MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

From Manchester for the world



Candidate brief

Head of Contracts

November 2026

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Head of Contracts

Directorate	Research and Business Engagement Support Services (RBE)
Reports to	Executive Director of Research & Business Engagement
Dotted Reporting Line	University's General Counsel
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.



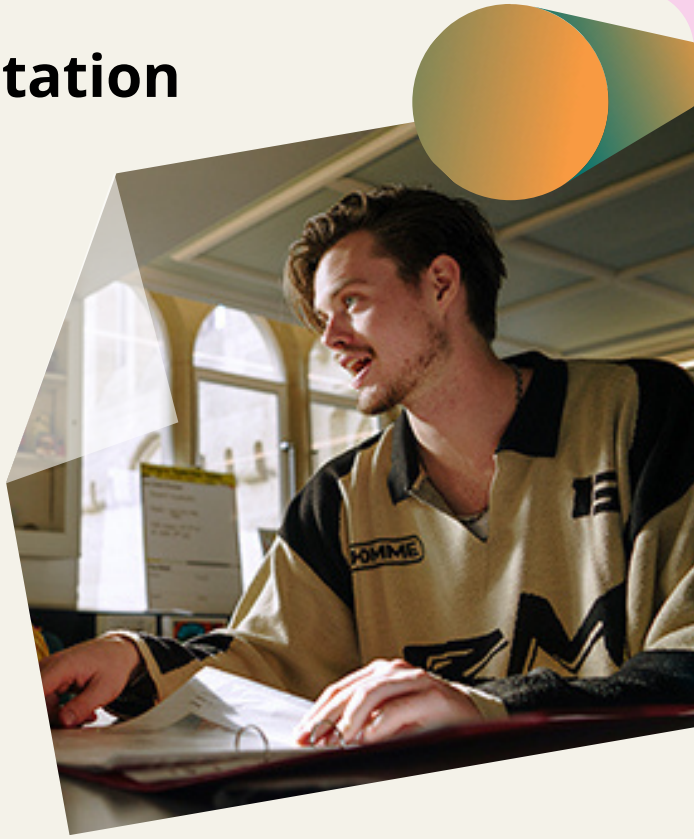
Global rankings and reputation

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 what a modern contracts service should look like within one of the UK's leading universities.

As Head of Contracts, you will provide strategic leadership and operational direction for the University's contracts function. You will ensure that agreements are delivered within appropriate timescales, reflect a proportionate approach to risk and support the ambitions of the University's strategy to 2035.

You will act as the University's principal expert on contractual risk, negotiation and governance. That will include leading complex, high-value and high-risk negotiations, advising senior stakeholders and making informed decisions that balance legal protection, commercial considerations and the University's wider objectives.

The opportunity extends well beyond providing technical legal expertise. You will lead and develop a team of contracts professionals while determining how the service should evolve. You will improve processes, make better use of operational data and accelerate the adoption of digitally enabled approaches to contract management. The ambition is to combine high-quality contractual expertise with a responsive, consistent and straightforward experience for colleagues and partners.

The Contracts Team works across a varied portfolio of activity involving academic leaders, professional services colleagues and external organisations. Its work helps the University progress important research and business partnerships while managing legal, financial and reputational risk.

Success will therefore require more than knowing what a contract should say. It will depend on your ability to understand the purpose behind an agreement, identify the issues that genuinely matter and help colleagues reach sound, workable decisions.

Shaping a contracts service for the future

The University has a strong foundation of specialist contracts expertise. The opportunity for its next Head is to build on that foundation and develop a service equipped for changing institutional needs.

You will examine the full contracting lifecycle, from the initial request and allocation of work through negotiation, approval, signature and ongoing management. You will identify where clearer processes, better information or new technology could reduce unnecessary complexity and improve the experience of those using the service.

This will include strengthening how service performance is understood. You will use operational data and management information to monitor delivery, identify trends and determine where improvement activity will have the greatest effect.

Digital development will be an important part of the brief. You will lead the adoption of digitally enabled approaches that improve efficiency, effectiveness and user experience. This is not simply about introducing technology. It is about ensuring that systems, processes and professional expertise work together to create a better service.

Overall purpose

Applying judgement to complex agreements

The University's contracts support significant projects, partnerships and institutional priorities. Agreements may involve complex questions of intellectual property, liability, confidentiality, information governance, funding, publication rights, regulatory obligations and commercial risk.

As the University's senior contracts specialist, you will develop and maintain a clear and achievable agenda for continuous improvement. This may include:

- Establishing more transparent approaches to prioritisation and workload management.
- Clarifying service standards and improving communication with service users.
- Identifying where templates, guidance or proportionate contracting routes could simplify routine activity.
- Strengthening the use of operational data and management information.
- Developing digital capability across the contracting lifecycle.
- Reviewing how contractual risk is assessed, communicated and escalated.
- Building capability and resilience within the Contracts Team.
- Strengthening collaboration with other professional services functions.

The role calls for considered judgement rather than an unnecessarily risk-averse approach. You will need to distinguish between risks that must be controlled, risks that can be mitigated and risks that may reasonably be accepted to enable the University to achieve its objectives.

Creating an excellent client experience

An effective contracts service must be legally sound and easy to work with.

You will establish clear expectations around service responsiveness, reliability, transparency and quality. This includes ensuring that agreements are progressed within appropriate and clearly communicated service levels, and that colleagues understand where matters stand and what is required from them.

You will maintain visible relationships with senior stakeholders and service users, using regular communication, feedback and insight to build confidence in the service and guide further improvement.

The aim is not to remove appropriate challenge. It is to ensure that challenge is clear, constructive and focused on helping the University reach the right outcome.

Contributing to institutional priorities

You will support the development of proportionate contractual frameworks, market-based pricing approaches and regular consideration of the University's contractual risk appetite. In doing so, you will help enable research, innovation and business partnerships while protecting the University's legal, financial and reputational interests.

Key accountabilities

Leading and developing the Contracts Team

You will lead, develop and line-manage a team of contracts professionals, providing clear direction and creating an environment in which people can perform at their best.

This will include planning resources, allocating and monitoring workloads and ensuring that the team can respond effectively to competing priorities. You will develop capability across the function, support professional growth and embed a positive, collaborative and high-performing culture.

We are interested not only in the contracts you have negotiated personally, but also in how you have improved the performance of a wider team or service. You may have introduced clearer ways of prioritising work, strengthened professional standards, developed colleagues' confidence or created a more consistent client experience.

Working across a complex University

The Contracts Team sits within Research and Business Engagement, but its work connects with colleagues throughout the University.
You will collaborate closely with Legal Affairs, Finance, People, Information Governance, innovation functions and other professional services teams. You will also work with academic leaders and external partners to ensure that contractual arrangements support strategic projects and partnerships.

This creates a leadership role in which influence is as important as formal authority. Different stakeholders may bring different priorities, timescales and perceptions of risk. You will need to bring those perspectives together, explain complex contractual issues clearly and help colleagues reach decisions that protect the University while enabling progress.

Your first priority will be to understand the contracts operation in depth: its people, workload, relationships, processes, systems, performance information and existing strengths.

You will need to establish credibility quickly with the team and with senior stakeholders who will rely on your advice. Listening will be important, but so will creating clarity about the direction of the service and the standards colleagues can expect.

From there, you will develop a clear and achievable improvement agenda. This may include:

- Establishing more transparent approaches to prioritisation and workload management.
- Clarifying service standards and improving communication with service users.
- Identifying where templates, guidance or proportionate contracting routes could simplify routine activity.
- Strengthening the use of operational data and management information.
- Developing digital capability across the contracting lifecycle.
- Reviewing how contractual risk is assessed, communicated and escalated.
- Building capability and resilience within the Contracts Team.
- Strengthening collaboration with other professional services functions.

The challenge will be to deliver meaningful improvement while maintaining a high-quality service and continuing to progress important agreements. You will need to balance immediate operational pressures with the longer-term development of the function.

Person specification

Governance and delegated authority

You will ensure that contracts comply with the University's governance arrangements and relevant regulatory and statutory obligations.

As an authorised signatory within delegated authority, you will be accountable for ensuring the legal acceptability and compliance of the contracts you approve. You will also provide authoritative advice on risk assessment and risk appetite, making executive decisions where appropriate.

Service improvement and performance

Champion service excellence across the Contracts Team, ensuring services are responsive, consistent, trusted and client-focused.

Use operational data and management information to monitor performance, identify trends and guide improvement.

Lead the development of processes, policies, systems and ways of working across the contracting lifecycle.

Develop clear service levels and effective communication with senior stakeholders and service users.

Lead the adoption of digitally enabled approaches that improve efficiency, effectiveness and user experience.

Create effective collaboration across Research and Business Engagement and the wider Professional Services community.

What you could bring

Experience in higher education, research or innovation would be valuable, particularly where it has involved complex partnerships and governance arrangements. However, equivalent experience gained in another large, regulated or professionally complex organisation may be equally relevant.

What matters most is the evidence you can bring. We are looking for someone who has:

- Led and negotiated complex, high-value contracts and partnerships.
- Applied strong knowledge of contract law and contractual risk management within a complex organisation.
- Provided credible and authoritative advice to senior stakeholders.
- Balanced legal, commercial and organisational considerations when making decisions.
- Led and developed a professional team and improved its performance.
- Delivered high-quality, client-focused professional services.
- Improved processes and ways of working through redesign, operational data or digital tools.
- Worked effectively across organisational boundaries and built trusted relationships with different professional groups.
- Used evidence and insight to translate improvement ideas into practical change.
- Operated confidently within governance, regulatory and compliance frameworks.

A solicitor or equivalent professional legal qualification would provide a strong foundation for the role. The University will also consider candidates who can demonstrate substantial equivalent professional expertise and experience.

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.

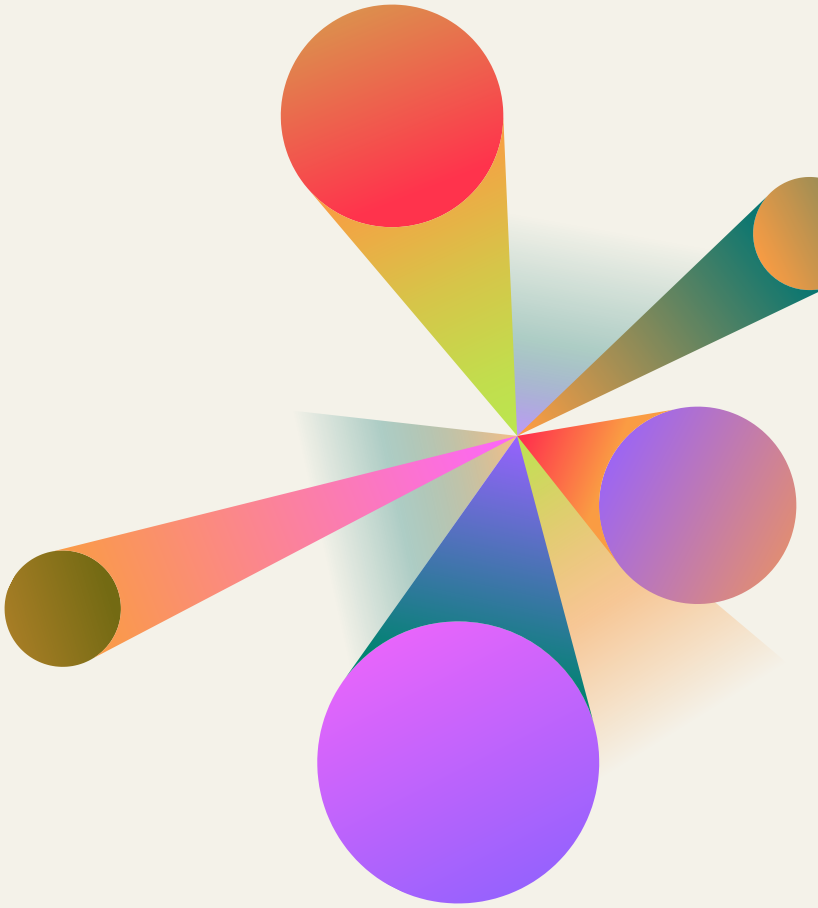
Sustainability
A sustainable approach that safeguards our future university by championing environmental practices, advancing digital capability, and supporting financial stability and philanthropic initiatives.

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

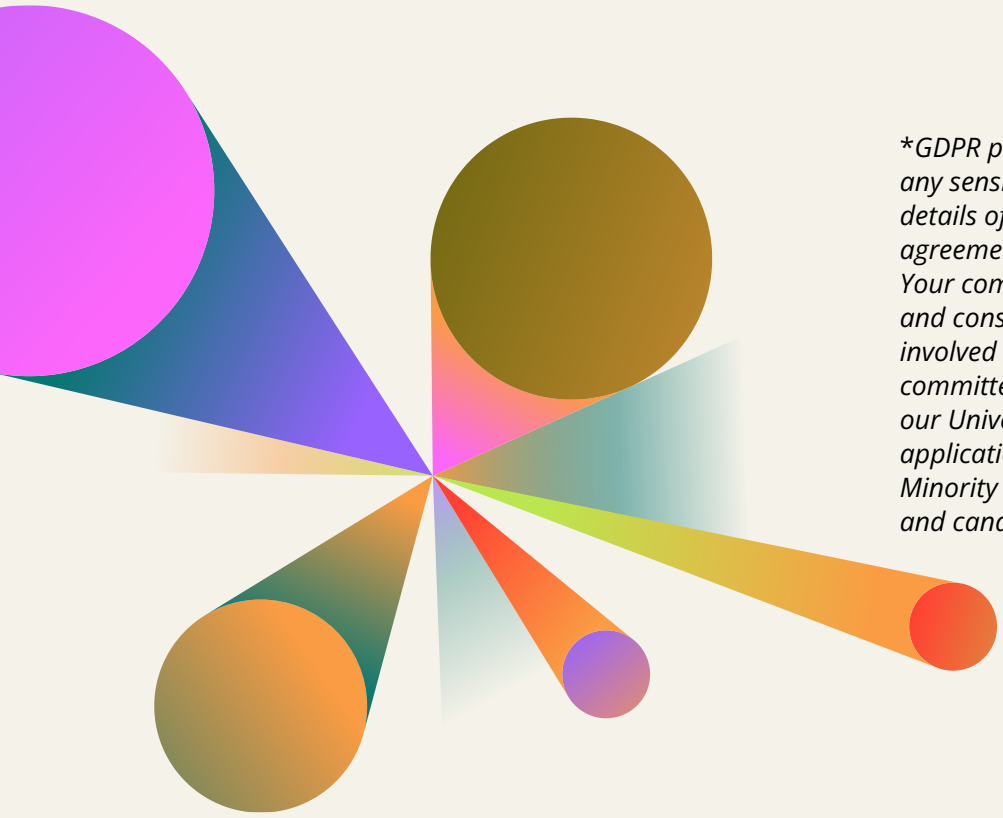
To apply, please visit the job advert on the University of Manchester website and search for reference PSX-032732.

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.

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Royal Charter Number
RC000797