RESEARCH OFFICE
STRATEGY 2023 – 2028

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA · UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Contents

PREAMBLE

The mandate and structure of the Research Office

The Research Office's mandate involves virtually every aspect of the University's research effort, including policy, strategic and operational support of research, postgraduate studies, and capacity development.

Together with other relevant research support departments, it plays a critical and enabling role in the realisation of the University of Cape Town's (UCT's) research vision, encapsulated within UCT's *Vision 2030*, of "unleashing knowledge in, for and from Afrika[1] to redefine and co-create a sustainable global future." This involves research management and support to enable sustained excellent and responsible research; advancing UCT's strategic imperatives to continue growing, transforming and sustaining the research enterprise; and fulfilling internal and external statutory requirements. This involves, in turn, the following broad array of functions:

Advancing research strategy

- Providing and analysing data to support institutional strategy planning.
- Making input into, engaging with, and assisting in the realisation of the goals that emerge from the University's strategic planning.
- Servicing and making input to strategic research-related committees such as the University Research Committee and its sub-committees.

Enhancing researcher development

- Developing and managing researcher-development programmes and supporting researchers at all levels of their careers: postgraduate, postdoctoral, early-career, mid-career and high-flying.
- Attending to the unique needs of both individual researchers and research groupings.

Advancing the responsible conduct of research

- Inculcating and supporting a culture of research integrity by working collaboratively with researchers, other relevant internal offices and external bodies as well as the relevant Faculty and Senate ethics committees to promote responsible conduct of research by providing training, information and dedicated support.

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[1] UCT's *Vision 2030* has chosen to spell Afrika in this way as 'an invitation to reclaim Afrika's agency and use it to validate the global character of the local in the 21st century'. Throughout this document we therefore use this spelling *when quoting from Vision 2030*.

Supporting the procurement and governance of research funding

- Expanding access to external funding opportunities and grants (both national and international) as well as developing and supporting proposals for such funding.
- Providing and facilitating a smooth pre- and post-award process for managing research grants, recognising that a large portion of the post-award support is provided by allied offices, including but not limited to Research Contracts & Innovation, Central Research Finance, Debtors and Faculty Finance.
- Administering a suite of internal grants through a proposal-driven, committee-managed process.
- Managing and improving the funding for postgraduate research.

Advancing cross-cutting and impactful research

- Providing opportunity for internal networking.
- Encouraging inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration.
- Raising the profile of inter- and transdisciplinary research.
- Facilitating the ethical review and approval of transdisciplinary research.

Advancing internationalisation

- Mapping of partnerships and identifying opportunities.
- Forging new strategic partnerships and maintaining and nurturing existing international and continental partnerships.
- Increasing visibility of UCT's research and its achievements to the international community to attract top postgraduates, researchers, donors, and funders.

Communicating internally about UCT's research effort

- Effectively sharing information within the research community about available research funding and partnership opportunities (internal, local, and international), resources for enhancing skills in various aspects of conducting successful research, and essential policy updates and compliance requirements for researchers.

Providing support for the evaluation and reporting of research conducted in the University

- Accrediting and evaluating the University's research groupings.
- Supporting and managing applications for NRF rating and research chairs.
- Tracking UCT's research output and impact.
- Reporting to government as required by statute, such as the submission of research-output data to the Department of Higher Education and Training.

This complex mandate is executed by the following directorates in the Research Office:

- The Research Support Enterprise (RSE), comprising hubs responsible for Data Analytics and Reporting (DAR), Research Support Services (RSS), and the International Grants Hub (IGH)
- Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development, incorporating the Postgraduate Funding Office (PGFO)
- The Office of Research Integrity (ORI)
- Global Strategy and Visibility (GSV)
- Research Systems
- Research Finance and Operations

The Research Office executes its mandate in collaboration with the faculty offices and following departments:

- Central Research Finance (CRF)
- Communication and Marketing Department (CMD)
- Development and Alumni Department (DAD)
- eResearch
- Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office
- Institutional Planning Department (IPD)
- International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO)
- Research Contracts and Innovation (RC&I)
- UCT Libraries

These are supported through functional support departments including Information and Communication Technology Services (ICTS), Human Resources (HR) and Finance.

Postgraduate Studies & Researcher Development

Supports the development of research capacity through seminars, workshops, one-on-one consultations and some research funding. Recognising that researchers can have very different research backgrounds, the directorate aims to help them achieve their individual research potential. Support is provided to academics to reach key research milestones such as completion of doctoral studies, publications, successful postgraduate supervision, ad hominem promotion and winning grant proposals. Researchers are also assisted in fulfilling their responsibility towards broader society through engaged scholarship. Activities of the Postgraduate Studies portfolio reflect under the Postgraduate Funding Office report.

Research Support Enterprise

The research support enterprise unit encompasses research support services, the international grants hub, data analytics and reporting, and the postgraduate funding office (PGFO). The report of the latter is available separately, due to there being a separate GOB fund for the PGFO.

Global Strategy & Visibility

The Global Strategy and Visibility Directorate focuses on ensuring that the university's research endeavour is visible internationally and offers strategic support to the Research Executive. This includes identifying and nurturing international partnerships and networks with a research focus, supporting strategically important interdisciplinary research groups, the analysis of research data (such as co-publishing data and international rankings) to best position the university globally, and the communication and marketing of research. The Directorate comprises three clusters or focus areas: research communication and marketing, global engagement and research collaboration.

UCT Research Office Directorates

Office of Research Integrity

The purpose of the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) is to sustain and enhance the responsible conduct of research at UCT and to promote research integrity (RI), ethics and compliance in accordance with the highest applicable national and international ethical and legal standards. The (ORI) provides guidance and advice to researchers, professional and administrative support staff, academics, and ethics committees on UCT policy, procedures and other responsible conduct and research integrity matters. It services three Senate-level ethics/integrity committees: Ethics in Research (EiRC), Senate Animal Ethics (SAEC) and the Institutional Biosafety Committee. It also provides research integrity/responsible conduct of research training and education.

eResearch & Research Systems

UCT eResearch is a distributed organisation that promotes the use of advanced information technologies to support innovative research practice. eResearch partners with research groups to accelerate and transform research, connecting them to the most appropriate systems and services to support the research lifecycle. The research systems unit ensures that innovative, ICT-based management and information systems are implemented to support the UCT research community. This includes the eRA system. The systems manager is tasked with working across a range of professional staff departments that support research to ensure integration with other ICT systems, provide business systems leadership for current and possible future research and student mobility requirements, and provide overall management and support coordination of these systems

Rationale for a Research Office strategy

Dr Linda Mtwisha, executive director of research

The development of this strategy for the Research Office is informed by at least the following four important reasons:

First, UCT has adopted a bold and exciting new research vision, embodied in the University's *Vision 2030*, of "unleashing knowledge in, for and from Afrika to redefine and co-create a sustainable global future." In response, the Research Office has aligned its own vision and mission with that of *Vision 2030*, within the context of the Research Office's mandate. Making this vision a reality requires a carefully planned strategy.

Second, the ever-increasing magnitude and complexity of UCT's research effort, which is placing immense strain on the Research Office's resources, equally requires a strategy that allows the Office to offer agile and effective support to the University's research community.

Third, the ever-changing external environment and trends in research require a strategy that is not only a response to the current situation but may also be adapted to cope with future scenarios.

Fourth, the fact that responsibility for research management and support is shared across various professional support departments in the University as well as in the faculties creates a disconnect, which needs to be managed strategically.

Therefore, we consider a carefully targeted strategy to be key to enabling the Research Office (a) to give the best possible support to realising the ambitions of, and opportunities inherent in, the University's research vision and to take the lead when we are able to do so; and (b) to overcome, as far as possible within our mandate and in partnership with other relevant offices and departments, the systemic hurdles that currently impede its service delivery.

To be able to construct an integrated and effective strategy for the Research Office, it is in the first place necessary to understand what the University's research vision seeks to achieve and how the Research Office's own vision and mission supports its realisation:

The 2030 Research Vision for UCT

UCT's 2030 Research Vision of "unleashing knowledge in, for and from Afrika to redefine and co-create a sustainable global future" is premised on the three pillars of excellence, transformation and sustainability that underpin UCT's *Vision 2030* of "unleashing human potential to create a fair and just society".

This research vision entails several core aspirations, namely that:

- *Africa must be at the centre of our research focus*: we aim to use our research to build knowledge in and for the benefit of Africa.

- Our Africa focus should include *giving Africa's knowledge a global reach and prominence*.

- A central element of our research effort must be to *work towards a global future that is sustainable.*

- We must anchor our work towards a sustainable future in an emerging common agenda that foregrounds *the attainment of a fair and just society*; and therefore:

- We must emphasise research that has an *impact beyond citation-impact*; that is to say, that has an impact (directly or indirectly) on the quality of life; environmentally, socially, and economically.

Attaining this vision requires a conceptual reorientation, which entails building an agile and networked research approach underpinned by our disciplinary strengths while bringing together cross-cutting expertise across academic departments and faculties and embedding social responsiveness and a community focus.

Putting this into practice requires a structure that:

- Nurtures and fully supports our faculty-based foundation of disciplinary excellence.
- Further develops and enhances our existing agile inter- and transdisciplinary layer of short- and long-term interactive research groupings, spanning academic departments and faculties; and which includes the introduction (and championing across the entire UCT) of specific grand research challenges focused on critical problems in Africa.
- Encourages and recognises impactful research in all its forms, including citation impact, innovation, and all other forms of societal impact.
- Gives tailored support to the different modes in which research is undertaken, whether individually or in research groupings, and recognises the specific needs of individual researchers on the one hand, and differently configured research groupings on the other, including Research Chairs, Centres of Excellence, and complex interdisciplinary groupings.

Putting this structure into practice assumes:

- An environment which prioritises a voice and agency for all who contribute to the attainment of UCT's research goals.
- An active linking of academia, society, and industry.
- A purposeful focus on people and developing their potential, that is to say, to be transformative and to transform.
- A focus on the excellence and impact of our research, in which the quest for new knowledge is integrated with societal impact.
- A recognition of the central importance of fostering sustainability.
- A targeted direction of resources to create a strong link between the three pillars of excellence, transformation, and sustainability.

How, then, does the Research Office fit into the realisation of this vision?

The vision of the Research Office

In the Research Office we have articulated our own vision and mission, which reflects the core aspirations inherent in UCT's research vision as outlined above.

Vision: "We want to be a research office where the research community is enabled and inspired to realise the transformative power of research to uplift society."

Mission: "We empower the UCT research community through strategic support to produce excellent and responsible research which responds innovatively to the needs of African society and the world."

Core values: In pursuit of our vision and mission, our core values are:

- Service-orientated
- Responsiveness
- Flexibility & adaptability
- Shared leadership & accountability
- Inclusivity & collaboration
- Trust & mutual respect
- Kindness & empathy

To realise this vision, we put forward the following strategy for the next five years, which can be summarised in the phrase "collaboration, continuous improvement and innovation in our orientation and practices", which means:

The pursuance of continuous improvement in our services, people and orientation and practices to optimally contribute to realising research excellence, foregrounded by transformation and sustainability.

To realise this vision, we put forward the following strategy for the next five years:

THE STRATEGY

The Research Office strategy

Our aim is to tailor the way we work to better meet the diverse requirements of UCT's research landscape, aiming to support the University's 2030 research goals more effectively. By adapting the way we work, we strive to contribute to realising the vision of achieving excellence, underpinned by transformation, productivity, sustainability, and impact. In this regard, transformation will be a fundamental aspect of all activities within the Research Office, extending beyond specific initiatives to permeate all areas of our work.

In constructing our strategy, we proceed from the premise that the strategy is not, and should not, be aimed at covering everything that we do, but rather at putting in place the key drivers essential to our task of realising our vision.

The guiding principles of the strategy

The following principles underlie the strategic approach of the Research Office:

- Being client-centred.
- Forging a collaborative approach, both within the office and with other professional support departments as well as with the faculties, research groupings and individual researchers.
- Being innovative and open to new ways of doing.
- Heeding the outcomes of the Research Support Transformation Project[2].
- Keeping our focus on that which can make a decisive difference to achieving UCT's strategic research goals.

Core elements that inform the strategy

To 'unleash knowledge in, for and from Afrika to re-define and co-create a sustainable global future', we prioritise:

- Enabling researchers through effective and efficient systems and processes (that take into account the varying needs of researchers and advance the ease of doing research).
- Contributing to the development of a transformed and transformative academic and research-active staff.
- Giving tailored support to the various groups of researchers, including early-career, mid-career, established and high-flying researchers, postdoctoral research fellows and postgraduate research students.
- Building an international research collaborative framework, with an Africa focus and encouraging Global South: Global North equity guided by the *Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity*.

The approach to formulating the strategy

In formulating the Research Office strategy, we collectively as the Research Office and its constituent directorates undertake to do five things: (a) identify our stakeholders, for only when we know who we are serving can we work out how to support them in the best possible way; (b) ascertain what the individual needs of each stakeholder are in order to tailor our

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[2] The Research Support Transformation Project is a multi-phase project that aims to create a more nimble and agile capacity that will better facilitate and enable our fast-growing research enterprise.

support to their needs; (c) identify the key challenges and opportunities that flow from our stakeholders' needs (seen against the backdrop of the University's strategic goals), for these are the challenges that must be singled out for solution; (d) formulate (keeping in mind the guiding principles and core elements of the strategy) what can be done to resolve those challenges and seize the opportunities by harnessing new ideas, for that is the pathway to the systemic reform that will result in an agile Research Office that can fully support UCT's ambitious research goals. Following the strategy formulation, we will (e) develop a workplan in which we (i) detail what must be done, and within what timeline, to reach the ultimate goal of providing the most efficient support to the attainment of UCT's 2030 research goals and (ii) consider what the ideal Research Office business-processes configuration is to achieve the desired results.

a) *Identifying our stakeholders*

Central to our vision and mission is to be client-centric: supporting, empowering, and inspiring our researchers is at the core of what we do and therefore our first task is to identify who our stakeholders are. The Research Office has a range of stakeholders that make use of its services, while the individual directorates have a selection of these stakeholders as their clients: some directorates have only a small subsection of these stakeholders, while others interface with most of them; and, again differing from directorate to directorate, certain stakeholders require more time and effort than others. Furthermore, it is important for each directorate to have a sense, on an ongoing basis, not only of who its stakeholders are, but also to which of them its support is most important.

b) *Ascertaining our stakeholders' needs*

Having identified our stakeholders, it is crucial to review continuously what the unique needs of each of our stakeholders are. Only when we have a clear understanding of what our stakeholders' current needs are, will we be able to identify and articulate what opportunities and challenges the fulfilment of these needs present to the Research Office.

c) *Identifying the most important opportunities and challenges revealed by our stakeholders' needs*

Having established our stakeholders' needs, we map these needs onto the University's strategic goals and imperatives. Knowing what our stakeholders' needs are and seeing them in the context of the University's overall strategy and the need to adhere to research compliance requirements allows us to isolate those challenges and opportunities on which we must concentrate above all else in our domain in the time frame until 2028, in order to ensure the health of UCT's research effort and the realisation of the core aspirations

of the University's research vision and, ultimately, the University's overall vision of excellence, transformation and sustainability.

d) Formulating what can be done to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities

Having identified the principal challenges and opportunities, we take the crucial step of formulating what we are going to do about them. In formulating the solutions, we:

i) take account of:

- Our strengths and weaknesses in producing the desired solutions.
- The opportunities and threats that present themselves in this context.
- Consider how to minimise the threats, address the weakness, and leverage our strengths and opportunities; and

ii) test those solutions by asking if they:

- Follow the guiding principles of the research strategy.
- Prioritise the identified core elements of the strategy.
- Collectively speak to the research vision of the University and the Research Office, including the assumptions contained in them.

e) Develop a workplan

The realisation of the set strategic goals will be organised and articulated through work/implementation plans, which will require collaborative engagement and implementation across departments. To ensure the strategy remains flexible and responsive, the work plans will be updated annually taking into consideration insights gained from the strategy's implementation and prevailing realities.

The substantive strategy

In rethinking its way of work to effectively support the evolving demands of UCT's complex research enterprise, in the context of a research-intensive university facing a variety of unpredictable external factors, the Research Office collectively commits to the following:

Our stakeholders and their needs

We unambiguously place the needs of our varied stakeholder-base at the centre of our plans to support UCT's research effort. It is important to give a sense of just how extensive and diversified this stakeholder-base is as a first step to understanding the complexity that our forward-looking plan must accommodate. We take a broad view of the concept of a stakeholder, and we include all those that rely on our services, information or support.

Within the University, our stakeholders include (a) the entire research community, from postgraduates, postdoctoral research fellows and junior research fellows, through to different categories of academic staff, comprising permanent and contract staff; staff funded by the General Operating Budget (GOB) and soft-funded research staff; staff with teaching and research responsibilities and those who are designated as research staff; staff who are emerging researchers, or established, or high-performing – either as individuals or organised into research groupings; and post-retirees such as Senior Research Scholars; (b) the executive leadership, of which the VC, the DVC: Research and Internationalisation, the deans, and the deputy deans responsible for research are principally concerned with our operations; (c) Senate and faculty-level committees on which we serve, contribute to, or service; and (d) other PASS departments, offices, and clusters, including faculty offices, with which we cooperate or share responsibility for joint delivery-obligations.

Outside the University, the Research Office's stakeholders include (a) government departments, with which we liaise on behalf of the University and individual researchers and postgraduates, from which we receive funding, to which we provide data and reports, and with which we cooperate in various programmes and projects; (b) universities and other research organisations with which we have research partnerships or joint projects and in regard to which we provide liaison and support; (c) international and local funders and donors connected to the research project; and (d) local and international regulators with whom we work and to whom we report.

We seek to understand the needs of each of our stakeholders and, in doing so, we consider it to be of the utmost importance to develop a clear understanding of the nature of our relationship with each stakeholder, for only when we have a deep understanding of this relationship will we be able to see the needs of the stakeholder and how they should be addressed in the proper context.

Key focus areas emerging from identified challenges and opportunities

Collectively, the Research Office identifies the following principal focus areas, as distilled from (a) the direction provided by the research goals of *Vision 2030* and from (b) our environmental scan of our ability to support the attainment of those goals, taking into consideration our stakeholders' needs, as revealed, *inter alia*, by the Research Support Transformation Project and research compliance requirements. These key focus areas echo the core reasons enumerated in the Preamble for embarking on the process of formulating a strategy for the Research Office. They can be divided into (1) key strategic goals and (2) critical enablers of these strategic goals.

1. Key strategic goals

1.1 Enhanced impact of UCT's research: Responding to the opportunities for the development of inter- and transdisciplinary research contained in Vision 2030

The University's new research vision brings exciting opportunities for the Research Office to support equally, but in an intensified way, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research as envisaged by *Vision 2030*. However, this poses demands on the supporting role of the Research Office in light of the siloed approach within the University to many aspects of research finance, ethics, and training, which impact in particular the support of inter- and transdisciplinary work.

The high potential of inter- and trans-disciplinarity work to contribute meaningfully to the production of quality new and path-breaking research is accepted throughout the world, as is the fact that many of Africa's and the world's most intractable problems can only be solved in a meaningful way by researchers from different disciplines combining their problem-solving efforts. Therefore, it is imperative that the University must fully enable the growth of inter- and transdisciplinary research, not at the cost of disciplinary research, but alongside it.

The goal of the Research Office in this context is to enhance and deepen interdisciplinary research at UCT by co-creating significantly enhanced opportunities for such research, with a view to enabling an increased number

of the research community engaging in interdisciplinary research as well as facilitating UCT's research having greater social and knowledge impact.

To these ends, and to support all layers of UCT's research structure in an equitable manner, the Research Office will, while continuing and refining the support provided to the centrally important disciplinary base of the University's research:

- Seek to learn from existing inter- and transdisciplinary exercises to deepen and expand this kind of approach across the University.
- Offer significantly increased, holistic and optimally integrated support to inter- and transdisciplinary research.
- Initiate and coordinate initiatives to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary networking and collaboration.
- Raise the profile of inter- and transdisciplinary research within and outside UCT.
- Facilitate the ethical review and approval of inter- and transdisciplinary research.

1.2 Increased number and quality of active and productive researchers

Developing, enabling, and empowering researchers across the continuum of their careers is central to building a research active and productive community and a successful research enterprise at UCT as well as in South Africa and our continent. Researchers need to develop, among other things, sound research skills and practices, strong disciplinary research expertise, and a niche in order to strengthen their profile and advance in their career at every stage of their academic journey. They also need to develop skills for navigating the research ecosystem, including how to build networks, apply for grants and gain recognition for the impact and quality of their work, e.g., through NRF ratings, awards, and nominations.

Our Researcher Development (RD) programmes must therefore offer bespoke spaces that empower and strengthen researchers, from their postgraduate studies, through their postdoctoral and early-career stages, to the time that they are established and even high-flying researchers, and whether they work at UCT or elsewhere on the continent. The Emerging Researcher Programme (ERP) and offerings facilitated by the Office for Postgraduate Studies (OPGS) focus on our internal audiences, UCT researchers, while the UCT Researcher Development Academy (RDA) offers customised courses to researchers in South Africa and the continent.

The RD programmes deliver a variety of activities which provide a framework within which researchers feel integrated into a community of practice that is supportive and resourceful and gives them opportunities to upskill themselves regarding new trends, policies, and practices in research. Through the programmes, researchers are brought together with other Research Office clusters and other professional/support departments to

learn about these institutional practitioners whose role, along with the systems and processes they provide, is often central in enabling their research.

Historically, RD activities have received appreciation from the research community, but for our work to be as impactful as possible we need to reach even more effectively into our community and continue developing our interventions.

Our end-goal is to facilitate an increased number of research-active and -productive staff and to enhance the calibre of our researchers.

We have identified three key issues that need to be addressed to enhance the impact of our service to the research community:

First, an important obstacle that prevents researchers from accessing and benefitting from our activities is the lack of visibility of our programmes and the services we offer, despite the fact that we have developed tools and platforms to explain what we can do for our audiences.

Second, flowing from this situation, we have also observed that often researchers approach their research in an unplanned way, without a long-term intellectual project and an integrated career plan. This lack of careful planning is attributable not only to not taking up the general support offered by the Research Office, but also to time constraints for developing their research footprint and gaps in the University's strategy and practice in regard to mentorship.

We believe it is crucial for our institution to embrace mentorship as a tool that is a consolidated university-wide strategy as opposed to the small pockets where this is already happening.

Third, however much formal support a researcher receives, there is a need to interact meaningfully with peers about both professional matters and other issues that affect the life of a researcher. An isolated lonely researcher, unconnected to a diverse community of peers, is unlikely to thrive. Although communities of peers are created through different mechanisms at UCT, more can be done to ensure that no-one is left behind.

Therefore, to further improve the effectiveness of our researcher-development offerings, we aim to:

i. Communicate, connect and cooperate in order to render what we offer researchers more visible. Through improved communication about the role and function of the researcher-development activities and their generous eligibility criteria, we aim to tackle the obstacles to participation in different ways, namely by:

- Communicating directly with researchers, emphasising that we support researchers at every level of their career and implementing a system that pushes customised information towards the researchers.
- Enrolling the support of the structures within which these researchers reside, namely faculties, departments, and research units, to refer their new staff members in a structured way to the researcher development programmes.
- Brokering relationships pro-actively with institutions in South Africa and on the continent, showcasing the researcher development successes of our programmes to promote a demand for our courses from them; and leveraging our networks and fundraising to enable us to holistically develop African scholarship, an important component of our UCT research vision.

ii. Empower researchers to gain a better understanding of career planning. We want to use our researcher-development framework to strengthen our training opportunities to assist researchers in planning their future progress in their careers most effectively and in the shortest timeline, both in-person and online; by:

- Establishing exactly what the needs are across the various career levels by implementing a differentiated approach to upskilling that suits the various levels of expertise and development requirements along the continuum from postgraduate researchers to high-flying established researchers.
- Producing integrated training that considers practices from other Research Office clusters and professional departments, their expertise and policies and their specific research management systems.
- Developing a central and up-to-date repository that our researchers can draw from to assist them in their research journey.
- Shifting behaviour towards careful career planning, working with the relevant structures to complement our work by promoting and entrenching mentorship more fully within the institution.

iii. Co-create spaces of belonging, personal and professional networking to break the isolation of researchers. In these spaces, we will:

- Encourage researchers to work together on challenges related to research as well as challenges that are not directly linked to their disciplines and that may extend outside the realm of the research.
- Create a space to connect researchers, their research and their ideas. These spaces will provide opportunities for conversations where researchers think together about solutions to the varied

challenges they face. This can foster a sense of belonging which brings an enhanced experience to both individuals and the research community.

1.3 Increased, diversified, and accessible research funding

Access to funding is the lifeblood of research-intensive universities. An increased level of research funding contributes not only to an increase in the number and quality of publications but also to improved translation and impact of the research. In turn, more effective dissemination beyond the academic environment raises the visibility of the institution in which the research and publications are produced. To remain at the forefront of universities in Africa and to improve our global position while, more fundamentally, producing research that contributes meaningfully to the knowledge needs of Africa, UCT must engage in a concerted and ongoing effort to increase the inflow of research grants, contracts and donations.

However, success in achieving a continued increase in research funding is hampered by a variety of external and internal factors. External factors include a decrease in national research funding both in the form of agency funding and corporate funding, increased competition for international research funding, a dominant focus on Global North priorities in available funding and an increasingly complex regulatory environment. Internal factors include a too heavy reliance on a limited number of funders and a limited number of principal investigators accessing such funding; low capacity and financial constraints in providing support both for researchers who apply for grants and for successful applicants in the post-award phase; limited capacity to cater for the differing needs and skills of researchers at different career stages and the unique requirements of various grants, particularly large international grants; insufficient attention to increasing postgraduate funding; and a lack of alignment between targeted funding sources and UCT's strategic goals.

Our overall goal is to improve the sourcing of funding for research by all levels of UCT researchers by increasing the number and success-rate of researchers applying for funding, and to that end we will:

- Increase researchers' general awareness of funding sources and support services.
- Capacitate and empower researchers across all UCT faculties and at all career stages to apply for and successfully obtain research funding through streamlined and targeted training interventions, linking them to funders within their research focus areas and according to their needs.
- Build capacity in supporting grant applications and post-award support for large international grants.

- Streamline the application process by developing easy-to-use resources for specific target funders, with the goal to increase funding applications and grants awarded.
- Build partnerships between UCT fundraising teams to support areas of strategic importance.
- Prompt the URC to continuously reflect on the use of the funds under its control by investigating what the needs and priorities of researchers are and determining how the University can best direct the funds at its disposal to support its strategic research goals.
- Deploy the strategic funding made available by the UCT Executive to advance UCT's strategic goals.
- Identify and support new strategic initiatives such as research chairs and centres of excellence, in line with our research priority areas.

Regarding postdoctoral research fellows funding specifically, we will:

- Increase and diversify the sources of funds for postdoctoral research fellows, including working with the DAD to fundraise for this purpose.
- Improve communication about funding opportunities and processes for postdoctoral research fellows to the postdoctoral community and to the faculties.
- Streamline the application and reporting process for postdoctoral research fellows and faculties.
- Improve the level of service delivery to postdoctoral research fellows to help them secure funding. If funded by the mentor via researcher funding, we will extend this support to the mentor.
- Work with relevant stakeholders to correct the processes that impede the smooth administration of postdoctoral funding.
- Make visible funding and awards for postdoctoral research fellows across UCT.
- Work closely with mentors to monitor postdoctoral research fellows' progress to minimise requests for extension funding.
- Train, at an early stage, postdoctoral research fellows on how to apply for funding.

The above goals regarding postdoctoral research fellows' funding apply equally to postgraduates, with specific support offered to supervisors soliciting grant-holder linked and free-standing bursaries.

1.4 An enhanced culture of research integrity: the responsible conduct of research

An ethical approach to research is unquestionably a fundamental precept of good science. When researchers embrace research integrity as an indispensable part of their research, as every researcher should, it reduces the risk of adverse consequences and produces outcomes that are trusted because the research was conducted according to the stringent requirements of modern scientific practice.

However, the value and indeed necessity of embracing the responsible conduct of research as a way of life is not always clear to researchers. First, because the nature and intrinsic value of research integrity practices have not been sufficiently inculcated in some researchers, who sometimes hold incorrect views on what the responsible conduct of research is about and, at best, view its processes as tiresome boxes that must be ticked or, at worst, resist complying with them. Consequently, they often view the work of the Office of Research Integrity in the Research Office as constituting an unnecessary bureaucratic policing of research, whereas the role of the Office is actually to enable responsible research practices and to empower researchers to achieve this.

In addition, there is a lack of awareness of the relevant policies and procedures – not only among researchers but also in cognate departments that need to play a role in this regard. This is exacerbated by insufficient opportunity to do the necessary upskilling. Added to this is a general lack of a sense of the importance and urgency in respect of eliminating research-integrity deficiencies at all levels in the University, with a concomitant dearth of resources devoted to promoting the responsible conduct of research and delays in implementing policy reforms.

To resolve these challenges, we will:

- Institute a media blitz that will seek to address the range of challenges identified above in a dynamic, creative, context-specific, and engaging way, namely reframing the commonly held view of ethics committees and of research integrity and responsible research practices, underpinned by strengthening relationships with the Global Strategy & Visibility directorate, more proactive marketing of our services and offerings and a more informative website.
- Develop and implement a Responsible Conduct of Research mentoring programme targeted not only to emerging researchers but to every level of researcher and enabled by discipline-specific trainers.
- Develop a guideline or clear set of criteria that can be used to drive engagement around policy implementation as successful policy implementation requires multiple steps including:
  - Identifying an implementation team that will be responsible for developing a plan and timeline and carrying it out with reporting requirements.
  - Identifying the impact that the new or revised policy could have on existing policies and processes.
  - Identifying the impact that it could have on infrastructure and people and finding mechanisms to accommodate and incorporate for this impact.

- Develop and implement an integrated Institutional biosafety and biosecurity programme to strengthen the biosafety and biosecurity programme at UCT, through development of adequate policy, increased development, and training opportunities and, a culture change to one which supports positive, transparent engagements related to biosafety and biosecurity. This will support more consistent institutional compliance with international and national legislative requirements, which are currently inadequately enforced.

Furthermore, recognising that unfair and inequitable research practices undermine research integrity in a variety of ways, we reiterate our commitment to working towards embedding the *Cape Town Statement on Fostering Research Integrity through Fairness and Equity* in UCT's research culture by striving to realise its goals, championing its values, and working toward the implementation of its recommendations.

1.5 Advanced internationalisation through global partnerships and visibility

Efforts to advance internationalisation through the Research Office have two overlapping prongs: brokering and maintaining international partnerships and engaging with the world through visits to and from UCT and through other forms of communication.

International collaborations are critical to sustaining and increasing the quality and quantity of research and research capacity and, importantly, to addressing continental and global grand challenges. A great deal of the University's research income comes through external funding, much of this depending on international collaboration – and increasingly through large, often interdisciplinary, competitive grants from international agencies. We should, therefore, enable and nurture bilateral or multilateral partnerships that enhance and promote UCT's research priorities while promoting regional and national priorities.

Our vantage point in Africa and ranking as the leading university on the continent presents a huge opportunity, but it brings more potential partners to our doors (either through engagements with the executive or on-the-ground with academics) than we can centrally support. Central support – whether in terms of funding or time – cannot be effective if it is spread too thin. While acknowledging that the most effective partnerships and networks are those that evolve bottom-up by individual researchers and research groups, it is also true that a great deal of collaboration grows out of our membership of formal international research networks, each of which brings different and distinct benefits to its members, such as internal and external funding for research and the building of trust over time at academic and executive level. However, are we extracting full value from the many networks to which we currently belong and pay membership fees?

To effectively select which partnerships and networks to support, it is imperative that we take a proactive and strategic approach. This requires furnishing the executive with comprehensive research and analyses to inform and facilitate their decision-making processes.

Reaching an international audience to promote UCT (which increases our reputation and can attract collaborators, postgraduates and academic staff, funders, and donors) needs to cut through the noise of our competing institutions, adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape and take account of the needs of the executive to enable their important objectives.

There exists an opportunity to streamline the communication of internationalisation efforts across various executive teams and PASS departments within UCT. By improving how information is shared, we can bridge the knowledge gaps about ongoing internationalisation activities, ensuring that all parts of the University are aware of each other's initiatives. This will also help to capitalise on potential synergies between different areas, avoiding the risk of overlooking opportunities to enhance our international presence.

Finally, global engagement often relies on international travel, which is costly not just financially but also in terms of the impact on the environment.

To tackle these challenges, we will:

- Support the executive with ongoing analysis to inform decision-making around the selection of new and maintaining of existing partnerships and networks, and to develop over time a small set of centrally supported strategic research partnerships.
- Put in place structures to work across offices involved in internationalisation (for instance, the Office of the Vice-Chancellor, the DVC: Research & Internationalisation, and IAPO) to develop broad awareness, share information and leverage opportunities.
- Research changes in the relevant media landscape to ensure that we can respond with agility.
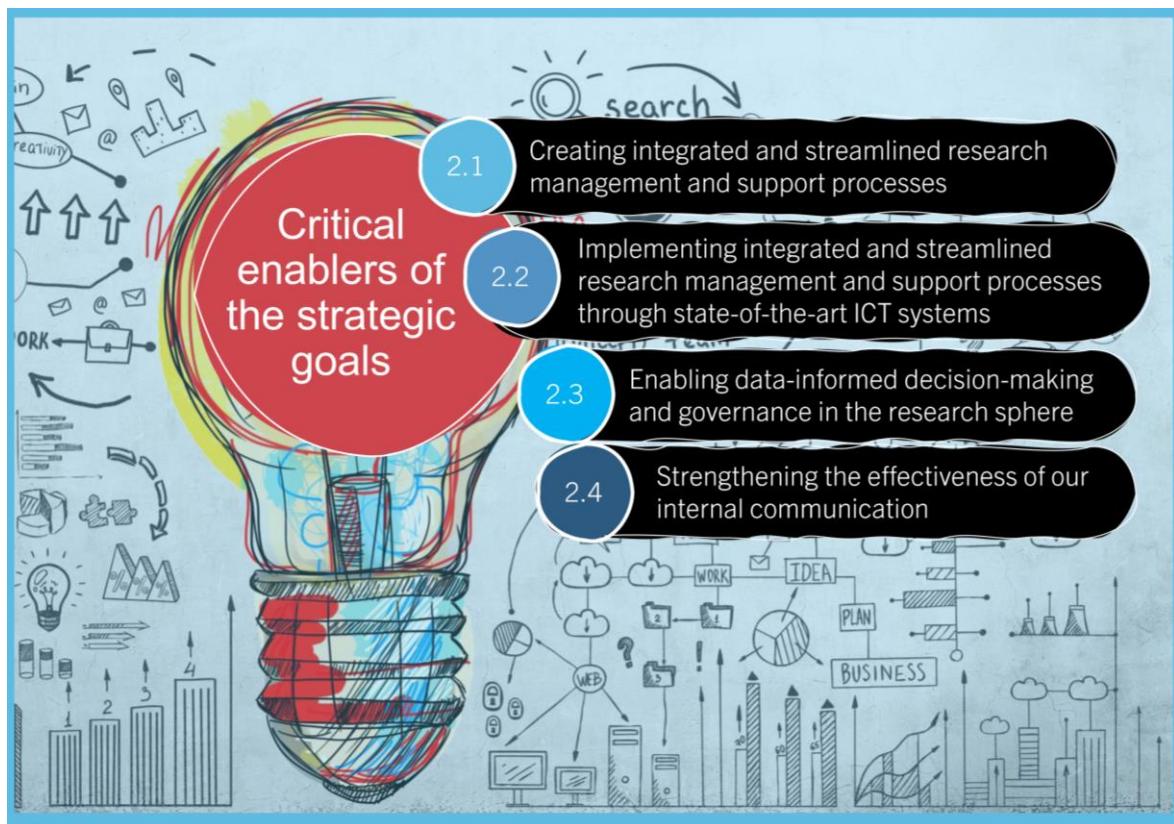
2. Critical enablers of the strategic goals

2.1 Creating integrated and streamlined research management and support processes

Freeing researchers from unnecessary bureaucratic processes and making it easy to navigate necessary processes are cornerstones of all effective research operations. If these conditions exist, engagement with research will increase, researchers will be more productive, job satisfaction will improve, and the retention rate will increase. The responsibility for research management and support is shared across various professional support departments in the University as well as the faculties, and the disconnect between the different entities that carry this responsibility is one of the main drivers of slow and unwieldy processes, a situation which is exacerbated by sub-optimal communication between the different directorates within the Research Office. Overcoming this to enable streamlined and fit-for-purpose research support is one of the central goals of the ongoing Research Support Transformation Project run through the office of the DVC: Research & Internationalisation, which will inform a Research Office Business Process Review as a cornerstone of our 5-year strategy.

The creation of easily understood and intuitively navigable research management processes and systems that are accessible to all researchers, whether staff, postdoctoral research fellows or postgraduates, is a key objective of the Research Office, working in collaboration with allied offices providing research support. To this end, in order to contribute to the

elimination of the splintered research-support spread and to ensure ease of access to our interventions, support, and information, we will:

- Continue to review UCT's research support business processes, by instituting an office-wide Research Support Business Process Review to integrate and streamline operational processes for improved efficiencies and with streamlined interfaces to collaborating offices; and review the office structure for optimal support of the Research Office strategy.
- Increasingly arrange portfolios within the Research Office according to cognate functions to prioritise the efficient use of staff, increase institutional knowledge retention and improve employee continuity.
- Collaborate with RC&I, CRF and the FHS Research Office to develop the Pre- and Post-award Knowledge Hub that will serve as an expert knowledge resource for researchers when applying for research grants; enable training for new principal investigators and provide clarity on the operational process flow for a project life cycle and how UCT's support functions seamlessly link into each other.
- Set up permanent liaison mechanisms between the various directorates in the Research Office itself; and between these directorates and the specific professional support departments with which they interface to achieve role clarification and ongoing dialogue about, and solutions for, duplication, delays and miscommunication.

Further strain on research management and our researchers is caused by the insufficient alignment of UCT research-support capabilities (people, processes, systems, finances, equipment) to the changed research landscape, with many support processes retrofitted from Teaching and Learning and not fit for purpose for the research endeavour. This places an administrative burden on researchers and research support staff.

The Research Support Transformation Project currently underway, under the leadership of DVC: Research & Internationalisation, is critically important to address the shortcomings in our Finance- and HR-related governance structures, processes, and systems and to adapt our research-support systems better to facilitate UCT's research endeavour, taking into consideration the unique requirements of the various research categories. This will involve a review of the organisational structure for research support with the objective of establishing a coherent research-administration structure between professional support structures and the faculties.

2.2 Implementing integrated and streamlined research management and support processes through state-of-the-art ICT systems

The future of a globally competitive UCT on the research front depends on good research management and support. Thus, UCT will put in place state-of-the-art ICT systems to ensure the easy electronic availability of all data relevant to research monitoring and planning; achieve seamless

interoperability between the various systems containing the relevant data; and ensure transparency and visibility of all research management and support processes for research administrators and researchers alike. We will also collaborate with eResearch stakeholders to make sure that our revamped Research Management and Support Systems are better integrated and interoperable not only with each other but also with the Research Data Management, Research Output and Researcher Profile Tools widely used both inside and outside the University, and particularly systems developed by major UCT funders such as e.g. the NRF, the NIH and the European Commission and international open research partnerships such as ORCID, EOSC and OpenAIRE.

This is not an option: no serious research-intensive university can hope to manage the intricacies of the research endeavour without state-of-the-art ICT systems. UCT embarked on this road several years ago, but – as is the case everywhere – this is a hard road and implementing a seamless system that is user-friendly requires determination, fortitude, and patience. We have the former one and we trust that our research community has the latter two as we continue this journey.

To achieve this goal we will, in conjunction with eResearch and ICTS:

- Constitute a task team to collect and consolidate the requirements for an integrated ICT solution to best meet UCT research management and support needs, also based on the outcomes of the Research Support Transformation Project and of the Research Support Business Process Review.
- Actively pursue the detailed specification and implementation of the requirements emanating from the task team for an integrated ICT solution.
- Revamp the Research Support Hub website to be user-friendly and support the adoption of the improved Research Management and Support Processes and the integrated ICT solution.

2.3 Enabling data-informed decision-making and governance in the research sphere

Access to reliable research management data is indispensable to the effective governance of, and successful planning in, a university and thus to maintaining and improving its competitiveness. Reliable data must not only be accurate and complete but also comply with the FAIR Principles, ensuring it is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable, as well as capable of being processed by machines. It enables strategic planning, compliance with regulatory obligations, reliable reporting to internal and external constituencies, and meaningful assessment of individual and institutional performance. It is of the utmost importance to a research-intensive university such as UCT that the available data should include data relevant to the analysis of research activities. The availability of good data relevant

to research is especially important to ensure (a) that a strategic approach to all aspects of human-resource and performance management of researchers at all levels of the University is supported, (b) that UCT remains at the forefront of the ranking of South African universities and improves in the international rankings; (c) that informed decisions can be made about whom to collaborate with and how to maintain collaborations and related fund-raising efforts effectively; and (d) that future evidence-based investment decisions by the University Executive on research endeavours are enabled. In addition, research units and individual researchers also need easy access to research data relevant to them to enable their own planning of their collaborative efforts and advancement.

By implementing a state-of-the art ICT solution for Research Management and Support, we will take the University to a position where it is fully enabled by the availability of data that is relevant to the analysis of its research performance and fully capacitated to analyse the data. We will thus work towards:

- Creating a real-time research dashboard, providing access to reports and data analyses through visualisations on the UCT website and being accessible via smart devices to anyone in the University who is engaged with planning of whatever kind connected with research, whether for their personal research, for a research grouping or a faculty, or for the University as a whole (with the necessary safeguards built in to ensure that the data available to each user is appropriate to their level of authority and need to know).
- Instituting, in cooperation with IPD and cognate departments, a virtual rankings hub as a strategic measure that will ensure that UCT has contextual knowledge about its metrics to enable it to take appropriate proactive measures to ensure its leading position in the rankings.
- Instituting, again in cooperation with IAPO and other cognate departments and faculties, a virtual collaboration hub to enable the provision of relevant data and metrics with a view to improved analyses of UCT's collaborations and ultimately more productive partnerships.

2.4 Strengthening the effectiveness of our internal communication

Meeting the strategic objectives outlined above depends – almost without exception – on effective communication within UCT's research ecosystem: researchers, postgraduate students and research support staff (within the Research Office, RC&I, CRF, IPD, IAPO, UCT Libraries, ICTS etc., and in faculties and research groups).

Researchers need information about the various tools available to them to enable high-quality research and the development of their skills. They also need information about opportunities for funding and potential partnerships

(both within and outside UCT) that will lift the quality of their individual and collaborative research. Postgraduates need toolkits and information sharing so that they feel fully supported through the postgraduate journey and can minimise the time to graduation.

The set of stakeholders we engage with other than those described above include, firstly, those who require internal communication to achieve their objectives, including the executive and colleagues in the Research Office (in particular Research Systems and ORI); and secondly, a number of stakeholders who not only depend on our services for communication, but are also frequently critical for facilitating our communication with researchers and postgraduates. These include the research committees such as the URC and the Board of Graduate Studies, faculties and deans' offices.

Communicating with researchers, in particular, poses significant challenges. The first of these is reaching the targeted communities. Various factors influence researchers' willingness to engage with the platforms and mediums used to communicate with them. The second is the fact that most researchers work under severe time pressure, which means that they are likely to learn about and adapt to new systems, processes and ways of conducting research only if they are sure that there is a significant benefit flowing from the time spent. The third is that different stakeholders have different preferred mediums for consuming information. The fourth is keeping up with and adapting to a constantly and rapidly changing media landscape, so that a platform/medium that is effective for reaching a particular constituency may become redundant and replaced with a new medium within the space of a year or two (and occasionally more rapidly than that).

The Research Support Transformation Project is addressing many of these challenges and must be an integral part of our internal communications. Beyond that, we will continue to innovate, finding new ways to reach the research community, persuade them of the need to engage with the communications owing to the value they provide, and encourage their buy-in of new processes and systems.

To do this, we will:

- Investigate the effectiveness of our current methods and mediums of internal communications, across the range of stakeholders, including postgraduates and researchers at all stages of the research pipeline.
- Develop and test new methods of communication.
- Ascertain whether the implementation of current and new methods of reaching and engaging with our internal stakeholders has been effective.

Conclusion: The Strategy and the Road to 2030

This strategy constitutes a broad framework for recasting the work of the Research Office in such a way that it supports the realisation of UCT's 2030 research vision creatively and in the most efficient way possible, while heeding the results of the Research Support Transformation Project and generally keeping the needs of our stakeholders firmly in our sights.

It is important to reiterate what it is *not*. It is not a plan outlining everything that the Research Office will do over the next five years as part of its ongoing review of the relevance and efficacy of its services. Rather, the *Strategy for the Research Office 2023 - 2028* seeks to identify the key strategic goals of the Research Office and to set out in broad terms the critical enablers essential to realising our goals, with the ultimate purpose of contributing meaningfully to the realisation of UCT's 2030 research vision. Formulating the strategy in this way means that it has the necessary flexibility to ensure that its implementation can be adapted to take account of new insights and changes in the external and internal environment.

The strategy will be accompanied by a detailed workplan covering the five years allocated for the attainment of the Research Office strategic goals (which includes consideration of the ideal Research Office business-process configuration). To ensure the strategy remains flexible and responsive, we will annually update the workplan. This revision will consider evolving conditions and insights gained from the strategy's implementation.

In summary, then, the strategy seeks to capture the essentials of optimally supporting the attainment of our researchers' ambitions as well as the University's research goals through a flexible approach that is sensitive to the ever-changing conditions in the research landscape.

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"If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together".

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