

Executive summary

This strategy provides a vision for the nature of UCL's research over the next ten years. We seek to build upon the radical tradition – of innovation, accessibility and relevance – established by our founders and embodied by successive generations. We assert an adaptable framework through which we can sustain and add value to the expertise of our researchers, thereby discharging UCL's responsibilities to the people of the world and its future generations, as well as our debt to our visionary predecessors. We define a series of mechanisms through which UCL research can fulfil its potential.

What we seek to do

UCL is committed to using its position and unique set of strengths to develop and disseminate original knowledge, not only for its own inherent value but also to address the significant challenges facing the world today and those that will arise in the future. Our capacity to do so depends on our continued and expanded ability to fulfil this strategy's three aims: to inspire and empower research leadership; to cross boundaries to increase engagement; and to deliver impact for public benefit. UCL is uniquely placed to fulfil these aims, given the breadth of our research activity, our commitment to challenging orthodoxy and conventional wisdom, our rich culture of collaborating across disciplinary borders and beyond, and our enthusiasm for harnessing the value of our research to advance and enrich society.

We want to stimulate disruptive thinking across and beyond our university to transform knowledge and understanding, and to tackle complex societal problems. We wish to help to enable society not only to survive to the next century – an urgent challenge requiring unprecedented collective action and partnership – but also to thrive, so that the lives of future generations are worth living: prosperous, secure, engaged, empowered, fair, healthy, stimulating and fulfilling.

As a community of scholars and those who support them, we must each focus our efforts, based on our founding values and driven by our intellectual curiosity, to be a force for positive social change. The role of our university is to understand society in order to transform it, in particular increasing society's fairness and resilience.

This strategy seeks to enable and empower all our researchers to thrive as research leaders, providing opportunities for engagement and impact, while ensuring that they retain the freedom to steer their own course, experiment and develop in unique ways. We see this as crucial in order to maintain the richness and diversity of research at UCL.

Our aims

The three aims of this strategy describe our aspirations relating to research leadership, crossing boundaries and delivering public benefit.

Aim 1 – Inspire and empower research leadership: More than anything, our individual and collective research leadership underpins the contributions that we can make to humanity. We seek to identify, attract, inspire and empower those who demonstrate – or show their potential to develop – research leadership, regardless of their background. Leadership is exemplified in diverse ways, by researchers at all career levels. Research leaders advance their field, develop novel lines of enquiry, support and mentor their colleagues, and are engaged with the research community (within and beyond their discipline) and the wider world.

Our objectives

- 1.1 Support breadth and diversity
- 1.2 Nurture, develop and celebrate those engaged with research
- 1.3 Cultivate diverse forms of research leadership

Aim 2 – Cross boundaries to increase engagement: Rarely can the most interesting questions or the most significant societal challenges be adequately addressed by one discipline, one university or one sector alone. While disciplinary excellence is at the heart of everything that we do, to amplify and inform our research we need to cross conventional, but often artificial, boundaries – between disciplines, between communities (disciplinary, academic and otherwise) and between different kinds of activity – in order to increase mutual knowledge and engagement, and develop co-design and co-production approaches to research and complex societal problems.

Our objectives

- 2.1 Champion cross-disciplinarity
- 2.2 Build and support partnerships
- 2.3 Encourage our research to thrive beyond traditional boundaries

Aim 3 – Deliver impact for public benefit: We consider the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake to be a fundamental good and the basis of all our research impact. We also seek to maximise the public benefit resulting from our research, including by furthering academic disciplines and scholarship, enhancing our cultural contribution and engaging in public discourse, growing national and global prosperity, providing policy advice, informing professional practice, contributing to positive environmental change, and improving health and wellbeing. We will support activity of these kinds and the myriad other ways in which our research can deliver public value.

Our objectives

- 3.1 – Champion a broad definition of research impact
- 3.2 – Foster open and engaged research
- 3.3 – Stimulate societal impact through cross-disciplinarity and collaboration

Our cross-cutting themes

Our three aims describe what we are seeking to do. Each is reinforced by our three cross-cutting themes, which draw on our founding principles and current capability, and characterise how we will advance those aims through responsible research, our institutional influence and a global perspective.

Cross-Cutting Theme A – Pursue a responsible research agenda: *UCL 2034* states that we will ensure that our “research and education are rooted in our ethical principles”. The key elements of this are: understanding the distinctive role (and limitations) of the university in advancing knowledge and enquiry; nurturing cultures of integrity in all our research activities, and supporting rising standards across all fields; leading in ethical consideration of research and its applications; engaging with those who will be affected by our research activity; minimising the negative environmental impact of research; and enhancing the public benefit derived from research.

Cross-Cutting Theme B – Exert our institutional influence for the greater good: The growth in UCL’s size, breadth, impact and reputation in recent decades presents us with both opportunities and – drawn from our founding values – obligations. We have considerable potential to help shape the environment in which academic endeavour takes place, to influence others’ thinking and to advocate rational, evidence-based and inclusive decision-making.

Cross-Cutting Theme C – Maintain a global perspective: As London’s Global University, we will marshal our collective expertise to: extend our local and global knowledge in order to increase our cultural sensitivity, make us better partners and increase the ‘grassroots’ relevance of our research; support the growth of independent research capability globally, and facilitate partnership working at all levels; help our students to bring their research-based education to bear on their global careers and lives; and deliver impact to address global problems.