

ual:

2023-2028

# Research strategy

Changing the world through  
our creative endeavour

camberwell college of arts | central saint martins | chelsea college of arts | london college of communication | london college of fashion | wimbledon college of arts



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# Introduction

This year, the University of the Arts London (UAL) launched its new strategy, ‘The World Needs Creativity’<sup>1</sup>, which sets out our ambitions for the next decade. The strategy has three guiding policies: ‘to give our students the education they need to flourish in a changing world’, ‘to bring a high-quality creative education to more students than ever before’, and ‘to change the world through our creative endeavour’.

Our third guiding policy is directly addressed by this strategy.

Our knowledge and research are at the core of our approach to changing the world for the better. It is the way we expand the borders of knowledge and creative practice, how we enhance the way we teach our students, how we identify and address some of the world’s biggest problems, such as climate change and social injustice, and how we support the growth of the creative sector and economy.

We have already been rewarded for our successes in research. In 2021, our University scored highly on the Research Excellence Framework for Art and Design: History, Theory & Practice. As we celebrate and build on this, we believe there is still more we can do. For this reason, across the summer of 2022, we convened a series of workshops with UAL staff and students to discuss how.

These conversations assessed our current strengths, including our strong relationships and connections with people and institutions outside the University, the distinctiveness of our creative practice, and our status as a world-leading institution. These conversations also sought to identify how we build a stronger research culture at UAL and how we increase the quality and impact of our research beyond the University.

From these conversations, we identified new objectives for our research, along with the specific policies that would be required to fulfil them. Those objectives and policies shape the Research Strategy document that follows. Achieving these ambitions will help us realise the central aim of our strategy: becoming a University governed by social purpose.

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# The strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to address the third vision statement – “changing the world through our creative<sup>1</sup> endeavour” – of the University of the Arts London’s main strategy, “The World Needs Creativity”. Our current research spans Art, Architecture, Communication, Computing, Culture, Design, Education, Fashion, Media, Music, Performance, Photography, Screen.

To do so, we identified four objectives:

## Objective 1

### Nurturing a world-leading research environment

## Objective 2

### Demonstrating the value of creativity to society

## Objective 3

### Using our strengths to tackle societal challenges

## Objective 4

### Enhancing the quality of our teaching through research

For each of these objectives, we outline the current state of play, our vision – the future we would like to see – and the specific policies that will realise it.

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<sup>1</sup> We understand that creativity can have various definitions dependent on context. For the purpose of this strategy, creativity is defined as the artistic expression and/or practice that connects and communicates seemingly disparate concepts in an original, innovative and valuable way.

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## Objective 1

# Nurturing a world-leading research environment

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# Nurturing a world-leading research environment

## The state of play

In 2021, the Research Excellence Framework scored UAL highly for the unit Art and Design: History, Theory & Practice. Research is one of our greatest strengths, in the way that it both informs and evolves from our practice, as well as through traditional modes of scholarship. Our strength lies in the people who work here and the connections they have forged with individuals and institutions beyond UAL.

## The vision

A stronger research culture means nurturing researchers with targeted measures of support for every stage of their research career. We want a culture that supports new ways of thinking about core subject areas through cross-disciplinary collaboration. Postgraduate research students will be given the support they need to contribute. In doing so we will increase informal networks of collaboration and attract more researchers to our community. We will also expand beyond our current research disciplines<sup>2</sup> into strategically valuable areas where critical mass can be achieved. Expansion will provide us with epistemic diversity, strengthening our interdisciplinary context, and supporting innovation in creative research across disciplines. We are also investing in a new Social Purpose function, which will provide policy and impact support to our researchers and use internal change to build evidence and leadership in our sectors. These changes will ensure we can translate our insights into real world impact.

Objective one is a key enabling priority for the Research Strategy, vital to the delivery of all objectives, and the development of a culture and environment in which research thrives.

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<sup>2</sup> Art, Architecture, Communication, Computing, Culture, Design, Education, Fashion, Media, Music, Performance, Photography, Screen.

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## To achieve this, we will

- Enhance our capabilities with development and training to support staff at all stages of their research careers.
- Increase our research capacity by doubling the number of academic staff with PhDs within five years as well as supporting staff onto the research pathway.
- Further expand our research efforts beyond existing disciplines to support inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research and innovation.
- Foster and support a research culture in which knowledge is widely shared, informed by the principle that research should be as open as possible, ‘Open Research’<sup>3</sup>.
- Establish a Doctoral School as a focal point for PGR advocacy and support.
- Grow our external research income by 100% to enable sustainable growth.

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<sup>3</sup> Open Research – making publications and other forms of outputs freely available online (open access), in addition to the underlying research data (open data).

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## Objective 2

# Demonstrating and improving the value of creativity to society

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# Demonstrating and improving the value of creativity to society

## The state of play

We argue that creativity is core to a flourishing and equitable society and have an ambition to support the growth of the creative sector and the creative economy. We work within the wider creative industries and contribute to their powerful collective voice and impact.

## The vision

We believe that, through our research, we can do even more. We want to become greater advocates for the power of creativity to improve people's lives. We will leverage our research, public and community engagement, and other forms of research-linked knowledge exchange to champion the transformative potential of creativity. We also want to collaborate with people in society beyond art and design, from policymakers to scientists, so that our research is shared more widely, and its insights applied.

## To achieve this, we will

- Ensure our stories, analysis and insights reach a wider global audience to inform and shape the policy environment for the future of the creative sectors, including their diversity and sustainability.
- Promote and champion our research in all its forms, including practice-based research.
- Further engage with local communities, industry partners and other universities to deliver research-driven knowledge exchange, working to develop the evidence base for these activities and their impact.
- Undertake research that supports, grows, and advocates for the role of the creative economy and creative participation.
- Provide systematic evidence about the impact of our research on societal issues.



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# Objective 3

## Using our strengths to tackle societal challenges

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# Using our strengths to tackle societal challenges

## The state of play

Creativity can help address some of the world's biggest problems. As a university, we have identified causes where we believe creativity can make an important difference, including, but not limited to, social inclusion, climate crisis and racial injustice. For the latter two areas, we released specific strategies in 2022. This year we are co-creating a Social Purpose Strategy that will enable us to set priorities in line with our values. This is crucial to becoming a university governed, above all, by social purpose. Through research, we can be a galvanising force for change.

Success will need sustainable growth of research income underpinned by external investment in strategic and collaborative partnerships with those who share our ambitions in these areas. We will develop world-leading physical and digital infrastructure, and we will work in partnership to advocate for policy change at the national and global level. We will be a leader in tackling societal challenges through our creative research, and as evidence for this, we will create a better evaluation culture across our disciplines, which will strengthen our ability to show how we are solving societal problems.

## The vision

To address societal challenges by galvanising our efforts where we have critical mass to deliver impactful change, leveraging our reputation and partnerships. We will prioritise areas that cut across the intersections of the societal challenges we want to address, bringing people together, between disciplines and across sectors.

## To achieve this, we will

- Focus on areas that allow impactful outcomes in addressing societal challenges.
- Grow capacity by identifying and investing in emerging strategic areas, ensuring our skills and infrastructure are ready for the future.
- Develop and support inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary approaches to address societal challenges aligned with our priorities, delivering demonstrable impact.
- Develop tools to better encourage impact evaluation across our disciplines, including by evaluating our own activities.

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# Objective 4

## Enhancing the quality of our teaching through research

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# Enhancing the quality of our teaching through research

## The state of play

Research at UAL informs the way we teach our students and enhances our pedagogy, particularly in the way that so much of our teaching is developed through practice-based methods. We can do more to support this, and to support more staff to become researchers. Our strategy will ensure that more of our research feeds into both our teaching and pedagogy, changing the way our students learn for the better. We have already committed to doing more with our Climate Action Plan, for instance, including a pledge to teach students to develop sustainable practices and business models.

## The vision

There is an opportunity to make research a much bigger part of our educational remit. This requires us to discover innovative ways to enhance our teaching practice and to embed research into our teaching curriculum. We want to do more to strengthen the alignment between teaching and research because exposure to new knowledge at the edge of our disciplines is foundational to our world-class creative education.

## To achieve this, we will

- Support a culture of critical analysis including through practice-based and creative pedagogy.
- Provide staff development on how to develop a research-informed, and research-led, teaching practice.
- Evidence the impact of our research across the curriculum.
- Increase opportunities for students to engage with our researchers in structured ways.
- Ensure research alignment with current UAL programmes, informing ongoing curriculum design.

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# Conclusion

This Research Strategy document sets out how we fulfil the third guiding policy, 'Changing the world through our creative endeavour', of our main University strategy, 'The World Needs Creativity'. What began as a series of conversations with UAL staff and students has evolved into a document that outlines how we will improve research at our institution.

To do so, we will focus on four objectives: to nurture a stronger research culture, evidence the value of creativity to society, tackle societal challenges, and enhance the quality of our teaching through research. If we achieve these four objectives, we will not only improve our University, but make a greater difference to the world.

A University which changes the world through our analysis, knowledge and creativity, is a University we all want to see: one governed, above all, by delivering on our social purpose.

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