

University of Essex

Research Strategy 2019-25

Our Research Vision for 2025

Our vision of Essex researchers is one of activists, advocates, change-makers, innovators, reformers and disruptive thinkers. Curiosity, tenacity, social action and impatience for change define our 'Essex Spirit'. Our diverse community and international profile create an outward looking research culture underpinned by our values of inclusion and responsibility, academic freedom, respect, trust and evidence-based rigour.

We will build a distinctive environment animated by an innovative and inclusive working culture (link to People and Culture people strategy) in which our researchers pose imaginative and bold questions, challenging received wisdom and extending the frontiers of knowledge. Our energetic and dynamic academic community will conduct creative and ambitious research with integrity. Combining disciplinary specialism with interdisciplinary collaboration, Essex's open and agile research environment will enable both sustained work on established global challenges, like climate change, and rapid responses to new and unanticipated global challenges, like COVID-19, as well as national reconstruction and the impact of leaving the European Union. We will continue to invest in state-of-the-art facilities in key areas of excellence that will be recognised world-wide to be at the leading edge, attracting the best minds to our research community.

We will nurture and support our researchers at all career stages by embedding a strong yet flexible research development framework, and encouraging continuous personal and professional growth. Our expertise in developing the next generation of scientists, scholars, critical thinkers, professionals, and activists will be recognised globally. Our research community, culture and assets enrich our curriculum, providing a uniquely Essex research-led education for our undergraduate and postgraduate students, who become an active part of our research community and benefit directly from our research excellence and international reputation.

Our local, national and global collaborative partnerships ensure the widest possible knowledge exchange and maximum research impact. Our networks with research partners, business and industry, third-sector groups, local government and policy makers create new opportunities to work together for the benefit of individuals, communities and society.

Our Research Priorities

Our Research Strategy for the period 2013-2019 focussed on Research Quality, Sustainability and Impact. Our 2019-25 Research Strategy builds on these pillars in line with the priorities of the University Strategy 2019-25 – People, Knowledge and Communities. During the period of this Research Strategy it will be essential to support our research community and mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 on our ability to deliver our Research Priorities. To this end, our Research Vision and Priorities for the coming five years will be reviewed annually and COVID-19 will remain a central concern in setting our priorities in the Research Action Plan.

1. People: Our Internationally Renowned Researchers:

Core to our mission of excellence in education and research for the benefit of individuals, communities and society are the talented and creative people committed to producing new understanding and knowledge at the leading edge.

1.1 Supporting and Nurturing our Researchers

- We will promote a cohesive research community through University, Faculty and Department research groups and activities, our digital infrastructure and the use of space to engender a sense of belonging to support individual researchers working within discipline boundaries and to promote innovative research collaborations and interdisciplinary excellence.
- We will provide support for our diverse research community to pursue curiosity-driven research and disciplinary knowledge essential to underpin interdisciplinary approaches and to provide a discovery pipeline leading to translational research and the delivery of impact.

- Our Research and Enterprise Office will work to provide support for our researchers to help identify funding opportunities, develop funding applications, optimise grant success, and ensure effective post-award management and delivery. We will include early career researchers in collaborative programmes and, where appropriate, when developing large grant applications to aid in career development.
- Our integrated programme of research leadership training will be open to all research staff, providing a core programme and optional sessions. It will aim to equip researchers with the strategic and operational capabilities to achieve personal research goals and to develop and lead transformative research projects and major research investments that generate new knowledge, break intellectual boundaries and transform lives.
- We will ensure trust and confidence in our research by providing research integrity and skills training for researchers at all career stages, including implementation of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.
- We will fulfil our commitment to open research by providing and supporting open science training and developing a clear framework for researchers to work within. We will develop further our policies and processes for open research and open data to optimise knowledge exchange and dissemination, and research transparency, visibility and impact.

1.2 Enabling and Celebrating Research Excellence and Leadership

- We will ensure, whenever possible, that the University research leave scheme promotes our individual and collective research ambitions and provides the time and space for our researchers to enhance existing research programmes and develop new areas for the future.
- We will promote mechanisms for enabling researchers to lead and engage in research and knowledge exchange activities, including the use of work-load allocation models and research incentive schemes.
- We will celebrate excellence in research, knowledge exchange and impact through events, communications and annual awards.

2. Knowledge: Our Globally Significant Transformational Research

The creation and discovery of new knowledge is at the heart of the research mindset at Essex. Innovating both within and between disciplines, we ask difficult questions and break intellectual boundaries to extend knowledge and address both established and emerging challenges of local, national and global significance. The Essex research culture will continue to be animated by knowledge creation and exchange, research impact and, where appropriate, social action.

2.1 Transformational Research

- We will further enhance the quality and reach of our national and international research and increase our reputation and visibility. We will create and support our areas of cross- and interdisciplinary strength by developing diverse, innovative and flexible research communities capable of responding to and pioneering solutions for existing and emerging problems.
- We will promote and support sustainable and globally recognised research excellence within disciplines undertaken by individual researchers across our three faculties.
- We will support research excellence in all of its forms including: curiosity-driven research; research that is curiosity-driven with longer term translational goals; and research with a translational focus from the outset.
- We will invest in the development of new peaks of excellence in cross- and interdisciplinary research to innovate new perspectives, approaches and ways of understanding.
- We will encourage and support our researchers to participate in strategic consortia activities, including doctoral training consortia.
- We will strengthen our research reputation by drawing maximum benefit from our engagement with our established research partnerships nationally (Eastern Arc) and across Europe (Young European Universities Research Network (YERUN) and Young Universities for the Future of Europe consortium (YUFE)).

- We will strengthen our international research reputation and maximise the opportunities for research impact and knowledge exchange by (a) developing and delivering strategic research-led collaborations with key institutions and (b) supporting individual researchers and research groups through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and other University funding streams.

2.2 Transformational Environment

- We will create a diverse, inclusive and innovative Essex research environment with leading-edge technologies in priority areas to enable world-class research and attract new talent to Essex. The quality of our research environment will also increase our international profile and leading researchers from world-class institutions will be drawn to Essex to access these facilities, further benefiting our research community and reputation.
- We will continue to invest strategically in our research infrastructure and facilities to strengthen our peaks of excellence and develop new interdisciplinary priority themes with the potential to be world-class as well as uniquely Essex.
- We will provide the intellectual, cultural, digital and physical environments to attract, retain, and support the highest quality research staff and postgraduate researchers.
- We will invest in and harness world-class infrastructure and facilities to benefit our collaborations in the UK and globally.

3. Communities: Our World Class Research Communities and Networks

Our mission is to create transformational knowledge for the benefit of individuals, communities and society by developing on- and off-campus networks with a diversity of local, national and international stakeholders. Connectivity between researchers across our Essex campuses will form communities of excellence where transformational interdisciplinary research can thrive. Beyond our campuses we will create research communities with global and regional partners to produce new knowledge that can be applied to improving people's lives.

3.1 Developing and growing our research communities

- We will ensure that our researchers benefit from the growth in our research community during the last five years, which has created critical mass and research power to ensure the sustainable delivery of world-leading research.
- We will support our staff and student researchers to collaborate both with each other and with local, national and international stakeholders to build a global research community that creates new knowledge to transform lives.
- We will leverage our existing research partnerships nationally with the Eastern Arc and across Europe through YERUN and YUFE, establishing communities around complementary expertise to generate collaborative research capacity and power that is greater than the sum of the parts.
- We will develop new local, national and international collaborations to deliver the widest possible impact and sharing of the new knowledge generated from our excellent research.
- We will situate Knowledge Gateway as the focal point of a regional cluster of innovative organisations, with both tenants and the regional business community benefiting from support delivered as part of our University Enterprise Zone status.

3.2 The impact of our research

- We will work closely with regional stakeholders to help businesses, charities and public sector organisations innovate to improve their performance. We will be an active partner in the development of regional strategies and initiatives in support of this objective.
- We will leverage the long-term partnerships we have developed around the Knowledge Gateway and Innovation Centre to create a collaborative innovation community that can solve established and emerging challenges by linking the discovery of new knowledge to its systematic application for the benefit of individuals, communities and society. We will enhance our links to organizations in Southend's Business Incubation Centre (BIC) to strengthen the impact of our research.

- We will develop impact pipelines, media engagement and training opportunities to ensure that our academic research is valued by a wide range of external stakeholders, including policy makers, businesses and practitioner audiences.
- We will ensure that Knowledge Exchange (KE), as a key means of delivering research impact, is encouraged and supported by our KE staff in professional services.
- We will establish programmes of public engagement that maximise the opportunities for researchers to work with local, national and international partners with a focus on areas that could benefit from the knowledge and skills across our faculties such as Health, Wellbeing and Social Care.
- We will exploit fully the commercial potential of our research to maximise impact for society in line with our commercialisation strategy (Cross Ref).

Achieving our ambitions

Our University Strategic plan sets out our ambition that by 2025 we are recognised nationally and globally for the international excellence and world-leading quality, scale and impact of our research. To achieve this ambition, we have set a number of aspirational targets (or key performance indicators (KPIs)) that will enable us to measure our progress.

- By 2025, we will be recognised nationally (top 25 Times Good University Guide: KPI 1) and globally (top 200 Times Higher Education World Rankings: KPI 2) for the quality and impact of our transformational research.
- We will be in the top 20 nationally for overall research profile in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF), and each Unit of Assessment submitted by the University will be in the top 20%, using TGUG methodology. (KPI 8)
- We will be ranked in the top 40 of UK institutions for citations per publication by 2022; and in the top 25 of UK institutions for citations per publication by 2025. (KPI 9)
- Our research income target (KPI 10) is that:
 1. research income per FTE for academic and research staff, calculated at institutional and cost-centre levels, to meet (by 2022) and exceed (by 2025) average benchmark achieved by research-intensive UK universities.
 2. research income from industry calculated at institutional level, to meet (by 2022) and exceed (by 2025) the average income reported by the Cluster group X of institutions as defined by KEF
 3. total income reported in HEBCIS calculated at institutional level to meet (by 2022) and exceed (by 2025) average reported by the Cluster group X of institutions as defined by KEF

Research ambition

In developing a set of research objectives and performance indicators we will need to take into account the immediate and longer-term impact of COVID-19 on the ability to deliver the Vision and Priorities set out in our Research Strategy. To ensure we can monitor our progress and provide the necessary support to achieve our Research Vision, we will review data on research in the Autumn term to provide an evidence-led approach.

Summary of Objectives 2019-2025

People

	Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
RPO1	To attract, retain, and support the highest quality research staff and postgraduate researchers through provision of stimulating intellectual, cultural, digital and physical environments, as well as providing appropriate resources.	People Objectives 3, 8, and 9
RPO2	To promote innovative research through the development of research groups and activities at University, Faculty and Department levels, and enable the full exploitation of our digital and physical infrastructure. We will review our portfolio of Research Institutes, Centres and Groups to address existing and new research opportunities, and provide the flexibility to introduce other research entities in future (for example, hubs and networks) if committees consider that this would add value.	People Objective 9
RPO3	To enable our research community to deliver a step change in the capture of external funding through the provision of support to identify funding opportunities, develop funding applications and ensure effective post-award management and delivery – including promoting research on COVID-19 issues. We will encourage academics to serve as reviewers for research councils and other funders, attending funding panels and other meetings of research funders.	People Objectives 3, 5, and 6
RPO4	To nurture our diverse community of early career researchers by ensuring their inclusion in the development of funding applications, including larger multi-disciplinary grants.	People Objectives 5, 6, and 7
RPO5	To equip our researchers with the strategic and operational capabilities to achieve personal research goals and to develop and lead transformative research projects through an integrated programme of research and leadership training.	People Objectives 5, and 6
RPO6	To build trust and confidence in our research through the provision of research integrity and skills training for researchers at all career stages, including implementation of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.	People Objectives 5, and 6
RPO7	To provide the time and space for our researchers to enhance existing research programmes, develop new areas for the future, engage in knowledge exchange activities, we will ensure that the University research leave scheme, work-load allocation models and research incentive payments promote our individual and collective research ambitions.	People Objectives 7, 8, and 9

Knowledge

	Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
RKO8	To enable our researchers to develop in-depth discipline specific expertise by encouraging and supporting curiosity-driven research within individual disciplines across our three faculties.	Knowledge Objectives 5, and 6
RKO9	To encourage the development of new perspectives, approaches and ways of understanding through targeted support for new peaks of excellence in cross- and interdisciplinary research areas.	Knowledge Objectives 5, and 9
RKO10	To strengthen further our existing peaks of excellence and enable the development of new interdisciplinary priority themes by investing strategically in world-class infrastructure and facilities.	Knowledge Objective 5
RKO11	To raise our research profile through engagement with our established research partnerships nationally (Eastern Arc) and across Europe (Young European Universities Research Network (YERUN) and Young Universities for the Future of Europe consortium (YUFE)).	Knowledge Objectives 6, 7, and 8
RKO12	To strengthen further our international reputation and provide opportunities for the widest possible impact and knowledge exchange of our research through the development of strategic research-led collaborations with key institutions and by supporting individual researchers and research groups through GCRF and other University funding streams.	Knowledge Objectives 6, 7, and 8
RKO13	To ensure maximum transparency, visibility and impact of our research through our commitment to open research and to enable the widest dissemination of the knowledge produced by our researchers by developing and implementing an open science framework for researchers to work within.	Knowledge Objectives 6, 9, and 10

Communities

	Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
RCO14	To create a strong and impactful research community with the critical mass and research power to deliver our research ambitions through recruitment of the most talented researchers.	Communities Objective 7
RCO15	To strengthen our research community through the provision of support for our researchers to develop their own research agendas and to lead on and participate in strategic consortia activities, including doctoral training programmes.	Communities Objectives 6, and 7

	Objective	Cross reference to University Strategic Plan
RCO16	To embed long-term research partnerships in our community we will engage our researchers in the ecosystem we have developed around the Knowledge Gateway and Innovation Centre to enable the creation of an innovation community that can solve real-world challenges, through linking basic research and the discovery of new knowledge to systematic application for the benefit of individuals, communities and society.	Communities Objectives 6, and 9
RCO17	To ensure that our academic research is both accessible and of benefit to a wide range of external stakeholders, including policy makers, businesses and practitioner audiences through the development and implementation of impact pipelines, media engagement and skills training.	Communities Objectives 6, 7, and 10
RCO18	To apply our research to address questions that will contribute to the rebuilding of economies, communities and society in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Communities Objectives 6, 7, 9 and 10
RCO19	To expand the reach of our research through Knowledge Exchange activities (KE), supported by our KE staff in professional services, including programmes of public engagement that maximise the opportunities for researchers to work with local, national and international partners.	Communities Objectives 6, 7, and 9
RCO20	To exploit fully the commercial potential of our research in order to maximise its impact for society, in line with the commercialisation strategy (Cross REF).	Communities Objectives 9, and 10