

Research with impact for a better world

Our research advances knowledge, discoveries and solutions to respond to local, national and global social, economic and environmental challenges.

Entering the new decade, our Research & Impact Strategy, will bring together people to provide sustainable solutions to today's and tomorrow's challenges. This will be underpinned and enhanced by our research culture which is open, inclusive, inspiring and ethical.

Our objectives over the next five years focus on three commitments to: [1] ensure our research community is supported by our infrastructure and resources to enhance collective and interdisciplinary working throughout our research disciplines, institutes, networks and centres to make new discoveries and tackle societal challenges at all scales; [2] to develop and support people and ideas to create a vibrant research culture and environment that is open, ethical and supportive and; [3] to enhance and create relationships, collaborations and partnerships thereby enriching our research and delivering transformational benefits for public good and economic prosperity

To achieve this we will exploit natural synergies between our Education, Global and Research & Impact strategies strategically shaping our investments and the development of international partnerships and research of global reach and importance. Finally, our Research and Impact strategy recognises our context as a leading research-intensive Russell Group institution and driving prosperity and success in our region

To achieve our objectives we will pursue two complementary courses of action. Firstly, we will build critical mass and reinforce distinctive areas of strength that bestow benefits for the university as a whole. We will be bold in following pathways of high risk when there is potential for high reward. Secondly, we will sustain our commitment to and support for emerging research and individual scholarship. We recognise that discovery research may have a long burn from the time of inception to the point where previously unimagined benefits and impacts are realised.

[i] Optimising our structures, environment, and culture:

Our College and departmental system integrates and resources research campuses at Streatham, St Luke's, Wonford, Truro and Penryn. Our strategy will provide structures to enable all our researchers to flourish. We will ensure that our clusters of excellence in research help support and develop our national and international profile. These include our commitment and investment in research into: (a) sustainability, environmental health, climate and clean energy; (b) data sciences, artificial intelligence and engineering; (c) health, disease, aging and well-being; (d) policy, law and impact and (d) global cultures, arts, heritage and humanities. We will stimulate communities of new working in these areas via three types of operational research grouping that will engage research staff within and between our College and departmental system: *University Institutes*, *Research Networks* and *Research Centres*.

[i] Our *University Institutes* co-create and co-locate inter-College and cross-disciplinary research as catalytic centres of creativity that collectively help define our research brand. Currently these are represented by the Environment and Sustainability Institute (ESI); the Global Systems Institute (GSI); the Institute for Data Sciences and Artificial Intelligence (IDSAI); the Living Systems Institute (LSI) and a new institute the Societies and Cultures Institute (SCI) within humanities and social sciences. These *University Institutes* represent areas of strategic importance and investment and their remit and performance of will be reviewed formally at five-year intervals. They will be expected to articulate with a wide range of activities with other research groupings to maximize our return on investment. A newly established *Exeter Futures Initiative* will also be designed to provide spaces for cross-disciplinary working to explore new research opportunities.

[ii] To enable agile collective research groupings to develop quickly in response to changing imperatives and opportunities we will also facilitate the rapid establishment of *Research Networks*. These will use virtual resources to quickly link and mobilise researchers where we enjoy critical mass in thematic areas across our campuses and Colleges. Research Networks will be challenge-led, and will realise the benefits of collective strength to deliver at scale, longer-larger research grants and associated outputs.

[iii] More defined *Research Centres* will continue to develop based on inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary foci and partnerships. Recognising the wide diversity of well over 100 existing Research Centres at the UoE, we will promote a review and rationalisation of existing groupings to create maximum coherence and opportunity for collaborative interaction.

These three levels of research grouping, along with our wider research community of individual scholars and their associated networks, will be supported by Professional Services teams who will share best practice, offer advice and training, promote impact development, gather evidence and undertake evaluations. This support will apply across the full research project lifecycle via the development of academic, commercial, and community partnerships across local, regional, national and global networks.

We will continue to invest in capital, equipment and digital infrastructure and will implement mechanisms to optimise co-creation, innovation and cost-recovery. We will support open research, including open access to research publications and data. We remain focused on the underpinning of our research base with major investments and we will put mechanisms in place to identify future areas and opportunities where we can make a major contribution. These investments will achieve net sustainable growth in our research power that will be benchmarked against ambitious targets in research income, national and global league tables, industrial investments, spin-out activity, research incubation and acceleration activity.

[ii] Inspiring people and ideas

This is a strategy for researchers as well as for research. We believe that investing in our research environment and culture enables our researchers to thrive, make outstanding contributions and build sustained and successful careers at the University. Our core values¹ of openness and transparency underline our ethos that we will enforce the highest standards and principles of research integrity and responsibility, and reward effort, collaboration and collegiality as well as individual success. Independent audits provide clear evidence that the University of Exeter delivers world-class research of global significance and that many of our researchers are amongst the most cited in their fields. We support a continuum of activity from discovery-based to problem-focused research. We recognise that the authority and subject-specific expertise of individual researchers is vital in assembling the complementary teams of interdisciplinary researchers that can unlock new knowledge and address complex problems.

We will therefore commit resources to develop a nurturing, inclusive and sustainable environment for all of our researchers. This will be framed in the context of new ways of working that have emerged though the Covid-19 pandemic, accelerating our capabilities for virtual research working whilst underlining the importance of protecting the well-being and health of our staff and the value of personal interactions as a catalyst of creativity. We will focus in particular on our postgraduate and fellowship research community whose members are key ambassadors of the University and play an important role in helping forge new relationships alongside developing new intellectual agendas. Support will encompass individual mentoring through to development of larger, longer projects that require effective teamwork between academics and professional services staff. This will include investment in the development of leadership skills for all career stages, and the creation of

¹ <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/ourvalues/>

opportunities for the creative exchange of ideas and mechanisms to establish and promote partnerships. We will also encourage and enable engagement between our researchers and funders to help inform funder strategies and to support intelligence and experience-gathering for future opportunities that will enable us to capture the resources we need to support our research programmes.

A major commitment is to support our Education Strategy to encourage students to become active researchers and agents for change enabling them to use their research skills and capabilities in every aspect of their future working life. We aim to establish an ecosystem in which students co-create research ideas, innovative research-inspired learning and practices.

[iii] Transformation through collaboration and partnership:

We recognize we have a distinctive range of established strength areas that span STEM subjects as well as the humanities, business and the social sciences. Critical to our success as a research-intensive university is our ability to define problems and find creative solutions through proactive working partnerships with diverse organisations. We will continue to build transformative partnerships that build on our traditional strengths but also explore new domains and translational opportunities at the boundaries of our current areas of expertise. This will entail facilitating and rewarding interdisciplinary and collaborative research at all scales and working with industry and a wide range of other non-academic organisations at regional, national, and international levels. Our research will be outward-facing and integrated with opportunities emerging from our Global Strategy, including international networks and new funding opportunities to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. We will interact with a range of stakeholders in our research activity, demonstrating the transformative benefits of our research in technological advances, healthcare, environmental sustainability and intelligence, security, arts, culture, politics and policymaking. Our commitment to public engagement and engaged research brings our research outputs to a wide non-academic audience and works with our local communities in its delivery.

Looking forward:

This Research and Impact strategy sets out an approach to enable all staff and students to fulfil their research potential in conducting research of the highest quality for the greatest societal benefit and academic impact. Successful delivery on our ambitions will require us to be agile in a changing geopolitical landscape. In order to reach the widest possible range of global beneficiaries we will form truly world-class competitive research teams that can take advantage of new funding opportunities and shape national research agendas. This will ensure that research conducted at Exeter is held in high esteem internationally and is visible and accessible to all. Our Strategy promotes effective teamwork and connections, to build partnerships, and to adapt our ways of working to enable staff and students to flourish in a rich, well-managed, environmentally sustainable, diverse and nurturing research environment.