RESEARCH STRATEGY 2028

BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

THIS RESEARCH STRATEGY EXTENDS TO 2028, TO ENSURE THAT THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT CAN BE IMPROVED, RESEARCH STAFF AND PGR POPULATIONS CAN BE DEVELOPED, AND THE BODY OF OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS CAN BE ENHANCED, IN LINE WITH OUR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE QUALITY, INTENSITY AND INCLUSIVITY OF RESEARCH.

Research Strategy 2028 will be instrumental in building the community of researchers and body of high-quality research activity, from which we will select, to provide the optimal submission to REF 2028.

The university's strategy for REF 2028 will be a separate but intrinsically linked document to be developed incrementally and in response to Research England REF 2028 guidance. The most significant external factor is the probability of changes to the definition of staff who must be submitted for assessment, which could require the submission of all staff with teaching and research academic employment function.

Research Strategy 2028 as presented here is specifically not intended to be an externally facing document, indeed it contains internal measures and other information which are business confidential. Once the research strategy has been finalised, a public-facing version of the document will be produced by Marketing and Communications for publication on our website and communication through other channels.

INTRODUCTION

BCU'S 2025 STRATEGY SETS OUT WIDE-RANGING AMBITIONS THAT SUPPORT OUR MISSION TO BE THE UNIVERSITY FOR BIRMINGHAM AND TO ENABLE INDIVIDUALS (AND ORGANISATIONS) TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL.

Our STEAM agenda is identified as a key differentiator and enabler for studying across discipline boundaries. STEAM will also power research and innovation activities through engagement of staff with the STEAM agenda and through external partnerships facilitated regionally and internationally by our STEAMhouse initiatives.

Within the BCU 2025 strategy there are key success measures linked explicitly to research and these must therefore be fully embedded in our Research Strategy 2028. Specifically:

STEAM Agenda
- 'We will fund a further 100 STEAM PhD scholarships to support the cross-disciplinary researchers of the future'. A significant proportion will be recruited through the Academic "Grow Your Own" scheme, which will be particularly aimed at under-represented groups and enable growing the next generation of academic staff by addressing barriers to progression from UG and PGT taught courses into PGR study, and on completion, providing potential academic employment opportunities within the University.

Excellence in Research:
- '50 % of our academic staff will be categorised as research active and will produce research outputs'. By 2025 at least 50% of our academic staff will be engaged in independent research and creating research outputs recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
- 'External grant capture over the period 2020-2025 will achieve £40M'. External grant income attributable to research will exceed £60M over the 7 financial years 2020-2027. External research income as reported to HESA during this corresponding period will exceed £40M.
- 'Every undergraduate programme will offer students the opportunity to engage in knowledge discovery and applied research'. Increasingly, students will undertake real-world research projects aligned to our thematic priorities and supervised by research-active staff.

It should be emphasised that the BCU 2025 strategy does not contain key success measures for the future REF, nor are these included in this Research Strategy as a linked REF 2020 Strategy document will be developed. Analysis of the REF 2021 results, sector benchmarking and comparison with peer organisations will inform this. The targets for submission will result from the implementation of our research strategy and the future REF criteria. Our research strategy will build the body of research-active staff, outputs, impactful-research, doctoral awards and research income from which a subset of the highest quality elements will be selected.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

OUR PREVIOUS RESEARCH STRATEGY BUILT ON THE SUCCESSES AND LEARNING FROM REF2014 AND EMBRACED FULLY OUR CORE INSTITUTIONAL AMBITION TO BECOME "THE UNIVERSITY FOR BIRMINGHAM".

These ambitions were embedded in the composite 2015-2020 Research, Innovation and Enterprise strategy "Out of the red and into the blue", with STEAM rather than STEM identified as a key differentiating element.

From this we distilled a "Better, Bigger, Broader, Bolder" ambition for research, to enhance quality, increase staff and subject participation in research, improve impact and grow research-derived income and research doctoral degrees awarded.

These ambitions recognised both the academic need for curiosity-led research to nourish the academic curriculum and the strategic need to deliver collaborative, demand-led funded research aligned to the research and innovation priorities of our stakeholders and partners. The resulting volume of higher quality research would in turn underpin a significantly strengthened submission to REF2021, to deliver downstream greater recognition of our research excellence. The strategy was built upon increasing research power, to ensure that more and better research would be conducted across a wider range of subjects.

The "better, bigger, broader, bolder" research strategy delivered an increase in volume and a small increase in quality, resulting in a more than doubling of research power to 786 from 322 in REF2021. This increase in research power translated in a significant uplift of 77% in mainstream QR funding, to £3.025m in 2022-23 from £1.704m in 2021-22.

Details of Submission to REF 2021:
Targets for submission to REF 2028 will be defined within the REF Strategy to be developed. However, it is useful to include here for general information the size and shape of the submission to REF2021:

- Academic Staff: 290 FTE, 310 individuals, 24% of eligible staff in submitted UoAs, an increase from 122 FTE / 14.1% in REF2014
- Units of Assessment: Submission to 14 of 34 UoAs, including new submissions to Psychology, Engineering and Sociology, an increase from 11 of 36 UoA submitted to REF2014
- Doctoral Awards: 263 doctoral awards, an increase from 85 submitted to REF2014
- Research Income: £16.4m, an increase from £13.9m submitted to REF2014

OVERVIEW OF 2028 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Research Themes of Strategic Importance
We will use increasingly challenge-led research themes to consolidate historic research capacity and excellence, and to act as a focus for new research investment in researchers and research infrastructure. The theme designations are designed to resonate with an external audience including the public, research-users and research partners and will provide the lenses through which we project our research capability. The aggregation of research by themes, rather than academic subject areas, allows better projection of institutional research capacity, capability and impact aligned to regional, national and international research priorities through which research funding will be focussed increasingly.

Themes ensure that expertise from complementary subject areas can be drawn upon from across all faculties to address increasingly collaborative, cross-disciplinary and STEAM-like research challenges, including those aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals and other regional, national and international priorities. There is no intention for themes to be managed by or mapped exclusively to individual faculties, indeed all faculties will participate to differing degrees in every theme. The themes are as follows:

- Global creativity, culture and heritage;
- Digital technologies and transformation;
- Green technologies and resource security;
- Fair, just and secure global societies;
- Life course health and care.

All draft applications for research funding and PhD project proposals will be examined for alignment with the thematic priorities and with faculty-based research capability and capacity, and will need Research Office approval before they can be submitted or advertised.

Equality of Opportunity for all Researchers
UKRI is focussing considerable attention on equality of opportunity for all researchers, and recent reports on the doctoral student population and analysis of submissions to REF 2021 have identified many areas of potential under-representation. Women have historically been under-represented in senior researcher roles, particularly in STEM subjects, and black and minority ethnic staff and PGRs within our research community.

Our body of PGR students is not representative of our taught student populations studying at undergraduate and postgraduate level. We will seek to address under-representation and barriers to entry into PGR study and subsequent academic careers for all disadvantaged groups. We will achieve this by supporting the progression of individuals from undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes into PhD study through the academic Grow Your Own (GYO) scheme and positive actions to address identified inequalities, particularly those faced by black and minority ethnic students and all students from the lowest socio-economic groups.

We will also instigate a series of researcher career development support mechanisms across the University, with a special focus on developing early career researchers; supporting staff joining the university from a professional practice background to become research active and increasing the proportion of staff with PhD qualifications. We will commit to implementing fully the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers within the next 2 years.
The BCU Research Strategy 2028 sets out the University's strategy for enabling and resourcing research and innovation through an improved research environment, ensuring that institutional and partner organisation needs for high quality research can be met. There is also an enhanced commitment to delivering internationally excellent research and to disseminating research findings openly to improve access to and application of new knowledge to deliver real world impact.

Successful delivery of Research Strategy 2028 will provide the foundations for an improved submission to REF 2028, to enhance BCU's academic standing and reputation as a partner of choice for collaborative research and innovation activities. BCU's role as a proponent of STEAM-based education and innovation will be increasingly recognised by external organisations of all types regionally, nationally and internationally.

Key Deliverables of Research Strategy 2028
Our research strategy to 2028 has therefore a number of purposes. Firstly, it must deliver the research ambitions framed in the institutional 2025 strategy, including research opportunities for our students and staff and growth in income attributable to research. Secondly, it must provide the strategic direction for enhancement of research environment, development of researcher capability and growth of research expertise linked to external demands and research funding priorities, from which our submission of staff, outputs, and impact case studies to REF 2028 will ultimately be selected. Thirdly, it must define the key research performance indicators, both internal and external, through which implementation can be monitored. Finally, it must contribute to our learning and teaching activities and crucially inform our curriculum and therefore, student experience.

Implementation of this strategy will be carefully managed, with central oversight and annual reporting on all aspects of research activity and delivery, supported by Pure. Monitoring will include reviews of staff research activity, outputs published, impact accruing, enhancement of research environment including cumulative progress of doctoral awards and research grant income against targets, and pre-approval of all PhD projects will be required to ensure alignment with the thematic priorities. The Research Strategy 2028 will be supported by new policies and processes shared with UEG in subsequent papers, and including, but not limited to:

- Annual REF readiness Review (A3R) framework
- Research output quality assurance process (ROQAP)
- Annual racking of impact from all research projects and candidate impact case studies
- Determination of researcher status and career stage expectations
- Pre-approval process for all PhD projects – funded and unfunded
- Taxonomy, characteristics, and validation of all university research groupings
- Annual tracking of research environment indicators including HESA returns
- Responsible use of metrics in researcher performance assessment
- Institutional commitment to open access: Open Access by Default (OABD)

The 2028 Research Strategy identifies five strategic goals, each with underpinning objectives, to enable these aims to be achieved.

STRATEGIC GOALS

GOAL 1 | RESEARCH REPUTATION

Enhance our reputation for high quality and impactful research regionally, nationally, and globally

Increase the quality and volume of research in STEM subjects, while protecting the quality of historic research excellence in the Arts and Creative disciplines.

Establish STEAM-linked research themes to facilitate interdisciplinary challenge-led and enquiry-driven research and aggregate research capacity. This will enhance our profile and research and innovation partnerships with business, industry, commerce, public and third sector.

Invest strategically REF2021-derived QR funding, primarily through the research themes and into new areas that will most effectively strengthen our research portfolio and enhance our teaching and learning delivery. This will include investment in our Academic "Grow Your Own" scheme to develop cross-disciplinary researchers of the future, improve equality and diversity in our PGR population and address barriers to doctoral study face by disadvantaged groups.

Develop large and strategic funding applications in our areas of externally recognised strength to increase research income and ensure financial resilience of research.

Actively participate in the University Alliance mission group and other key regional, national, and international networks to promote our research to a global audience.

Engage extensively with online, print and broadcast media and maintain a strong presence for research on our university website and social media.

Establish a research showcase calendar of events for internal and external audiences.

GOAL 2 | RESEARCH IMPROVMENT

Improve our research environment and foster an inclusive research culture

Demonstrate a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all staff to engage in research, with more than 50% of our academic staff producing research outputs which will internationally recognised in terms of originality, significance and rigour by relevant discipline norms and discoverable in the public domain.

Ensure all staff with a research WAM allocation are supported to make high-quality applications for external grant funding, appropriate to their experience and career stage. Increased applications numbers and success rates will contribute to the cumulative total of £40M of research-grant income over the period 20-21 to 21-27 as reported to HESA.

Provide research leadership in faculties to support the development of high-quality, well-targeted bids with an increased emphasis on peer-review and internal quality assurance processes to improve success rates.

Increase funding for doctoral studentships through participation in multidisciplinary doctoral training programmes, securing funding from public and private sector sources and developing co-funding models using internal and external resources.

Increase the proportion of research published in journals by our researchers in all disciplines, with an ambition to achieving 100% open access, where possible, through appropriate targeting of open-access journals and gold and green routes for paid-subscription and hybrid journals.

Use Scopus-derived and other relevant bibliometrics responsibly to help academic staff target submission of their articles to the higher-ranked journals in their discipline using of field-weighting. Increase the percentage of publications co-authored with international partners and corporate partners to improve citations and research collaboration measures used by many league types derived from bibliographic data or metrics.

Accelerate and articulate the impact of our research by building impact into research project design, monitoring impact during project life and tracking post-life impact effectively, using the PURE impact module to record, corroborate and evidence.

GOAL 3 | RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Undertake high quality and impactful research in partnership with other HEIs and stakeholders, private sector, public sector and third sector, regionally, nationally, and globally

Focus investment and build upon high quality challenge-led and enquiry-driven research that will be increasingly collaborative and STEAM-like within in the thematic areas identified above.

In essence, each theme will act as an umbrella under which individual researchers and research areas can be focused, incentivised, resourced, protected and quality-assured.

Each faculty will contribute to every theme in different proportions, aligned with their agreed faculty research priorities, and individual's research which falls outside of the agreed research theme and faculty priorities will not be resourced.

The themes will also act increasingly as catalysts for cross-institutional collaboration, drawing on STEAM-like concepts.

Establish sustainable and mutually beneficial international research partnerships that build capacity and expertise to address global challenges, which are increasingly multidisciplinary and demand STEAM-like approaches.

Encourage and support interdisciplinary and collaborative research with other HEIs and stakeholders in key sectors to deliver cultural, social, economic, and environmental and health impacts, regionally, nationally, and globally.

Build on our existing research partnerships through co-created and collaborative research programmes with partners in key sectors, further developing exemplars such as, the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, Centre for Brexit Studies and West Midlands National Park initiative.

Identify and selectively invest centrally our QR funding in research groups with demonstrable potential to make a significant contribution to high quality and impactful research in these thematic areas.

Utilise the facilities, infrastructure, and expertise in STEAMhouse to engage in collaborative research with end-users and to facilitate knowledge exchange and commercial activities leading to impact.

Establish Community Research Awards as part of our commitment to community presence and engagement and enhance our reputation in the city and region.

GOAL 4 | RESEARCH STAFF & STUDENTS

Develop Staff and PGR students to realise their full research potential

Staff

Commit to implementing fully the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and deliver and report internally and publicly on the commitments required from the institution, managers of researchers and researchers themselves.

Develop research staff capability through effective leadership, mentoring, peer support and provision of university-wide researcher development and training programmes.

Invest in new researchers at all career stages who have outstanding professional profiles and clear potential to generate research income, produce high quality outputs, engage in impact and knowledge exchange activities, including enhancing research into teaching and learning.

Plan for staff succession in priority areas to ensure that research profile, leadership, outputs, and impact can be sustained.

Use the Individual Performance Review (IPR) process to set clear expectations and measures for research and scholarship inputs and outcomes and ensure that research and innovation tariffs in the workload allocation model (WAM) are ring-fenced for research activities.

PGR Students

Improve the PGR experience through increasing supervisory expertise and capacity, providing programmes and training with a focus on transferable skills, creating opportunities for networking and engagement with the wider research community.

Deliver enhanced PGR life course support from application to award through the Doctoral Research College in partnership with Faculties and Academic Services, with a focus on growing PGR numbers and increasing completions within 4 years of full-time study.

Increase the number of PGR students through a 'Grow your Own' approach, addressing barriers to progression from UG into masters and PhD and beyond.

GOAL 5 | RESEARCH BENEFITING TEACHING & LEARNING

Embed research into teaching and learning to enhance the student experience and employability

Offer taught students the opportunity to engage in career enhancing activities linked to knowledge discovery and applied research through the introduction of a research participation system, placements and projects and summer internships.

Encourage the participation of research-engaged staff, including research leaders and staff in professional services, in curriculum development and delivery across taught programmes.

Increase the proportion of staff with doctoral-level qualifications to enhance the student experience, through supporting existing academic staff to undertake doctoral study and appointing new academic staff with PhDs.

Provide opportunities for contract research staff and PGR students to contribute to teaching and learning activities as part of their ongoing professional development.