MAKE THE POSSIBLE HAPPEN

YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY 2026 STRATEGY

Est. 1841

YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY
We live in times of rapid-changes, global challenges and huge opportunities. To survive and thrive, universities must adapt, listen, lead intellectually and learn from others, just as much as we promote the value of learning to others.

Throughout our history, York St John has always been an institution that chooses the right moments to step back, reflect and redefine its course to respond positively to a changing world. It is how we have grown a range of courses over many years, transitioned successfully to become an established university and started successfully exploring new markets that reflect changing needs.

Our 2026 Strategy is one of those redefining moments. It is a different type of Strategy. It tells a story of how our university’s new mission, vision, values and priorities reflect some of the most important issues society faces. It links our past, present and future around the common themes of opportunity, equality and social justice. It speaks with pride about our contribution and our ambition: to transform ideas into impact, aspiration into action, dreamers into doers – to make the possible happen.

As a society it is more important than ever that we can respond to the proliferation of information and ideas around us with analytical, empathetic and critical thinking skills. As a sector, Higher Education must step forward and define with confidence how it will help to shape the future. York St John University is ready to rise to those responsibilities. Our new Strategy is a framework for our future and a catalyst for a different kind of conversation. We look forward to influencing what comes next.

Ann Green
Chairman of Governors

Professor Karen Stanton
Vice Chancellor
After 178 years of educating people from all walks of life, this is what we know:
Humans have an incredible capacity to learn, to grow and to change.
To make the possible happen.

The speed of change in the 21st century and the scale of innovation is remarkable.
We live amidst the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
The students of today are the pioneers of tomorrow in a world we don’t yet fully understand.
And as an educational institution, preparing students for this uncertain future is our greatest responsibility, biggest challenge and most amazing opportunity.
We must be ready.

2026 will be a landmark year for York St John University.
185 years of life-changing education.
20 years as a university.
A moment in time to focus the mind.

What do we need to become by 2026?
What will our contribution to the world be?
And how will we get there?

This Strategy is our ambitious response.
MISSION

With pride in our heritage we look to the future by learning from our experience. We were founded as a teacher training college in 1841, born out of a socially conscious, ethical conviction: that sharing education is a route to a fairer world. Our motto – that our students should have life and have it more abundantly, is as relevant now as it has always been.

Today, the role we play has evolved, but our core contribution endures. Education still is a force for the possible. It releases human potential. When we use education to advance knowledge, promote understanding and create new opportunities, we foster deeper human connections. We bring people together. We enhance empathy and encourage critical thinking. These things are as important today as they have ever been. Our mission reflects that.

Driven by our commitment to fairness, we focus our expertise, talents and creativity to advance knowledge, promote understanding and create educational opportunities for the benefit of all.
VISION

Our mission grounds us in who we are, but our vision prepares us for what we need to be.

This is the age of the human: the evolution in power relations and recognition between us, people’s new relationships with technology, and our influence on our planet, are all setting the course for profound changes in how we live and experience the world. Understanding human choices and human agency across these themes is essential.

What does this mean for our university?

Equality

The fight for a fairer society has reached a new phase. Issues of equality, dignity and mutual respect that historically have been hidden or suppressed, are gradually surfacing to change the debate.

Demographic, economic and social trends are fostering more diverse communities and shifting the power relationships within them.

Yet at the same time many people feel more polarised. Political differences appear more pronounced and poverty persists as one of the most pressing challenges we face.

York St John has always been proud to stand up for social justice. That commitment is as important today as it has ever been. In changing times, we can help people see the big picture, bring ideas together and celebrate each individual human contribution.

Technology

The fourth Industrial Revolution makes the relationship between people and technology increasingly blurred.

Technology has stepped into many roles previously done by people. This trend will only accelerate.

The skills of greatest value in the future workplace will be those contributed by humans that complement and enhance what technology offers.
This means that sharing and applying knowledge through social skills, complex problem solving, cognitive abilities and more will increasingly shape the success and influence of our graduates and staff.

As a university we have a responsibility to foster these attributes – to harness what technology offers and supercharge it with human qualities.

**Sustainability**

We have never been so aware of our responsibility to our planet and the impact human choices have on our shared home.

The next generation inherit a legacy that has seen the earth as an industrial resource and the consequences as an issue for the future. That future is now.

Each decision we take, investment we make and innovation we pursue must recognise this wider environmental responsibility. Building on the positive initiatives we already have in place to protect our habitat and procure new business and buildings responsibly, we must set a positive example – shaping capacity to rise to the environmental challenges our planet increasingly faces.

Humans still have it in our gift to change our relationship with the natural world and find a more sustainable future – our expertise can inspire success.

**VISION**

We will share the transformative power of university education to inspire the brilliance in every human.
VALUES

With a mission focused on fairness and a vision to inspire human brilliance, people must be at the heart of our university.

Our values reflect this focus on people. In the decisions we make, the actions we take and the way we do things we will be guided by them.

These are the things that matter the most to us to help us get things done. Who we are, how we are and what we do will all be values-led.

They have been shaped by our people, informed by our heritage and inspired by our ambition. If our mission grounds us in our history and our vision prepares us for our future, then our values guide us on our journey. They define how we behave and what we expect of one another.

Being intellectually generous, curious and rigorous.

We share our knowledge, experience and practice with each other and our communities for wider social benefit. We foster inquisitiveness with passion and enthusiasm for exploring and developing knowledge, so we can be the best at what we do.

Promoting fairness and challenging prejudice.

We are deeply committed to diversity and advancing social justice. We focus on widening access to higher education, as we have since our foundation in 1841. Our inclusive environment and commitment to equality nurture a strong sense of belonging within our community.

Inspiring each other to succeed.

People matter to us. We treat others with trust and respect and promote support and challenge. We find inspiration from learning from each other.
As information proliferates, values-led intellectual rigour remains one of society’s most important assets yet the way knowledge is exchanged is rapidly evolving.

This century we have already seen extraordinary changes in the way organisations operate, grow and develop their people. Some of the biggest businesses in the world today would have been inconceivable 20 years ago.

Technology enables people to redefine and increasingly select different ways to receive education.

In the next decade the concept of the 21st century university will continue to be reshaped.

Student expectations will change.

The way society engages with expertise will evolve.

We must demonstrate the agility to adapt and the expertise to engage with these issues.

We must play a more prominent and strategic part in shaping the Higher Education sector’s response, leading the agenda on the issues that matter the most to us and contributing with confidence to sector-wide debate.

As we do, we will be clear about our purpose. Three core priorities ground us as a proud and ambitious university and reflect our collective commitment to why we are here. They are integral to our focus and our contribution to individuals and society.

For each priority, our experts and our students will create a collaborative community, learning from each other to stay relevant and responsive to the changing external context: ready for what comes next.

**Inspiring learning**

Inspiring learning means enabling one another through supportive relationships and shared understandings, where students, staff and partners co-create the curriculum based on the latest thinking and developments.

It means enabling our students to recognise and realise their potential, through critical-thinking, self-evaluation and the ability to influence, building on learning opportunities within and beyond the curriculum.

It means enabling our graduates to enjoy social, entrepreneurial and employment opportunities that support mobility and a flexible readiness for their future, whilst making a valued contribution to society.

And it means enabling individuals to thrive in a diverse learning community where wider world views are embraced and a lifelong sense of belonging to our University community is fostered.
Impactful research

Impactful research means applying the talent, expertise and capacity of our staff and students to doing work that has a meaningful impact for them, our partners and the wider community.

It means cultivating a vibrant environment for research to take place, through both impactful outputs and outstanding partnerships. The way we work with others will help us to promote social justice and enhance engagement with our experts.

It means the application of rigor, intellectual coherence and integrity, alongside robust concepts and analysis.

Clear about career

Being ‘clear about career’ means we empower our students to reach their full potential – developing graduates who are ready for the professional careers of today and the opportunities of the future.

It means recognising that Higher Education and employment are increasingly intertwined. We will continue to grow the pool of leading and dynamic partner organisations we work with to ensure our curriculum and advice are relevant to industry and inspirational for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

It means providing opportunities for all students to engage in work-related experiences so that they can discover and grow their talents.
York St John has always been a place where students and staff alike grow as people – where educational experience and life experience carry equal value – a ‘whole person’ approach. This remains fundamental to our future progress. To continue developing the whole person, we must be agile. The experiences and expertise we foster and focus on must evolve to reflect a changing world and new opportunities within it.

We have chosen four transformational projects to bring this to life, offering new opportunities and insights to our students, staff and communities.

These projects target several critical contemporary skills: future thinking; networking; understanding of scientific and technological progress; mental wellbeing and resilience; and creativity.

They position us to contribute to some of the major challenges emerging in the 21st century.

They offer our students and staff the chance to grow intellectually and personally. To build understanding of their subject and themselves. To be future ready.
ONE: We are proud to be part of York, a city that has always been intrinsically linked to and shaped by international influences and interests. The launch of our London campus extends our world-wide reach further, creating new opportunities for forward-thinking and global networking. Here we will develop our ‘future-lab’ so that students and staff can access even more of the latest ideas and practice. Our portfolio of courses will be strengthened and diversified and our wider influence enhanced.

TWO: Mental health will become a leading area of our expertise and impact. Through major strategic partnerships, we will explore new research and enhance support for one of the biggest health challenges of the 21st century. Supporting the mental health of our students and staff will reflect the importance we place on this issue.

THREE: Stronger subject expertise and new partnerships will strengthen our contribution around Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). We will widen access to these subjects and in doing so cultivate graduates with skills that are critical to the changing economy alongside research that tackles complex ideas. We will promote the significance of science to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the world and we will find common and complementary themes across our STEM courses and the Liberal Arts. Our students will engage with the ethical, moral and aesthetic questions that bind these subjects together, helping us and them to answer the big questions.

FOUR: Creativity will be cultivated and celebrated. Through the development of a new Creative Centre at the heart of our York campus, we will reaffirm our commitment to the Arts and to the value of makers, creators, storytellers and entrepreneurs in a contemporary context. We will inspire our students to inspire each other.
We must be relentless in our duty and desire to demonstrate impact and to do this at every level: individual, institutional and societal. Our role in our city, our region and in contributing to global challenges and debate will expand.

Impact

Through our mission, vision, values and purpose, alongside the projects we are focusing on, we will be:

- Outstanding for learning and research that enables our graduates to succeed and that raises our academic profile.
- At the forefront of eliminating social inequalities in higher education, reflected in our students’ outcomes.
- A partner of choice.
- An anchor institution in York and at the leading edge of the intellectual, economic and social evolution of our region.
- Known for a culture of excellence, demonstrated through our governance, management and people.

For nearly 200 years we have consistently identified opportunities, risen to challenges and explored new possibilities. Thousands of students have travelled that journey with us.

The next stage of the journey comes at perhaps the most uncertain period of change throughout our history.

It is a moment to be bold, ambitious and ready for change. This Strategy will guide us.

We are privileged to be in the position of helping thousands of people to learn and grow each year, widening access to learning as we have always done.

Now we must do so in new ways, preparing a path to an unprecedented future. We will do this whilst being led by our values. We will make the possible happen.
KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

We have 26 Measures of Success for Strategy 2026. Nine of these will be benchmarked against a set of peer, competitor and high-performing institutions.

By 2026 we will have:

- Achieved the Gold award for Teaching Excellence by the Office for Students.
- Enhanced student outcomes for all underrepresented groups.
- Reached 90% overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey.
- Risen 50 places in the Sunday Times annual university guide.
- Increased research income to 2% of our total income.
- Secured professional and managerial employment for 70% of every cohort of graduates.
- Grown to 10,000 students in total, 8,000 on campus.
- Ensured our operating cash flow as a percentage of income is greater than 11% each year.
- Reduced the median gender pay gap to below 10%.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Vice Chancellor’s Office
York St John University
Lord Mayor’s Walk,
York YO31 7EX

01904 624624
www.yorksj.ac.uk