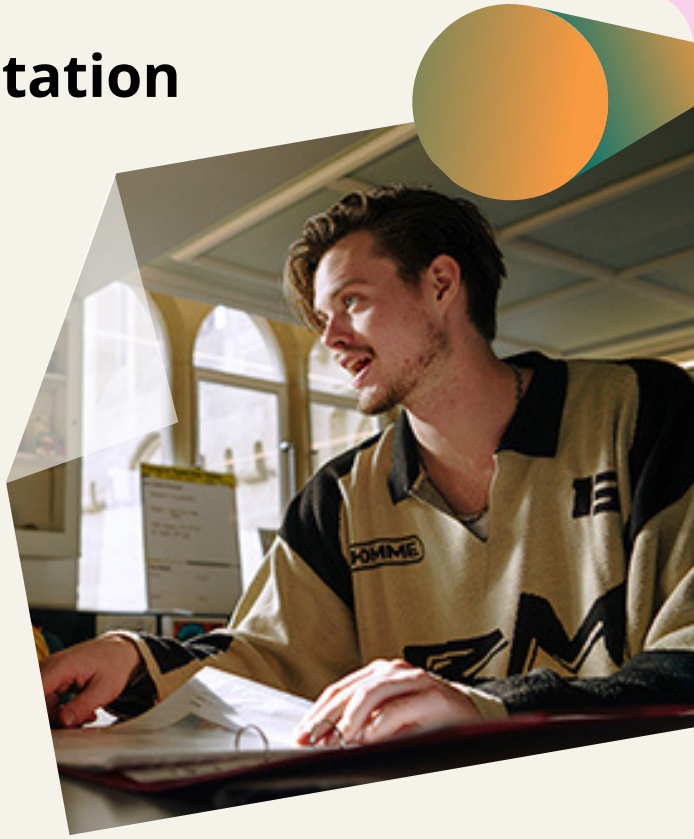
Global rankings and reputation

The University has a global reputation for excellence in research, teaching and civic engagement. We rank 40th in the world (QS 2026), with 93% of our research rated world leading or internationally excellent (REF 2021).

We are first in the UK and Europe, and second globally, for social and environmental impact (*Times Higer Education* Impact Rankings 2025) – the only university to place consistently in the global top ten since the rankings began.

Manchester's expertise supports partners worldwide and our campus brings together students from more than 170 nationalities, making us one of the world's most international universities.

Learn more about our rankings and reputation: manchester.ac.uk/about/rankings



From Manchester for the world

***From Manchester for the world* is our strategy to 2035, defining our ambition to be a great civic university for the 21st century.**

Our strategy focuses on five priorities: flexible, digitally enabled learning; accelerating research impact; driving innovation; strengthening partnerships; and modern, data driven services.

Realising the ambitions of our strategy will define our next decade and beyond, and work to achieve this is already underway. In 2026, we partnered with Microsoft, becoming the first university in the world to provide Microsoft 365 Copilot access and training to all students and staff.

Read our full strategy – *From Manchester for the world:* manchester.ac.uk/about/manchester-2035/full-strategy

"As we enter our third century, we stand at a pivotal moment. *From Manchester for the world* means working with our city and region deeply, to develop the ideas and solutions our communities and the world urgently need."

Professor Duncan Ivison
President and Vice-Chancellor.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

From our earliest days, we've worked to break down barriers and improve lives. Today we are committed to building a truly inclusive university where equity, access and belonging shape our work. We invest in leadership, programmes and data to support this ambition and report our progress annually.

We are committed to meeting and exceeding our obligations under current legislation and by doing more, we build on Manchester's existing reputation for rich diversity. Recognising, embracing and valuing difference leads to improvements for all.

University leadership



Professor Duncan Ivison
President and Vice-Chancellor

Professor Ashley Blom
Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health

Professor Fiona Devine
Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

Professor Colette Fagan
Vice-President for Research

Patrick Hackett
Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer

Professor Jenn Hallam
Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students

Professor John Holden
Vice-President for Civic Engagement and Innovation

Ele Morrissey
Director of People

Professor Sarah Sharples
Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering

Professor Nalin Thakkar
Vice-President for Social Responsibility

George Whalley
Interim Chief Financial Officer

Read detailed biographies of the University's senior officers:
www.manchester.ac.uk/about/people/university-executive-team/

Governance

The University of Manchester's governance structure reflects the principles of good governance in higher education. Responsibility is held by the following bodies:

Board

The University's governing body, chaired by Philippa Hird. Its 23 mostly lay members hold ultimate responsibility for strategic direction and financial oversight.

General Assembly

A two-way forum through which the University shares achievements and receives feedback from its wider constituencies. It has around 100 members.

Senate

The University's principal academic authority, responsible to the Board for promoting research and maintaining academic standards in teaching.

About Professional Services



Professional Services (PS) play a critical role in ensuring The University of Manchester can achieve its strategic goals, with more than 5,000 PS colleagues providing vital support across a great range of services.

PS colleagues are crucial in ensuring the highest standards of teaching and research take place at the University, and key to the successful delivery of our strategy to 2035, *From Manchester for the world.*

They work to make a consistent, positive difference to our entire University community – from students to alumni and partners – both within our central Directorates and as non-academic colleagues across our Faculties and Schools.

Our PS comprise:

- Compliance and Risk
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Estates and Facilities
- Finance
- Governance Office
- History and Heritage Office
- People
- Learning and Organisational Development
- Legal Affairs
- Library
- IT Services
- Research and Business Engagement
- Student Experience
- Communications, Marketing and Engagement
- Teaching and Learning Support Office
- Development and Alumni Relations
- Social Responsibility
- Planning
- University of Manchester Worldwide

PS colleagues lead and facilitate negotiations with partner organisations and key stakeholders, act as the strategic lead in many areas, and provide specialist advice and support across a variety of different functions.

They span a vast range of services and comprise a swathe of professions, from accountants, IT specialists, administrators and technicians to marketers, careers advisers and manual support colleagues.

Overall purpose

This is an opportunity to shape how one of the UK's leading universities appears in the news, participates in national conversations and responds when the spotlight turns towards us.

As Head of Media Relations, you will lead the media operation for The University of Manchester, building a more proactive and influential approach to how we use the University's expertise, research, people and ideas to strengthen our profile and reputation. Just as importantly, you will provide calm, credible leadership when complex or sensitive issues require an immediate response.

This is a newly created leadership role rather than a like-for-like replacement. Media relations is being established as a standalone area of leadership, giving the successful candidate a clear mandate to focus on its development while working closely with strategic and research communications colleagues across the wider function.

You will inherit an established team comprising a Media Relations Manager, four Media Relations Officers and a Communications Intern. The opportunity is not simply to maintain the existing operation. We want you to understand what works well, identify where we can improve and develop the team, its service and ways of working for the future.

It is a role with two very different rhythms. On one hand, you will be looking ahead: finding stories with the potential to cut through nationally, developing relationships with influential journalists and identifying opportunities for our academics and senior leaders to contribute to the debates that matter. On the other, there will be moments when events move quickly and the University needs clear advice, strong judgement and an effective media response within a very short timeframe.

Success will depend on being equally comfortable in both environments.

The Opportunity

Few organisations offer the breadth of potential stories available at Manchester. Across our Faculties, research institutes and academic communities are people working on subjects with real relevance to public life and the news agenda. Part of your challenge will be to connect that expertise with what is happening beyond the University and turn it into media activity that earns attention.

We want to become more proactive about those opportunities.

That means looking beyond responding to requests or issuing announcements. You will help the University anticipate where it can contribute, bring strong editorial instinct to our pipeline and develop relationships that mean journalists see Manchester as somewhere to turn for expertise, comment and stories.

Established media relationships will matter. We are looking for someone who understands how major news organisations operate and already has the credibility and networks to open conversations with senior journalists, editors and producers. The brief is particularly focused on UK media, while recognising that Manchester is an international institution whose stories and announcements can have significance well beyond the UK.

You will also have the opportunity to strengthen the external profile of senior University leaders, identifying where they can make a distinctive contribution to national conversations and helping them do so confidently and authentically.

Overall purpose

Leading when the story becomes difficult

The opportunity is not solely about generating positive coverage.

A major university operates in a complex and highly scrutinised environment. Issues can develop quickly, involve competing perspectives and attract significant public and media interest. The Head of Media Relations will be one of the people the University turns to when that happens.

You will help assess the media implications of emerging issues, develop the appropriate response and advise senior colleagues on how and when the University should communicate. At times that will require drafting statements and messaging at considerable pace, balancing accuracy, institutional considerations and the realities of a live news environment.

We are looking for someone able to bring perspective rather than simply react to pressure: someone who knows when a response is needed, when it is not, and how individual decisions can affect longer-term reputation.

The role therefore requires a combination that is not always easy to find: strong journalistic instinct, strategic judgement and the confidence to provide clear advice when the stakes are high.

Finding Manchester's voice

How we communicate matters as much as what we communicate.

You will be expected to turn complex academic, research and institutional issues into clear and compelling media material, from proactive stories and press releases to briefing lines and statements produced in response to developing situations.

The expectation is for communication that remains authoritative and credible while becoming accessible, human and engaging. You will need the judgement to understand different voices and audiences, adapting your writing appropriately while protecting the University's institutional position.

This is therefore a role for someone who remains close to the craft. You may be leading the strategy and the team, but you will still need to know what makes a strong line, recognise the angle in a complicated story and produce excellent copy when circumstances require it.

Leading and developing the Media Relations team

The wider communications function is evolving, and this appointment creates an opportunity to examine how media relations operates within it: how work is prioritised, how colleagues collaborate, how performance is understood and where the team can increase its impact.

We are therefore interested in what you have done with teams, rather than simply the media activity you personally delivered.

You will bring experience of setting clear expectations, developing the team and creating an environment in which experienced communications professionals can do excellent work.

Key accountabilities

Working across a complex University

Media Relations may be centrally led, but the stories are not.

Some of Manchester's strongest opportunities begin with academics, researchers, Faculties and institutes spread across a large organisation. You will need to build trusted relationships with these communities, understand their expertise and help colleagues recognise when their work could resonate with audiences beyond the University.

That creates an interesting leadership challenge. You will have responsibility for the media strategy without directly controlling every part of the organisation that contributes to it.

Influence therefore matters enormously.

You will need to be comfortable working across organisational boundaries, negotiating different perspectives and bringing colleagues together around the right approach. At times you will advocate for an opportunity; at others you may need to challenge an approach or explain why a story needs to be handled differently.

Candidates who enjoy complexity, relationships and connecting expertise across an organisation are likely to find Manchester particularly rewarding.

What you could bring

We are deliberately open-minded about where the successful candidate has built their career.
Higher education experience would be valuable, particularly experience within a large and complex university, but it is not a prerequisite. We are interested in accomplished media leaders from other large, prominent or highly scrutinised organisations who can bring a different perspective to our work.
What matters more is your evidence.

- Led media relations at a senior level within a complex, high-profile organisation.
- Developed proactive strategies that generated significant earned media coverage and strengthened reputation.
- Built trusted relationships with senior journalists and major UK media organisations.
- Managed sensitive or reputationally important issues where judgement and pace mattered.
- Advised senior organisational leaders confidently, including where the advice was difficult.
- Led and developed experienced communications professionals and improved how a team operates.
- Translated complicated subject matter into clear, compelling stories and messaging.
- Operated effectively across organisational boundaries where influence and relationships matter as much as formal authority.

International media relationships are not themselves essential. However, you should understand how communications operate across international audiences and how organisations can work with local expertise and agencies to extend their reach.

Person specification

The first chapter

This role has deliberately been created with room for its new Head to shape what comes next.

An early priority will be to get underneath the media operation: understanding the people, relationships, story pipeline, pressures and existing strengths before determining where change will make the biggest difference. The wider brief includes developing the team and improving ways of working and service standards as the communications function evolves.

Alongside that, you will need to establish credibility quickly with colleagues across the University and with the senior leaders who will rely on your judgement.

Externally, we will want you to bring your network and understanding of the media landscape to bear, identifying where Manchester could be more visible and creating a stronger pipeline of relationships and opportunities.

There will inevitably be issues to manage along the way. The challenge will be to strengthen the proactive operation without allowing the reactive agenda to consume it. That balance is central to what we want this appointment to achieve.

The practical picture

The role sits within the Directorate of Communications, Marketing and Engagement and reports to the Interim Director of External Engagement. It is Grade 8, with a salary range of £61,165 to £72,997, and leads the Media Relations Manager, four Media Relations Officers and a Communications Intern.

The role is Manchester-based with hybrid working. The normal expectation is at least two days per week on campus, although the nature of the position means flexibility will be important and attendance may need to increase for significant meetings, events or emerging issues.

There is also a genuine out-of-hours element to the position. The Head of Media Relations will participate in the senior on-call rota, currently expected to be approximately one week in every eight to ten. During that period, you would be the initial contact for urgent situations and help bring together the appropriate University response.

We think it is important candidates understand this aspect of the role from the outset.

Key behaviours

One University
A 'One University' approach, whereby we break down silos and work collaboratively towards furthering the University's strategic goals, vision and values.

Service excellence
Committed to prioritising service excellence and high performance to deliver great people-centred experiences.

Agility
Demonstrate a commitment to agility and continuous improvement by embracing change, championing innovation, and being flexible and forward thinking to adapt.

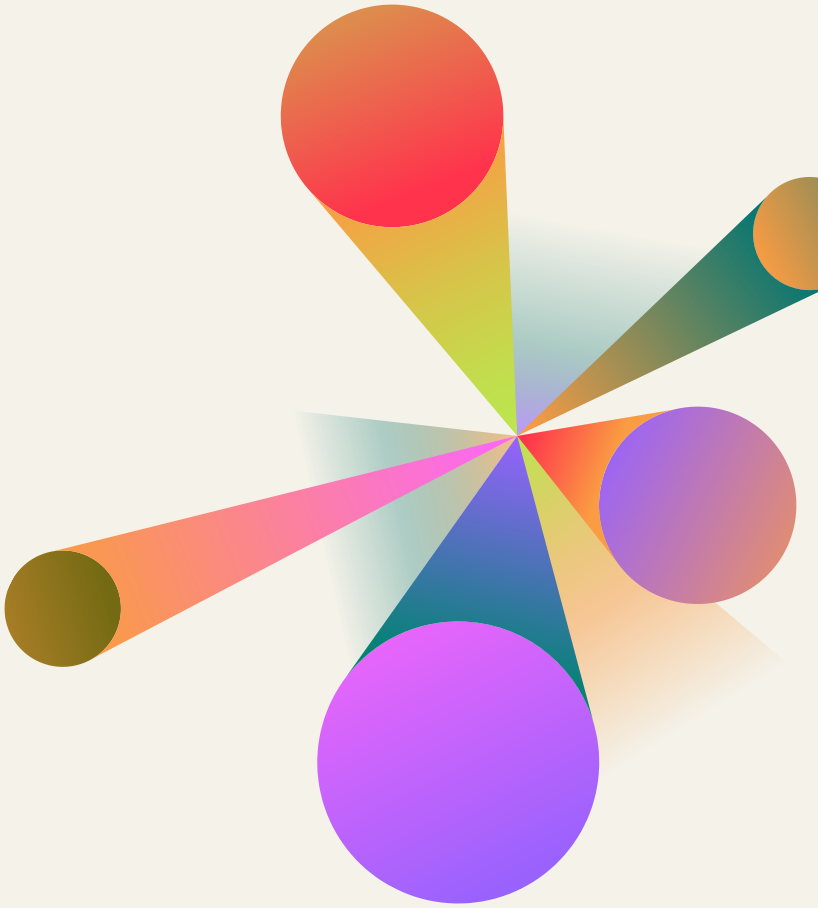
Sustainability
A sustainable approach that safeguards our future university by championing environmental practices, advancing digital capability, and supporting financial stability and philanthropic initiatives.

Inclusion
A commitment to furthering equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing to create a positive work environment and culture.

Social responsibility
Promote and champion the University's social responsibility ambitions to advance social inclusion, prosperous communities, better health and cultural engagement.

Freedom of speech and academic freedom
Support the University's commitment to securing and actively promoting the importance of free speech and academic freedom within our community.

People leadership
Demonstrate effective leadership by empowering, motivating and developing teams to achieve high performance. Build a collaborative and inclusive work environment and provide clear direction, support and feedback.



How to apply

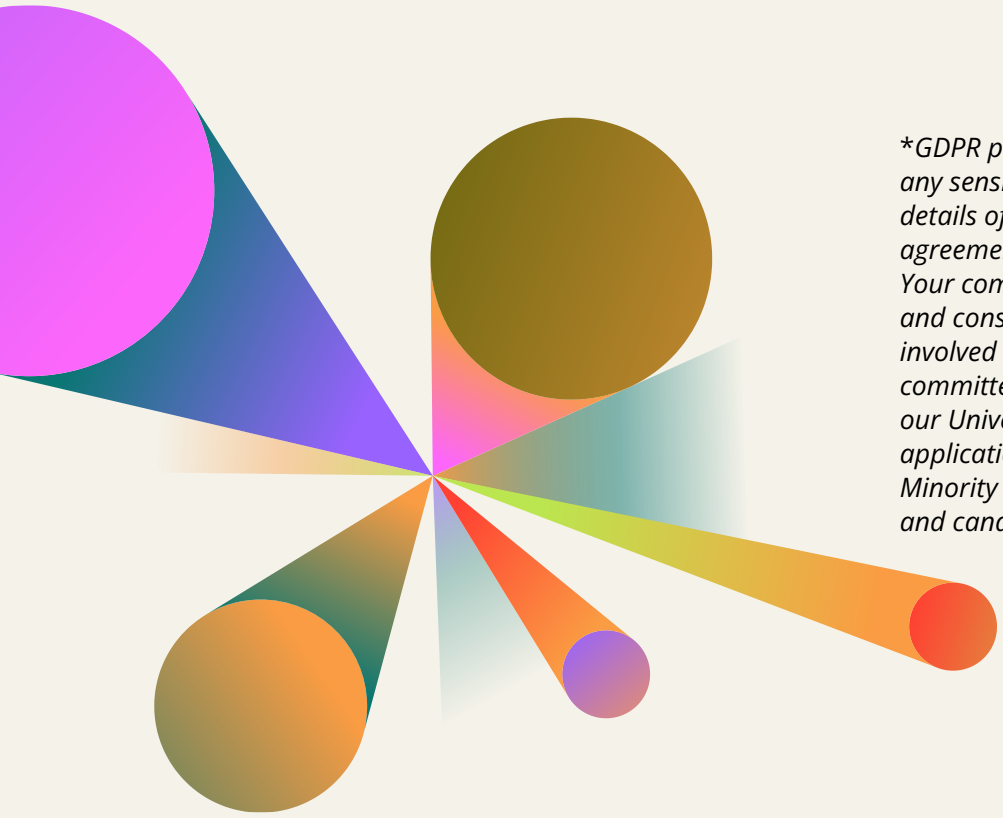
To apply, please visit the job advert on the University of Manchester website and search for reference PSX-032794.

For informal enquiries or to arrange an exploratory conversation, please contact Andrew Dixon at talent.attraction@manchester.ac.uk.

Please note that interviews will be held early in the new year.

We want every candidate to have the opportunity to perform at their best. If you would benefit from reasonable adjustments at any stage of the recruitment and selection process, please contact talent.attraction@manchester.ac.uk. We will work with you to understand your needs and agree appropriate support, treating any information you share sensitively and confidentially.

In accordance with GDPR guidelines*, we are only able to process your sensitive personal data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life or sexual orientation) with your express consent.



**GDPR personal data notice – please do not include any sensitive personal data, including the contact details of your chosen referees (without prior agreement), within your CV and covering letter. Your completed 'equal opportunities monitoring and consent form' will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. We are committed to further enhancing the diversity of our University Executive and particularly welcome applications from women, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority candidates, candidates with disabilities and candidates with other protected characteristics.*



We are an open place of enquiry and challenge. We embrace and celebrate difference, diversity and debate, and we pride ourselves on being a place of education, learning and community where we are able, within the law, to question and test received wisdom, express new ideas and explore controversial or unpopular topics and opinions. Find out more from our Policy on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

The University of
Manchester Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

Royal Charter Number
RC000797