

University of Westminster

Strategy for Research Development and Support 2018-2023

1. Our Objective

To develop our research activity and its impact in our areas of excellence to double income from research grants and ensure that 70% of all REF outputs are at 3*/4* level

Our Objective in Context

“This is a critical part of our endeavour, focused on areas of research and knowledge exchange where we make a difference and where that difference is valued for the impact it makes” (Being Westminster)

One of the defining features of a University is that new things are constantly being discovered and new opportunities created. The University of Westminster is no exception and has a strong reputation for research and for knowledge exchange. Research is indeed “a critical part of our endeavour”, both for our students in developing their own insights and skills, and for those beyond our walls in reaping the benefit of knowledge generated at Westminster. Research is the second of our four strategic areas of activity and a natural counterpart for our teaching, international collaborations, engagement with industry and preparation of our students for the world of work.

We pursue opportunities for new research and for knowledge exchange wherever they emerge from our attested strengths and emphases. The main way we build on those strengths and bring in new partners and beneficiaries is through our four research communities, and we will be making a significant commitment to building those communities over the next five years.

“We will develop a unified, interdisciplinary community of researchers with a vibrant body of PhD students at its heart. Our success will be achieved by researchers and those supporting research working in a seamless partnership” (Being Westminster)

We are our people, and nurturing and developing research means nurturing and developing the people who carry out and enable our research. Through guidance and advice, via practical and moral support, through maintaining a culture in which only the highest standards are good enough, we aspire for Westminster to be the University that researchers want to join and commit to, and a natural choice for our collaborators.

Exciting and impactful research requires a concerted effort by ambitious, supportive and professional teams across the University, and we will all respect our research and knowledge exchange endeavour as something which benefits everyone.

“We aim to double our funded research activity, with high and consistent quality in our outputs and increased impact on business, industry and the wider society” (Being Westminster)

Doing the research we want to do, to make the difference we want to make, requires energy and it demands resources. We will strive to secure the financial, physical and digital resources which enable us to flourish. Brilliant insights and discoveries are nothing if they are not effectively communicated and disseminated, and so we will ensure that we share and showcase our work via the most appropriate media to the best of our ability.

By 2023 “we will be making a stronger contribution to the world’s learning and wellbeing through our research”, and “we will be making a bigger difference to organisations and society through our knowledge exchange endeavours” (*Being Westminster*). This strategy constitutes our institutional commitment to achieving these goals, and we are doing this because it is a fundamental part of what the University of Westminster stands for.

Professor Andrew Linn
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

2. Our Focus: People, Culture and Inclusion

To create a positive place and culture so all our people are supported and encouraged to realise their ambition

Research Communities

Research groups ebb and flow as researchers and their collaborators come together to respond to questions and opportunities, and it is important that we are nimble as an institution and able to organise ourselves to make a difference whenever and wherever possible. Colleagues with responsibility for research will sometimes work alone and at other times in different constellations. Flexibility to respond to new opportunities in a climate of respect for all forms of high quality research, scholarship and knowledge exchange characterises the University of Westminster.

Underpinning our research endeavour are four cross-cutting research communities that speak to our recognised research strengths, our values, and the impact we have on the world. These have been established following widespread consultation and will allow us to show both partners and beneficiaries what is distinctive and special about research at Westminster. New communities may be identified in the future, but the core Westminster Research Communities at this point in the University's history are in the fields of:

Arts, Communication and Culture
Diversity and Inclusion
Health Innovation and Wellbeing
Sustainable Cities and the Urban Environment

These communities will enable researchers to contribute their expertise across subject boundaries and encourage colleagues to work in innovative ways, ensuring that the knowledge, expertise, passion and energy of our researchers contributes to global debates and new solutions.

We will identify experienced and passionate leads for these flexible communities, who will be able to inspire colleagues, energise them around opportunities for external funding and increase impact and visibility to achieve our objective. We will provide specific and focused support from the Research Office and via the strategic use of our financial and physical resources to ensure that the communities are set up to succeed.

The four communities will not replace existing structures but will strengthen our research environment by building new connections across groups, centres, schools and colleges. They will develop new partnerships with external stakeholders and create opportunities for all our students. They will grow our capacity to lead and collaborate internationally on large-scale projects. The communities will enhance our reputation for research.

By 2023 the research communities will have underpinned a doubling of income for research and knowledge exchange across the University and cemented our international reputation in these fields of endeavour.

Graduate School

PhD students are "at the heart" of the Westminster research community, and we must ensure that this statement is experienced as a reality. For doctoral candidates to succeed and thrive, the Graduate School not only provides the regulatory and quality framework for

the delivery of research degree programmes but also supports the broader skills training and development of doctoral researchers and their directors of studies and supervisory teams.

The Graduate School is established and well-regarded, and over the next five years it will develop a physical presence in the University as an environment where all those involved in the doctoral journey can feel at home and find practical and intellectual support.

We will increase supervisor engagement by recognising and celebrating the good work that supervisors do and increase supervisor awareness and engagement through the introduction of the module *Supervising Research Students*. We will make research methods training coherent and comprehensive across the University for both doctoral and other early-career researchers. We will increase external collaborations by integrating a work placement and mentoring scheme into current provision which focuses on links between research and the wider world, unifying our objectives of research and employability.

By 2023 the Graduate School will be a vital physical resource for the research community, and we will be able to point to significant improvement in responses to questions on research culture in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The Graduate School will contribute to the achievement of our objective by enabling increased numbers of doctoral researchers and increased submission and completion rates, focusing on our four key areas of research strength.

Research, Teaching and Learning, and Employability

Research is not a stand-alone aspect of our life as a university. Our research communities are conceived as ecosystems where research, knowledge exchange, learning, employability and our global partnerships all nourish each other. A key difference between study at school or college and study at university is that learning at university takes place in a context where research is being carried out by both staff and students. This research culture must tangibly enrich the experience of all students from level-4 onwards as we realise our commitment to learning and teaching on the one hand and research and knowledge exchange on the other as two sides to a single objective.

We are, like all universities, committed to providing teaching which is research-informed, and we understand this in a range of ways, as articulated by the Higher Education Academy.¹

Teaching may be *research-led*, where students are taught research findings in their field of study, either by learning from colleagues who are themselves active researchers or from a climate of robust scholarship ensuring that all teachers are up-to-date with the latest research findings in the field. It may be *research-oriented*, where students learn research processes and methodologies. The taught experience may be *research-tutored*, where students learn through critique and discussion between themselves and staff or we may refer to *research-based learning*, where students learn as researchers.

We will enmesh teaching and research via active collaboration between the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation (CETI) and the research communities. We will as an institution ensure that all our students develop research skills through their assessments and are able to articulate them to current and future employers.

¹ HEA / University Alliance. 2016. *What does research-informed teaching look like?* <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/what-does-research-informed-teaching-look>

By 2023 we will be able to celebrate a wide range of ways undergraduate and postgraduate taught students enjoy and benefit from our research activity and contribute to it, as a result of year-on-year joint initiatives between our research communities, CETI, the Careers & Employability Service, and Student Enterprise.

Leadership and Governance

Research leadership is provided by many individuals across the University who may lead in their subject area, group or community, at a school, college or university level. Others contribute as mentors and supervisors in a myriad of ways. Recognising the contribution of colleagues to research leadership and governance in generating a culture of inclusion and accountability will support the institution in growing quality research and enhancing its reputation with external partners and funders.

Responsibility for the research strategy rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research in collaboration with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Knowledge Exchange and the University Executive Board REF (Research Excellence Framework) lead.

Each of the colleges has a Research Director, who is a member of the College Executive Group and responsible to the Head of College. Research Community leads deliver the University Research Strategy through their agreed plans and activities. Research coordination in schools will vary according to local needs but will be agreed and overseen by the College Research Director. Individual research planning will take place in schools as part of workload planning.

REF planning is overseen by the REF Director with Unit of Assessment leads.

Support and development is coordinated by the Research Office (RO), providing post-award and impact support as well as support for research governance. Support and development for research-related activity more explicitly concerned with knowledge exchange is provided by the Corporate Partnerships team. The Research and Scholarly Communications team works with colleagues in all areas to support best practice including open access, research data management and the responsible use of indicators (metrics), and the Academic Liaison and Learning Development team support the development of research skills. **Close working between these teams is critical to our success.**

Research is the ultimate responsibility of the University Research Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Council. The Court of Governors identifies a link governor for research to ensure a connection between research planning and governance of the University. Operational matters are progressed by a monthly research planning group.

The University is committed to the principles of the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* (UUK, 2012) and has a framework for research governance which includes *The Code of Research Good Practice*, the *Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research*, the *Procedure for Managing Allegations of Research Misconduct* and the *Research Data Management Policy* and other relevant policies, codes and guidance.

Research ethics review is available for all levels and types of research and is managed by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and other devolved RECs. The University enables researchers to seek ethical consideration with the use of an online ethical review system.

The principles of research good practice will be further strengthened through ongoing dissemination of external and internal guidance. The University's HR Excellence in Research Award continues to include development in Research Ethics and Integrity as part of its commitment to the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* (2008).

By 2023 the current structure will be embedded and respected, and its successful operation will be crucial to our success in grant capture, high quality research outputs and impact. Leadership will be a natural feature of our research culture and all who espouse it.

Enabling Research and Scholarship

We will enable and unlock the very best research from our diverse colleagues by explicitly supporting them with resources and policies designed to cover the entire academic lifecycle. At the same time, we will ensure that we maximise the benefits to our research culture by colleagues and managers working to objective and transparent goals and processes.

We will implement a fair and transparent system of allocating research resources and workload hours to eligible research staff. We will aim to harmonise that system across the University whilst ensuring capacity for local adaptability and determination to suit a diverse research culture and deliver relevant college and school research strategies. We will ensure that WAM hours for research are linked to clear and objective goals. Objectives and goals will be monitored annually and will be comparable in scope and scale across the institution.

We will clearly distinguish between the role of research and the role of scholarship for workload and career advancement and ensure that a transparent and fair process is in place to allow colleagues to move between teaching/research and teaching/scholarship roles as appropriate and as agreed with their line managers.

We will ensure that our staff are valued and recognized in an ever-shifting educational and research environment by supporting a career progression framework that documents and implements clearer processes for researcher advancement and progression and ensure that appropriate development and support for research and knowledge exchange promotions to Reader and Professor titles are accessible and clearly signposted.

We will ensure that issues around gender, diversity, BME and other protected characteristics are specifically included and addressed, monitored and acted upon in resource distribution, promotion and development policies and continue to support the researcher and BME networks that seek to empower a wide variety of different researchers within the institution.

We will ensure that there is appropriate research representation in senior staff appointments and ensure the appropriate succession planning is in place for key research leadership roles in the University and in colleges.

We will pursue an appropriate research mentoring scheme to ensure that staff are able to access relevant expertise at each stage of their career, not least around the quality of outputs and dissemination. We will ensure that a consistent approach to sabbaticals is taken across schools and colleges with enhanced oversight on deliverables via college research committees, and with explicit sanctions for non-delivery.

We will clearly outline how we intend to support and resource staff during the early stages of their career.

3. Our Focus: Physical and Digital Environment

To create a physical place that inspires learning and that meets current and future needs

To take full advantage of the opportunities the digital environment offers in driving the education and learning of all our students and the working experience of our colleagues

Environment for Research

We currently have diverse facilities across the University with varying currency, deployed for both teaching and research, with some dedicated facilities and laboratories for research across the campuses. Most of our spaces in fact have some bearing on our research capability, ranging from offices (as inspiring and conducive environments for the generation of ideas and the production of high-quality outputs) to libraries, archives, studios and clinical environments, to seminar and meeting rooms. Spaces include:

- Studios and specialist technology enabled digital and analogue environments
- Exhibition spaces
- Spaces for external-facing workshops, seminars, conferences and congresses
- Library: physical spaces and physical and digital resources to support research across the University
- High performance computing facilities
- Dedicated wet laboratory facilities
- The Fabrication Laboratory at Marylebone
- Dedicated specialist discipline-specific laboratories and spaces.

As our estates strategy develops it is essential that research needs are clearly articulated and understood and that research is not compelled to take place in spaces designed for other purposes. This is the responsibility of the University Executive Board and Planning Committee in response to a clear steer from Research Committee. It is also essential that we do not conceive of the physical and the digital environment for research as separate things: they constitute a single facility.

Around 12% of our facilities and space are dedicated to research. To double research income we must address the issue of future spaces, facilities and resources to grow research. Future facilities will be constructed from the outset to support our strategy for future growth, by design. They will be flexible and re-deployable across the research landscape of the University, to serve multiple disciplines and the needs of our research communities.

Research spaces will be underpinned with flexible and scalable science and technology provision, enabling colleagues to work safely and securely with research data and collaborate and communicate with external organisations. Spaces will be technology enabled to support research commercialisation. Digitally enabled research laboratories will support industry-based research projects and collaborative applied research with industry that can securely handle big-data processing, addressing the needs of our Research Community activities, informed by and compliant with Jisc's current and future norms and recommendations.

By 2023 we will have in train a research strategy with a unified approach to the development of our physical and digital estate at its heart. All digital and estate developments on external

grants will have been devised via a coordinated conversation with our Estates Services and Information Systems & Support teams to ensure the ongoing development of a first-rate and sustainable Westminster resource (including both infrastructure and staffing) and not a series of local solutions.

Environment for Doctoral Researchers

We are committed to establishing a physical space for the Graduate School by 2020, which will encourage increased engagement from doctoral researchers and integrate doctoral research culture into the wider research culture. This will comprise: office space for the Graduate School Registry; a training room with a capacity of 40; social space for doctoral students from across the University; access to laptops and printing; small bookable rooms.

By 2023 we will see a physically real Graduate School and a truly interdisciplinary postgraduate community. Its success will be measured via the PRES survey, via the level of engagement with the Doctoral Researcher Development Programme (DRDP), via the number and timeliness of PhD completions and by the number of doctoral candidates enrolling at Westminster.

Environment for the Research Office

The Research Office comprises 9 colleagues as of March 2019 with new colleagues joining the team. The RO is currently inadequately located on the second floor of 101 New Cavendish Street, a rented and sparsely populated open-plan office space. Accessibility by and to researchers is suboptimal. It is well recognized that the professional services which engage best are those where there is the closest working between the Professional Services (PS) team and academic colleagues in a spirit of *One Westminster*. We aim to ensure that colleagues enabling research and developing researchers are co-located with academic colleagues in an accessible and conducive physical environment.

By 2023 researchers and the Research Office will be co-located to ensure maximum collaborative potential in order to achieve university research income and researcher development ambitions.

Virtual Research Environment

The [Virtual Research Environment \(VRE\)](#) is the University of Westminster's Research Information Management system for all elements of the research lifecycle. It currently includes modules to support the PhD student journey, research governance and ethics review, researcher profiles, repository, and pre-award funding applications.

As we move towards 2023, further developments will include the implementation of a full funding module, an upgrade to the Graduate School Examinations module and the piloting of a research data archive. A REF administration module is under development to streamline manual processes relating to the REF submission. There is further potential to develop an impact module and to use the data we have to better visualise the University's international collaborations and partnerships by research area.

Funding for support of the VRE needs to become sustainable, and we need to move away from single points of knowledge across the product.

By 2023 we will see a more diverse, flexible, interconnected and sustainable Virtual Research Environment which will allow us to support research and researchers and share our knowledge and our impact to facilitate the achievement of our research objective.

Open Research at Westminster

We are committed to making our research openly available wherever possible. Our [Open Access Policy](#) (updated in 2018) requires researchers to deposit all research outputs in [WestminsterResearch](#), our institutional repository, supporting but going beyond the REF Open Access Policy and enabling long-term preservation of and access to our research.

The [University of Westminster Press](#) is leading the sector in publishing open access monographs and journals and is fully involved in discussions of future national policy around open access to monographs and journals.

The University's [Research Data Management Policy](#) recognises that the institution has a responsibility to support data management best practice (including enabling open data wherever possible) and that this falls within the remit of a range of stakeholders across the University.

By 2023 Westminster will have increased the discoverability of, and open access to, our research, and continue to be recognised as a sector leader in open access university press publishing. Resourcing for research data management support will be on a sustainable footing. By the end of the next REF cycle (REF2028), the University's press will have advanced multiple income streams and will thereby have become financially sustainable.

4. Our Outcomes: Reputation and Financial Sustainability

With focused work through our people, place and technology we will grow our already distinctive reputation so that we are widely respected as a strong university, recognised for what we do and our commitment to making a difference

Our financial sustainability that meets current and future investment needs is achieved through the delivery of our objectives, creating an inclusive, inspiring and high-performing learning environment that attracts students to study here and colleagues to work here.

Reporting and Review

a) For the REF 2021 exercise, we anticipate submitting up to 60% of our staff in c. 13 Units of Assessment, or twice as many as were returned for the 2014 exercise. Our target is to ensure that at least 70% of our research entered into REF 2021 is judged to be of 3* (internationally excellent) or 4* (world-leading) quality. This result will help ensure that we retain QR funding from 2022 equivalent to that currently received by the University (approximately £4.4 m. per year), as well as enhancing our reputation for research excellence across our recognised areas of research strength.

We will submit a draft Institutional Code of Practice (CoP) for approval by Research England in summer 2019. All aspects of the CoP will be underpinned by a commitment to existing university policies to ensure that our REF procedures do not discriminate against any individuals. The University REF team will consult widely on the CoP, and we will also undertake a series of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to ensure that the impact of our processes and criteria is monitored and subject to review.

The selection of outputs will be underpinned by ongoing peer review overseen by the academic lead for each Unit of Assessment and engaging internal and external readers. Final decisions on our submission will be made by the University REF 2021 Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for REF.

b) Our new research communities are a pioneering undertaking for this university, and indeed for the sector as a whole where research 'themes' are more often the cross-institutional structures adopted. Because of our Westminster commitment above all to our people, our students and our colleagues, it is natural for us to nurture and develop inspiring and empowered constellations of *people* to achieve our research objective. The communities will be reviewed after 18 months (Autumn 2020). We will also launch a programme to review the effectiveness and reputational value of our university research centres.

By 2023 we will have raised the proportion of staff at Westminster with significant responsibility for research who are operating at levels of international research excellence in REF terms, as well as established clear staff development processes for those who wish to move towards taking on a significant responsibility for research as part of their overall workload.

By 2023 we will have established a flexible and informative set of key performance indicators for research to allow us to measure the effectiveness of our strategy and to inform our planning.

External funding

A key objective as we enter the next five-year phase is to double our income from sources external to the University, either on our own or (increasingly) in collaboration with other researchers or stakeholders, to support research and knowledge exchange activity. This currently stands at around £4m p/a. Given the quality of our research activity in those areas identified with our research communities, it is our contention that current funding levels are unacceptably low and reflect an over-reliance in some areas on internal funding. We welcome the commitment by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to reconsider the balance between QR and research council funding streams.

External funding is important to allow us to undertake the research we want to do and which we know to be important. It is also the means by which we can develop our facilities, which will in turn enhance both research and teaching & learning. As we work towards our stated commitment of doubling such income, we will focus on:

- Mapping our activities, particularly in our research communities, to the challenges of UKRI and target UKRI strategic opportunities
- Embedding the use of *Research Professional* to search for funding
- Developing and implementing processes that allow for rapid decision making for bids that require matched funding for strategic or large bids
- Embedding the funding strategies outlined at the launch of the research communities
- Diversifying funding sources, by building an effective partnership between the research development/external relations teams and key research areas/ research communities
- Regular reporting on bids submitted and outcomes to research leaders
- Encouraging and supporting the development of bids being led by other institutions where we are collaborators
- Enhanced support (including considering bid writing and external paid-for peer review) for high value/strategic bids.

By 2023 we will have capitalised on the all the strategic commitments outlined above and realised by the various operational plans summarised in the Appendix to at least double our income derived from research and knowledge exchange.

Internal Support

Universities are subject to highly critical, highly public scrutiny, particularly in terms of financial probity and the student experience. In this context it is important to reinforce the virtuous circle between research, teaching & learning and employability and to clarify some of the ways research actively benefits the student experience.

We are committed to research-informed teaching (see above), and this can only be achieved if a significant number of our teachers are also pushing forward the frontiers of their disciplines. Many of our most dynamic teachers are simultaneously engaged in research and knowledge exchange, so investing in research is key to attracting and retaining the best university-level teachers. In turn our research and knowledge exchange activities enable strong engagement with employers, bringing their expertise into the University to the benefit of our students and our curriculum. A strong research environment is vital to attract Master's students and doctoral researchers to Westminster, and an investment in research is an investment particularly in the Master's-level taught experience. In TRAC terms Teaching and Research income and expenditure are treated as hermetically sealed aspects of the

business. They are not. The University of Westminster is a complex and integrated community of learning, one where accountability is a key value but also one where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The principal source for internal support for research is the Quality Research income provided each year by Research England. Most is returned direct to the academic areas which performed best in REF 2014 via an established algorithm. A percentage is retained centrally to provide the basis for the University's Strategic Research Fund, which may be supplemented from other agreed sources. As we seek to capitalise on the deployment of internal monies, we will:

- Improve/monitor the return on investment in internally funded research
- Maximise the benefit from QR money linked to the Global Challenges Research Fund, developing links to and capacity for making a difference in developing countries
- Ensure that central/QR funding is strategically aligned to developing externally funded opportunities that generate a return on investment
- Support people to be competitive for external calls.

By 2023 the relative reliance on internal and external funds will have shifted considerably. The bulk of centrally deployed QR money will be allocated via the research communities in response to their detailed plans and monitored by Research Committee.

APPENDIX

Specific objectives and targets for 2018-2019 drawn from local operational plans

Research Communities

Colleges

Graduate School

Research Office, Corporate Partnerships and Library & Archives Service

REF

Other Research Objectives

OUR PROMISE TO OUR COLLEAGUES:

We enjoy being part of an educational community where all of us – teachers, researchers and members of Professional Services – make a worthwhile difference.

We help you do your best work with groups of students who are challenging, interested and keen to learn.

We provide opportunities that support your own learning, through interaction with colleagues and partners and through smart, evolving technology.

We provide an environment where you can grow – personally and professionally – and feel safe and supported.
