

# Planning for a sustainable future

## Information pack for colleagues in Schools/Functions

### Participating in the engagement session

You are invited to an engagement session on the implementation of the University strategy. I hope very much that you will be able to join the discussion. Please find here information about the purpose and logistics of the session, a message from Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource) and the high-level Strategy implementation proposals for you to read prior to the discussion.

#### Session outcomes:

The purpose of the engagement session(s) is to enable colleagues to consider and feedback on the high-level Strategy implementation proposals to make our University more sustainable in the future and to implement our Strategy. This feedback will be important to inform the final proposals that are taken to Council on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

#### Session logistics and timings:

- This session is expected to last around 60 minutes and will be conducted over Microsoft Teams.
- The session will be led by your Head of School/Function.
- This information pack includes:
  - a message from Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)
  - a link in Mark's message to his video update on 6 October 2020.
  - the Strategy implementation proposal document with an introduction from Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)
- To enable a productive and effective discussion please make sure that you have read the attached proposal document. If you were unable to listen in at the time, you will also find it helpful to view the video from the all-staff briefing where Mark Fellowes presented the proposals.
- The engagement session will:
  - open with a general introduction about the work
  - introduce the high-level proposals
  - invite a discussion among participants about each of the four proposals.:
    - **Question-1:** What are the potential impacts of this proposal for our School/Function?
      - What are the positive impacts?

- What are the challenges we foresee?
- How could any challenges be mitigated?
- **Question-2** : What needs to be considered to enable effective implementation of this proposal?
- **Question-3**: What other options to address the University's financial shortfall might you have expected to be reflected in these proposals?

## **An update from Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resources), on the work on implementing the University Strategy**

Earlier this year, the new University Strategy was agreed – a strategy that has been built on wide engagement and input from colleagues across the University. Our strategy rests on four pillars – *Community, Sustainability, Engagement* and *Excellence* – which outline the ambitions that should underpin any institution with the history and global impact of a university like ours.

COVID-19 has changed many things. We work differently, we teach differently, we engage differently. Once the threat of COVID recedes, we will undoubtedly face national and international economic challenges and social uncertainty. Delivering our strategy must acknowledge these realities, taking the positives where we can and mitigating the threats where we can't.

In delivering our strategy, we have focused on two key principles. The first is that we must learn from previous change programmes, ensuring that colleagues have multiple opportunities to engage with projects that change the way we do things. My [video update on 6 October](#) was a part of this effort, as is the sharing of this high-level proposal, provided below. I would like you to reflect on the proposals and help us refine our approach.

As the plans develop, we will continue to engage and will use the new Planning and Change Board to ensure that our business cases for change are robust and the plans remain integrated as an over-arching programme for delivering the University Strategy. Second, the proposals are built on making best use of our resources, rather than by focusing on redundancies or closure of academic units as a way of making savings.

Instead we:

- Make better use of our buildings by moving towards a model of shared offices, where flexible working is available if desired, supported by a new digital strategy that provides the equipment and infrastructure required to enable this way of working. This will free up a substantial amount of space, saving on maintenance costs and allowing us increase income by letting space and critically, by allowing us to grow student numbers. As we come out of the demographic dip and see a rapid rise in demand for HE, we need to be positioned so that we can take advantage of the coming opportunity for growth.
- Make better use of our financial resources by moving to an organisational model that encourages long-term, integrated strategic thinking. By refining our resource allocation models, and working with Schools and Functions in a rolling programme of engagement that focuses on the long-term ambitions of each and encourages better ways of working together, we aim to avoid the existential challenges that units sometimes face, by planning for the long-term and supporting evolutionary change.
- Review our teaching portfolio, to ensure that we reduce the administrative and organisational burden on those supporting our students and our teaching programmes, while continuing to improve how we teach. To achieve this we need to consider reducing assessment loads, numbers of modules and programmes, while considering embedding use of blended learning and thinking through the timing of teaching and assessment across the academic year. Together, these will help reduce workloads, improve student experience, and combined with better use of our estate enable growth in student numbers, an opportunity which is currently limited by our ability to timetable additional classes.
- Finally, and integrating with an outcome from Phase 1 discussions with UCU and the Staff Forum, and also discussions about how we work, we need to consider workloads and expectations.

Your input in developing these proposals is very important. Please make time to attend the engagement sessions in your Schools and Functions and help us learn from your experience and insight.

We will be seeking the University Council's approval in November to the proposed package of change initiatives. In the past year we have developed new change governance processes, and each component project will be required to follow the relevant stages of approval and engagement before being implemented. These processes will ensure that relevant colleagues and students are engaged in shaping the final proposals for each project in the most effective way, that there is rigorous oversight by relevant University committees of the financial and strategic business case for each fully developed project, and importantly that consideration is given to the required resource and appropriate phasing of the proposals in relation to our wider portfolio of change initiatives, including work responding to the current Covid-19 challenges. This will result in increased visibility, transparency and understanding of the impact of our change initiatives as we deliver our Strategy.

In times of challenge we cannot ignore the dangers, nor can we solve them with silver bullets. Instead we must acknowledge them, ensure that the things we can control are well-managed, and that we have the capacity to absorb the things we can't. This plan is not glossy nor over-ambitious and it doesn't involve spending money we don't have. It aims to make the best use of our skills and resources, and is focused on delivering a Strategy built on pride in our achievements and our ambition for the future.

# PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## Introduction and context

Earlier this year, the new University Strategy was ratified. This followed extensive engagement with colleagues, governing bodies and students, and endorsed four key principles: **Community**, **Excellence**, financial and environmental **Sustainability** and **Engaged University**.

- We are a **Community**, both while part of the University and also once we graduate. We respect each other and those who benefit from our experiences, and work to ensure that we can achieve fairness and equality in our University.
- We recognise the importance of **Excellence** in our teaching and research, bringing the best to our students and to those who benefit from the knowledge we build.
- We are **Engaged**, locally and globally. We make a positive difference to our neighbours, the economy, to arts and culture, and to policy and our graduates travel the world, bringing their experience and Reading's values to wherever they are.
- All this must be underpinned by **Sustainability**.
  - Excellence is only possible with financial sustainability, allowing us to invest in colleagues and facilities and continue providing world-leading opportunities for learning and research
  - the University also has an obligation to support environmental sustainability, reducing our own negative impacts on the environment and supporting others through our strength in research and teaching

These broad ambitions are brought into focus through 10 high level KPIs, which make it clear that our ambition is to ensure that the University's reputation, resilience and relationships are as strong as possible by our centenary year. These ambitions are challenging, particularly when you consider not just where we are, but also the existing context in which we operate. Even before the advent of COVID-19, immense political and regulatory changes to the higher education landscape were challenging us to develop the financial, structural and cultural resilience necessary to safeguard our future. Questions about 'value for money' and cross-subsidy for research, the Augur review, market differentiation, inflationary pressures costing the University around £10m per year, demographics, and Brexit challenge how we are to work if we are to succeed in this environment. These challenges and the uncertainty about the future they create set the backdrop against which initial thinking about how we might achieve our strategic ambitions was set.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created another requirement that this work potentially needed to address. This work therefore began with two purposes. Not only were we to find ways to deliver the new Strategy and address our embedded challenges, but also to contribute to savings required to address the financial threats of the pandemic. Hence this work became Phase 2 of the COVID-19 response. Following the proposed agreement on Phase 1, we reverted to focusing

solely on working on ways of delivering our new University Strategy, while being clear that we must acknowledge the challenges and opportunities that the pandemic brings.

This work started in mid-May 2020, when the Phase 2 Project Plan was approved by UEB. This work brought together colleagues from Schools, Professional Services and those with specialist expertise along with representatives from RUSU, to explore four broad but inter-related themes:

- *How can we make our Schools financially robust?*
- *What is the optimal way to deliver our professional services?*
- *How should we be teaching?*
- *How do we support excellence and sustainability of our research?*

Each workstream was led by a member of the University Executive Board, with expert input from members of a Taskforce and several internal advisers to the project whose interests cut across the workstreams (comprising representatives from Legal Services, HR, Finance, Change Management, Digital Technology, Space Management, RUSU, and Diversity and Inclusion). Their role focused on integrating the four workstreams into a unified programme, ensuring that outcomes worked towards addressing the gap between where we are and where we wish to be in 2026.

Workstreams have also drawn extensively on the knowledge and insights from a wide range of colleagues, where appropriate at this stage. This wider engagement has included Deans, Heads of Schools and Functions, School Directors of Teaching and Learning, Research Division Leads and Chairs of Communities of Practice. It has also drawn on insights from last year's consultation on the new Strategy, including with the Leadership Group, and with the feedback from Leadership Group earlier this year on ways of addressing short- and long-term financial challenges.

Presented here are outlines of high-level proposals that set out a strategic roadmap that aims to implement key elements of the University Strategy and in particular deliver on KPI-5 (10% cashflow from operating activities as a percentage of income) by our centenary year in 2026. It must be emphasised that these ideas are at different stages of detail and planning, and as they become more developed, each will require further scrutiny ahead of approval, in late November 2020. All proposals will then need further engagement and discussion to implement them successfully in line with our University Strategy and input from students, Senate, Council and colleagues across the University on the implementation phase of this work will be critical to its long-term success. This paper is an early step in that process.

## **SOME UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES**

The Taskforce has drawn heavily on key themes that arose from last year's Strategy consultation and from the ideas put forward by Leadership Group earlier this year on achieving financial sustainability:

- reducing inefficiencies in our processes and administration
- focusing on quality and consolidation of our strengths
- facilitating better cross-working across Schools, including HBS, and between Schools and Functions
- accepting the need for constant and sustained improvement based on improved, flexible ways of working rather than reactive change
- addressing workload and development of a flexible workload model
- supporting staff and student welfare through better management of change and the cumulative impact of multiple change projects

- engaging our community better in decision-making and being more open and transparent
- the urgent need for a review of our portfolio and associated assessment
- making better and more sustainable use of our physical and digital estate, with both financial and environmental benefits

These findings and the strategic principles, particularly Community, were our starting point. The Taskforce work is based on the premise that long-term sustainability is achieved through focusing on value and not cost, and is best achieved by getting the fundamentals right and making the best use of what we already have, not grand 'magic bullet' solutions.

Building on the outcome of Phase 1, we do not start from a premise of building financial sustainability of the University simply by making redundancies. While we obviously cannot rule out that some structural change may be required, the Taskforce has sought to make best use of resources and by being competitive in terms of research funding and student recruitment.

The taskforce has therefore taken certain principles as given:

1. Any view of the future size and shape of the University must be internally consistent and help contribute to meeting our strategic vision. We cannot have unconnected (and possibly conflicting) strategies working in an uncoordinated fashion.
2. Resources are limited, we must **live within our means**, so:
  - a. we will make the best use of our current physical infrastructure
  - b. staff growth will be slow, and we must help colleagues work effectively, including through clear guidance on expectations
  - c. we will encourage flexible working aided by technology
  - d. we will ensure that programmes run efficiently, and this may require change for those that are not economically viable
  - e. we will ensure that income is best applied, through changes in the University's financial model and through regular financial/strategic evaluations of each School and Function
  - f. in the longer term, academic units that continue to perform poorly over time (as measured by teaching and research reputation) will be reduced in activity or closed
  - g. we do not seek 'miracle cures'; we get our foundations repaired first.
3. At the same time, despite the challenges, **opportunities exist**, through changes in demographics, demand for HE and in technology, so we will:
  - a. make better use of space to allow cost-effective growth in student numbers
  - b. use changes in space and technology provision to support improvements in student experience including provision of student learning spaces
  - c. streamline processes to create efficiencies, but also more effective outcomes for both colleagues and students
  - d. allow growth in student numbers at a pace that allows entry tariffs to increase

- e. grow subjects in demand and of high reputation, and where growth is limited but reputation high we will endeavour to maintain excellence and seek alternative pathways for sustainability
- f. work to ensure that our teaching and research is considered excellent, both nationally and internationally
- g. find ways of working that encourage collaboration and break down barriers between and among the University's Schools and Functions, streamlining and simplifying reporting lines
- h. ensure that our academic activities benefit from our commercial and internationalization activities, both directly and in terms of opportunities for colleagues and students
- i. embrace changes in resource use and ways of working that enhance environmental sustainability and help the University embed its knowledge and experience in our local community
- j. seek ways to use online technology to widen our appeal beyond our campuses, benefitting those who would otherwise be unable to study with us

### **Managing change sustainably for our community**

To be clear, the proposals within this document require a considerable change in how we work. The benefits gained by these changes will continue long into the future, and in some ways these are approaches which others have introduced some time ago. At the same time, we must learn from previous change programmes, and throughout Phase 2 we have worked hard to do this. The proposed changes are transformational, and achieving this will require a phased approach over the next five years.

### **Financial overview**

A wide range of options for establishing an improved financial position have been looked at across the workstreams, and it has become clear that while some savings can be made by shrinking the University, this will not be sufficient in and of itself to provide the robust financial stability and foundation for excellence that is required. Delivering the Strategy therefore is not based on making redundancies. Instead, the University needs to ensure it can grow income in conjunction with delivering efficiencies across all areas of activity if it is to achieve its financial aims.

Key changes are to be delivered in two main ways.

1. A combination of efficiency savings created by changes in how we work and use our resources will produce direct reductions in costs.
2. Most significantly, these changes will also contribute, via more efficient use of both space and organization, to the ability to be able to recruit significant numbers of additional students at limited additional cost.

A very high level analysis suggests that to meet our KPI in 2026, savings of £7.5M can be made from changes in how we work and how we use our resources (most notably space, but also in



simplifying processes), and an increase in student recruitment of ~375 per year in the last three years of the plan (an increase in our projected intake of 8-9%). Given that the number of 18-year-olds is going to increase by around 18% by 2026, and at the same time the rate of participation in HE is predicted to continue to increase, these changes in demographics should allow both an increase in intake, and an increase in entry tariff.

## THEMES EMERGE

Three cross-cutting themes emerged that lay the foundations required for implementing the University Strategy. We need to 1) **evolve our ways of working** in order to allow us to be able to make necessary changes to allow us to 2) **make the best use of our resources** which in turn enables us to 3) **deliver excellence** in a sustainable way. The key activities presented in these proposals are grouped under these three themes, while recognising that elements of all the themes are often present across activities.



The figure above represents the main recommendations of the Phase 2 workstreams. Much work remains to fill out the necessary detail on these proposals, but two major areas (space and teaching) are particularly well-developed, and each is required to drive the realisation of the

efficiency savings and other anticipated strategic benefits within the timescale of the Strategy. At the same time, we wish to be clear about the direction of travel for the less well developed elements of the proposal.

## THEME 1: EVOLVING OUR WAYS OF WORKING

### Proposal A: Re-imagining the way we work

Evolving our ways of working is fundamental to our proposals to deliver our Strategy. Pressures to be more effective, efficient and sustainable, from both financial and environmental perspectives, were already moving us in this direction, and this has been hugely accelerated, albeit in an unplanned way, by the seismic shift to remote working and delivery as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic has shown that:

- we can work flexibly, but that there are community and equality challenges
- we are not tied to place for many activities
- we have relevant digital technologies, although there are local challenges.

We must grasp this opportunity and momentum to **work differently in a planned, equitable and consistent way** that addresses the changing needs of our institution and our community and that enables us to be a more flexible and agile institution with colleagues who are more adaptable to changes in the demands of their work.

There are three interdependent aspects of our ways of working, **people, places, and technology**, and we need to consider all three within a programme that encompasses an emerging estates strategy. This must be aligned with a structured approach to the development of the digital workspace, while working in partnership with our community to recognise and address the significant associated cultural impacts of such changes through our HR and people strategies.

While we have a wide range of digital initiatives that are at different stages, we do not have a **digital workplace strategy** to enable a structured approach to the continued use and development of the digital workspace. Work is required to bring together existing activities and new requirements that establish a sustainable digital workspace, in line with the vision and meeting the needs of different user groups. This could include, but is not restricted to:

- the further development and rollout of Microsoft Teams and other digital solutions
- a device strategy for colleagues (and potentially students), providing the equipment needed for flexible working
- setting expectations for digital working with appropriate support and development solutions
- working in tandem with developing estates projects to consider required reconfigurations of spaces to facilitate digital working and collaboration
- determining security and storage solutions for longer-term flexible working.

### Moving to a functional estate

Analysis shows that currently Reading operates more area per FTE than any of the other S10 institutions (this is a group of 10 comparator universities in the south-east of England) and delivers a lower than median teaching and research income. Our plan anticipates significant savings from a change in how we use our space. The aim is to unlock an operating cost saving and to increase income (through rental and through accommodating growth in student numbers within our

existing estate) through a reduction in area per FTE required for academic purposes of around 20%.

The proposals set out how we might realise both financial and strategic benefits from a shift in approach from the current 'owned' space model to a **functional model**. This delivery plan makes some assumptions about opportunities that could emerge through changes in the shape of the academic portfolio or through different approaches to teaching delivery, purely to illustrate potential at this stage.

Two early delivery projects have been explored as possible first packages of work. First, a quick win arising from the HLS project, to withdraw from the Lyle Building where there is interest from the NHS in letting Harborne and Lyle and so avoiding significant budgeted costs of refurbishment. Second, given the impending planning permission deadline for Chancellors, an opportunity to explore moving SBE into consolidated office space in Edith Morley, including moving Architecture up to Whiteknights and so bringing the School together in one location. This opens up teaching space in London Road that could provide further rental income (University of Law) and the option of restructuring the top floor of Chancellors as general purpose teaching space, lack of which is a significant constraint on our ability to grow.

These proposals constitute a significant long-term change and assume the following ways of working:

- shared occupancy of offices for academic colleagues becomes the norm (recognizing that this already occurs in parts of the University)
- a sufficient number of bookable rooms to facilitate meetings and tutorials
- flexible working with colleagues encouraged and supported, allowing colleagues to work away from campus for a proportion of their time if this suits their favoured way of working
- a complementary digital strategy
- changes to how we teach, reducing the requirement for University-operated space
- we can make additional space for staff common rooms and for student learning spaces, further reinforcing community cohesion.

There are significant cultural changes associated with the proposals, in particular for shared academic office space (and we note that there will need to be reasonable exceptions based on requirements of role), that will have impacts for our academic communities and potentially for the student experience and these require careful evaluation. At the same time, space could be freed to increase both community space (common rooms) and student-facing study space. We will need to engage early with stakeholders to explore these in the context of developing the wider vision for ways of working, to develop clear expectations and to support colleagues through the change.

## **THEME 2: MAKING THE BEST USE OF OUR RESOURCES**

### **Proposal B: Establishing a programme of Strategic Review**

The University needs to be able to adapt effectively on an ongoing basis to changes in student market demand, external regulation, and even global events to be competitive while remaining true to our strategic aspirations. Planning for both academic areas and professional services needs to effectively incorporate the assessment of our current position against our immediate and longer term requirements, and to use this to make informed data-driven decisions around prioritisation of

resourcing, be that money, capacity and/or skills. This will at times involve the re-focusing of the academic portfolio and/or professional expertise to most effectively achieve this goal.

A strategic review programme should inform the direction of travel for the University, translating our strategic objectives into actions including where we do and do not invest, based on transparent and agreed evidential models. The programme provides a structure for effective and holistic assessment and decision-making to ensure the following objectives are achieved:

- University priorities, requirements and expectations are defined, based on agreed and shared management information, creating a direction of travel that will include setting out medium to longer term areas for growth / reduction in both academic and professional service areas
- University priorities, requirements and expectations are transparent to all colleagues, and clearly align with strategic aspirations
- lines of responsibility and accountability for effective delivery of University priorities, requirements and expectations are clearly defined following the model of devolved leadership
- where the defined management information indicates that an area of activity is not achieving defined criteria thresholds (be that of quality, efficiency, or need), recommendations for action will be made by UEB
- recommendations for action could involve re-prioritisation of activity/resource, restructuring of management or organisational units, additional support (financial or skills based), reduction/closure of activity
- regular annual reviews will continue as part of the current Sustainable Planning System, but will be supplemented by a programme of more detailed engagement (provisionally called 'strategy evaluations' for convenience) with Schools and Functions, to consider changes to internal and external drivers, allowing us to focus on continuous evolution, rather than reaching moments of significant upheaval.

### School strategy evaluations

A rolling programme of School strategy evaluations will be set up to help support excellence and ensure resources (staffing, space) are allocated efficiently to support the long-term sustainability and strategic direction of the University. Phase 2 cross-workstream collaboration (with expert engagement) has drawn up an initial view of what **Research and Teaching Excellence criteria** would look like, driven by our strategic ambitions. Market potential and financial performance indicators will also be used to create an overview of subject level performance. The excellence metrics will be the primary drivers for any recommended intervention, with market position and financial performance helping to inform what this might be. The rolling programme of review, covering all Schools over a 4-year period, combined with the associated data sets would set clear expectations for Schools of the indicators that are a priority in line with our Strategy. The process will enable a consistent assessment of excellence / performance across the academic portfolio.

The range of outcomes from reviewing these assessment criteria would include identifying areas for growth and planning for the associated space requirements, additional support (be that financial or skills-based), reductions in activity, or restructuring of management or organisational units. During 2020/21, performance based on current data sets would be shared with Schools so that they can become familiar with the assessment criteria and their current position and to enable discussions about what the data indicates and what actions Schools will take in response. The programme of review would then be rolled out from 2021/22. The review process will need to

articulate closely with teaching, research and financial planning processes, and could be directly incorporated into the SPS cycle.

## Financial model

We need to review and refine the Schools' financial model to ensure it is fit for the more challenging times we find ourselves in. SUMS Consulting (a not-for-profit HE specialist consultancy) advise that any financial model only ever has an effective life span of about 5-6 years before changes are required to reflect external changes and ensure effective incentives to continue positive behaviours. The financial model needs to be aligned to our strategic objectives, transparent and comprehensible, deployed to appropriate levels of accountability and responsibility, enable institutional financial sustainability and medium-term investment planning, and incentivise collaboration and other positive behaviours. Taking account of a wide range of factors identified by the Schools workstream, a project would be run to develop an updated financial model with supporting input from SUMS across 2020/21 for implementation in 2021/22. The targets and financial measures underpinning the new model would need to inform the new system of strategy evaluations and provide a way of monitoring financial performance effectively.

## Professional services strategy evaluations

A similar process will be developed for professional services, focused on identifying and meeting our business needs at the optimal level. Phase 2 work has identified the need for an approach that ensures excellence where it is necessary and optimal delivery standards where it is not, to ensure strategic use of limited resources. An initiating project, as set out below, will establish the basis for the rolling review of activity. The fundamental aims of the underpinning initiating project and the rolling programme of strategy evaluations would be to ensure the professional services are able to support the University's service needs through working in partnership in as flexible and cost efficient a way as possible, not only to support colleagues, students and external stakeholders now to deliver institutional priorities and requirements, but also to help develop how we go about our business into the future.

A key element will be the ability to support **improvements in processes**. We have already demonstrated a commitment to this ambition by putting in place skilled resource to provide the capacity as well as the required expertise. This investment is already having an impact with the Quality Assurance process review completed and under implementation, and the Extenuating Circumstances process review underway. We need to ensure that as part of the proposed Strategic Review process, priorities for this support are identified and incorporated into a multi-year programme.

The rolling programme of service strategy evaluations would start in 2021/22, to assess where financial resource should be reduced or increased, where specialist support and resources to review and improve processes should be invested, and where areas would benefit from internal or cross-university re-structuring or managerial changes. In addition to this focus on the services themselves, there will be ongoing review and action to ensure that they can operate in an environment that enables collaborative, integrated working across any organisational boundaries, and which mitigates those factors that can lead to siloed working.

## Criteria for service requirements

The initiating project underpinning the service strategy evaluation programme will require the set-up of a process with associated criteria, including benchmarking data where appropriate, for identifying what services are required, at what level and in what format, and comparing this to a catalogue of current provision. The aim of the design process will be to ensure we align, manage

and resource our services in the most effective way to support delivery of excellence in teaching and research at the University.

This initiating project will incorporate six main elements that will underpin the development of measures and criteria for the annual assessment of service delivery at the institution. These elements are:

- **identifying what services we provide now**, and **what services are required** in the short to medium term
- **assessing the level and quality required** for different service activities
- reviewing our activities against **benchmarking** and other sector information
- identifying the **best way to deliver our services**, and then identifying ways to **evaluate the impact** of providing them

This suite of activities will then provide the foundations for the annual review, to ensure that we can continually and iteratively assess if our service provision is aligned in the most effective way, and where required adjust resourcing of services in the most efficient manner.

### **Proposal C: Establishing a programme of Portfolio Review**

Analysis undertaken through this project indicates that we offer an unsustainable number of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught programmes and modules at Reading, with concomitant staffing requirements for programme delivery and support. However, we lack any consistent way to determine the appropriate size of our teaching portfolio or to assess which programmes are sustainable.

Equally, we have a wide variety of practice across the University in terms of programme structures, module load and assessment load/practices, including progression rules. The recent pandemic has demonstrated the burden that this variety and complexity places on both academic and professional services colleagues. The sheer number of programmes and modules we teach, reliance on face-to-face teaching and volume of assessment means that there is significant strain on our current resources, especially in relation to processing the volume of assessment.

It is vital to the longer-term future of the University that we 'get our house in order' through reducing a portfolio of activity that has proliferated to the extent that it is driving inefficiencies across our operations. Considerable work has been undertaken in the Teaching workstream to explore solutions for addressing this proliferation and ensuring that we can manage future growth in a strategic and planned way.

Our approach to using technology-enhanced learning to date has resulted in some highly innovative teaching, but this has not been consistent across our portfolio and there have been no consistent expectations in the mix of teaching methods. Recent experience of our work to deliver a mix of online and face-to-face provision provides a strong basis from which to consider how we might use blended learning as an intended institution-wide approach to further enhance and future-proof our teaching and learning experience at Reading. We should not miss this opportunity to build upon the good practice developed this year and to keep pace with the sector and the expectations of our future students by offering a quality blended learning experience that prepares students for the modern digital workplace and that has the potential to change the way in which we use our teaching spaces.

We will embark on a **programme of Portfolio Review** to enhance our provision and reputation while realising financial efficiencies and improved ways of working. This is a highly developed and self-coherent proposal, which has already had considerable expert stakeholder engagement and which, indicates positive financial and strategic benefits based on an initial assessment against our new financial and strategic criteria for decision-making. If commenced this academic year, the

programme will support all academic areas to review their portfolio, and redesign teaching and assessment, for changes to be introduced for the 2022-23 session, with benefits being realised from that point.

The proposal sets out three main areas of activity that will be the focus of the programme, supporting Schools to review and rationalise programmes and modules, establish more coherent, consistent and simplified programme expectations and structures, reduce module load and assessment load and improve teaching practices by adopting an augmented blended learning approach. This will be a significant programme of review, redesign and continuous improvement to enhance the quality of teaching and the student experience at Reading. The three broad areas of activity are:

1. **establishing criteria for reviewing academic programmes** and module offerings to rationalise our current offering and to enable sustainable processes for ongoing portfolio review
2. **establishing typical expectations of programme offerings** to simplify programme structures, reduce module and assessment load and to facilitate timetabling
3. **exploring a more structured university-wide approach to blended and online learning** that supports the student teaching and learning experience.

The proposal includes an option to combine these three activities with **exploring different structures for the academic year** as part of the Portfolio Review programme, which would allow Schools to make changes to programmes in a more coherent and comprehensive way, considering, implementing and realising the benefits from other improvement activities at the same time. Exploring different structures opens up opportunities to reorganise our teaching activity across the academic year in order to reduce assessment load, to facilitate a more efficient use of space in line with the wider proposals set out in this report for space usage and new ways of working, to provide opportunities for the necessary planned future growth and innovation within and beyond current programmes and to improve the student academic experience.

This is a major exercise, given the significant number of programmes and modules at Reading. Work will necessarily be phased to deliver the key component activities in a structured way through to 2022-23 and to ensure that stakeholders are adequately engaged with the implementation and that there is adequate capacity to deliver the required activities. We will need to consider carefully the institutional tolerance for change across all the proposals set out in this report, but these Teaching proposals are fundamental to enabling excellence in teaching and learning, improving the experience of both students and colleagues, enabling more efficient use of professional services and unlocking real potential in our use of space. We recommend that they be approved to commence this autumn.

#### **Proposal D: Setting expectations of contribution through workload management**

Phase 2 has reinforced the need for, and potential benefits of, setting expectations for colleagues around contribution, both in Schools and Services. Workloads and associated expectations around the contribution that colleagues make to the University will both underpin and be necessary corollaries of the proposals set out above. It is important that this is properly considered and managed holistically to ensure the best outcomes for colleague wellbeing and for our drive for excellence as set out under our strategic principles of Community and Excellence, and that it adheres to the three tenets under the Leadership Framework: Resourceful, Responsible, Respectful.

The Phase 1 MoU commits to a workload review, conducted jointly with representatives of the UCU and Staff Forum, with a view to establishing a common understanding of concerns and potential solutions. The outcome sought is an agreement with the University on **high level principles for balanced workloads** for all colleagues, which would include a **new approach to**

**workload management.** It is important that this work is incorporated into, and fully articulates with, the wider proposals being put forward under Phase 2, and with preliminary work already undertaken within this project to consider workload balance and expectations for T&R colleagues.

The expected changes to ways of working beyond our immediate response to the pandemic, such as flexible and/or remote working and changes to digital and physical environment, all require careful consideration around expectations. This is a two-way process including both **expectations in terms of what should be required of colleagues**, but also **what is required of the University to support colleagues** to transition to and succeed in a new environment. Changes will impact colleagues in different ways across the institution and careful change management will be required to support the development of different skillsets, approaches and outputs, where those are needed.

The proposals around portfolio review, and within the strategic review around process improvement, are both explicitly expected to contribute to relieving workloads by making any necessary administrative and governance processes purposeful and streamlined. This needs to articulate with and inform ongoing consideration of workload management for relevant academic and professional services areas.

Workload and expectations need to be seen as two sides of the same coin – expectations can only be achievable (and therefore reasonable) where workload is appropriate. Equally workload (in the sense of content rather than quantity) needs to be informed by our institutional requirements and priorities.

On the academic front, initial work has already been undertaken within this project to identify suitable **expectations around research outputs, income and impact**, and this valuable work has demonstrated the benefits workload management can offer in helping us to use our resources most effectively and to provide a development framework tool to help raise expectations and change behaviours. Further work around how **PGR supervision** contributes to the University, including workload impacts, is planned to follow. The work around research will need to be mirrored by **an equivalent piece on the education front**, inputting into a wider project which in conjunction with the proposals on ways of working, will underpin a set of expectations around workload, engagement and contribution for academic colleagues.

Similarly, the work under the Strategic Review process for professional services will help to define more clearly the priorities and roles within areas, which can then feed into appropriate **professional services workload management strategies and expectations** at a local level.

## **THEME 3: DELIVERING EXCELLENCE**

Delivering excellence is a cornerstone of the University strategy, and as such each element has been assessed in relation to its potential for impacting positively on that aspiration. The current financial drivers mean that proposals are very much formed with the dual aim of improving our financial position, while laying the foundations for delivering excellence in the future. While no specific proposals are set out separately on delivering excellence, the Phase 2 project has developed a number of tools to assess and monitor academic excellence, and to support excellence in how we work, in particular facilitating decision-making that aligns with our strategic principles.

### **Defining Excellence**

As set out under Proposal B (Establishing a programme of Strategic Review), the programme of strategy evaluations is intended to drive school and service performance as well as ensuring



resource is allocated effectively to support the delivery of excellence in academic areas (mindful of relevant resource constraints).

For Schools, a preliminary set of **Research and Teaching excellence criteria** have been considered. Activities defined as excellent from a teaching perspective are those that demonstrably enhance educational provision and the wider student experience, as well as supporting positive outcomes for our graduates. Primary are based around a combination of NSS, Continuation and Graduate Prospects measures, alongside other data sets to provide contextual information (SSR, PG data, APP metrics). On the research side, activities defined as excellent include those that support excellence of our research and of our research reputation, as well as supporting the development of the best talent and future research leaders. Metrics are focused around grant income compared to target, PGR SSR, and REF output and impact GPAs.

For both teaching and research excellence, the focus has been on creating a set of metrics that can be benchmarked against the sector and disciplines, to allow for a more objective and contextualized assessment in identifying where excellence exists and where improvements are required. These assessment criteria will underpin research, teaching and financial planning processes, allowing for a consistent understanding of expectations, alignment in approach, and early intervention where required to improve performance.

One of the criteria that will be developed to **assess service requirements** will need to identify what services, including level and format, are required to effectively support our strategic principle of Excellence. While some professional service areas directly support teaching and research either centrally or through Schools, there are significant portions of activity that indirectly support this capability by ensuring the University can function as effectively as possible. It will be important to reflect this balance and the different requirements in order to assess what an 'excellent' output should mean for different service areas.

### **Improving our students' academic experience**

While the major programme of Portfolio Review set out under Proposal C has a strong efficiency driver, there will also be many benefits for our students' academic experience, which we would expect to be reflected in our teaching excellence measures. Portfolio Review will enhance teaching quality and reputation, deliver attractive high-quality programmes based on sound pedagogy, increase student satisfaction with teaching through a more uniformly positive student experience and through students' improved experience of community, and create opportunities for innovation, collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches in the curriculum. Rationalising the portfolio may free up some time for research activity for T&R colleagues and also provide greater opportunities for student/staff partnership in relation to research, scholarship and knowledge exchange activities.

A change in the structure of the academic year will aid reduction of the assessment burden, consistently a cause of student discontent, and can create the opportunity for increased teaching contact time in those subject areas where this is currently perceived as very light. Through supporting a more creative and engaging use of the Summer Term that some of the models enable, we can make our programmes more attractive and competitive, with real potential to enhance the research component of (particularly undergraduate) programmes.

The opportunities to reduce assessment burden, improve student community cohesion, and increase contact time should not only support students' academic progress, but also their wider welfare including mental health.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This is the first stage of what will be a long-running project, and it must align with the rest of the University's activities. We have not considered Commercial activity, as this lies somewhat outside of the academic group and has existing goals. We also have not considered internationalisation, beyond assuming that our current mix of home/international students will not change (currently ~80:20), as this will be predicated on the work of our new PVC (International).

## DELIVERING OUR SHARED VISION

Our shared vision for the University is one focused on **reputation, resilience and relationships**, where we are recognised locally, nationally and globally for our excellence in teaching and research. Our new University Strategy outlines what that will look like, and here we outline recommended approaches to help us achieve our ambitions, despite current challenges and long-standing weaknesses. This is a once in a generation (or perhaps more) change based on getting the fundamentals right, not the glossy grand plans on which strategic plans are often based. This is about taking a long, hard look at ourselves and how we work, making sure that we make optimal use of our financial and physical resources, allowing our colleagues to flourish and our students to succeed in a University where we place our community to the fore.