

<b>Institution: University of East London (UEL)</b>
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<b>1. Context and mission</b>
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## Context and Mission

The University of East London, ranked in the World Top 250 modern universities, is an anchor institution: our home borough, Newham, is one of the most deprived areas in the UK with 43% of children living in poverty (CPAG 2018). The population is ethnically diverse: more than 70% of residents identify as Black, Asian, dual heritage or an ethnic group other than White British (ONS, 2019). This is reflected in the demographic of our students, 50% of whom are from Newham and neighbouring boroughs and 44% have a non-UK nationality: 50% identify as other than White (rising to 65% if exclusive of non-declarations); 25% are 30 years old or older. Undergraduates comprise 75%; 23% are PGT; and 1% are PGR (2019/20). Our local diverse profile has profound connections internationally, creating a global focus that places us in the top quartile for 'international outlook' (Times Higher Education Young University Rankings, 2020).

Of staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR), 31% do not identify as White; for teaching staff, this is 35%. We are ranked 1st in UK and 2nd in the world for 'reducing inequalities' (Times Higher Education Impact Ranking 2020). We are 12<sup>th</sup> (nationally; 2<sup>nd</sup> in London) for Social Inclusivity in the most recent Times League Table, evidencing our long-standing commitment to inclusion and social mobility.

The university is a member of the Million Plus Group, and is affiliated with London Higher, a network of London HEIs, of which our Vice-Chancellor & President, Professor Amanda Broderick, is chair-elect. She also chairs the Association of Commonwealth Universities Audit & Risk Committee. We belong to UCLPartners, a network of academic and clinical researchers and NHS bodies. Through research grants and academic partnerships, we work locally and internationally with cultural institutions (e.g, V&A, Museum of London). For KEF, our peer grouping is Group J.

Our vision is to be pioneers of future careers and deliver sustainable innovation. Our mission is to accelerate inclusive talent by realising potential, wherever and whenever it is found and advance knowledge and innovation to help people and planet.

## Institutional research focus

Our research is driven by values of the common good and tied to our goals outlined in our Vision 2028 strategy. Our history as an anchor institution in East London since 1892 remains reflected in a culture drawn from and shaped by the population of East London, its global roots and its community needs. Our research is participatory, inclusive, empowering, and impactful by design.

The disciplinary range is broad: we are returning academics to 13 UoAs, spanning science, engineering, humanities and arts. The academic staffing comprises 575FTE, of which 249FTE (43%) have SRR. Our six schools are The Royal Docks School of Business and Law (RDSBL); Architecture, Computing & Engineering (ACE); Arts and Creative Industries (ACI); School of Education and Communities (EDUCOM); Psychology; Health, Sport and Bioscience (HSB). We also have two interdisciplinary research institutes: Sustainability Research Institute (SRI) and Institute for Connected Communities (ICC).

We are establishing enterprise career zones with major employers such as Amazon Web Services to deliver new employment pathways, reskill workforce, promote research, knowledge exchange and entrepreneurship, and support SME innovation. This is to ensure our research and teaching is Industry 4.0-ready, to address the opportunities of a world of artificial intelligence, quantum computing and the Internet of Things; developments accelerated by Covid-19. We believe that social mobility, diversity, equality and inclusion are prerequisites to an engaged and career-ready community. Our location and the profile of our community reminds us daily of the urgent need to find impactful solutions to significant local and global challenges.

**2. Strategy**

Our 2015-20 strategic plan to be “London’s leading university for civic engagement” has been taken further in our latest 10-year plan, Vision 2028. One of the four strategic objectives in this transformation strategy is “to increase the economic, social and cultural impact of our education, research and enterprise activities to the communities we serve”.

Research strategy: innovation with impact

What?	Co-create	Consult and Collaborate	Inform
How?	Impact platforms	Expert panels Community Consultation Civic engagement Multidisciplinary Institutes	Investigator-led projects Research groups Response-mode funding
Enablers	Researcher Development Program; Academic Progression Framework Excellence studentships; Graduate Academic Assistants Institute core funding Concordat (KEC; RDC; RIC; liP) Action Plans		

Figure 1 Strategy breakdown

Through active engagement we develop partnerships with local government and community organisations to explore and address challenges, issues and concerns as articulated with/by community partners. We strive for their active participation in the development and delivery of research projects, emphasising co-production to deliver sustainable problem-solving. Our focus on communities is not only in East London but also abroad: we are working with governments, universities and NGOs in countries including (currently) India, Zambia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Brazil, stressing interdisciplinary collaborations that maximise impact, commercialisation and

## **Institutional level environment template (REF5a)**

dissemination. We aim to recreate in other locations the research ecosystem that is maturing in East London, by explicitly forming 'impact platforms' - defined as a place-based network of agencies and infrastructure, building on existing partnerships and forging new ones, to launch co-created projects that will have significant local benefit and global reach.

### **Consultation and collaboration mechanisms**

We have established formal and informal community consultation mechanisms within the university, including a 'Community Consultation Group' with initial membership drawn from the neighbourhood teams in the borough, the local clinical commissioning group and representatives of the voluntary, faith and community sectors in Newham. This group has identified the need for mechanisms to facilitate agile, responsive ways of working to address the barriers associated with community-university partnerships. We also engage locally through participation in external civic groups and collaborations: the PVC (Impact & Innovation) is a member of the Newham Covid-19 'Community Impact Group'; our Public and Community Engagement Manager is part of Newham's Volunteering and Social Cohesion Strategy working group; and academics serve on Newham Council's 'Youth Safety Action Group' and the 'Disproportionate Impacts of Covid 19' task and finish group.

Community engagement activities in collaboration with Newham Council have included a series of initiatives that closely align to the strategic aims of both organisations. For example, we are a strategic delivery partner on Newham's '50 Steps to Wellbeing' initiative, co-designing and delivering research to increase the health and wellbeing of Newham residents; we supported the Air Quality initiative, training student volunteers to champion behaviours to improve air quality; our researchers worked with Newham Public Health to develop research-informed understanding of Covid-19 impact on Newham's communities, contributing evidence to wider conversations about the disproportionate impact of Covid on Newham's communities and analysis of the causes of vaccine hesitancy in certain demographic groups.

### **Research Leadership**

Research strategy is driven by the university Impact & Innovation Committee (I&IC), chaired by the PVC(I&I), with membership including the six school directors of I&I, all of whom are engaged in productive research. Other members of I&IC include professional services colleagues who support research, including library and information services (LIS) and members of the Office for Postgraduates, Research and Engagement (OPRE). The I&IC is responsible for development and implementation of the research strategy and generating ideas for strengthening the research base and promoting research rigour and impact. School 'Impact champions' drive impact activity at school level, across a range of industry/business/community-engagement and in support of REF-impact and recording case studies.

Informal mechanisms to provide leadership and develop leaders include a program of interdisciplinary 'mixers' (e.g., 'East End Social' for academics to discuss ongoing and planned research in Newham; 'Beers with Research' hosted by senior staff for a PGR audience; 'research resolutions' hosted by professional support staff for staff identifying as 'developing' or 're-engaging'). These activities moved online in March 2020, although a regular professoriate lunch, instigated in 2018 to encourage all senior researchers to take responsibility for research leadership, will recommence when conditions allow.

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### Enablers

#### **Researcher Development Program (RDP) and Academic Progression Framework**

The RDP aims to develop researchers at all levels, including PGR students, ECR academics and re-engaging academics. This program as well as the new Academic Progression Framework are discussed in detail in Part 3.

#### **PGR Studentships**

An early priority of our 2015-20 strategy was to engage undergraduate students in research, feeding into a 'graduate accelerator scheme', to enable high-performing undergraduates to proceed to post-graduate research. An initial target of 50 post-graduate studentships was exceeded by 2018 and the percentage of timely PhD completions has increased each year since 2016 to stand at over 80%. In 2016, UEL joined the ESRC-funded "UCL, Bloomsbury and East London" (UBEL) Doctoral Training Partnership, which has funded 6 studentships in the social sciences and psychology. The DTP gives our post-graduate students access to the training offered to the wider cohort of PGR students at the partner institutions. As part of Vision 2028, in addition to on-going PGR studentships, the University is investing in a new academic apprenticeship scheme (the 'VC&P Graduate Academic Assistant programme') to foster a diverse talent pipeline throughout the institution.

#### **Core-funding and interdisciplinary institutes**

Our research community operates through two multidisciplinary Institutes, research centres and research groups, to which research funding is allocated.

The Sustainability Research Institute was established in 2001 as one of the first of its kind in the UK. It has built an international reputation for conducting results-orientated innovation expertise, using state-of-art test sites and facilities, and exploiting cross-sectoral networks.

The Institute for Connected Communities was established in 2020 when we identified the opportunity to strengthen our research on community well-being through closer integration with world-leading research on digital life and community cohesion. It evolved from the Institute of Health and Human Development (IHHD, est.2006), and is led by a Professor of Law and Criminology and expert in online harms and cyber-safety (following the departure of previous IHHD directors through retirement and taking a new post elsewhere).

The RIX Centre is a research and development unit, forming research and learning partnerships and co-developing software and training to exploit the potential of digital tools for the benefit of our most excluded fellow citizens. SRI, ICC and RIX are allocated core funding, but are expected to generate income from contract research and consultancy, as well as grant funding.

Research funding to schools is allocated by the DI&Is, working with the PVC(I&I) to ensure funding supports our core strategic aims. Spending plans balance infrastructure investment; support for the research environment (e.g., seminars, conferences, workshops, events, public engagement activities); and project support (including internships and research expenses) intended to pump-prime activity leading to a research funding bid. Each School sets strategic priorities for research and develops a local plan for investment and development, as detailed in REF5b.

A central university fund ('New Initiatives') supports university-wide initiatives, including strategic infrastructure investment, sabbatical rotations, researcher development, initiatives to promote interdisciplinary working. The use of **Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)** is intended to create a sustainable platform for connecting and re-engaging business in East London. In a

## Institutional level environment template (REF5a)

competitive process, ten core mechanisms are designed to provide early investment – for example, travel funding or support for proof of concept work – as leverage for sustainable partnerships, leading to KTP or Innovate UK funding. The **Global Challenges Research Fund** and the **Strategic Priorities Fund** are also distributed competitively. We have prioritised funding for interdisciplinary teams who focus on geographic locations (e.g., Zambia; India) where we already have an established network of NGOs, local academics and public organizations.

### Future objectives 2021-2027

The university signed (2019) the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, implementing the revised Concordat AY2020-21. We are compliant with our obligations under the Concordat, including annual reporting to support and strengthen research integrity. Using the UKRIO's self-assessment tool, we are reviewing our research practices, systems and policies, including training and monitoring, to enhance compliance and provide assurance of best practice. Our strategic aim is to **improve research quality by fostering an open culture**, not just with respect to open access publications and open data, but also open research design and project planning. This is consistent with our ambition to be exemplary in our practice of co-creating research projects with the stakeholders and beneficiaries of the research. We audit the function of our research ethics committees in consultation with the joint Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) and UKRIO 'Research Ethics Support and Review in Research Organisations' guidance document.

As well as being open, we will be outward-looking. We will continue to work to increase the visibility and support for public and community engagement, signing the **Manifesto for public engagement** and using the EDGE self-assessment tool provided by the NCCPE. Our ambition is to move from 'Gripping' to 'Embedded' in the next 18 months launching our next phase of development, renewing our commitment to engagement and strengthening our ability to listen and respond.

Our two enabling aims over the next six years are (1) to improve the research literacy of all academic staff, including those who do not have SRR but need to stay current with clinical or other professional practice; (2) to increase the rigour of research through support and enabling mechanisms described, so driving quality and impact. The goal is to be a leader in responsive-mode research, delivering time-critical sustainable innovation that improves lives, locally and globally

### 3. People

Our staff base is one of the most diverse in the UK. For staff with SRR, 61% are British and amongst the other 39%, there are 37 different nationalities; 51% are female; 30% are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity ('BAME') or did not declare; 6% declared a disability. Only 4% of staff with SRR have fixed-term contracts, but overall, 29% have 'fractional contracts' (i.e., part-time). There is a gender and ethnicity divide in the distribution of fractional contracts: 42% of White women and 30% of White men have fractional contracts, compared with 22% of BAME women and 6% of BAME men. This arises from vocational segregation: fractional contracts more common in architecture and the performing arts, which has a larger proportion of White staff, and less common in engineering and computer science, with a larger proportion of BAME males. The figures for teaching and 'other professional' staff are quite similar, with the exception being that there is a larger proportion of fixed term contracts (15%).

In 2019, the university established an Office of Institutional Equity, acknowledging the fact that ED&I is not just a matter for HR. The Dean for Institutional Equity is responsible for championing all aspects of equality across teaching, research and engagement. The university is a 'London Living Wage

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Employer'; holds Bronze status for Investors in People; has a Level Two Disability Confidence award; is a Stonewall Diversity Champion; has 'Commitment level' for the London Healthy Workplace Charter; holds an Athena SWAN Bronze award (2017); and a Bronze Race Equality Charter Mark (2019). The Schools of Psychology, ACE and RDSBL all have Bronze Athena SWAN and are working towards Silver whilst also supporting other schools to establish SATs and develop action plans.

We aim to attract and retain high quality staff to align with our Purpose of Enhancing Lives, Changing Futures, and are motivated by this and our Vision 2028 Strategy to create an inclusive and sustainable future. The vocational/discipline gender/ethnicity divide noted above is being explicitly addressed by investment in talent pipelines across the institution. New staff are inducted into the institutional research support, research ethics and integrity practices. ECRs are encouraged to bid for university funding to pump prime their research. They are also encouraged to propose PhD projects and become members of PhD supervisory teams, supported by more experienced members of research active staff.

### Researcher Development Framework and Developing and Re-engaging Researchers

As confirmed by an *EU HR Excellence in Research Award*, we support and manage career development at all levels in alignment with the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*. An example is the Vitae-aligned Researcher Development Program (RDP), which comprises training and networking events; UEL's Annual Research Conference; school and departmental research meetings and seminar series; social media and public dissemination. Within the Schools, staff can apply for central and School research initiatives, this has led to multiple funding awards, including short sabbaticals, student internships, conference attendance and, research expenses

The university subscribes to the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), and we take full advantage of UKRIO's specialist, subject-specific expertise across disciplines, including an annual training and update session for members of the URES and the Researcher Development Framework. We also subscribed to the second edition of the suite of Epigeum's online Research Integrity Modules, which provide comprehensive training informing users of the key concepts of research integrity and identifying all steps of the research process to deliver robust and consistent training in responsible research conduct. It is mandatory for all postgraduate research students to complete the Research Integrity Modules, which are open to all researchers.

## 4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

### Income

UEL has averaged £2m annual research income across the census period, reflecting a diversity of funding sources. This includes a growing Innovate UK and KTP portfolio, as well as a range of European funding, spanning from FP7, through H2020 ERC and MSCA projects. Ongoing EU projects support research in UoA4, UoA16, UoA20 and UoA22 and these areas have the potential to consolidate and grow: we have Horizon Europe bids are under evaluation or in development.

Our strategy has been to encourage more people to write smaller bids build a culture of success. ECRs, those identifying as developing or re-engaging researchers, or those with lower historical bidding activity are particularly encouraged with, personal targeted support (GrantCraft; ReDs; School DILs).

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The Research and Development Support (ReDS) team support grant capture through signposting funding calls, assisting with preparation of bids, including access to training and support from GrantCraft (WRG Europe, Ltd.). This ensures bids are of high quality when submitted. QR funding is used to gather proof-of-concept data when it will enhance the chances of success of a bid. Academic are encouraged to bid for smaller awards, including non-fEC. This is in recognition of the fact that many of our community partners – including the local authority and local charities – have need of academic expertise without the means to pay fEC rates. This approach to subsidise research projects serves a strategic objective: namely, to forge partnerships that deliver measurable economic, social or cultural impacts from research engagement. Furthermore, many initially small-value projects lead to larger collaborations or even response-mode bids.

The overall number of applications has remained steady and the high success rate has been maintained (2017-18 = 122 bids, 46% success; 2018-19 = 111 bids; 38% success; 2019-20 = 124 bid; 41% success). ReDs is working to increase bid volume and value, from diverse sources, without compromising success rate.

## University Infrastructure and Facilities

The university is situated across three sites in the London Borough of Newham: the site of the original technical college in Stratford; a campus at the Royal Albert Docks (1999); and the University Square Stratford (2013). When it opened in 1999, the campus at the Royal Docks was the first new university campus built in London for over 50 years.

University Square Stratford was a collaboration between UEL and Birkbeck, University of London, funded by HEFCE, which opened in 2013. USS houses specialist studio spaces, a suite of music and multi-media recording and production rooms, rehearsal rooms and live ensemble/band recording and control rooms. These facilities are supported by staff offices, teaching spaces, computer labs, and a technical store. The Docklands and Stratford campuses have specialist science and engineering labs as detailed in REF5b.

The Library is split across the Docklands and Stratford campuses, that latter located in a dedicated, 24-hour access, modern building that opened in 2015 at a cost of £14.7 million. The library's extensive archival collections include Olympic and sports history ('British Olympic Association Archive'; 'When Saturday Comes' football fanzine archive); refugee and forced migration studies ('Refugee Council Archive', plus 11 other named collections covering refugee and migration issues in the Living Refugee Archive; theatre and performing arts ('Hackney Empire Archive'); the East London Studies collection, including 'Hidden Histories Archive', comprising over 4,000 oral histories curated by Eastside Community Heritage; as well as the 'UEL Institutional Archive'. UEL Archives has undertaken several civic engagement projects funded through the UEL Civic Engagement Fund, including documenting the history of the Royal Docks and life histories of displaced persons. We work in collaboration with London Stadium Learning on a Heritage Lottery Funded project entitled 'Passing the Flame', working with local schools and documenting the intergenerational legacies of the three London Olympic Games (1908, 1948 and 2012). Recently, we have been using virtual technologies to enhance both academic and public engagement with our collections e.g., working with JISC and JSTOR on a project to make materials from our East London Theatre Archive (ELTA) accessible virtually.

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Being located in the East End of London, with significant levels of deprivation but also undergoing phenomenal economic regeneration and with emerging creative industries, we inform and influence the evolution of strategic infrastructure developments, for example having input into the local regeneration planning. We are networked with key creative organisations, including Stratford Circus Youth Zone, East London Dance, and Here East; professional theatre companies; the V&A, National Youth Theatre, Museum of London and WAC Arts. As such, our location provides living laboratory and is both inspiration for, participatory with, and beneficiary of our research.

## Support for researchers

The Office for Postgraduates, Research and Engagement (OPRE) provides research support across the institution. It incorporates the pre- and post-award funding support team, Research Development and Support (ReDS), who work closely with the Head of Public and Community Engagement to ensure proactive facilitation of networks, not only for securing funding, but also in developing partnerships and collaborations with diverse stakeholders to ensure that our research is responsive and relevant to local and global communities. This ensures our research reaches beyond the usual research sharing environments that are typical in academia: the stakeholders of our research include the communities, advocacy groups, charities and NGOs, local government, policy makers and other individuals and organisation. OPRE includes the Head of Ethics and Compliance who administers the university Research Ethics Committee and is responsible for staff development and training around ethics and research integrity. She oversees the action plans around the Researcher Development and Research Integrity concordats. The Graduate School is also part of OPRE, supporting the training and development of post-graduate researchers, including administration of the University Research Excellence Studentships and university research internships. We are a signatory to the San Francisco DORA, and our commitment to open research is supported by a post in LIS dedicated to Open Science.

## Open Research

Our strategic priority to promote open research supports reproducibility by ensuring that research results, methods, materials, analysis and primary data are made available. The UEL Research Repository is home to research outputs including journal publications, proceedings, practice-based materials, theses, and research data. The repository moved to Haplo in 2019, and has increased engagement: in 2020, there was an increase of 24% in deposits and 35% downloads, from over 200 countries and territories. The repository allows us to mint DOIs for datasets, theses, and other UEL publications, including Open Access journals in social science, business and education.

In 2020, we used the annual 'Love Data Week' to highlight our policy of open data. In 2021, a more subdued online event focussed on data ethics. UEL's latest Research Data Management Policy (2019) requires Data Management Plans (also a mandatory condition of the ethics approval process) and the sharing of data, to be 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'. UEL also has an electronic data archiving service provided by Arkivum, enabling us to meet funder and institutional requirements on data security and integrity. Both systems are ISO27001 certified and allow long-term secure storage and management of research data, including sensitive data as well as other institutional assets such as the library archive's digital collections.



**Institutional level environment template (REF5a)****Facilitation of impact**

Academics are encouraged to document public and civic engagement activities (including, but not limited to, research) and measures of impact by through the annual Performance and Development Review (PDR) and the new (from AY2020-21) Academic Progression Framework. Since 2016, the university has held a site-licence for Vertigo Ventures Impact Tracker, and we have a core of 'early adopters' who are championing its use. Nevertheless, our civic ethos is embedded, so that much of this activity is about surfacing and recording it, rather than needing to germinate or grow it.

**Future objectives 2021-2027**

Open science, which is based on the bedrock of community engagement, will remain a key strategic aim that drives development and delivery of research projects, through co-production to deliver sustainable problem solving.

Plans for the development of our campus' involve concentrating allied health research in the clinical labs in Stratford; making Docklands the focus for sustainability research and the creative industries, including arts, architecture, engineering and digital innovation. Complementing the development plans for the university estate, we are launching a transformational 'Digital First' project. The website is being completely rebuilt, with the new site being launched in May 2021. We intend to use the new website to better showcase the expertise that is available to external stakeholders, with opportunities to engage with us and for us to promote the impact of our research.

The University of East London is committed to enhancing lives and will focus research investment on the areas where we have strength and potential to make the greatest difference. An organizing principal is measurable progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing; SDG10 Reduced Inequalities; SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG16 Social inclusion and Justice. Research towards these SDGs is strongly supported across the institution, the aim being to achieve our mission to find and accelerate inclusive talent and advance knowledge and innovation to serve our communities.