UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON
The *Career* University

# RESEARCH
## 2024-2029

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# RESEARCH 2024-2029
## FOREWORD

## We are Research #UWL

In a world where political, economic and socio-cultural issues are becoming increasingly complex, research and education play a major role in providing efficient solutions and building a pipeline of future experts. However, as current challenges evolve and as society itself undergoes unprecedented changes, research must also adapt. With growing pressure to meet the demands of diverse stakeholders – agile, collaborative research responding directly to end-users' needs is more and more valued and valuable.

We believe that with its connections with industry, the public sector and the third sector, its diverse workforce and its long-standing reputation for high-quality education, the University of West London (UWL) is in a unique position to provide innovative solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges, such as — the evolution and integration of Artificial Intelligence in society; health issues posed by increased life expectancy; the need to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the necessity to advance progress towards a society where Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are truly embedded and respected. These challenges inform the University's cross-disciplinary research areas for Research 2024-2029.

As we embark on our journey for the next five years, we are committed to building on our excellent performance in the last Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021) and to consolidate our reputation as an institution that delivers rigorous research across a wide variety of disciplines while standing out for its diversity and its outstanding teaching activities.

To this end – following an extensive engagement exercise with staff, students, professional services and research partners – we have developed a Research Strategy whose aim is to harness the potential of our research environment in conjunction with UWL's high-quality teaching. We strongly believe that by capitalising on UWL's strengths, we can create research that addresses crucial economic and socio-cultural problems while speaking to a wide variety of audiences. More than ever, our mission is to nurture talent in all its forms. Our vision is to be a University that challenges, inspires, transforms and achieves.

**Prof. Aude Bicquelet-Lock**
Director of Research and Development

# OUR VALUES

Our Research Strategy aligns our research activities with the University's new strategic plan *Impact 2028.* It is inspired by the same values – emphasising the pivotal role of research and innovation in advancing UWL's future aspirations. It is grounded on the belief that, in a rapidly evolving research landscape, inclusive and trusted research stands at the forefront of progress.

## Excellence

With a focus on addressing society's most critical challenges, we are committed to delivering cutting-edge research that has a lasting impact on society whilst upholding the highest academic and professional standards.

## Innovation

Our aim is to develop original – and, at times disruptive – ideas to address current social, economic, and cultural challenges. We are committed to conducting rigorous research that leads to innovative solutions and drives positive changes.

## Integrity

Our research strategy places honesty, transparency and accountability at its core – fostering a culture of care and respect for all individuals involved in the research process, prioritising accountability, open communication and abiding by the highest ethical standards to produce trusted research.

## Inclusivity

We are committed to creating inclusive and diverse academic environments where students and staff feel valued and empowered to achieve their goals. We are dedicated to fostering inclusion and diversity by actively supporting all research endeavours that address EDI-related challenges.

## Social Responsibility

We believe in the power of carrying out rigorous research as a means to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future. Our strategy is driven by a commitment to produce responsible and sustainable research that aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and makes a meaningful impact on society.

## Courage

We know that we will need to expand the scale and range of research we conduct to achieve our strategic goals. We will use all the available opportunities to do this, looking for imaginative partnerships and collaborations with the potential to take our research to new levels.

# OUR TARGETS

The 2017-2020 and 2021-2025 Research and Scholarship Strategies enabled UWL to consolidate its research activities and progress to the top 100 universities for the overall quality of its research in the last Research Excellence Framework.

Building on this, UWL's new strategic plan Impact 2028 has set two ambitious high-level targets for our research:

1. To be ranked within the top 70 universities in the next REF (REF 2029)

2. To develop UWL's doctoral capacity from 250 to 1000 students by 2028.

# OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

This section describes how we intend to achieve the high-level targets outlined by *Impact 2028*. In doing so, it defines our objectives for research and provides a list of actions that we will implement in order to achieve them. Each objective is equally important to the delivery of our research strategy.

## 1. DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH-INFORMED EDUCATION

Our first objective is to deliver high-quality research-informed education with the aim of reinforcing students' learning and employability.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Expose undergraduate students to research opportunities to enhance learning and student engagement.
- Develop opportunities for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students to input into research and knowledge exchange activities.
- Develop means for staff at all career stages to benefit from national and international networking activities that will extend the reach of their research and can be translated into teaching activities.
- Support research and knowledge exchange that can readily feed into teaching material/activities.
- Ensure that research and partnerships with external organisations and industries enhance students' experience and employability.
- Build research partnerships in sectors of prime relevance to undergraduate and postgraduate students' programmes.

## 2. DIVERSIFY OUR RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

Our second objective is to diversify our research portfolio while maintaining our commitment to produce innovative, impactful and rigorous research.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Direct significant levels of funding to drive new research initiatives prioritising the University's mission and future ambitions.
- Provide the necessary infrastructure to enhance the capacity and capability of research staff/students to develop research skills and seek competitive research grants.
- Provide the necessary infrastructure to enhance the capacity and capability of research staff/students to engage with end-users and collaborate with academic/non-academic partners.
- Continue to develop our Open Research Environment with a commitment to make all stages of the research lifecycle open, transparent, collaborative, inclusive and efficient.

## 3. SUPPORT RESEARCH TACKLING EDI-RELATED CHALLENGES

Our third objective revolves around supporting research that addresses Equality, Diversity and Inclusion while creating positive and nurturing environments for both students and staff.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Appoint EDI leads for each School/College.
- Champion inclusive research via training events and internal awards celebrating best EDI-related research.
- Embed EDI considerations in all research projects and funding applications.

- Offer internal research funding schemes specifically inviting applications for research addressing EDI-related challenges (eg our Vice-Chancellor's scholarships and Early Career Research Impact grant applications).
- Support the work of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group (EDAG). Use our research capacity to identify and address institutional gender, ethnic and other inequalities.
- Support diversity in developing Impact Case Studies (ICSs) to be submitted to REF 2029. Target resources towards those with protected characteristics to ensure they optimise their chances for high-quality impact and engagement.

## 4. DEVELOP OUR CAPACITY FOR MULTI AND INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Our fourth objective is to bolster our capacity for multi and interdisciplinary research across our Schools, Colleges, Institutes and Research Centres.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Support multi and interdisciplinary research in thematic areas that align with national and international challenges, the university's new strategic plan Impact 2028 and our teaching and research expertise.
- Engage with local, national, and international stakeholders sharing interests in research around our cross-disciplinary thematic areas.
- Encourage cross-disciplinary research through dedicated internal funding schemes (our VC scholarships and ECRI grant applications).
- Facilitate internal research and innovation collaborations through seminars, conferences, and workshops.
- Use the Research Support Unit to coordinate staff and research engagement with end-users and external stakeholders.

## 5. FACILITATE IMPACT, ENGAGEMENT, AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Our fifth objective centres on developing an infrastructure and culture that enable impact, engagement, and knowledge exchange activities.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Align our Research 2024-2029 and Impact 2028 strategies to address relevant local, national, and international priorities (eg the West London Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan; 'Net Zero' and the SDGs).
- Align our Research and Knowledge Exchange strategies to generate effective collaborations and identify clear targeted communities for impact.
- Embed pathways to impact in all research projects and funding applications.
- Support co-creation and co-production with end-users to deliver shared, evidence-based contributions to knowledge.
- Support knowledge exchange activities that ensure our best innovations are readily translated for the economic, social and cultural benefits of end-users and communities.

- Improve the visibility of our research to extend our influence and develop new partnerships with government, industry and the third sector.
- Engage with our alumni across all sectors of society to identify areas of mutual support and collaboration.
- Maximise the use of our collaborative space (Westmont Enterprise Hub) where businesses can draw on the full breadth and depth of University expertise to make their ventures a success.
- Implement a programme of distinguished visiting fellow/professorships with key partner institutions to develop joint research projects and applications for funding.

## 6. INCREASE AND DIVERSIFY OUR RESEARCH INCOME

Our sixth objective revolves around increasing and diversifying our research income.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Develop an agile 'bidding culture' where staff are encouraged to develop bids for internal/external sources of funding, learn from feedback and refine applications.
- Employ resources such as academic leave and workload adjustment to enable major grant preparations.
- Align our research activities to the research challenges identified by UKRI, Horizon and other major research bodies/councils.
- Develop national and international partnerships aligned with the University's research ambitions and the development of long-term sustainable relationships.
- Develop support for staff (at all career stages) to apply for funding.
- Encourage and support collaborative bids with partner Universities.
- Encourage and support consultancy opportunities congruent with Schools', Colleges', Institutes' and Research Centres' activities

## 7. INCREASE OUR DOCTORAL AND POST-DOCTORAL CAPACITY

Our seventh objective focuses on increasing our capacity for doctoral and post-doctoral research while developing our infrastructures and providing first-class supervision/mentorship.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Develop a proactive approach to postgraduate recruitment strategy.
- Develop additional Professional Doctorate degrees in areas congruent with the University's teaching and research activities.
- Secure industry-based research collaborations that enhance doctoral education and contribute to the growth of contract research.
- Increase the number of self-funded doctoral students.
- Provide support and mentoring to early career researchers who are on track to become potential supervisors.
- Embed the recruitment of postgraduate research students in grant applications and bidding strategies
- Enhance our supervisory capacity to support increased numbers of postgraduate researchers.

## 8. ENHANCE OUR CORE FACILITIES AND SYSTEMS

Our eighth and final objective is to enhance our core facilities and systems to facilitate the production and publication of cutting-edge research.

**We will achieve this through the following actions:**

- Improve our laboratories and research space to enable staff to deliver high-quality research and collaborate with other institutions.
- Invest in the acquisition and maintenance of first-class equipment to enable innovative research.
- Invest in high-performing Research Information Management Systems helping to manage applications and acting as a repository of research data.
- Improve our processes to support pre- and post-award research administration (including contracts and grant management).
- Improve the capacity and flexibility of our financial and legal systems to be able to respond to a rapidly changing and unpredictable research environment.
- Develop dedicated research space to facilitate interdisciplinary work and cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- Improve our postgraduate research training, culture and physical/digital environment.
- Integrate Research 2024-2029 with the University's IT strategy to make sure research data is GDPR compliant, securely stored and compliant with funders' requirements for Open Data.

# OUR CROSS-DISCIPLINE RESEARCH THEMES

Building on our interdisciplinary capacity and research strengths as a university, we have set six priorities for delivering our research strategy. Our cross-discipline research themes align with future challenges identified by UKRI, the UK's policy on strategic industries and other strategic funding opportunities. They also tie in with our partnerships with businesses, charities and other universities focusing on research areas of mutual interest.

**Our cross-discipline research themes include:**

### The Future of Health

Aligned with our research on public health, biomedical sciences, psychology, ageing and person-centred care, our cross-disciplinary theme on 'the future of health' aims to improve the effectiveness of health and care services and to provide evidence based solutions by going beyond traditional collaborations among health-related disciplines. One of our emerging strengths – with opportunities for future growth – lies in the application of new technologies inidentifying heart disease. In addition, our pioneering research institute, the Geller Institute for Ageing and Memory, which brings together expertise in psychology, sociology, epidemiology, public policy, nursing, philosophy, and the arts, has a growing interdisciplinary programme of NIHR research to benefit people living with dementia, older people, and their care partners and families.

### Making AI Work for Society

From Autonomous Vehicles to ChatGPT, Artificial Intelligence is revolutionising the way we think, act and live our lives. This cross-disciplinary theme focuses on harnessing the power of AI while critically assessing its impact on society. The aim here is to draw together research expertise from across UWL to set up a new Digital Futures Lab working on AI applications in areas such as Education, Health, Music and the Creative Industries. Other avenues for research also include Smart Cities and Infrastructures, developing Natural Language Processing and Data-Mining techniques for businesses and policy-making.

### Advancing EDI

As a university widely recognised for the diversity of its students and workforce, UWL is in a great position to address issues related to inclusion and diversity. As such, our cross-disciplinary theme on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion covers a vast array of research areas including gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, neurodiversity and socio-economic disparities whilst also focusing on intersectionality and under-researched topics affecting specific groups and minorities. Emerging research areas with prospects for future development include male victims of domestic abuse, sense of belonging for Black students in Biomedical Sciences, and addiction treatment approaches for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) populations.

### Rethinking Risk and Security

As political, social, and environmental challenges evolve and become increasingly interconnected, security issues, too, are changing and intensifying. The aim of this cross-disciplinary theme is to consolidate and expand the critical mass of the University's research around Crime, Risk, Security and Policing and their intersections with contemporary challenges in order to foster new collaborations with external partners. Areas for future research include Cyber Security, global food security and developing anti-stigma interventions for use in policing.

### Accelerating Progress towards the 17 SDGs

The aim of this cross-disciplinary research theme is to identify challenges and knowledge gaps critical in accelerating progress towards the SDGs. By pooling our diverse research strengths and innovative techniques – such as remote sensing, non-destructive testing methods and immersive technologies – our interdisciplinary teams focus on developing solutions to protect and prevent potential damage to land and marine ecosystems. Building on current projects, future avenues for research include operationalising smart sustainable drainage systems, developing safe water reuse and helping sustain urban forests and trees.

### Future Culture

This theme draws on UWL's long-standing research into creativity and the creative industries where we have worked alongside top practitioners and artists. It will aim to expand the understanding of creative thinking and innovation, and contribute to the economy, social policy and to education through research which extends from haptics to heritage conservation and from gender policy to challenging the representation of older adults in the media.