

Research Culture and Environment Self-Assessment

Context

Excellent research depends on, and is enabled by, an excellent research culture and environment. In 2024, the University launched its [Research Culture and Environment Framework](#) and [Hub](#). The Framework sets out four broad themes that are integral to a strong, positive and inclusive research environment, and the Hub brings together support, resources and case studies within those themes.

[From Manchester for the world](#), the University's strategy to 2035, sets out the ambition to create [one of the best research environments in the world for researchers to do bold, ambitious research with impact](#).

Enhancing the quality of the University's research culture and environment is therefore a key priority within the '*accelerating research excellence to impact*' delivery plan.

This guidance is intended to support self-reflection and improvement. It is not an exhaustive list of topics that organisational units must address, nor a top-down checklist for preparing REF 2029 Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) statements. Instead, it provides structure to help organisational units identify their own research culture priorities, areas of strength and areas for development. There are many reasons why an aspect of research culture may be more or less mature in any given organisational unit; the purpose of this exercise is to understand these differences and identify meaningful actions, not to assess or judge them.

What this guidance is for

This research culture and environment self-assessment guidance¹ has been developed to:

- Raise awareness of the University's overarching [Research Culture and Environment Framework](#) and share examples of existing good practice.
- Support organisational units, including Schools, Departments, Divisions and REF Units of Assessment, to reflect on their current research culture and its impact on their environment by identifying both areas of strength and areas for development.
- Support organisational units to identify and prioritise actions that will enhance their research culture and environment.
- Generate useful local reflection and provide structure and initial ideas that can also inform the development of both the unit-level and institutional level REF 2029 SPRE statements.

¹ The research culture and environment self-assessment has been developed in collaboration with colleagues across the N8 Research Culture and Environment group.

How to complete the self-assessment

Organisational units are requested to:

1. Review relevant local and [University wide initiatives and activities related to the Research Culture and Environment Framework](#). Use this review to reflect on your research culture environment, assign a [maturity level](#), and to identify two to three areas for development. **Organisational units should focus on the areas most meaningful to them**; they are not expected to cover every theme or sub-theme, or to provide a comprehensive account of every aspect of the Framework.
2. Download and complete the [self-assessment template](#), including examples that support the maturity level selected. Where opportunities for improvement have been identified, outline one or more priority actions that would strengthen the research culture and environment. Guidance and an examples are provided within the self-assessment template. [Suggested reflective prompts](#) may be useful to support completion of the template.
3. Return the completed self-assessment template to the Faculty REF Manager by 15 December.

Maturity Level Descriptors

Use the descriptors below to support consistent judgement when assigning a maturity level.

Level	Descriptor
Emerging	Activity is limited, informal or inconsistent. Practice is often dependent on individual initiative rather than clear structures, expectations or support.
Developing	Some structured activity is in place, with early initiatives, growing awareness and examples of practice. However, implementation remains uneven and is not yet consistent.
Established	Practice is well established, consistently applied and integrated into the culture and operation of the School, Department or Division. Leadership, behaviours, systems and decision-making reinforce this area effectively.
Leading	Practice is mature, innovative and continuously improving. There is strong evidence of impact, effective practice is shared internally and externally, and the area is recognised as an example for others.

Suggested Reflective Prompts

The prompts below are aids to reflection. Organisational units should use them selectively, focusing on the questions most relevant to their context.

General Prompts

- What is currently in place? What activities, structures, expectations, support or practices exist in this area?
- How consistently is this applied or experienced? How far is this understood, used and experienced consistently across the organisational unit?
- What evidence or examples are available? What evidence, examples or indicators suggest this area is working well, or where there are gaps?
- What are the main strengths and areas for development? What appears to be working particularly well, and where is further action needed?
- What priority actions should be taken next? What practical steps would strengthen this area?

Supporting Diverse and Rewarding Careers

- *Training and development:* What training and development opportunities are in place for PGRs, postdocs, fellows, technicians, supervisors and PIs? How are development needs identified, promoted and reviewed across different groups? How consistently are these opportunities accessed, encouraged and valued, and what evidence or examples demonstrate this in practice?
- *Internal investments:* What internal investment opportunities are available to support career development, including for PGRs, fellows and research staff? How clear and accessible are these opportunities, and how consistently are they taken up? What examples show how these investments are supporting development, progression or new opportunities?
- *Recognition and reward:* What approaches are in place to recognise and reward the full range of research contributions? How clearly are career pathways, progression routes, expectations and opportunities communicated across career stages? How consistently are these applied in practice, and what examples suggest they are understood and valued?
- *Inclusivity:* What practices are in place to support inclusive recruitment, induction, retention and career development? What examples indicate people from different backgrounds, roles and career stages experience an environment in which they feel supported and valued?

Building Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity

- *Interdisciplinary collaboration:* What mechanisms or opportunities are in place to support interdisciplinary collaboration? How consistently are these used to stimulate new connections? What examples show how funding, events, networks or other approaches have enabled interdisciplinary activity?
- *Cross-sector collaborations:* What approaches are in place to build and sustain partnerships with industry, public services, third sector organisations or other external stakeholders? How effectively are these partners involved in shaping research? What evidence or examples demonstrate the value and effectiveness of these collaborations?
- *Collaborative partnerships:* What partnerships are in place with local communities, regional and national organisations, and international partners? How are these relationships developed, sustained and connected to research activity? What evidence or examples show how such partnerships are contributing to research quality, relevance or reach?
- *Collaborative working practices:* What practices, expectations or support are in place to enable effective collaborative and team-based research? How clearly are shared credit, communication, leadership, roles and contribution understood and applied? What evidence or examples suggest that collaborative ways of working are inclusive, effective and valued?

Upholding the Highest Levels of Responsible and Ethical Research

- *Research governance, ethics and integrity:* What support is in place to promote research integrity, ethics and good research practice? How consistently are University-wide policies and processes understood and used in practice? What evidence or examples show how expectations are applied and where further development may be needed?
- *Responsible research and innovation:* What approaches are in place to consider the wider implications, risks, benefits and beneficiaries of research? How effectively are the elements of RRI built into research design, delivery and decision-making? What evidence or examples demonstrate this in practice?
- *Environmental sustainability in research:* What practices are in place to support environmental sustainability in research, including travel, procurement, laboratory activity, fieldwork, data use or resource consumption? How consistently are sustainable practices encouraged, supported and monitored? What examples highlight progress, challenges or areas for improvement?
- *Equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in research practice:* What approaches are in place to embed equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the design, conduct, leadership and participation of research? How consistently are barriers to inclusion, accessibility and equitable participation identified and addressed? What evidence or examples show where practice is strong and where further action is needed?
- *Trusted and secure research:* What arrangements are in place to identify and manage issues relating to trusted research? How effectively are relevant requirements understood and supported in practice? What evidence or examples show how risks are being managed and where awareness or support may need to be strengthened?

Enabling Open and Impactful Research

- *Open research:* What support, guidance, systems or expectations are in place to enable open research practices? How consistently do researchers engage with training, guidance and support to make outputs accessible, discoverable and reusable? What evidence shows how reproducible and robust research practices are supported?
- *Research impact:* What support is in place to help researchers plan for, develop, evidence and communicate impact? How effectively are the routes to impact considered throughout the research lifecycle? What evidence or examples demonstrate how impact is being supported and achieved?
- *Business engagement:* What approaches are in place to engage with businesses and innovation partners to shape, apply or extend research? How consistently are these relationships developed, supported and connected to research goals and outcomes? What evidence or examples demonstrate the value of this engagement?
- *Public engagement:* What approaches are in place to involve communities, publics or service users in shaping research? How consistently are public or community perspectives considered across the research lifecycle? What examples show how this engagement is meaningful, inclusive and beneficial?
- *Policy engagement:* What approaches are in place to connect research with policy? How consistently are researchers supported to contribute evidence, analysis or recommendations to policy audiences? What evidence or examples show how policy engagement is influencing practice, decision-making or public debate?

Research Culture and Environment Framework Themes and Initiatives, Activities and Case Studies

The examples below are provided as a reference point to help units identify existing institutional support, initiatives and case studies that may be relevant to their own reflections. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to define what each unit should include.

Theme	Institutional Level Context, Initiatives and Activities, Case Studies
<u>Supporting Diverse and Rewarding Careers</u> for all involved in research across the University, from PGRs to senior researchers and professors, as well as all those whose contributions are vital to the research process, such as research methodologists, technical professionals, and research enabling staff.	<u>Context</u> The University is a signatory to the Researcher Development Concordat and, through associated action plans, is committed to continuing to build an environment in which researchers can thrive. As a signatory to the Technician Commitment, the University is also committed to ensuring greater visibility, recognition and career development for technicians across all disciplines. Relevant sector-leading employment policies include the academic returners policy for those returning from leave to re-establish their research, and extended paid notice periods for those on finite-funded permanent contracts. <u>Initiatives and Activities</u> – <i>Training and Development opportunities for all career stages:</i> PGR, research staff, new academics, research fellows, PGR supervisors, mid career academics and leading researchers. This includes supervisor and PI toolkits, access to coaching and mentoring via Manchester Gold, and bespoke programmes such as Prosper and targeted leadership programmes including Aurora, Women into Leadership, 100 Black Women Professors, Stellar HE. – <i>Internal Investments:</i> In PGRs (President’s Doctoral Scholar, Bicentenary, PhD by Enterprise), Fellows (Bicentenary, Simon and Hallsworth, Deans Prize, DKO) and dedicated funding streams for research staff to develop collaborations and disseminate their research to support their career development. – <i>Recognition and reward:</i> For staff at all career stages including academic and research staff promotions (noting recognition within the promotions criteria and guidance for collegiality, academic citizenship, impact, public engagement and social responsibility activity), academic research leave and recognition via showcases, excellence awards, making a difference awards. – <i>Inclusivity:</i> EDI charter marks, EDI support networks, Targeted leadership and development programmes, for example, Aurora, 100 Black Women Professors Now, Disability Advisory and Support Service. <u>Case Studies</u> – Researcher Development for PGRs – Prosper at UoM, Chris Bowden – Leading for Research Fellows Joan Chang & James Higginson – Leading Researchers Programme Saska Petrova

Theme	Institutional Level Context, Initiatives and Activities, Case Studies
<u>Building Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity</u> to address major societal and scientific challenges which require multi or interdisciplinary responses, grounded in meaningful collaboration and co-production with internal and external partners.	<u>Context</u> Central to From Manchester for the world and the accelerating research excellence to impact leap and delivery plan is the University's ambition to build on the outstanding research excellence and interdisciplinary research and combine expertise from across disciplines to understand and find new solutions to the world's most pressing problems. <u>Initiatives and Activities</u> – <i>Internal Investments and mechanisms for interdisciplinary collaborations:</i> To support growth of internal and external collaborations, for example, pump priming investments to support interdisciplinary research and seed funds to support international engagement. Research platforms provide focus and resource to connect, drive and amplify interdisciplinary collaborations. Research institutes bring disciplines together to generate and sustain excellent research. – <i>Cross Sector Collaborations:</i> Extensive collaboration with industry is enabled by the innovation ecosystem and assets which includes Unit M, Business Engagement and Knowledge Exchange (support for industrial partnerships, SME engagement, knowledge exchange and consultancy), Innovation Factory (support for commercialisation), Masood Entrepreneurship Centre (support for fostering entrepreneurship skills) and SISTER (regional innovation). – <i>Civic partnerships:</i> Cultivating place-based impact through collaborations including the Cambridge x Manchester Partnership, the GM Policy Hub, Local Innovation Partnership Fund projects, the GM Civic Universities Agreement and the Greater Manchester Citizen's Panel. – <i>Collaborative practices:</i> Training, guidance and resources to support team collaborative research, engaged research practices, public engagement. – <i>Support for team research:</i> Embedded Research Development support for large consortium bids, cross-faculty research development network ensuring join-up across interdisciplinary bids in conjunction with platforms and other functions, for example, Research Impact, Business Engagement and Policy. <u>Case Studies</u> – Interdisciplinary Research Case Studies – Pump Priming – Team research – Discipline hop

Theme	Institutional Level Context, Initiatives and Activities, Case Studies
<u>Upholding the highest levels of responsible and ethical research</u> is vital for a thriving research culture. Good practices enable researchers to produce high quality work with rigour, integrity, sustainability and creativity.	<u>Context</u> In relation to ethics and integrity the University operates in alignment with the Concordat to Support Research Integrity and embeds its principles in institutional policies, governance, and practice. In relation to sustainability <u>Our Sustainable Future</u> is the University's environmental sustainability strategy and University is a signatory to the <u>Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice</u> and is commitment to continued action in the Concordat's priority areas, including leadership, sustainable infrastructure, sustainable procurement, emissions from business and academic travel, collaborations and partnerships, environmental impact and reporting data. <u>Initiatives and Activities</u> – <i>Research governance, ethics and integrity:</i> Expectations of research integrity are set out in the <u>Code of Good Research Conduct</u>, <u>research integrity training</u> is provided for staff and PGRs, policies and guidance is provided on the ethical conduct of research including <u>animal research</u>, research on <u>human participants</u>, <u>human tissue</u>, <u>clinical trials</u>, <u>ethics applications and routes of approval</u>. – <i>Responsible research and innovation (RRI):</i> The <u>RRI framework</u> provides a structured, University-wide approach to embedding ethical, responsible, and socially aware practices across the full research lifecycle, guided by the principles of anticipate, reflect, engage and act. – <i>Environmental sustainability in research:</i> <u>Resources and guidance on how to operate efficiently and reduce waste in labs</u> including the <u>LEAF framework</u> and <u>associated training</u> and <u>6R Responsible Plastics Protocol</u>. – <i>Equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in research practice:</i> The statement of research expectations embeds EDI principles, recognising adjustments needed in certain circumstances and <u>guidance to support embedding and evidencing EDIA best practice in grant applications</u>. – <i>Trusted and secured research:</i> Guidance and resources are provided via the research security hub on how to keep colleagues safe and research secure, export control flowcharts, policy on responsible international research collaborations. <u>Case studies</u> – <u>Environmental sustainability in research</u> – <u>Using the RRI Framework</u> – <u>Clinical trials</u>

Theme	Institutional Level Context, Initiatives and Activities, Case Studies
<u>Enabling open and impactful research</u> to ensure that our researchers' findings and data are accessible to, and reusable by, others, and the research has meaningful benefits outside of academia.	<u>Context</u> The Office for Open Research, in line with the University position statement on open research, champions an open and responsible research culture. The University has a position statement on the responsible use of research metrics and is a signatory to both the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA), recognising the diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. Research Impact Group (RIG) brings colleagues together across functions and faculties with a focus on accelerating excellent research to impact through the establishment and maintenance of a strong and supportive 'one university' ecosystem. . <u>Initiative and Activities</u> – <i>Support for open research:</i> Includes developing skills and knowledge to make research more open via the open research skills framework, guidance on managing research data, access to open research repositories, creation of open research communities including the open research fellows programme. – <i>Supporting researchers to develop, track, and embed research impact:</i> Advice and guidance from research impact teams including research impact training and resources and support with funding applications and REF impact case study development. – <i>Collaboration/Engagement with business:</i> Internal funding is available for translational research, UKRI Impact Acceleration Accounts and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and innovation funding schemes such as Ideas with Impact. – <i>Public, community and civic engagement:</i> Social Responsibility teams provide training, resources and support for public, civic, and community engagement. The Engaged research hub provides resources, case studies and details of ongoing work to support participatory research. – <i>Policy engagement:</i> Policy@Manchester connect researchers with policymakers, influences public policy with evidence and research informed recommendations, publishes accessible policy analysis and recommendations and empowers researchers, via training and guidance, to embed policy impact in their research. – <i>Communicating your research:</i> Comms and Marketing teams provide guidance and resources on boosting impact through better communication, including the promoting your research toolkit, and the research visibility checklist. <u>Case Studies</u> – Open Research Fellowship Hannah Long – Open Research Accelerator Funds David Buil-Gil and Cristina Temenos – Research Impact Training Jackie Kindell – Participatory Research Practice Uncertain Futures Project