

Research Strategy 2015-2020 (short form)

The 2020 strategy document identifies research with impact as one of five key themes over the period 2015-2020. The Westminster vision is to be a practice-focused university ranked in the top half of UK institutions with some disciplines in the top 500 world-wide.

We are committed to ensuring that the university promotes and develops innovative, cutting edge, and interdisciplinary research which adds value through its originality, significance and rigour, and its critical impacts on global society.

The full requirements for research are detailed in the 2020 implementation plan. This document incorporates the major KPIs and articulates a broader range of enabling principles and targets.

Broad aims of the research strategy

- Through research networks and active mentoring we will continue to raise the proportion of staff operating at levels of international excellence and move to a position where all staff are research engaged.
- Being research engaged rather than research dominated we will blend the novel with the established to push boundaries and explore the links between practice and research in areas with real impact.
- The Graduate School will continue to support and extend an active doctoral programme evidenced by a vibrant community of early career researchers.
- We will ensure that our research activities are sustainable outside government funding (i.e non-academic, knowledge transfer partnerships, contract research and consultancy)

Key targets in this area are:

- A sustained level of research income at four times the level of quality research (QR) income
- A sustained submission to grant success rate of 20:1 or higher across all Faculties
- A stable portfolio of projects across a range of disciplines and funding sources
- Each faculty to develop, maintain, and monitor a strategy for delivering impact in their chosen subject areas.
- All staff to be actively mentored and provided with research and/or scholarship so that they can become research-engaged and maximise eligibility for the next REF exercise
- Year-on-year increases in PhD student numbers with completion rate in 4 years greater than 70% and to approximately double the postgraduate research community by 2020.
- Return greater than 30% of staff to the next REF exercise with an increased number of Units of Assessment.

Singly and together these targets and objectives will allow Westminster to systematically grow our research capacity, develop an academic community informed by research while making our discoveries open to the public funding our work. The unique mix of disciplines at Westminster mean we are well positioned to reconnect with and support the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) agenda and its cross fertilization into the creative arts and social sciences

(STEAM). By developing and revitalising these links we will address the perceived lack of skills in these areas and enhance our reputation in a range of evidence based subject areas.

Recent government white papers on Science, Technology, and innovation point clearly to five key strategic principles. The Westminster 2020 research strategy maps to these themes as follows:

Excellence

Success in the REF2014 exercise demonstrates the strength of our research activities with 20% of our research at 4* level and 43% at 3*. Particular areas of strength is evidenced by Media, Arts, and design performing in the top 5 UK wide and in the top 20 world-wide. English language and literature provided the best improved unit of assessment in the UK, with other strong performances in Politics and International relations, Architecture and Built Environment.

A review of research centres in 2014 has consolidated our activities into a small number of (15) core research centres. We will want to see these develop and consolidate activities at internationally excellence and world-beating levels. A wider range of research groups will support developing research activities moving towards centre status as appropriate.

Additionally we will support individual excellence wherever it is found and subject to resource limitations encourage them to play significant roles in their disciplines by engaging with national and international agendas, promoting their activities where appropriate, and engaging with our region via sabbaticals, secondments, projects and other mechanisms.

Agility

Ability to respond to the changing nature of research priorities, funding, policy shifts and Grand Challenges requires that as an institution we care adaptable and fleet-of-foot to capitalise on various funding streams, respond to key initiatives, and be able to contribute to global debates.

To ensure that we support academic staff in being agile and able to respond to the evolving nature of their disciplines we shall ensure that support system remain fit for purpose and provide sufficient resource to support research applications, partnerships, and networks. For example, by use of facilities, matching funds where appropriate, bid preparation and screening, as well as simplifying pre- and post-award support. We will also endeavour to ensure that sufficient staff time is available to support research aspirations through appropriate use of work modelling while also acknowledging that this will require careful prioritisation in the context of university business.

We will continue to exploit our knowledge and invention by appropriate commercialisation (e.g patents, copyright, and licensing) using streamlined and effective processes. The intention will be to ensure that our innovation in research is translated effectively into our global networks and into society for the greatest impact. These processes will be agile to allow for rapid exploitation, avoid undue delay in dissemination of research outputs, and build an impact portfolio for the next REF exercise. Where possible the intention will be to re-invest income from these activities back into the research at faculty, centre/group, or individual level as appropriate.

Collaboration

Novel ways of collaborative working are the key to solving the scientific, social, and humanitarian challenges of the global community.

Novel multi-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and potentially disruptive insight is to be encouraged at all levels of research – between individuals, groups, research centres, and faculties in a manner that can lead to substantial impact.

Collaboration with our local regions, neighbour universities, will be supported and developed so that our innovative staff can influence regional, national, and international debate, develop and extend personal networks, and contribute to the larger grand challenge problems seeking to address questions of global significance and which are beyond the capacity of single individuals and single disciplines. Where possible we will seek to support these initiatives by a mixture of direct and indirect resourcing.

Linking research to teaching and integration of research topics and research groups should play a greater part in defining and supporting the curriculum, especially at final year undergraduate, postgraduate (master's) through specialist materials, project support, and where possible access to state-of-the art facilities. Our senior research leaders will be expected to demonstrate a role in disseminating our achievements through this integration and to the wider public.

Place

As a University located in the heart of London, Westminster has an enviable position, able to provide a global learning environment, and inspire the next generation of world citizens to help shape a better future for all.

Through our global engagement strategy we will seek out and identify research opportunities for university level collaboration with a small number of institutions in Europe, India, China, and the Americas. In supporting excellent research wherever it is found we continue to support individual partnerships both at home and overseas. In choosing our partners we will be conscious of the quality of the collaboration and the opportunities for generating global impact.

By investment in our University estate we maintain and develop a world-class environment for all our research that is attractive to potential partners, funders, and individual researchers. This will be a mixture of facilities, atmosphere, funding, and the unique Westminster identity.

Together with our partners and alumni we will seek to create a world-class experience for our overseas PhD students and Post-doctoral researchers using a mixture of direct and collaborative supervision, graduate school events, professional development and training with London as our canvas.

Openness

We will continue to support the principles of research integrity and openness in all our research activities.

Through maintenance of our on-line repository and web-interfaces we will ensure that our research is disseminated to the widest possible audience and that where research is publically funded the results will be made available through open-access. By appropriate in-house or external facilities we will ensure that the accompanying data sets are stored and made easily available.

We will continue development of the Virtual Research Environment (VRE) to make our internal processes transparent and easy to use.

As appropriate we will continue to discharge our statutory obligations for reporting and maintenance of research statistics and data (including but not confined to REF) as well as contributing constructively to national level debates regarding funding and support for research in the UK and Europe.