

# **RESEARCH STRATEGY**

2018-2023

# OUR AMBITION FOR 2023

- We will have significantly increased the level of research and established ourselves in the Top 400 internationally.
- More than 60 per cent of academic staff will be actively researching and that research will influence teaching across the board.
- We will be one of the pre-eminent modern UK universities for excellent and challenging research.
- 2 ▪ We will be known for the societal impact of our research in Leicester, nationally and internationally.



# DISCOVER, CHALLENGE, TRANSFORM...

This strategy sets out our drive to challenge conventional thinking and find new knowledge to transform our society for the better. It has rightly been developed by staff and students across the university and is a clear and confident statement of our ambitions for research and the actions we will take to achieve them.

We have a track record of research that impacts society and makes a real difference to people's lives through improvements to health & well-being, infrastructure, creativity, economic growth, business and civil society. Our commitment to research is integral to our aim to develop our students as critical thinkers. This was recognised in the assessment received by the university in the Teaching Excellence Framework which highlighted research that *"fed into the curriculum through a focus on application to real-world settings and research-led work placements"*.

Our new strategy is timely as the UK faces up to the challenges of Brexit, economic transformation, wellbeing for an ageing population, changes to the world of work and our security, both in the real and virtual worlds. Internationally there are broader issues: responding to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, climate change, power structures in flux and the consequent challenges of migration and economic growth.

Universities have a key role in UK industry, through the development of new technologies and a skilled workforce. DMU is well-placed to lead in this regard, with internationally recognised research groups in cyber-security, transport, energy, water, advanced manufacturing and creative industries. This strategy will ensure we keep a clear focus on our goals as we respond to these challenges and the challenges yet to come.

Integral to our strategy is the recognition of the commitment to excellence and impact of our staff. The strategy recognises the need to nurture their creativity and commitment in order to achieve our goals. This involves being open to challenging ideas.

Disciplines evolve over time and we are committed to supporting emerging areas that challenge convention and to supporting research at the interfaces between disciplines that exploit synergies to address key societal challenges.

**Underpinning this strategy are DMU's values:**

- **Creativity:** innovative research requires creative thinking and we must ensure we have an environment that encourages this.
- **Professionalism:** all our research must be conducted with individuals and leaders operating with appropriate transparency, autonomy and accountability
- **Pride:** it is important that we enjoy our research and celebrate success.
- **Respect:** our research community expects mutual respect which in turn leads to constructive criticism being sought and given.
- **Aspiration:** our diverse range of students all deserve to gain the benefits of an education informed by the latest thinking of internationally-renowned researchers.

Our research reputation directly impacts on our university's wider reputation which in turn makes us an institution of choice for students, staff and external partners.

This research strategy has been written to inspire our staff, students and partners to engage with us and other research leaders and to translate our ambitions into actions that will create a real difference in society.

# CONTEXT

Our research excellence was borne out in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014. More than 60% of our research was judged to be of international quality with 18% internationally leading. We aim to increase the amount of top-rated research in all our schools and strengthen our top-performing units for REF 2021, namely:

- Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
- Computer Science and Informatics
- Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
- Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

As well as focusing on the nationally-important and internationally-recognised REF outcomes, we take a broad view of research across a spectrum encompassing internationally-leading research outputs; performance-based research; pedagogic research; near-market innovation and technology transfer.

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We also seek to challenge conventional disciplinary boundaries by bringing together diverse teams that can have greater impact than individuals. The research highlighted above is often focused on 'niches', a characteristic of our research we value and wish to maintain.

We have invested significantly in our staff in recent years. Our Vice-Chancellor's 2020 (VC2020) lectureship programme has recruited more than 100 research-active early career academics; they are already making a significant contribution to our research outputs and culture. More recently we have recruited more than 40 Early Career Academic Fellows (ECAAF), recent PhD graduates who are appointed to a one-year post which can lead to a full VC2020 lectureship.

Our Future Research Leaders (FRL) programme has identified and mentored our rising research stars and developed their research leadership skills, thereby setting out a path to senior positions which several have already achieved.

DMU is not unaffected by the external environment, but a clear vision and strategy allows us to remain resilient in the face of reduction and concentration of funding and changes in government funding whether through Brexit or other policies. We are well equipped to exploit the increasing focus on impact, interdisciplinarity and excellence.



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PhD student: Hajara Alfa who is looking at plants native to her home in Nigeria.



# EXCELLENCE

**To achieve impact on researchers globally, and impact on society more widely, our research has to be at the highest level. Research evaluations and funding are increasingly focusing on only the most original and impactful research. Further, our students are right to expect a learning experience that is informed by internationally-excellent research. DMU will therefore have an unrelenting focus on excellence in deciding where to invest resources, both time and money, across existing or emerging areas. In promoting our research beyond the institution, we will focus on quality to demonstrate that our research stands out when compared to peer institutions.**

This pursuit of excellence will require us to engender a pervasive and dynamic culture of research. We will encourage as many of our staff as possible to engage in internationally recognised research. In recent years, we have recruited a significant body of excellent researchers through our VC2020 lectureships and our ECAFs. Many of these have already established themselves as strong research leaders and we will continue to support existing appointees and recruit new ones.

#### **To achieve these goals, we will:**

- Recruit to our highly popular ECAFs with a view to future VC2020 lectureships. Our focus on excellence will be central to this and this recruitment will enhance established strengths and emerging areas. We will support these early career researchers with time and money to ensure we harness their excellence and enthusiasm to the full.
- Invest in staff and facilities in key areas. We will keep under review our policies on incentivisation in research and enterprise to encourage and support success. Giving greater autonomy to successful research groups will be a feature of this approach to incentivisation.
- Invest in our research infrastructure whether in physical space or through enhanced IT services. We will seek to introduce flexible space in "research hotels" to incubate emerging research, particularly for our early-career researchers.

- Give Associate Deans responsibility for implementing faculty research strategies and delivery of devolved targets, with support from PVC/Deans and the PVC Research. The PVC Research and Associate Deans will develop large bids for research funding.
- Enhance our management of research data and staff publication data, including making more data and publications available through open access. This will enhance compliance with REF and funder requirements, increase our international profile and lead to new collaborations.
- Ensure we have appropriate staffing and software in place to support and manage our grant application, award and management processes. This will ensure we meet funder requirements and increase our success in grant capture through dedicated staff support, bid development and internal peer review.
- Ensure that our excellent research and impact maximises our position in the next REF. This will require strong leadership at institutional and school level.

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- **Number of research grants submitted**
- **Number of research grants successful**
- **Mock REF Grade Point Average**

#### **KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS**

- **Research Income**
- **PhD Completions**
- **REF2021 Grade Point Average**

# PEOPLE

**Motivated, high-achieving staff members are essential to research excellence. DMU's aspiration to be a more research-intensive university will entail having a more diverse and more highly-qualified research community and maintaining our ethos of social and ethical values.**

We will have more research funding to enable research. We will recruit the best and retain them through training and mentorship while also offering rewards for strong performance. To create an environment in which research will thrive, we will intensify our efforts to ensure that our researchers feel that their contribution to research excellence is valued and recognised.

We will invest in the research excellence potential of our staff, providing them with the time, personal development support and resources they need to undertake ambitious and rigorous research. Our research will challenge convention. We will ensure that we celebrate the success of our staff.

We will seek to maintain and develop the highest calibre of staff and research students using our reputation for excellent researcher development and research support. Research students are central to our focus on excellence.

We will deliver the infrastructure required to create a dynamic and pervasive culture of excellence in research, and foster conditions of support and motivation that allow staff and post-doctoral researchers to flourish. We will continually review processes to ensure none are unnecessarily burdensome.

## **To achieve our Staff Development goals, we will:**

- Further develop programmes that support ECAFs, VC2020 lecturers and our highly successful FRL programme.
- Enhance the training and mentoring network for all research staff, including ECAFs, VC2020, mid-career and senior staff, along with our PhD students. This programme will encourage greater interaction, promote teamwork and empower our researchers. We will support early career researchers in collaborations with other institutions.
- Retain the HR Excellence in Research Award.

## **In postgraduate study, we will:**

- Ensure that our Doctoral Training Programmes (DTPs) are proactive and adding value to our research and student experience. We will further embed #DMUglobal, #DMUlocal and employability through placement opportunities within the DTPs.
- Ensure we have the systems and processes in place to enable streamlined progression through the PhD student life-cycle.
- Ensure seamless and timely recruitment processes across faculties, the Graduate School and International Office. Our recruitment will focus on quality and on supporting students in making the transition to a research environment.
- Deliver a consistently high PhD student experience across faculties.
- Provide greater support and training to supervisors and address areas where a lack of supervisory capacity is constraining recruitment.

## **Through resourcing, we will:**

- Support staff in finding good, quality time to focus on research through timetabling and an enhanced and proactive research leave scheme, with a focus on VC2020 staff and international collaboration. We will track our high-performing groups to ensure they have the staff resource required.
- Ensure our processes for allocating research time use existing data sources and are more closely integrated with the appraisal and workload systems; this will support staff in their research and ensure accountability.
- Support applications for external fellowships.
- Further develop 'pump-priming' of emerging research and the support for postgraduate research scholarships supervised by early-career researchers.
- Ensure our IT systems can support our researchers.

## **In recruitment and retention, we will**

- Offer a professional infrastructure for research, as expected by funders, partners and prospective research staff and students; this will include research development/project management, research data management and research infrastructure.
- Create a clear career pathway for academics, including the new grade of Associate Professor and development of VC2020 staff with a focus on ultimate promotion to Reader and Professor.
- Recruit research leaders to strengthen leadership in key areas.
- Develop PhD Graduate Teaching Assistant roles, to support the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career.
- Develop enhanced communication mechanisms for celebrating and sharing success across the institution.

## **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- **PhD student satisfaction**
- **Diversity of research-active staff**
- **Number of externally-funded fellowships**

## **KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS**

- **Percentage of VC2020 staff retained or promoted**
- **Percentage of PhD student submissions on time**
- **Percentage of staff with a research workload allocation**



Professor Liming (Luke) Chen: Research study into how technology could help our ageing population.

# GLOBAL

DMU's global instinct is at the core of our research strategy. Our research must engage globally to be at the forefront of knowledge and to ensure the broadest range of beneficiaries, both academic and non-academic. Our research will address global challenges such as globalisation and migration, human well-being and climate change among others.

At DMU we believe that internationally leading research is not possible without meaningful international engagement whether this is through publishing in international journals, publishing with international co-authors, capturing funding in international consortia or spending time researching outside the UK.

Our research staff and research students should have a global perspective as an integral part of their approach to research. We will take active measures to recruit staff internationally and to increase the international focus of our research.

To support these goals, we will:

- Develop and deliver an international communications strategy to promote our research excellence globally. This will include an enhanced web presence, greater use of social media and engagement with international media.
- Develop the international focus of our researchers' own publication strategies to increase academic impact through training, research time allocation and appraisal.
- Support staff taking international research leave, and host international research leaders at DMU.
- Increase and make more visible our research and our flagship #DMUglobal programme, with research-focused international exchanges and global opportunities for staff and students.
- Increase attendance at international conferences to present internationally leading research, and host international conferences at DMU.

- Use open access and open data to develop collaboration globally.
- Develop further partnerships with selected universities outside the UK.
- Ensure our recruitment practices and processes effectively support international applicants.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Percentage of internationally co-authored papers
- Number of international incoming visiting fellows and outgoing international research leave visits
- Number of international conferences hosted

## KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS

- WUR League Table position for Research
- WUR League Table position for Citations
- Number of research-focused #DMUglobal trips





# SOCIETAL IMPACT

DMU's Strategic Framework states that we are a scholarly community, one committed to the public good. This commitment is reflected in our focus on research that has societal impact. We strive to ensure that our research addresses key societal challenges and improves people's lives, by enabling them to achieve their goals. We are focused on improving our city, our region, our country and global society.

We will further enhance our reputation for using our research in our teaching and learning to help provide students with the intellectual and practical skills (including research and enterprise skills) to assist them in gaining employment in an increasingly competitive and global job market. Our focus areas provide excellent opportunities for industrial placements, internships and teaching by practitioners. Through this our students will develop key skills in the critiquing and testing of ideas.

We will undertake extensive and targeted external marketing, public engagement and media activity, thus enhancing the visibility of our research and reinforcing our reputation as a university with which to do business. We will have a first-class presence for research on our website.

#### To successfully engage, we will:

- Further develop links between #DMUlocal and research, to ensure our research brings benefits within Leicester and Leicestershire.
- Support staff in developing public engagement initiatives and engagement in learned societies, NGOs, journals and professional bodies.
- Develop a scheme to support undergraduate research through summer research internships.

#### To promote our work, we will:

- Link our research with city issues to become a partner of choice, and increase brand recognition across Leicester and Leicestershire.
- Raise the profile of research students' contribution to the university and improve our Graduate School marketing strategy to increase the visibility of students' research to potential applicants.
- Implement social media and traditional media training, and promote the use of collaboration tools.

#### To promote collaboration, we will:

- Establish inter-disciplinary themes addressing key societal challenges such as urban living, lifelong well-being, creativity in the digital age and social value; bringing together inter-disciplinary teams will allow us to better highlight and promote the uniqueness of our research.
- Support our staff to collaborate and to realise their own visions for research.
- Use open access and open data to collaborate with partners globally.

#### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- HEIF income
- DMUlocal research projects
- Number of downloads of publications and datasets

#### KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS

- REF2021 GPA for Impact Case Studies
- New awards and number of 3\*/4\* outputs within inter-disciplinary societal challenge themes
- Percentage of DMU news stories focused on research



# MONITORING

It is the responsibility of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research to drive this strategy, to support research and to build research capacity; of the Director of the Graduate School to support research students and DTPs; and of the PVC/Deans and Associate Deans of Research and Innovation to oversee annual faculty and research group plans to ensure that the strategy can be achieved.

A broad range of institutional, faculty and research group KPIs will be developed and kept under review so that progress can be monitored.

DMU is committed to ensuring that our research community is vibrant, intellectually exciting, and open to creative and novel solutions for the benefit of society and the wider environment.

The alignment of principles, projects, people and programmes that is articulated in this strategy will help DMU achieve greater research success and wider international recognition.





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