

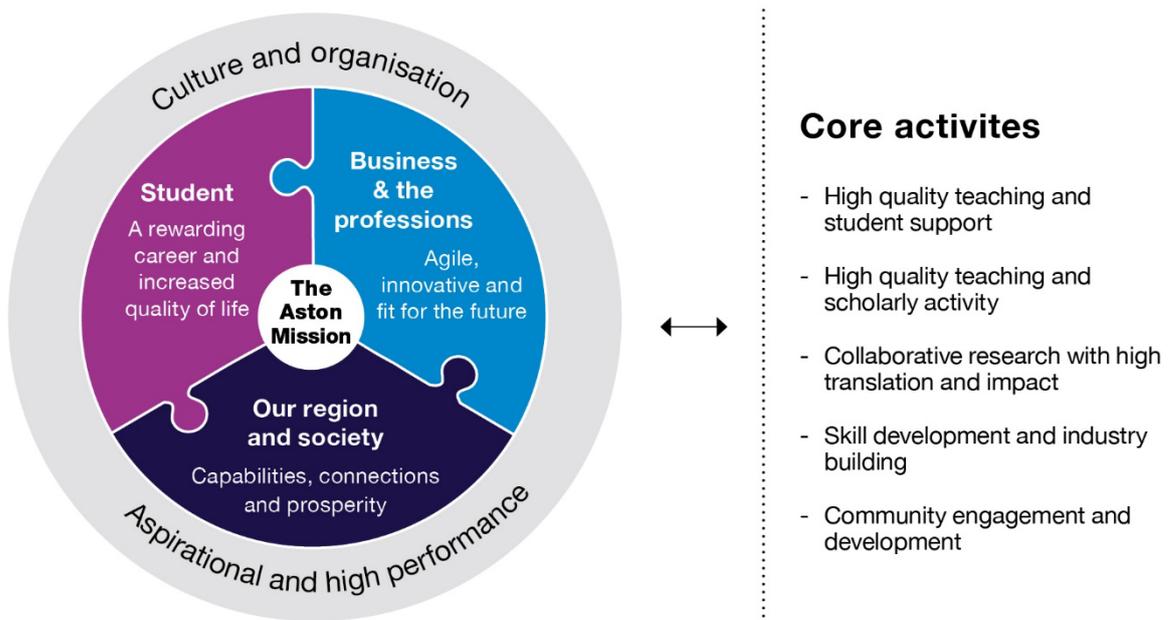
Institution: Aston University

1. Context and mission

1.1 Founded in 1895 as the Birmingham Municipal Technical School, Aston evolved into the UK's first College of Advanced Technology in 1956, and became a University in 1966. Today, we are a 'dual intensive' University, which values excellence in education and research equally. Aston University's mission is to deliver for its beneficiaries (Figure 1):

- i. Students – through research led pedagogy and training work-ready graduates (70% of students participate in an Integrated Placement Year).
- ii. Business, Professions, and Public Sector – through collaborative research with practical outcomes for partner organisations (e.g., BT, GW Pharmaceuticals, Thales, Defence Science Technology Laboratory, West Midlands Police and Public Health England).
- iii. Region and Society – through informing policy and public debate, increasing the knowledge base (e.g., West Midlands Combined Authority, Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, or Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital).

Figure 1: The Aston Mission



With that 'beneficiaries approach' at its core, the [Aston Strategy 2018-2023](#) is innovative in its focus on impactful research, student placements, graduate job pathways and CPD programmes.

Growth of the Institution

1.2 The Aston Strategy 2018-2023 explicitly recognises the importance of attracting, retaining, and supporting high quality staff; our recruitment processes ensure that candidates career aims closely align with our strategic objectives. In 2019, 68% of Aston students and 25% of academic staff identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic. The University is committed to increasing the representation of minority groups amongst all staff and students and *The Guardian* named Aston [University of the Year 2020](#) in recognition of this commitment and our track record. Aston is aware of the difference between the composition of our staff and student populations: we have committed to the Race Equality Charter and are developing an application for a Bronze award during 2021-22. The University has formed two new working groups, one looking at ways to support Black students and staff, and one tasked with making Aston's curriculum more inclusive.

1.3 Since REF2014, Aston has grown substantially:

- i. [Turnover](#) has increased from £117m in 2012/13 to £165m in 2019/20;
- ii. Student FTE has grown by 46% between July 2013 and July 2020 (Table 1);

Table 1: Growth of Aston University Student Community (HESA, FTE)

	2012/13	2019/20
Undergraduate	7,502.14	11,488.32
PGT	1,118.96	1,553.68
PGR	302.07	302.84
Total	8,923.17	13,344.84

- iii. Academic FTE has grown by 66% between 2013 and 2020 (Table 2), based on a snapshot of contractual data taken annually from our HR system on 31 July. This growth has delivered a marked improvement to our SSR, and by increasing the number of T&R and Teaching-only staff, we have protected the research time of those with Significant Responsibility for Research. The FTE returned to REF has increased from 199.43 in 2014, to 435.76 in 2021.

Table 2: Growth of the Aston University Academic Community (FTE) 2013-2020

	31/07/2013	31/07/2020
Academic: Teaching and Research	308.45	406.94
Academic: Research Only	122.68	172.15
Academic: Teaching Only	73.18	258.03
Academic: Leadership	0	2
Total Academic	504.31	839.12

- iv. Central research support capacity in the [Research and Knowledge Exchange \(RKE\) Department](#) (section 4.4) has increased to 56 individuals. RKE now includes the Aston Graduate School (section 3.15-3.19) and the Early Career Researcher Forum (section 3.13-3.14).

Aston and the Midlands

1.4 Aston University is a critical part of the regional economy. Table 3 details Aston's economic impact on the region ([Metro Dynamics, 2019](#)). Aston Business School's bespoke programmes provide local businesses with clear and cutting-edge information on how to improve performance. Since 2014, 92% of businesses on the Small Business Growth Programme gained confidence to grow their business, 88% increased their business skills, and three in five companies expect turnover growth in excess of 200%. In addition, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) working with Aston received an average 1107% return-on-investment from the initial grants provided through KTPs (applied research projects launched in collaboration with local businesses). With 75% of our KTPs awarded to SMEs, Aston explicitly works with the region's smaller companies.

Table 3: Aston University Economic Output 2017/18	Amount (£m)
Core Operations	274.8
Research & Innovation	68.3
Teaching	397.7
Students Expenditure	264.4
Placements	25.2
Total	1030.4

1.5 Aston is a member of [Midlands Innovation](#) (MI), eight research-intensive institutions to driving cutting-edge research, innovation, and skills-development. MI partners have [generated £10bn](#) in Gross Value Added, supporting 95,000 jobs in the region. Aston works closely with regional industrial partners and has a well-earned reputation for supporting and working with high growth smaller technology businesses. Aston is part of a number of strategically important MI initiatives:

- i. [Midlands Engine for Growth](#) (ME4G) aims to raise the long-term economic growth rate of the region, enhance job creation and add £34bn to the Midlands economy by 2030;
- ii. In partnership with two other HEIs, Aston launched an angel investment network, [Minerva Birmingham](#), in 2019;
- iii. £1.5m investment in the [Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute \(EBRI\)](#) through the [Energy Research Accelerator](#);
- iv. The Connecting Capabilities funded [MI Commercialisation of Research Accelerator](#) (MICRA) providing training for academics and revenue streams to help expedite the translation of research to solutions, marketable products and services;
- v. The Research England Development funded [West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute](#), which supports inclusive economic growth in the West Midlands;
- vi. Collaboration in shared funding applications for advanced equipment such as the £3.2m [High-Performance Computing Midlands Plus](#) (2017);
- vii. £3m awarded by Research England (total investment £5m) in 2020 for ‘TALENT’ to develop skills and opportunities for technicians in higher education, reinforcing Aston’s support for the [Technician Commitment](#).

1.6 Aston is committed to increasing access to Higher Education while adding value and improving employability for its students. Aston’s student recruitment reflects this commitment (Table 4). [The University](#) is an active agent of social mobility, recruiting more Index of Multiple Deprivation Q1 students (33%) than the sector average (21%) and with its proportion also growing faster than sector average.

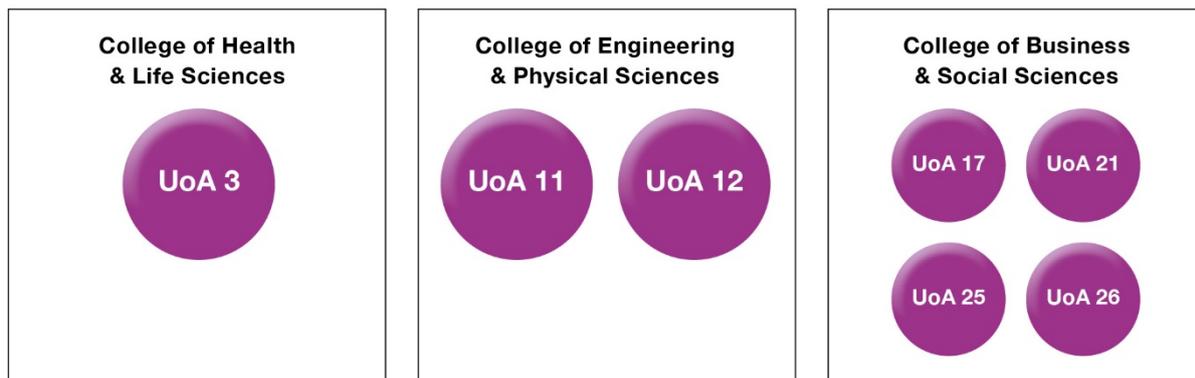
Table 4: Aston Student Demographics	2019/20
(Total number 17,686; UG 13,186; PGT 3,875; PGR 625)	
BAME	70%
White	30%
Have a declared Disability	8%
Household Income less than £43k	34%
Household income less than £25k	27%
Female	49%
Male	51%
West Midlands (2019/20)	46%
Birmingham (2019/20)	31%

2. Strategy

University Structure

2.1 Between 2014 and 2020, Aston University was organised into five academic Schools; these were consolidated as three Colleges in August 2020. In REF2021 we are returning to seven Units of Assessment (Figure 2). This structure will further embed the priorities of the University Research Strategy (section 2.3), by providing more opportunities for cross-disciplinary research.

Figure 2: Aston's Colleges and our return to REF 2021



2.2 [Research Committee](#) is a Sub-Committee of Senate with responsibility for the development, implementation and evaluation of the Research Strategy, including integration of the University and College Strategies. This structure is reinforced by weekly informal meetings between the PVC Research and College Associate Deans for Research. Our [REF Code of Practice](#) details the University's governance structures for REF2021.

2.3 Aston's [Research Strategy \(2019-2023\)](#) is constructed around four mutually-reinforcing elements: **Impact, Collaboration, Excellence, and Sustainability**. Together with our new [Knowledge Exchange \(KE\) Strategy](#), it provides a framework to prioritise strategic investment, and assess how research and KE activities deliver for our beneficiaries.

2.4 Aston's commitment to **excellence** informs all our activity; including the recruitment, support, retention and development of exceptional individuals at all career stages (section 3). This commitment reinforces Aston's position as a 'dual-intensive' institution, with the quality of Aston's teaching recognised by [TEF Gold](#) (2017). In 2020, Aston was named [The Guardian's University of the Year](#), and the [Times Higher Outstanding Entrepreneurial University](#), while the new Students' Union building won [The Guardian's 'Buildings That Inspire'](#) award. We mark our successes through our annual Research Celebration event and KTP Showcase, both hosted by the Vice-Chancellor.

2.5 A central pillar of our Strategy is the role played by Aston's newly accredited **collaborative**, multi-disciplinary University Research Institutes (URI). Each URI represents an area of critical mass, and **excellent** research with **impact**: [Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies](#) (AIPT-UoA12); [Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute](#) (EBRI-UoA12); [Aston Institute of Health and Neurodevelopment](#) (IHN-UoA3); [Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics](#) (AIFL-UoA26). The URIs are priorities for research capital investment, and are key drivers of financial **sustainability**, accounting for one-third of research awards in 2019-20.

2.6 Our 'beneficiaries approach' and track-record of research on real-world problems mean that **impact** is deeply embedded in our academic units and our professional services teams (section 4). For example, our portfolio of 27 KTPs (eighth largest in the UK) provide an excellent platform for delivering research with impact. Aston's KTP team won awards at the Innovate UK 'Best of the Best' National KTP Awards in 2019 and 2020.

2.7 Collaboration is a critical element of translation and delivering impact to our beneficiaries (ILES-4.7). Aston currently has over 30 institutional-level [research partnerships](#) with international universities (58.7% of outputs were published with international co-authors in this REF period), and over 100 further partnerships focussing on staff and student exchange. Aston has research-focussed Knowledge Exchange relationships with 50 Industry Partners (5.8% of outputs during the REF cycle include industrial co-authors (above average)).

2.8 The future health of Aston's research environment is predicated on financial **sustainability**. Our position as a 'dual intensive' University and the resulting commitment to widening participation, retention, student placements and employability involves numerous resource intensive interventions; consequently, the more financially sustainable our research is, the more we can afford to do. Our [support for bidding for research funding](#) is clearly set out, including policies for internal [peer review](#), [match funding](#) and [due-diligence](#). Our objective is to grow funding from UKRI, Government (including KTPs) and industry: in 2019-20, we won our highest-ever level of UKRI awards (£8.5m out of £30m).

Interdisciplinary research (IDR)

2.9 Aston actively facilitates IDR at all levels (individual, group, institutional), as well as with research partners in the UK and abroad. We invest in IDR through the URIs (section 2.3), Study Leave, the International Collaboration Fund and activities run by the Strategic Funding Managers (SFMs) (section 4.5).

2.10 Interdisciplinarity forms a significant element of training provision for Post Graduate Researchers (PGRs) and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) delivered by the Aston Graduate School (AGS), the ECR Forum and Organisational Development. AGS organises an annual conference around an IDR topic, as well as an annual [Interdisciplinary Seminar Series](#) with invited academic speakers.

Research Integrity

2.11 Aston's [Research Integrity Policy](#) and associated [Research Integrity Assurance Procedures](#) expect the highest standards of integrity in the conduct of research. The University is a signatory of the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, and is committed to the principles of honesty, rigour, transparency, open communication, care, and respect.

2.12 Aston University Research Integrity Office (AURIO) is the central point of contact for [Research Ethics, Governance, and Integrity](#). AURIO includes the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research Integrity), the Research Integrity Manager and Research Integrity Officer. AURIO works with Aston University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) to monitor and improve institutional ethics policies and guidelines, and provides training and support for Researchers via dedicated programmes (section 3.10). In 2020, Aston funded a Research Ethics Portal to streamline the research ethics process.

2.13 Aston is a signatory to [DORA](#). The University's [Policy for the Responsible Use of Research Publication Metrics](#) (2020) reinforces the primacy of substantive peer review and recognises the value that metrics can add to that process. Scival is used for reporting, benchmarking and analysis of research indicators.

Structures to support an open research environment

2.14 Our [Open Research Data Policy](#) (2019) highlights the requirement to maintain accurate and retrievable data generated by research in order to open up data for scrutiny, to validate and replicate research, and to re-use data. The Policy applies to all researchers, PGRs and professional services staff supporting research data management. Evidence of progress towards compliance with the Concordat on ORD is reported regularly to the URC.

2.15 Aston’s [Open Access \(OA\) Policy](#) aligns with UKRI OA requirements for REF2021. Aston provides [comprehensive guidance](#) on all aspects of OA, with specific expertise provided by the Library’s Open Access and Research Repository Specialists, and Information Specialists.

2.16 Aston has committed £370,000 to securing Gold Open Access since 2014. In 2020 Aston decided to focus investment on the publishing element of new transformative/read and publish contracts. Such contracts offer greater return on investment when compared to paying individual Article Processing Charges for non-funded authors. To date Aston has contracts with eleven publishers.

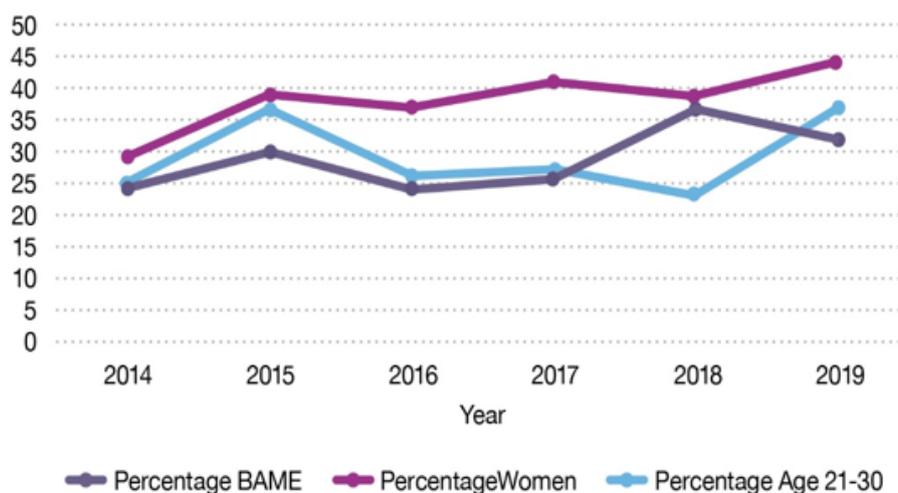
2.17 99% of REF Category A staff have an ORCID iD.

3. People

3.1 In 2015, Aston moved to a standard model of permanent appointment with a three-year probation period for Teaching and Research staff. Since then, the share of (T&R) staff on fixed-term contracts has fallen from 35% to 2%. Aston has not used zero hours contracts during this REF period.

3.2 Aston’s academic recruitment since 2014/15 (Figure 3) demonstrates our commitment to improving diversity (section 1.6). In 2021, we will consider anonymous shortlisting for our academic recruitment processes.

Figure 3: Recruitment of underrepresented groups to T&R and Research-only roles (2014-2019)



3.3 Promotion is one of the ways we reward and retain excellent staff and build a strong community of academics, with 145 T&R colleagues promoted since 2014/15 (Table 5). Promotion for Teaching and Research staff is based upon excellence in either Research, or Teaching and Learning. On the Research route, the promotions criteria are explicitly aligned to the Research Strategy (section 2.3).

	Total	Gender Breakdown
Lecturer to Senior Lecturer	77	60% M - 40% F
Senior Lecturer to Reader	44	57% M - 43% F
Reader to Professor	24	63% M - 37% F

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

3.4 Aston’s [Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#) details our commitment to creating an inclusive environment aligned with the broader Aston Mission (Figure 1). Data collection and analysis is critical to the understanding of Aston’s EDI profile, informs discussions with staff and students, and helps to identify areas of culture, policy, and practice which require improvement. *The Guardian* 2020 University of the Year Award specifically highlighted Aston’s EDI programme (section 1.2). We are striving to address our leaky pipeline and the lack of diversity (particularly with respect to race), at senior levels. In 2020, we developed our LGBT+ Inclusion Charter and we are working towards enhanced training and support with respect to disability.

3.5 The EDI Strategy is operationalised through [policies and procedures](#) and diverse membership of University Committees. The [Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Forum](#) (EDIF) (Figure 4), consolidates eight active strands of activity across the University. EDIF reports to the University Executive ensuring relevant activities align with management priorities and University Strategy.

Figure 4: EDI Committee Structure



3.6 EDIF works in parallel to the Gender Equality Project Management Group, which focuses on the priorities of the Athena SWAN Charter. By 2025, we aim to eliminate our [Gender Pay Gap](#) of 19.5% in 2020 by focusing on consistency of starting salary, and pay parity on promotion and within professorial bands. Aston’s Pay Gap Working Group is looking at issues around the relative lack of diversity at senior levels; developing anonymous recruitment processes focused on skills-based assessment, and developing a pool of diversity and inclusion experts to support recruitment panels. The College of Engineering and Physical Sciences’ excellent practice in this area is recognised by its ATHENA Swan Silver award and is being adopted across the University (Table 6).

Table 6: Athena SWAN Awards	Type of Award	Level
University	Institutional	Silver
School of Engineering and Applied Science	Departmental	Silver (Applying for Gold during 2021)
School of Life and Health Sciences	Departmental	Bronze
Aston Business School/Aston Law School	Departmental	Applying for Bronze
School of Languages and Social Sciences	Departmental	Bronze

Staff Wellbeing

3.7 Aston has a comprehensive suite of [Health, Safety and Welfare policies, procedures and guidance](#) covering: Leave and Attendance (including [the Parenting at Aston Scheme](#), Flexible

Working, and Compassionate Leave); Wellbeing (including EDI, Work-Life Balance, Work-Related Stress and Menopause); all aspects of Working at Aston. Staff have highlighted the following as particularly valuable:

- i. Since 2017, the cost of parental leave is no longer borne locally; instead, the University centrally funds up to a year of parental leave above statutory rates;
- ii. Mental health/wellbeing resources that are reflected in our Workplace Wellbeing Charter accreditation;
- iii. All staff employed for more than 26 weeks may [apply for flexible working](#);
- iv. All services, facilities, promotion and job opportunities are available to staff on extended leave;
- v. Comprehensive support is offered to those taking extended leave for reasons of ill-health;
- vi. Staff requiring periods of leave for caring may request part-time working, flexible hours, or take up to one-year unpaid leave;
- vii. Formalised KIT and SPLIT days, re-induction processes and phased returns help colleagues returning from extended leave to re-establish careers;
- viii. A robust Bullying and Harassment Policy.

Academic Career Development

3.8 In 2018-19, [My Development Conversation](#) replaced the previous Performance Development Review. This shifted the emphasis from biannual review to continuous dialogue, which is particularly important regarding the professional development and employability opportunities of fixed-term research-only staff. Through this process, colleagues agree targets for grant applications, publications and public engagement activity. In 2017/18, the University opened the promotions path up to Professorial level for both Research, and Teaching and Clinical staff.

3.9 Mentoring networks offer a safe, informal environment for staff to discuss issues, and seek guidance. All new staff and ECRs have at least one mentor, usually a senior colleague and we have invested in [PLD](#) mentoring software. At senior levels, mentoring and coaching is arranged on a personal basis, with some senior staff accessing mentors in other universities. The Culture, Employment and Development in Academic Research Survey ([CEDARS-2020](#)) indicated that 60% of respondents at Aston have a mentor, and that 58% of those with a mentor stated that the relationship had a positive impact on career development.

3.10 Aston's staff development programmes are well established. All staff complete [mandatory training](#), including E&D Awareness, Unconscious Bias and General Data Protection Regulation Awareness. Academic staff access [continuing professional development](#), including 'Introduction to Learning and Teaching' and the 'PGDip in Academic Leadership'. Staff without a teaching qualification must obtain this or an Advance HE Fellowship within 2 years of joining Aston. The RKE team offers training geared to the research lifecycle (sections 2.9, 4.5). The Organisational Development team [provides training opportunities](#), including Executive Development, Change Management, and The Institute of Leadership & Management programmes.

3.11 [Study Leave](#) is managed at College level and is recognised as an essential element of a research environment that prioritises excellence.

3.12 Aston is a signatory of the [Technician Commitment](#), a sector wide initiative led by the Science Council, supported by the Gatsby Foundation to help address key challenges facing technical staff. A technicians' representative is a member of URC.

ECR Forum

3.13 Aston maintains its commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers through regular reviews and updates of policies, practice and the Researcher Development Programme. [The HR Excellence in Research Award](#) (2020) recognises this institutional undertaking. Responsibility for the implementation of the Concordat rests with the 'HR Excellence in Research Award Group', which is co-chaired by the ECR Facilitator and the Dean of the Graduate School.

3.14 [The ECR Development Programme](#) is managed by the Researcher Development Advisor and Professional Development Advisor, both of whom are based in the Graduate School. It includes formalised Career Development Planning and Training Needs Analysis, plus a wide range of centrally managed courses (Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities, Personal Effectiveness, Research Governance and Organisation, and Engagement Influence and Impact). Elements of the annual [Graduate School Training Programme](#) are also open to ECRs.

Support of PGR students

3.15 Formed in 2010, the Aston Graduate School (AGS) is a cross-university initiative, led by the Associate PVC/Dean of the Graduate School. The [Graduate School Management Committee \(GSMC\)](#) reports into Research Committee, ensures the quality of PGR-programmes across the University, fosters interdisciplinary initiatives and supports PGR-student wellbeing. Thus, it has had a considerable impact on the student experience and quality of the doctoral process.

3.16 AGS has implemented standard processes and documentation for the PGR lifecycle, and ensures quality standards for all research degree programmes. Overall responsibility for the welfare of PGRs lies with the Colleges who own the PGR programmes. College Directors of Research Degree Programmes are members of GSMC, thus ensuring that AGS has strong links to the day-to-day running of all research degree programmes. All staff with supervision responsibility are required to complete mandatory supervision training regardless of career stage.

3.17 The [Graduate School Training Programme](#) supports career development, both within academia and beyond. PGRs receive a comprehensive [AGS Handbook](#); attend the AGS and College Inductions; undertake 90 hours of research skills training; and are invited to complete the Introduction to Learning and Teaching Practice course delivered by the University's Education Team before undertaking any teaching. The AGS Training Programme is based on the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and the training sessions align with the Framework's four domains. Funder specific requirements are met through training provision offered by Colleges and the relevant UKRI doctoral training structures for each College.

3.18 [Aston Postgraduate Research Society \(APRS\)](#) encourages collaboration between Colleges, aiming to improve the social and academic experiences of Aston PGRs. APRS nominates representatives to relevant committees within the University governance structure.

3.19 The [Centre for English Language and Communication at Aston](#) offers training for students and staff for whom English is not their first language.

4. Income, infrastructure and facilities**Income**

4.1 The growth in academic faculty, coupled with the expansion of research support provision has facilitated an increase in grant capture (£15m in 2013/14 to £30m in 2019/20) and research income (£12.5m in 2013/14 to £17m in 2019/20). Record grant capture in 2018/19 and 2019/20 will underpin continued growth in research income.

Facilities

4.2 Since 2013/14, £25.55m of capital expenditure has been incurred against research project codes, research cost centres and research estates projects in Aston's areas of research strength. Since 2018, this investment has aligned with the URIs (section 2.5) in order to maximise return, for example £7.3m investment into 30 AIPT laboratories, supported by a £500k Wolfson equipment grant, plus an additional £3m internal investment on equipment.

4.3 The [Midlands Innovation consortium equipment catalogue](#) facilitates equipment sharing between member universities. MI also enabled Aston to partner on successful cross HEI funding applications (section 1.6)

Infrastructure (research, translation and impact)

4.4 Aston's research support infrastructure is led by the PVC Research and Executive Director of Business Engagement. The RKE Department (section 4.4) includes 56 members of staff and nine teams (Research Strategy, Funding and Impact; Graduate School; Research Integrity; Knowledge Exchange; Business Engagement; Regional Strategy; Corporate Client Solutions; and Research Marketing). Our support for research also includes teams in Finance, HR, Library Services, Organisational Development, plus Research Managers and Administrators in Colleges.

4.5 During the REF period, the University Grant Writing Programme (organised by the Strategic Funding Managers (SFM)) has developed into a comprehensive course. The programme takes 15 participants through the application process from initial idea to approval, including costing, peer review and mock panels. As part of the Programme, we draw on the experience of senior staff with a track-record of funding success to provide constructive feedback to participants. The SFMs regularly run drop-in sessions to support all aspects of research funding.

4.6 The [Development and Alumni Relations Office \(DARO\)](#) facilitates partnerships with third-party organisations as well as managing philanthropic relationships with alumni. DARO works with academics and SFMs to secure funding from charitable trusts with a focus on the URIs.

4.7 To mark the University's Golden Jubilee in 2016, the Aston University Prize Fund was established to facilitate research. Between 2016-18, Aston matched funds 50:50 for 54 PhD Studentships (£2.1m); six Research Fellows co-funded by external partners (£348k); and £120k for International Research Scholarships.

4.8 Aston has received £577k of Global Challenges Research Fund QR funding since 2018. Funding supported collaborative initiatives with international partners. We have strengthened collaborations leading to further competitive, collaborative awards, such as a Newton Fund award with Indonesia, an UKRI/GCRF award and a Newton Prize nomination on nutrition in Kenya.

4.9 Aston has invested in systems that underpin our activity throughout the research lifecycle, including:

- i. Moving from pFACT and Agresso Awards Management to Agresso Research Costing and Pricing for the costing and management of research funding;
- ii. Elsevier hosting of PURE for research information management;
- iii. Subscriptions to Scival and ResearchProfessional;
- iv. Dods Parliamentary Companion.

4.10 Through our [Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#), we aim to deliver economic growth, productivity enhancement and social impact around five key themes: research and knowledge transfer; degree apprenticeships and work-based learning; employability and entrepreneurship; regional and civil engagement; business engagement.

4.11 Our work in Knowledge Exchange also tackles social and economic challenges, informs and influences policy to foster a culture of evidence-based policymaking and will form the foundation of our Civic University Agreement (2021). We work closely with regional bodies, developing shared projects that benefit citizens, for example:

- i. Raising awareness of the importance of eye health ([Villa Vision](#) initiative);
- ii. Sustainable business growth and productivity ([Unlocking Opportunity](#) with the Federation of Small Businesses);
- iii. Consultancy activities undertaken with SMEs; Aston is the most active university in the Midlands, and ninth in the UK ([2018/19 HE-BCI data](#));
- iv. EBRI working with Low-Carbon SMEs including, [FuturEnergy Ltd](#) and [Modus Waste & Recycling](#);
- v. Through the Citizens UK Birmingham Business Leaders Programme, colleagues in Aston Business School are supporting BAME enterprises to access Government via the [COVID-19 Emergency Listening Campaign](#).

4.12 We have invested in our internal support for a diverse range of industrial research collaborations and translational research. Key posts are funded internally and through HEIF in the Knowledge Exchange team, the Business Engagement team, and in Schools (including Associate Deans Research and Impact Champions). In 2016, a Research Impact Manager was recruited to develop systems and processes to identify, nurture and capture information on the impact arising from Aston research; a full-time Impact Officer was added in 2019.

4.13 Since 2018, an annual Impact Fund of £150K has been invested to accelerate data collection for REF Impact Case Studies, and to support the development of a pipeline of more than 200 potential impacts across the University. A range of training sessions, workshops, group-based away days, and one-to-one consultations are delivered through RKE, AGS and the ECR Forum to spread and embed best practice regarding the integration of impact into the research process. Aston works closely with the Industry and Parliament Trust and The Conversation to access training and support for developing researcher skills in engagement and to communicate the outcomes of its research.

4.14 Examples of our activities in translation and impact over this REF period include:

- i. Match-funding to support a portfolio of 21 ERDF projects (total value over £10m);
- ii. Through the Aston Centre for Growth, 14 dedicated SME support programmes working with almost 800 companies
- iii. Growth of our KTP portfolio from 7 to 27 in the REF period, including KTPs now held in all three Colleges;
- iv. Through MICRA (section 1.5), re-launching academic support processes for translation of technologies and intellectual property;
- v. Growth of collaborative working with international partners (academic and industrial) through £34.2m EU H2020 funded projects, in particular Marie S Curie Actions and awards from the Future and Emerging Technologies programme.