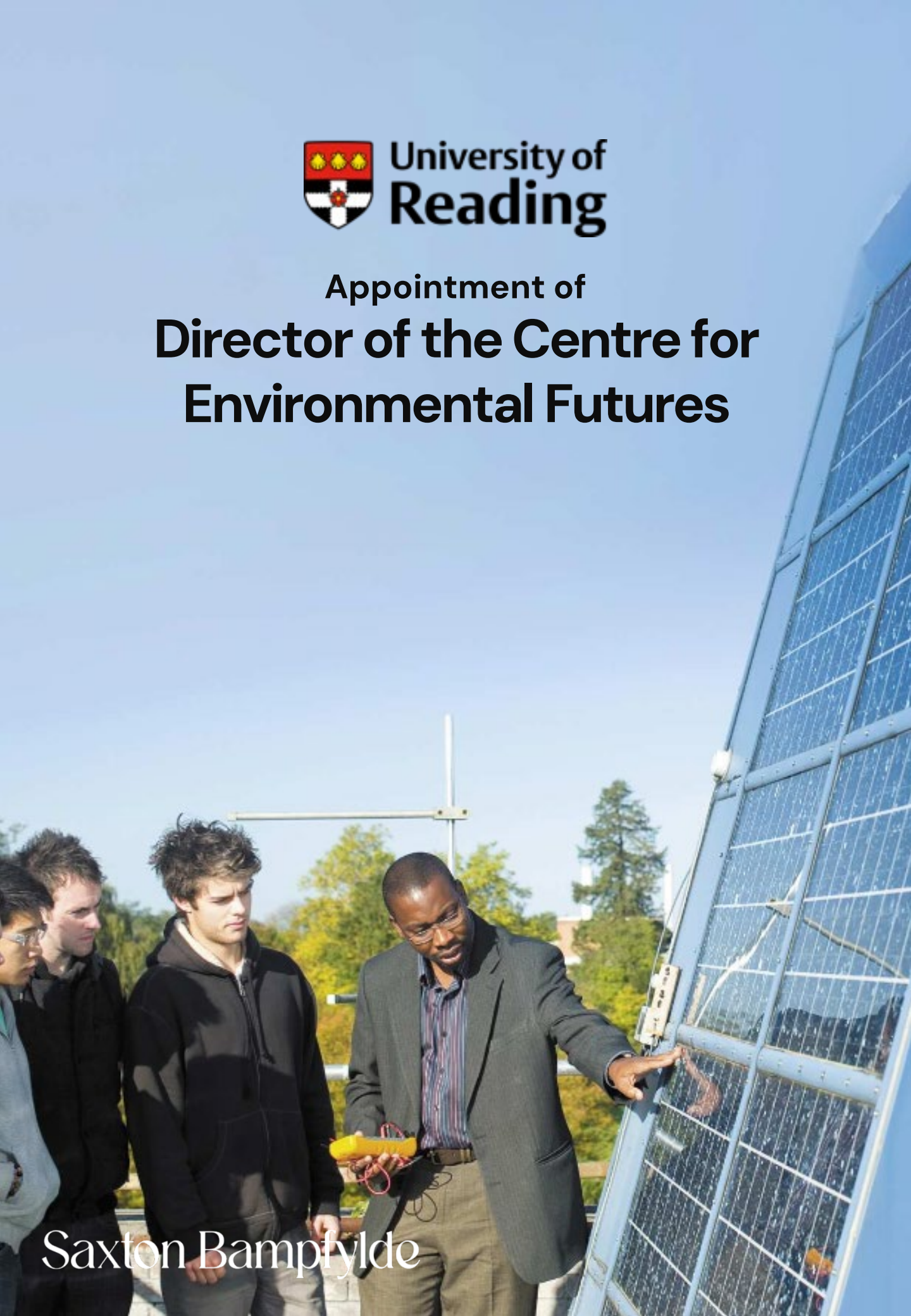
University of Reading

Appointment of

Director of the Centre for Environmental Futures



Saxton Bampfylde

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Foreword from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

We are delighted to be recruiting the inaugural Director of the newly established Centre for Environmental Futures at the University of Reading. This flagship appointment will play a pivotal role in advancing the University's strategic commitment to environmental sustainability. The Centre will transform the way environmental sustainability research is conceived, organised, translated and communicated, accelerating our ability to address some of the most urgent challenges facing society.

Building on our long-standing reputation for world-leading research in climate science, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture and energy systems, we are investing to strengthen our capacity to generate new knowledge, influence policy, transform industry practice and support the societal changes needed to build a more resilient future. The Centre for Environmental Futures also represents a major commitment to bringing together expertise from across the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities to develop innovative, whole-systems solutions to complex global challenges.

The appointment of an outstanding and visionary Director is central to the success of this ambition. The Director will provide integrated, transdisciplinary leadership across the full breadth of the University's disciplinary strengths, fostering collaboration and driving a step-change in research and innovation. Through a distinctive challenge-led approach, they will help position the Centre as a catalyst for impactful, world-leading research that delivers tangible benefits for society, the economy and the environment.

As the public face of the Centre, the Director will raise the University's international profile in environmental sustainability research, articulating a compelling vision and building influential partnerships across academia, industry, government and the third sector. We are seeking an exceptional leader with substantial experience in environmental sustainability, who may come from academic, commercial, policy or other relevant sectors. They will bring the strategic insight, intellectual credibility and external influence needed to lead a major programme of national and international significance.

This is a rare opportunity to shape a distinctive new centre at a defining moment for both the University and the field of environmental sustainability. The successful candidate will have an unparalleled platform from which to influence the future direction of research and innovation, helping to address the interconnected climate and nature crises while cementing the University of Reading's position as a global leader in systems-led environmental sustainability research.

Professor Parveen Yaqoob OBE
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

The University of Reading

The University of Reading is entering an exciting period of opportunity and transformation. As a globally connected, research-intensive university with a strong sense of purpose and place, we are committed to shaping a better future through education, discovery and partnership. This role offers a rare opportunity for an exceptional leader to contribute to the next chapter of our development, helping to advance our strategic ambitions, strengthen our impact and inspire lasting change across our community and beyond.

Our four guiding principles form the foundation of our strategy: a genuine love of learning; creating new knowledge; embracing and celebrating diversity of people and ideas; and caring for our environment.

Home to more than 27,000 students and with campuses in the UK and internationally, Reading brings together expertise spanning the sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. This breadth underpins a strong culture of interdisciplinary research and collaboration, enabling us to address complex challenges from multiple perspectives.

Environmental sustainability is one of Reading's defining areas of research strength and a major strategic priority for the University's next phase.

At a glance

- In the top 200 world institutions *
- Top 30 in the UK **
- Home to 27,330 students from over 160 countries
- Award-winning campuses in Reading, Henley-upon-Thames, Johannesburg and Iskandar, Malaysia
- Multi-award-winning sustainability leadership across research, education and operations including the THE award for Outstanding Environmental Leadership, London Higher Award and the Times Sustainable University of the Year 2025.
- Host of the International Universities Climate Alliance secretariat from 2026.
- Powerful strategic collaborations with world-renowned organisations including the ECMWF and Met Office, Natural History Museum, British Museum and Royal Berkshire Hospital.

*The University of Reading was ranked =194th out of 1,503 institutions in the QS World University Rankings 2026
**Ranked joint 27th in the UK in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026

Sustainability at Reading

Shaping the Future from a Position of Strength

The University of Reading is recognised internationally for its leadership in environmental sustainability. Our expertise spans meteorology and climate science, biodiversity, agriculture, food systems, hydrology, and environmental policy, generating knowledge that informs policy, shapes practice and drives real-world impact. Sustainability is embedded across our research, education, partnerships and operations, providing a powerful platform on which to build the next phase of our ambition.

Research Standing and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The University of Reading has a long-standing reputation for research excellence across the environmental sustainability landscape. Our strengths in climate and atmospheric science, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, hydrology and environmental systems are internationally recognised and increasingly connected through interdisciplinary collaboration. Our experts contribute to globally significant scientific initiatives, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), while our research has delivered practical impact in areas ranging from flood forecasting and climate resilience to greener aviation. As host of the International Universities Climate Alliance secretariat from 2026 to 2028, Reading is helping convene global academic collaboration to support climate action and sustainability worldwide.

The research environment is strengthened by major interdisciplinary initiatives. AgriFood Futures brings together expertise across food, agriculture, health and the environment to support more sustainable and resilient food systems. The Systems and Futures Hub, while having a particular focus on agrifood has a University-wide remit to build capability in systems and futures approaches across research, innovation, education and stakeholder engagement.

The Centre for Environmental Futures will work closely alongside these initiatives, connecting expertise from across the University around shared environmental challenges. Together, they provide a powerful platform for whole-systems approaches to environmental sustainability, helping to drive ambitious collaborative research, develop innovative solutions, build external partnerships, attract investment and strength impact.

Sustainability at Reading (continued)

Interdisciplinary Environmental Sustainability Networks at Reading

Climate, weather and resilience
- TAMSAT (Tropical Applications of Meteorology using Satellite)
- Hub for Applied Weather and Climate Research (HAWC)

Energy and the built environment
- Energy Meteorology Group
- Technologies for Sustainable Built Environments (TSBE)
- Energy and Environmental Engineering Research Group

Nature, landscapes and environmental change
- Nature-centric Catalyst
- Biodiversity, ecology and environmental science

Food, farming and natural resources
- Centre for Dairy Research
- Crop Research Unit
- Soil Research Centre
- National Fruit Collection
- Cocoa Quarantine Centre

Data, modelling and decision -making
- Centre for the Mathematics of Planet Earth (CMPE)
- Climate and Finance
- Advanced environmental computing

Policy Influence and Agenda Setting

Environmental sustainability research at Reading is distinguished by its ability to inform decisions and drive change beyond academia. Our researchers help shape national and international understanding of climate and environmental risks, influencing policy, supporting governments and informing industry practice. Reading hydrologists helped co-design Europe's flood warning system, improving preparedness and helping to save lives, while our climate and environmental experts regularly contribute evidence and analysis to governments, international organisations and global scientific assessments.

The University's influence is amplified through strategic partnerships with organisations including the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), the UK Met Office and the National Centre for Atmospheric Science. The £30 million Advancing the Frontiers of Earth System Prediction (AFESP) programme exemplifies Reading's commitment to addressing some of the most complex questions facing society through ambitious, collaborative research. The University's internationally acclaimed climate science leadership, including work such as the globally recognised Climate Stripes, demonstrates how Reading combines scientific excellence with public engagement and influence.

Building on these strengths, the Centre for Environmental Futures will position Reading's research at the forefront of real-world application and policy development.

Sustainability at Reading (continued)

Why Reading

- Regius Professorship in Meteorology and Climate Science awarded in May 2026 to Professor Hannah Cloke OBE
- Top 100 globally in the THE Sustainability Impact Rankings 2026.
- Joint 30th globally in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2026.
- Host of the International Universities Climate Alliance secretariat from 2026.
- Home to one of the world's most influential climate science communities, strengthened through partnerships with ECMWF, the Met Office and the National Centre for Atmospheric Science.
- ECMWF headquarters is currently being built on Whiteknights campus and is due to open next year.
- Reading hosts Met Office staff within MetOffice@Reading and a new joint Met Office and Reading initiative, Local Hazard Prediction, will launch in the near future.
- Successful bid to retain position as one of only 8 members of the MOAP – the Met Office Academy Partnership
- The Meteorology Department is home to major elements of the NERC funded National Centre for Atmospheric Science (NCAS) and the National Centre for Earth Observation (NCEO).
- Ranked 1st in the UK and 9th globally for Atmospheric Science in the Shanghai Ranking 2026 .
- Top 5 position in UK People & Planet University League for the past four years, including 1st place 2023-2024.
- Multi-award-winning sustainability leadership across research, education and operations including the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Connecting Communities with Climate Change in 2012, the THE award for Outstanding Environmental Leadership, London Higher Award and the Times Sustainable University of the Year 2025
- One of Britain's top green spaces, recognised through a 16th consecutive Green Flag Award in 2026.

About the Centre for Environmental Futures

The University of Reading is internationally recognised for its world-leading research in climate science, environmental sustainability, agriculture, food systems and the natural environment. Building on decades of globally influential research and policy engagement, Reading has established a distinctive reputation as a trusted, independent voice on some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing society. Alongside this global research leadership, the University is recognised as one of the UK's leading institutions for sustainability in practice, having been named Sustainable University of the Year 2025 in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide.

The University's new Strategy 2026-2040 places environmental sustainability at the heart of its vision and ambitions. The Strategy commits Reading to becoming globally recognised as a leader in environmental sustainability through its research, education, policy influence, partnerships and operations. By 2030, the University aims to achieve and maintain a top 25 position in the QS Sustainability Rankings; by 2035, to be recognised globally for leadership in environmental sustainability research; and by 2040, to achieve net-zero carbon emissions across all scopes of activity.

These ambitions reflect Reading's belief that universities have a critical role to play in generating knowledge, informing policy and enabling meaningful action towards a more sustainable, prosperous and inclusive future for people and the planet.

To help realise these ambitions, the University is establishing the Centre for Environmental Futures as a flagship institutional initiative. The Centre will be pivotal in advancing Reading's strategic goal of becoming a globally recognised leader in environmental sustainability. It will bring together expertise from across disciplines to develop innovative, systems-based responses to the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental resilience, food security and sustainable development.

The Centre will strengthen the University's capacity to deliver internationally leading research, attract major investment and partnerships, influence policy and practice, and generate real-world impact at scale.

The role

We are seeking an exceptional and ambitious founding Director to provide strategic leadership for the Centre for Environmental Futures as the University's flagship vehicle for advancing environmental sustainability research. Working across disciplines, Schools and institutes, the Director will convene and enable collaborative research that builds on Reading's existing strengths, increases research intensity and impact, attracts major external funding and partnerships, and strengthens the University's global reputation for environmental sustainability research and innovation. The role is centred on delivering the University's strategic ambitions through collective research leadership, creating the conditions for researchers to work together on ambitious challenge-led programmes, rather than developing a separate vision, strategy or individual research agenda.

Team/Governance Structure

The Director will lead the Centre for Environmental Futures team, through a matrix management structure, where key individuals will work closely with and be accountable to the Director to support the delivery of the Centre's Strategic Plans. The Team will include a Specialist Research Project Manager, a Policy Lead, a Communications and Engagement officer, and have business support. In addition, we expect to appoint an Advisory Group* to support the Director in developing and delivering a strategic plan for the Centre. The Director will be expected to engage with a wide spectrum of academic colleagues across all Schools and research areas to deliver agreed outcomes for the Centre.

*The Advisory Group will be made up of internal and external members, the exact composition to be determined by the Director; they will support strategic thinking and horizon scanning.

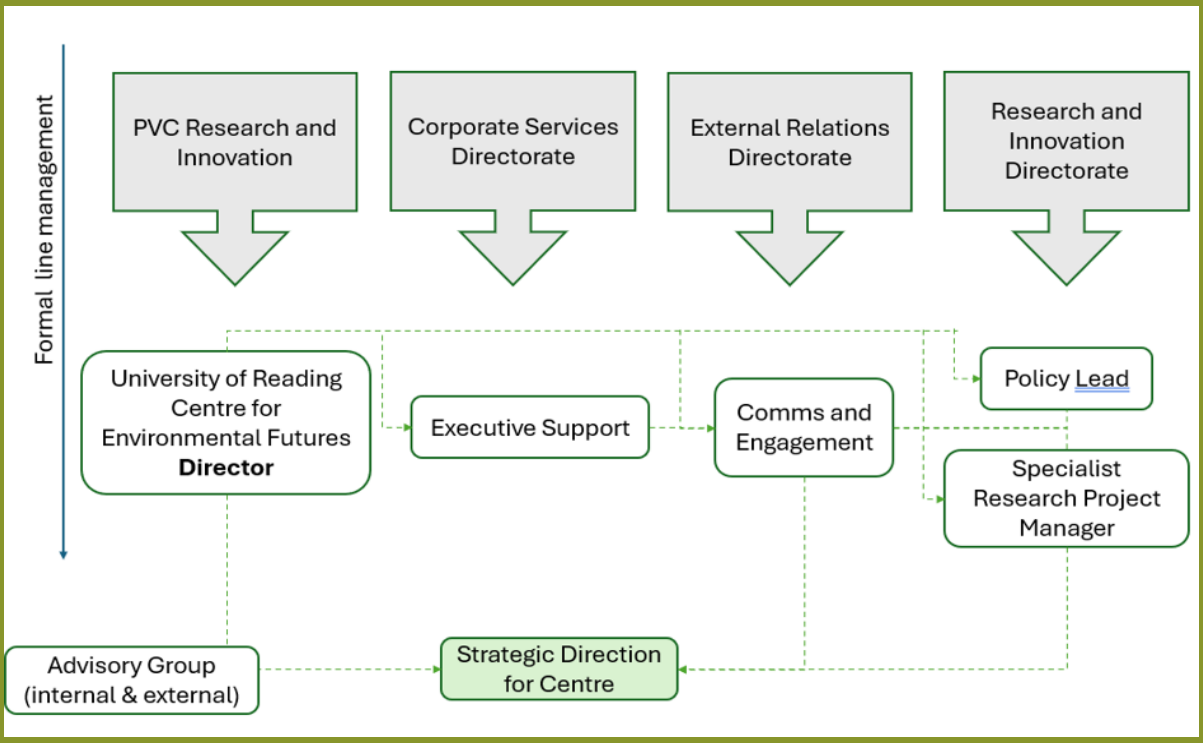

Figure: Organisation chart for the University of Reading Centre for Environmental Futures team, illustrating formal line management and matrix management responsibilities (dotted green line).

The role (continued)

Director duties and responsibilities

Strategic leadership

- Shape and drive the strategic direction of environmental sustainability research at the University of Reading, working in partnership with senior research leaders, including Associate PVCs, Research Development Leads and Heads of School, to develop and deliver an ambitious, institution-wide research vision.
- Lead the Centre for Environmental Futures, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation that harnesses expertise across the University to accelerate research excellence, growth in funding income, and long-term global reputation.
- Secure and enable major research opportunities by building strategic partnerships, engaging influential stakeholders, and catalysing high-value, interdisciplinary funding initiatives. Use established networks to convene key collaborators and influence future research and funding priorities.
- Champion the University's environmental sustainability research on the global stage, enhancing its profile, influence and impact while shaping national and international research agendas and policy discussions.

External positioning, profile and partnerships

- Provide proactive, high-level leadership by driving impactful engagement with influential research, government, and industry stakeholders. Strengthen Reading's position at the forefront of national and international environmental sustainability research and innovation, strengthening our reputation, extending our influence, and forging strategic partnerships in the UK and globally.
- Lead the community of strong external voices and amplify their impact across a breadth of expertise and in line with our whole-system approach; shaping and championing our position across international and national research, policy, and environmental sustainability communities.
- Champion the translation of world-leading research into economic and societal impact by driving knowledge exchange, policy engagement and collaborative R&D with industry partners.

Research culture

- Provide visionary leadership in cultivating an ambitious, inclusive, forward-looking research environment that empowers the next generation of researchers across all disciplines to develop the skills and expertise required to transform Reading's capability in environmental sustainability.
- Work with research leaders to champion a culture of research excellence, collaboration and innovation to equip emerging researchers to address complex challenges and to deliver transformative impact at scale.
- Play a strategic leadership role in enhancing the University's REF performance across relevant Units of Assessment, shaping the Environment sections and working closely with the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellors for Research and Innovation (APVCs R&I) and UoA leads to maximise submission quality.

Accountability

- Accountable to the Research and Innovation Committee and the University Executive Board for the successful implementation and delivery of the University of Reading Centre for Environmental Futures, driving performance against agreed KPIs and building a sustainable model for the future of the research centre.
- Accountable to the University Executive Board and Council for securing a portfolio of major funding for large scale research bids and investments and ensuring a return on investment.
- Accountable to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research & Innovation for driving and delivering the research centre's contribution to delivering the Institutional Research and Innovation Strategy, demonstrating impact against institutional R&I KPIs.
- Responsibility for the effective financial management and oversight of resource decisions for the University of Reading Centre for Environmental Futures, ensuring that resources are deployed in a cost-effective manner to achieve the objectives of the centre and the University. Ensure compliance with governance requirements.
- Work with Heads of Schools and Departments, APVCs R&I, Research Division Leaders, other research leads, and appropriate Professional Service Leads to align strategic plans and priorities.

Professorial duties and responsibilities (if appropriate):

Where appropriate, there is an option for this role to include a 0.2fte allocation for academic research. This would be agreed on an individual basis.

Supervision received

This post will be line managed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation.

If a Professorial appointment, the postholder will be an academic member of the most appropriate academic School (determined by the appointee's research profile).

Supervision given

The Director will not have any direct line management responsibilities. They will lead the wider University of Reading Centre for Environmental Futures Professional Services team via the matrix team management structure outlined above, with the Policy Lead and the Specialist Research Project Manager accountable to the Director.

Contact

The postholder will work closely with academic and Professional Services colleagues in relevant Schools/ Departments and Professional Services Directorates.

They will be expected to have extensive senior level external engagement via a network of external professional contacts for the purposes of understanding and sharing best practice and external intelligence gathering. It is expected that this network will be extended over the course of the appointment. This should include senior representatives of funding agencies, industry, government bodies, NGOs and charitable organisations.

Person specification

Skills and Attainment

- Strategic and intellectually agile leader, with the ability to rapidly assimilate complex information, distil key insights and identify strategic, high-impact opportunities.
- Ability to shape and deliver strategic solutions to complex challenges through innovation, foresight and collaborative influence.
- Exceptional relationship builder, skilled at engaging diverse stakeholders across sectors and disciplines. Proven ability to quickly assess strategic priorities and mobilise partnerships that deliver tangible outcomes at institutional, national or international levels.
- Able to convey complex ideas with clarity and authority across a range of audiences. Confident and effective in influencing senior stakeholders through written, oral and interpersonal communication at the highest level.
- Proven senior leadership presence, with the ability to lead through influence.
- Skilled in negotiating and navigating complex environments, demonstrating sound judgement, political acumen, and emotional intelligence to drive high-level decisions and institutional change.
- Confident change leader with a strong track record of driving transformation in complex academic and research environments. Able to challenge the status quo constructively and inspire others around a shared vision.
- Post-doctoral degree or equivalent.
- If a Professorial applicant: Internationally distinguished research profile in environmental sustainability, with a proven track record of world-leading contributions, academic impact and/or policy influence in the environmental sustainability sector.
- Experience of securing and/or administering and managing significant external research funding from national or international sources.
- Leadership and/ or management qualification. (desirable)

Knowledge

- Strong understanding of the external research, innovation and policy landscapes relevant to environmental sustainability, including their intersections with economic development and social equity.
- In-depth knowledge of the strategic priorities of UKRI, government departments, international funders and philanthropic organisations, with demonstrated ability to align research vision with emerging funding opportunities and to lead successful external income generation.

Person specification (continued)

Relevant Experience

- Proven track record of strategic research leadership, demonstrated through successful development of interdisciplinary research cultures and cultivation of high-impact external partnerships across academia, industry, government and third sectors.
- Extensive experience in leading and delivering large, complex trans/interdisciplinary research programmes involving multiple institutions and stakeholder groups.
- Demonstrated ability to set and execute strategic direction in a senior leadership role, making high-level decisions, managing risk and being accountable for delivering transformative research outcomes.
- Established track record of impactful engagement with policy makers, industry leaders and other end-users of research, resulting in demonstrable influence on policy, practice or innovation.
- Significant experience and/or deep understanding of the ecosystems required for securing and managing large-scale external research funding, including leadership of multi-partner bids aligned with funder priorities.
- A strong track record of building and sustaining diverse, high-performing research teams and collaborative partnerships, working effectively across disciplines, sectors and cultural contexts.
- Experience of national and international horizon scanning, identifying emerging trends, funding opportunities, and strategic risks to inform long-term planning and competitive positioning.
- Experience of developing, implementing or leading a research centre or similar organisation (desirable).

Other

- Ability to travel nationally and internationally as required which may require flexibility in relation to days and times of work to facilitate this.

Terms of appointment

Fixed term post for 6 years in the first instance with the potential opportunity for extension, based on organisational need and postholder's ability to meet the role requirements.

This is a full-time role with the possibility of an allowance of up to 0.2 FTE academic research or external roles, if appropriate.

This document outlines the duties required for the time being of the post to indicate the level of responsibility. It is not a comprehensive or exhaustive list, and the line manager may vary duties from time to time which do not change the general character of the job or the level of responsibility entailed.

- **Location:** Reading
- **Salary:** Competitive
- **Pension:** USS (the Universities Superannuation Scheme) with employer contribution of 14.5%
- **Annual leave:** 26 days per year plus public holidays and additional days (normally 6 in total) when the University is closed around Easter and Christmas.

For further benefits details, please visit: https://www.reading.ac.uk/human-resources/working-life/employee-benefits

Information on relocation assistance can be found here: https://www.reading.ac.uk/human-resources/recruitment/relocation-assistance

Due diligence
Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.

How to apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to the University of Reading on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **IBVXF.**

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Friday 13th November**.

The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice
According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

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