

# Speech by Vivienne Stern MBE, Universities UK Annual Conference 2023

Colleagues, good morning.

Just over a year ago, at UUK's last Annual Conference, I described the challenges I saw facing our sector and UUK itself.

I said that the one thing I had heard time and time again in preparing to take up this role was this: get off the back foot.

This morning I want to show you how we are going about doing just that.

I want to thank many of you in this room for the time you have given up to help us get our priorities straight.

My colleagues and I have benefited from hundreds of hours of conversations with you and with many others who work in our universities or who care about them. I have visited 54 universities across the UK and met with many of your senior teams, and some of your governing bodies.

Through our task and finish groups, policy networks and the Board, we have had the opportunity to draw on the immense combined wisdom of our membership.

Through our newly established Political Advisory Group, we have sought frank advice from experience politicians, including several former higher education ministers, in both Houses of the Westminster Parliament, and from several political parties.

I also want to thank the UUK staff team. It is a bright, ambitious, bunch of people who have a huge commitment to what we do. You will know some, but not all of them. They deserve all our thanks.

The result is the strategy we are publishing today.

We called it A common cause because we can see that we need to work much more closely with our member universities; with our sector's agencies, and with all those with an interest in the future of our higher education system to meet the challenges

we collectively face. But we also want to signal that we have an opportunity to make common cause with those whose interests are aligned with our ~~own~~ who have a stake in the many things that our universities can do for the nation and the world.

It is profoundly influenced by the idea that was sparked for me by the University of Aberdeen's founding purpose: to be open to all, and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others. In short, our mission should be drawn directly from those of the institutions we represent, and that the purpose of UUK's work should be to ensure that our universities are able to thrive ~~not~~ out of self interest, but because the whole of society benefits if they do.

Thrive: that became an important word for us. For ~~it~~ crystallises the task ahead of us. Put simply, will our universities be better, ~~stronger~~ and more effective in the future than they are today? The alternative path is laid out before ~~us~~ in which shrinking income, rising costs, growing public and political hostility and international competition lead to the slow decline of a once ~~great~~ system.

And if we want thriving universities in the next decade, what is it that will tell us that we have achieved that goal? How do we achieve it?

So, here's the strategy in a nutshell.

In brief, we're going to focus much more of our effort ~~on~~ smaller number of bigger things. We have described them internally as 'two for us, and three for the world'.

We will focus our efforts on your three core missions ~~on~~ making our sector better and more effective contributors through education, research ~~and~~ knowledge exchange.

Specifically, the challenge we are setting ourselves is to cred



growth, and to the development of proposals for a 10 year science strategy. And, as Sally will set out in her speech tomorrow, we're going to try to take back control, to coin a phrase, of the qv



My point is this ~~these~~ cities, and this ~~country~~ needed you. They still need you. We all need you to thrive, and not to decline.

This must be our mission.