VISION
AMBITION
STRATEGY
2026
THE UNIVERSITY OF READING
“...We will articulate the ambition through the LIMITLESS concept. This reflects our mind-set: optimistic, forward-looking and open to new possibilities...”
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FOREWORD

The University of Reading is an institution with limitless potential. That was what attracted me to the post of Vice-Chancellor, and it is a fact that has been reinforced with each passing day. This is a place of global standing, of academic excellence and rigour, of exceptional resources and of real ambition for our students.

These attributes provide the foundation for continuing success. However, more is required to thrive in today’s – and tomorrow’s – higher education world.

This is the era of globalisation. Universities in the UK are competing against institutions around the world for students, for academics and for research investment. Educational aspirations are changing too. Learning is no longer about a single place and time, but a lifelong experience. Students, of all ages, are increasingly concerned about their employment prospects.

Our strategy sets out how the University of Reading will respond to these opportunities. It is based on a rigorous appraisal of our strengths as an institution, as well as a wide-ranging analysis of the higher education landscape. In developing it, we have asked ourselves what kind of a university we are, as well as the one we want to become. We have also asked what kind of a university others – employers, governments, future generations of students – need us to be.

The direction of our strategy can be seen on the pages that follow. It sets out an exciting path for the University of Reading. It is a path of real ambition, that will ensure our reputation for academic excellence is matched by a reputation for limitless innovation, relevance and impact.

I urge you to join us on our journey.

Sir David Bell
Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading
CONTEXT: A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT
The higher education sector is now changing, flexing and adapting more quickly than ever, and – again, like other universities – we can no longer rely on public funding, protected markets or predictable demand for what we do.

We will be more reliant on the willingness of organisations and individuals to pay us for work and services that they value, and we must respond to the reality of this increasingly competitive and global environment.

While our longstanding excellence and innovation in research and education will provide a sound base from which to develop and grow, **business as usual will no longer be enough.**
"...we need to understand and address the changing conditions for success and sustainability..."
It is also true, however, that this disruption of the traditional patterns of demand and funding for higher learning and research-based knowledge creates a wealth of new opportunities for enterprising and innovative universities.

• There are already signs of a growing demand for education that meets the needs of professional working lives – and this demand is expected to grow exponentially in emerging economies.

• Globally, there is recognition of the need for greater understanding of the past, present and future of the physical, political, economic, cultural and scientific worlds we inhabit.

• Rapidly advancing technology offers limitless possibilities to enhance and extend learning experiences.

Our strategy must enable us to seize these opportunities. We need to understand and address the changing conditions for success and sustainability, to capitalise on opportunities for growth, innovation and influence, and to be resilient in a volatile world.
2026 marks our centenary as an independent university with its own charter. That year provides an appropriate focal point as we plan for the future.

Our vision for 2026 is that the University of Reading will be a vibrant, thriving, sustainable, global and broad-based institution, responsive to, stimulated by and informing changes in the world around us. As a result, we will also be significantly larger in terms of students, global reach and presence, and revenue.

Our ambition, now and towards 2026, is to enhance our standing as a leader in research and higher education that defines and responds to the needs of individuals and societies, and, by so doing, to be counted among the very best universities in the UK and internationally.

We will articulate that ambition through the LIMITLESS concept. This reflects our mind-set: optimistic, forward-looking and open to new possibilities. For prospective students and staff, it will capture an aspirational outlook and a commitment to ground-breaking teaching and research.
Our vision
A vibrant, thriving, sustainable, global and broad-based institution, responsive to, stimulated by and informing changes in the world around us.

Our ambition
To enhance our standing as a leader in research and higher education that defines and responds to the needs of individuals and societies, and, by so doing, to be counted among the very best universities in the UK and internationally.

“...our mind-set: optimistic, forward-looking and open to new possibilities...”
OUR STRATEGY: HOW WE WILL WORK TOWARDS OUR VISION

To achieve our ambitions, we have to re-examine, and in places fundamentally reinvent, who we are, what we do, how we work, how we sustain ourselves and how we present ourselves to the world.

We must be alert to changes and opportunities in the external environment and ensure that we can keep pace as the sector continues to evolve.

The individual elements of our strategy are already present here at the University of Reading: what will change, and characterise our strategy towards 2026, will be the collective and concentrated effort we will make to enhance and fuse them.
Our strategy in the period to 2026 will be to:

- develop our distinctive identity as a leader in innovative and impactful research and higher education

- transform what we offer, in the light of our distinctive identity and our understanding of 21st century needs

- manage ourselves more effectively to ensure that we understand and deliver on our commitments

- foster a culture of strategic thinking and continuous challenge and renewal to ensure that we remain alert and responsive to changes and opportunities.
DEVELOPING OUR DISTINCTIVE IDENTITY

We will further develop a distinctive identity through promoting and extending our capabilities across three overlapping and interdependent themes:

Educating for 21st Century Lives; Securing and Sustaining Societies; and Advancing Policy and Practice. Our distinctiveness will be most evident in the fusion of these three themes, which will increasingly overlap as our strategy matures.

Educating for 21st century lives

We will be recognised for delivering strong programmes at all levels of higher education, within distinctive and innovative models, rooted in research and closely aligned with practice.

We will continually refresh our view of how learning can best be achieved, devise learning pathways to suit individual needs and develop new ways of delivering and accessing teaching and learning within them.

By doing so, we will enable learners at all stages of their careers to develop and fulfil their intellectual and personal potential.

These developments will bring about a change in the balance of our expanded student body, with an increasingly higher proportion of students on postgraduate and executive education programmes.

As our strategy matures, our programmes will increasingly reflect our overarching interest in securing and sustaining societies.
Securing and sustaining societies

We will be internationally recognised and valued for our cross-disciplinary understanding of, and creative solutions to, complex societal challenges and questions.

We will couple scientific research with insights into related socio-cultural, economic, ethical and legal frameworks, and address the human experience of societal challenges in the past, present and future.

Mutually enhancing perspectives will be interwoven through flexible and innovative interchange within our areas of research strength, achieving transformations within and across traditional discipline boundaries.

Through this framework, we will maintain and develop our strength in contributory disciplines and achieve consistent strong performance in research ratings and funding.

Advancing policy and practice

We will increasingly be recognised as a respected and influential voice in national and international debates around major societal challenges and issues.

We will be ever more adept at translating our research into ideas, programmes and services that have value beyond academia, and become a hub for the exchange and extension of learning through collaborations with a diverse community of academic, governmental, professional, charitable and industry partners.

In all three themes, and increasingly at their intersection, our work and expertise will be valued by those whose interest will provide our financial sustainability.
Vision
“...a vibrant, thriving, sustainable, global and broad-based institution, responsive to, stimulated by and informing changes in the world around us....”
TRANSFORMING WHAT WE OFFER

Decisions about what we do and what we offer will be informed by, and increasingly give substance to, our distinctive identity. This transformation will focus on the following areas:

- **building our educational portfolio** by further developing a research-informed, intellectually challenging, relevant and attractive curriculum, designed around interactive and experiential learning and supporting multiple levels and modes of study.

- **transforming student experiences** by designing complete learning experiences that enable all students to benefit from a comprehensive range of academic, developmental and professional opportunities, encouraging full and ongoing engagement with the University.

- **growing research strengths** by consolidating and growing world-class cross-disciplinary research capabilities to build research power and impact around distinctive areas of excellence – particularly those related to securing and sustaining societies.

- **engaging with policy and practice** to grow the University of Reading’s influence, facilitating collaborations with experts from related fields and promotion of research-informed policy, practice and professional education, and

- **growing our global presence** by expanding our international footprint beyond current operations in Malaysia and South Africa and by enabling students to access our services through a diverse range of face-to-face, online and hybrid channels. Some will be offered directly, others through partnerships and joint ventures with other institutions and learning providers; all will bear the hallmark of the University of Reading.
“...growing world-class cross-disciplinary research capabilities around distinctive areas of excellence...”
MANAGING OURSELVES MORE EFFECTIVELY

We will ensure that our underpinning operations and services, and our processes for academic and resource planning and performance review, are more effective, purposeful and better aligned with our strategic aims. In particular, we will:

- **redesign and align processes** for setting, supporting and reviewing strategic priorities at local and institutional levels, and translating these into our academic and business planning

- **systematically look ahead** for opportunities and threats, and set out clear plans for addressing them
Effective

“...to foster more agile, enterprising and business-like ways of operating, and to be more responsive...”

- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the University’s professional and support services
- change the working cultures of the University, at all levels, to foster more agile, enterprising and business-like ways of operating, and to be more responsive to changing demands.
Fostering a Cult
None of these changes will succeed unless they are understood, supported and owned across the University. We will foster and value the qualities of leadership, enterprise and accountability needed to embed strategic thinking and a culture of on-going reflection, review and renewal, making the University of Reading an exciting and rewarding place to work.
Underpinning our strategy are four fundamental principles that govern and shape the University’s priorities and pervade everything we do:
OUR FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

• **Academic excellence** – We will retain an unwavering commitment to the principles of academic rigour and integrity, and the intrinsic value of knowledge and understanding. This commitment will be reflected in our reputation for excellent research and the quality of our teaching, and recognised and esteemed by our peer communities.

• **Global engagement** – We will continue to ensure that we are recognised and experienced as an international institution in terms of our student and staff community, and global in the locations and reach of our activities and impact.

• **Financial strength** – We will secure growing revenue streams from a robust and balanced portfolio of academic and related enterprises, and manage operating costs to generate strong surpluses for renewal and investment, year on year, in our people, our research and teaching, our facilities and our global presence.

• **Thriving community** – We will continue to recruit and engage students, staff, alumni and external partners as lifelong members of an active and mutually supportive international community of learning.
PERFORMANCE: MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Our strategy sets out how we will pursue the interlinked ends of growth, innovation, influence and resilience to become the University we want to be by 2026. Our success in realising this strategy will therefore be assessed against these four areas, in addition to academic excellence:

- **Growth** – not simply in terms of students, staff and revenue, but also in our capabilities and engagement as a community.

- **Innovation** – in developing and pioneering new thinking about education for 21st century lives and about secure and sustainable societies, and in engaging in partnerships and collaborations with others working at the leading edge of international developments in these areas.

- **Influence** – with our approaches and insights in education and research cited and emulated by education providers and researchers around the world, and our people acknowledged and sought out as leaders in their fields, shaping policy and practice internationally.

- **Resilience** – being financially resilient in a competitive world and socially resilient as a community, able to absorb setbacks and respond collectively to difficult challenges.
As we are aiming to differentiate ourselves from other providers as much as to measure ourselves against them, only some of the standard benchmarks of university success will be useful. We will therefore develop, collect and evaluate new measures of strategic success, and incorporate them into our planning, development and review processes.

But as an indicator of some of the unambiguous measures we propose to use, we will:

- seek to embed ourselves strongly in the top 25 of UK universities, at the same time as remaining in the top 1% of institutions worldwide
- seek to grow our income by 25% by 2026.
RESPONSIBILITY: WHO WILL DELIVER THE STRATEGY AND HOW?

Our strategy is bold and challenging and takes a long-term view. The transformational change, and the individual activities which will help bring it about, will not happen all at once. The University will make progress at different paces in different areas of its activity.
We have already begun to consider and design some radical changes to what we do and how we do it, and work is in hand to identify an initial set of strategic change projects. Several of these projects are exploratory in nature and will give more definition and specificity to the strategy and our ambitions as they mature. This activity will extend into a collection of wide-ranging strategic development and change projects, across the full range of our activities and services, to enable us to implement our strategy over the coming years.

THINKING

Through widespread engagement of staff, students and other stakeholders in our strategy’s development and implementation, we will collectively foster new ways of thinking and behaving and ultimately reshape the culture of our institution.
Amb
Ambition

“Our ambition, now and towards 2026, is to enhance our standing as a leader in research and higher education that defines and responds to the needs of individuals and societies, and, by so doing, to be counted among the very best universities in the UK and internationally...”