

Research and Knowledge Exchange Plan 2026–2030

Context

During the previous strategic period (2021-2025) we achieved significant growth in new research awards and overall research income, while beginning to strengthen our research culture through targeted initiatives addressing known challenges. These foundations have positioned us strongly for the next phase of our institutional ambition: to deliver research and knowledge exchange that is world-leading, distinctive, and of demonstrable benefit to society. This document provides a high level overview of the five strategic objectives that underpin our operational plan, the outcomes we anticipate and the measures of progress we will use to monitor and evaluate success.

Strategic Outcomes

Over the next period, we will pursue five strategic objectives.

1. **Research Excellence:** 90% of our research outputs will be rated 3* and 4*, and 50% rated 4* in REF 2029.
2. **Research and Knowledge Exchange Income:** Combined income from research grants, contracts and knowledge exchange reaches £24M by 2030.
3. **Research Environment and Culture:** We are recognised as having an exceptional and distinctive research environment, rooted in our deep engagement with diverse intellectual traditions and enriched by the diversity of our community.
4. **Strategic Partnership and Capability:** The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate is a networked, enabling and strategic partner in delivering institutional research and knowledge exchange ambitions.
5. **Multidisciplinary Strength and Visibility:** We showcase multidisciplinary themes that demonstrate distinctive peaks of excellence and are vehicles for external engagement and impact.

Through these objectives and the collaborative endeavor of our research community, we will extend the reach and impact of our work, creating knowledge that matters, shaping a distinctive research identity, and contributing meaningfully to global and local challenges. The high-level plan is underpinned by an action plan that replicates our approach taken to planning in the last strategy period and has proved a successful framework for tracking quarterly milestones through relevant governance structures such as RKE Committee.

Strategic Outcome 1: Research Excellence

Half of our outputs and outcomes are judged world-leading and almost all will be judged world-leading or internationally excellent in REF 2029.

Intermediate Outcomes

- Our research output is consistently recognised as world-leading and internationally excellent, demonstrating originality, rigour, and significance.
- Impact is embedded across the research lifecycle, translating academic excellence into societal and economic benefit.
- We undertake targeted approaches to improving research culture and track and evaluate progress in a robust evidence-based way.
- We have a transparent, inclusive and evidence-based approach to research governance, ensuring integrity and accountability in REF delivery.

Objectives

- **Create the conditions for sustained production of 3* and 4* research through strategic investment, mentoring and alignment of institutional processes.** Researchers at all career stages and from all backgrounds are supported to generate and disseminate internationally excellent research through the most appropriate and impactful channels.
- **Integrate impact into the research endeavors of all staff**, equipping researchers with skills and understanding required to generate public benefit and broader societal impact from their research where relevant. We will embed impact planning early in the research lifecycle to maximise reach, significance and societal value.
- **Identify impact excellence and support colleagues to articulate this through case studies for Research Excellence Frameworks** Ensure all develop a comprehensive understanding of research impact and key staff are supported to prepare high-quality impact case studies for REF 2029 and beyond.
- **Demonstrate and evidence excellence across people, culture and environment.** Identify and target areas where efforts to improve research culture will be most beneficial, tracking progress in a robust and reportable way to deliver desired outcomes in people culture and environment.
- **Embed clear, evidence-based governance and accountability that connects vision to action and drives effective delivery or desired outcomes.** Maintain robust, fair and inclusive governance around REF preparations, ensuring that our ambition remains both realistic and aspirational.

Metrics / Indicators

- $\geq 90\%$ of our submission is rated 3* or 4*; $\geq 50\%$ rated 4* in REF 2029 (tacked annually through REF-readiness reviews)
- Positive feedback from staff engaged in relevant training/ briefings and mentoring activities.

Strategic Outcome 2: Research and Knowledge Exchange Income

Combined income from research grants, contracts and knowledge exchange will reach £24M by 2030.

Intermediate Outcomes

- We produce knowledge that is relevant to a global world and attract strong interest from partners and collaborators.
- We achieve sustainable growth in research and KE income, diversifying sources and strengthening the funding pipeline.
- Colleagues are supported and recognised for success in grant and contract income generation appropriate to their career stage.
- Commercialisation and enterprise are underpinned by clear governance and transparent decision-making.

Objectives

- **Ensure that institutional reward structures recognize success and encourage sustainable growth in research income.** Align ambitions with appropriate incentives, recognition and support structures to reward success and encourage sustainable growth.
- **Create a developmental and sustainable funding pipeline** supporting colleagues to secure grants, contracts and consultancies for projects that are appropriate to their career stage and to scale them where possible. A thriving and developmental culture for securing external funding will be reinforced by intelligence-sharing, sound financial returns and reputational benefits.
- **Deepen engagement with key external partners**, both domestically and internationally, to drive growth in knowledge exchange and enterprise income.
- **Support commercialization** by establishing strong governance and transparent decision-making frameworks for venture-building activities, including licensing and spin-outs.

Metrics / Indicators

- Annual targets for research and knowledge exchange are agreed as part of the budget planning cycle and reviewed regularly.
- Combined income from research and knowledge exchange projects reaches £24M in 2030
- New strategic research and knowledge exchange programmes established and launched

Strategic Outcome 3: Research Environment and Culture

We will be recognised as having an exceptional and distinctive research environment, rooted in our deep engagement with diverse intellectual traditions, research methods and modes of knowledge production. Our research culture will be enriched through a strong, connected community that articulates, enacts and recognises the value of excellent research for teaching, civic and cultural life and social change.

Outcomes

- We cultivate a collaborative, inclusive, and values-driven research environment where excellence is understood as relational and a strong orientation to institutional citizenship and equity in partnership is rewarded.
- Staff and students are supported to develop as researchers and leaders within a culture of openness, responsibility, and mutual respect.
- Our environment reflects and rewards both individual excellence **and** the collaborative work that enables it across our entire community.

Objectives

- **Support co-creation and shared purpose in research** by strengthening cross-disciplinarity, equitable partnerships, and collaborative and participatory approaches to research. We actively enable staff, students, and partners co-create priorities, practices and solutions that advance the institution's research ambitions.
- **Foster research integrity and responsibility** by embedding integrity as a lived research practice ensuring that research is conducted with rigour, transparency and respect for others
- **Promote open, transparent, and responsible research** that enhances both academic excellence and public trust.

- **Foster an inclusive and connected research environment** where everyone can contribute and learn, drawing on sector intelligence and partnership to strengthen practice.
- **Nurture research leadership** through recognition systems that champion collaboration, integrity and shared success. Value and reward both individual excellence and the collaborative and relational work that makes it possible through both formal and informal mechanisms.

Metrics / Indicators

- CEDARS (Culture, Employment and Development of Academic Researchers Survey) improvement from benchmark in 2025.
- Uptake and favourable opinion of researcher skills development and leadership programmes
- Qualitative case studies evidencing co-created, participatory research, and/or equitable research partnerships

Strategic Outcome 4: RKED, Strategic Partnership and Capability

The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate is a networked, enabling and strategic partner in delivering institutional research and knowledge exchange ambitions.

Outcomes

- The RKE Directorate acts as an enabling and strategic partner across the institution.
- Academic and professional leaders share strategic literacy and confidence to align vision, resources and delivery.
- Our systems and processes are efficient, transparent, and enable an excellent researcher experience.
- RKE colleagues feel valued, connected and aligned with shared goals.

Objectives

- **Foster evidence-informed leadership around research and KE** by building shared strategic literacy and confidence between professional and academic leaders grounded in evidence and best-practice to align vision, resources and business processes to support the effective delivery for research and knowledge exchange.
- **Strengthen team cohesion and foster a collaborative culture within and beyond RKED**

- **Optimise systems and processes** by simplifying and integrating research and KE support systems to enable efficiency, transparency and a consistent researcher experience.

Metrics / Indicators

- Service-level agreements established and maintained in key areas including post- award setup and project activation
- Successful delivery of cross-directorate projects and workstreams to support and embed research in operations.
- Successful roll-out of new systems and engagement of academic community through attendance at briefings, usage and positive feedback

Objective 5: Multidisciplinary Themes

Building on the strength of our disciplines, research centres and regional institutes, we will showcase multidisciplinary themes that demonstrate distinctive peaks of excellence and are vehicles for external engagement and impact

Outcomes

- We identify and promote cross-cutting themes that build critical mass and respond to societal challenges.
- Our research is visible, accessible, and valued by external partners and funders.

Objectives

- **Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration** by actively engaging staff, students and partners to co-create solutions to challenges that we care about as a community and have unique expertise to address.
- **Strengthen engagement with funders and partners** creating case studies around the impact of public and public-private funding in humanities, social sciences and our regional expertise and inspiring collaboration.
- **Provide platforms for visibility and influence** streamlining external communications and driving interest from stakeholders who want to work with us as well as boosting our reputation through a clear articulation of the benefit of our research in addressing global challenges and delivering meaningful change.

Metrics / Indicators

- Growth in funding for cross- institutional bids including from non-traditional funders
- External recognition / media coverage of cutting-edge research.
- Evidence of policy or practice influence from cross-disciplinary thematic research