

Institution: Plymouth Marjon University**1. Context and mission**

1. *Size and structure:* Plymouth Marjon is a small, values-based university with a 180-year heritage of social justice and transformative education. We focus on the holistic development of our students; academically, socially and spiritually. We have a significant positive trajectory of research excellence aligned to our values of curiosity, ambition, humanity, and independence. Recognising our history and size we are a member of Cathedrals Group and Guild HE.
2. *History and mission:* Our first students arrived in 1840 (St John's, Battersea) and 1841 (St Mark's, Chelsea) at our founding colleges. The fundamental belief of the transformative power of education for all with capability that inspired our inception remains just as important at Marjon today. Marjon was ranked first in England for teaching quality for two consecutive years and in the top ten for student experience and social mobility (Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019 and 2020). Geographically we relocated to a purpose-built campus, in Plymouth in 1973, which continues to provide excellent space for teaching and research.
3. *TDAP and RDAP:* In 1991 we became affiliated to the University of Exeter to run accredited undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including PGR which led to 29 PhD completions. We received TDAP and university college status in 2007 and university title in 2013. A partnership with the University of Chichester for PGR degree accreditation commenced in 2015 as we work towards achieving our own RDAP.
4. *Strategy and institutional focus:* The ambition to grow research at Marjon was identified in the strategic plan launched in 2014 and was reinforced in the Marjon Growth Plan 2017-2025. The Marjon Growth Plan identifies submission to REF2021 and achieving RDAP as key strategic priorities, alongside better embedding and formalising our research impact and civic engagement. The vision has been to build research excellence and establish a vibrant research culture from our base of teaching excellence, ensuring academic provision is research informed and nurtures curiosity.
5. *Disciplinary spread and maturity:* The 180-year history of teacher training provides our longest standing academic discipline of Education (UoA 23 submission). The underpinning knowledge base in physical education and green space for sports on the Plymouth campus meant Marjon quickly established a strong base for sport and outdoor education which evolved with the knowledge base of sport as an academic subject (UoA24 Sport submission). There is burgeoning research excellence in allied health, performing arts, business and social sciences which we anticipate being sufficiently mature to feature in future research assessment exercises.
6. *Local economic and demographic context:* Plymouth, known as the Ocean City, ranks as the 50th most deprived upper-tier local authority in England. Employment, education and health are prevalent barriers to Plymouth residents. Marjon sits within the Heart of the Southwest LEP where spend on research and development (<1%) is below the 2.4% of GDP target. Key features of the local and regional strategies include sustainability and green growth, digital development and wellbeing and these align to our research expertise and ambitions for Marjon. Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall also have lower levels of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading, writing and maths compared to England at key stage 2 (9% vs 11%) and lower proportion of pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs (38% to 42% vs 43%). Marjon staff and students contribute to delivery of local and regional strategies in several ways including through our inclusive education provision; acting as a community venue for sport, wellbeing and culture; building partnerships for research and knowledge exchange and through our research excellence related to themes such as lifelong wellbeing and professional practice and policy (see UoA23 and UoA24 REF 5b).

2. Strategy

7. *Achievement of strategic goals during assessment period:* The Research Strategy (2015-2024) focused on maximising original rigorous research alongside ensuring research provides social and economic impact. A significant positive trajectory is evident when reviewing progress against the five key strategic drivers of the 2015 strategy (see 7a to 7e).
- a. *To establish a reputation for research excellence in a subset of existing and emerging niche academic areas.* The submission of 24.5 fte to two UoAs reflects 43% of REF eligible staff within those subjects and demonstrates transformational progress in research excellence in these established disciplines. Esteem indicators, including invited keynote lectures, International partnerships and editorial positions have also burgeoned (see UoA23 and UoA24 REF5b). There has been a tenfold increase in research income (see paragraph 23). We have approved exemptions from four UoAs as small units and have utilised the cross-referral process signalling the growing success of more emergent research areas (e.g., 14% of outputs submitted to UoA24 are cross-referred to UoA3).
 - b. *To increase and continually improve research outputs in both number and quality.* Marjon research repository has 531 outputs deposited in the REF assessment period which equates to 7 outputs per REF eligible staff member or 19 outputs per staff member with a significant responsibility for research (SRR) evidencing high productivity of staff. The positive trajectory in research capacity is demonstrated by a twofold increase in outputs per annum from the start to end of the assessment period (e.g., 2013-2015, 44 outputs p.a. versus 2016-2020, 82 outputs p.a.). Two thirds of journal article outputs in the REF output pool were published in high quality Q1 journals and a rigorous internal & external review process of the REF output pool identified 75% of outputs were at least Internationally recognised, 25% at least internationally excellent with 10% as world leading quality.
 - c. *To achieve maximal societal impact for our research.* Our value of humanity, or making a difference to individuals and society, is integral to our applied research. The impact case studies submitted for this REF reflect longer standing activities for instance; i) the health and wellbeing clinics which run on campus and have supported 1400+ participants to enhance quality of life, ii) our research on educational isolation which has influenced policy and practice to improve life chances of young people (see UoA23 and UoA24 REF3). Many emergent projects will have matured by the next research assessment, for instance our research on the Plymouth Oracy which has improved pupil attendance, enhanced pupil confidence, and social emotional wellbeing.
 - d. *To develop an enviable network of external collaboration.* 80% of the outputs in the output pool are co-authored with external contributors from UK and International HEIs alongside partners outside academia. Collaborations were strategically supported by investment in 2017 through Mayflower PhD bursaries which partnered with external organisations (£390k investment). Our research environment is supported by a network of visiting fellows and professors (n=18) and external PGR supervisors (n=8) strategically aligned to our research excellence to enhance our exciting positive trajectory.
 - e. *To become a supportive generator of and magnet for world-class researchers.* A strategic investment was highlighted in 2015 to recruit and attract high quality researchers which has led to improvements in the research environment. There was significant investment made in recruiting research active leaders to support the research environment and currently the staffing base comprises eight professors (Bloxham, Cotton, Dawson, Hyland, Jones, Luke, Ovenden-Hope, Shum) and four associate professors (Cooper, Gibson, Leather, Ord). In relation to gender equality, it is worth noting 50% of the professors are female.

8. *Next five years:* The revised research strategy, 'Building Knowledge Together' (2020-2025) aims to support a culture at Marjon that aligns to our values and which ensures research and knowledge exchange are expected, supported, valued and celebrated. The four strategic headlines each have specific key performance indicators and in brief are:
 - a. Humanity, building knowledge capacity inclusively across our community including students and the public, built on trust and integrity.
 - b. Ambition, working in partnership to empower our community to be the best we can be, enhance decision making and promote our knowledge capacity.
 - c. Curiosity, stimulating debate and discussion to develop questions, establish new insights and encourage innovation.
 - d. Independence, exploring what we can contribute individually and in partnership, appreciating we can all make a difference in the world.
9. *Enabling impact and wider contribution to economy and society:* The central tenet of our revised strategy is to ensure our research reflects societal and place-based challenges and that we engage all our community, including students, staff, alumni, public, key stakeholders and peers to co-create knowledge and ensure it is shared in meaningful ways. The strategic approach to enabling impact includes raising awareness, embedding impact into the life cycle of research projects, providing resources, rewarding success, and monitoring activity. For example; i) research impact workshops form part of our researcher development series and in March 2018 we hosted a 'Research, Impact and the UK Parliament' event led by the UK Parliament Education & Engagement Service, ii) our academic promotion and career development framework recognises impact within criteria (see paragraph 17), and iii) we have appointed two research impact officers. This strategic approach recognises our inherent strengths and values base, in that community and stakeholder engagement is a pathway to impact.
10. *Research infrastructure:* Marjon developed a central research and knowledge exchange office (2.4 fte) in 2018, overseen by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, to support the research environment. Overall, £1.29 investment has been made to support the research environment (see paragraph 23) despite Marjon receiving minimal QR funding to date. There is an ambition to enhance research infrastructure as an outcome of this submission.
11. *Interdisciplinary research:* The formation of new research and knowledge exchange groups, involving partners from outside academia, aim to strategically enhance the opportunity for interdisciplinary research. Four groups were formed a) Context, Agency, Place and Education, b) Sustainability, Creativity and Innovation, c) Lifelong Health and Wellbeing and d) Resilience and Human Performance, each with a professor as a strategic lead and emerging researchers as co-convenors. This development is in line with the 2020-2025 Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy, and the groups will sustain the continued positive trajectory of the research environment including attracting talented early career researchers (ECRs), supporting PGR students, and competitively bidding for research funding.
12. *Open research and research integrity:* Marjon is committed to the principles of open access for research data and research outputs, recognising the benefits to the public and wider academic community. Marjon subscribe to the GuildHE open access repository and outputs are uploaded by a repository librarian; 60% of outputs in the REF assessment period are freely accessible within publisher stipulations. We are working towards the ambitions in the concordat on open research data and are exploring open data repositories. In line with our values, we are committed to ensure all research is conducted with the highest standards of rigour and integrity. We have a Research Code of Conduct to reflect our commitments and

report annually on our progress against the commitments in the concordat to support research integrity. Our research ethics committee, researcher development aligned to ethics and integrity, membership of research groups to ensure we share and meet best practice, values-based leadership framework and clear responsibilities related to concerns about integrity actively demonstrate how we meet these commitments.

3. People

13. *Marjon people strategy*: Marjon People strategy is centred on progressing a university wide community of success to enable growth and transformation. Our people centred approach, aligned to our values, contribute to 94% of staff feeling Marjon is a good place to work and 93% feeling proud to work with us (2018 staff survey). Several policies support staff including a flexible working policy and Marjon balance programme (staff wellbeing). Most academic staff are on contracts that include both teaching and research (82% vs 45% sector average) and 75% of academic staff at Marjon are on permanent/open-ended contracts (vs 66% sector average).
14. *Research leadership*: Plymouth Marjon has invested significantly in leadership and infrastructure for research with the deputy vice-chancellor as the most senior university officer. Research activities are coordinated at Institutional level and are supported by a recently formed research and knowledge exchange office. Research leadership is supported through academic roles with time allocation (1.8 fte) to REF UoA leads, strategic leads for interdisciplinary research groups and PGR coordinators for research environment areas. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee support decision making and ensuring a supportive and progressive research environment.
15. *Staffing strategy*: The staffing profile has evolved in line with the strategy and by 2022 we are on target to exceed 50% of academic staff with a doctorate (25% increase during REF assessment period to 40% from 32%). Successful approaches enabling this transition include: i) recruiting and retaining ECRs, 78% of staff submitted are entering their first research assessment, ii) recruiting professors and research leaders keen to mentor PGRs, ECRs and emerging researchers (see paragraph 7e), and iii) supporting existing academic staff to engage in research and complete doctoral study, 9% of current academic staff are engaged in doctoral study.
16. *Staff development*: All staff engage in an annual Performance Development Review (PDR) which includes research objectives and alignment to the values framework, with managers also participating in 360 feedback. These practices support a collegiate environment with rigour and integrity. An internal research programme and external events including conferences support staff development, e.g., in 2018-2019 one third of academic staff were supported to attend a conference. The research and knowledge exchange office support a research seminar series, academy lectures, researcher development series and writing retreats to promote a vibrant research culture. Recent initiatives, like writing retreats, have been particularly valued by females (76% of attendees), early career researchers submitting to their first REF (48% of attendees) and PGR students (40% of attendees), supporting our inclusive approach.
17. *Career Development*: Marjon recognises the importance of a highly skilled and committed academic workforce and have agreed to the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. During the REF assessment two key policies supporting this ambition have been implemented.
 - a. The Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure provides promotion opportunity, including a research pathway, to recognise and reward staff. We do not use research-based metrics or thresholds in keeping with [DORA](#). During the REF assessment period, 20% of staff submitted have been successfully internally promoted to associate professor or professor with evidence of significant and sustained achievement in research.

- b. The Academic Contribution Framework facilitates a fair and consistent approach to determining academic contribution; within this framework all academic staff are provided with time allocated to their academic development pathway (12% of time) with additional time for research leadership (up to 20% of time), professors and associate professors (8% of time), doctoral supervision and funded research projects.
18. *Research supervision and students:* During 2019-20 41% of REF eligible staff members were current or potential supervisors for PGR provision, 27% of REF eligible staff were supervising PGR students at Marjon or externally and 13% of REF eligible staff were primary supervisors (with PhD completions). The number of primary supervisors will grow by 40% over the next 12-18 months as the investment in Mayflower bursaries results in successful completions. Following the successful accreditation agreement in 2015 with the University of Chichester we have grown the number of PGR students to 29 (18 FT, 11 PT, 1/10/20) although this has not matured to PGR completions during the assessment period. The PGR students support our upwards trajectory through contributing to seminar and researcher development series and co-authoring research outputs. Our PRES data reinforce the partnership we have with PGR students, for instance in 2019-20, we were in the top quartile for Institutions in terms of valuing and responding to feedback. PGR students benefit from a generous development budget of £600 for full-time and £300 for part-time student p.a. to be utilised on researcher development aligned to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. In 2018-19, for example, this resulted in 67% of PGR students reporting they had opportunity to present a poster or paper at an academic conference which is above all benchmark responses to PRES.
19. *Equality and diversity:* As a values-based employer, Marjon is committed to providing a fair environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We have held Investors in People status 2000-2020, have been awarded the Disability Confident employer standard and recognition for our role as a Stonewall Diversity Champion. Marjon is aiming to eradicate the institutional Gender Pay Gap, which at 4.1% mean and 2.8% median (2018) compares positively with a national Gender Pay Gap in higher education (15.9%) and we are actively adopting the Athena Swan principles within our policies, action plans and culture. Our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee considers the equality and diversity of the University's culture and environment for work and study; advises on the development of policies, procedures and practices directly relating to equality and diversity; monitors statistics and data that evidence the University's compliance with its regulatory duties as a public-sector organisation; and promotes greater awareness of equality and diversity policies to ensure continuous improvement in University performance. Marjon has recently established 'Marjon Connect' which is an umbrella brand for various networks across the University, including an early career network and a women's network.
20. *Equality and diversity and REF2021:* The defined process in the approved code of practice resulted in 37% of REF eligible staff with SRR. Of staff with SRR; 55% identified as female which is lower than 64% of the female REF eligible academic population, 7% were from an ethnic minority which is above 2% of our REF eligible academic workforce from an ethnic minority, 12% had a declared disability which is higher than the REF eligible academic population with 9% declared disabilities and 5% identified as LGBTQ which is higher than the overall 2% of our academic workforce who declare as LGBTQ. The REF staff circumstances forms were all from female staff. The continued work embedding Athena Swan principles, revised Academic Contribution Framework governance and engagement with Advanced HE Aurora Women's Leadership Development programme will deliberately target promotion of research opportunities for female members of staff. There is some evidence of this activity starting to improve gender equity, for instance in the 20-21 academic promotion round two female academics, who had engaged with the Aurora programme, were appointed promoted to associate professor. Overall, it does seem the processes were equitable and resulted in a submission reflective of the REF eligible academic community.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities

21. *Research income:* During the REF assessment period Marjon has generated £1.5 million in competitively sourced research income from UKRI councils, UK based charities, UK industry and EU government bodies. There has been a ten-fold growth in successfully bidding for competitive grant income since the launch of the research strategy in 2015 (e.g., 2013-2015 average income £28k per annum, since 2015 average income £289 k per annum). The income has mainly been linked to Sport Science or Education which is consistent with the research strategy during the assessment period which identified establishing research excellence in a subset of existing academic areas. We are currently engaged in a range of ongoing competitively funded research projects evidencing the sustainability of our approach. Aligned to our Sustainability, Creativity and Innovation research group we are in the second year of a three-year project with a total partner award value of 572k euros for an EU funded Inter-Reg 2 Seas project exploring the reduction of food waste. We are also in the first year of a two-year project exploring student led knowledge exchange jointly funded for £250k by the Office for Students and Research England which is a cross-unit project.
22. *Other research and knowledge exchange income:* Alongside the competitively funded grant income reported in official figures we engage with other funded research activities in partnership with those outside of Higher Education. Examples of activities which support our research, enable the impact of our research but also generate income include i) Marjon Health and Wellbeing clinics (e.g., 2018-2019 £70k income) and ii) teacher recruitment and retainment projects (e.g., 2017-2018 £22k income). These types of activities reflect our new strategy of working in partnership, to co-create knowledge and positively impact on our place.
23. *Marjon research investment:* The income from external sources that have developed our vibrant research environment of International reach has been supported by internal strategic investment by the University (£1.29 million), despite the absence of mainstream QR funding. During the REF assessment period this has included significant investment in central research leadership and administration including the formation of the research and knowledge exchange office (£748k), PhD bursaries (£390k) and access to a range of research support services (£158k, see paragraph 24). Moving forwards, we expect to continue to generate external competitive grant income while also enabling more initiatives (e.g., seed-corn funding to pump prime projects and support larger grant submissions) from the resultant QR funding. Internal funding streams will be operationalised through the new research and knowledge exchange groups to ensure they align to our Institutional focus supporting sustainability and the vitality of our research excellence and will consider equality factors.
24. *Investment in research support:* Significant investment over the REF assessment period has been made to provide access to a range of research support services (£158k). This includes membership of and active participation in GuildHE Research and the Cathedrals Group Research and Enterprise sub-group and subscriptions to UKRIO, Vitae, UEA online modules, VV impact tracker and UKCGE. These research support services have supported our growing research excellence and ensure we can quickly transform to operate within best practice guidelines.
25. *Income strategy:* The success of competitive grant income has supported the development of Internationally excellent research whilst also increasing our Institutional capacity to bid for and manage grant income from both UK and EU funding bodies. We will encourage competitive grant income building on the success and expertise of staff now able to credibly work as principal investigators, especially related to regional and place-based challenges. Furthermore our 2020-2025 Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy highlights the importance of collaborative research bids so that we can grow our research capacity as part of large multi-centre trials.

26. *Facilities that support research:* The Marjon campus provides a good range of specialist facilities and resources to support research. For instance, over the REF assessment period, we have invested in updating our suite of BASES accredited sport and exercise science laboratories (£255k investment, see UoA24 REF 5b), The Edge enterprise and employability hub (£159k investment), bioscience and forensic laboratory space and equipment (£54k investment), The Workshop TV and Radio studios at the BBC site (£399k investment) and a range of spaces for school classroom replication, interviews, focus groups and other workshop activities. A lot of the research we engage in at Marjon does not require specialist facilities since it is applied to practice and aims to influence policy as opposed to basic science research. This type of research is facilitated through strong partnerships with a range of regional, National, and International partners (see paragraph 7d).
27. *Facilities that support PGR students:* A central PGR hub, which was renovated in 2018, provides an interactive coworking space, PC access and a meeting room for the primary use of PGR students. Marjon PGR students rate consistently rate facilities higher than average in the PRES survey (83% positive in 2019 and 85% positive in 2020). PGR students have good access to laboratories and other specialist facilities and can bid for research consumables to support the rigour of their research, while at the same time developing their bid writing skills. It is worth noting that during 2018-19 investment was made renovating The Oaks house on campus to provide bespoke post-graduate accommodation with flexible contracts that can work for PGR students and/or visiting researchers.
28. *Infrastructure and enablement of impact:* Research infrastructure is continuously developing at Marjon, with the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office forming the cornerstone of support for research, funding and facilitating impact. The strategy to enable impact is summarised in paragraph 9, and for instance has recently included strategic investment in research impact officer positions, specific research development workshops and tracking impact with vv impact tracker (£30k investment).