UEL’s research strategy is bold and ambitious. It represents our goal to remain one of the leading modern research universities in the UK. We are committed to ensuring a vibrant research community not only at UEL, but within our local and international communities where UEL is truly making a recognised impact through its dynamic projects and world class researchers. We are the leading university in London for civic engagement and nowhere is this more evident or celebrated than in the research that defines and inspires us as an institution of higher education.

As you read through this research strategy that we will take forward over the next three years, you will see what UEL has planned to make a difference in society through the creation of knowledge and an agenda embedded in both critical and applied research.

Professor Nora Ann Colton
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Vision

By 2017 UEL aims to be a leading modern university for research, innovation and enterprise in the UK.

UEL is an innovative academic community, delivering high quality research that is impactful, intellectually stimulating, socially relevant and for public good. Our mission is to carry out research and enterprise to build a strong international reputation and collaborate with other educational establishments regionally, nationally and globally to develop high quality research that will benefit society and industry. The expertise of our academic staff is the core capital of our university and our research, innovation and enterprise are highly relevant to the cultural, social and economic growth that society needs. We value creativity and innovation in all our research. Research informs our teaching and underpins our understanding of the concerns of our students and their communities. We actively engage and stimulate our students, communities, businesses, and partners, to help them understand better their place within society and to embrace the importance of knowledge and academic discourse that has significant impact for society, culture, and economy. We are recognised by the academic and non-academic community throughout the world for our high-quality critical and applied research, and for our innovation and creativity. Our research institutes highlight our main inter-disciplinary strengths, our drive to deal with real-world issues, and show our strategic commitment to encouraging innovation within and between disciplines with our partners from across all sectors of society. The institutes help guide our current strategic vision and investment strategies. Our priorities are also articulated in our key strategic objectives.
Some of the exciting regional opportunities driving our strategy include: First for Sport; the Olympics and their legacy; East London economic development; and new business initiatives in east London. Some of the current national and international external drivers to our research strategy are: UK government, European and funding council priorities, the UK research evaluation framework (REF2014) and the impact agenda; UK Research concordats; the reform of the NHS and the new commissioning landscape; the recognition of national and international professional bodies; student satisfaction and employability; national and world university league tables; open access agendas; staff satisfaction; and equality of opportunities.

Recent drivers and emerging opportunities

Our approach is underpinned by six main objectives:

1. Supporting a sustainable, vital and ethical research environment
2. Establishing an international reputation for applied and critical research in core areas reflected by research output and external funding
3. Leading academic and business facing partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration
4. Producing applied and critical research in all Schools that has clear linkages to high quality enterprise and teaching activities that enhance our students’ employability
5. Maximising impact, commercialisation and dissemination
6. Developing and building capacity for applied and critical research through doctoral programmes and early career researcher initiatives in Schools with explicit linkages to research centres and institutes

1. Supporting a sustainable, vital, and ethical research environment

- Building existing areas of research excellence, identifying opportunities and investing in new areas with potential
- Fostering applied research which is understood broadly to encompass research that is original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding which can include the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances as well as the experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes
- Fostering critical research which is understood broadly to encompass work which is original in its contribution to developments in theory
- Ensuring research is sustained through external research grants and commercialisation
- Actively attracting, retaining and developing staff and increasing the proportion of staff engaged in high quality research
- Investing in research and dissemination infrastructure (labs, IT, exhibition spaces; etc)
- Removing barriers, providing efficient administrative support, and ensuring effective management
- Championing good practice, integrity and the highest ethical standards; embodied in effective governance systems, processes and practices, embracing the UK Concordat to support research integrity
2. Establishing an international reputation for critical and applied research

• Supporting Institutes, centres and groups in developing their international reputation for excellent applied and critical research measured in research outputs and external funding

• Leading the way in our disciplines and engaging our academic peers; increasing the recognition of UEL research as international and world-leading and opening access to our work

• Fostering world-wide academic networks; supporting overseas visits, sabbaticals and visiting experts

• Hosting and attending leading international research conferences, events and exhibitions and communicating our work effectively

• Supporting high quality critical and applied research from concept development, through to proof-of-concept and concept implementation (including commercialisation and ‘near market research’)
3. Leading academic, community and business partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration

- Establishing multi-centre collaborations with top universities nationally and around the world
- Aligning research institutes with our expertise; and with national and European funding priorities
- Developing a programme of events to showcase UEL's strengths in research, innovation and enterprise
- Creating new knowledge exchange opportunities and building the East London, regional and national knowledge economy

4. Producing high quality critical and applied research that has clear linkages to teaching activities that enhances our students employability

- Inspiring students through teaching activities that embed applied, critical and practical based research
- Ensuring teaching is delivered by knowledgeable academics aspiring to international research reputations; creating curricula that showcase and reflect our critical and applied research and practitioner expertise
- Providing the research, analytical, and enterprise skills that make our students distinctive and competitive in the employment market
- Being business-facing as a means of preparing our graduates for life beyond employment and enhancing career opportunities through active engagement in research, innovation and enterprise activities
- Embedding UG students in critical and applied research, providing experience of professional and commercial research through internships, placements, project supervision
5. Maximising impact, commercialisation and dissemination

- Communicating our research effectively and widely to all, giving clear messages about its public good and benefits. In line with the UK concordat for engaging the public with research
- Fostering a responsive culture, and adapting to opportunities and to immediate economic, social and political challenges
- Engaging with business and other non-academic partners to understand their needs and develop solutions that help them prosper and demonstrate economic value
- Driving economic benefit through innovation, enterprise and consultancy (e.g. spin out companies; patents etc.)
- Working with external partners to identify employers’ needs; creating placement and employment opportunities for our students
- Implementing policies to promote and develop public engagement and entrepreneurship
6. Developing and building capacity for critical and applied research development programmes

- Enacting the UK Concordat to support the career development of researchers and develop careers through research mentoring and training from doctoral student to professor; ensuring professional ethical standards and integrity; and enabling researchers to achieve their personal research goals

- Giving expert support and professional training so that our PG students and ECRs have the right skills and expertise to embark on a successful career in research in line with UK Concordats

- Providing high quality postgraduate supervision; engaging PGRs in world-wide networks and exposure to good practice

- Providing a vital, creative and supportive postgraduate community, reflected in high levels of PGR student satisfaction

- Supporting bursaries for full-time research studentships in critical and applied research areas
For context, below are key university initiatives mapped onto these key objectives from 2010-2013 and planned (2014-2017)

A sustainable research environment
- The creation of the Research Development Service (ReDs)
- Strategically deploying our QR income to our research institutes, centres and academic schools
- Schools and centres that create synergies and align our work to reflect emerging academic and economic drivers
- Seed corn funding in support of targeted grants
- Increase in funding bids and funding attained through a focus on STEM areas and applied research across the university through multidisciplinary teams

Establishing an international reputation for critical and applied research in core areas reflected by research output and external funding
- Establishment of the Research Investment Fund
- Large-scale long-term injection of talent focussed on our established or emerging research strengths
- Supporting research which engages with teaching and learning in higher education, in widening participation in HE and in lifelong learning
- Institution-wide sabbaticals for academic staff that will grow our research culture through sabbatical projects that feedback into the University

Leading academic partnerships and community and business partnerships and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Support for mid-career academics through a release time grant and mentoring programme to assist these individuals in re-engaging with their research areas through publications and grant capture
- Supporting researchers who forge partnerships with other organisations that enable implementation-oriented work to be undertaken for initial concept development projects

Producing critical and applied research that has clear linkages to high quality teaching activities that enhances our students employability
- Support for undergraduate and postgraduate research interns that are mentored to engage in theoretical and applied research and that build community and business networks and connections
- Creating a research enterprise and innovation culture at UEL that promotes students’ learning and employability
- Ensuring that teaching is research led through peer to peer teaching observation and promotion routes
- Identifying learning processes which can inform the curriculum and support learners in developing attributes of entrepreneurial and innovative thinking

Maximising Impact, commercialisation and dissemination
- Creation of a dedicated Research, Enterprise and Innovation Unit
- Open Access for dissemination of research output
- Development and support for an impact strategy
- Development of a commercialisation panel and process

Developing and building capacity for critical and applied research through doctoral and early career researchers’ programmes with explicit linkages to research centres and institutes
- Appointment of VC Research Fellows
- Financial start-up and capacity building support for ECRs and promising researchers
- Piloting of the new research data support service (ISS)
- Participation in the Athena Swan initiative
- Funded bursaries for a select group of doctoral candidates
- Stronger emphasis on recruiting academic staff that contribute to applied research particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

Support for conferences attendance and organisation
- Support for International research collaboration through a travel bursary scheme tied to grant and project development
- CPD and knowledge exchange to establish a local, national and international reputation for excellence in knowledge transfer and to significantly grow external funding relating to such activities
- Creating a ‘one-stop-shop’ enterprise and innovation hub for commercial activity by providing support to academic staff and students on commercial matters, IP management; contracts management; marketing and start-up

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