



University of
Reading

Appointment of
Agrifood Futures Director



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 five new posts to the Agrifood Futures leadership team, who will play a pivotal role driving forward the delivery of our new ambitious strategy for agriculture and food research.

Agrifood Futures builds on the University of Reading's long-standing reputation for world-leading research in agriculture and food. It sets out the opportunities through which our research will make a major contribution to addressing the challenges facing the global food system of 2050.

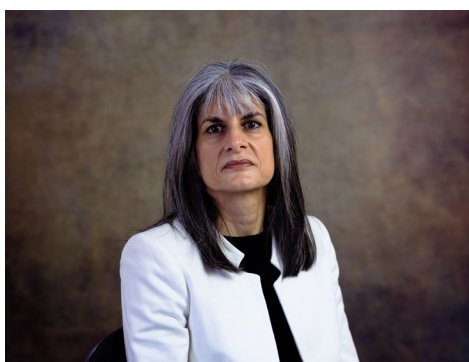
At a time when financial constraints are re-shaping the higher education landscape, the University of Reading stands apart. Thanks to anticipated growth in the ring-fenced assets of a Trust for food and agricultural research, we are in the exceptional position to make significant forward-looking investments in our people, infrastructure and capability. We are seizing this opportunity to reinforce our position as a global leader in food and agricultural research, while also addressing critical gaps in agrifood research capacity at both national and international levels.

Recruiting an outstanding leadership team to drive our Agrifood Futures strategy is the next critical step. We are seeking internationally recognised experts with exemplary leadership skills and the vision to shape the design of new facilities, foster a thriving interdisciplinary research culture across the University, and forge ambitious partnerships and co-investment opportunities across the global agrifood sector.

Named Sustainable University of the Year in 2025, Reading has a proud and enduring commitment to sustainability. We are globally recognised for our climate science, and we embed sustainable practices in everything we

do. Agrifood Futures will build on this record, ensuring that sustainability is at the heart of our research and innovation, contributing to a resilient global food system.

This is a defining moment to join the University of Reading. As we approach our centenary year in 2026, successful candidates will have the opportunity to shape the future of agrifood research, helping to create a world in which every person has access to a healthy, sustainable diet.



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

The University of Reading

Granted our Royal Charter in 1926, over the decades the University of Reading has been led by innovators and pioneers, pushing academic boundaries and leading social change.

Today, the University is ranked in the top 200 universities worldwide by QS and Times Higher Education, and the top 50 within the UK. Home to over 23,000 students, the University of Reading is proud to welcome staff and students from all over the world.

We strive to create a stronger, better University, building on our past to create an exceptional future. The University

Strategy is focused around the principles of – Community, Excellence, Sustainability and Engagement. These principles support us to act as a community engaged with the world around us and to deliver our shared purpose of sustainable excellence in all of our activities.

With an outstanding reputation for high-quality education and research, we have campuses in the UK, Malaysia and South Africa (Henley Business School). The University of Reading is truly international and holds a global reputation for providing a diverse and stimulating academic environment.





£1bn
contributor to
the UK economy¹



15th
in the UK for supporting
UN global goals⁴



**Sustainable
university**
of the year
2025²



27,465
students from around
160 countries⁵



26th
in the UK³



TEF
**silver
award**
for teaching excellence⁶

1 The Economic Impact of the University of Reading, Hatch Urban Solutions, commissioned by the University of Reading

2 The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2025

3 Ranked out of 107 participating UK institutions in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025

4 Ranked out of 57 participating UK institutions according to the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023, based on work towards United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

5 HESA 2021/22 Student Record and Aggregate Offshore Record, figures recorded to the nearest 5

6 Teaching Excellence Framework 2023



Agrifood Futures

Agrifood Futures is a new, ambitious research strategy. It will be a major driver of change in the way we produce, consume and think about food as we move towards 2050. It builds on the University of Reading's reputation for research excellence in agriculture and food and our work with global partners.

Already ranked in the QS global top 20 for Agriculture and Forestry, and named Sustainable University of the Year in 2025, Reading is building from a position of established excellence. The Agrifood Futures (AFF) initiative takes this further, aligning with government and global priorities around food system resilience, sustainability, climate impact and human health. The Strategy comprises three interconnected Priority Research Areas, each shaped to deliver long-term, challenge-led programmes of research and innovation:

1. A resilient food system for everyone
2. Farming systems that work with nature and our climate
3. Food that nourishes people and the planet

This next phase of implementation represents a significant step-change. At the heart of the strategy is a commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, global partnership and systems transformation. New nationally significant infrastructure is planned, including a state-of-the-art innovation farm, advanced food processing facilities, and a participatory research platform focused on nutrition and consumer behaviour. These investments are designed not only to support world-class research but to act as magnets for further external partnership and co-funding.

Recruiting a world-class leadership team is the next vital milestone. Reading is looking for international experts with global reputations and the ability to bring networks, funding, and influence. These leaders will play a direct role in the academic and strategic design of new facilities, the shaping of an interdisciplinary research culture across the University, and in ensuring Reading's voice is heard within national and global agrifood spaces.

More information about AFF can be found [here](#).

Agrifood Futures



The role – Agrifood Futures Director

Purpose

To provide visionary leadership to unlock the transformational potential of the AFF Strategy. This role will be instrumental in developing the academic vision for the enabling investments, strategically positioning these within the wider UK and international research infrastructure landscape, and leading a major programme of strategic partnerships and co-funding through which these investments will be realised.

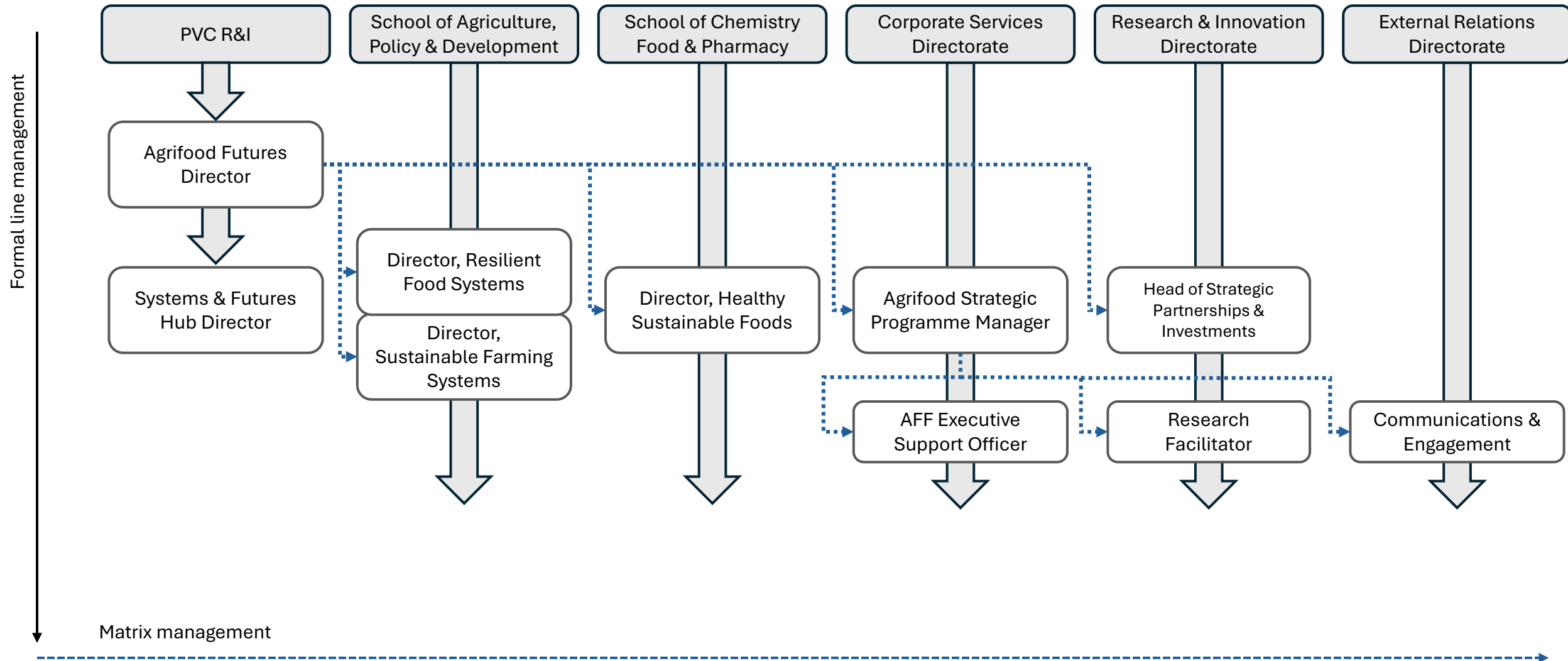
The role will also provide the integrated transdisciplinary leadership across the three Priority Research Areas, in partnership with the Professorial and Hub Directors, to facilitate a step-change in research, impact and innovation and create a truly distinctive and system-wide approach to agrifood research.

Team Structure

This post will be part of a wider AFF team that also includes three Professorial Director roles (to be appointed), the Systems and Futures Hub Director, the Agrifood Strategic Programme Manager, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Investments (to be appointed), a research facilitation post (to be appointed), a communications and engagement post (to be appointed), and an executive support post (to be appointed).

The Agrifood Futures Director will have line management responsibility for the Systems and Futures Hub Director. The three Professorial Directors and AFF Programme Manager will be accountable to the Agrifood Futures Director in a matrix management structure (see figure on next page).





Director duties and responsibilities:

- Provide visionary leadership in cultivating an ambitious, inclusive, forward-looking research environment that empowers the next generation of agrifood research leaders. Champion a culture of research excellence, collaboration and innovation to equip emerging researchers to address complex challenges across food systems, sustainability, climate resilience and food security, and to deliver transformative impact at scale.
- Overall responsibility for the leadership of the AFF team and will be accountable to the University Executive Board for the successful implementation of the AFF Strategy.
- Work effectively with a range of internal and external stakeholders and partners, to help position Reading at the forefront of national and international agrifood research and impact, establishing it as an organisation of major influence and impact in the sector.
- Lead the vision and ambition for large scale infrastructure investments that are nationally and internationally significant, and that will bring about a step change in Reading's agrifood-related research and innovation to deliver the transformational potential of the AFF Strategy.
- Engage at high levels with influential research, government and industry organisations across the agrifood sector to build reputation, extend influence and develop key partnerships.
- Build large consortia of partners around each enabling infrastructure investment to play a key role in shaping their design brief, ensuring that they meet the future needs of the sector and are positioned as unique and in-demand components of national and international agrifood research capability.
- Lead action to leverage a portfolio of major co-funding for large scale infrastructure investments, amplifying the global positioning and visibility of these developments beyond what Reading could achieve alone, whilst also ensuring best value for money for the NIRD Trust and University.
- Drive the Agrifood Futures Programme's contribution to delivering the Institutional Research and Innovation Strategy, demonstrating impact against institutional R&I KPIs.
- Support economic growth through commercialisation, knowledge exchange and collaborative R&D with a broad range of industry partners.
- Play a strategic role in enhancing the University's REF performance across relevant Units of Assessment (particularly UoA6) by contributing to high-quality outputs, impact and the development of a vibrant interdisciplinary research environment. This includes leading initiatives in capacity building, mentoring, and research development, with a clear focus on institutional as well as individual contribution to research excellence.
- Provide strategic leadership in embedding research excellence and innovation into the student experience, ensuring our graduates are equipped to lead as future agrifood system professionals. Collaborate with key stakeholders to maximise student engagement with cutting-edge research facilities, external collaboration, and professional enriching opportunities such as placements and on-campus roles.

Professorial duties and responsibilities:

- Lead a world-class programme of agrifood-related research, maintaining an internationally outstanding profile through high impact research outputs, significant research income and meaningful contribution to global challenges, while shaping the strategic direction of the field.
- Provide intellectual leadership and mentorship to research staff and PhD students, fostering a thriving, inclusive and innovative research culture.
- Drive research impact through active engagement with external stakeholders, including industry, government and international partners, ensuring influence and visibility.
- Forge and lead strategic collaborations across disciplines, Schools, and global networks to enhance the University's research capability and reputation.

Supervision received

This post will be line managed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Innovation, whilst also being an academic member of the most appropriate academic School (determined by the appointee's research profile).

Supervision given

The postholder will have direct line management responsibility for the Director, Systems and Futures Hub and will lead the wider AFF team via the matrix team management structure outlined above.

Contact

The postholder will work closely with the Professorial Directors and the wider AFF team to drive the delivery of the AFF Programme.

They will also 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 this appointment. This should include senior representatives of funding agencies, industry, government bodies, NGOs and charitable organisations.



Person specification

Skills and personal qualities:

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



Person specification

Knowledge and experience:

- Post-doctoral degree or equivalent.
- Internationally distinguished research profile in agrifood, with a proven track record of world-leading contributions, academic impact and/or policy influence in the agrifood sector.
- Sustained record of securing significant external research funding, including leadership of major grants from national or international sources.
- Authoritative knowledge of global food systems and the complex real-world challenges that influence and shape them.
- Strong understanding of the external research, innovation and policy landscapes relevant to agrifood, including their intersections with environmental sustainability, 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.
- 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.
- Proven track record of shaping the strategic design of research infrastructure through engagement with external stakeholders.
- Significant experience of 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.
- A leadership and/or management qualification is desirable.



Terms of appointment

This is a fixed term research- intensive academic post. This post is 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 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/benefits-grades-6-and-above>

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 **IBVXA**.

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 **Monday 29 September 2025**.

* 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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