

University of Sussex Research Strategy

Vision

The University Research Strategy establishes a framework to develop the international renown of Sussex as a research-intensive centre of critical thinking, learning and discovery, where excellence and innovation flourish and every individual is encouraged to make a lasting contribution to scholarship, knowledge and society.

The intellectual strength of Sussex is founded upon its research. Excellent research not only establishes our reputation as a major international University but it supports high quality teaching and learning, underpins scholarship, and is central to the exchange of ideas that contribute to the knowledge economy. Today, as when the University was founded, its staff and students seek to enquire, discuss, debate and make seminal contributions, whether in the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities or medicine. While the benefits of research are founded in the production of new ideas and understandings, they also include the personal development of engaged individuals and enhancement to society through the benefits of working with business, government, and the community.

Implementation

The Research Strategy establishes our vision and provides a framework of aims and objectives which confirm the commitment we have to furthering the position of Sussex as a leading University. It is a Strategy both for the immediate and the next few years. It sets out where we are going in research and how we are going to get there. There is a role for every member of staff in reaching our goals. Heads of Schools, Directors of Research & Knowledge Exchange, Directors of Doctoral Studies, and Research Theme Leaders exercise leadership in implementing the Strategy, as part of growing and enhancing research and knowledge exchange throughout the University. The Research and Enterprise Services Division, along with other professional services, will provide the support necessary for implementing the Strategy.

Strategy 1

Realistically build on current strengths to develop recognised centres of sustainable research excellence across subject areas.

Research at Sussex is spread across many disciplines. Increasingly, the size of the University makes it necessary for us to focus on areas where we can be internationally competitive. Research strengths are evident across the academic community, partly because staff have freedom to work within the constraints of available resource. While excellence is to be encouraged in all activities, we need to especially identify and nurture research where there is the capability or potential to be demonstrably world leading. Individual scholarship is critically important; our internationally significant research themes represent priority areas for investment, allowing us to grow our reputation in a realistic and sustainable way. Research themes do not map onto existing School structures; they are thematic and multi-disciplinary and facilitate collaborations between members of the University research community and external strategic partners.

Objectives

- Attract, support and retain the best staff, enabling colleagues to contribute to research in the University, attaining and maintaining levels of international excellence.
- Encourage work within and between disciplines that grows high plateaus of research excellence.
- Focus investment around key research themes, while maintaining a balanced subject portfolio, so as to grow activity in a financially sustainable manner.
- Ensure appropriate incentives and rewards are in place to encourage and enhance the research activity of the University.

Strategy 2

Demonstrate research of international standing in all subject areas and world-leading quality in recognised centres of excellence, through appropriate performance indices and other benchmarks of success.

Research is driven by intellectual curiosity but performance is increasingly measured by a range of indicators that are managed outside the University. Success is often determined in an international context and as a function of demonstrable performance relative to other institutions. The Research Excellence Framework (REF), whilst not the only success indicator, is the primary reference point. It indicates quality; it drives part of the higher education funding regime; it impacts on our ability to attract staff, students and other external income. We achieved a creditable result in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise but there is room for improvement. It is essential that we maximise performance in REF 2014 and beyond, providing external validation of Sussex as a high-ranking, research-intensive university. We need to update other performance indicators, to benchmark ourselves against high standards, inform decision making and corroborate success for individuals, Schools and the University. Most importantly, we must demonstrate continuous improved performance to satisfy ourselves that Sussex is growing its global research reputation.

Objectives

- Benchmark activity against national and international competitors, as a framework to inform decision making and focus activity.
- Monitor and evaluate performance at all levels, to facilitate a process of continuous improvement in research across the University.
- Ensure results in REF 2014 and beyond that demonstrate a growing research base and improving quality, with work that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

Strategy 3

Develop and maintain a sustainable environment based on people, culture and infrastructure, that facilitates the prosecution of research at appropriate volumes of activity and of the very highest quality.

The research environment at Sussex encompasses people, infrastructure and support systems. All need to be focused on delivering excellent research. We need to ensure that the effects of strategic decisions upon research capacity are fully considered, so as not to accidentally undermine a fundamental part of our endeavour. Protection of staff research time is of primary importance, along with support to enable excellent performance. To this end, the professional services and administrative processes need to be focused and proportionate. As a research-intensive university, Sussex also needs to ensure an appropriate relationship between research and teaching, ensuring that they are mutually supportive. Portfolio review will be used to further enhance research / teaching synergies across programmes and courses. The recently established Doctoral School will be developed to position Sussex as a university of preferred choice for all early career researchers, supporting their academic and broader professional development. Finally, it is essential that the infrastructure of the University is appropriate to a leading research institution. It is through sustained investment and maintenance of an environment that has research at its heart that we shall attract and retain the very best people to the University.

Objectives

- Maintain a supportive environment that recognises the needs of all staff and where their contributions are recognised, valued and rewarded.
- Through the Doctoral School, develop a vibrant and expanding community of doctoral and post-doctoral scholars, concentrating effort on externally-funded sources.
- Maximise the volume and spread of research grant and contract income, including recovery of the full economic cost of research necessary for long-term sustainability.
- Develop governance and management infrastructures in all activities that promote and support research, maintain integrity and establish high ethical standards.
- Create a physical environment, including the Library, IT and estate, appropriate to support world-leading research.

Strategy 4

In partnership with others, contribute to socio-economic well-being, in the region, nationally and internationally, as a result of exchanging ideas, knowledge and technology.

Sussex has the opportunity to play a major role in society, through links with the regional community, and with national and international organisations, where both partners benefit from productive knowledge exchange. We shall continue to embed enterprise, in its broadest sense, throughout the culture and organisation of the University. We recognise that enterprise and innovation are linked to the potential impact of our research base. At its core lies contributions to the knowledge economy. It includes other equally important themes that enhance quality of life, such as social engagement. Our partners are equally important in helping us contribute to the cultural richness of the city and region within which the University is embedded, and to the national and international communities with whom we engage. Translational research, the development and application of know-how, and the commercialisation of intellectual property are a major part of a strong enterprise culture, but not to the exclusion of other activities that reflect the overall intellect of the University. The agenda must be pursued in partnership with external public and private sector stakeholders, in ways that compliment and strengthen our research.

Objectives

- Embed a positive, sustainable enterprise culture throughout the University.
- Enhance contributions to national and international policy and practice arising from research-led knowledge partnerships.
- Recognise the importance of research impact and, where appropriate, maximise opportunities to translate the outcomes of research in ways that demonstrate high levels of excellence.
- Foster collaborations with appropriate external public and private sector organisations, regionally, nationally and internationally, that are mutually beneficial to both partners.
- Play a major role in society and the economy, through productive knowledge exchange, including the exploitation of intellectual property, and application of know-how.