

Institution: York St John University

1. Context and mission

Putting research at the forefront of our work

York St John University has made impactful research a cornerstone of its purpose and contribution as a modern, ambitious higher education institution.

Since the last Research Excellence Framework (REF2014), we have improved our infrastructure and developed our research culture with the aim of producing world-leading and internationally excellent research in greater volume and in more areas of the university. Our REF2021 submission will demonstrate investment aimed at growing our research capability and evidence of how we have attracted, retained, and enabled academic talent. It will show how our leadership, structures and environment are increasingly directed towards establishing a vibrant, fair, and equitable research culture. It will also proudly highlight where our research is already influencing policy and professional practice and improving people's lives nationally and internationally.

Our aspirations and the growing maturity of our university mean that our research journey is still ongoing. However, the demonstrable quality of our research in key areas evidences our rapid development and upward trajectory. Our progress has been driven by a growing academy of researchers, nurtured from within our own institution and recruited from elsewhere, who have helped increase our research capability and enhanced our reputation. We have a clear social justice mission and a distinctive identity as a Civic University and a Yorkshire University. It is this mission, along with our aspirations and our progress, that has been the basis for our strategic decisions and investment over the last six years.

Growing in confidence as a modern university

York St John University has been educating people in the heart of York for 180 years. Founded as a teacher training college, its original mission was to increase access to education for families who may not have benefited from it in the past. We have retained social justice as our focus and it is the strongest common thread in research across our institution. Our commitment to social justice influences the type of research we conduct; the open and collaborative way we undertake our research and the expectation we place on ourselves to bring about positive social change via impactful research. These historical roots have also underpinned the university's confidence in asserting its distinctive research identity and ability to develop a research culture that is socially engaged and enriches the communities we serve.

Reflecting our history and status as a smaller higher education institution, we are members of the Cathedrals Group and GuildHE. We have almost 8,000 students (158 PGRs) and a primary focus on learning and teaching. Over time we have grown a diverse curriculum offer that includes a focus on allied health professions, as well as the humanities and creative arts. More recently we have added social sciences and biomedical science, and we have an expanding portfolio of other STEM subjects. This offer is delivered in five academic schools: School of the Arts, School of Education, Language, and Psychology, School of Humanities, School of Science, Technology, and Health, and York Business School. Historically, our research agenda has been shaped by our curriculum developments, but increasingly our research strengths inform our curriculum content and drive new areas of delivery, particularly at postgraduate level. Research underpins all our academic programmes, and we support all staff in their aspirations to contribute to the intellectual leadership of their disciplines through their own research.

We were awarded university status in 2006 and research degree awarding powers (RDAP) in 2015 (previously our research degrees were awarded by the University of Leeds). We are, in these regards, a very new university. We made submissions to the Research Assessment

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Exercise 2001 (RAE2001), RAE2008 and REF2014. Achieving RDAP was a major milestone in our development and the most significant event to take place since our REF2014 submission. We have used RDAP as impetus to improve our research infrastructure at every level. It has given us ownership of our regulations and procedures so they can be better shaped to match our development journey, recruit and train a growing number of our own postgraduate research (PGR) students and attract a strong calibre of research active staff. Most importantly, RDAP have helped develop the institutional culture by establishing the production of impactful research as one of our priorities.

2. Strategy

Strategy 2020 and 2026:

Our ambitions for research are aligned with a wider strategic framework that guides and coordinates institutional activities and decisions. The university's strategic development has been guided by two overarching strategies – Strategy 2020 and Strategy 2026 – setting out the mission, vision, values, priorities, projects, and performance indicators that shape our work. The year 2026 marks a key milestone for York St John University of 20 years as a university. The strategy was built on an extended period of engagement with students, staff, and stakeholders, with the intention that it should be co-produced and owned by our academic community and partners. In this regard, it is an authentic and sustainable strategy. We have three priorities within the strategy: inspiring learning, impactful research and enabling our students to be clear about their careers. We are committed to keeping research at the forefront of our strategic agenda, and this has raised research expectations and aspirations across our academic community.

Recognising research in everything we do:

While Strategy 2026 provides our overarching direction, several new and enabling sub-strategies steer distinct but interconnected strands of work. Each of these sub-strategies contributes to the infrastructure and activity we deem necessary to enhance our contribution as a modern, progressive institution. They are also created to ensure we can respond fully to the agendas laid out in important national touchstones such as the UK Govt: Industrial Strategy, UK Govt: UK Research and Development Roadmap and forthcoming UK Govt: Comprehensive Spending Review (2020). Our sub-strategies include: People and Culture Strategy, Estates Strategy, Partnership Strategy, Digital Strategy, Internationalisation Strategy, Access and Participation Strategy and Environmental Strategy. As one of our three key priorities, the aim of producing impactful research runs throughout these strategies, shaping their development and success criteria. In this way, research is now integrated across our institutional activities and planning.

Our research strategy was developed by the university following REF2014 (launched in 2017 and reviewed and simplified in early 2019). The strategy emphasises interdisciplinary working, demonstrating greater research excellence through external recognition and wider dissemination of research as key goals. It also sets out our intentions to conduct more research that has impact on the community; to increase the quality of the research we produce; to increase the number of active researchers; to increase resources and income for research and to achieve wider dissemination of our expertise, outputs, and impact.

We have made considerable progress towards our aims. Our research productivity has increased substantially, with the number of research outputs produced in this REF cycle versus the last almost doubling (387 or 77 per year for REF2014 vs 743 or 106 per year for REF2021; source: Web of Science/InCites); we have grown the number of institutions we collaborate with in the UK (62 vs 101) and abroad (63 vs 289) over this period (source: Web of Science/InCites); we have more than doubled grant income since REF2014 (£703k vs £1.5m; £141k per year vs

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£213k per year; source: HESA) and a greater number of our staff are being recognised for the quality of their work and assuming leadership roles in their fields of expertise (e.g. editorships, reviewing grants, invited or keynote talks). One of the biggest markers of our progress is the size of our REF2021 submission, which is over twice the size of our REF2014 submission (68.2 FTE in 2014 vs 163.61 FTE in 2021). It includes four new UoAs (9 UoAs in 2014 vs 13 in 2021) and a large increase in the number of outputs submitted (242 vs 400). The size of our submission is indicative of our efforts to develop and extend research across the institution, as well as our inclusive research culture.

We foster a research culture that reflects our core values and mission, and which is intellectually generous, diverse, collaborative, and creative. We are a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and mindful of other important work that focuses on research culture (e.g., Wellcome: Research culture: let's reimagine how we work together). We are committed to both The Concordat to Support Research Integrity and The Concordat on Open Research Data and have Open Access (2014) and Research Data Management (2016) policies that make institutional and staff expectations clear. Part of our response to Plan S and cOAlition S has been to adopt a new university-wide position that all research data should be made publicly available unless there are legal or ethical reasons not to do so. We have invested in institutional repositories for research outputs (Research at York St John, RaY, launched 2015) and for research data (Research at York St John Data Repository, RaYDaR, launched 2020), as well as training to support progress in this area. As a result of these changes, we have seen a large increase in the availability of and access to our research (RaY includes 2,894 outputs that have been downloaded 85,000 times) and an increase in percentage of open access publications (17% REF2014 to 41% REF2021; Source: Web of Science/InCites). Our provision extends well beyond current open access requirements for REF2021 in several ways: the types of outputs accepted by our institutional repository, our new repository for research data and our university-wide expectation of open and accessible data.

Building on our strengths:

Underpinning our research strategy was the aim to build on existing strengths, partnerships, and collaborative themes evident across our academic community.

Since REF2014, we have encouraged our academics to collaborate around shared areas of interest and expertise and lead our research agenda. As a result, we have developed a number of new centres that are responsible for research, cultural and creative activities at YSJ. Our most longstanding centre is the Centre for Religion in Society (CRS; established in 2008). Thereafter, we have developed the International Centre for Community Music (ICCM; established 2016), York Centre for Writing (YCW; established 2017) and the Centre for Language and Social Justice Research (CLSJR; established 2019). All four centres are led by professorial appointments made after 2014, three internally and one externally, and all the centres feature as part of our suite of impact case studies.

This year we launched our first research institute at the university (Institute for Social Justice, ISJ). Led by a newly appointed director (0.5 FTE at professorial level), the institute aims to attract and shape external collaboration around the theme of social justice. Internally, it has allowed us to draw together existing community and research projects to build capacity and chart new areas of impactful and interdisciplinary research, public engagement activity and ways of inspiring our communities. Some of our established initiatives within the ISJ include: arts-based projects focused on mental health in the community ('Converge', which has attracted external funding from Research England (£356k) for an independent evaluation of its outcomes) and providing creative and life skills for prisoners (Prison Partnership); work with the police and community organisations to address bullying and abuse (AllAboutRespect); outreach work on improving employment prospects for autistic adults leaving further and higher education (PRO Autism) and specialised training to help ex-armed forces personnel transition to civilian life

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(Military Human). We have invested in staff research projects, supporting external bidding, PhD scholarships and post-doctoral researchers to establish the ISJ as a major part of our university.

Through our partnership work, we are embedded within the City of York and region more widely in meaningful and authentic ways. One example is our community clinics, which were developed in response to local need. They are underpinned by our research expertise and provide high quality services to those underserved by existing provision. Our Counselling and Mental Health Centre draws together local stakeholders (e.g., City of York Council and Independent Domestic Abuse Services) to offer affordable counselling and mental health services to citizens of York and North Yorkshire. The clinic also co-founded a Research and Training Clinic Consortium (RTCC) of other universities to share expertise and co-ordinate research activity. Other similar clinics operate across the university (e.g., YBS Business Consultancy Clinic) and include national and regional partners (e.g., NSPCC, Macmillan Cancer Support, John Lewis, Park Leisure, Ainsty Ales and Visit York). This partnership working has helped us engage our community in developing research priorities and projects and provides sustainable impact pathways for our research.

3. People

Our growing academy

As well as strategically positioning research at the centre of the university's focus, we have: (a) invested significantly in the cultural conditions to enable stronger research practice to spread and embed across the institution; (b) recruited and developed a more academically diverse, research-confident and experienced academy; and (c) established a clearer academic career pathway, from early career entry into research, through to senior roles and responsibilities.

Building on the expansion of our academic portfolio and increase in student numbers over several years, our academic staffing base has grown by 46.2% since 2014 (204.2 vs 298.6 FTE; source HESA). We have grown from 33.4% of staff submitted to REF2014 (68.2 of 204.2 FTE) to 54.8% of staff submitted to REF2021 (163.6 of 298.6 FTE). In creating a staffing base skilled in delivering impactful research, as well as exceptional learning and teaching, we have aimed to combine high-quality early career researchers (ECR) with experienced researchers who together deliver the full range of our courses. We have an extensive research training continued professional development (CPD) programme that is aligned with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and supports both groups of staff in developing the skills required for a successful research career. Grant writing and research impact training is provided via this programme and is available to all staff. In the case of staff new to research, we provide fee remission for degrees to study at YJSU or other institutions (an average of 47 staff per year over the REF period). Through initiatives like these, we have maintained the percentage of staff with doctorates above 70% despite the large increase in overall staffing.

Clear career pathways:

We have strengthened other areas of our career pathway for academics to better recognise and reward research. For example, we have introduced an accelerated promotions route, allowing staff to apply for senior lectureship up to three years prior to reaching the top of grade (2016-2017). Promotion is awarded based upon exceptional performance, including in research. So far, 53 academic staff have been promoted via this route. We also introduced the title of associate professor to acknowledge outstanding contributions to teaching and research (2013-2014). This title is intended to reward staff, raise aspirations, and provide a development route to full professorship. Since its introduction, four academic staff (4.0 FTE) have progressed from associate professor to full professor via this route. Currently, 9.4 FTE academics hold this title. In keeping with The Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), we do not prescribe or require the use of research-based metrics or thresholds as part of our promotion routes (though staff are

free to use them if they wish). Rather, staff make a case based on the specific strengths of the work and its impact.

Students and communities:

Our PGR community continues to grow, and we have taken steps to encourage all our students to undertake research and become a more integral part of the institution. Initiatives include: our popular Student as Researchers Scheme, which offers students paid opportunities to collaborate with staff on novel research projects and is a Higher Education Achievement Report approved activity; the offer of 10% remission on all PGR degrees undertaken by YSJU alumni and fee scholarships for MSc/MA by Research programmes based on undergraduate performance at YSJU. We have also introduced a wide array of research degree programmes to suit different academic areas of the institution and increase diversity among PGR students. These programmes include an MA by Practice Research, to sit alongside our PhD by Practice, and a suite of Professional Doctorates in education, religious ministry, applied linguistics and counselling psychology. We have also worked increasingly with collaborative partners such as the NHS to provide PGR scholarships. Finally, we introduced Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA), who contribute to teaching as university employees while completing their doctoral research. These initiatives have seen our PhD community double in size over the last six years (from 62 to 158 in 2019-2020), with a commensurate increase in PhD completions (REF2014 = 18 vs REF2021 = 55; 3.6 per year vs 7.9 per year; source: HESA).

In managing this growth, we have been careful to maintain a high-quality experience for our PGR students and to grow a vibrant and collegiate culture. As for our staff CPD programme, our PGR training is aligned with the Vitae Researcher Professional Development Framework and is a combination of centralised and school-based courses aimed at ensuring our PGR students have the knowledge, professional standards, and personal qualities for a research career. The programme includes input from academic staff, information learning services (liaison librarians, repository librarian and copyright and licensing officer) and career services and is supplemented by engagement with a range of external initiatives and organisations (e.g., GuildHE Summer School training and The Brilliant Club). Testament to the progress we are making in this area was the result of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey in 2018, when we were ranked first in the UK for overall experience and assessment and second for PGR retention.

Our inclusive, enabling culture:

Underpinning this wide-ranging commitment to supporting and strengthening research is a positive and inclusive culture, with a commitment to equality. Given the nature of our institution, this commitment is authentic, deep-rooted, and reflected in the identity of the institution and our research.

We have a university-wide approach (Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy) to achieve greater diversity and inclusion, and a range of enabling policies (e.g., academic leave, flexible working, special leave, career breaks) and initiatives (e.g., LGBT+, BAME and Disability staff networks) to support the career aspirations of all staff. With regards to our work on gender inequality, for example, our latest analysis of our gender pay gap data indicated that we are making progress on this issue (mean gender pay gap is now 9.3%, down from 11.5%, and median gender pay gap is now 16.2%, down from 17.7%). In other areas of equality and diversity, our institution is a sector leader. We are currently in the Top 100 Employers based on the LGBT Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (49th) and in the Top 20 Trans Employers (supported by our Trans Inclusive Framework). We are also a Disability Confident employer, a Mindful Employer, a University of Sanctuary, and we have a Gold Employer Recognition

Scheme Award from the Armed Forces. We recently committed to the Race Equality Charter and Athena SWAN Charter with the intention of achieving awards by 2022-2023.

For REF2021, 163.6 FTE staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR) were identified; they form 54.8% of the academic workforce with 17.8% being ECRs (53.3 FTE). The profile of staff (based on FTE) with SRR (47.7% female; 6.1% declared disability; 7.4% BAME) is very similar to YSJU overall (49.6% female; 8.1% declared disability; 6.0% BAME). As such, we are confident that our code of practice is fair and equitable, and that our REF2021 staffing profile reflects our wider institution. However, increasing diversity and inclusion is an ongoing area of importance and focus for us as an institution. Our aims in this area include greater diversity at institutional level (e.g., at least 10% BAME student and staff population) and continual improvement in equality and diversity training among our staff. This is captured formally as part of our YSJU 2026 Strategy.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

The increase in our research grant income noted above has been made possible by purposeful recruitment and the support of our research community, as well as successful partnership building. Funders in this REF cycle include the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Leverhulme Trust, Royal Academy of Engineering, Erasmus, The Health Foundation and many other charities and organisations. While we have made progress in this area, further increasing our success and competitiveness in attracting research grant income is a priority for the institution. Our target is for 2% of our total income to be from external research grants by 2026 (equivalent to £995k per year). We consider this to be an ambitious and achievable target for an institution our size and one that will ensure sustainable research activity over the next period of our development.

To support our progress to date and lay a foundation for achieving our aim, we have undertaken a programme of strategic expansion and investment in our resources, facilities, and estate. Our approach has combined several 'flagship' transformational projects intended to expand the university's role and reach, with ongoing improvements across campus. The net result is that our institution is significantly more modern and research-enabled today than at the time of our 2014 submission, with enhanced research support, IT infrastructure, learning and library facilities, laboratory and specialist space, and access to resources.

We now have an established Research Office (RO) and Business Development and Knowledge Exchange Office (BDKEO). The RO has specific remits for governance and compliance, research grant support, PGR and staff research training, and research data and performance monitoring. The office also provides administrative support for the University Research Committee and its subcommittees (e.g., University Research Ethics and Integrity Committee). The RO has been central to supporting increased grant applications, enhancing the support and training available to staff, and it has ensured engagement with research concordats (The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, The Concordat to Support Research Integrity, Concordat on Open Research Data).

The work of the RO is complemented by the BDKEO which was established to diversify non-teaching income streams and increase the range and scope of applied research, business development, and knowledge exchange at the university. The BDKEO engages with academic schools across the institution via knowledge exchange champions and school research leads, providing valuable support and advice. In practical terms, this has led to greater engagement with Local Enterprise Partnerships and securing our role in the Yorkshire and Humber Institute of Technology (a £10m project funded by the Department of Education). The BDKEO also led to the attainment of a Silver Watermark accreditation from the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE, 2019). The BDKEO will be central to our commitment to the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research and new Knowledge Exchange Concordat.

Our research infrastructure is also strengthening via developments that link our estate with strategic partnerships. In 2016, we opened a new 57-acre sports and recreation campus approximately one mile from our main York campus. We subsequently worked closely with the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys Foundation NHS Trust to support the building of York's new mental health hospital adjacent to that facility. The hospital opened in 2020, and through our partnership with the trust it is a key part of our strategy to make mental health in a social justice context central to our research agenda. To enable this to happen, we have recruited a new professor of counselling psychology to lead on this partnership, developed a new doctorate in counselling psychology and offered PhD scholarships in collaboration with the trust. This work has been mirrored by our partnership work with York District Hospital, with whom we established co-funded clinical research posts.

Our estates development programme has introduced a suite of new technical spaces at the university, such as laboratories on our main campus and at our new Sports and Recreation Campus, including biomedical science, human performance, and psychology laboratories. As part of this investment, we have significantly increased the technical support capacity across the institution. The number of technicians has increased from 15.4 FTE in 2014, to 31.2 FTE, with greater critical mass and expertise across a much broader range of research areas. The university is also a signatory of The Technician Commitment, led by the Science Council, ensuring we invest in the training, equipment and support recognised as essential to enable our technicians to work effectively. In all, our research community members are now benefiting from a much greater level of expert technical support for their research than ever before.

We recently expanded our reach by opening a London campus, located at the Barbican in a central business and cultural hub. The aim is to attract a wider pool of domestic and international postgraduate students and expand our research footprint by utilising both a northern and a London base. We have used QR to fund the first research (on parental leave) between the two sites and in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. At the same time, we have made complementary investment in our main campus and we are due to open a new Creative Centre in 2021, with a total budget of £15m. The centre reaffirms our commitment to the arts, including arts research and practice. Its flexible space will increase our capacity for arts-related research and public-engagement, teaching and community engagement and will strengthen collaboration with local and regional arts practitioners. It will ensure that research in the arts remains prominent and at the forefront of the institution.

Overall, since 2014, our ambition to improve research infrastructure has been a key driver for investment of over £39m. The strategic projects and partnerships we are investing in, and the positioning of impactful research as a priority in our 2026 Strategy, will ensure that this investment continues during the next REF cycle. We will remain a strong example of a civic and regional university that delivers positive social change for and with its community.