

Senate

25/39 A meeting of the Senate was held at 2.15 pm on Wednesday 5 November 2025 in Chancellors G06.

Present:

Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Oceiah Annesley
Dr Mona Ashok
Dr Caroline Baylon
Professor Paddy Bullard
Professor Anastasia Christakou
Dr Simon Clarke
Dr Emma-Jayne Conway
Pam Cottrell
Dr Chris Daw
Dr Deepa Driver
Dr Ilan Dwek
Professor Richard Frazier
Professor Becky Green
Professor Louise Hague
Amalia Hatiris
Dr Craig Hughes
Professor Carmel Houston-Price
Martina Hudson
Dr MARRISA JOSEPH
Professor Yelena Kalyuzhnova
Tiam Koravand
Professor Gunter Kuhnle
Professor Elizabeth McCrum
Dr Kieran Lee Marshall
Professor Sarah Marston
Professor Peter Miskell
Sara Pawar
Sally Plank
Dr Karen Poulter
Dr Jo Anna Reed Johnson
Professor Trish Reid
Dr Karenjit Sandhu
Tamir Sharif
Professor Katja Strohfeldt
Elyn Thompson
Professor Anne Verhoef
Professor Adrian Williams
Ella Withington

Professor Parveen Yaqoob
Professor Dominik Zaum
Louise Sharman (Secretary)

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed new members to the Senate and in particular the incoming RSU Officers and Student Representatives. Members of the Senate introduced themselves.

The Vice-Chancellor outlined the format of the meeting to Senators encouraging them to raise any additional items for discussion under the Vice-Chancellor's report.

The Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to the following who had died since the last meeting of the Senate:

James Stedeford, Category Manager in Procurement

Professor Andrew Kakabadse, Professor of Governance and Leadership at Henley Business School

Emeritus Professor Michael Twyman, who joined the School of Arts in 1959, was instrumental in establishing the Department of Typography and Graphic Communications in 1974, Honorary Doctor of Letters 2008, recognised through the Queen's Anniversary Prize 2011

25/40 Minutes of the last meeting

The Senate approved Minutes 25/16 to 25/38 of the last formal meeting held on 19 June 2025. All relevant matters had been passed in full to the Council at its meeting on 30 June 2025. Senate had also received an extract in return from the Council meeting held on 25 September 2025 on matters relevant to Senate.

25/41 Membership of the Senate in 2025/26

The Senate received a list of its membership for the session 2025/26 and noted Ordinance A3, which contained its terms of reference. Since this was the first meeting of the new academic year, and there were many new members, the Vice-Chancellor drew Senators' attention to its major remit, which was to exercise general responsibility for the academic standards of the University

Items for Presentation and discussion

25/42 Update on AI in Research

Council received a presentation on how the University was using AI in research from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Dr Ashok. The presentation had also been given to the Council at its meeting on 25 September 2025 and a note of the comments raised were included under agenda item 15 (Minute 25/52)

The presentation highlighted to Senate:

- Opportunities – analysing massive datasets, identifying patterns, making predications, image recognition, natural language processing, automating repetitive tasks, generating new text based on a prompt.
- Industries seeing immediate impact included: Law, Insurance, Content Curation, Accounting, Medicine, Radiology, Translation, Customer Service.

- That the University was looking to define priority areas, engage key partners, identify training and infrastructure needs – [withheld, section 43].
- A number of Schools had won awards for their work using AI – AI related projects had received c£6.4M in funding since 2020; there were currently c£6.1M applications in submission.
- Example awards included using AI to reduce hospital appointments which had reduced missed appointments by 40% saving c£250k - the University had been shortlisted for the THE Research STEM Project of the year for this work. In addition, an AI project to improve early detection of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases had been awarded £1.2M of funding.
- The University was one of 24 universities awarded a Turing Network Development Award
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence – Dr Mona Ashok had presented eight recommendations in regard to: governance frameworks, assurance programmes, green infrastructure, AI literacy, equitable collaboration, transparent reporting, funding, and trust
- Dr Ashok had been involved in an AI roundtable for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) – recommendations were that: AI should be treated as an augmentation engine; capability could be built using AI; AI literacy needed to be improved; a Global South partnership should be created on AI; the focus on AI should be for diversity, value and ethical governance
- Dr Ashok had also worked with the Council of Europe on AI in the context of human rights, democracy and rule of law
- The University was working closely with the Thames Valley AI Hub – this brought together academics and other professionals, and acted as a bridge between academics, industry, investors and institutions. Regular events were held to discuss AI topics
- Governance and ethics sector level initiatives included: UNESCO recommendations on the ethics of AI, OECD AI principles, Funders and national projects, research integrity bodies, academic and policy trackers
- Broadly universities were: writing institutional strategies and policies, setting up governance and review processes, publishing research integrity/methods guidance, tightening data security and procurement, investing in infrastructure and access, training and capacity building
- Next steps for the University would involve the development of an Action Plan to: build on priority areas via champions; training and development; infrastructure; support for funding opportunities; external showcasing; consideration of governance, ethics, policy

The Senate noted that a workshop was to be held the following week with UCRI and other colleagues, including from DTS, to help shape an action plan.

The following comments and questions were raised on the presentation:

- The use of the term 'AI awareness' was used a lot – what did it mean?
Dr Ashok noted that the term meant different things to different people depending on their level of understanding. AI Literacy was important for individuals' personal experiences. It was important for individuals to understand what data was used for
- There was considerable interest in using AI – was it possible to learn what others were doing in this area across the University?
The use of champions and a Community of Practice had been developed with the aim of bringing colleagues together to look at ways of enhancing their use of AI – further communications would soon be published on this
- Work on an action plan was welcomed, but given how diverse and sophisticated AI was how ahead of the curve could the University be?

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that this was to be a discussion point at the forthcoming workshop

- Was there a risk around AI, being out of step with public opinion and the position of various institutions e.g. OfS, DfE? Many individuals were concerned about the environmental impacts of AI, what was the University doing to make sure that increasing use of AI in Teaching and Research did not damage the University's environmental credentials?
- It was important to consider the role of education through the Community of Practice
- The University needed to be prepared for push back from students who were concerned about the environmental damage of AI, ethical considerations, and the impact of AI on certain sectors e.g. creative industries
- Useful research was available on the appropriate use of AI to enhance critical thinking
- There was a need to find balance in the use of AI

The Senate thanked the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Dr Ashok for the presentation. Dr Ashok invited Senators who wanted more to contact her.

25/43 Teaching Excellence Framework: OfS Consultation 2025/26

The Senate received a presentation from Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor McCrum in regard to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

The Office for Students (OfS) had launched a consultation in September 2025 on a new approach to quality regulation that would see the TEF become the core of a wider assessment system; this would involve significant changes to the scope and assessment cycle of the TEF. The consultation was due to close on 11 December 2025.

The presentation highlighted:

- OfS Approach to TEF – the OfS viewed high quality education as:
 - Courses that were well designed and were delivered and assessed effectively
 - Academic support and resources that students need to succeed, effective engagement with students
 - Equipping students to achieve positive outcomes after they complete their course
- Overview of the current TEF:
 - Desk-based assessment of a provider's student experience and student outcomes
 - OfS produces indicators using national datasets
 - Providers and their students submit evidence
 - Context accounted for through benchmarking and information provided from providers
 - Academic and student assessors carry out assessments and award ratings
 - Ratings at provider level, but informed by data across subjects and student groups
 - Providers incentivised to improve or continue delivering the highest levels of quality
 - Useful information provided to students
- Key Proposed Changes to TEF:
 - Scope – expanded to include all registered providers; inclusion of apprenticeships was under consideration; expected to include PGT provision in next round; possibility of including TNE and PGR in future
 - Student Experience – Assessing the quality of the student experience:

- OfS propose to assess the quality of course content and delivery; assessment; academic support; resources; student engagement.
 - OfS would base assessments on: submissions from institutions; an independent student submission; benchmarked NSS data
 - NSS data would include Learning Opportunities alongside existing measures
- Student Outcome – the provider must meet a minimum threshold to achieve a Bronze rating. The threshold would be a percentage of its students that continued and completed their studies. The OfS planned to remove the requirement for a minimum threshold for progression. The OfS would assess how good students' outcomes were using a set of benchmarked data indicators including graduates' use of what they had learned in HE and salaries three years after graduation
- Submissions – Assessors would make judgement based on key TEF data, a provider submission and a student submission. The provider could submit contextual information. Educational Gains would be optional
- Integrating Quality and Standards – overall ranking would be based on the lower of the two rankings between Student Experience and Student Outcomes. A Bronze or requires improvement ranking might require further investigation
- Incentives and Interventions – to drive improvement for students, the OfS proposed rewarding institutions that were delivering the highest quality and using stronger mechanisms to motivate improvements where quality is lower. For Gold and Silver rewards would include: reputational benefits, assessment less often and potential eligibility for some kinds of funding in future. For Bronze and requires improvement: may be assessed more frequently, may be ineligible for some kinds of funding, could face limits to growth in student numbers, interventions where necessary
- The OfS proposed to assess all institutions for the first time over a three-year cycle
- Impacts and considerations for the University:
 - [redacted, section 43]
 - [redacted, section 43]
 - [redacted, section 43]
 - [redacted, section 43]

The following comments and questions were raised:

- Given the proposals within the White Paper would the University receive inflationary tuition fee increases if it were awarded Bronze or below
It was noted that this matter currently formed part of the consultation process
- How would earnings data be gathered?
It was expected that existing mechanisms such as Graduate Outcomes and LEO data would be used
- It was not known yet what benchmarking data would be used
- Given that younger generations were more interested in work/life balance could a salary metric impact results?
It was expected that salary would be one element, but there would be others are how useful students found their studies/how prepared they felt
- In considering the wider political context around the role of HEI versus value for money what might be important for government or universities might not be important to students
- In considering the balance of ratings was there a risk that one area could fall below standard and pull down the overall ratings?
This would relate to how the definition of material was worded, but was definitely a risk

- Was there a possibility that different rankings could eventually lead to a differential in fees charged in HEIs
It was confirmed that this was a possibility
- OfS had recently added a line to the consultation that if NSS data was not available it would seek an alternative measure
- In regard to the LEAP Project, it was noted that procurement was about to commence for an attendance solution with an aim to pilot in Semester 1 2026/27. In respect of student engagement there was a link between the TEF and improving student continuation
- Was the current monitoring/evaluation system sufficient at present?
The STEAP process was currently ongoing and was looking to improve metrics in a number of areas

The Senate thanked Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor McCrum for the presentation.

25/44 Academic Year Review

The Senate noted that following the implementation of a new academic year structure in 2024/25, a Review of the Academic Year was to commence on the new semester structure.

- Throughout 2024/25, feedback was sought from colleagues and students (via BoSSEs, SSPG, NSS comments, direct emails and evaluation discussions) on the new semester structure. Key challenges identified were:
 - Concerns raised over the 7 week 'gap' between the end of teaching for Semester 1 and the start of teaching for Semester 2, particularly for those who do not have exams over this period.
 - Most colleagues and students consider the Semester 2 mid-semester week as disruptive to the flow of teaching.
 - Students require more time at the end of Semester 2 to revise and consolidate learning, before going straight into exams.
 - There was significant pressure on colleagues to get marking and results processing completed in time.
- It was assumed that:
 - The academic year would remain at 30 Weeks comprising two 15-week semesters
 - Maintain two 3-week assessment periods one at the end of each semester
 - No change to the start of the academic year
 - All Semester 1 teaching to complete prior to winter break
 - Key feedback points to be addressed without altering graduation dates
- Considerations:
 - Confirm institutional deadlines for any changes to semester start and end dates in 2026/27
 - Identify activities for Semester 2 mid-semester break
 - Review opportunities to move, repurpose or remove the Semester 2 mid-semester break for undergraduates
 - Assess flexibility around the scheduling of winter and spring breaks
 - Explore a phased rollout – some adjustments in 2026/27 and broader reforms in 2027/28
- Aims:

- To shorten the period between the end of teaching for Semester 1 and the start of teaching for Semester 2
- Improve flow of Semester 2
- Provide students with additional opportunities for revision before Semester 2 exams
- Extra time for staff marking and results
- Next Steps – stakeholder consultation, workshops, and staff survey
- Recommendations to be submitted to UBTLSE and UEB in January 2026

Members of the Senate were asked to contribute their views to the consultations, workshops and survey.

25/45 UBTLSE Quality Assurance and Standards in Education

The Senate received a number of items from UBTLSE (also see Minute 25/48) explicitly concerned with Academic Quality and Standards. UBTLSE regularly considered reports relating to the maintenance of quality and standards in teaching and learning. This report was based on items discussed at meetings on 1 July and 9 September 2025. Senators were asked to review the items contained in the report as they formed part of the evidence base upon which Senate could provide assurances to Council that University provision remained in line with the expectations of the Office for Students (OfS) and other key regulatory bodies. The report contained recommendations/actions in respect of:

- Assurances on Quality, including:
 - OfS Condition of Registration B3: Student Outcomes
 - Office of the Independent Adjudicators (OIA) Annual Statement 2025
 - National Student Survey 2025
 - Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2025
 - School Teaching Enhancement Action Plans (STEAP)
 - Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
 - Sector bodies and national initiatives (for information)

The Senate was asked to consider the contents of the report and provide assurance for Council as to the quality of provision

The Senate unanimously approved the report for submission to the Council, confirming that the UBTLSE report provided assurance and evidence that the University was maintaining quality and standards in learning and teaching.

25/46 Report of the Vice-Chancellor

The Senate received the Vice-Chancellor's address to the Senate, noting in particular:

White Paper on Post-16 Education and Skills:

The government had published its White Paper on Post-16 Education and Skills on the 20 October 2025. It was not a 'typical' White Paper in the sense that this was not presented as a consultation document,

rather it was an announcement of the statutory and non-statutory changes the government intended to take in the forthcoming years. The headlines were:

- A confirmation that tuition fees would rise with inflation for the next two years, with the intention that thereafter tuition fees would be linked, by statute, to inflation;
- A confirmation of the introduction of a new tax, the levy on international student fees, which was hypothecated to fund the (re-)introduction of parental income-contingent maintenance grants in subjects that aligned with the government's priorities;
- An explicit expectation that universities would drive economic growth at the local, regional and/or national level;
- An expectation that universities would 'specialize' in areas of strength and collaborate with each other to gain efficiencies and ensure that there will be sufficient and across-the-board high-level skills at the regional level to support economic growth;
- In terms of research, ensuring that 'Excellence' remained at the heart of the REF 2029 and UKRI grants to fund 80% of full Economic Costing (FEC), without the indication that this would be funded from additional allocations;
- A strengthening of the powers and role of the Office for Students (OfS), especially regarding the financial sustainability of the sector and tackling poor performance, with franchises singled out as an area of deep concern. Universities failing in delivering excellent education might be barred from raising their tuition fees and/or increasing their student numbers;
- The introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement from January 2027, and the need for universities to recognise outcomes at levels 4 (part 1) and 5 (part 2), alongside the current level 6 (degree);
- An expectation that universities and further education providers would be working together to a greater extent than is currently the case.

At first sight, the White Paper did little to alleviate the current financial challenges (e.g. the increase in tuition fees was netted off by the new levy on international student fees), nor did it offer a major systems reset. However, much would depend on the detail and the will of the government to prioritize reforms in the busy parliamentary timetable. The White Paper contained a number of contradictions/inconsistencies/tensions such as: the expectation to drive economic growth whilst specialising in a market economy; the requirements of OfS Condition B3 (continuation and progression) and allowing exit points for the LLE. Response amongst the sector to the Paper was mixed.

Community:

- The appointment of Laura Clayton as the Chief Operating Officer
- Mental Health Charter – The University's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy had been launched this month. The strategy outlined how support, services and guidance were provided across the institution and Reading Students' Union, with a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Athena Swan – The University had successfully renewed its silver institutional Athena Swan Charter Mark, recognising ongoing commitment to gender equality.

Excellence:

- University of Reading researchers had been shortlisted in two categories at the THE Awards 2025. Dr Andrew Daymond and Professor Tom Sizmur were nominated for Knowledge Exchange Initiative of the Year for their work with Ghanaian cocoa farmers. Professor Vicky Li and Nicholas Berin Chan

from Henley Business School were nominated for Research Project of the Year (STEM) for developing an AI system with the NHS that reduced missed appointments by 40%.

- League Tables - The University had been ranked 45th (Daily Mail), 65th (Guardian) and 33rd (Times and Sunday Times), all of which saw an overall drop in position. In the THE World University Ranking, the University remained just outside the top 200 institutions.
- Global Sustainability Leadership Scheme - The Global Sustainability Leaders Scholarship Scheme, launched mid-year, had proven highly attractive to undergraduate applicants. It was the UK's largest sustainability-focused undergraduate scholarship programme. [Redacted, section 43]. The Scheme had been recognised by The Times and The Sunday Times, which awarded Reading *University of the Year for Scholarships and Bursaries 2026*.
- REF Panel Members - Eleven University academics had been appointed to serve on expert panels for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029.

Sustainability:

- Student Recruitment - Student intake for 2025/26 academic year overall hit the targets set, [redacted, section 43].
- Universities and Colleagues Union (UCU) was balloting for industrial action over the agreed pay award.

Engaged University:

- ECMWF – groundbreaking ceremony was held in July

The following questions and comments were raised on the Vice-Chancellor's Report:

- It was expected that changes proposed in the White Paper for Research would happen quickly and that UKRI would consolidate research effort/award fewer larger grants in future years – the amount of time currently spent on preparing grant applications was fairly similar for small and large grants
- Changes in League Table positions was noted, this was attributed to other universities improving faster than the Reading. League Table rankings were important, and were helpful for student recruitment, but it was not thought that government looked at them closely

Items for report and approval

25/47 Report of the University Executive Board

All items were covered throughout papers submitted.

25/48 Report of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience

The Senate received the Report of the meetings of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (UBTLSE) held on 1 July and 9 September 2025.

The report contained updates on:

- Key decisions and changes to policies

- External Examiner nominations
- Annual Report on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct
- Online Exams and Assessment Security
- Assessment Adjustments
- University Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Academic Year Changes Review (see Minute 25/44)
- Learning Capture
- Home Foundation Year Project
- Micro-credentials

The Senate noted the report and approved the Annual Report on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct for onward transmission to the Council.

25/49 Report of the University Committee for Research and Innovation

The Senate received the report of the University Committee for Research and Innovation.

The Senate approved the Annual Statement on the Researcher Development Concordat for onward transmission to the Council.

25/50 Report of the International and Global Engagement Strategy Board

The Senate noted the report of the International Global Engagement Strategy Board which had met twice since the last meeting of the Senate.

25/51 Student Recruitment and Admissions Update – September 2025 Initial Enrolment Analysis

The Senate received and noted a report from Global Recruitment and Admissions on the current enrolment position.

It was noted that:

- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43]. This had been an exceptionally challenging year for international PGT recruitment, given changes in Visa regulations, ancillary costs of studying in the UK and a decline in the Chinese market which the UK had relied on quite heavily.
- PGR numbers were up on last year last year at all domiciles but down on two years ago.
- IFP enrolments were roughly in line with last year [redacted, section 43].
- [Redacted, section 43].

25/52 Report from the Council

The Senate received a report from the Council for its information.

Items for note

25/53 Chair's Action

The Senate noted that the following items had been approved by Chair's action:

- Amendments to Ordinances:
 - The addition of Master of Planning (MPlan) to Ordinance C3
 - Removal of Dean D&I from A3
 - Amendment of Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary to Chief Operating Officer A9 and B3
- The appointment of Dr Simone Knox to SSCER to 31.7.2028, Dr Will Bailey-Watson to the Arts Committee and Joint Standing Committee of the Senate and Council to 31.7.2027
- The award of DSc to Professor Kebreab

25/54 Retirement of Professors

The Senate approved that that under the provisions of Ordinance B7 the title of Professor Emeritus/Emerita be conferred with effect from the date indicated on:

Professor Richard Ellis (30.9.25)
Professor Glenn Gibson (30.9.25)
Professor David Pendleton (6.6.25)
Professor John Preston (31.8.25)

25/55 Other Retirements

The Senate approved that each of the following be accorded the title of Honorary Fellow for a period of five years with effect from the date indicated:

Alan Twyford (30.6.25)
Shiela Bond (29.8.25)
Aboodi Shabi (29.8.25)
Gail Rolland (31.8.25)
Martina O'Connell (10.9.25)

25/56 Reports of Examiners for Higher Degrees by thesis

The Senate approved recommendations for the award or otherwise of Higher Degrees.

25/57 Senate representative on the Council

The Senate noted the expiry of term of office for Professor Frazier as Senate Representative on Council on 31.7.2026. If Senators were interested in the position Professor Frazier was happy to speak further with them.

25/58 Dates of next meeting 2025/26

Wednesday 7 January 2026 at 2.15 pm – reserve meeting (online)

Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 2.15 pm (online)

Wednesday 29 April 2026 at 2.15 pm – reserve meeting (online)

Thursday 17 June 2026 at 2.15 pm (in person)