



**UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER** 

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE
EXCHANGE STRATEGY**

2022-2029

OUR VISION:

OUR UNIVERSITY IS A PLACE WHERE DISCOVERIES ARE MADE, BARRIERS ARE BROKEN, DIVERSITY IS CELEBRATED AND WHERE EVERYONE IS WELCOME

Our people stand out as significant contributors to their communities—through their innovation, enterprise and problem-solving—seeking to make the world a more sustainable, healthier and better place.

OUR OBJECTIVE

Finding Solutions to Make a Difference for Our Communities and the World

At the University of Westminster, we make a distinctive contribution to understanding and improving our world, guided by our three priorities: wellbeing, inclusion, and sustainable development. Our distinctiveness is underpinned by our unique history and locations, our established areas of research excellence, and our innovation. We understand Research and Knowledge Exchange to comprise a single mission from pure research to community engagement, as we make new discoveries, cutting through traditional disciplinary divisions and academic hierarchies, to push boundaries and break barriers.

Research and Knowledge Exchange (KE) are together one of four equal objectives at the University of Westminster, alongside and integrated with Education, Employability and Global Engagement as part of **Being Westminster**.

Making a Difference articulates our vision for Research and KE (RKE) at Westminster in the coming decade. It sets out our commitments to colleagues, partners, students, stakeholders and beneficiaries so that we harness our energies and grow our resources, focusing on the things that matter the most. These commitments will allow us to plan and resource current activities and realise future ambitions that are increasingly fully funded. We will work together in an environmentally responsible manner across academic and professional services teams, opening up our knowledge where possible, promoting diversity and inclusion in all our endeavours, and making a difference for our communities and the world.

By 2029 we will be.

- At the forefront of research and KE globally in Arts, Communication & Culture, Diversity & Inclusion, Health Innovation & Wellbeing, and Sustainable Cities and the Urban Environment
- Amongst the most diverse communities of researchers in the world
- Offering every student the opportunity to experience and benefit from learning in a research and knowledge exchange environment
- Sought out by non-academic partners because of the difference our expertise makes
- Pursuing research and KE activities which are financially sustainable and which generate investment for the future
- A unified community where everyone cares about and can feel part of our research and knowledge exchange endeavour.

OUR COMMITMENTS



Impact in Our Areas of Excellence

In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) Westminster was recognised as being a leading institution for the impact of our research, with several of our subjects amongst the very best in the UK for the evidenced difference they make to society. We constantly pursue further and more effective ways to share our knowledge globally, taking inspiration from the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), broadening our range of stakeholders and based on our research strengths.

We will:

- Identify research across all Schools with the capacity for increased impact and invest in enabling that impact
- Prioritise funding opportunities which have clear and compelling potential for societal impact, ensuring diverse research, researchers, impacts and output modes reflect our commitment to inclusivity and diversity
- Respond proactively to opportunities to undertake contract, collaborative research and commissioned consultancies
- Support impact-generation effectively through strategic planning and resourcing of impact activities throughout the University
- Actively engage with policymakers in government and funding bodies to understand where Westminster expertise and excellence can make a difference and act promptly on opportunities to tackle interconnected global challenges to people, planet and prosperity
- Engage non-academic beneficiaries in the co-design and evaluation of research impact and KE initiatives from the outset
- Evaluate performance openly and transparently, using robust, user-led, qualitative and quantitative methods
- Identify key examples of Westminster research making a difference, and showcase those case studies on our website
- Ensure activities are undertaken ethically and with integrity and rigour, mindful of how our research, KE and their impact affect our diverse stakeholders differently.

Engagement with Communities, Partners and Stakeholders

The University of Westminster has since its foundation as the Polytechnic Institute been committed to the enrichment and benefit of the wider community by making knowledge available to all, and this has not changed. We occupy a privileged location and have a distinctive profile that allows us to engage ethically with a range of stakeholders for mutual benefit. We pursue rich and holistic partnerships, building on our relationships forged through our other endeavours to capitalise on our research excellence wherever possible.

We will:

- Ensure that knowledge created at Westminster can be applied in ways that make the biggest difference
- Launch the centre for employability and enterprise at 29 Marylebone Road, providing a new interface between business, the community and the University
- Actively engage with employers in our locality to understand and respond to their needs, ensuring that research impact grows from Westminster's connections forged through 29 Marylebone Road
- Actively support innovation by working in partnership with businesses and third sector organisations to secure funding, harnessing the commercial potential of our expertise
- Focus on growing income, including through Executive Education, taking a pro-active approach to tenders and proposals, and through the sale of individual modules to support continuing professional development and reskilling
- Proactively engage with potential KE and research partners in our identified global priority regions
- Make connections and develop collaborations with other public bodies that share our values and create mutually beneficial outcomes in the public domain
- Host conferences and public events of interest and value to academics and the wider public
- Ensure that our public and community engagement demonstrates a strong relationship to our research and KE and evidences careful planning and robust design of the engagement pathways to ensure a strong return on investment
- Support and incentivise our students as agents of KE across a range of initiatives year by year and support partners in accessing student and graduate talent.

OUR COMMITMENTS



Our Dynamic Research Communities

RKE at Westminster is strong across many disciplines, but we recognise our world-leading excellence in: Arts, Communication & Culture, Health Innovation and Wellbeing, and Sustainable Cities and the Urban Environment. These, along with our Diversity and Inclusion priority, constitute our four overarching University Research Communities, enabling cross-School interdisciplinary working across boundaries as well as driving connections externally. These are our areas of manifest strength, and we will continue to prioritise support for research and knowledge exchange within these communities.

We will:

- Increasingly position the Westminster voice at the heart of international debate in these areas of core strength and in response to the UN SDGs

- Prioritise grant capture which strengthens our research in these areas
- Proactively communicate our commitment to ever-growing research strength in these fields to identified partners in government, industry and the relevant professional sectors
- Strategically commit human and financial resources to supporting and developing our ambition in these four areas
- Ensure that research, researchers and output modes address and improve diversity and inclusion as the norm.

An Environment Where Everyone is Inspired to Succeed

Our research culture is underpinned by openness. We support our colleagues to carry out research and KE activities by identifying and safeguarding time in our workload allocation model, providing opportunities for all academic colleagues whatever their career stage, ensuring that all colleagues with a responsibility for research and KE have appropriate objectives and support to allow them to flourish. We celebrate research and KE success through our promotions and salary review processes, as well as through our external communication strategies and by congratulating each other when we do great things.

We will:

- Proactively advise, guide, support and mentor at the local level so that colleagues can seek internal promotion and external opportunities, being particularly alert to ways underrepresented groups can be additionally supported

- Continue to promote both research and knowledge exchange as equally clear and valued routes to promotion
- Increase the number and diversity of leaders, including readers and professors, in both research and knowledge exchange across the whole University, prioritising EDI initiatives
- Ensure that all colleagues with responsibility for research and KE have an annual planning meeting with a senior School colleague and that funding plans are shared with the Research and KE Office so that they can be supported
- Look to our professors as role models, leading by example especially in our commitment to grant capture and to embedding EDI.

OUR COMMITMENTS



Our Education Endeavour

RKE and Education are two equally important objectives at the University of Westminster. Westminster is a modern university leading the way in how our research and our student experience enrich and inform each other. Our Research & Education Strategy is based on six principles. Westminster students are researchers, Westminster research helps make our courses special, doctoral (PhD) researchers embody the interface of research and education, we carry out research on education, we provide education on research, research is for everyone.

We will:

- Become a leading institution in the understanding and modelling of the nexus of research and education in a modern university
- Provide curricular and cocurricular opportunities for students to engage in research and KE

- Clarify and communicate to current and future students as well as colleagues the benefits of studying in a research and KE-rich environment
- Incentivise colleagues to explore creative ways of using research and KE to support authentic and active learning and assessment
- Embed research and KE in both new and revalidated courses to enrich authentic learning
- Develop initiatives each year which work across our research, KE and education workstreams to promote student engagement with all aspects of RKE, including enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Support our students to test and validate ideas for businesses and social enterprises through the continued expansion of Westminster Enterprise Network (WeNetwork), in alignment with our employability strategy.

The Westminster Postgraduate Research Experience

Doctoral (PhD) researchers are at the heart of our Westminster research community. Our Graduate School, formed in 2012, will empower our postgraduate research (PGR) community for the next decade and allow us to maintain and constantly enhance the excellence of the Westminster postgraduate experience. The Graduate School has a physical home at the entrance to our Regent Street building, signalling the centrality of PhD work as the lynchpin between education and research at Westminster.

We will:

- Ensure PGRs are supervised by academic teams trained in best practice
- Provide funded PhD scholarships to allow the very best postgraduates to achieve their research ambitions, regardless of background, recognising non-standard trajectories into research degrees
- Actively pursue membership of doctoral training programmes to access funding for more PGRs

- Review, develop and enhance the Westminster doctoral researcher development programme year by year to provide the best possible support for PGRs as they develop themselves and their careers and continue to employment
- Provide high-quality physical and digital environments in every School to complement the state-of-the-art training environment at Regent Street
- Develop sufficient appropriate specialist study and research spaces for PGRs
- Monitor and constantly improve our approach across professional services to marketing, outreach, recruitment, admissions and progression
- Monitor and take positive action in all schools to increase the numbers of PGRs from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in research and KE.

OUR COMMITMENTS



Researcher Development

Our mission at Westminster is to help our people “fulfil their potential and contribute to a more sustainable, equitable and healthier society”. This means that we must share best practice in enabling our researchers to develop the knowledge, skills, insights and tools to increase their ambition and make more of a difference. We recognise that research and knowledge exchange opportunities are constantly changing, and we need to be responsive as well as responsible in embracing those opportunities.

We will:

- Ensure that all new academic colleagues have access to an integrated training programme to allow them to get stuck in and thrive in research and KE at Westminster
- Provide a dynamic portfolio of researcher development events and resources for colleagues at all stages of their research career, informed by feedback, sector knowledge and colleague consultation so that it is always fit for purpose
- Engage proactively with funding bodies and key research partners to guide colleagues in achieving our shared ambitions, championing all forms of research undertaken within our University to ensure parity of opportunity

- Use QR income and other resources identified by Schools responsibly and transparently to ensure that all colleagues at all stages and particularly those at early- and mid-career stages are enabled to develop and disseminate their research, to enhance its impact and develop new skills and relationships
- Understand pressure points in research careers and use our resources proactively to support all colleagues at those points, particularly the transition from PhD to postdoctoral research and postdoctoral research to first academic appointment, and periods of parental leave and other life events that impact colleagues’ research trajectories
- Evaluate and improve our research environment informed by feedback from our people, enabling the development of an inclusive research culture, meeting the expectations of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, retaining our HR Excellence in Research Award
- Ensure that open research is embedded across the RKE life-cycle, while respecting disciplinary differences.

Celebrating Our Successes

Our research will only make a difference if it is visible, accessible, and openly available where possible. We are a research powerhouse, and we must not be coy about that, constantly remembering that Research and KE is one of our four equal strategic objectives and celebrating it as such.

We will:

- Ensure that research and KE are reflected and promoted in our physical and digital environments
- Recognise and reward the role of all colleagues involved in our research and KE successes and empower a greater diversity of colleagues to achieve their ambitions

- Ensure that grant successes, fellowships and other national and international achievements are communicated with pride via our internal and external communication mechanisms
- Maintain an annual programme of Vice-Chancellor’s research events to celebrate the people and the achievements in our Schools, research communities and research centres.



WORKING TOGETHER

Our people, and the way we work together as a community, are the underpinning foundation of our institution. RKE at Westminster is open and for the whole community to benefit and gain inspiration from our excellent research, learning from our insights and benefiting from our strong partnerships. We recognise the many groups who are under-represented in research and KE and the precarity of employment of researchers and see the need for positive action.

We will:

- Ensure that our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion is at the core of how we engage with everyone from their first interactions with us and throughout our work together
- Resource and develop the Research and KE Office and Business Engagement teams to provide the best possible advice, support and guidance to allow us to achieve our targets in research and KE
- Recognise that the RKE community comprises colleagues from across the institution in academic, technical, specialised and professional services roles and resource these roles and support role-holders to develop and progress
- Ensure that Professional Services teams more broadly are properly supported to develop plans which are constantly aligned with our RKE Strategy
- Empower and develop those in RKE leadership roles to innovate, take initiative and galvanise others around them to achieve our agreed ambitions
- Actively monitor and evaluate EDI in research and KE using internal and external survey mechanisms such as the annual wellbeing survey and the Culture, Employment and Development in academic Research Survey (CEDARS), taking action where needed
- Use the PDR process to monitor time allocation, hard and soft resources for research and KE
- Act on researcher feedback and co-create with researchers to increase levels of equity, diversity and inclusion in our researcher community whilst recognising the importance of intersectionality in those groups underrepresented in research
- Expect all those involved in the RKE endeavour to be familiar with and commit to the Making a Difference strategy.

OUR PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

We are very fortunate with our physical spaces both in central London and at Harrow, which constitute an inspiring environment in which to undertake research and share it with our communities, partners and stakeholders for mutual benefit. While state-of-the-art specialist lab or studio facilities are the essential environment for world-leading research, it is increasingly our digital estate which enables both primary research and its impact.

We will:

- Ensure that all those involved in RKE across all roles are supported with the necessary physical and digital infrastructure to allow them to achieve their objectives and the ambitions of our organisation
- Work with Information Systems & Support (ISS) to plan and develop policies to enable researchers to access the digital support and platforms needed for their research and KE activity
- Proactively identify the need for specialist facilities and ISS infrastructure to enable research and KE and ensure this is included in the pipeline of capital projects
- Provide appropriate study and research space for academic colleagues and PGR students
- Identify, market and increase revenue from our specialised research and KE environments and the expertise which comes with them
- Capitalise on our unique estate to be a recognised and highly valued location for conferences, performances, events and other revenue-generating activities which are true to our Being Westminster mission and priorities.



OUR REPUTATION

The University has seen steady improvements in our relative standing as a research organisation through successive national research assessment frameworks, such that we are recognised as ‘punching above our weight’.

Through the commitments articulated in our Making a Difference strategy, we will continue to improve the quality of our research outputs, the power of our impacts and the excellence of the environment we create, and by doing so will continue to enhance our reputation for what we do, evidenced by ongoing improvements in our REF standing for all units of assessment. We will increasingly be seen as a partner of choice for collaborations and a trusted and valued source of expertise and insight.

We will:

- Review existing REF unit of assessment arrangements to optimise return to the University in quality-related (QR) funding
- Recognise the diverse range of contributors and outputs that reflect the disciplines we engage in, while ensuring that the quality of our research outputs is maximised and that they are findable, accessible, interoperable and re-useable, openly available where possible, enabling them to reach the widest possible audiences, both qualitatively and quantitatively
- Increase the number of colleagues returned to future national research assessments
- Maintain a robust and progressive commitment to ensuring the highest levels of ethics, rigour and integrity in all our research and KE activities and partnerships
- See our colleagues increasingly honoured within and beyond their disciplines for the excellence of their research and for their contributions to the national and international research endeavour.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Underpinning great research is the funding to allow it to happen, and great research in turn leads to revenue via strong knowledge exchange. This is the bottom line. Our success in subsequent REF exercises has meant increases in our annual QR income from Research England to support our research environment, and this provides a strong platform to bid with confidence for significantly increased and sustainable funding which will drive our excellent research over the coming decade.

We will:

- Proactively seek increased funding from a wider range of sources to enable our research and KE to flourish, supported by the RKE Office
- Embrace commercial opportunities which support and are in line with our university values and priorities
- Develop our portfolio of short course provision to ensure its increasing contribution to our revenue streams
- Responsibly and consistently report on income generated from our KE activity both dynamically and via our annual returns.





MEASURES OF SUCCESS

There are established national assessment processes for the quality and quantity of research and KE we undertake, and we will prepare for these and engage with them responsibly and openly. In addition, we engage in internal peer review and mentoring to ensure that research quality is fully understood across the university and constantly enhanced. We foster a culture which ensures we collaborate with our community to ensure informed evidence for any changes we make to our research and KE environment and to the effectiveness of our research infrastructure.

We will:

- Achieve annual research income per FTE and a growth rate above the benchmark for our peer group
- Increase the number of Westminster subject areas above the post-92 benchmark for research income per research active FTE to 17
- Maintain a top-20 postgraduate research experience as evidenced by the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
- Achieve PGR overall satisfaction of +2.5% relative to Westminster's benchmark
- Respond to changing national Research Excellence Framework and Knowledge Exchange Framework metrics to ensure and evidence continued improvement against them
- Increase the number and range of researchers and research from underrepresented groups above benchmark.



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