Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022-28

Introduction

Research and knowledge exchange (RKE) at the University of Chester (UoC) is being transformed by the hard work of academic staff, postgraduate research students and our professional services staff – drawing on our hugely important links to external stakeholders and those using our research. We seek to continue our mission to grow high quality RKE activities which positively impact our communities – local, regional, national and international – whilst producing lasting social benefit.

All RKE activities at UoC seek to contribute to advances in knowledge through addressing the grand challenges and 'wicked problems' society faces as we traverse the 21st century. This is a good time to be refreshing our RKE strategy, overlapping as it does with the recent launch of UKRI's Strategy (2022-2027), which places research and innovation at the heart of society and the economy. Our RKE Strategy aligns to the new Faculty configuration and provides real opportunities for enhanced inter-disciplinary working across our dynamic academic communities, whilst drawing on the talents of our Citizen Students. We refresh our RKE Strategy at a time when we have seen major improvements in our research as assessed by REF2021 and our knowledge exchange as seen through KEF2 outcomes. Our staff communities should celebrate these achievements and recognise that in the crowded marketplace we find ourselves in, there is still much to be done to build on these gains. It is the emphasis on quality that drives the RKE Strategy, and we will provide support and improved intelligence via our systems, structures and processes to achieve this.

This document, therefore, sets out a Research & Knowledge Exchange Strategy (RKE Strategy) delivered across a six-year window. It is prompted (but not driven) by the need to align to sector norms with an institution-wide approach to better managing the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The RKE Strategy also revises our approach to the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and engaging students in RKE through the Citizen Student Strategy (CSS). It emphasises quality, excellence and innovation through the creation of an outcomes-oriented and evidence-informed RKE culture. It also foregrounds our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in line with the University's core values.

Key Aims

The key aims of the strategy seek to:

1. Enhance the quality, impact and esteem of outputs and research activities, strengthening the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
2. Significantly increase research grant and contract income.
3. Enhance the quality and economic value of regional engagement activities, strengthening the Higher Education, Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) Survey and Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).
4. Enhance the experience and outcomes of Postgraduate Research Students, delivering improved performance in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).
5. Enhance the experience of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students with respect to Research and Knowledge Exchange, aligned to the Citizen Student Strategy (CSS).

Core to this is the need to establish areas of RKE activity which have the potential to achieve critical mass and excellence, such that we become better known for these. Whilst there is already strong evidence of this within UoC's profile, establishing this in other areas is essential. Of equal importance is our impact on place and region (whilst ensuring we address our national and international profile through the REF). This speaks to our role as a civic University and we must orientate to the priorities of Local Authorities (LAs) (e.g., the One City Plan), Local Enterprise

Partnerships (LEPs), NHS partners, businesses and the third sector. Continuing with sandpits, public lectures, research, knowledge exchange and other valuable engagement activities are central to the RKE Strategy. This will be driven via the Research and Knowledge Exchange Institutes (RKEIs), supported by Academic and Professional Services staff, and facilitated through a revitalised research culture. The KEF (through HE-BCI) will quantitatively capture the shape, size, and trajectory of these activities, but longer term, this will involve implementation of a university-wide Public Engagement Plan alongside seeking NCCPE Watermark status.

This RKE Strategy also seeks to ensure that all UG and PGT learners experience the UoC research environment as academically enriching, exciting and rigorous as Citizen Students. We will be driven by a new sub-committee with responsibility to deliver a programme of activities that ensures linkage between RKE and the CSS.

This Document

What follows is a brief discussion of the various elements which make up this strategy - REF, KEF, PGR/PRES, and CSS & RKE, with institutional aims associated with each. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Performance Indictors (PIs) that follow will be monitored via a reconfigured governance framework residing with Pro Vice Chancellor Research & Innovation (PVC R&I), encompassing a Research Management Group, Knowledge Exchange Management Group, PGR Subcommittee, and CSS & RKE Group. As with all KPIs, qualitative and quantitative outcomes will be triangulated as outlined in the Statement on the Responsible Use of Metrics. The KPIs will be enabled through six workstreams (see 'Enablers'), and whilst there is overlap across the workstreams, no prioritisation is implied by the ordering. Necessarily, these will be achieved in tandem with a new Research Leadership Team, including RKEI Directors, Associate Dean of PGR Studies, Associate Deans R&I.

Areas of Focus:

1. Research Environment and REF

The REF2021 results were released in May 2022 (after the existing RKE Strategy was published), demonstrating improved performance at institutional level and across all UoAs submitted to REF2021. Institutionally, the proportion of work considered to be at 3* and 4* level went up from 31% in REF2014 to 51% in REF2021, alongside an 85% increase in the submitted staff headcount. Mainstream QR income has more than doubled to £1.99M, with total QR and HEIF income now at £4.56M (2022/23). At the same time, we need to enhance forward planning and monitoring of outputs, impact and environment (including an annual mock-REF) for REF2028, plus put in place initiatives to enhance output quality. Implementation of a CRIS (Current Research Information System) will support us in this.

Institutional aims for research and REF

The broad aim for REF2028, is to obtain a **GPA of 3.00 and Research Power of 765**

2. Knowledge Exchange and KEF

The KEF results (Appendix A) show performance above the Cluster J average (teaching intensive Universities with evidence of research) in 5 of the 7 perspectives. As with REF, there is no room for complacency due to potential challenges in maintaining performance and income.

Institutional aims for knowledge exchange and KEF

The broad aim beyond KEF2 is to be **at or above the Cluster J average in at least 4 of the 7 perspectives**, and for HEIF to return to current levels of income within three to five years. Alongside

this aim, we seek to implement a university-wide Public Engagement Strategy and seek NCPPE Watermark Status to underline our commitment and strength in this area.

3. Postgraduate Research Provision and PRES

The 2020/21 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results (Appendix B) were released in the months following the existing RKE Strategy, revealing high levels of student satisfaction among PGR students. The 2021/22 results (Appendix B) show a decline in performance across 6 of the 8 categories and a 6% decline in overall satisfaction compared to the previous year, although still matching sector averages and outperforming the sector in certain areas (e.g., supervision). To return to prior levels of performance, we will appoint a PGR Associate Dean who will develop infrastructure around:

- Institution-wide PGR student induction, training, and development opportunities
- Institution-wide PGR supervisor training and development opportunities
- A forum for the PGR Student Voice to provide feedback to the wider institution
- Communication from the institution tailored to PGR students and supervisors

Institutional aims for Postgraduate Research provision and PRES

The broad aim for the next PRES is to **achieve ≥80% overall satisfaction** in Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) in all categories. The longer-term target is to review our portfolio and attract high quality, high performing PGR students across our RKEI and in areas of critical mass.

4. Citizen Student Strategy and Research & Knowledge Exchange

The aim is to create a dynamic, impactful environment (both physical and digital) such that all UG and PGT students have a positive experience of RKE throughout their learning experience. Delivery will be through the recently established CSS & RKE Group, which has already convened and proposed initial suggestions:

- Audit all physical spaces across all sites to ensure RKE is visible (e.g., posters of staff and student RKE achievements; pop-up RKE events/experiments/studies).
- Audit teaching across UG / PGT programmes to ensure that research experts are fully visible to students and continue to make a high-quality contribution to curriculum design, module delivery and dissertation supervision.
- Establish an annual (end of term) Undergraduate Research Conference for presentation of dissertations/final year projects to peers and academic staff, with a range of awards.
- Utilise University of Chester Press for publication of outputs that showcase the highest quality research of PG and PGR students.
- Take responsibility for TEDx events and developing these into TEDx Salon type events.
- Liaise with the Social Capital Steering Group, to ensure all events offered are sufficiently and appropriately RKE-focused.

Institutional aims for Citizen Student and Research & Knowledge Exchange

The broad aim is to be a **beacon of excellence with respect to CS and RKE**, developing the scale of involvement with UG, PGT (and PGR) students year on year. The KPI for this workstream will focus initially on a year-on-year increase in engagement in cross-institutional and Faculty RKE activities.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs have been identified to monitor progress towards the Key Aims of our RKE Strategy and will be supported by PIs within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate (RKED)and within Faculties. This monitoring will be guided by the University of Chester Statement on the Responsible Use of Metrics.

Key Performance Indicator	**Target**	**Workstream**
REF Performance (Grade Point Average (GPA) and Research Power)	3.00 and 765 respectively	2
Research grant and contracts income	Minimum of £5M per annum	2
KEF Performance (Cluster J perspectives)	At or above average for ≥4 of 7	3
PGR student experience and outcomes in Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)	≥80% overall satisfaction	5
UG and PGT student experience and engagement in cross-institutional and Faculty RKE activities	Year on year increase	6

Monitoring

PIs have been identified to support the KPIs within RKED and will be developed and refined in tandem with the workstreams. Further information on potential measures for research quality is included in the Statement for the Responsible Use of Research Metrics. Both documents are available for Academic and Professional Services staff.

A **Dashboard of Institutional Research and Knowledge Exchange Metrics** will be developed that will be, in part, informed by SciVal and the CRIS that is currently in development.

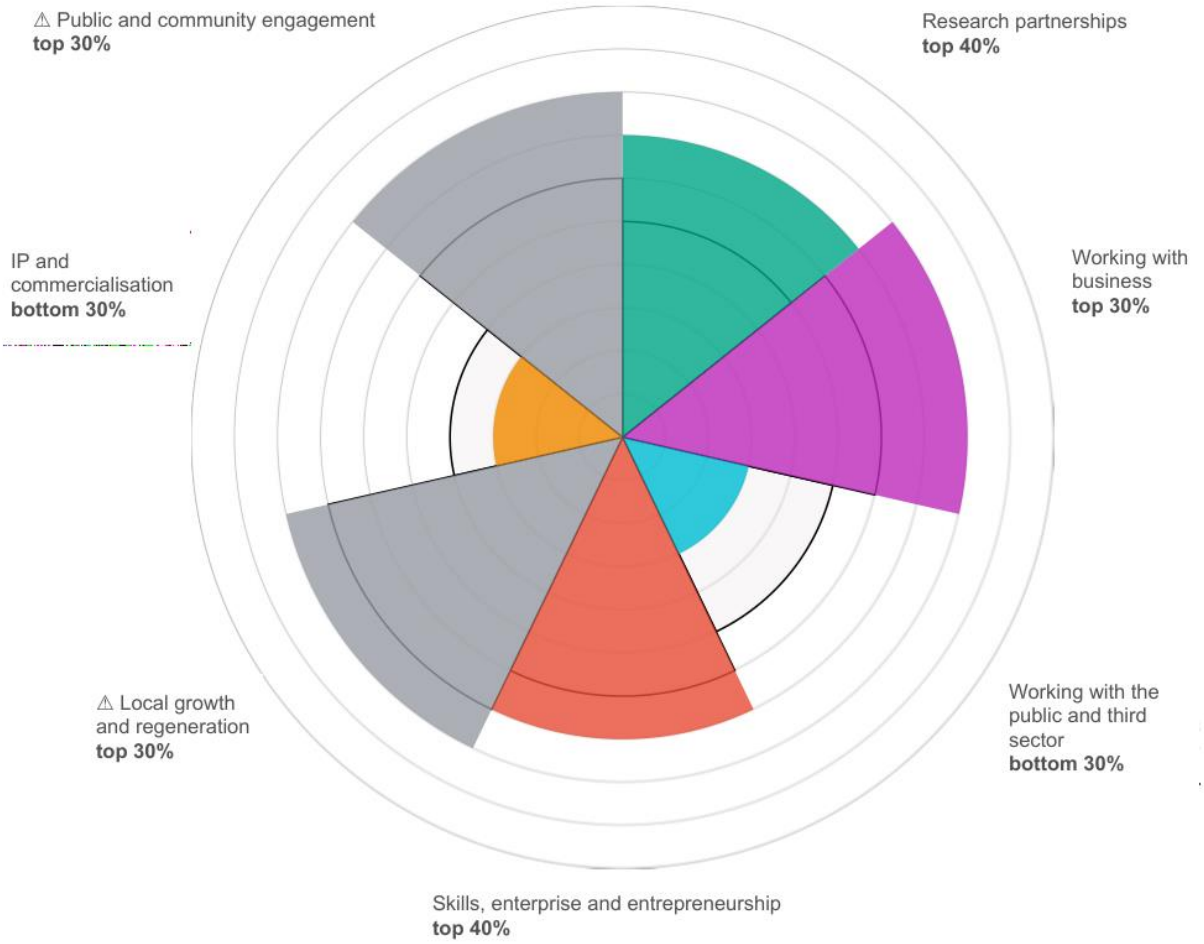
Enablers

The KPIs will be enabled through actions outlined within dedicated workstreams. The success of this relies on the co-operation and determination of all staff contributing – i.e., those leading and supporting the workstreams, and some are achievable only if the required budget is allocated. Where there are interrelationships, impact may be seen on several of the workstreams.

1. Leadership, Governance and Communication (PVC Research & Innovation)	2. Research Data and Intelligence (REF & KEF Manager)	3. Knowledge Exchange (Head of Research & Innovation Office)	4. Enhanced Performance (Director of Research & Knowledge Exchange)	5. Postgraduate Research Experience (Associate Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies)	6. Citizen Student Strategy & RKE (Deputy Head of Research & Innovation Office)
• Appoint Associate Deans R&I (ADRs), Directors of RKE Institutes and Associate Dean PGR. • Support ADRs and HoDs on understanding and implementation of the RKE Strategy in collaboration with SET and PVC/Executive Deans. • Establish Research Management Group and Knowledge Exchange Management Group, responsible for analysis of PIs and advising on REF and KEF matters. • Cultivate PGR Subcommittee and Establish Citizen Student Strategy (CSS) RKE Group, responsible for analysis of PIs and advising on PRES matters. • Enhance RKE communication for staff and students.	• Implement Current Research Information System (CRIS) with priority modules and establish metrics and analytics tools. • Monitor KPI and PIs, communicating progress as appropriate to stakeholders. • Exploit research funding intelligence (including around priority areas with critical mass). • Facilitate analysis and assessment (i.e. 'mock-REF') of outputs and impact case studies using quantitative tools and qualitative assessment. • Monitor and respond to equality, diversity and inclusion of Cat A staff submitted versus Cat A eligible staff, and Cat A submitted staff submitting to and being successful with funding applications	• Monitor KPI and PIs, communicating progress as appropriate to stakeholders. • Monitor and respond to internal and external factors potentially impacting on performance of any KEF Cluster J perspectives, exploring opportunities for UK Shared Prosperity Funding, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Continuing Education (CE). • Exploit KE funding intelligence (including KTPs and around priority areas with critical mass). • Develop a Public Engagement Strategy focussed on priority areas with critical mass within RKEIs, to address key challenges within Cheshire, Shropshire and the wider region; and gain NCCPE Watermark status. • Monitor (funded and nonfunded) engagement and collaboration with strategic partners as well as anchor institutions, businesses and stakeholders. • Monitor impact of RKE Strategy on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for potential barriers to participation.	• Monitor KPI and PIs, communicating progress as appropriate to stakeholders. • Develop a strategy for staff retention (including around priority areas with critical mass). • Establish RKE as a core element of the PDP that is linked to workload planning and considers: profiles; outputs/publications; impact; research (and KE) income; PGR doctoral registrations, supervision and completions; and markers of esteem. • Develop training resources for staff to enhance understanding of and performance in the aforementioned areas, with a focus on publication strategies and output assessment. • Develop and implement RKE Staff Mentoring Scheme in conjunction with CAID	• Manage data for PGR, retention and completion rates, monitoring quality of recruitment and alignment to priority areas with critical mass. • Explore and develop a strategy to introduce a doctoral training pathway. • Monitor performance relating to Graduate Outcomes, developing a strategy to enhance careers advice and transferable skills training for students and supervisor training for staff. • Monitor performance relating to PRES, developing a strategy to enhance research culture. • Enhance communication and foster a positive research community for PGR students. • Monitor and respond to equality, diversity and inclusion of PGR students recruited versus PGR students completing (including progression).	• Engage with the SaP Chat network to promote student engagement in RKE, ensuring effective communication of successes. • Explore and develop a strategy to ensure immersion of RKE in all physical and digital spaces. • Explore and develop a strategy to ensure full visibility of RKE expertise in all courses. • Establish an Undergraduate Research Conference, monitoring and identifying opportunities to enhance engagement in crossinstitutional and Faculty RKE activities. • Establish a University of Chester Press outlet for PGT/PGR outputs. • Reconfigure TEDx, developing TEDx Salon to galvanise student interest in RKE.

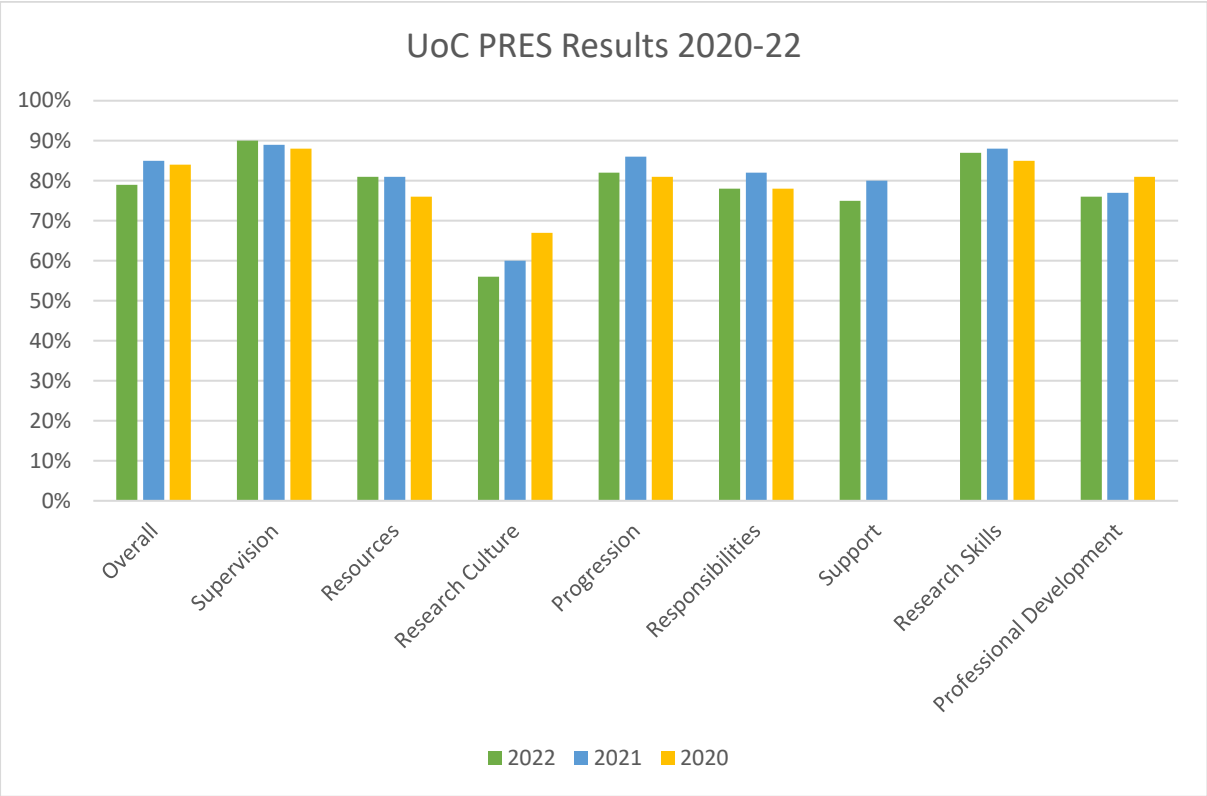
Appendix A: KEF Cluster Comparisons

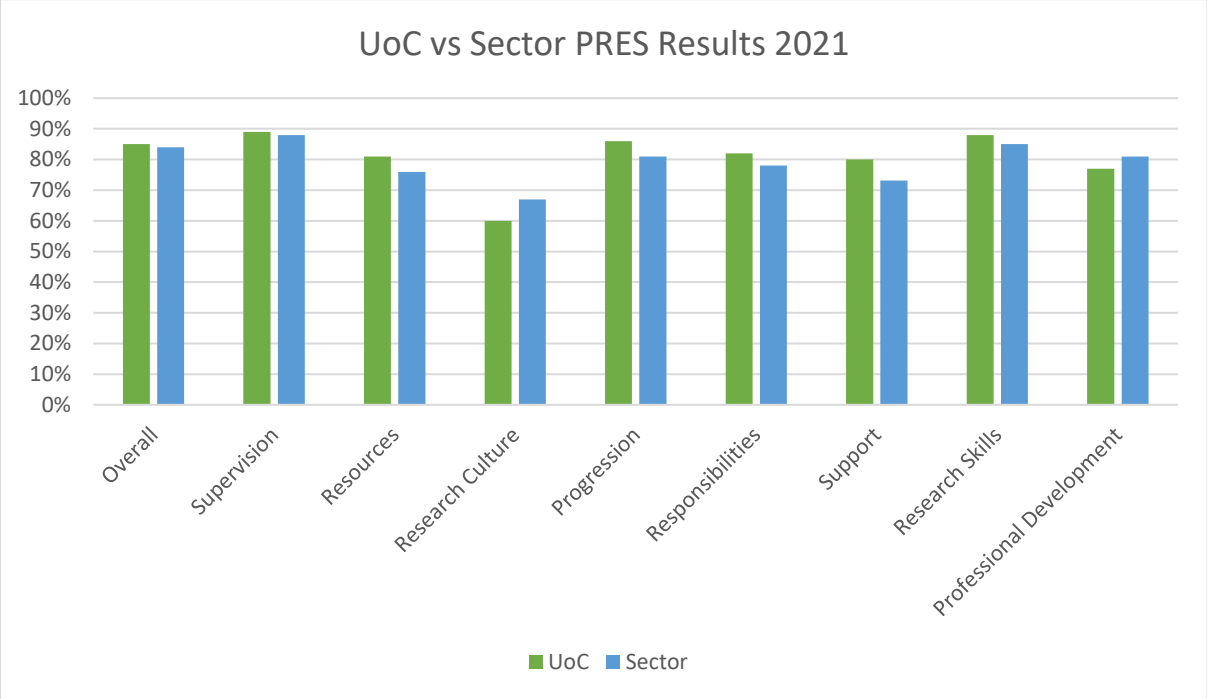
Each segment below shows the relative strength of University of Chester for each KEF perspective, compared against the average for Cluster J (as denoted by the black decile line). Segments are displayed using deciles; for example, a segment that reaches the outer edge of the chart shows that the institution is one of the top 10% of all institutions for that perspective.



Note that the metrics for public and community engagement and local growth and regeneration have associated narratives that give a more complete picture.

Appendix B: PRES Percentage 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'





Appendix C: RKE Strategy for Staff

Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022-28

Our Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022-28 has been established following extensive analysis of research (R), knowledge exchange (KE), postgraduate research (PGR) and the Citizen Student Strategy (CSS) at the University of Chester. This has included an analysis of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) in comparison to the Higher Education sector.

Our overarching aim is to be a beacon of excellence for thought leadership, intellectual discussion and respectful dissent. We will continue to develop a thriving RKE culture which is entrepreneurial, dynamic, impactful and aimed at addressing our local, national and international issues and concerns. This will be supported by an enhanced physical and digital RKE environment, with an infrastructure that actively promotes RKE for both staff and students and benefits external stakeholders. We will maintain our continuing focus on auditing the impact of our RKE Strategy on Equality, Diversity and Diversity within the University.

Staff → Students → External Stakeholders

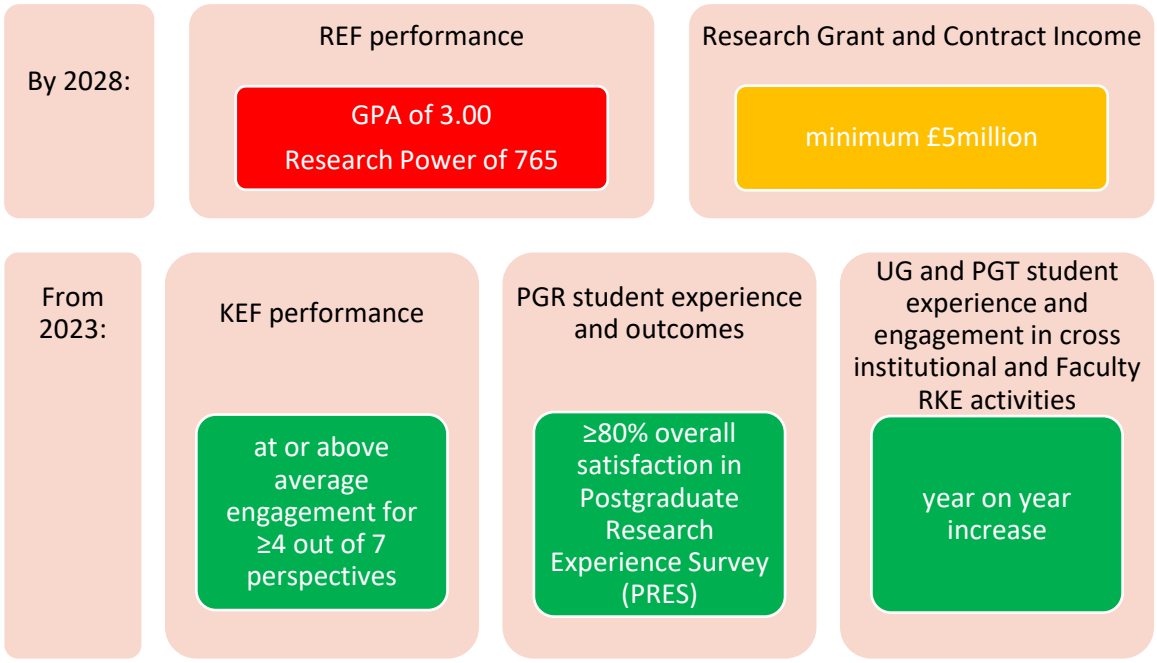
Key Aims

The Key Aims focus on further developing our RKE environment and the impact within and beyond the institution, recognising the value of increased performance in national assessment exercises and the influence this may have upon University League Tables.

- Enhance the quality, impact and esteem of outputs and research activities, strengthening the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- Significantly increase research grant and contract income.
- Enhance the quality and economic value of regional engagement activities, strengthening the Higher Education, Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) Survey and Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).
- Enhance the experience and outcomes of Postgraduate Research Students, delivering improved performance in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).
- Enhance the experience of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students with respect to Research and Knowledge Exchange, aligned to the Citizen Student Strategy (CSS).

Enablers

Six workstreams have been constructed to deliver the Key Aims and include initiatives relating to Leadership, Governance and Communication as well as Enhanced Performance through providing staff at all career stages with development opportunities to support achievement of these Key Aims. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is embedded across several the workstreams. These enablers will be driven by Faculties, Research & Knowledge Exchange Institutes (RKEIs) and the Research & Innovation Office (RIO).

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPIs have been identified to monitor progress towards the Key Aims of our RKE Strategy and will be supported by Performance Indicators (PIs) within the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate (RKED) and Faculties. The University of Chester Statement on the Responsible Use of Metrics will guide this monitoring.