VISION 2026

Review of the University vision, ambition and strategy
January 2016 | Sir David Bell KCB, Vice-Chancellor
Undoubtedly, there has been a significant amount of work done since the Council approved the University Strategy in 2013. Activity is strongly aligned to the key elements of our 2026 Vision and consistent with the high-level approach we took to strategic themes.

This review points to a number of actions, and associated outcomes, which demonstrate that we are successful now and will be more successful in the future.

But there is absolutely no room for complacency. The national and international context for higher education continues to be fast-moving and it remains to be seen whether we will have the speed of adaptation necessary to retain and improve upon our current position. Both the research environment and the market for students remain fiercely competitive.

We still have to demonstrate that we can generate a regular operating surplus (in our case, of around £10m per annum). Not only is this necessary to help sustain our ambitious capital programme, it will also provide confidence to the Council that we understand all that is required to run ourselves in a sustainable manner.

Internally, we have been through some major changes recently which have, unarguably, been disruptive and caused significant anxiety and concern on the part of many staff. This is particularly true with the implementation of the Professional and Administrative Services Review. These changes are necessary to improve our operating budget position and our internal processes. However, the University Executive Board, and the broader leadership group, now have to work very hard to sustain our sense of being a ‘thriving community’, one of the underpinning elements of our Strategy.

We will produce this document every other year for Council. Key Performance Indicators and Major Projects will be reported on to the University Council every January and July.

**Sir David Bell KCB**
Vice-Chancellor, University of Reading
We are already among the UK’s top universities and the top 200 in the world. But in order to thrive in a changing world, we must:

- Develop our distinctive identity as a leader in research and higher education
- Transform what we offer to reflect our identity and the needs of our students and partners
- Manage ourselves more effectively
- Become more strategic in our thinking and more responsive to changes and opportunities

Building on our proud history of innovation and influence, we are shaping this strategic development through three overarching strategic themes:

- Educating for 21st century lives
- Securing and sustaining societies
- Advancing policy and practice

Underpinning our strategy are four fundamental principles that will continue to govern and shape our priorities and pervade everything we do:

- Academic excellence
- Global engagement
- Financial strength
- Thriving community

We will ensure its delivery through robust sub-strategies for:

- Research
- Teaching & Learning
- Global Engagement
- Finance
- Estates
- People
Our vision is to 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 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 doing so, to be counted among the very best universities in the UK and internationally.
The University is very evidently building on its strengths. We are introducing new programmes and developing existing ones across our broad discipline base. Last year, we introduced Spanish and launched a postgraduate diploma course for Physician Associates; this year, we open our new School of Architecture and reconfigure our provision in established areas such as computer science, bio-engineering and systems neuroscience.

We are implementing an ambitious research strategy, placing value on the highest quality research across the institution. The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) demonstrated that some of the best research in the country is in Reading disciplines as diverse as Meteorology, Classics, Agriculture, Business and Real Estate & Planning.

We are the only UK university of our size committed to running major operations overseas. With the opening of our Malaysia campus, we now have a significant presence in three continents across five global sites.

We have also invested strongly in our technology enhanced learning, and a major capital programme, including the Thames Valley Science Park.

Living within our means necessitates difficult choices and there is still more to do to achieve a sustainable operating budget. Our new system of planning and resource allocation introduces shared responsibility for financial sustainability. With cross-University efficiency targets, these developments will put the University in a position to deliver an operating surplus for the Academic Group of £10m by 2019–20.

**Measures of success**

- Total Academic Group income 6.5% higher than in 2013–14
- £96m invested in major capital projects
- £150m from land disposals

**2020 milestones**

- £10m annual operating surplus in 2019–20
- £55m annual research grant awards in 2019–20
- Malaysia campus to have c3000 students and be generating c£2m surplus
- Phase 1 of the Science and Innovation Park to be completed
**VISION**

As a research intensive university with a breath of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, we are in a strong position to address real world challenges at local, national and global levels. The Research Strategy 2020, launched in autumn 2015, sets out our ambitions to build the quality and quantity of our research, enhancing our interdisciplinary research and demonstrating its relevance through increased research income. To achieve these ambitions, we have established new research structures and processes and invested in key posts to drive and support this endeavour.

Externally, our research strengths have traditionally been most evident in the broad areas of Health, Environment and Food, and these form three of the University’s research priorities under our strategic theme of Securing and Sustaining Societies. More recently, we have begun a programme of work to draw out and develop our existing strengths in the new priority areas of Prosperity and Resilience and Heritage and Creativity, demonstrating another aspect of our responsiveness and openness to areas of highly topical relevance.

We have always done impactful research, but over the past two years our approach to achieving impact has become more informed, tactical and bold. One tangible, strategic initiative which demonstrates our increased appetite for delivering impact from our excellent research and expertise base is our leadership of a new collaborative Institute for Environmental Analytics (IEA). This innovative centre, supported by a substantial HEFCE Catalyst Fund grant, will enable our world-renowned capability in earth observation data to be used for a wide variety of commercial applications.

**Measures of success**

- 27% of our research rated 4* in the 2014 REF and 51% rated 3*
- 38th in the UK for quality, 27th for research power and 19th for research intensity in the 2014 REF

**2020 milestones**

- At least 87% of our research to be rated 3* or above in the next REF with at least 31% rated 4*
- To be ranked 20th in the UK for research quality and 25th for research power in the next REF

As 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.
In developing the Strategy in 2013, more students, more research income and new sources of revenue were all considered necessary for the University to be both sustainable and competitive. Revenue remains important to our stated ambition to generate reasonable operating surpluses, but our challenge is to balance the three key components. We have grown our student population, but we have also recognised the need to consider our optimum size and shape, to understand our greatest assets and to protect these in any plans for expansion. So while the underlying assumptions remain true, we have very recently tested them. We have debated the abstract question of the optimum size for a university of our type, but we have also raised practical questions about pressures on teaching, research and social spaces across our campuses. We have asked what types of growth will best serve our institution, our staff and our current and prospective students.

In many respects the University is well placed for expansion. It has the physical space to grow, particularly on the Whiteknights campus, and it has underpinning financial strength through its investments. Achievement of operating surpluses will help us to fund major projects. Crucially, we are not bounded by the UK; our expanded global reach offers potential for further growth in students and revenue beyond the UK. The challenge remains to keep these opportunities in balance with our other strategic ambitions of growth in quality and rankings.

**Measures of success**

- 4.5% increase in student numbers – Undergraduate numbers increased by 6.4%  
- 15% increase in international students (now 29.5% of overall student population)  
- 34% of our academic staff are not British (excluding sessional staff)  
- New campus open in Malaysia  
- 9.1% increase in students in Henley Business School campus in South Africa

**2020 milestones**

- c3000 students at Malaysia campus  
- £195m fee income from credit bearing students

As a result, we will also be significantly larger in terms of students, global reach and presence, and revenue.

**VISION**

A vibrant, thriving, sustainable, global and broad-based institution, responsive to, stimulated by, and informing changes in the world around us.
AMBITION

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

Our research – and therefore our teaching – has always had a strong focus on the wider world. But we are now clearer and louder about what we do and how well we do it. Our focus on the strategic theme of Securing and Sustaining Societies, together with our major new research strategy infrastructure, give us the opportunity to increase our research standing.

We are Advancing Policy and Practice through connections between our research expertise and the needs of individuals and societies. We are a leader in the design and delivery of MOOCS and in Executive Education. We have a highly successful Knowledge Transfer Centre and an expanding NHS service provision, including the Berkshire Memory & Cognition Research Centre and a clinical trials unit established with NHS partners.

We are bringing to life our strategic theme of Educating for 21st century lives. We are refining our suite of programmes to meet current needs and enhancing and diversifying the mechanisms through which we teach. We are making rapid advances in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), including ensuring that summative assessments will be submitted, marked and graded electronically. We are planning to provide lecture capture facilities across the University.

Beyond this, we are creating a set of ‘digital products’ to underpin the entire student journey from first enquiry to graduation and beyond, transforming the way we market ourselves and engage with students.

Measures of success

• NSS Overall Satisfaction score maintained at 89%, with increased response rate
• 411,008 learners registered on University of Reading MOOCS since October 2013
• Launch of Essentials – an on-line resource centre for all current students
• One of the largest KTP participants in the UK

2020 milestones

• National Student Survey (NSS) assessment and feedback score above 80%
• Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) assessment and feedback score above 80%
• At least 87% of our research impact to be rated 3* or above in the next REF
League tables matter. We have put benchmarked performance at the heart of the planning system and our institutional strategic KPIs give us a balanced view of achievement against our own stated ambitions and our performance relative to the sector.

We fluctuate between the low 30s and the low 20s in the domestic league tables. Responding to student feedback, we have already improved work turnaround times and invested in the library. We are now improving performance in assessment and feedback through e-assessment. We are also making our research outputs more visible, which should result in higher citation counts and improve our position in global rankings.

Our ‘internal health’ is a key driver of our ability to be competitive. To provide the best teaching and experience for our students, we need to attract and retain the very best staff, working in a diverse and inclusive environment. Staff morale has dipped with the pace and scale of change. Our ambition is that employee engagement will exceed the sector norm in 2020.

Our values and behaviours are woven into staff reward and recognition. We launched a new People Development function in 2014, and our updated staff review process has both Performance and Development as key measures of success. This year we appointed new Deans of Diversity and Inclusion and strengthened staffing in HR to support this important work across the University.

**Measures of success**

- Secured top 30 places in two of the three most significant domestic rankings, including top 25 in the Guardian
- Returned to top 200 in THE and QS world rankings

**2020 milestones**

- Top 25 appearance over the preceding three years in at least one domestic league table, and in the top 30 in all others
- Appearance in each of the preceding five years in at least one of the top 200 global rankings
- Employee engagement above the sector norm