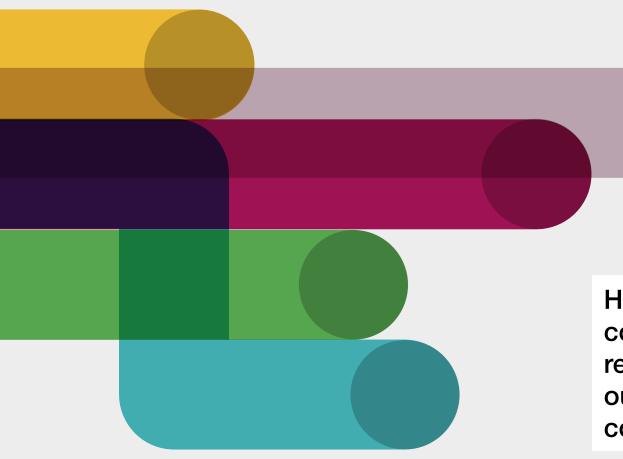^UCL

Enhancing UCL's research culture
Our 10-year Roadmap

How we're developing a fair, collaborative and inclusive research culture, where both our research and research community can thrive.

Enhancing our research culture. To help us do our best work.

At UCL, we're known the world over for our research. Our REF results are testament to the globally significant work that's underway across our institution – with around 18,000 research outputs a year helping to shape policy, tackle challenges and improve lives.

A healthy, inclusive and sustainable research culture underpins our excellence in research and innovation, and is vital to UCL's academic and societal mission. It's shaped by expectations, both of individuals and the institution, as well as by the values, attitudes and behaviours of our community. It affects the entirety of the research process, from end to end, as well as the experience and careers of the people within it.

In short, research culture matters. It's not enough to strive to keep doing more and better quality research. We need to invest in creating the conditions for that work to happen.

Research culture naturally overlaps with broader workplace culture, work on which is recognised as an enabling priority in UCL's Strategic Plan 2022-27. But the research and innovation eco-system presents unique challenges and pressures that mean we need to take a nuanced and targeted approach to enhancing research culture.

This is why, following an in-depth consultation with you – our research community – about what's working well and where we might be falling short, we're setting out to build the research culture you told us would support you to do your best work. And to ensure we can continue to deliver change for the better, well into the future.

Over the next few pages, we'll share our vision for the future, how we plan to get there and what we've done so far.

Professor Geraint Rees
UCL Vice-Provost
(Research, Innovation
& Global Engagement)

Emma Todd
Director of Research Culture

We know – from what you've told us – that as a community you thrive, and do your best work, when you feel part of a collaborative, inclusive and people-centred culture. So investing in UCL's research culture isn't simply the right thing to do from a people perspective, it is critical to us achieving our academic and societal mission.

Our vision for the future

Our vision for UCL's research culture

We want to create a **fair, collaborative** and **inclusive** research environment that facilitates **excellence** and where we **support one another to succeed**.

That environment needs to be one where:

We live our values of care and respect, openness and inclusion, rigour and innovation, and integrity and mutual accountability.

All contributions and skillsets are celebrated, and everyone has the chance to do their best work and pursue their aspirations.

Our research is carried out to the highest standards.

Our research culture journey

Step 1: Consultation

To gather the views of our research community

Read the key insights from the consultation

2.4k
survey responses

30 hours
of focus groups & semi-structured interviews with

135 members
of the research community

2021

Step 2: A test-bed for change

To test new approaches through pilot projects and mature the debate on research culture

Read more about the projects delivered in 2021/22

15
cross-UCL projects

24
faculty projects

2021/22

Step 3: 10-year Roadmap

Building on the previous stages of work, we've created a Roadmap for change: a framework to guide how we'll develop our research culture over the next ten years. This programme – which we'll begin to roll out from January 2023 onwards – brings together new and existing strands of activity, in alignment with UCL's Strategic Plan 2022-27.

Our Roadmap sets out the themes and goals that we'll be focussing on. Initiatives will be designed and delivered, in conversation with the research community, to make progress against the goals. And we'll work directly with faculties and departments to support more bespoke local improvements. We'll also harness meta research and relevant UCL academic expertise to better understand the ecosystem and deliver meaningful change that will stick.

The work will be overseen by a Programme Board, made up of research and professional services staff from a diversity of disciplines, roles and experience. And we'll be working with a Community Steering Group, so we can continue to listen to what's needed across the university and develop interventions that will make the biggest difference.

Just as important as the flagship initiatives we undertake will be our work to empower teams and individuals across UCL to create positive change. Achieving our vision will require a collective effort, and tweaks in local context can have a powerful ripple effect.
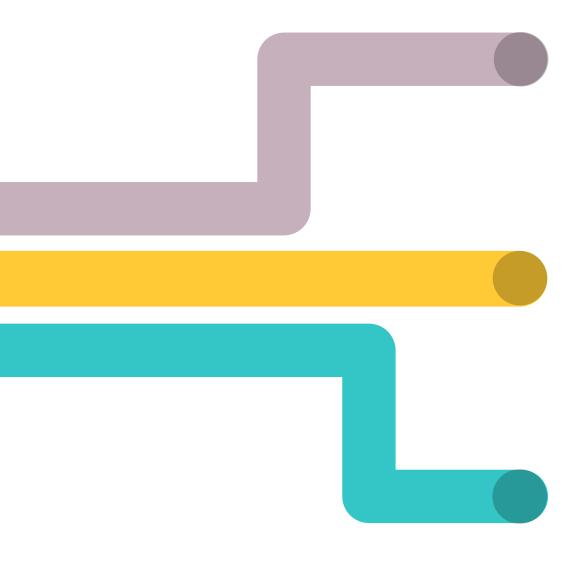
2023 +

10-year Roadmap: Themes

Findings from the consultation and subsequent focus groups helped us define five themes, by which we'll organise our activity. These themes outline common needs from our research community across different disciplines and career stages.

01 **Transparent and fair career development**

02 **People-centred leadership and management**

03 **Opportunities to collaborate and innovate**

04 **Openness and integrity in our research and innovation**

05 **Supportive and inclusive environment**

01 **Transparent and fair career development**

We want researchers, at all levels and from diverse backgrounds, to understand the different ways they can progress, feel supported in developing their careers, and trust that merit will be the arbiter of success.

02 **People-centred leadership and management**

We want managers and leaders to prioritise people and teams. We want them to seize opportunities to develop the research leadership skills they need for the future and to take ownership for creating a healthy research culture – that supports researcher wellbeing as well as research excellence – in their local context.

03 **Opportunities to collaborate and innovate**

We want our research community to have the time, tools and licence to fail fast and learn from their mistakes in a culture that values continuous improvement. We want people to be able to connect with projects and networks – across disciplines, geographies, sectors and cultures – and to be able to develop new skills and perspectives that support both the delivery of their research and their personal development.

04 **Openness and integrity in our research and innovation**

We want the principles of Open Science and research integrity to be at the heart of our research practice, alongside a broader definition of research excellence that rewards and recognises non-traditional contributions. We want to embrace these principles not just for the sake of compliance, but in recognition of the value they bring to our research.

05 **Supportive and inclusive environment**

We want every contributor to research to feel valued and recognised in an institution that acknowledges and rewards team endeavour. We want our researchers to experience psychological safety and know that their mental health and wellbeing are prioritised. We want greater diversity and inclusion at all levels to lead to diversity of thinking and a strong sense of belonging.

Goals and initiatives

These are some of the goals we are setting ourselves over the next 10 years. Some will be delivered through complex, multi-stakeholder projects, others through smaller, incremental improvements. We won't be able to address all of them at once, but will instead prioritise the goals and initiatives we believe will make the biggest difference.

For details of current initiatives, visit the research culture web pages.

Theme 01: **Transparent and fair career development**

a. Make promotions processes and practices more transparent, inclusive and aligned with UCL policy, for research-active staff of all backgrounds and career stages

b. Improve the quantity and quality of appraisals of research-active staff

c. Support Early Career Researchers towards independence

d. Increase accessibility to, and take-up of, training opportunities

e. Increase awareness and understanding of varied career pathways for Early Career Researchers

f. Explore targeted career development support for staff with specialist expertise, such as technicians

g. Ensure fair reward, in line with sector standards

Theme 02: **People-centred leadership and management**

a. Define and develop research leaders for the future

b. Establish people management as a critical activity for managers of researchers and a priority for the institution

c. Support Principal Investigators to develop their leadership and management skills

d. Develop a culture of two-way feedback

e. Ensure that our leaders are informed about the priorities for research culture and supported in their practical implementation

f. Amplify the voice of research-active staff and students in institutional decision-making

Theme 03: **Opportunities to collaborate and innovate**

a. Free up researcher time to collaborate and innovate by implementing time-saving initiatives

b. Increase effective collaboration across disciplines and cultures to support diversity of thinking

c. Increase talent mobility across the institution and externally

d. Empower trial and error and continuous improvement

Theme 04: **Openness and integrity in our research and innovation**

a. Increase research transparency, where methods, analysis and data are reported and disseminated openly, clearly and comprehensively

b. Develop sector-leading practices around open data

c. Support and reward non-traditional outputs alongside more traditional ones

d. Embed the use of responsible metrics in practice

e. Foster transdisciplinary research, engaging stakeholders beyond academia

Theme 05: **Supportive and inclusive environment**

a. Recognise and support team science and the broad range of contributions to the research endeavour, including the input of research support staff

b. Increase diversity and inclusion at all levels, in particular with regard to gender, race and disability

c. Develop the skills and environment that will enable constructive disagreement

d. Increase awareness and openess about mental health

e. Explore ways of reducing the precarity associated with research contracts

Enabling and measuring progress

Enablers

To embed our themes successfully, we've identified three enabling factors:

Data about the research community:

We need better data to inform strategic decision-making, track the progress and impact of initiatives, and better understand, segment and tailor efforts to our research community.

User-centric communications:

We need to demystify how UCL works at the same time as simplifying the 'ask' we make of our research community, signposting support, and setting clear expectations of what a good research culture looks like.

Partnership working:

Working in partnership internally with faculties and functions and externally with our peers will help us deliver better solutions.

Measuring progress

We'll use a combination of responses from the Staff Survey and the Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey, alongside other data such as recruitment and retention targets, turnover, and referrals for stress, to measure progress against our goals.

Long-term programmes such as this one need some flex in them. So we'll be taking an agile approach that allows us to respond to changes in our environment, test out new ideas rapidly and move forward even in times of uncertainty.

Change will take time, and commitment from us all.

Many of the cultural changes we want to effect will require buy-in and action across the research and innovation eco-system.

As we strive to make improvements on an institutional basis, we'll also make sure we're part of broader discussions with colleagues across the sector.

We've deliberately developed this Roadmap to be rolled out over the next ten years, recognising that it takes time to create any kind of meaningful cultural change. It will take prolonged effort and a shared commitment to tackle the issues you've raised with us, and to build the kind of culture we all want.

Ultimately, we want UCL to be known not only for the quality of our research, but for the quality of our research environment.

There's a lot we can do together to make UCL an even better place to do research, and we're keen to get started.

Find out more or get involved
Visit our web pages
ucl.ac.uk/research/culture

Email the team:
researchculture@ucl.ac.uk