

Professor Dame Jessica Corner appointed Executive Chair of Research England

Professor Dame Jessica Corner has been chosen as the preferred candidate for the role of Executive Chair of Research England, taking up appointment in October subject to ratification by the House of Commons Science & Technology Committee.

As Executive Chair, Professor Corner will be responsible for leading Research England in its critical role in providing more than £2 billion annually in grant funding to English universities for research. She will also support knowledge exchange activity and oversee other major funding programmes, as well as the sustainability of the higher education research base in England.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Shearer West congratulated Professor Corner on her selection, saying:

“I wish Jessica every success in this role, which is critical to the success of research excellence across the higher education sector in England. She has made an immense contribution to the University of Nottingham and leaves research at the University in a much stronger position, with a significantly larger research portfolio, currently valued at more than £900 million, and improvements across all REF2021 measures. With a new five-year research strategy and a motivated research leadership team in place, I have every confidence that she has laid the foundations for further success in the future.”

During her six-year tenure at the University of Nottingham, Professor Corner has led the University’s transformational five-year research strategy 2017-22 which included such sector-leading initiatives as the research fellowship programme. This highly successful scheme attracted more than 100 talented academics to Nottingham to provide the research leadership pipeline of the future. The programme has focused on exceptional research and innovation and prioritised support for underrepresented groups with 50% of the fellowships awarded to women and 16% to those who identify as BAME.

Professor Corner led the University’s preparations and submission for REF2021, ensuring comprehensive support for academics to develop their scholarly work and to ensure evidence of its impact, whilst research strategy initiatives significantly strengthened the University’s research environment. The recent REF2021 results delivered improvements across all measures and, according to analysis by *THE*, secured the University 7th position in the UK for research power. A strong advocate, role model and champion for equality and diversity, Professor Corner provided personal mentoring and coaching to many colleagues to develop their careers and their personal effectiveness. This contributed to significantly increased participation among women and colleagues from BAME backgrounds in REF2021.

The Vice-Chancellor will confirm interim UEB leadership arrangements for the Research & Knowledge Exchange portfolio shortly. A recruitment consultancy has been engaged to run an external competition to identify Professor Corner’s permanent successor.

Looking forward to her appointment, Professor Corner paid tribute to the many colleagues with whom she has worked at Nottingham:

“I am delighted to be chosen as the preferred candidate for the Executive Chair of Research England, although it will be a wrench to leave Nottingham and the many colleagues and friends that I have made here. In my view, our national research base has never been stronger, although there are clearly some challenges ahead, and I look forward to supporting research excellence across the country in the same way that I have enjoyed growing our research excellence here at Nottingham.

“There is always more to do in the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research & Knowledge Exchange, however, this feels like the right time to move onto my new role when Nottingham has recently secured improvements across all the headline measures of REF2021 and secured 7th position for research power in the UK. I want to thank every colleague in the research community whose hard work has contributed to delivering this achievement and so many more in the University’s research outputs.”

Professor Corner also initiated the research Beacons of Excellence programme. Aligned to support and champion the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), these six multidisciplinary research areas devised programmes to tackle today’s grand challenges from securing the future of our food, to ending slavery, and

personalising our approach to healthcare. Collectively the beacons generated more than £200m in external grant funding, attracted talented individuals and supported internationally important research. This model, unique in the sector in 2017, also provided the blueprint for the China Beacon Institute at our campus in China, securing millions in research funding from the Ningbo government.

Commercially, Professor Corner established Nottingham Technology Ventures and the University Innovation Fund to support how the University grows and supports its portfolio of spin out companies, securing more than £100 million investment into these companies to enhance the University role in commercialisation. She also helped researchers at Nottingham to secure the largest single award received by the University, more than £29 million from UKRI to establish the UK's most powerful Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanner as a national facility which will develop unprecedented insights into brain function and the mechanisms of human disease.

Within the University, Professor Corner advocated for the streamlining of research services to better support the academic community, established the digital research service and developed the international collaboration fund to support major partnerships with, for example, the University of Tübingen.

In addition to her role at Nottingham, Professor Corner holds several national roles, as Registrar of the Academy of Medical Sciences and Movember's Global Cancer Advisory Committee. With more than 35 years' experience in higher education, Professor Corner is a Professor of Cancer and Supportive Care, and a renowned academic in her field with more than 200 academic publications.

As one of the first students to graduate with a degree in Nursing from London University, she went on to specialise in Cancer Nursing at the Royal Marsden Hospital, gaining her PhD in 1990 from Kings College London. She was Director of the Centre of Cancer and Palliative care Studies and Deputy Dean (Nursing) at the Institute of Cancer Research at the Royal Marsden Hospital for 12 years, the first nurse to be appointed to a Chair at the Institute.

Professor Corner was Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Southampton between 2010 and 2015. In 2014 Professor Corner was awarded a DBE for services to Health Care Research and Education and elected as a fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences in 2015.