

**Institution: University of Westminster**

## 1. Context and mission

The [University of Westminster](#) was established in 1838 as London's first Polytechnic, committed to educating the working people of London. Today, we continue to build upon this history in serving one of the most diverse communities in the UK. Our student population exceeds 19,000, with students from 165 countries. Among London-domiciled students, 59.9% are the first in their family to go to university; 70.4% are BME. We were named the most internationally diverse UK university in the latest [HDI index](#).

The University's purpose and values are articulated in '[Being Westminster: Our Strategy 2018-2023](#)'. These build on the institution's long-standing mission to reduce inequality and promote inclusion in higher education. Our values support our purpose. We are progressive, compassionate, and responsible.

774.84 FTE colleagues are employed in academic roles (31/7/2021), all on teaching and research (94%) or research only (6%) contracts. 744.90 FTE are Category A eligible and 396.25 FTE (53%) of these are Category A submitted (as determined by our REF2021 Code of Practice). The academic structure is organised around three Colleges – Design, Creative and Digital Industries; Liberal Arts and Sciences; and the Westminster Business School – each incorporating four academic Schools. Research takes place within every School.

Westminster has submitted to every RAE/REF since 1992. Areas of particular strength in REF2014 included Media and Communications (GPA:3.37), Art and Design (GPA:3.36) and English (GPA:3.11), with over half our UoAs submitting >10% world-leading research. For REF2021 we are submitting to 13 UoAs. This includes one new unit (UoA20) and the consolidation and expansion of previously separate submissions in Modern Languages and Area Studies in UoA26.

The majority of our activity (c.77%) is concentrated in social sciences, arts and humanities, with 5 units submitting each to Panels C and D, but with distinctive research specialisms in life sciences, psychology and computer science, and a strong focus on societal impact and practice-based research.

## 2. Strategy

Research is one of four strategic pillars of '[Being Westminster: Our Strategy 2018-2023](#)', and was one of five priorities in the previous 'Westminster 2020' strategy (2015-18). Our core commitment is to research that has 'impact in the world, is internationally recognised and informs our teaching'. Enabling this is underpinned by the following strategic objectives, set out in our '[Strategy for Research Development and Support 2018-2023](#)'.

### 2.1 Investing in, developing and retaining world-class researchers

The University recognises that 'we are our people' and that a vibrant and sustainable research environment depends on recruiting, developing and retaining world-leading researchers. This has been achieved through: clear and consistent embedding of research criteria within recruitment and promotion processes; transparent and inclusive procedures for ensuring research hours allocation in staff workloads; and strengthening researcher development, training and mentoring through our central Research and Knowledge Exchange Office ([RKEO](#)) (see 3.1). University sabbatical policy has provided opportunities for dedicated periods of research through the Schools and is particularly targeted to supporting a return to activity for those who have taken a break from research for family leave or to assume a major leadership role. Over the next five years the University is working to embed researcher-specific induction processes and further integrate researcher development and mentoring into the annual review cycle for all staff.

## 2.2 Investing in doctoral training and studentships

There has been significant investment in studentships and bursaries to attract exceptional students to our areas of research strength. School and research centre studentships funded through QR are supplemented by funding from the University's [Quintin Hogg Trust](#) (QHT) – a charity founded in 1903 to support education at Westminster – which annually spends more than £4million on student experience-related activities, many directed towards research (£3.6million 2015-20). In 2015 the QHT provided £315k pa funding for 15 three-year University studentships and in 2020 committed to funding 10 full studentships each year (c.£210k pa) on an ongoing basis. Several studentships and fieldwork bursaries have also been funded since 2017 using GCRF-QR. The University joined the AHRC-funded [Techne](#) Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) in 2018, which co-funds on average 7 studentships p/a at Westminster. The University's [Graduate School](#) (established 2012) has significantly expanded provision of training to PGRs and supervisors and invested in new systems to manage progression (see 3.2). Plans over the next five years include a collaboration to provide newly-designed schemes and events for BME researchers, new consolidated space for the Graduate School in central London and a dedicated programme to address employability for PGRs.

## 2.3 Creating an open research environment

Our successful, inclusive open research environment reflects our commitment to opening education to all and is a manifestation of what we have always done and are proud of in our history. It also recognises that **Open Access** looks different for each discipline. Our [Open Access Policy](#) requires researchers to deposit all outputs (including PhD theses and datasets) in our [WestminsterResearch](#) repository, managed through the University's Virtual Research Environment (see 4). In addition to capturing traditional text-based outputs, this includes an innovative, sector-leading focus on art and design, enabling **open access to and data sharing of practice-based research** and ensuring full accessibility of all our research. A centrally-managed APC fund enables researchers to publish in the most appropriate place and meets funder expectations. We work with our Library to engage in sector-wide discussions, signing agreements wherever possible to enable our researchers to publish OA at low or no cost.

The **University of Westminster Press** (UWP), established in 2015, is a key component of our open research environment. [UWP](#) is managed by experienced industry personnel, contributes to wider policy discussions around OA and is overseen by a multi-disciplinary academic board. It provides full open access to peer-reviewed journals and books in a variety of digital formats, and inexpensive paperback editions, and is widely recognised as a pioneer in not-for-profit 'Diamond Access', particularly in the social sciences and humanities. The Press also supports our impact strategy through OA 'policy briefs'. Since 2015, UWP has published 31 books, 5 briefs and 15 journal issues. Total views and downloads to 31/7/2020 were 703,345.

Our [Research Data Management \(RDM\) Policy](#) provides a framework for compliance with the **Concordat on Open Research Data**. The associated RDM Roadmap records and monitors progress. Guidance and discipline-specific training enables researchers to manage, curate and share their research data, meeting the FAIR principles and maximising the integrity and reproducibility of their research.

Specialist roles, including repository and research data management staff, play a vital role in enabling the embedding of data management and open access into the entire research lifecycle, alongside active post-award management. Bespoke advice and training on all aspects of open research (including ORCID) are provided to staff and doctoral researchers.

## 2.4 Investing in cross-disciplinary collaboration and partnerships

Over 80% of QR income is returned to Schools/UoAs (c.£3.9million+ pa) to support staff research time, studentships, equipment purchase, fieldwork and other researcher expenses, where decisions can best be made about local staff and research group needs. At University-

level, building capacity for research excellence and impact has been realised through two major phases of investment. In 2014 a new Research Centres Policy was introduced to consolidate and promote the quality and sustainability of research centres across the University and identify appropriate support mechanisms. The Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies was established in 2015, as a cross-university institute bringing together transdisciplinary expertise to address contemporary issues of pressing concern, with the initial theme of 'social media'. Five University Professorships were created in 2016-17, with an interdisciplinary remit, to enhance research leadership. A further c.£1.86million was made available in 2015-2018 from designated central Strategic Research Funds specifically to support cross-university, cross-disciplinary collaborative research projects and impact activities.

In a second phase beginning in 2018, the University undertook a consultative exercise to identify areas for targeted central investment, based on strong track records of cross-disciplinary excellence and where external funding is available to support future growth. Following extensive input from staff and other stakeholders, in 2019 we launched four cross-university **Research Communities** to facilitate national and international research collaborations, networks and partnerships:

- Arts, Communication and Culture
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Health Innovation and Wellbeing
- Sustainable Cities and the Urban Environment

Each Community has a senior academic lead (appointed via an internal application process), dedicated support from 2FTE facilitators and a substantial budget to provide seed-funding for projects aligned to external opportunity and public engagement activities. Between 2019-2021 the four Communities will receive c.£560K of dedicated internal investment.

Over the next three years the University plans to:

- Further enhance the alignment of our activities, particularly in our Communities, with UKRI priorities and strategic opportunities.
- Diversify funding sources through effective partnership between the RKEO and Communities.
- Implement new processes for rapid decision-making for large or strategic bids that require matched funding, with enhanced support from the RKEO.

## 2.5 Enabling impact and engagement

Support to **enable impact** is core to our institutional philosophy and has expanded significantly through dedicated workload allocation for impact activities, new professional service support and investment in seed-funding for projects that facilitate our growing focus on public engagement and external partnerships. 1FTE Research Impact Officer works with researchers to support impact generation, provide guidance and manage evidence of impact, alongside the Communities facilitators. The wider RKEO supports researchers in integrating impact into projects applying for external funding and manages internal funding streams, including GCRF. The Communities manage a stream of competitive funding for generating impact through public engagement. £285,935 of central funding was made available in 2018-20, additional to that from Schools, to support impact generation and capture for REF2021 case studies.

The RKEO coordinates with teams across the University to enable a rich environment for impact via synergies with knowledge exchange and other key agendas, including alignment with the UN SDGs. The University is a signatory of the NCCPE manifesto and member of the Universities Policy Engagement Network. Events Coordinators in each College provide support for a range of public engagement and community outreach activities. There is a focus on research related to social enterprise, a commitment recognised through the award of the Social Enterprise Gold Mark and our Creative Enterprise Centre. The University Partnerships Scrutiny Panel oversees processes and approvals and ensures oversight and governance for formal partnerships.

## 2.6 Supporting a culture of integrity

The University is committed to a **culture of research integrity** and is compliant with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, articulated by a policy framework including the Code of Research Good Practice, Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research, and Procedure for Managing Allegations of Research Misconduct. These are available on the [Research Governance pages](#) of our public website, alongside annual narrative research integrity statements. The University is a member of the UK Research Integrity Office, from which it seeks advice where necessary. In 2021-22, we will seek to embed further **responsible use of metrics** (as articulated by the Metric Tide report) into our research environment, underpinned by guidance and training for researchers, senior leadership and other stakeholders.

Processes for management of **research ethics** are well-established for all levels and types of research. All researchers are expected to seek ethical approval through an online review system (see section 4). Review is carried out by Research Ethics Committees with members and Chairs allocated dedicated time in their workloads for these roles. 1FTE Research Ethics and Integrity Officer supports the committees and guides applicants through the process. Ethics and integrity training are also integral to doctoral and staff Researcher Development Programmes. For staff and PhD researchers working under our Human Tissue Authority licence, the Human Tissue Steering Group has put in place Standard Operating Procedures and training to ensure research meets legal, regulatory and best practice requirements.

## 3. People

### 3.1 Staff

We have organisational structures and operational processes designed to ensure that staff have the time, resources and vibrant research environment necessary to undertake world-class research. **Annual workload planning** and **professional development reviews** are managed at School level through standardised processes to ensure cross-university consistency. Time to undertake research is incorporated into staff timetables as part of overall workload, ensuring fairness in hours allocation and clearly specifying the expectations for different levels of research activity. Across the University, Category A submitted staff have on average 29% of their workload devoted to research-related activities.

Our institutional mission and purpose are to provide opportunities for people from every background to realise their potential. Care for colleagues' wellbeing is central to this and the University runs an annual survey of all staff to inform its Wellbeing Action Plan. In addition to an Employee Assistance programme, staff also have access, for example, to the award-winning [Juice](#) platform, which highlights relevant health and wellbeing events and activities and includes the NHS Feeling Good app.

As a signatory of the Vitae **Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers** (2019), Westminster seeks to create the optimum culture for our researchers by focussing on three defining principles: Environment and Culture, Employment, and Professional and Career Development. This has been achieved through close collaboration between researchers, academic line management and professional support. Since REF2014, we have reviewed and implemented a revised **career progression framework** to ensure clear processes for researcher advancement and progression across all academic grades, including for part-time and fixed-term staff. A dedicated **Researcher Development Programme** is available to all staff members but particularly targeted at **early career researchers** and those working to build their research careers, and is supported by a dedicated 1FTE Research Development Officer based within the RKEO. The Programme has been designed in consultation with ECR representatives and has incorporated recommendations from both Vitae's Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey and our internal Readers' and Professors' Survey on Research Priorities.



Annual invitations for applications for **promotion to Reader and Professor** include opportunities to highlight equality-related circumstances, such as caring responsibilities or periods of long-term leave, so that applicants' achievements are contextualised. Of Professoriate titles awarded since 2014, 50% have been to women, 12.5% BME.

**Mentoring** for staff at various career stages (including those on fixed-term contracts) is organised at School level, complemented by College mentoring circles, in which 8-10 mentees from across a range of disciplines meet to discuss professional experiences and challenges in a supportive peer group led by experienced researchers. Additional to School investment, each College also manages a centrally-funded **Researcher Development Fund** to provide dedicated seed-funding specifically for ECR-led projects (£144k in 2019-20).

In line with our inclusive ethos, both the University Research Committee and Researcher Development Working Group include peer-elected representatives from our early-mid career and Readers/Professors cohorts to ensure staff input into research strategy and decision-making.

### 3.2 Doctoral researchers

Our University Research Strategy recognises that an active body of PhD students is crucial to developing a unified community of researchers. Our **Graduate School** (GS) has a mission to enhance student experience and progress and provide research training and career development across the University. All PGRs are required to undertake the **Doctoral Researcher Development Programme** (DRDP), based on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, to ensure timely completion of formal stages and evidence the development of research skills. This includes sessions devoted to career development, employability, engagement and impact, with speakers from academia, business, UKRI, Vitae and London First. The DRDP includes '**Wellbeing when Writing**' workshops (part-funded through OfS/Research England Catalyst Fund for PGR Mental Health) and other sessions supportive of mental health and wellbeing. Where PGRs identify training needs beyond those offered within the DRDP, they can apply to the **Globally Engaged Researcher Fund** which provides £50k per year to support such needs.

The **Graduate Assembly**, led by PGRs, meets termly, giving researchers an active voice and facilitating their capacity to shape the development of the University research culture. Elected PGR representatives attend Academic Council, University Research Committee, the Researcher Development Working Group, College Research Committees and GS Board. The [PhD Society](#) provides a platform to communicate PGR interests and was highlighted as an 'example of good practice' in the latest HEPI report on the challenges faced by UK PhD students.

Each doctoral researcher is assigned at least two supervisors, with one acting as Director of Studies, with a minimum of six scheduled meetings per year. Supervisors are required to undertake training in the expectations of their role and requirements of the doctoral programme. In 2016, Westminster introduced a new **Annual Progress Review** (APR) system that, moving beyond the traditional two-stage upgrade and final viva, provides a continuous loop of monitoring, feedback and corrections. This gives PGRs the opportunity to report on work accomplished and enables supervisory teams to ensure good progress towards successful and timely completion. Key stages of the programme – APR1 after 7 months, APR2 half-way through the programme (upgrade incorporating internal viva), APR3 (draft thesis) around 6-12 months before submission, and APR4 (confirmation of readiness to submit) immediately prior to submission – are monitored by the College Research Committees and GS. Internal assessors from outside the supervisory team are used to evaluate student progress at each key stage. Progress is supported through the Virtual Research Environment (see section 4), on which all records of supervision meetings, APR and ethics approval are held. Clear processes are implemented to prevent, and where required address, unsatisfactory performance. Where remedial action is needed this is articulated in a timely manner and solutions determined collaboratively between researcher and supervisory team. The GS has clearly-articulated

processes for researchers who may need to suspend their studies or require that mitigating circumstances be considered.

The success of these processes is evidenced by **completion rates** that are now consistently above the 70% UKRI benchmark (>76% in 2016-17 and 2017-18, 74.75% in 2019-20). The 2019 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey reported overall satisfaction of 79% in line with the sector and average for London HEIs, and above sector scores for progression and assessment, with 84.9% compared to 79.1% nationally.

### 3.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Since 2014 Westminster has been working with our researcher communities to interrogate and develop our policies and to embed practices that support equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our research activities. The importance of this is indicated in our publicly-available [Equality and Diversity and Dignity at Work and Study policies](#). Commitments include agenda items at all committees of the University and regular reviews including an [Annual Staff EDI Report](#). We were the first university to be awarded the post May-2015 **Athena SWAN** Bronze award and gained the **HR Excellence in Research Award** in 2015 (renewed 2017 and 2020).

All staff are required to pass an **Equality and Diversity Essentials e-Learning Module**, which includes case studies and reflective exercises. Further mandatory training in multicultural competence and sensitivity is required for all senior leadership positions. Staff involved in decision-making concerning our **REF2021** submission received additional mandatory REF-specific EDI training.

A range of key policies and guidance (available via the staff intranet) ensure consistency and transparency in **recruitment and selection** (including for internal research leadership roles) and support for all staff with caring responsibilities, ill-health or other equality-related circumstances, including parental leave, flexible working and time-off for dependents. Staff who sit on interview panels (which must be gender-balanced) are expected to attend a specific recruitment and selection training workshop, which includes case studies and sections on unconscious bias.

Westminster has a proud record of **recruiting doctoral students** from non-traditional and ethnically-diverse backgrounds, and has been Diversity Lead for the AHRC-funded Techne DTP since 2018. Internally-funded studentships are frequently targeted at applicants from under-represented groups. Processes ensure that EDI concerns are central, including e.g. careful consideration of non-standard entry qualifications on a case-by-case basis. In every year since 2014, where information is given, >50% of entrants have been the first in their family in HE; >43% of PGRs have been BME.

Westminster has an active set of **Colleagues Networks** led by and representing staff with protected characteristics who are traditionally under-represented in research: the BME Network, LGBTQ+ Staff Network and Women of Westminster (WoW). The networks are now consulted on all senior appointments and members are represented on both the University EDI Committee and steering group of the Diversity and Inclusion Research Community, ensuring a connection between our research agenda and those spaces where active discussion of issues impacting on equality and diversity arise.

The networks also support policy development. For example, the University's Transgender Equality Code of Conduct and guidance on transitioning was developed in conjunction with Stonewall and the LGBTQ+ network. WoW's research sub-group has highlighted issues including School research hours allocation. In June 2020, in response to BME network representation, the University recognised the need to review the terms of reference of all University committees to reflect our EDI commitments; a process completed late 2020. Our [Black Lives Matter Commitment Plan](#) fosters an actively anti-racist, inclusive and safe environment for all University members. Commitments include: regular equal pay audits and monitoring to ensure EDI principles and actions are embedded in our structures and externally

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validated; decolonisation of our research and curricula; expanding our reporting by ethnicity and using data to inform key strategic actions; and creating protocols for racial accountability at each level of the recruitment and promotion progress.

Data for academic staff employed by the institution (31/7/2020) identified that female colleagues are paid less on average than male colleagues by 5.13%, and BME colleagues, relative to white/non-BME colleagues, by 5.91%. This can be attributed to relatively fewer female and BME colleagues in the most senior roles; a legacy which is being addressed through our EDI Committee and network input into new appointments. Currently, 40.38% of senior academic colleagues are female, 21.15% BME. 32.3% of Professors are female, 10.17% BME.

To support EDI within the context of REF2021 the University has undertaken a series of **Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)** of Category A staff submitted, as well as of the selection of outputs for each UoA. Data from the final EIA on 31/7/2021 shows the following:

Equalities denominator	% Category A Submitted Staff
<b>Age</b>	
25-34	5.86
35-44	31.31
45-54	33.78
55-64	22.07
65 and over	6.98
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
BME	19.14
Information refused	1.58
Unknown	3.83
White	75.45
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	48.20
Male	51.80
<b>Disability</b>	
No known disability	96.85
Yes	2.93

No reliable data is available for those who declare as non-binary. The percentage of Category A submitted staff identified as ECR is 5.23% (HESA return).

Analysis indicates that these figures (Category A submitted) are comparable (around 1% difference for gender and 2% for ethnicity and disability) to the overall academic staff profile (Category A eligible). Where larger differences in representation of staff by gender or ethnicity of >5% were identified in individual UoAs, further contextual data were sought to understand this. Results of these analyses are being used by the RKEO, HR and Diversity and Inclusion Community to support ongoing plans to meet EDI targets and further development of an inclusive research environment.

#### 4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

Central operational support for research activity, including **income generation**, is coordinated by the RKEO (21FTE), which provides support for funding bids, contract set-up and post-award; ensures a joined-up and strategic approach to developing partnerships; and supports on information systems and national and international policy environment. All researchers benefit from a Research Development Partner assigned to each School, who identifies external funding

## Institutional level environment template (REF5a)

opportunities and facilitates applications, complemented by a range of bid workshops at University, College and School levels. Since 2014, our largest proportion of income has been from EU government bodies (c.30%); c.20% from research councils.

Developing and harnessing our physical and digital environment are key objectives outlined in our Being Westminster 2018-23 strategy. The University's **Digital Strategy** (underpinned by our IT Security & Use Policy) prioritises support for impactful research, including enhancing collaborations, embedding digital excellence in the research lifecycle, and improving IT capacity. Provision of up-to-date computing equipment and capability for remote working has a 'laptops first' policy and VPN access for secure connectivity, along with a service catalogue of key software. Desktops are still supported, especially for researchers working in 'big data' environments. We continue to develop this environment, with an application for CyberEssentials certification underway, and to carry out proof of concept projects, for example, with Amazon Web Services to investigate the use of public Cloud for the provision of infrastructure services.

The University's innovative research information management system, the **Virtual Research Environment (VRE)**, brings together not only traditional functionality such as repository, researcher profiles (including for PGRs) and funding bid management but also supports the doctoral student journey and ethics applications. Launched in late 2013, work on the VRE saw the streamlining and taking online of what were previously paper-based manual processes, understanding that better managing administrative burdens enables researchers to carry out information management tasks more easily. The University has continued to work as a partner with the developer Haplo, launching a next generation open source single repository (2018) that captures all research including practice-based art and design research and a dedicated REF outputs module (2019). This has moved from being a Westminster project to becoming an enhanced research information management system formed of three products with 31 clients across the UK and now in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

Across its four campuses (three in central London, one in Harrow), the University incorporates significant dedicated **facilities for research**. Details of these are set out in REF5b, but include:

- 3 **exhibition spaces**, including the world-leading [Ambika P3](#) Gallery;
- Several **specialist collections**, including in [fashion](#), [town planning](#), [Chinese visual culture](#) and the [University archive](#);
- **High-performance computing and wet laboratory facilities** based at New Cavendish Street (c.£3.35M expenditure since 2013-14, including £1.76M on lab refurbishments in 2019-20);
- 1,300m<sup>2</sup> **Fabrication Laboratory at Marylebone**, with access to 3D printing, laser cutting and other advanced digital fabrication processes (£1.49M in 2015-16).
- Various dedicated studios, laboratories and specialist technology-enabled digital and analogue spaces.

The University's historic [Regent Street Cinema](#), restored in 2015 with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Garfield Weston Foundation, and often cited as the 'birthplace of British cinema', has served as an important hub for research and impact-related activities, particularly in the arts and creative industries.

The University has invested significantly in refurbishment of **library spaces** since 2014 (£5,793,006). This includes >£2million invested in our Marylebone campus Library (2014-16) and >£3million in Harrow Library and Emerging Media Space (2016-17). The Library provides access to 261,108 physical items, 728,187 e-books and 98,185 e-journals and databases and has developed research-specific guidance and specialist subject support for researchers at all levels, invested in packages such as SAGE research methods and video content, and offers free inter-library loans so researchers can access any materials required.

Currently c.12% of University facilities and space are dedicated solely to research. Future facilities are being constructed from the outset to ensure that research spaces are underpinned with flexible and scalable science and technology provision, enabling colleagues to work safely



**Institutional level environment template (REF5a)**

and securely with research data and collaborate with external organisations. Central to our strategy is the requirement that research needs are clearly understood and research is not compelled to take place in spaces designed for other purposes. By 2023 we are committed to ensuring that this incorporates new digitally-enabled research laboratories able to support industry-based research projects and collaborative applied research that can securely handle big-data processing, informed by and compliant with external standards.