



Keele Research and Innovation Strategy 2025-29

Introduction: context, purpose, goals

Keele University is, distinctively, a small but agile research-intensive academic community. Our proud historic connection to liberal, indeed experimental principles of education has fostered an interdisciplinary vision of knowledge connecting the natural sciences, medicine, humanities and social sciences. This drives Keele's research, innovation and knowledge exchange strategy, placing research excellence at the centre of our reputation and impact.

By working with others across the UK and internationally, and using innovative, rigorous methods, our researchers will offer solutions to deep-rooted challenges affecting human health, wellbeing, belonging and creative potential. They will also address the increasingly complex social, material, technological and economic structures and environments in which people and non-human cohabitants live, work, and interact.

From our home of North Staffordshire, UK, and through long-standing principles of inclusive education, community service, and critical curiosity, Keele's research is both locally engaged and globally ambitious. Our researchers remain deeply motivated by a collegial and equitable approach to inquiry – one that fosters collaboration across borders and disciplines. By strengthening our international partnerships and amplifying our global influence, Keele is committed to advancing research, education and knowledge exchange that shapes the future and enhances lives worldwide.

This people-first strategy is for Keele researchers at every career stage, our research enablers, technicians; and the partners and communities that can help us to shape our research and benefit from it; whether within our region, nationally or internationally. Our strategy commits us to:

- focus consistently on research excellence and its potential impacts (societal, economic, industrial and business, commercial and cultural);
- align the university's excellence with regional, national and global priorities;
- foster collaboration, openness and integrity by recognising excellent research citizenship that encourages integrity;
- empower researchers and research enablers to achieve their best through an inclusive and equitable culture;
- ensure financial sustainability; and
- ensure that research is at the centre of reputation.

10-year ambition

Over the next decade, Keele will be a catalyst for global change, harnessing the power of research to create a healthier, more sustainable, and more inclusive world. Our researchers will not only address pressing challenges but actively shape solutions that refine industries, improve lives and inspire new ways of thinking.

By aligning our work with the UK's Industrial Strategy and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, we will drive innovation that makes a lasting difference – locally, nationally, and globally. Keele's research will be known for our ability to mobilise knowledge into action, through innovative practice, research-led education and knowledge exchange, creating real-world impact. We will be recognised as world-leading in key areas where our expertise drives transformation:

- Revolutionising healthcare – through advances in primary care, global health and wellbeing
- Advancing sustainable futures by innovating in life and material sciences, clean energy and environmental resilience.
- Shaping the digital world – by leading research in digital society, data ethics, and technological innovation
- Building inclusive and creative communities through research in social inclusion, heritage and creative cultures.

Our research will not just contribute to important conversations – it will lead them, driving change to improve lives, strengthen communities, and shape the future.

4-year strategy

Over the next four years, our research leaders will sustain a positive environment for growing research areas of exceptional quality, in fields of national and international strategic importance. As these continue to flourish, they will demonstrate world-class expertise, secure significant and sustained external funding for research and facilities, enabling them to attract and retain leading researchers in their field.

Agile research leadership will better reflect the diversity of the university and the communities we work with and for. We will foster a vibrant and inclusive research culture where excellence is not only encouraged but expected, and achievements are suitably recognised and rewarded. Alongside providing opportunities for all, we will ensure that high performance is nurtured and celebrated, promoting an environment where ambition and performance drive success. Our outstanding training and development opportunities will cultivate the best in every researcher from postgraduate researchers to early careerists, technicians and research enablers, and emerging and established leaders. We will build a culture where leadership in research is defined by innovation, integrity and impact, underpinned by the values of good research citizenship and leading the advancement of open, engaged and transformative research.

During a time of rapid social and civic change, we will sustain Keele's research contributions by creating the conditions for a strong innovation-led local economy, working to ensure this improves lives and livelihoods for our local communities. We will work closely with industrial partners to align Keele's research and innovation activities to the UK Government's key Growth Driving Sectors where there is local comparative advantage and/or scope for growth, specifically clean energy industries, digital technologies and life sciences. We will continue to form research alliances with local, regional and national governments, the charity and voluntary sectors, and the cultural and creative sectors to achieve wide-ranging impacts for local communities. We will amplify and bolster our regional and national position by developing and growing our Science and Innovation Park into a UK-leading Innovation District; by working in partnership with the Midlands Innovation consortium of research-intensive HE partners.

Our interdisciplinary institutes

An important channel and showcase for these ambitions and commitments will be our interdisciplinary institutes that address major themes of local and global challenge - *Global Health and Wellbeing*, *Social Inclusion*, *Sustainable Futures* and *Digital Society*. The institutes will bring together experts from across the University to co-develop research with external partners and communities that address local, national and global challenges. For example, we extend our world-leading research and knowledge mobilisation in primary care, public health, mental health, allied health professions into international settings with global partners. Innovative research on sustainable energy systems, digital technologies, inclusive and sustainable governance is amplified and scaled by collaborations between the institutes, their directors, and partners.

Subject area strengths

More focused areas of disciplinary excellence underpin our interdisciplinary research, including musculoskeletal health and care, regenerative medicine, entomology and vector borne diseases, star clusters and exoplanets, materials science, policing; key areas of English literature (displacement and forced migration), History (environmental history), the cultural industries, and research as creative practice (documentary film, sound design, creative writing). Some of these areas are organised as clusters, some undertake research through established and emergent research centres. We will continue to invest in and build our areas of subject excellence, ensuring they translate into an outstanding undergraduate student experience. Our world-class research will continue to create new opportunities for our students to deepen their subject knowledge, engaging with cutting-edge views on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary challenges.

Investing in our research future

A foundation for this growth and dynamism is our Keele Doctoral Academy, which will continue to offer a high quality and distinctive postgraduate researcher experience through its training commitment. Looking forward, it will shape communities of new researchers, assisting them to integrate into the wider research ecosystem through institutes, centres and clusters.

Quality supervision will be central to this, ensuring postgraduate researchers receive rigorous, supportive mentorship that enhances their ability to tackle complex research challenges. Through collaborations with partners in academia, industry and other sectors, Keele will equip postgraduate researchers with the expertise and adaptability needed for careers both within and beyond academia. By fostering a mixture of disciplinary excellence, innovation, and, through placements and where appropriate, interdisciplinary challenge and knowledge mobilisation, we will prepare our researchers to lead in their fields, wherever their careers may take them.

Pillars: supporting our 4-year strategy

Keele's research ecosystem comprises disciplines, clusters, research centres and institutes. Faculties and schools provide the administrative engine. The research infrastructure is enabled by technicians, professional service colleagues in Research and Innovation Support (RaISE), Partnership Development, Human Resources and Organisational Development. Crucially, our Information and Digital Service supports the digital needs of our research and innovation, including a High-Performance Computer facility, and a range of special collections.

The whole ecosystem is supported by five research and innovation **pillars which are drivers of priority research commitments**:

Research Excellence – researchers will deliver rigorous, original and significant research that is world leading

Innovation – researchers will prioritise innovation, highlighting originality in thought, method, analysis and practice as sources of transformation and translational activities

Engagement, collaboration & partnership – researchers will continue to develop Keele’s already strong approaches to working with external partners from all communities, including academic institutions and research organisations worldwide. They will cultivate the specialist skills required to undertake excellent collaboration and co-production across all disciplinary areas, while fostering academic partnerships that drive knowledge exchange, innovation and impactful research outcomes.

Keele researchers, research enablers and technicians will also develop an acute awareness of context recognising diversity, power imbalances, information asymmetries, and the implications these have for research methods and routes to impact.

Furthermore, researchers will be especially mindful of the distinctive approach to equitable and ethical partnership that is needed for international research and innovation.

Knowledge mobilisation for impact – researchers will mobilise innovative research outputs to generate and accelerate the reach and significance of its impact, from which ever career stage it emerges. From research design to implementation delivery; our coproduced knowledge will be mobilised to serve stakeholders and partners, including international and underserved communities.

Inclusive and vibrant research culture – research leaders will use an evidence-based approach to support everyone equitably to succeed. We will acknowledge when it goes wrong, but aim above all to identify, support and celebrate openness and integrity across our research culture, from postgraduate researchers to professors, technicians and research enablers.

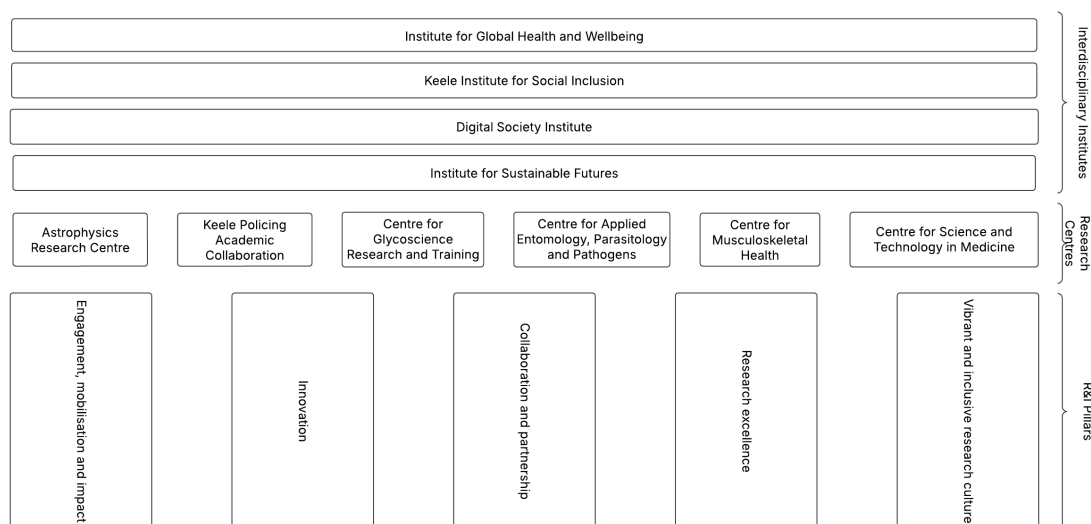


Figure – The R&I ecosystem at Keele is supported by foundational pillars, with centres of research excellence and interdisciplinary institutes facilitating impact and knowledge mobilisation.

Delivery

To deliver this strategy we will focus on continuous enhancement in the following areas:

Leadership and communication – we will foster an inclusive research culture, ensuring clear pathways of communication and connection within Keele and beyond. By creating and sustaining a supportive environment for future research leaders and researchers, we will empower them to communicate their work effectively – whether engaging with policymakers, industry leaders, or the public. In doing so, we will ensure that Keele’s research is not only world-class but widely understood, valued and mobilised for real-world change.

Our commitment extends beyond the university, strengthening engagement with local, regional, national and international partners. A core part of this vision is our commitment to external communication and public engagement in research, ensuring our research reaches diverse audiences and contributes to societal understanding, dialogue and impact. Through open research practices, accessible communication strategies and participation in key frameworks such as the Knowledge Exchange Concordat, we will enhance the visibility, reach and influence of Keele’s research.

Recognition – we will recognise everyone involved in delivering all aspects of our research and innovation eco-system, from award planning to post-award engagement, impact and legacy, celebrating excellence through all our successes and challenges.

Values & Behaviours – our research community will work within Keele’s values and behaviours framework, ensuring that every aspect of our work reflects excellence, integrity and a commitment to responsible research. These principles guide our approach to research leadership, collaboration, and innovation, shaping a culture where knowledge and expertise drive forward-thinking solutions and professionalism is embedded in all research practices.

Honesty and integrity underpin everything we do—we insist on inclusion, respect, and recognition of each other’s contributions. Our researchers take ownership of their work, understanding its significance and proactively driving outcomes that benefit not only the university but wider society. Through strong teamwork and collaborative spirit, we foster equitable and dynamic partnerships across disciplines, institutions, and communities.

Support to succeed – we will provide comprehensive support to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive and excel. Success will be fostered through a rigorous training and mentoring programme, supporting the development of skills, resilience and expertise needed to perform at the highest level.

We will nurture a culture of excellence, where we are empowered to push boundaries in research and innovation. By drawing on strong institutional networks and structured developmental pathways, we will not only support individual success but also create a dynamic environment where high-quality research and leadership flourish.

Financial sustainability – we will focus on strategic initiatives to ensure the financial sustainability of our research and its contribution to the institution through diversifying our funding sources. We will invest in our research environment aligned to the ambitions of this strategy and our assets and infrastructure.

AI – working with Keele’s Information Digital Services, we are committed to harnessing the potential of AI to support and improve our research and innovation, establishing a focus on collaboration (for example, Midlands Innovation), good governance and integrity throughout.

Partnerships – we will continue to seed new collaborative research opportunities with a diverse range of external partners – spanning commercial industries, academic institutions, public sector bodies, and international research organisations. In the context of Innovate UK and linked

investment vehicles, we will foster partnerships that drive innovation, societal impact and knowledge exchange, ensuring that research is mobilised effectively across sectors. We will build on the growth established during the previous plan period, supporting first time researchers in this area, equipping them with the skills and confidence to engage in cross-sector collaboration. Through academic leadership development, we will enhance expertise in knowledge mobilisation and exchange, ensuring that Keele researchers are at the forefront of shaping interdisciplinary and applied research that benefits businesses, communities and global initiatives.

International –We will continue to increase Keele’s reputation, seeding international collaborations, growing access to global science systems, new funding sources, growing international postgraduate researcher relationships, attracting academics and doctoral students in priority disciplines and institutional keystone geographies. Building a recognised and respected global profile will remain critical, ensuring Keele’s research is not only internationally connected but also widely impactful.

Policy engagement – Ensure all areas of Keele’s research with implications for public policy are well placed to achieve influence, growing the skills of researchers at all stages of their careers to engage with policy makers and encompass key policy challenges into research design where relevant.

Infrastructure

Key to delivering this strategy over the next four years is our infrastructure and assets:

Institutes: aligned to the major global areas of importance: social inclusion, the digital society, sustainable futures and, health and wellbeing, facilitating multidisciplinary research and innovation with external partners and bringing all stakeholders together to tackle major global challenges.

Research centres and clusters of excellence: delivering cutting edge research and innovation in specialised areas.

Researchers: acknowledging that we need all researchers from postgraduate researchers to professors to achieve excellence to enable us to achieve our ambition.

Technicians: acknowledge the importance and technical expertise of colleagues and commit to empowering them to achieve and excel in their careers.

Professional Services: acknowledging the key role that professional services provide and the expertise they bring (for example, RaISE, and sustaining public and community engagement).

Partners: we celebrate the crucial role of our Science & Innovation Park, Keele Deals for knowledge exchange, the new Keele Innovation District which serve as hubs for collaboration and impact. These initiatives not only strengthen our engagement with local, regional and international networks of SMEs, but also position Keele at the heart of national and international research and innovation. Through strategic partnerships with leading research institutions, industry leaders, and policy bodies worldwide, we will continue to expand our influence and connectivity across sectors.

Outcomes

To measure the progress of our strategy we will set target outcomes under the following themes:

- **Research excellence** – quality of outputs, impact generation, levels of co-production, REF outcomes

- **Collaboration and partnership** – partnership activity including co-development, involvement of underserved communities and delivery of Keele Deal commitments
- **Research culture** – our research leadership structure reflecting and serving our research community; responses to specific research culture and postgraduate experience surveys; delivery of our HR Excellence in Research action plan; recognition and celebration of excellence in all our successes and challenges; supporting all to succeed through mentoring, research planning and training
- **Leadership and communication** – pipeline of future leaders in all career pathways; clear, bi-directional communication channels; Keele researchers and leaders contributing to policy development, advisory boards and national research councils, shaping key agendas in priority disciplines
- **International** – global research leadership in global consortia, advisory boards and policy discussions, partnerships with leading universities, research institutions and industry partners worldwide, quality publications, alignment with key international priorities
- **Financial sustainability** – diversity of funding sources, strategic and transparent use of QR, investment in research environment and cost recovery of research to ensure sustainability.