

Senate, 15 October 2025

President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

Main Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report provides summary information on current and forthcoming developments, both internal and external, for information. The President & Vice-Chancellor will introduce the Report at the meeting and members will have the opportunity to raise questions. This report is structured around the University Vision's four Pillars and their respective Priorities, after a section about the external environment. Where information relates to more than one Pillar or Priority it is included under the most relevant theme. The report now comprises two parts, the main report and a supplementary report with additional information and updates, available in the Reading Room.

1. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

1.1 Government announcements on higher education reform expected in the Autumn, following commitment to getting 2/3rds of young people in higher level learning. This is set within tight budgetary constraints; Ministerial reshuffle sees government focus on education for economic growth

- The government's fiscal rules and tax pledges continue to limit its room for manoeuvre in decisions on public finances. The situation has been exacerbated by the [welfare benefit concessions](#) made in the summer and student loan repayments being [less than forecast](#). It is in this context in which higher education, which is already not a government priority, must compete for limited resources.
- An announcement on higher education reform is expected later this year, which will set out [expectations of the sector in five priority areas](#): economic growth, civic contribution, access and outcomes for disadvantaged students, teaching quality and efficiency and reform. This reform will be situated within the government's recently announced [ambitions](#) for two-thirds of young people to participate in higher level learning but funding for reform will be limited due to the constraints outlined above and spending will continue to prioritise education aligned with the government's economic growth and NHS ambitions. This has already been seen, for example, with the [instruction](#) given to the Office for Students to prioritise the [protection of public money](#) (including by greater regulatory oversight of franchised provision), [priority given to education funding for high-cost subjects in strategically important areas](#) like science and engineering, and making funding available for [modular study](#) in priority skills need areas such as computing, nursing and midwifery. The [move](#) of adult skills to the Department for Work

and Pensions in the recent government reshuffle risks skills funding being increasingly focussed on lower levels of education and training, in order to address individuals Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs).

- The University is working with policy makers to demonstrate its contribution to economic growth and the policy decisions needed to achieve this. Work is underway, in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University, to provide Sheffield MPs with examples of how both institutions contribute to each of the government's missions to encourage greater cross-government understanding of this.

1.2 Government under pressure to act on migration; international students' compliance with the immigration regime under increased scrutiny and the international fee levy confirmed at Labour Conference reflective of a wider anti-immigration sentiment

- Immigration continues to be a key issue for the government given its manifesto commitment to reduce net migration and pressure from Reform to act in this space. The measures announced in May's [Immigration White Paper](#) to reduce international student visa refusals and improve registration and course completion rates will be introduced as soon as the government is able to do so and are being [presented](#) as a way to address students claiming asylum whilst in the UK. The higher education sector recognises it needs to demonstrate commitment to ensuring compliance with the immigration regime, which may require more to be done than currently. Universities UK and the Russell Group are discussing the establishment of a sector-wide 'taskforce' to address compliance areas of concern (e.g. English language competency, recruitment agent malpractice and low quality courses). The University is supportive of this development and will feed into it.
- The government has [announced](#) that it will introduce a levy on international student tuition fees to fund maintenance grants for disadvantaged students studying those subjects aligned with its economic growth priorities. The sector has previously called for the [reintroduction of maintenance grants](#) and, whilst this announcement will not provide maintenance grants for all, the move to improve students' access to HE should be acknowledged. However, serious [concerns](#) remain about the impact of the levy on international student demand and the corresponding impact that this would have on universities' finances, their ability to reinvest in education and research, as well as on local economies. The University, along with other Russell Group institutions, recently commissioned [analysis](#) into the impact of a levy on international student demand. This found that if fees were raised to cover a 6% levy (as originally proposed in the Immigration White Paper), the UK could lose more than 77, 000 students in the first 5 years of its introduction with the University's political constituency, Sheffield Central, being the 7th most affected in the country in terms of GVA loss (£32.6m).
- The University will work with sector mission groups and policy makers to raise awareness of these issues and urge the grants announcement be funded in another way. The University is also feeding into the work of a coalition of advocates for international students to highlight international students' importance to the economy.

1.3 The University has implemented measures to respond to a new Office for Students condition of registration on preventing harassment and sexual misconduct and the implementation of the Free Speech Act

- A [new condition of registration](#) on preventing harassment and sexual misconduct came into effect on 1 August and the University has developed an [information hub for addressing harassment and sexual misconduct](#) and a new [Intimate Personal Relationships between Staff and Students Policy](#). This policy prohibits any relevant staff member from having an intimate personal relationship with one or more students, in line with the new OfS condition.
- The Free Speech Act began to come into force on 1 August with its implementation coordinated by the Free Speech Working Group, chaired by Professor Mary Vincent.

2. EDUCATION

2.1 DELIVERY OF THE PORTFOLIO

2.1.1 Access and Participation

- The [Access and Participation Plan](#) for 2025/26 to 2028/29 came into effect in September 2025. The plan is built on five intervention strategies with associated targets relating to Access, Participation & Progression. Most targets are aimed to be met by 2029-30, with ethnicity awarding gap targets set even further into the future due to their complexity. A key focus of this new plan is evaluation, with each intervention having an evaluation strategy to measure its impact to ensure only effective activities continue.

2.1.2 Ofsted new Education Inspection Framework

- Ofsted recently published their response to a consultation for the new framework that they will be using to inspect different providers. Alongside the consultation response, they have published a series of supporting information related to their renewed Education Inspection Framework:
 - [Consultation outcome](#)
 - [Education inspection framework: for use from November 2025](#)
 - [Further Education and Skills \(FES\) toolkit](#)
 - [Information for FES providers](#)
 - [FES Operating guide](#)
- The University has agreed to a request for a pilot visit between 28 and 31 October 2025 from the Ofsted Policy team. The North East Yorkshire and Humber inspection team will be visiting to trial the logistics and principles of the new inspection framework.

2.2 ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT

2.2.1 Admissions

- The UG Home intake is expected to be above target reflecting a positive admissions cycle with an overall increase in applications, offers and accepts this year. This position

illustrates the continued recovery of lost market share and improving the overall reputation and ranking of the University.

- Guardian University Ranking 2026 position increase to 16th in the UK (30th in 2023) - Including top 10 in the UK in 12 subject areas
- Complete University Guide Ranking 2026 position increase to 16th in the UK (28th in 2023)
- The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026 position increase to 13th in the UK (20th in 2023)
- The UG Overseas intake is expected to be below the rebaselined target and reflects an overall decline in applications, offers and accepts driven by continued reduction in demand from key markets including China and India.
- The PGT Home intake is expected to be marginally below target whilst representing another encouraging year for the University against sector wide decline. PGT Home remains volatile and hypersensitive to a range of wider environmental factors including the cost of living, student finance and employment market.
- The PGT Overseas intake is expected to marginally above the rebaselined target whilst recognising this still reflects an almost 50% reduction in registrations compared with 2 years ago. This illustrates the significant shift in student demand coupled with aggressive global competition.

2.2.2 Student Recruitment

- Our September pre-application open day received 4,248 prospective student bookings (+367 or + 9% cf September 2024), 2,747 of whom attended (+202 or +8% in comparison to September 2024).
- Across the three events delivered so far this cycle, we have recorded attendance for 9975 prospective students - 1314 (15%) more than this point last cycle.
- Bookings for our October and November open days currently stand at 2651 students and 1608 students respectively - both are broadly in line with bookings received for these events at this point last year.
- As agreed through the open day standards work, all bookable subject talks were a maximum 45-minutes in duration, with any subsequent tours or Q&As clearly promoted as optional elements to afford greater choice and flexibility to our visitors. Anecdotal feedback from both staff and visitors has been positive so far. Bookings are underway for our remaining two Autumn open days; as of 17/9/25, October has 2,651 prospective student bookings, and November has 1,608, both of which are currently tracking in line with numbers for last year. Live bookings (updated every 4 hours) can continue to be viewed via the [MARC events dashboard](#).

2.2.3 Post Results Open Day

- On Saturday 16th August, we welcomed Clearing Offer Holders, as well as Access+ students (whose status changed to Unconditional Firm following their results) to the newly renamed Post Results Open Day (PROD) on-campus. This event attracted 64 Clearing Offer Holders; of which five accepted their offer with our Admissions colleagues

during the event in a new “Accept your offer zone”. As of 12/9/25, 50 PROD attendees are now registered to commence studies this autumn, with 1 student deferred until 2026.

- In addition, 35 Access+ UF students either visited us in-person or online, indicating some appetite for this new engagement opportunity to support transition, and increasing the ROI of this event. A new format of event was trialled, replacing subject talks with subject drop-ins and increasing the flexibility of the day for visitors, which was well received by attendees.

3. RESEARCH

3.1 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

3.1.1 Research Excellence Framework

- Research England has announced a ‘pause’ of three months to take stock of sector feedback about some of the previously proposed changes to how the Research Excellence Framework operates. The REF outcome is a key indicator of our research excellence and drives significant income (c. £50M p.a.) We are confident that our preparations remain appropriate and are continuing with the timetable previously discussed and agreed at UEB. Our expectation is that the eventual guidance may water down some of the proposed changes and we may see a slightly simplified framework.

4. INNOVATION

4.1 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

4.1.1 Regional Engagement

- Defence and security

Following discussions at UEB, we have updated our [statement](#) on work in defence and security, focusing on our defence work as a contribution to the UK’s sovereign capability. Alongside this, we have a defence and security framework which allows us to identify projects as linked to defence and to ensure we have scrutiny in place via a Defence Assurance Board for the small number which are likely to be close to deployment.

South Yorkshire will be one of the first regions to receive a **Defence Growth Deal**, as part of the recently announced [Defence Industrial Strategy](#). This deal was in part due to significant input of the University around its research and innovation strengths in defence.

4.1.2 Global Engagement

- Sheffield Urbanism Showcase brings global partners together

In July, we welcomed 15 of our international partners to Sheffield for the Sheffield Urbanism Showcase. This event, funded by our Partnership Development Fund, formed part of an international week of Global Urban Dialogue, celebrating the cutting-edge urban research undertaken in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University. Researchers from our global network—including partners from the University of Cape Town, University of Ghana, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, IIT Bombay, Tongji

University, as well as partners from Lebanon, Pakistan and Somalia, joined our Sheffield Urbanism community for a series of dynamic panel discussions and collaborative sessions. The showcase provided an excellent platform for our international visitors to share their insights and engage in a truly global conversation.

4.2 ADVANCED MANUFACTURING RESEARCH CENTRE

4.2.1 Opportunities

- The [Government has announced](#) that Rolls-Royce SMR has been selected as the preferred bidder to partner to develop small modular reactors for the UK. The University is a key partner of Rolls Royce SMR and so this offers opportunity for increased collaboration on SMRs.

5. ONE UNIVERSITY

5.1 PHILANTHROPY

5.1.1 Campaign targets, milestones and significant developments (data as of 11 September 2025)

- The number of hours given back by University alumni and friends in 2024/25 was over **16900** against a target of 13000. Most hours ‘donated’ by alumni were in support of projects linked to employability. There was also a marked increase in alumni getting involved in international recruitment activities.

Financial Year	Volunteering hours (target)		Total vol hours to date	Campaign Forecast
	2024/2025	2025/2026		
Volunteering hours (alumni & friends)**	16,933 (13,000)	26 (16,000)	101,684	133,658
Volunteering hours (students)	45,685 (20,000)	0 (20,000)	214,733	254,733
	62,618 (33,000)	26 (36,000)	316,417	388,391

** Figures include hours contributed by Alumni and friends. ‘Friends’ are defined as non-alumni who are not UoS staff.

5.2 REPUTATION

5.2.1 Golden thread update

- In April an update was shared with Council about work to develop a brand proposition or golden thread for the University, agreed as ‘Independent thinking. Shared ambition’.
- With the support and enthusiasm of Council and of colleagues from right across the University, this work has progressed over the past five months.
- The golden thread has continued to be socialised internally through, for example, this [explainer animation](#) narrated by University colleagues.

- ‘Independent thinking. Shared ambition’ has started to be embedded into a range of University activity, from student welcome videos and recruitment activity to our honorary graduate nomination process and internal newsletters.
- Work is taking place to formally launch ‘Independent thinking. Shared ambition’ internally and externally from 22 October. This launch activity is set out in more detail in the Supplementary Report in 5.2.1.
- ‘Independent thinking. Shared ambition’ will help us show the world what is distinctive about our University, about who we are and what we stand for.
- The project leads will attend UEB early in the new year to talk through the five-year road map for this work.

5.2.2 League Tables

- QS World University Ranking

The University of Sheffield has regained a place in the top 100 of the QS world rankings, rising 13 places from 105th to 92nd and rising from 17th in the UK to 15th. Our rise in rank is primarily driven by three metrics: Academic Reputation, Employer Reputation and Citations per Faculty. We have also seen gains in the Employment Outcomes Metric; however, this contributes only 5% to the final ranking compared to the combined 65% of the other three measures.

- Academic Reputation Score Increased from 58.3 to 73.0
- Employer Reputation: score increased from 48.7 to 61.7
- Citations Per Faculty: Score Increased from 43.9 to 68.4

These improvements are the result of the work of colleagues across the institution to nominate more contacts for the reputation surveys and improvements/updates to data submissions.

- The Guardian

The University of Sheffield has placed 16th in this year's guardian league table, up 4 places from 20th in the 2025 edition published last year. This increase in rank is driven by improvement in 6 of the 8 metrics used by the Guardian. Most notably, an improvement in the two NSS based metrics “Satisfied with teaching” and “Satisfied with Feedback”.

- The Times

The University of Sheffield has ranked 13th in this year's Times Good University Guide. This is up one place from last year.

In addition, the University has been named Times and Sunday Times University of the Year for Student Experience 2026.

Daily Mail

- In the 2026 edition of the Daily Mail's League Table, Sheffield placed 13th, down three places from last year. Sheffield is still the top institution in the north of England and top in the Russell Group for student experience.

5.3 MEDIA COVERAGE AND IMPACT

- The Economic Times published an [op-ed](#) from the VC on the importance of reputation in the global HE sector.
- Media coverage of clearing which included key messaging around the University accepting 'high-quality' applicants (to counter the media narrative of universities lowering tariff), our accommodation guarantee, support for WP students and our responsible recruiter approach. These were featured in [The Guardian](#), as well as [The Tab](#) and [The Sheffield Star](#), [Hits Radio](#), [Heart](#) and Capital FM (link not available). An interview with clearing student Carolina Kukichi who volunteered at the call centre featured on [BBC Radio Sheffield](#) and Capital FM (link not available). An [advice piece](#) was published in The Sheffield Star.
- New research which reveals how some children develop natural immunity to a bacterial infection and could help develop vaccines for Strep A - saving half a million lives globally each year was published in a number of publications including the [Daily Telegraph](#).
- Coverage in [Times Higher Education](#) positioning us as sector-leads for supporting more children under protection plans in accessing higher education.

6. FINANCE

6.1 RESEARCH AWARDS

- The total value of new awards for the last 12 months to the end of August 2025 is now £161m, a fall of £27m compared to £188m in August 2024 and the lowest figure for over 3 years.
- There has been a decrease in the total number of awards - for the 12 months to the end of August 2025, the number of new awards opened is 803 compared to 870 as at August 2024. There has been a fall in the number of RCUK awards by 36 to 148 in the last 12 months, which is the lowest number in the last 3 years, whilst the number of UK Government and Charity awards have decreased by 17 and 11 respectively in the 12 months to August 2025 compared with August 2024.
- The value of new awards for the 12 months to August 2025 has risen in EU Framework (£2m), Industry (£1m) and Overseas & other awards (£2m). However, the value of RCUK awards has fallen by £11m to £53m, the lowest value in over 3 years, reflective of the fall in the number of awards and the value of UK Government has fallen by £18m.
- The fall in the number and value of UK Government awards can be partly attributed to the decrease in the number (33) and value (£7m) of new Catapult awards over the last 12 months. The timing of these awards appearing in the figures does change annually.
- Excluding Capital Projects, as of August 2025 in addition to the above figures, £82m awards have had notification of being successful.
- In the 2 months since the last report, there have been 2 new awards for over £1m. £1.9m awarded by the Royal Society to the Faculty of Social Science and £1.6m from STFC to the Faculty of Science

- The value of the Research Net Contribution is £45m for the 12 months to August 2025 compared to £44m for the 12 months to August 2024 an increase of £1m (2%).
- As of August 2025, research grants work in progress (research order book) which excludes capital projects, stands at £325m which is a decrease of £25m on the work in progress figure of £350m recorded in August 2024.

7. LEGAL AND REGULATORY MATTERS

7.1 REPORTABLE EVENTS

- Since the previous report to Senate in June 2025, there have been no new reportable events provided to the OfS.

Senate, 15 October 2025

President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

Supplementary Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

No Supplementary content.

2. EDUCATION

No Supplementary content.

3. RESEARCH

No Supplementary content.

4. INNOVATION

4.1 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

4.1.1 Regional Engagement

Event - UK Clean Energy Summit 2025

- We held the UK Clean Energy Summit 2025 in partnership with SYMCA and High Value Manufacturing Catapults. The summit attracted over 300 delegates from across the clean energy sector. Organisations represented include the French Embassy in the UK, Siemens, Dassault, the Department of Business and Trade, as well local authorities and councils, universities and research institutes such as UKRI and Innovate. There were 23 speakers covering a range of topics from nuclear and small modular reactors to hydrogen, energy supply chain and sustainable aviation fuels. Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Ed Miliband, provided a short video speech which was presented at the event and shared later on social media.

4.1.2 Global Engagement

- University of Cape Town summer school

15 undergraduate students and a staff member from Sheffield attended a summer school provided by the University of Cape Town in September 2025. The summer school, entitled 'Global Citizenship, Social & Environmental Transformation and Social Justice & Reconciliation' provided participants with a range of academic sessions and trips to local sites of cultural and historic importance. Topics included the politics of memory and forgetting, unfinished business in South Africa and the politics of transnational justice and the links between social and environmental transformation. Students were encouraged to consider their own social contexts, role in the social change ecosystem and how to be an active citizen in the face of local and global challenges. The summer school was fully-funded for participants with a proportion of places ring-fenced for students from widening participation backgrounds. This is the second year a cohort of University of Sheffield students have participated in this summer school which builds on our extensive links with the University of Cape Town.

5. ONE UNIVERSITY

5.1 PHILANTHROPY

5.1.1 Reputation and rankings

- CAR is leading a concerted marketing focus on the British Council Study UK Awards. This forms part of work to drive a further increase in the number of alumni with impact responding to QS.
- A comprehensive comms plan is running that includes engagement with One University leads, widespread internal comms to encourage staff to promote the awards to their alumni contacts and direct promotion via a range of channels to international alumni.
- A [dedicated webpage](#) for alumni has content from previous winners, including Emily Rickman.
- 32 applications from Sheffield alumni have been received to date.

5.1.2 International recruitment

- The Vice-Chancellor hosted an online international alumni group lead assembly meeting on 17 September to provide an opportunity for our committed International Group Leads to hear directly from the VC and network with each other. This is the first event of its kind and will support employability, recruitment, reputation and rankings work. 34 group leads from around the world including China, Saudi, Singapore, HK, India and Malaysia attended

5.2 REPUTATION

5.2.1 Golden thread update

- Work is taking place to formally launch 'Independent thinking. Shared ambition' internally and externally from 22 October. This launch activity will include:
 - A brand video featuring a broad range of staff, students and alumni to help bring to life the golden thread and showcase our University community.

- Branded campus dressing and campus digital screen content featuring values-led University stories and brand level designs.
- Paid advertising targeted at academics in China and the USA, and employers in the UK. The specific objective of this strand of activity is to increase awareness with some of the markets we are targeting for nominations from global academics and employers in the QS reputation surveys. Content will therefore focus on our research strengths around neuroscience and energy as we know this will resonate with those audiences. The activity will also create greater awareness at a key time for international recruitment.
- Social media content, a new set of public web pages and direct communications with key external stakeholders.
- A staff event in Firth Hall on Wednesday 22 October. This will be an opportunity for colleagues to learn about the internal and external brand activity and to discuss how we can work together to strengthen our reputation and tell the story of who we are as a university.
- Guidance and toolkits are also being developed for staff to help empower people to embed Independent thinking. Shared ambition into every day activities and interactions with stakeholders in an appropriate way by the end of the year.

5.2.2 Public affairs

- We hosted a visit by Aviation Minister, Mike Kane MP to the Energy Innovation Centre to coincide with the announcement of government funding to speed up sustainable aviation fuel production. We also secured extensive media coverage.
- We engaged with our local MP Abtissam Mohammed and wrote to the Home Office regarding support for Gazan offer holders. To combat misinformation on social media, we responded to a number of enquiries and updated our webpages and shared information via our official social media channels.

5.3 MEDIA COVERAGE AND IMPACT

- The Daily Express featured a [large spread](#) about a new treatment to target hearing loss by Rinri Therapeutics, a leading University of Sheffield spin-out company.
- Dr Kate Miltner, Lecturer in Data, AI & Society, took part in a 15 minute-long discussion about a rise in the number of people using ChatGPT for therapy on BBC Radio Five Live. The segment can be heard [here](#) (it starts at 37:16 mins in.)
- Research by Professor Renee Timmers on the benefits of actively engaging with music that brings up trauma from the past was featured in [Guardian](#) and [The Independent](#).
- Professor Dame Pamela Shaw was featured on [BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour](#) [item starts 7:28], discussing the similarities and differences between MND symptoms in men and women.
- New research which found increasing urbanisation has been linked to a decline in crucial pollinator populations received widespread coverage including [The Guardian](#)
- Expert comment was featured in the [Financial Times](#) from Professor Nigel Dunnett with regards to helping gardens cope with drought and flood.

- Dr Christian Morgner from the Management School is currently in talks with two commercial companies about the Tasty Spoon™ after they saw the widespread media coverage [the research](#) received.
- Following widespread media coverage, including Fox News in the US, for Engineering research that has developed tiny robots to fix leaky water pipes, a US manufacturing company that supports infrastructure projects is meeting with the academics to explore collaboration.
- Previous extensive media coverage of the tofersen Phase 3 clinical trial has been instrumental in raising awareness of the new drug, which has now been approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

5.4 STRATEGIC PLANNING

- UEB has approved the faculty, school and professional services annual action plans for 2025-26. Key themes from the academic plans relate to: Financial sustainability and efficiency; programme improvements and simplification; enhancing the student experience and outcomes and; staff development and wellbeing. As per the agreed timeline, UEB will approve the medium-term plans for phase 2 schools in December.

6. FINANCE

No Supplementary content.

7. LEGAL AND REGULATORY MATTERS

No Supplementary content.