

Institution: University of Northampton

1. Context and mission

The University of Northampton (UoN) was awarded full university status in 2005 and in 2013 was the UK's first internationally accredited Ashoka-U Changemaker Campus. This was in recognition of UoN's commitment to social impact which has been key to the University mission and research strategy since 2013. Four key themes underpin this commitment – Education, Health and Well-Being, Heritage and Culture, and Business and Enterprise. In 2018 the University opened its new £330m Waterside Campus and welcomed 11,985 students. Our current (2019/20) student population is 12060. UoN's PGR population has grown from 248 in 2014/15 to 392 in 2019/20. We have a strong widening participation remit with one of the most diverse student populations in the country. The University derives most of its income and dedicates most of its activity to teaching. Currently, 16.79% of our academic staff are research active in terms of having significant responsibility for research. This reflects the fact that some courses (Initial Teacher Training, Journalism, Nursing, Policing) have employed staff with strong professional expertise who have not previously had an expectation or opportunity to undertake postgraduate level research. We support and encourage all staff who wish to undertake PGR study.

A recent institutional restructure (2019) established three Faculties (Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology, Faculty of Business and Law and Faculty of Health, Education and Society), all with research active staff. They offer disciplines that fall within the Arts, Business, Education, Law, Health, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Science and Technology. Our more mature research areas are History and English alongside Health, Education, and Geography/Environmental Sciences. Recent research strengths have developed in Biological Sciences, Engineering, Psychology and Sociology. Within the Faculties are 10 interdisciplinary research centres that focus on China and Emerging Economies, Critical and Creative Writing, Dementia research, Education, Environment, Health Sciences and Services, History, Physical Activity and Life Sciences, Psychology, Sustainable Business Practices.

UoN has four research institutes: the Institute for Creative Leather Technologies (ICLT), the Institute of Logistics Intelligence & Supply Chain Transformation (ILIST), the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact (ISII), the Institute for Public Safety and Criminal Justice (IPSCJ). These predominantly support research-only staff and focus on key research areas supported by the University Strategic Social Impact Plan (2015-2020) with a focus on interdisciplinarity, collaboration and applied research.

As the only University in Northamptonshire, we work closely with key stakeholders to support local priorities providing a strong regional presence. We work with established networks to ensure strategic alignment with local and regional needs and to enable social impact. Examples include [Northamptonshire's Hidden Needs](#) in collaboration with Northamptonshire Community Foundation, the Northamptonshire [Health and Wellbeing Board](#) and the [South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships \(SEMLEP\)](#), the County's Cultural Forum, Local Authorities and Statutory Bodies, and Local Business Improvement Districts. In 2016 the University was named HEI of the year in the Social Enterprise Exchange (SEE) Change Recognition Awards in acknowledgement of the work done with public and third sector bodies to catalyse social innovation in the local/regional community. In 2019 UoN signed a Civic University Agreement in partnership with local government and other major institutions such as the NHS, LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) and other educational establishments to consolidate existing work in support of local businesses, health, welfare, culture and education.

Regional (East Midlands) research and enterprise priorities come from membership of organisations such as the Arc Universities Group, South-East Midlands Universities (SEMU) and England's Economic Heartland initiative via SEMLEP. Examples of joint initiatives include working with the University of Bedfordshire and the Open University to support SMEs with access to business growth workshops, grants and internships to support growth plans,

Northamptonshire Communities of Practice (NCOP) which works with a range of stakeholders to develop better outcomes for people with dementia, and the Building Better Opportunities Fund in partnership with Commsortia (GBP2,200,000) to support people back into employment.

UoN's national and international reach is focused on delivering social impact and social value. This includes research with national governments bodies (e.g., the Department for Education, Her Majesty's Treasury, Department of Health and the Home Office) and the British Council to deliver projects in South East Asia. International funding has come from organisations such as Autism Education, Caritas International, Erasmus+, Horizon2020, Norwegian Ministry of International Development, Save the Children, Sierra Leone's Ministry of Education, UNICEF. Alongside membership of Ashoka-U, we are also members of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and UM PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education).

2. Strategy

A review of research was undertaken in 2015 alongside the launch of the University Social Impact Strategy (2015-2020). 6 key areas of development were identified to improve the research culture and environment:

1. **Research quality:** Focused investment in researcher professional development, mentorship, peer review, funded discipline-based conference and networking events aimed at building confidence in research with an emphasis on originality, significance and rigour. ECRs were a key focus with, for example, sessions on designing research projects, methodologies, coherence of argument building, contribution to theory-building, impact and applicability for potential policy influence. UoN's Researcher Development programme directly aligns to the four domains of Vitae (2015) and the obligations of the Vitae (2019) *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*.
2. **Research impact:** In line with the career stage of the academic, this has involved training, mentoring and workshops on identifying, applying, and tracking or evidencing impact. A dedicated Research Impact Officer was employed to provide guidance and support for impact and colleagues were mentored by an external academic with expertise in building and evidencing impact. Competitive internal funded research opportunities aimed at delivering quality research with demonstrable impact include an Impact Accelerator fund, Policy-related research awards, BIIG Ideas, Innovation Fund, URB@N and seed corn funding.
3. **Increase number of research active staff:** A key priority for UoN since 2014 has been to grow a strong, sustainable research base. This has led to a drive to grow the number of research active staff, develop new areas of research and increase PGR (Postgraduate Research) student numbers. Staff are supported for part-time level 8 study financially and in terms of scholarly hours for study. In 2014 49 staff were registered for doctorates, with a further 43 registrations from 2015 to 2019. Between 2014 and 2019 30 members of staff have been awarded PhDs. Measures of success include an increased number of staff and UoAs being submitted to REF2021. 104 staff were submitted to REF2014, this has increased to 181 for REF2021. The number of UoAs has increased from 9 to 12. We have small UoAs in terms of number of staff submitted but this growth reflects a strategy to employ research active staff in areas where it is clear we can develop a critical mass and sustain a vibrant research culture.
4. **Increase research income:** This has been supported by investment, training and development in research platforms like Grantfinder and Funding Institutional alongside a repurposing of our Research and Innovation Funding Support Team to provide tailored guidance for funding applications, allocated time to support bidding processes and enhance support for pre and post award activity. This team also provides weekly information on tenders, enterprise and innovation opportunities. This has led to increased

bidding activity from a wider range of staff and evidence of success is illustrated by an increase in total research and enterprise income submitted for REF2021 (REF2014 was GBP6,749,245; REF2021 is GBP9,592,252). In line with our commitment to delivering social impact, research applications that do not cover direct costs or full economic costs have regularly been supported where they align with the University Strategic Plan. Funding successes have come from collaborative, interdisciplinary work supported by research intelligence and building on existing networks and partnerships.

5. **Increase collaborative and interdisciplinary research:** This was initially enabled by moving the Research Institutes out of the School/Faculty structure in April 2015 to sit independently under the Executive Dean for Research. This encouraged the Institutes to work in a multidisciplinary way and to develop stronger collaborative impact-related projects regionally, nationally, and internationally. This strategy has been successful with research projects supported by British police forces, the British Council, the Cabinet Office, Northamptonshire County Council, Big Lottery Fund, and Big Issue Invest. The multi-disciplinary, collaborative work of the Institutes is illustrated in their contribution of outputs and impact case studies to three UoAs. They have delivered projects in south-east Asia, USA and Europe. Our Global Challenges Research Funding alongside support from the British Council has been used for projects on social impact in Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Korea and Hong Kong. We are now developing this work in Latin America building on a new project in Mexico. To date these partnerships have led to funded PhDs, publications, knowledge exchange and HEI collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

6. **Promote equality, diversity and inclusion in research:** Our Equality Assessment for REF2014 (EA2014) demonstrated that 39.8% of staff submitted to the REF were female and the demographic range of staff submitted was overly represented by those who were aged under 34 (ECRs accounting for 24%). As a result of this a Women in Research Working Group was set up to look at barriers to research for female academics and support for female academics to complete Level 8 study was strengthened. Our Equality Analysis for REF2021 shows that the percentage of female staff submitted has risen to 47%. The demographic age range of staff submitted to REF2021 is more evenly distributed with 13% in the age range 25-34, 34% aged 35-44, 31% aged 45-54 and 22% aged 55 or above. This reflects the maturity of staff in several disciplines since 2014 and supports a strengthened focus on mid and senior research staff in our Researcher Development Programme. While the EA2014 did not show any significance discrepancies in those who could be submitted to the REF based on ethnicity our own research indicates people of colour are not sufficiently represented in the research community and we seek to address this in the current research plan (2020-25).

UoN's Research Plan (2020-2025) looks to build on the developments outlined above. We remain a teaching-intensive university but have clear ambition to expand our research capacity by setting sustainable and realistic goals. Critical to our mission remains a commitment to produce research that has social impact. All staff had opportunity to contribute to the Research Plan to ensure it encapsulated staff-wide considerations. This includes a stronger commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion (training/development on decolonising the research agenda and fostering an inclusive research environment, dedicated internal funding for race and equality-related research projects and funded bursaries for PGR students of colour). We believe the key to advancing EDI priorities is having strong policies, procedures and values alongside dedicated projects and funding to support positive change. The Research Plan also commits to aligning our research to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030. We have signed up to the SDG Accord (2021) and the Social Mobility Pledge as these are core to the UoN mission. Our research ambition is underpinned by an agreed set of values that prioritise equality and inclusion, training and support, ethics and integrity, and health and wellbeing.

In 2020 we introduced academic Teaching and Research (T&R) contracts alongside Teaching and Scholarship (T&S) contracts. These recognise the different contributions staff make to the

University mission and this is reflected in workload allocation. Academic staff on T&R contracts receive specific time allocation for research activity in addition to time for scholarly activity. Dedicated time for research alongside strengthened training and development are key to enhancing the quality of research outputs and the range of research activity.

As a signatory of the Universities UK [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#) UoN is committed to maintaining the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research. Our Research Ethics Committee (REC) oversees the institutional *Research Ethics Code and Procedures* which sets and updates University policy, default expectations and detailed guidance in relation to research ethics. A network of specialist Faculty/Department Ethics Committees are responsible for reviewing staff and student research with oversight of ethics processes. REC provides day-to-day guidance, leadership and mentoring to ensure consistency and conformity of research ethics processes at all levels. REC reports directly to the institutional Research & Enterprise Committee.

Research Integrity

The University has a [Research Integrity Policy](#) and [Action Plan](#) that outlines our wider commitments to reviewing and developing our culture of integrity and developing our researchers to ensure best practice and fulfilling the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. In collaboration with the Graduate School, the Research Support Team and senior researchers within faculties provide training for PGR's and research staff. This is overseen at University level by a new post that was created in 2019 of Academic Integrity Officer who provides additional expertise and support. Breaches are investigated and regulated through the University's *Ethics Code and Procedures* and interlinked *Research Misconduct* and *Academic Integrity and Misconduct* policies.

Open Research

In 2018 substantial investment was made in the purchase of a CRIS to facilitate the growth in open research and to increase open research at the University. The CRIS enables greater visibility of researcher's profiles and related research outputs and activities. This was a move from a single repository that required mediated access with limited business intelligence to a centralised system with interoperability with HR and PGR software platforms creating greater efficiencies.

An institutional budget is available for the payment of article processing charges, including payment for open monographs. Additional investment has been made in digital preservation with staff and PGRs required to deposit datasets in the CRIS prior to publication. In 2018 all UoN theses were digitised and are available via Ethos and our research [portal](#). In 2019 the requirement for a digitised copy of student's thesis was introduced, including a choice of creative commons licences.

From 2015-2018 Professor Charles Oppenheim, an internationally recognised expert in the areas of Intellectual Property (IP) Rights and scholarly publishing was a Visiting Professor to the University. Oppenheim provided training and mentorship, adding to the research training provision. Training in Open Research and Data Management forms part of staff and PGR induction, with advanced workshops held throughout the year.

Open Research is supported through projects such as [Knowledge Unlatched](#) and the [Open Library of Humanities](#). The Head of Research Support has advocated for open research at national and international conferences including the [International Network of Research Management Societies](#), [The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions](#) and the [Consortium of National and University Libraries](#). UoN publishes an open access journal in [Engineering](#) bi-annually attracting an international readership. All staff are encouraged to create and publish open educational resources, presentations, long-form and grey scholarly material.

3. People

UoN's staffing strategy is primarily governed by its teaching portfolio with priority given to staff who can enhance and strengthen the research expertise of a discipline. From 2020 academic staff can be appointed on or transfer to T&S contracts, T&R, or research only contracts. This decision was taken to allow for a better allocation of resources recognising the contribution staff make to UoN, enabling staff to determine their academic career and progression routes. To ensure the University recognises all contributions to our mission we revised our Associate Professor and Professor titles to better reflect the range of contributions and achievements made by our staff in terms of research, learning and teaching and professional practice or enterprise. These career pathways are open to all academic staff (fixed term, full time, part time) with EDI considerations embedded in the process.

All human resources policies are aimed at treating and developing staff equitably and transparently. These policies cover sabbatical leave, study leave, flexible and remote working, fair and transparent recruitment processes, and support for equality-related circumstances. Equality Impact Analyses are undertaken for all University policies and procedures. A standard workload allocation model is used to ensure the effective and equitable management of workloads. Managers complete mandatory training in fair recruitment practices, managing equality and diversity and challenging unconscious bias.

The University has colleague-led advocacy groups aimed at further supporting those with protected characteristics. These include the Global Ethnic Majority Group, the LGBTQ+ group, the Disability Group, the Women's Group and the Gender Research Group. 169 colleagues have completed the University's 'Springboard+' staff development programme for women, trans and non-binary colleagues. The scheme supports personal and professional development including leadership, goal-setting and strategic visioning skills. The Navigator programme is the equivalent for men and transmasculine colleagues. All advocacy groups feed into our Staff Equality and Inclusion Forum which reports directly to the University Management Team. The University has made a commitment to adhere to the five principles articulated in the Equality Commission Unit's Race Equality Charter (REC). This provides a framework to identify and address institutional and cultural barriers faced by UoN staff from ethnic minorities. Our institutional analysis clearly indicates that while we have a diverse student body, this does not translate into our PGR student body (for home students) or our staffing profile. We have, therefore, committed to funded PhD bursaries aimed at students of colour alongside funded projects on race in research and decolonising the research agenda. Representation among our senior research community has improved. The last call for Associate Professors (2020) saw 21 successful applications. 52% from women and 25% identifying as persons of colour.

Central training and development needs are identified and monitored by the Dean of Research, Impact and Innovation in collaboration with research support staff. This is complemented by research training in Faculties and Research Centres. All staff complete an annual Performance Development Review (PDR) with their line manager to identify goals and development needs. A research component is built into all research-active staff PDRs (typically this includes targeted activity such as bidding, publications, impact or international network building). Progress is reviewed at three points throughout the year. We have a strong mentoring programme for staff at all stages of their career. Mentorship is determined according to individual needs and can come from both internal and external colleagues. All Faculties and Institutes have Visiting Fellows and Visiting Professors (approved by the Research Enterprise Committee and Senate) who support this process.

Staff training and development is delivered by the Graduate School, Human Resources, Library and Learning Services and RIFS. Examples include training in using our Current Research Information System (CRIS), Funding Institutional, equality and diversity in research, unconscious bias, open access, responsible use of metrics and ethics. Development looks to enhance and support individual career ambitions and to further the strategic research ambitions of the

University. This includes sessions on sustainable leadership in research, developing research impact, policy-relation research, aligning research to the UN's SDGs, leading and managing a research project. Faculty and research centre development and training is designed to build on and deepen institutional-wide support with a stronger focus on local, discipline-based needs. All researcher development programmes are reviewed annually for currency and to respond to staff and student requests.

PGR students receive an extensive package (over 40 sessions annually) of induction and generic researcher-development training from the Graduate School along with competitions and an annual research conference. This is complemented by discipline-based induction and training delivered through the Faculties and Research Centres. Support is available from the University's central Additional Student Support and Inclusion Services Team (ASSIST), Learning Development and Educational Linguistics teams. PGR representation and engagement has increased through co-produced PGR support and development activities (e.g., internally funded Feasibility, engagement, accessibility, sociability, sustainability at Level 8 FEASST@8 and Supporting community to collaborate and emotionally engage in digital shifts at Level 8 - SuCCEED@8 programmes) which have fostered student-led peer-support, digital inclusion and community-development projects, and new PGR representative roles and forums. UoN PGRs are guaranteed teaching experience and the opportunity to complete our C@N-DO course which is an accredited route to Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. We provide several competitive bursaries, scholarships and awards that are available annually or biannually (for example, the Chancellors fund, Dr Mike Daniel Research Degree Scholarship, Sir John Lowther Scholarship for Arts students, T D Lewis Scholarship). UoN is a member of the East Midlands Doctoral Network (EMDoc) and the Midlands Doctoral Researcher Forum (MDRF) providing access to annual conferences, networking and support across universities in the East Midlands region.

PGRs are well supported during their programme of study. A probationary period is followed by key development milestones (initial project approval, ethical approval and transfer) ensure that progress is carefully monitored. Supervision is regular, logged and tailored to individual needs. An annual progress review provides an auditable quality check of both the researcher's work and the support provided by the supervisory team and ensures that development needs are being identified and met. The university's regulations require that supervision teams include at least one colleague with PhD completions, and an experienced Director of Studies. Colleagues who are new to supervision are required to complete the Graduate School's training in research degree supervision, and new supervisors act as second supervisors in the first instance, to ensure that they are mentored by experienced colleagues.

PGRs benefit from dedicated workspace, with social areas and meeting spaces to foster a multidisciplinary and inclusive PGR community. Before moving to the Waterside Campus PGRs were dispersed across different sites. Giving them a dedicated research and communal space has been keen to fostering a better PGR research environment and this has been reflected in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) since 2018. UoN has performed well coming first nationally for overall satisfaction in 2020 and fourth in 2018, while regularly featuring in the top ten across all categories.

ECRs have a range of opportunities for personal and professional development. This includes awareness of specific funding opportunities and training in publishing, networking and building a research profile, career planning, impact and public engagement. Master classes on knowledge exchange and external collaboration are provided. Central provision is supported by discipline and project specific training at Faculty and Research Centre level. All ECRs receive a mentor. Opportunities are provided centrally and locally to present research findings (Annual Research Conference, seminars and workshops). Funding is available for conference attendance and wider networking opportunities.

The development pathway for mid-career and experienced research staff is the Associate Professorship (AP) scheme and Professorships. The AP scheme was redesigned in 2020 and is

supported by a dedicated researcher development programme and mentoring from senior Professorial colleagues (internal or external) from their discipline. Associate Professors participate in committees related to research governance and strategy and dedicated time for research leadership activities. Professors have dedicated research time and a training programme that focuses on responsible leadership in research, generating income from external sources (research funds, consultancy, research funded by industry), building and leading a research team, commercialising research and generating Intellectual Property, and building personal reputation/esteem. A Readers, Associate Professors and Professors (RAPP) forum feeds into the University Research and Enterprise Committee.

Equality and diversity issues were considered throughout the REF process with equality impact assessments being carried out at key stages. Our code of practice sets out a clear process for the selection of research outputs to minimise any biases. Outputs were selected on the quality of the research as per REF guidelines. There were no limits placed on the number of research outputs that staff could propose, and all proposed outputs were considered for submission. Our CRIS attribution algorithm was used to distribute all outputs that had been graded, removing human bias from the selection process.

All staff were provided with our code of practice (in different formats when requested), including those on annual and long-term leave. Consultations were carried out across all faculties and research committees. All staff involved in REF preparations completed internal training for unconscious bias as well as specific REF-tailored training by an external trainer from Oxford University. This covered the selection of staff, issues in relation to special circumstances and identifying bias in relation to the selection of research outputs. Staff selection for inclusion in the REF submission was based on T&R or Research contracts (minimum 0.2 FTE on 31 July 2020) and meeting the criteria for an independent researcher.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Since 2014 investment in infrastructure and facilities has involved building a new University Campus in a new location closer to Northampton's town centre. Waterside Campus opened in 2018 at a cost of GBP330,000,000. This investment was undertaken to embed the University more centrally within Northampton and raise the profile and presence of the University locally. Waterside Campus is closer to Northampton's Cultural Quarter, local government offices the hospitals (Northampton General Hospital and St Andrew's Hospital). This was done to enhance existing relationships with key local stakeholders. The new Campus was planned with sustainability and changemaker values at its core. In moving to one main campus site, we brought together two library sites into one Learning Hub and all academic staff and research support services to facilitate collaboration and interdisciplinarity.

Over GBP60,000,000 has been invested in research including physical space, facilities, equipment, and systems. This includes a new GBP7,000,000 purpose-built Institute for Creative Leather Technologies and laboratories and equipment for engineering, micro-biology, molecular biology, physiotherapy, sports, environmental science and environmental modelling, microscopy and analytical testing, physical testing and specialist wet spaces. There are new computer suites and game technology studios built alongside TV, radio and news studios. Dedicated studios and workshops for Art and Design and a new print room are the most recent additions.

Investment has also encompassed new staff and systems to support research. This includes a CRIS and Arkivum (a platform for digital preservation), Funding Institutional, GRANTfinder and SciVal. A platform for digital preservation Staffing for research support has increased, with a 1.0FTE permanent Head of Research Support (2016) and dedicated staff to focus on the REF, including an Impact Officer and an Outputs and Environment Officer. A permanent Repository Support Officer has been recruited to support open research (2021). A dedicated RIFs team publicise and support bidding activity, update research related policies, and oversee projects pre- and post-award, support knowledge exchange and KTPs.

Institutional level environment template (REF5a)

Support for impact has come with two business support brands Inspire2Enterprise and Northamptonshire Growth Hub (part funded by the UK government via SEMLEP). These are gateways to business support providing information, specialist advice, training, consulting, coaching and mentoring to new and existing social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, public sector bodies, third sector organisations looking to trade by way of social enterprise and corporate organisations seeking to create further social value through corporate social responsibility. The Hub delivers several European part-funded business support projects on behalf of the University and Northamptonshire County Council.

As partners in Innovate Northamptonshire, a European Regional Development Fund programme to support regional innovation, UoN hosts a range of forums to gauge local need and target key communities. Free and open business forums allow academics and the business community to exchange priorities and ambitions. Local businesses and enterprises can apply to our BIIG ideas fund which matches them to expertise within the University to develop collaborative projects. Recent projects include the social impact of nurseries in an area of high deprivation, movement of a charity operation online during Covid19, a community radio project and sustainability streams for a housing organisation.

The infrastructure, facilities and support for research have been developed to align with UoN's continued commitment to support the local and regional community and to fulfil its on-going mission to produce research that has social impact and social value.