2020–2026
STRATEGIC PLAN

University of
Reading

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VICE-CHANCELLOR'S FOREWORD

This new strategy for the University of Reading was created by the University community itself. While I have led the process, the content has been influenced by the consultation and discussions with students, colleagues, alumni, the University Council, and a wide range of external stakeholders. This influence is evident throughout the strategy. It has led to the elevation of environmental sustainability as a key differentiator of the University, and prioritised activities to support the wellbeing of students and colleagues, such as addressing workloads and managing change better.

This strategy is not a glossy sales pitch or a document to put on a shelf and forget about. Its primary purpose and audience is ourselves: it should be our own internal statement of our ambition, as well as to the wider world. It should also act as a living and practical guide to help us all plan and prioritise our activity.

This new strategy seeks to galvanise our University community around a shared set of ideals, and guide and prioritise decisions in the years leading to our centenary in 2026.

Predicting the future and getting it right is difficult at the best of times, and we face many challenges. We live in a volatile world with many uncertainties. Brexit, discussions about the future role and funding of higher education, increasing marketisation, and worldwide demographic changes will all have an impact on our future. Our response requires this to be a flexible strategy, a living document to be reviewed and updated as circumstances change.

Yet change must not be pursued as an end it itself. In a sense, I believe this strategy proposes a return to the basics and the core values that characterise the University of Reading: a genuine love of learning; creating new knowledge; embracing and celebrating diversity of people and ideas; and caring for our environment. We have maintained these values throughout our history and they will continue to guide us in the future as we transform the way we work. It is important to recognise that our University culture is just as important as our focus on academic excellence.

That is why this strategy is unashamedly led by our values and principles. We need to move to a model of distributed leadership so that a broader range of people have the ability to shape the University activities that they know best, and take ownership of the quality of education and research. I see this strategy as a process rather than an end in itself. Consequently, I wish it to have a far greater emphasis on the way we work, with recurring themes on stronger governance, more involvement of students and staff at all levels, and working with partners outside the University. To succeed we must not only deliver on our aspirations, but do so in a way that is consistent with our principles.

My vision for the University of Reading in the years leading up to our centenary is, quite simply, that it transforms people's lives through the excellence of our education and research. Our shape has changed over the past decades, but our origins lie in a movement to improve society through education. Our ability to make change comes from our community holding true to our values. So let us keep sight of our core purpose, to challenge and transform the outlook of the students we educate, and improve the lives of our neighbours, the prospects for our country, and the future of our planet.

Professor Robert Van de Noort
Vice-Chancellor
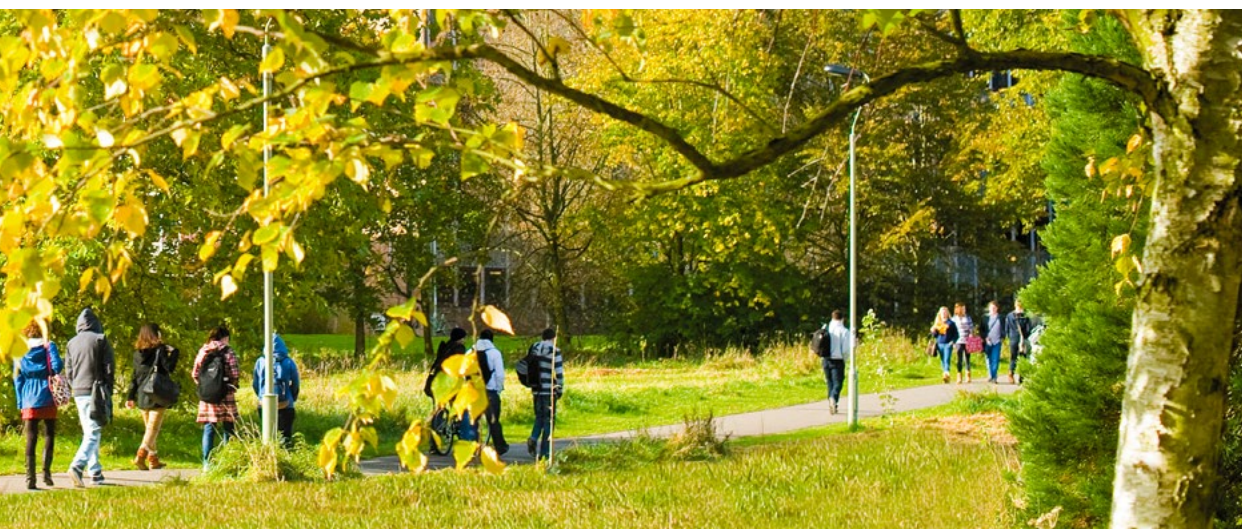
OUR CONTEXT

We have built our new strategy during the year that followed the appointment of Professor Robert Van de Noort as Vice-Chancellor. The process has involved extensive consultation and engagement with our whole University community: students, colleagues, alumni and external stakeholders. Input has been sought through surveys, meetings and discussions, both formal and informal, with Reading University Students' Union, through formal governance bodies and committees, our Staff Forum, and People Plan Board.

The University operates in an environment that is both challenging and volatile.

It is challenging because the real value of the tuition fees for UK and EU undergraduate fees (the University's largest single source of income) has already reduced by 18% since 2012, and this figure is likely to increase to a 30% real value reduction by 2026. Further change to higher education funding regime is almost certain in the next few years. Many universities in the UK have sought to offset this financial challenge by growing their student numbers. However, this cannot be a sustainable long-term strategy, not least as the past decade has experienced a significant demographic decline in the number of 18-year-olds, who make up our largest yearly intake of new students.

It is volatile because the costs and uncertainties arising from the UK's departure from the European Union, and the ever-changing international higher education scene beyond Europe, have become impossible to predict with any measure of certainty. Combined with increased marketisation since the lifting of the student number cap in 2015, these factors have deepened the already intense competition across the higher education sector, with many institutions developing aggressive growth strategies.

In 2020 the University of Reading can look back at a number of years of rapid increases in student numbers. This period of growth had allowed the University to strengthen its financial position in the face of these seismic changes. It has also brought with it pressures, often negative, on the experience of students and colleagues, and a tension between growth and quality.

It is time to reimagine our future and focus on our priorities.
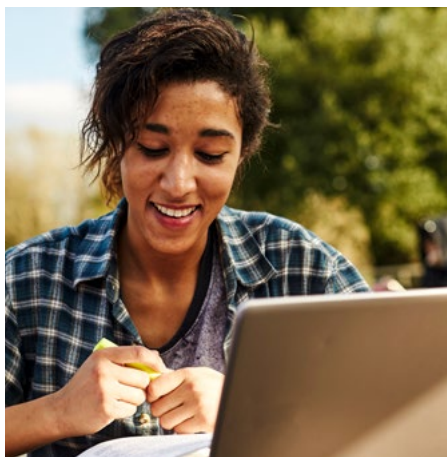
OUR PURPOSE

"We act together, using our collective skills and diversity, to deliver a better world through the transformational power of quality education and research."

The University of Reading has a distinctive history, not least as the only university to be granted its Royal Charter between the two world wars, in 1926. Before this, our teaching emerged as a force for good in Reading, with the establishment of the Schools of Art and Science. In the late 1800s, these merged to form an extension college of the University of Oxford, part of a wider social movement to build a stronger future for the nation by increasing access to quality education.

Since then, the world of higher education has changed significantly. More people go to university than ever before and the impact of university teaching and research extends well beyond national boundaries. However, some of our original ethos – of learning and research as a way to help our region and better the world – has been lost or obscured by increasingly intense competition and the requirements of increased sector regulation. This regulation is important and necessary for good governance and accountability. Yet the massive growth of higher education, while extending access to more people, has created a new set of incentives for universities that sometimes distract from our core purpose.

Fundamentally, the University of Reading does not exist for its own sake and its purpose is not its own improvement, but for the betterment of others. We do not teach our students or undertake research with the goal of increasing our prestige. This strategy views our purpose through the lens of our connections with the world, and with each other, and an obligation to give back – which has been at the heart of our mission throughout our history.

Fundamental to this mission is our commitment to academic freedom, enshrined in our Royal Charter. This sense of curiosity and independence to pursue new ideas lies at the very heart of university life. For our students, learning how to form, challenge and defend an argument with empathy and respect is a life-enhancing experience. For our academics, the freedom to challenge received wisdom and test new ideas in a spirit of discovery is how we achieve progress.

OUR FOUR PRINCIPLES

Reading's distinctiveness comes from how we deliver on the transformational promise in our strategy. Our four strategic principles will shape our actions and guide our decision-making and prioritisation. There are no hard lines between these principles. They merge and overlap – for example, our engagement with the world influences our sense of community, and our commitment to the environment can bring financial benefits – and there are tensions between the principles – for example, the need for financial sustainability will frequently slow the delivery of other aspirations.

We should embrace this ambiguity as with it comes flexibility and creativity. But doing so requires judgement and leadership. It also requires trust. It requires a distributed model of leadership where we empower all our colleagues – across academic Schools and professional Functions – to take ownership of these principles, and accountability for their decisions, to deliver a set of shared and overarching aspirations.

The consultation process has demonstrated that these principles resonate with our students, colleagues, alumni, partners and stakeholders. They are all based on a fundamental truth about who we already are, and also create an aspiration for how we can improve.

PRINCIPLE 1: Community – putting our people first

- The University is, first and foremost, a diverse, inclusive and supportive community of people – students, staff and alumni.
- We provide students and colleagues with a fulfilling working and study setting that supports their development.
- We use our knowledge and skills, collectively and individually, to solve problems and create opportunities for the benefit of people and the planet and the advancement of the University.

While there is no fixed hierarchy to our principles, the first principle is deliberately about our people. The skills, diversity and commitment of our University community have always been our chief strength, and must remain the linchpin of our strategy and the starting point for our engagement with the world.

A commitment to our people may sound banal but genuinely putting our people at the heart of how we work requires us to rethink our culture, our processes and our governance. This is not an overnight change – but over time it amounts to a quiet revolution.

This University community is made up of a multiplicity of communities with differing cultures and identities. Respect for and inclusion of this diversity is not negotiable. This respect must also extend to the different ways colleagues contribute to the work of the University – whether in a research, teaching or professional capacity. It extends to the interaction between students and colleagues, with shared creation of the learning experience at its heart. We all play an important role and, as with these principles, there should be no hierarchy.

What binds these communities together is the fact that we are working towards the same purpose. We celebrate our diversity of people and roles as a source of strength by encouraging inclusiveness and interaction, not by creating silos. The future will almost certainly hold challenges and difficult decisions. We cannot shy away from these but in tackling them, we must be sensitive to any impact on our community.

Aspiration: To be a university that is genuinely people-orientated.

University Executive Board-led priorities for the University:

- Work with our Students' Union to strengthen the student voice in our decision-making, including introducing a University Executive Board lead for student experience.
- Enhance and protect our physical campus environments as a major contributor to our sense of community and wellbeing.
- Develop skilled, responsive and representative leadership and management.
- Introduce a new change governance process and decision-making structures to better involve our community, achieve greater consistency and timeliness, and ensure appropriate management of workload.
- Invest in staff development, including effective use of the apprenticeship levy, to improve colleagues' work and create career development opportunities.
- Review and improve processes for managing workload through better planning and provision of appropriate tools and training.

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-1	Staff Survey: 'employer of choice' score (which brings together multiple measures including diversity and inclusion)	Third quartile (53rd percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
KPI-2	National Student Survey: 'I feel part of a community of staff and students' (Question 21)	Second quartile (32nd percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)

Examples of where we are already putting this principle into practice:

Stonewall
Acceptance without exception

WE ARE A STONEWALL TOP 100 EMPLOYER

84%
OVERALL STUDENT SATISFACTION remains high, matching the sector average [1]

ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF STUDY

56% of our students are female,

35% are from a black and minority ethnic background and

10% have declared a disability [2]

PRINCIPLE 2: Excellence – aspiring to the highest standards

- We transform lives by focusing on excellence and innovation in education and research – locally, nationally and globally.
- We create an environment where our students and staff can excel academically and personally.
- We work in partnership with government, business, charities and other organisations to enhance student learning and career development and to extend the impact of our research.

At the core of our mission to transform lives at a local, national and global scale is pride in being the best we can be. Our education, research and professional activities must be of the highest standard to deliver on this promise. Being supportive, diverse and inclusive does not mean we are content with mediocrity. Far from being mutually exclusive, we can use the strength of our community to drive quality. This requires a culture of continuous improvement as well as the tools and facilities that allow all members of our community to be accountable for their own activity. We must embrace change and innovation, and the risks that come with it, and accept that failure can be part of the path towards excellence.

Two of the largest changes to sector regulation – the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – reinforce that excellence is not optional. Being held accountable in this way, and through league rankings, is an opportunity to demonstrate our strengths and learn how we can improve. A focus on delivering excellence will ultimately be reflected in these frameworks and tables. We also recognise that education and research are interlinked. Excellence lies in working in partnership with our students to ensure that our research and teaching enhance and inform each other.

A culture of continuous improvement requires honesty with ourselves about areas where we must improve and a commitment to apply our skills and resources to achieve improvement. Where excellence cannot be achieved, despite this effort and focus, we cannot shy away from difficult decisions to end specific activities.

The specific measures for excellence will vary by activity and discipline, and Schools and Functions have an important role to play by defining clear local targets that give context and meaning to our aspiration.

Aspiration: To be in the top quartile in the UK sector for our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and research

University Executive Board-led priorities for the University:

- Create stronger academic communities of practice and facilitate sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise to enhance teaching and research quality.
- Deliver efficient teaching through organisational change, including improved timeliness and quality of feedback, improved timetabling, assessment design and practices, and consistency across joint programmes.
- Focus on researcher and research leadership development.
- Improve understanding and use of data and metrics to improve planning in both teaching and research.
- Increase research influence and income, including strategic research partnerships.
- Ensure that success in achieving excellence is shared, celebrated and rewarded.

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-3	National Student Survey: average of education-specific questions (Questions 1–25)	Bottom (first) quartile (17th percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
KPI-4	Rank amongst UK universities in THE World University Rankings	Joint 29th	Top 25

Examples of where we are already putting this principle into practice:

IN THE TOP 20% OF WORLD INSTITUTIONS FOR FIVE YEARS IN A ROW [3]

98% OF OUR RESEARCH IS INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED and **78% is internationally excellent** [4]

94% OF GRADUATES IN WORK OR FURTHER STUDY SIX MONTHS AFTER GRADUATING [5]

3 QS World University Rankings 2016–2020

4 Based on our submissions judged to be world leading, internationally excellent and internationally recognised in overall quality by the Research Excellence Framework, 2014 and the Times Higher Education's analysis of REF 2014. See the overall table of excellence at **www.timeshighereducation.com**

5 Based on the 2016–17 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey of 2,779 University of Reading first degree leavers, of which 73% responded

PRINCIPLE 3: Sustainability – managing our resources for today and tomorrow

- We work together to make the best use of our resources to ensure the sustainability of the University.

- We recognise that maintaining financial sustainability is a process that requires us to review what we do, how we work, and respond to changing circumstances in a planned and managed way.

- We are committed to play our part in tackling climate change and are recognised as a University that leads on global environmental sustainability.

We cannot achieve our goals if we do not have a solid financial base that we can maintain into the future. Ambition is useless if we cannot keep the lights on. The pressures currently facing the sector mean that financial sustainability requires greater strategic focus than might be required in more comfortable times. Casting our financial goals in terms of sustainability requires us to demonstrate value over time and not simply focus on short-term cost.

Responsible management of our resources, however, extends beyond our finances. How we power the lights is just as critical to our future. Our planet faces colossal threats and the choices we make today will have consequences well into the future. Our world-leading research strengths in climate change and environmental science are a critically important way we can deliver change in the world. We also have a long-standing commitment to align these research strengths with the management of our finances, our estate and our community. We have already made huge strides but we must be ambitious in our commitment to using our research strengths to inform our actions.

These two concepts – financial and environmental sustainability – are intrinsically linked. Explicitly bringing them together acknowledges the tensions that can exist and requires us to actively manage them. There is a financial cost to reducing our carbon footprint and enhancing our environmental impact. This needs to be managed responsibly so we do not undermine our financial future.

However, an emphasis on sustainability also brings major financial benefits by enhancing efficient resource use, reducing duplication and waste, and focusing on long-term cost as well as short-term gain. For example, we have achieved:

- £30 million in cumulative revenue savings from reducing carbon emissions

- £45,000 in annual savings from improvements to the University's central servers

- £210,000 cumulative revenue savings from our waste strategy

- £90,000 of costs avoided by reusing 20 tonnes of waste furniture and equipment

To fulfil our long-term ambition to be the greenest university in the UK, we will lead by example and commit to genuine carbon neutrality by 2030. We will not make that goal easier but less meaningful by excluding critical but challenging components such as travel or accommodation in order to achieve it more quickly. In doing so, we understand the full cost and implications of our target.

This pledge to be both financially and environmentally sustainable aligns with our commitment to the University's social sustainability encapsulated in Principle 1 – Community.

FINANCIAL

Aspiration: To be financially sustainable at all levels to ensure resilience in the face of current and future national and global challenges

University Executive Board-led priorities for the University:

- Undertake a review of changing student expectations and requirements, including overseas-based students, to ensure our structures and offerings allow us to deliver on current and future demands.
- Review our current offerings to ensure they meet demand and deliver on financial and strategic requirements.
- Develop a commercial strategy with a view to generating increased income through commercialisation and engagement with business.
- Strengthen international partnerships and support growth of trans-national education.
- Review and revise the strategic financing model for Henley Business School.
- Review the University's investment portfolio in light of changing operational context, including around climate change, and long term viability.
- Deliver improved return on investment through proactive and streamlined change management that considers the impact of change across the whole organisation.

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-5	Cashflow from operating activities as a percentage of income	7.9%	10%

Examples of where we are already putting this principle into practice:

£43 MILLION

in the value of NEW AWARDS WON in 2017/18

Our success rate with Research Councils was 33%

£175 MILLION

CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN OUR CAMPUS between 2016 and 2019

DIVESTMENT FROM FOSSIL FUELS IN 2020

ENVIRONMENTAL

Aspiration: To be recognised for our world-class research in climate change and its impact on the environment and society, and be a leader in global environmental sustainability

University Executive Board-led priorities for the University:

- Embed environmental impact as a critical component in change and project management.
- Develop an environmental strategy with clear targets, timeframes and measures, and adjust policies to drive environmentally sustainable action.
- Reduce electronic waste through effective recycling and reuse, including developing an 'IT Shack' to recycle computers for colleagues and students.
- Embed environmental sustainability across our curriculum and our staff training programme.
- Inset our carbon footprint by developing woodlands or other landscapes that sequester carbon, through an internal levy on air travel.
- Place sustainability and biodiversity at the heart of our community, including management of campuses and other landholdings.

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-6	UK People and Planet University League ranking	29th (1st class award)	Top 5

Examples of where we are already putting this principle into practice:

MORE THAN 40% REDUCTION IN CARBON EMISSIONS from 2008/09 baselines

CO_2

500+ INDIVIDUAL SOLAR PANELS INSTALLED ACROSS OUR CAMPUSES

15.5% REDUCTION IN WASTE PER PERSON

15

PRINCIPLE 4: Engaged University – impact beyond our campuses

- We work with partners in a coordinated way to play a positive role in the social, cultural, environmental and economic life of our local communities.
- We use our global links to benefit the towns and regions in which we operate and use these local connections to strengthen our work around the world.
- Public engagement and consultation, including in research, is a valued part of how we live and work, for both our staff and students.

While our first principle of Community focuses on our University community of students, colleagues and alumni, our community does not stop at the boundaries of our campuses. Both principles are inherently based in respecting and celebrating the communities in which we operate. There is no sharp distinction between our University community and our local region. Many of our colleagues are also our neighbours. A significant proportion of our alumni go on to make their home in the region. And our students too are an integral part of that community while they study with us.

The University is a major economic and cultural contributor to Reading, Wokingham and the Thames Valley. Our presence has an impact on the people who live around us, and sometimes that impact can be negative. Some universities have lost this connection with their local community as they have grown and focused on their international connections, and this has led to renewed discussion in the university sector about the need to revive local connections and redefine the meaning of a 'civic university'.

This principle represents our commitment to be a University for Reading as well as of Reading. We will engage with the world on our doorstep – from supporting our staff to volunteer for good local causes in work time, to opening up our superb sporting facilities to local clubs and athletes and using our research strengths to support local and regional improvement. Being a good neighbour means we listen to those who live and work around us, involve them in our decision-making, and better co-ordinate our regional engagement. It also means we are honest about any negative impacts and work with our staff, students, alumni and neighbours to create solutions to these problems together.

This in no way diminishes our emphasis on wider UK and global engagement, which remains vital to our academic, reputational and financial success. Indeed, these are more important than ever, and our national and international reach brings important economic and cultural benefits to our local region. We have partnerships, campuses and relationships in almost every part of the country and the world. As the UK negotiates its place in the international community, we must continue to lead by example and demonstrate the value of being welcoming and outward looking. It is also important that, where we have a physical presence overseas, we consider how to engage with those local communities and how we can reflect our values in doing so.

Nurturing these partnerships takes time and commitment and we recognise that the return on this investment may take time, and that the benefits can be social, intellectual and cultural as well as financial.

Aspiration: To be a university where our community is connected to the world through our teaching, research and active engagement

University Executive Board-led priorities for the University:

- Enhance local partnership working, including creating a clear 'front door' to the University, so that external stakeholders can access University knowledge and services.

- Create a life-long learning programme for Reading based on a clear understanding of local needs.

- Strengthen our position as a global university in education and research.

- Link University expertise on environment and sustainability with local partners and stakeholders.

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-7	Knowledge Exchange Framework metrics		To be determined
KPI-8	THE World University Rankings international outlook – UK universities	Top (fourth) quartile (75th percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
KPI-9	Economic impact on UK economy (Gross Value Added)	£0.8 billion	£1.0 billion

Examples of where we are already putting this principle into practice:

IN THE TOP 100 FOR INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK [6]

CONTRIBUTE £480 MILLION A YEAR TO READING AND THAMES VALLEY BERKSHIRE [7]

MORE THAN 1 MILLION INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATIONS FOR OUR FREE ONLINE COURSES

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF EACH OTHER

Implementation of this strategy requires the collective effort of all members of our University community. Each of us has responsibilities that we must meet and expectations that we are entitled to have of each other.

The 3Rs Framework, developed by our People Plan Board based on staff survey feedback, sets out three tenets of leadership for the University of Reading: Resourceful, Responsible and Respectful. It is underpinned by a conception of leadership that is about more than management or seniority. It understands that each of us can demonstrate leadership in our own area of activity, expertise and influence. These 3Rs, and the conceptual and analytical structures that sit below them, will provide the basis by which we can turn our four principles into action.

OUR STUDENT COMMUNITY

By attending university, our students are making a considerable investment in their future, both in time and money. Our Student Charter and Student Contract clearly set out what our students can expect of their University and what is required of them in return. It recognises the importance of an effective partnership commitment, in which the University and its staff have professional obligations but where students are also responsible for themselves as learners and as individuals. Our students are also expected to respect our neighbours in the local community and behave in a considerate manner.

OUR STAFF COMMUNITY

While we do not exist for the sole benefit of advancing the University, membership of this community, and working towards our common goals, is what binds us together. Supporting and furthering the interests of this community, in consultation with our partners, allows us to effectively advance knowledge, scholarship and innovation. We expect all colleagues to think beyond the boundaries of their discipline, function or interest, and work constructively with others to reduce barriers to collaboration and minimise duplication and inefficiencies. The successful implementation of this strategy requires that we are all empowered to make decisions in our area of work and expertise. This means we must all be accountable for delivering on our principles and aspirations and on the specific activities for which we are responsible.

OUR LEADERSHIP GROUP

Our academic Schools and professional Functions should have autonomy to appropriately implement this strategy locally, and the necessary management and financial authority to do so. This requires our Leadership Group of Heads of Schools and Functions and Deans to demonstrate the same need for visible and consultative leadership and accountability for local delivery against targets agreed through our annual planning process.

OUR UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE BOARD

This strategy requires ambitious and coherent strategic leadership from our University Executive Board, which has ultimate accountability for delivery of the strategy against measures agreed with the University's governing Council. This leadership must be informed by transparency and open dialogue. It must be underpinned by a commitment to be visible, to consult, and to listen and respond to our internal community and stakeholders.

OUR MEASURES OF SUCCESS

	Measure	Current	Target
KPI-1	Staff Survey: 'employer of choice' score (which brings together multiple measures including diversity and inclusion)	Third quartile (53rd percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
KPI-2	National Student Survey: 'I feel part of a community of staff and students' (Question 21)	Second quartile (32nd percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
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KPI-4	Rank amongst UK universities in THE World University Rankings	Joint 29	Top 25
KPI-5	Cashflow from operating activities as a percentage of income	7.9%	10%
KPI-6	UK People and Planet University League ranking	29th (1st class award)	Top 5
KPI-7	Knowledge Exchange Framework metrics		To be determined
KPI-8	The World University Rankings international outlook – UK universities	Top (fourth) quartile (75th percentile)	Top (fourth) quartile (i.e. 75th percentile or above)
KPI-9	Economic impact on UK economy (Gross Value Added)	£0.8 billion	£1.0 billion

University of Reading

100% recycled

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this document please recycle it**