



## Solent University Strategy 2025

Ready for the Future

### Research and Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy

Real-world learning, real-world research, real-world impact

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## 1.0 Introduction

Solent University has made research and knowledge exchange one of three priorities in the University's Strategy 2025, alongside student success and engaging with our communities. The University's Strategic Mission for 2025 is to enable our learners to be work-ready, world ready and future ready. Its vision states that by 2025 we will enable students to succeed by being a University that:

- Transforms the lives of people from all backgrounds, through learning that is relevant to the real world.
- Provides an outstanding student experience through our exceptional staff and facilities.
- Excels at providing its learning community with the confidence, skills, knowledge and experience that they need to successfully pursue fulfilling lives and life changing careers.
- Delivers a unique curriculum shaped around inspiring industrial partnerships, ground-breaking professional insights, knowledge exchange and research.
- Makes a material impact on environmental sustainability.

In accordance with the University's Strategy 2025, Solent has an enabling strategy for research and knowledge exchange to ensure that the successes of our students and our engagements with our communities are both shaped and inspired by our research and knowledge exchange. Furthering knowledge through research and engaging with our communities for an exchange of knowledge are the two cornerstones of our drive for excellence.

Research and knowledge exchange are of equal significance to Solent University. We believe generation and exchange of knowledge are deeply linked, differing only in the techniques applied for measuring their success.

During the course of the Strategy, we will build our research distinctiveness by supporting our academic staff and celebrate their successes, so that they feel empowered and thrive in an academically attractive and supportive environment. The benefits of research will reach our entire learning community, from undergraduate students to postgraduate researchers, thus supporting our ambitious student communities from around the world in their journeys to be truly future ready.

We will ensure that our communities, be they local, international or global, benefit from the outcomes of our applied research and that we are able to share our knowledge with them. We will also learn from our communities about their priorities, challenges, experiences and successes. This exchange of knowledge will lead to real-world impact, benefiting both the University and our communities.

To achieve these goals, we will focus on and develop our core strengths and areas of expertise. These are reflected in our strategic research themes and knowledge exchange priorities.

## 2.0 Solent University's research themes and knowledge exchange priorities<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Solent University's research themes are:

1. Environment and Engineering: Safe and sustainable energy, transport, and material systems.
2. Social Research and Policy: Improving individual and community wellbeing through practice, provision, and policy.
3. Human Function and Health: The evaluation of human function, health and the social context.
4. Media, Culture and the Arts: Communication, cultural and media studies, creative arts and practice.

### 2.2 Solent University's knowledge exchange priorities are:

1. Maritime: autonomous shipping, alternative energy, seafarer's employment, and training maritime trainers.
2. Sustainable Business: small business growth, entrepreneurship and sustainability, leadership and management skills, and business education & enterprise.
3. Justice: human rights, ethical practice, safeguarding society and legal education.
4. Health & Wellbeing: community physical health and mental wellbeing, corporate consultancy in health, sport and exercise science consultancy.
5. Student entrepreneurship: creative industries, enterprise and intellectual property
6. Engineering: hydrodynamics, composites design manufacture, engineering material, CAD, simulation and automation.

## 3.0 Underpinning elements and facilitating principle

The University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy has four underpinning elements and one facilitating principle.

The four underpinning elements are:

- 1) improving Solent's research culture,
- 2) developing research and knowledge exchange databases,
- 3) building a strong research community, and
- 4) growing our knowledge exchange activities.

The facilitating principle is:

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<sup>1</sup> These research themes and knowledge exchange priorities may change during the course of the strategy depending on the expertise of the academic staff.

Receiving the necessary support from Professional Services and from academics across the University for successfully delivering the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy.

### 3.1 Underpinning Element #1: Research Culture

To successfully deliver the new Research and Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy, we need to develop the University's research culture. Solent is a young University which is building its research identity step by step. Since receiving its Research Degree Awarding Power in 2017, research in the University has been growing. The most recent REF submission in 2021 showed the increase in the volume of our research and promises an improvement in quality in comparison with the previous submission in 2014. From this basis, we will continue to develop by ensuring that research is at the heart of everything we do. We will embed research informed teaching across our undergraduate and postgraduate provision, ensuring that curriculum content throughout the University is underpinned by our own research and/or that of others, and we will celebrate and support all research activities in the University, thus making research synonymous to our academic identity.

To deliver the enabling strategy, we will enhance understanding among staff around what constitutes research and knowledge exchange and the national standards that exist in measuring their success. Placing research and knowledge exchange as one of our key strategic priorities, has provided the institutional urgency to ensure the culture change we need is achieved. The following are some of the key actions that will be taken to build a strong research culture institutionally:

- Embed a culture of inclusivity and of respect and awareness of equality and diversity in the management of all research and knowledge exchange activities, in the recruitment and training of all research students, and in the recruitment and employment of all research and knowledge exchange active staff;
- Provide support to staff for achieving excellence in research and knowledge exchange activities and value their contributions;
- Communicate effectively with staff and external stakeholders on research, knowledge exchange and knowledge-driven public engagement activities;
- Provide strategic leadership at all levels in research and knowledge exchange activities;
- Recruit academic staff with excellent research and/or knowledge exchange track-records and potential;
- Celebrate and showcase successes in research and knowledge exchange activities.

### 3.2 Underpinning Element #2: Research Database

One of the key actions of the Enabling Strategy is to ensure that datasets on research and knowledge exchange are comprehensive, accurate and available for analysis. This will allow informed decision-making and ultimately progress towards successfully fulfilling the Enabling Strategy. It will also underpin monitoring and implementation of the Enabling Strategy against its milestones and Performance Indicators. The datasets that will be developed include:

- A comprehensive database to capture and update Individual Research and Knowledge Exchange Plans (IRKEP) from academic staff.
- A secure system to report, capture and return all qualifying Knowledge Exchange activities.
- A fit for purpose Central Research Information Management System.
- Undergraduate and Postgraduate course page links to stories on research and knowledge exchange from across the University.
- A Research Dashboard to monitor progress in all areas of research and knowledge exchange work against the University Performance Indicators.

### 3.3 Underpinning Element #3: Research community

The key measure of success in research is the University's performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). REF is an exercise UK Research and Innovation conducts every six to seven years, which leads to the allocation of annual Quality-related research funding (QR).

Building on and learning from our REF 2014 and REF 2021 submissions, planning for REF 2027 started in November 2020. Central to those plans is the development of a vibrant and thriving research community. To this end, the following key measures will be taken during this Enabling Strategy:

- Identification of the research subject areas for submission in REF 2027, known as the Units of Assessment (UoA), will be finalised as per staff expertise in research within the first two years of the launch of the strategy
- Communities of researchers within each UoA will be headed by a research lead
- To respond to the requirements of REF, we will focus on the four pillars for each UoA:
  - i. Bids: winning suitable bids and grants;
  - ii. Outputs: successfully publishing relevant quality outputs that are world-leading or internationally excellent;
  - iii. Impact Case Studies: identified at the time of writing bid proposals and nurtured and developed through the lifetime of each project and beyond;
  - iv. Doctoral students: external doctoral students recruited through the newly launched Graduate School will be aligned to at least one of the UoAs.

### 3.4 Underpinning Element #4: Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge exchange comprises activities that range from delivering non-credit bearing courses, consultancies and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships to renting out the University's specialist facilities for knowledge exchange purposes. Besides generating direct income to the University, these also draw further funding from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) in support and development of a broad range of knowledge-based interactions between higher education providers and the wider world, resulting in benefits to the economy and society.

Growing knowledge exchange, such as consultancy, as well as their reporting and returning, is essential to successfully implementing the Research & Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy. While HEIF calculation only accounts for those activities that have generated income for the University, some knowledge exchange activities, such as knowledge driven public engagement, are

not monetised. It is nevertheless important that these are reported and returned as they are captured in the results of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), whose aim is to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public funding for knowledge exchange and to further a culture of continuous improvement in universities.

To grow knowledge exchange in support of the University's Research & Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy, the following are the key priorities:

- Further embed the University's successful knowledge exchange activities, such as delivery of maritime Continuing Professional Development provision and responding to demand from business communities.
- Build on recent successes in winning Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) contracts and continue to grow in this avenue of knowledge exchange year on year while developing lasting client relationships.
- Provide support and incentives, including training and workshop sessions, to staff for developing a keen awareness of different kinds of knowledge exchange activities and ways to grow them.
- Engage with communities using knowledge driven public engagement activities to secure further knowledge exchange opportunities.
- Grow income for the University from consultancies, by better engaging with communities and businesses to understand their needs and priorities.
- Continue to invest in capacity using a proportion of our HEIF allocation, in order to develop larger scale strategic relationships and address national priorities.
- Promote use of the University's specialist facilities and equipment by communities and businesses to increase innovative capacity and productivity.
- Capture all relevant knowledge exchange data from the University using robust systems and mechanisms provide advanced management information for Solent and comprehensive KE narratives as required by UKRI.

### 3.5 Facilitating principle

Under the new 2025 Strategy, research and knowledge exchange features as one of three key strategic priorities. As a result, the importance of a university-wide approach, supported by both professional services and academics, is central to the delivery of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Enabling Strategy.

The key elements of professional services support include:

- External Relations to support the Research Office to promote research and knowledge exchange activities, celebrate institutional and individual successes, and build a strong research-based academic identity for the University.
- People and Development to support the recruitment of research and/or knowledge exchange active staff who can advance and apply their research and knowledge exchange expertise to teaching and progress the University's research and knowledge exchange initiatives.
- Solent Learning and Teaching Institute to support the delivery of the new Post Graduate Certificate Courses for enhancing the learning experience of doctoral students.

- Information, Communication and Technology to support storing of research data in a secure way as per current data storage rules and in compliance with the contractual requirements set out with external parties.
- University Library Services to provide guidance in relation to resource requirements and ensure that subscribed library resources are available to academics for advancing their research, teaching and knowledge exchange work.
- Finance Services to assist the Research Office and academics in bid support and award management.

The key elements of academic support include:

- Academics across all Faculties and Schools ensuring that their teaching at all levels is underpinned by current research findings, whether their own or those of others.
- Academics at all levels engaging in activities linked to the University's research themes and/or knowledge exchange priorities that generate income, outputs, and impact.
- Academic leadership at the School, Faculty and University levels promoting research informed teaching and a culture in which staff and students alike are encouraged to put research at the heart of learning.
- Academic leadership at the School, Faculty and University levels creating high-performance research and knowledge exchange cultures in which staff are supported and mentored, interdisciplinarity and collaboration are promoted, and success, as measured by high quality outputs and the award of significant external funding, is valued and celebrated.

## 4.0 Measuring success

The decision to make research and knowledge exchange one of Solent University's three strategic priorities reflects the step change that we plan to make over the coming five years. The Enabling Strategy described above, identifies the University's four research themes and six knowledge exchange priorities and sets out our goals and ambitions, the underpinning elements, and the facilitating principle. We look forward to working together to put research and knowledge exchange at the heart of everything we do.

We will develop and sustain a virtuous circle where research generates the knowledge that allows us to work in partnership with key stakeholders to help our communities meet their challenges, which in turn further informs our teaching and drives more engagement and research. Thus, this Enabling Strategy will support the delivery of Solent's real-world curriculum informed by our applied research leading to real-world impact.

The University has identified the following performance indicators against which we will measure the success of this Enabling Strategy:

1. Grow research and knowledge exchange income through bids, contracts and knowledge exchange activities, such as research grants and consultancies, from the current value of

0.2% to 0.8% of the total University income. This is measured against the Million Plus Universities baseline and has intermittent annual projection milestones (KPI).

2. Increase the proportion of academic staff, who are aligned to research pathway, publishing outputs of quality that is world-leading or internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour from 28% to 47%. This is measured against the Million Plus Universities baseline and will be measured by the internal review process and mock REF exercise (PI).
3. Increase funding income from the Higher Education Innovation Fund from the current position in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile to the top quartile in the sector. This is measured through data published by UKRI and has intermittent annual projection milestones (PI).
4. Grow the proportion of externally recruited doctoral students from the current level of 60% to 80% of the total cohort. This is measured against comparator Universities and has intermittent annual projection milestones (PI).
5. Increase the Community Impact element of the Knowledge Exchange Framework measure such that the results place the University in the top 20% in the cluster (PI).

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