

Institution: Newman University

1. Context and mission

Mission

The mission of Newman University is to make a transformational impact to individuals and communities through the distinctive contribution of its staff, students, and graduates, producing research and scholarship of benefit to society and providing high-quality, accessible academic and professional education based on social justice and equality. Our aim has been and will remain to be recognised nationally and internationally for the integrity, benefit, and quality of our research and scholarship, making a positive difference to society across the social sciences, arts, humanities and education.

The University

Situated on the south-western edge of Birmingham, Newman is a small Catholic university with approximately 350 staff and 2,800 students, including over 40 research students spread across MPhil, PhD and EdD programmes. Our undergraduate and postgraduate students are predominantly drawn from the local area, with a very high proportion of commuter students. We consistently exceed sector averages for recruitment from under-represented and disadvantaged groups including mature students, disabled students, students from low-participation neighbourhoods and first generation HE students. People from under-represented groups make up the large majority of our student population and we are proud of our distinctiveness, our commitment to social justice, and our contribution as a community university to local, regional and national research agenda, from social mobility to research excellence.

Academic Structure

Newman was founded as a teacher-training College in 1968 and became a University in 2013. Since its inception Newman has expanded from a purely teaching-oriented institution to one that focuses on both teaching and research across a much broader social science, professional, and arts & humanities provision. In 2020, the University is organised into two faculties: the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Arts, Society, and Professional Studies. Research is embedded at subject-level and supported by research groups and Centres across the Institution. Currently, Newman has six research centres: the Children, Young People and Family Research Centre; the Romero Freire Institute: Dialogue, Pedagogy and Praxis; the Humanities Research Centre; the Newman Research Centre for the Bible and its Reception, the Sport, Physical Activity and Health Research Centre; and NILE – the Newman Institute for Leadership in Education. Our institutional research focus is on social impact for the public good as outlined in the section on strategy below.

Research at Newman

Combined with our significant investment in academic staffing, we see our modest size as a benefit in allowing us to support high-quality research leading to successful dissemination and publication. In REF2014, our outputs were commendably rated: in the Table of Excellence produced by the *Times Higher* for Research Outputs, Newman appeared at 89th place nationally, above many institutions who would see themselves as research-led. As a small teaching-led university, we do not have an extensive research infrastructure or the economies of scale of larger institutions but all academic staff are on teaching and research contracts and engage in advanced scholarship and/or peer reviewed research. Of these 129 academic staff at the time of the Census for the REF, 59 had a significant responsibility for research. As a small institution, our research environment is largely centralised, working in conjunctions with subjects and Faculties in a hub and spoke model to make the most productive use of time and resources.

REF2014

In the last research assessment exercise, REF 2014, Newman University entered 25 staff across six Units of Assessment: Psychology, Education, Sport & Exercise Sciences, English Language & Literature, History, and Theology & Religious Studies. All six Units were identified as having a percentage of internationally excellent (3*) work, and half were also identified as having a percentage of 4* world-leading research. The three Units Newman entered in RAE2008, Education, Sport and History, all improved significantly on their results in the 2014 research exercise. While participating in a selective exercise in REF2014, we consider it important that all our Units included Early Career Researchers as defined by the REF. This development of research capacity continues with our submission to REF 2021, which now includes all academic staff with a significant responsibility for research and so is expanded to over twice the size in number of researchers returned.

Research Aims

The University's overarching research aim in the next few years is to achieve Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP). In this regard, Newman has worked well with its validating partner, Liverpool Hope University, to progress the number of successful research degree completions over the REF period. The University has more than doubled its total number of successful completions in this time and is looking to attain the required number of completions (30+) in the next year. An inclusive and equitable approach to staff scholarly development has underpinned the wider context of the University's research strategy, policies, and environment, as outlined in the remainder of this document.

2. Strategy

As a Catholic University, Newman's Strategy for Research begins with an extract from *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 15 August 1990: "The basic mission of a University is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society." Our research, whether foundational, applied or user-defined, is underpinned by a common aim to make an impact in society, contributing to social justice, education, health and well-being, to scientific, human, and cultural understanding, and to the sum of knowledge.

This has been our abiding objective and Newman places research and scholarship at the heart of the University's life and its contribution to society. The University's strategy for research has four pillars for growth: Postgraduate Research; Staff Research and REF Engagement; Scholarship and RDAP; Enterprise and Income.

Strategic Theme 1: Postgraduate Research

Our objectives in this area are to:

- 1.1 Grow research student numbers and timely completions
- 1.2 Expand research supervisory experience alongside a programme of training and development for supervisors and students
- 1.3 Build our capacity to apply for research degree awarding powers
- 1.4 Sustain an appropriate environment to attract high-quality researchers and postgraduate students.

Strategic Theme 2: Staff Research and REF

Our objectives in this area are to:

- 2.1 Plan for an increased number of staff submitted to the next Research Excellence Framework

- 2.2 Expand academic leadership through the appointment of Professors and Readers
- 2.3 Grow new researchers and sustainable, successful research centres through strategic investment and targeted support
- 2.4 Nourish our research culture by protecting research time, mentoring early-career researchers and recognising research achievement
- 2.5 Encourage engagement in collaborative research, advanced scholarship, and external research partnerships to build research capacity
- 2.6 Attract and retain academic and professional support staff who will help us to achieve a mature, self-sustaining research base.

Strategic Theme 3: Scholarship and RDAP

Our objectives in this area are to:

- 3.1 Promote dialogue about academic identity and the development of shared understandings about the nature of scholarship, including broad engagement with appropriate researcher development frameworks
- 3.2 Encourage the development of externality in research and scholarship; through contributions to subject associations, learned societies, relevant professional bodies and the research infrastructure of Higher Education
- 3.3 Stimulate the scholarships of discovery, integration, application and teaching, leading to the production of relevant public outputs
- 3.4 Deliver research-informed-teaching and practice to the benefit of students
- 3.5 Engage with and promote students as researchers, co-producers and partners in scholarship at all levels of study
- 3.6 Provide staff development and support, primarily through the Graduate School and Academic Practice Unit, for the development of scholarly practices, academic writing and public engagement
- 3.7 Grow a learning community which values, rewards and celebrates those who lead and engage with research and advanced scholarship for the common good.

Strategic Theme 4: Enterprise and Income

Our objectives in this area are to:

- 4.1 Increase externally-funded research and evaluation projects, independently and in collaboration with partners in the UK and overseas
- 4.2 Grow academic capacity to develop enterprise and third-stream work
- 4.3 Promote research and scholarship which has demonstrable impact on the public good
- 4.4 Foster activity in social entrepreneurship and in supporting staff and students to develop successful social ventures and enterprises in partnership with others
- 4.5 Collaborate with external organizations and our alumni to develop our ability to offer excellent diverse opportunities for work placements, school experience and professional practice
- 4.6 Nurture staff and student civic involvement to develop varied community engagement activities promoting student learning from real-world challenges and also to engage the community in the benefits of Higher Education.

An emphasis on social enterprise is seen as particularly important to enable staff and students to work collaboratively to tackle societal challenges and improve communities. We build our work as active members of key external partnership organisations and networks to ensure our contribution in the local, regional, national and international communities are known, understood, and appropriately valued. In 2020 Newman submitted to the Knowledge Exchange Framework, signed up to the principles of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat, and committed to participation in the Knowledge Exchange Concordat development year. Newman has for several years carried the Social Enterprise Mark to underpin the socially engaged nature of its research and its approach to knowledge exchange.

Implementation

A Newman University Research Strategy Action Plan for the implementation of these objectives is reviewed annually and considered in relation to global, national, and regional priorities such as the United Nations sustainable development goals, the UK Industrial Strategy 2017-20, and the Midlands Engine. The plan is focused on staff formation around advanced scholarship and on the indicators that contribute to achieving the overarching goal of RDAP as recognition of the University having successfully established a mature, self-sustaining research base at Newman. In terms of our promotion of sector-wide responsibilities, we work productively with the research arm of our mission group, GuildHE Research. Formerly CREST, GuildHE Research is the research consortium for smaller and specialist higher education institutions to promote and advocate for the recognition and support of excellent research wherever it is found.

Integrity, Ethics, and Open Research

As part of GuildHE Research we contributed to the Vitae (in partnership with UKRIO) research integrity landscape study commissioned by UKRI in 2019. The University subscribes to the five commitments for those engaged in research and is committed to the principles proposed in the 2019 revised version of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity:

1. upholding the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research
2. ensuring that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards
3. supporting a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers
4. using transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct should they arise
5. working together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly

At Newman, matters of staff and student research ethics and integrity are overseen by the Research Ethics Committee, which scrutinizes several hundred research proposals each year. All researchers are subject to the University's Code of Practice for Research, which provides a framework for the governance of all research throughout Newman University.ⁱ As noted in the Code, the University promotes Open Research and favours green publication; it is working towards compliance with the Concordat on Open Research Data at institution level. Newman also supports the 2020 UKRI Open Access Review on the future of Open access post-REF2014. As part of the GuildHE Research Consortium we subscribe to an EPrints Open Repository. The University has also contributed to focus groups on the developing plans for a shared service repository for outputs, and attended pilot meetings. In order for work to be considered as part of the next REF, staff are required to deposit all journal articles and published conference papers in an institutional repository, or alternative, with an acceptable embargo period and within an acceptable length of time after it is accepted for publication. The University maintains a central fund and application process to support publication in journals that charge Article Processing Charges to publish articles through the gold open access route with no embargo period.

Interdisciplinary Research Centres

Our six research centres support and facilitate interdisciplinary research across the humanities and social sciences. For example, the Humanities Research Centre brings together colleagues from Theology, History, Drama and English Studies to work on projects that range from funding bids to impact projects, pooling resources and staff expertise to support joint conferences, seminar series, and postgraduate research. The University also supports cross-disciplinary work across Faculties, as reflected in the UoA submissions by the work of various research centres, such as the Centre for Sport, Physical Activity and Health, the Newman Institute for

Leadership in Education, and the Children, Young People and Families Research Centre.

Impact

Our strategy for Impact has emphasized place. As a University whose students and stakeholders are largely drawn from the areas neighbouring the campus, our approach has been to encourage and support staff to work in partnership with local and regional schools, charities, companies, and organisations. This is reflected in our Impact case studies alongside the wider commitment to promote research that makes a positive difference in society, whether locally, regionally, or beyond.

Looking Forward

Within a context of equal opportunities and research integrity, our ongoing research strategy in the coming five-year period 2021-2025 will seek to further cultivate our researcher base, target enhancement of our research environment to support an application for Research Degree Awarding Powers, ensure adherence to the Concordat for Research integrity, work towards 100% Open Research compliance, and nurture the further development of interdisciplinary research at the University.

3. People

Our staffing strategy in the census period has been underpinned by our REF Code of Practice, guided by the University's Human Resources (HR) policies and People Strategy (2015-2020). All academic staff at Newman are on teaching and research contracts: all have a responsibility for research, broadly defined, with those who have a significant responsibility for research submitted to the REF. All academic staff are expected to be engaged in some measure of research, scholarship, or practice.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

As detailed in the University's Code of Practice, equality, diversity and inclusion at Newman is overseen by the Equality and Diversity Committee, Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, which reports to Senate. The development of the Code was reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Committee in April 2019, and recommendations for enhancements incorporated prior to submission. Consultation was also undertaken in 2019 with Units of Assessment, Human Resources, Unions, and members of the Research Committee, leading to revisions and iterations of the Code. Sign-off of the Code and its processes, including evidence of consultation, was made by Senate. The processes in the Code promote inclusivity such that the principles governing the Code are consistent across the University, with no exceptions and no variations across Units of Assessment. Ultimate responsibility for the REF process sits with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, while key responsibilities also sit with designated Unit of Assessment Coordinators, the Research Committees, the appeals panel, and staff identified in this Code.

The University is keen to develop further its research-support infrastructure and promote its commitment to equality through the pursuit of external accreditations. As a medium-term goal, the University intends to work towards an application for an Athena Bronze award and subsequently the Race Equality Charter Mark.

Readers and Professors

In terms of senior research appointments, the University runs a biennial readers and professors application round open to all academic staff and specifically welcoming of a diverse range of applications. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is run after each biennial round and each meeting of the annual pay grade gateway review. The University places equality at the heart of promotion processes and its readers and professors application criteria and procedure were

reviewed and approved at its Equality and Diversity Committee. Newman currently has a 50:50 split of male (3) and female (3) professors at the end of 2020 following appointments made in the latest appointment round. Senior management posts in the University (Deans and senior postholders) are ethnically diverse and the University wishes to see this reflected in the professoriate.

Promotion of Staff Scholarship

The University expects all academic staff to engage in scholarship and to be scholarly in their practices. At Newman, this means that scholarship is purposeful, well-founded and appropriately conducted; it may involve knowledge creation, integration, sharing or application, as well as the development of ways of knowing in others. Such scholarship produces meaningful results which are communicated effectively and may issue in research publication but equally may find expression in other disseminated outputs and forms of public engagement. The Graduate School and Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Directorate (formerly Academic Practice Unit) work with staff and students to promote scholarship, researcher development and the exploration of academic identities. Engagement with emerging professional researcher frameworks is promoted alongside support for the co-production of scholarship at all levels within the University. Postgraduate students are engaged as researchers and scholars, supported by staff who participate pro-actively in professional development to support their scholarly teaching, supervision and broader academic practice.

Staff development on scholarship and research related issues is organised by the Graduate School and the Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship Directorate. Research seminars are held throughout the year, some organized centrally or by Research Centres, and some within subject areas and Faculties. Contributors to these seminars are a mix of University staff, research students, and invited speakers from other institutions.

Postgraduate Researchers

Overseen at Newman by the University's Research Degrees Subcommittee, research students are registered both with Liverpool Hope University, our research degree validating partner, and with Newman University. The University has approximately 40 research students (PGRs) registered across MPhil, PhD, and EdD programmes. An in-house research degree training programme is operated annually and supplemented by local, departmental research training. The University subscribes to the VITAE Researcher Development Framework and conducts research training needs analyses at the point of application, then annually thereafter. Members of the central Graduate School, including the postgraduate coordinators, organise a number of regular staff-student liaison meetings with PGRs each year to address issues, plan training, and discuss ways to improve the research student experience.

In addition to locally produced training at Newman, the University has provided students with various additional training resources from Epigeum to the UEA Online Training Series of seminars for PGRs. Research students have access to training and research resources at Liverpool Hope as well as Newman and can avail themselves of the SCONUL scheme to access materials at other libraries. All students are entitled to claim an allowance each year to contribute towards research expenses. Research students also have a dedicated PGR room for either hotdesking or office working and are allowed free printing. A biannual PGR staff-student liaison committee run by the postgraduate research coordinators seeks to be a forum for two-way communication and problem-resolution. It also organises the annual Festival of Doctoral Research which takes place each July soon after the Annual Monitoring Review Process, which ensures appropriate monitoring of progress for all research students. PGRs also have access to the network of research students across GuildHE Research, have access to the shared services provided by the consortium, and can participate in the annual two-day research student summer school in London.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

As appropriate to a small university, oversight of strategic research objectives is undertaken by the central Research Committee, which is also the parent body for research degrees subcommittee and the research ethics subcommittee. A detailed action plan for the implementation of these objectives is provided and reviewed annually. Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Research Committee draws from across the university for its constituency and supports both established and early career researchers. A research student representative sits on research degrees subcommittee.

Research Office

Central to research support is the coordination of the Research Office and Graduate School. The research office maintains a corporate research data base; up-to-date information on research performance in the University; postgraduate research student training and oversight; formalization of the University's research centres; organization of an external speakers research programme; facilities to provide regular information on grants and external funding opportunities as well as assistance to academic staff in preparing research applications, including advice on costing and pricing, meeting funding eligibility criteria, and submission of bids.

Investment

During the REF period, the University's major investment in research infrastructure was the establishment of an interdisciplinary Centre for Science, Knowledge and Belief in Society, which the University created to conduct an international 3-year research project to explore 'Science and Religion in Society'. The Centre was housed in dedicated facilities from early 2015 to summer 2018 and supported through grants from the John Templeton Foundation and the Templeton Religion Trust. The Centre, which included colleagues in our humanities and psychology UoAs, supported over a dozen members of staff at its height, including a research office manager and administrator, a number of research fellows, and two doctoral students. At the end of the successful initial project, the Centre relocated to the University of Birmingham to develop its ongoing work.

Research Centres

The University has six Research Centres as discussed in Context and Mission above. These are supported by the central Research Office and Graduate School, and the University's Finance Office. For much of the time that Newman hosted the Centre for Science, Knowledge and Belief in Society Research, Centre activity was also supported from 2014 to 2018 by a research bid writer. This post, whose core function was subsequently absorbed in the Finance Office, was shared with two other universities, and supported the development, writing, and submission of applications to a range of funders. As from 2018, other research funding support for Research Centre activity was outsourced on a consultancy basis. The University has supported bids to many funders during the REF period, including the British Academy, Leverhulme, the Wellcome Trust, Nuffield, the AHRC and ESRC.

We have targeted our QR Strategic Priorities Fund allocation from UKRI at key interdisciplinary projects that meet the programme's aims and are also aligned with our institutional mission. These were focused around public perceptions of religion and science in 2018-19 and Educational Policy in 2019-20.

Support

A sabbatical scheme has operated across the university for the majority of the REF period alongside a small-grants initiative to support practice-based research. The current sabbatical scheme has been in operation for five years and has awarded 3+ sabbaticals per year to research-active staff. In addition, the Research Committee invited research groups to bid for a

maximum of £3000 as a contribution towards more substantial research projects. Financial support up to £2000 is also provided for staging conferences at the University and, outside of Unit of Assessment funding, support is given for conference presentation to a maximum of £400 per conference. More general support covers both advice to the research community and information to the Research Committee and is provided by the Research Office Administrator as part of the range of provision offered by the Graduate School. This involves organizing regular research seminars, research training workshops and inaugural-professorial lectures, as well as enabling suitably qualified academic staff to engage in postgraduate research supervision. The University continues a policy of contributing 50% to the registration costs of staff who undertake professionally-related research degrees at other universities: a practice it has maintained over the course of this REF period.

ⁱ <https://www.newman.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2018/02/Code-of-Practice-for-Research.pdf>.