

UWE Research Strategy 2020



UWE RESEARCH STRATEGY 2020

1. CONTEXT

UWE Bristol combines outstanding research with real world impact, a high quality student experience with excellent employment outcomes, and active and successful business engagement and enterprise support.

We submitted over 320 staff to the *2014 Research Excellence Framework* (REF 2014), among the largest submissions in our Alliance University 'mission group'. Nearly two-thirds of our research was rated internationally excellent or world-leading – up sixty-five per cent on 2008. On 'research power' – quality combined with the number of staff engaged in research – we ranked just outside of the top 50 universities nationally - at 54th. Our ambition is to build and improve upon this achievement.

- *UWE Research Strategy 2020* sets out the University's over-arching strategy for research, building on the 'Research with Impact' theme in our overall *UWE Bristol Strategy 2020*.
- The *Strategy* drives our ambition to be the leading 'Alliance University' and in the top fifty universities overall for research excellence.
- We emphasise and are proud of our research and scholarship in its own right. Research is also, however, integral to and drives learning, teaching and the student experience, student employability, continuing professional development, knowledge exchange, innovation and enterprise support. And it has wide-ranging impacts – economic, social and environmental.
- A large proportion of academic staff as a whole are actively engaged with research, from those pursuing high quality research with impact, in high-profile research centres, through to those whose scholarship builds on subject awareness and current knowledge to inform teaching and learning.
- The *Strategy* is informed by the University's performance in REF 2014 and aims to support and enhance outcomes in REF 2020/21. The REF is a valuable and widely understood benchmark of research excellence and impact and helps drive quality - but it is not an end in itself.
- *UWE Research Strategy 2020* is underpinned by a linked *Research Impact Strategy*, and by work on *Key Performance Indicators and Metrics*. Both will inform our ambitions, outputs and outcomes going forwards.
- It also provides a common framework for *Faculty Research Implementation Plans* which will take forward the Strategy in operational terms, appropriate to the priorities, opportunities and subject mix across our four faculties.

The *Strategy* goes on to identify objectives, summarise where we are now, set out where we want to get to, and finally how we propose to achieve our objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES

UWE Bristol Strategy 2020 describes our ambition for 'Research with Impact', one of four core themes, as:

“World-class performance in selected areas of research that meets the needs of our community, a sustainable economy and society and feeds the scholarship and enquiry that underpins our learning and teaching.”

Expanding on this, the objectives of *UWE Research Strategy 2020* are:

- To advance knowledge, support sustainable economic growth and development, and enhance health, well-being and the environment.
- To achieve outstanding and far-reaching research impacts on business, government, the NHS and other stakeholders, communities and society.
- To enhance the recognition and profile of UWE nationally and internationally.
- To integrate research learning and teaching in order to attract students, enrich the student experience, support student retention and enhance graduate employability.
- To drive business and public engagement, innovation and enterprise support, and the role of UWE as an ‘anchor institution’ in the city-region and beyond.
- To become the leading, comprehensive Alliance University for world-leading and internationally excellent research.
- To enhance our capacity to recruit and retain high quality staff, and to promote employee engagement, career opportunities and job satisfaction.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- Measured by REF 2014, we kept pace with the strong improvement in overall research quality nationally in the UK. Having said that, a number of the larger Alliance HEIs, made significant gains and have overtaken us in the headline *Times Higher Education* (THE) league table.
- We are stronger in league tables which factor in the total volume of staff submitted to the REF as well as quality in percentage terms. On the THE ‘research power’¹ index we were just outside of the top 50 nationally at 54th, reflecting the overall scale of high quality research at UWE.
- We also did particularly well in terms of ‘research impact’, included for the first time in REF 2014 - 49th nationally for ‘impact power’², underlining achievement against our strategic ambition of ‘research with impact’.
- The REF is an important benchmark of research quality. Many other staff are, however, actively involved in research and producing research outputs (recorded in the University’s Research Repository <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/>). Many also supervise research-based student projects and focus scholarly activity on maintaining the currency of subject knowledge and professional practice in support of their contribution to learning and teaching.

3. WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO?

- Our ambition is to secure an increasing volume of internationally excellent and world leading research with impact across core research clusters.
- These will, in turn, support the excellence of our teaching and learning, knowledge exchange and engagement with key partners and stakeholders.

¹ A measure of research volume as well as quality, GPA x fte members of staff submitted

² Based on ratings for impact rather than overall research.

- Our aim is for the University as a whole to be ‘Best in Class’: the best placed comprehensive University Alliance HEI in terms of overall THE league table placings in REF 2020/21.³
- Our goal is defined here in terms of REF outcome which provides a robust benchmark of performance but if we succeed, this will enable us to achieve our wider ambitions for research and the wider benefits that will follow from this.
- Research metrics will be important measures of progress against objectives. Headline indicators already featured in the University Corporate Scorecard include:
 - External research funding secured per fte staff.
 - Quality research outputs registered in the Research Repository per fte staff.

Appropriate headline targets will be agreed with Faculties as part of the annual planning process.

- A wider set of metrics and Key Performance Indicators will inform and support the work of Faculty and University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committees and the University Research Strategy Implementation Group.

4. HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

The four keys to success are:

- **Focus:** on excellence with impact.
- **People:** build on talent and opportunity.
- **Learning and Research:** research underpinning the student experience and employability.
- **Culture and Place:** embed and enhance a research culture.

4.1 Focus: on excellence with impact

- Build on our best performing subject areas, our strongest performing Units of Assessment (UoAs) in REF 2014 and high profile, high impact research centres and emerging centres of excellence.
- Focused investment, building on demonstrably excellent international and world-leading research – focusing our investment of QR funding, internally funded support for research, HEIF, resources for Postgraduate Research (PGR). Students, targeted investment in new research leadership, research-active staff, the resources of the Research, Business and Innovation Service (RBI) and other professional services support.
- Selectively refocus the UoAs to which we submit in REF 2020/21 and link staff with strong individual profiles to the best performing research groups.
- Identify and selectively invest in emerging research areas and groups with clear potential to achieve sustainable research excellence with impact including cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- Identify in *Faculty Research Implementation Plans*, clear ambitions and targets for individual research centres, groups and UoA submissions in support of the overall UWE goal of ‘best in class’.

³ Based on the headline measure of Grade Point Average and discounting smaller more specialist submissions.

- Increase overall quality by reducing the volume of submitted research for REF 2020/21 which does not meet a threshold of at least international excellence – to be achieved by enhanced research leadership, strong support for existing research-active staff, targeted recruitment of new research leaders and research-active staff and increased use of internal and external quality review.
- Maintain an appropriate span of research across teaching subject areas in order to support and enhance learning and profile in subject league tables, mapping UoAs against league table subject groups.
- Encourage and support interdisciplinary and collaborative research with world-leading academic partners and other stakeholders, both in the UK and internationally in order to drive up research quality.
- Build on our success in research impact through co-created, and long-term collaborative research and partnership with key communities, business, government agencies and other stakeholders, regional, national and international, as set out in the accompanying *Impact Strategy*.

4.2 People: build on talent and opportunity

- Selective, targeted investment in new professorial research leaders - faculties to develop academic and business cases for research leaders with outstanding personal profiles and demonstrable capacity to build teams, generate externally funded research and build on our core research strengths.
- Investment in a cohort of 'new blood' academic appointments who will split their time 50:50 between research and teaching with the expectation that they will develop a strong profile for submission to REF 2020/21 linked to excellence in terms of teaching and learning.
- Invest QR funding in post-doctoral, early career researchers.
- Support and invest in 'mid-career' researchers including increased focus on targeted staff training, mentoring and development opportunities for current staff in support of high quality research and research impact.
- Wherever appropriate appoint research active academic staff with research potential and with the capacity to enhance links between learning, research and practice-based teaching.
- Set clear performance measures and expectations for research centres and groups underpinned by effective guidance, support and personal development reviews at an individual level.
- Use Performance and Development Reviews, mentoring and effective research leadership to ensure staff time for research, is planned and prioritised in the context of overall workloads and time management, including scholarship and internally-funded time.
- Support academic staff to realise their full potential in research and scholarship - through effective leadership, mentoring, provision of training and development, internal peer support and review.
- Refocus Postgraduate Research in order to manage internal investment, increase external and collaborative funding including further Doctoral Training Centres and international partnerships, and support the continuing growth in the trajectory of PGR completions.
- Focus investment and support for PGR students around strong research groups to enhance the research ecosystem and support research excellence with impact.

- Establish a focused Professorial Research Leadership Programme to include all professorial staff as part of the *Performance 2020 Programme*.
- Succession planning and development of capabilities of existing staff in anticipation of the retirement of key research leaders.

4.3 Learning and Research: research underpinning the student experience and employability.

- Develop *Learning and Research 2020* as a key project within the University's *Learning 2020 Strategic Programme* – research as one of the four 'pillars' supporting *Learning 2020*.
- Identify and implement measures to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience and graduate employability driven by excellent research with impact.
- Enable and encourage the contribution of all research-active academic staff, including research leaders, to curriculum development and delivery across undergraduate, postgraduate and professional programmes.
- Encourage and support the contribution of staff on research contracts and PGR students to teaching and learning including through provision of appropriate training and development.
- Enable and encourage all academic staff to use research and scholarship to maintain the currency of subject-based knowledge and professional experience and to embed this in their delivery of teaching and learning.
- Expand and enhance opportunities for students, undergraduate as well as postgraduate, to engage with and contribute to research and research-based learning and teaching across all programmes.
- Ensure that academic staff have the appropriate training, development, expertise and experience to support student-based engagement with research practice and to integrate research and current subject knowledge with the practice of teaching and learning

4.4 Culture and Place: embed and enhance research culture and environment

- Increase research investment from both internal and external sources including increased investment in research leaders, research active staff, internally-funded staff time and professional service support.
- Enhance the visibility of research to the student body, UWE staff and visitors to the University real and virtual including social media, emphasising that research is firmly embedded in the culture of the University.
- Build the profile of UWE research with impact with external stakeholders, funding bodies, the HE sector, potential students and their advisors, and employers.
- Further strengthen links between research, knowledge transfer activities, innovation and business engagement including through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, the West of England University Enterprise Zone, Regional Growth Fund and Local Enterprise Partnership initiatives.
- Strengthen and support the role of University Research Centres and Centre Directors as key drivers of research strategy implementation including through the Professorial Research Leadership programme and a revised scheme for professorial reward and remuneration.
- Invest in research infrastructure and facilities to support research strengths and generate increased volumes of external research income, high quality outputs,

and excellent examples of research impact, including opportunities for communication, collaboration and innovation across the University as a whole.

- Develop and maintain high standards of research governance and integrity, ethics, data management and open-access publishing.
- Implement a Research Information System (CRIS) to track, analyse, support and enhance performance.
- Ensure professional services are integrated, fully aligned with and support Faculty priorities and overall strategy on research with impact.

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