

# RESEARCH IMPACT STRATEGY 2022-28

The University of Reading is committed to achieving impact from its research through its Research and Innovation Strategy (2019) and the University's Strategic Plan (2020-26). This Impact Strategy supports those strategies and is an important component in their delivery.

The Impact Strategy contributes to the University's four Strategic Principles:

- bringing together our **communities** (staff and students) in common purpose
- using a problem-centred approach will ensure we become an **engaged university**
- by understanding the nature of the problems we will achieve **excellence** in our research through the purposeful knowledge we produce
- working together to make the best use of our resources and research we be able to tackle local and global **sustainability** in a meaningful way.

The world is facing complex and intractable problems ranging from climate change and food security to communicable and non-communicable diseases, refugee crises, migrations and cultural loss, and increasing social, economic and political inequalities. These problems play out at local, regional, national and international scales and require a range of diverse solutions from policymakers, practitioners and citizens to address them.

Curiosity-driven, 'blue-skies' research is highly valued at the University and there are many examples where such research has led to discoveries that have changed the ways we live. The University also actively seeks to foster research that intends to have an impact on the world around us and in doing so to improve the lives of people and their environments. The extent to which university research contributes to solving these challenges is the impact of our research.

## Why do we need an Impact Strategy?

Our Impact Strategy sets out how we will support research and researchers to improve the world around us, ensuring that the outcomes of our work are relevant to and benefit wider society. By doing engaged research that aims to have impact we can demonstrate how our research is relevant to people outside of the University, thereby engendering and maintaining public support for research.

Seeking to achieve impact is an important driver of research and helps convey the benefits of research to funders, government and the general public, helping to justify the investment of time and money in research activity. This Strategy will ensure that realising impact is embedded into our research culture, and that researchers are supported to work towards the widest possible reach and impact for their work.

## What do we want to do?

Research informed by, influenced by, or conducted in response to real-world problems produces powerful knowledge that can be shared through partnerships and engagement activities. Research outcomes that are adopted by end-users can help address the problem and bring about the changes needed to make a difference to those experiencing the original challenge, making a positive contribution to society and the economy. Research that initiates this change has achieved impact. Working to achieve impact we can develop strong partnerships with non-academic organisations, enriching the outcomes for both partners.

Through a positive research culture the University aims to support research that generates academic impact through to research that addresses societal, environmental, or commercial need and, by doing so, will facilitate people to work with others who have common aims and interests.

The aims of our Impact Strategy are to:

1. Systematically strengthen the impact of our research
2. Embed the generation of impact from research in our research culture.

Its primary objectives are to:

- Embed a challenge-centred approach at all levels of our work, enabling researchers across a wide range of disciplines to engage with solving real-world problems
- Create strong partnerships between academics, professional services and external partners to deliver the strategy
- Develop strong leadership in Research Divisions to maintain institutional oversight of the strategy, to evaluate the progress of activities and ensure that the different strands of activity contribute to a common goal
- Use the approach outlined in this Strategy as the basis for decisions on resource allocation, evaluation and metrics, delivery mechanisms, systems and data to support research impact.

### **Who is the Impact Strategy for?**

The Impact Strategy is relevant to everyone who is leading, conducting or supporting research, public engagement, policy engagement, knowledge exchange and commercial activity. The Strategy will support better recognition of those undertaking impact work and facilitate working together across academic disciplines and functions in pursuit of common goals.

As a result of the Strategy, all researchers will be supported to discover and achieve a range of impacts arising from their research. Researchers will be able to place their research into the context of wider challenges facing society and to consider the potential for impact from their research as part of the development of their research ideas and questions. This strategy enables people undertaking different types of activity, either alone or co-produced with partners, to work towards common goals and can benefit from collective action.

### **How will we support the Impact Strategy?**

Delivery of the Strategy will be driven by the researchers who are conducting the underpinning research. It will be supported by Research Division Leads, Impact Leads, Research Deans and staff in Research Services, the Library, Knowledge Transfer Centre, Research Communications and other professional services to ensure that a collaborative and flexible approach is adopted to enable impact to be fully developed.

A collective understanding of the real-world challenges that our research can address will be curated by working with academics, professional service staff and partners, to facilitate working together across boundaries to leverage maximum impact. Training and support will be provided to ensure that staff are equipped to engage with impact-generating activities, using public engagement, policy engagement, knowledge exchange and commercial activity as necessary, and that they have considered the steps needed to realise their planned impact, and are able to capture evidence to demonstrate the impact of their activity.

Implementation of the strategy will require contributions from a wide range of research leaders at University, Theme and Research Division level, from academics, professional services staff and, where appropriate, external stakeholders. Successful implementation of the strategy will be evaluated at all organisational levels to assess the effectiveness of the actions.

## **Delivery**

The Impact Strategy builds on past investment made by the University through the Building Outstanding Impact Support Programme which ran from 2017 to 2021. It will be delivered using a flexible framework that enables individual researchers, Research Divisions and Themes to identify and 'own' impact activity within their areas, and it will provide support for researchers to explore and engage with ways of achieving impact.

To ensure that progress is maintained, and to provide points to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategy, delivery will be divided into four interdependent areas:

- a) Identifying the key challenges and problems our research can address and defining pathways to impact
- b) Nurturing a healthy impact pipeline and supporting individual researchers and projects in their impact work
- c) Building capacity and strengthening our impact culture
- d) Monitoring, evaluation and evidence.

### ***a) Identifying the key challenges and problems our research can address***

The initial stage will be co-development of a consultative and researcher-led approach for each Division. The approach will depend on the nature of the discipline and maturity of the impact culture with the Division. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that each Division will work to identify societal, economic or environmental challenges that align to the Division's research as part of its overall planning. The Research Division will action the approach, with support from professional services colleagues in Research Services, the Knowledge Transfer Centre and Research Communications team, via a series of workshops and/or meetings to understand the emerging research topics and questions and their linkages to the external challenges they seek to address.

Once these challenges have been identified, pathways to impact will be developed to identify the mechanisms by which research can be framed within non-academic contexts so that researchers undertaking a range of activities (e.g. public engagement, policy engagement, knowledge exchange, commercialisation) work to address the challenges.

### ***b) Nurturing a healthy impact pipeline***

Support for all aspects of research impact will be provided in the following ways:

- Continual engagement with researchers to increase their awareness and understanding of impact and how to achieve it, and to help researchers embark on this journey
- Supporting the activities of researchers who are working to understand the problems that policymakers, businesses, practitioners and the general public are experiencing
- Enabling researchers to conduct their research in response to an external problem
- Supporting researchers to work with external stakeholders and broaden the reach and significance of their impact
- Supporting researchers in the evaluation of the outcomes and impact of their work and in the collection of evidence for learning and future case studies.

The development and creation of impact to contribute to resolving the identified problems will involve researchers, or teams of researchers, working with policymakers, practitioners, businesses and the general public to create and mobilise knowledge. Funding for these activities will be provided from the Impact Development Fund and project support will be provided by relevant professional services teams. Robust impact plans for each project will be produced and regularly reviewed by the Impact Development Manager to monitor progress against milestones.

### ***c) Strengthening our impact culture***

We will work to create a culture that enables and promotes the achievement of impact. Priority areas include developing strong leadership for impact and providing training to develop skills. We will reward, recognise and promote those who demonstrate strong commitment to engagement and impact, and we will communicate, share and celebrate our activity and success. We will work with Heads of Schools to ensure that the efforts of researchers working on impact are appropriately recognised through workload allocation and through reward and promotion processes). The strategy will link into the work of Expectations and Workload pathway to devise indicators on impact projects and to provide information as part of data collection exercises.

### ***d) Monitoring, evaluation and evidence***

Each year we will regularly review progress against the research topics and challenges identified by Research Divisions to consider if they are being effectively addressed and we will consult with the identified stakeholders to document the changes arising from collaborative and individual action. This will provide evidence to underpin other exercises (e.g. REF case studies and environment statements).

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The delivery of the strategy requires contributions from a wide range of stakeholders. Key contributors include the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Innovation, the Research Deans, Research Division Leads and Impact Leads, individual researchers and the Impact Team. The Strategy sets out a framework that will enable 'bottom-up' ownership of impact, with topics and challenges defined according to the interests and expertise of individual researchers and facilitated collaboration between groups of researchers working within or across Research Divisions. The contributions listed below will vary over the different stages of the strategy and there is likely to be local variation of responsibilities to best fit different disciplines.

Anticipated responsibilities are:

- **Individual researchers:** Participate and engage with each stage of the Strategy (individually and collectively) to define areas that are important to them or their discipline and commit to actions which have the potential to lead to impact from their research.
- **Research Division Leads:** Engage with each successive stage of the Strategy and work to engage academic colleagues to achieve the objectives of each stage. RDLs are responsible for monitoring and ensuring the health of the impact pipeline and taking the necessary action to ensure it continues to develop. This will include some of the responsibilities from the current Impact Lead role which was developed under BOISP. In larger Schools, RDLs may wish to appoint Impact Champions for particular areas of focus who will work with the Impact team and RDLs to ensure the full breadth of impact can be realised.
- **Senior Impact Development Manager:** Facilitate support by managing the Impact Development Managers and ensuring appropriate liaison with other professional services. Plan activities for each of the stages and identify key milestones. Report on delivery of the Strategy and ensure later phases of the strategy are fully resourced, particularly in the run-up to the next REF exercise.
- **Impact Development Managers:** Ensure the success of the strategy by co-owning each of the respective stages alongside the relevant RDL. Supporting Research Divisions and teams to identify key areas, nurturing the approach co-developed by the Division. Provide a strategic steer and intelligence in addressing aggregated problems.

- **Research Development, Knowledge Transfer Centre, Research Communications:** Involved in early stages of the Strategy to help determine contribution in later phases. It may be that projects require further research and research funding or it could be they require some support for developing relationships with business. Until the initial phases of the strategy are in train, the extent of future involvement of these teams won't be clear.
- **Research Deans:** Provide Theme-level leadership as the strategy progresses through the stages and support cross-Theme working. Champion the strategy's approach. Use the strategy to set the agenda for particular Research Themes and impact projects and support requests for resource and support.
- **PVC-R&I:** Sponsor and resource the Impact Strategy and integrate it within the University's strategy and governance structures. Receive annual reports and hold the Strategy implementation to account. Responsibility may be delegated to a committee.

#### **Resource**

- **Impact Development fund:** A fund will be established to support the development of the Strategy and the associated impact projects. This will be supported by the RETF strategic fund.

*Anthony Atkin, Senior Impact Development Manager*

*Approved by University Committee for Research & Innovation, 1 March 2022*