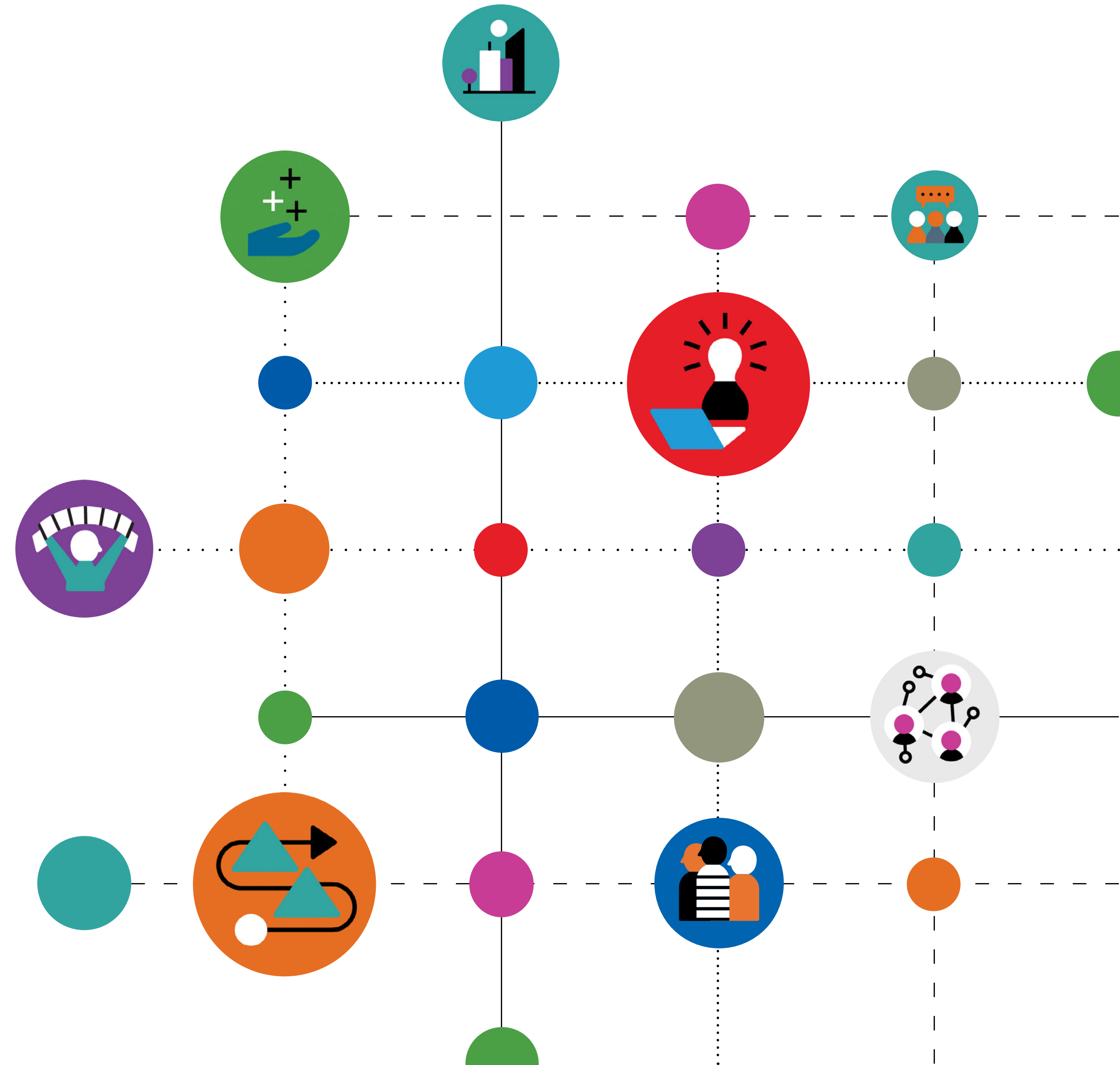Research

The what, why and how for universities seeking to become truly civic institutions

ARUP

Interactive Contents Menu

Executive Summary

Since the Civic University Commission and University Partnerships Programme were established in 2018, there has been various activity on civic initiatives and a varied uptake of Civic Agreements. In addition, the onsite of the Covid-19 pandemic and more virtual teaching have changed everyday university life.

With this in mind, we have commissioned this research which reviews universities' approaches to become more 'civic', and the future role universities have in the management of place. Focusing predominately on universities across the Midlands, this report critically evaluates the revitalisation of the civic movement while suggesting long-term objectives and strategies for delivering more effective civic universities.

Universities were traditionally founded on the vision and philanthropic spirit to serve local people and places and, in so doing, bring about positive social, economic and environmental impact. However, this original concept slowly faded away in the 20th Century due to global socio-economic distractions, as universities started looking more globally than locally. More recently, universities have begun to look inwardly, with changes slowly shifting towards how higher education is supported, funded and regulated, starting with the localism agenda, decentralisation, devolution and levelling up all being introduced in the last decade.

We have interviewed various universities members to get an up to date insight on their approaches and challenges they have addressed while on their journey to become more civic. Our report introduces the relevance of civic universities and highlights some of the difficulties with reference to case studies from our research. We also set out an approach that universities could follow to become more civic, and summarise the change in Central Government policy and the funding landscape for universities.

With these priorities setting out the direction of travel for future civic interventions, universities will be better placed to respond to and successfully attract local stakeholder support and funding programmes increasingly linked to local place-based outcomes. At this crucial moment of the climate crisis and post-pandemic recovery, universities have a civic responsibility to utilise their research and innovation strengths as anchor institutions to maximise local impact to deliver some of the much-needed change for their locality.

We conclude the report with eight calls to action for universities to formalise their civic work into clear public facing civic agreements, so the strategy between local partners for the places they represent is targeted and makes a real difference to prosperity, social justice and the environmental movement. Our calls to action are:

Our calls to action are
– Reaffirming a role for civic agreements
– Capturing the local in civic agreements
– Mobilising anchor institutions and building a broad-base coalition for change
– Developing a flexible framework and avoiding overstretch
– Joining-up the education and skills system
– Creating a legacy
– Placing the civic university at the heart of university's digital and campus strategies
– Implementing the agreement and holding partners to account

We encourage you to read on to understand why the civic agenda and becoming a civic university are essential for universities; if you feel there is a chance for a university to align to our priorities and deliver meaningful impact locally, we look forward to discussing it with you.

1. What is a Civic University?

In recent years, there has been a growing call for universities to become more 'civic', in short, to ensure their activity is aligned to local public needs and rooted in place. Through their positions as anchor institutions, universities have a hugely influential role in contributing to the economic, social, cultual and environmental well-being of the places in which they are based.

The Civic University Commission (CUC) was set up in 2018 by the University Partnerships Programme (UPP) Foundation. UPP are the main sponsor of the Civic University Commission. The commission was underpinned by two foundational reports. The Progress Report, which provides an account of the origins of the civic university, the ongoing nature of universities' levels of civic engagement, the public perception of universities, expert opinion on the significance of place and local leadership, and the capacity of universities to apply their knowledge to the economic and social challenges facing local areas.

The second CUC report, by Lord Kerslake, Truly Civic: Strengthening the Connection between Universities and Their Places (2019), makes a case for universities as significant local and global institutions, and argues for a focus on placemaking. The report presents a series of recommendations, including a call for a civic university agreement between a university (or universities) and civic partners (such as local government, businesses, and the voluntary sector) to enshrine their strategy and measuring the effectiveness and incentivising the civic university.

The CUC's purpose was to see if the idea of the civic university, which had emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States in the 19th Century, could be restored and repurposed as an ideal for 21st Century higher education. This call to action also comes when the country is facing challenges around low productivity, widening spatial inequalities, health crises, reduced local government funding and climate change affecting most parts of our country.

Funding for university research and innovation is being linked increasingly to place-based outcomes. Since the UPP Lord Kerslake Truly Civic report, universities are increasingly proactive in responding to 'civic' principles to ensure it supports and maximise the impact of growth opportunities within their local geography.

Over the past decade, there has been a steadily growing place-based policy narrative from government, including the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships in 2011, and followed by devolution deals and Combined Authorities which predominantly emerged around 2015-2017. The Midlands Engine, Northern Powerhouse and Thames Estuary Commission are examples of pan-regional initiatives. All these bodies have been promoting strategies that reflect their functional economic geographies rather than traditional administrative areas. Furthermore, the government's recent Levelling Up agenda has come to the fore, seeking to fund local authorities address economic inequalities and lagging regional productivity.

Progressing to become more civic as an education institution means developing more locally grounded and locally owned strategies that deliver beneficial local impact beyond students and campuses. Universities have always undertaken some civic role, but very much in an ad-hoc, piecemeal way. This has been somewhat dependent on and influenced by the network of innovators, entrepreneurs, large businesses, government bodies, public service providers and community stakeholders in the place with the university. However universities can play a pivotal role in bringing together partners and offering leadership to help develop a more robust economy and help contribute to solving societal challenges.

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2. Why we need Civic Universities

The concept of a civic university is rooted in the 19th Century when pre-university institutions directly impacted the local economy through research, collaboration with industry, and the move towards adult education contributed to the development of the local civic society. The modern-day civic agenda is a revival of these ideas; universities have the ability to stimulate place-based competitiveness, upskill local populations, and tackle social disadvantages.

The civic approach is an opportunity to encompass major innovation initiatives that generate economic growth, alongside creating partnerships with local businesses and organisations to develop the holistic growth of their localities. The rapid growth of students and the need for education has led to their realisation regarding the importance in the local story and impact. As a result, new challenges have begun to shape the role of universities further, accelerating the transition from a global to a local, place-based focus. These challenges include:

– The transition to a carbon-neutral economy;

– Improving health outcomes and tackling health inequalities, especially following the pandemic;

– Combatting issues of digital exclusion, illiteracy, and inequalities;

– Accelerating productivity growth, narrowing the productivity gap between places, and tackling poverty, including through retaining and upskilling the workforce;

– Supporting and increasing the commercialisation of innovation-led technologies and their use-cases;

– Building local ecosystems to support sustainable and inclusive growth, helping define place / being local in a digital world, and;

– Supporting city centres and the high street to develop new roles in the context of the shift from bricks to clicks in retail.

The Pandemic

Nevertheless, what can universities do to provide solutions to these challenges, particularly when there are so many partners and numerous strategies and agreements in place? Arup's The Future Ready University report outlines that universities have already adopted various responses to these challenges, with the pandemic acting as a catalyst for these actions. The pandemic highlighted the need for better investment in healthcare, and the need for allied relationships with local healthcare organisations. The covid crisis exposed the unpreparedness of the UK, outlining an opportunity for universities to expand research within the umbrella of 'heath security'. They provided a vital role, helping develop new treatments and vaccines, and securing in-person assistance for local hospitals to offer research facilities for the vaccination rollout.

Universities should be central to the post-pandemic recovery. Significant disruptions to education advanced the transition to a digitalised education system. The hybrid-teaching approach created an opportunity to expand and improve learning environments, developing students' critical digital knowledge and skills, creating a resilient cohort for an increasingly digitalised workspace. Lectures broadcast online have widened the scope of potential students, increasing the flexibility and convenience of learning. Mature students, or individuals of a lower socio-economic background can manage better additional responsibilities that may have previously prevented them from engaging in higher education.

Many universities are global institutions, attracting many international students, and making an impact internationally through their research. This global role is not incompatible with a stronger local civic role. As well as learning from global best practice, by helping solve societal challenges locally, our universities can develop solutions with a global application. By widening participation and by being better connected to diverse communities and businesses, universities can enhance their global brand.

The move towards digital learning has also challenged the role of the physical campus. Students have identified that online learning can be transactional and impersonal; disregarding the considerable investment students commit to at enrolment. The Future Ready University report predicts that increased remote working will not take away from the social significance of the campus. The civic role drives universities to open campuses and increase access to services to better their social resilience. Historically, campuses can be regarded as exclusive to students and staff, but these spaces can offer a setting for social exchange for both students and the wider community. Primarily, the physical campus will always centre around educational and research activities. However, for universities to maximise their civic impact the physical campus's role in the future at the heart of towns and cities, and communities.

2. Why we need Civic Universities

Climate change

Universities have an important role in helping tackle societal challenges faced by places. These include responding to climate change (with many declaring climate emergencies and making commitments to reach net-zero carbon emissions), improving the health of people and reducing health inequalities in the context of an ageing population, tackling social exclusion, equipping the workforce with the skills it needs for the future, and modernising and maintaining our infrastructure and energy systems. Universities, working with government bodies, businesses and entrepreneurs, communities and other NGOs have an important role to play in innovating to create the new products, processes and insights needed to tackle these issues, and Universities combine local knowledge and global reach; a global perspective can help solve local problems, and local solutions could have global markets and applications.

This approach can support entrepreneurship and business growth; firms respond to future profit, market and growth opportunities where there is societal need. It can help improve public and community services, and deliver genuine positive change.

There is a particular crucial opportunity for the civic and climate change agendas to align. The challenge of climate change is a shared concern across government, educational organisations and local communities. Delivering a civic agenda that addresses climate change can provide opportunities for research and academic collaborations, both locally and internationally; economic advantages through the development of new skills, linking back to universities' capacity to provide continuous learning pathways that support the upskilling of local communities and the enhancement of capabilities of local firms. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have become more localised, with towns and cities setting new targets to reach 'net-zero', and universities seeking to reduce their own carbon footprints.

Local Leadership

Demand for higher education has increased, pushing universities to rethink how education is delivered. Digital transformation can help with the development of new education (including business education) courses that are more modular, potentially shorter, and enable more flexible learning, supporting community and business needs for continuous learning and upskilling. This type of civic engagement is a mutually beneficial opportunity for local communities, organisations, and universities to address digital exclusion, inequality and combatting the widening productivity gap, as set out in the CUC report.

The public sector funding landscape is changing accordingly, with numerous place-based funds or initiatives following. These include the Government R&D roadmap and imminent R&D Place Strategy, Stronger Towns Fund, Freeports, Levelling Up Fund and forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Using new local funding opportunities will allow for creative approaches that improve the productivity performance of both large and small companies. Universities can work together with local organisations and institutions to effectively deliver more locally grounded and locally-owned strategies that benefit both within and beyond their localities. These new funding streams can be used to sustain the progress and momentum introduced by the civic agenda and support cultural well-being and broaden social resilience.

Universities are increasingly anchoring innovation districts where innovators, entrepreneurs, R&D intensive larger businesses, investors and public sector organisations are collaborating to spin-out, start-up and scale-up new businesses, and to drive corporate and public sector innovation. Innovation Districts are driving regeneration of city centres and other urban locations.

2. Why we need Civic Universities

Conclusion

Universities with an adopted civic approach have the potential to drive the positive future development of our towns and cities, delivering opportunities and welcoming environments for local communities. The idea of being 'civic' is embedded within the role of universities; as established by the actions that have already been taken. However, the UPP Foundation report states that only a few universities can claim to be strategically civic, indicating that to claim the civic status institutions require a clear strategy that outlines what routes they will take to become civic. It is valuable to evaluate the importance of forming a Civic Agreement and how it may vary by institutions' size and location. The Civic Agreement can be used as a powerful tool to champion the action of universities, utilised by institutions to streamline their 'civic' activities to produce a successful outcome that benefits the university and its local community.

"Universities need to be at the heart of the UK's approach to addressing major challenges such as raising productivity, responding to climate change, improving health outcomes, connecting people to opportunities and levelling-up. As universities face unprecedented changes, including in terms of funding, digital transformation, and public expectations, strengthening their civic role is now more important than ever."

Tom Bridges
Director, Leeds Office

3.1 The Role of Civic Universities in Levelling-Up

Since the CUC reports at the end of the 2010s, the societal context has changed in unprecedented ways, impacting universities and what is expected of institutions. This is creating new questions as to how universities engage and embrace becoming civic institutions.

The government's Levelling Up agenda is timely in the context of the Civic University movement, with both ultimately sharing aspirations to address economic disparity and improve opportunities across place. The recently unveiled Levelling Up White Paper sets out a series of missions that collectively aim to improve productivity, boost economic growth, encourage innovation, create good jobs, enhance educational attainment and renovate the social and cultural fabric of stalling parts of the country, not a different set of drivers that frame the civic university 'call to action'. As Lord Kerslake stated upfront in the Civic University Commission report, "universities can be significant 'anchor institutions', able to make an enormous impact on the success of their places".

The growing number of major universities opening satellite or affiliate campuses is particularly interesting in the context of levelling up, pushing the boundaries of a university's civic mandate outside of the traditional 'home' city to more peripheral and deprived localities. In doing so, it offers a model for addressing acute educational disparities across and within regions, by expanding access to traditional educational 'coldspots'.

Universities in peripheral and/ or more deprived locations have multiple civic benefits that help to address the challenges at the core of the government's levelling up missions, notably:

– Widening access and raising participation in education: satellite campuses contribute to the diversification of university systems and/ or course delivery, as well as geographical diversification, thereby often contributing to the diversity of students able to access university;

– Responding to local needs and markets: universities in smaller centres or peripheral locations are often able to be more responsive and uniquely placed to serve the needs of their localities;

– Generating economic development and spillover effects: university campuses in small or isolated locations often bring significant direct employment and investment as well as stimulating local demand for goods and services (especially knowledge-intensive ones);

– Increasing local business productivity: universities can establish a local ecosystem of entrepreneurship and business through upskilling and improving human capital;

– Regeneration and cultural improvements: universities often develop or regenerate physical assets and improve local social and cultural activities in areas where other investments can be sparse.

It's an approach more established in the U.S.A, where the Morrill Act of 1890 identified the need to educate the general population after the Civil War, from which a system of land grant institutions emerged. Shimeng Liu reported in a 2015 academic paper that areas, where the US federal government made land grants to universities back in the 1860s have been flourishing in the 21st Century. As Noah Smith in a Bloomberg article declared, "it turns out that investing in universities was one of the most far-sighted moves that the government ever made". Meanwhile, a 2017 Atlantic article titled 'could small-town Havards revive rural economies', commented that "those rural areas in the US that are thriving today are either home to natural features they can capitalize on – like Aspen, Colorado, or they are the home to colleges or universities".

For example, Walla Walla in Washington state was a struggling town during the 1990s due to farming automation and lumber mill closures. In 2000, the Community College started an oenology and viticulture programme, training locals in the art of winemaking. The result has been a boom in local wineries, from 16 to more than 170 in the locality, as well as spin-off industrial sectors in wine distribution and hospitality. Equally, the college started an entry-level technician training for wind-turbines, in response to the emerging wind industry cluster in the area, which is growing by 15 to 17% annually. As a result, Walla Walla Community College graduates can expect to earn twice the average salary of other new hires in the region, and the college is largely attributed as having created a new economy for the town.

3.1 The Role of Civic Universities in Levelling-Up

In the UK it has recently been through the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 that the opportunity of universities to extend their presence further afield has been possible, with the last few years seeing a growing trend of new secondary campuses to meet more local need.

CASE STUDY: Nottingham Trent University in Mansfield

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has recently partnered with Vision West Nottinghamshire College (VWNC) to create 'NTU in Mansfield', a £6.5m investment specifically designed to offer a different route into higher education as well as degree courses built around the local job market. Mansfield is currently within the top 10 per cent of most deprived places in the UK for education, skills and training.

As well as courses designed around the local job market, the courses have also been designed so that people already working or with caring responsibilities can access them.

Through the Towns Fund, Mansfield District Council seeks to secure further funding to redevelop more premises and support an additional 2,285 places at the campus. It will become the centre of the university's business innovation and growth programmes, which support both new companies and those seeking to expand.

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3.2 Can universities do more for the local economy and drive forward innovation?

As part of a recommendation in the Civic University Commission, universities are seen as strengthening local impact, supporting a place's economic life, and being a catalyst for local economic growth. They do this through local employment and increasing capital spent locally. In addition, their research, projects and programmes have an essential role in innovation to drive new ideas and approaches in the economy and other fields, successfully securing funding. Elsewhere in this paper, the way that universities can help drive local economies and places is made, including to the Levelling Up agenda.

The Levelling Up White Paper places importance on the links between economically-significant clusters of economic activity and the location of higher education and research institutions: "These research powerhouses of the UK often pioneer the development of new technologies, which are then diffused and commercialised by partnering private companies to create a cluster".

However, how do these benefits and impacts always get transferred to the local economy and is it always apparent? Some say we should challenge the general automatic view that "that innovations by universities in the UK automatically lead to new jobs in the economies where they are located", with other valid questions on how particular local innovation then gives rise to economic decision making in a global context where new products will inevitably get manufactured elsewhere.

In responding to a headline in the scientific journal Nature "Why do so many scientists ignore the needs of our cities?" it suggests deep-rooted forces that result in a disconnection between universities, cities, and where they are located. Thus, the presence of a university is not a guarantee of local economic success or a vibrant and inclusive urban community. Indeed, the Levelling Up White Paper acknowledges that "In the UK, the depletion of civic institutions, including local government, has gone hand-in-hand with deteriorating economic and social performance. This is probably present in some of the challenges places face – how do cities overcome their graduate retention challenges without having a direct link to their local economy?

How can this change, and what is needed for success? A more place-based civic approach would align universities more closely with the sector strengths of the local economy in which they are based with clear leadership as part of a boarder strategy for an area. Partnership arrangements will be key to this as working with other local institutions, including other universities, may present its challenges and also help to align the various artificial boundaries that exist when we talk about place.

The approach does not mean that an individual university has to lead on everything, or that it has to align everything it does to the local economy given the diverse subjects each institution covers and the related complex systems it operates within. However, the approach will depend on those subject areas with a greater capacity for integrating with local sector focus rather than remaining purely academic pursuits. This could even involve universities supporting new growth in the local economy, potentially with satellite campuses to stimulate local demand for goods and services, research and business and community engagement.

The global and local economies will continue to change, and places and universities will need to continue to adapt and take the public along with them. A UPP Foundation (2020) survey of post-industrial towns found that more than half of respondents believed universities should play a greater role in the local economy. Aligning the benefits and messaging of how universities as civic institutions make positive contributions to the local economy and environment and social improvements will be part of driving forward improvements across the country and will ensure that the local distinctive and strengths are widely understood and known.

3.2 Can universities do more for the local economy and drive forward innovation?

University of Wolverhampton
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CASE STUDY: University of Wolverhampton

The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) has a Vision for 2030 to "Transform the leadership and workforce of our Place through inclusive student success and world-class research".

In shaping their academic provision, they specifically reference Place to work with partnerships to invest in the economic needs, including new industries and skills.

They see the need for anchor institutions (including universities) that drive forward improvements in places as without that, the location and the institutions will not get better.

Challenges in the local area inform the university's projects, including issues on education attainment, digital poverty, skills development, and driving innovation.

UoW has campuses and assets outside of Wolverhampton, including Walsall, Telford, Stafford and Hereford. They seek to understand regional strategic priorities, evidence need and ensure that their skills, place improvements and economic development activities are aligned to the skills and economic priorities of each of the areas LEP.

Springfield Campus – Wolverhampton

The university's £100m Springfield Campus seeks to stimulate economic regeneration in Wolverhampton and the Black Country through the £17.5 million National Brownfield Institute, which uses technology to develop modern methods of building through innovation and partnership with the construction industry. The NBI puts Wolverhampton on the map as an international leader in sustainable construction, circular economy and brownfield development.

The 12-acre Springfield Campus is currently home to the Thomas Telford University Technical College, Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills and the recently opened £45million School of Architecture and Built Environment. This creates a perfect hub for collaboration and research development, across all expertise levels.

The space is pioneered by the Igloo Visualisation Centre, which enables the visualisation of a range of data, including site mapping data, geological information, concept designs, interactive VR walkthroughs and 3D laser scan data. This technology will support local businesses in delivering faster and more efficient brownfield regeneration.

These investments are laying the foundation for delivering a national centre for sustainable construction and Circular Economy, which UoW and partners are developing further.

ARUP

3.2 Can universities do more for the local economy and drive forward innovation?

CASE STUDY: University of Leeds

Leeds City Region Ide@ Initiative

The University of Leeds is convening and leading an initiative to accelerate innovation-led economic growth in Leeds and across West Yorkshire. The project was started in 2018 when the University decided it, and others, needed to do more to support growth by building an ecosystem to support entrepreneurs, start-ups and scale-ups.

The project was led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University. A team of senior stakeholders was convened, comprising entrepreneurs, the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, the LEP Chair, the Chief Executive of Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust, relevant business leaders of Arup and KPMG (representing corporates), and investors in fast growing businesses.

This team participated in Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Regional Entrepreneurship Programme (REAP) to learn from MIT's experience as being at the heart of the world-leading Greater Boston innovation ecostsytem as well as best practice globally.

The Leeds City Region team was chosen to represent the main stakeholder groups that ned to work together as part of a successful system for maximising innovation-led economic growth: entrepreneurs; universities; corporates; investors of risk capital; and government.

The team developed a strategy aligned with the policies and values to promote inclusive growth of West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Leeds City Council, and the University. This included an initiative to build a more inclusive and diverse cohort of entrepreneurs and to support them to scale their businesses.

There is a strong focus on a mission-orientated approach to innovation and enterprise, focused on developing new solutions to major societal challenges in leeds and beyond, such as tackling climate change, improving health outcomes, and promoting more sustainable patterns of mobility.

The initiative is aligned with the plans for growing the Leeds Innovation District, centred on the redevelopment of the Leeds General Infirmary and the University of Leeds Nexus initiative and building focused on supporting spin-outs and industry collaboration. The strategy is now being taken forward with substantial funding from West Yorkshire Combined Authority.
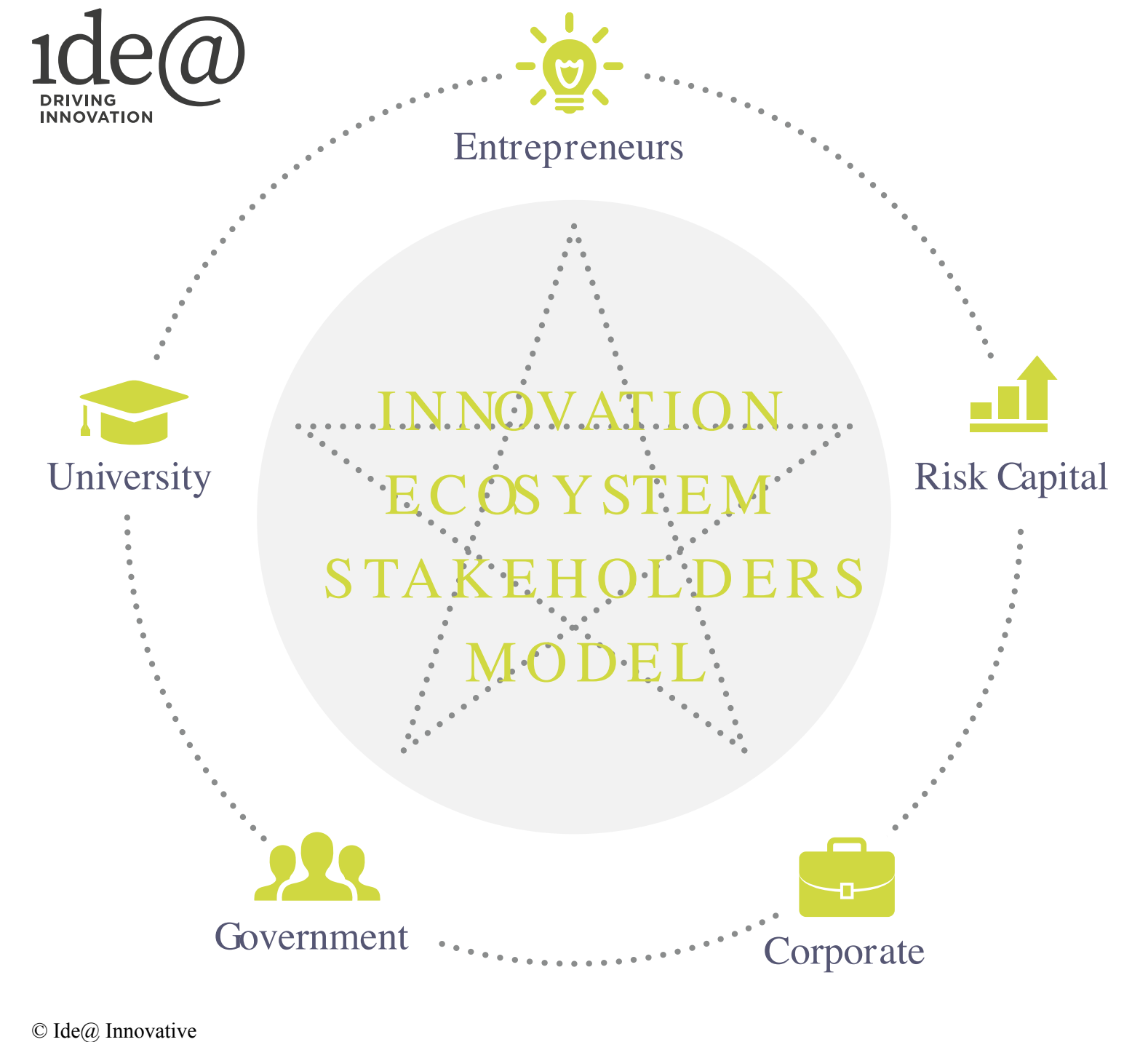
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3.3 What can universities do to improve the educational attainment of their localities?

The UK faces a growing skills crisis, with some of the worst productivity levels and acute shortages across multiple sectors. Over half of the UK's workforce lack workplace digital skills, and 22% of adults are without the fundamental everyday digital skills. As digitalisation increases, it opens up the potential for the UK to be left behind, creating barriers to competitiveness and productivity. In addition, UK universities have identified an increased uptake in the number of students within higher education, which has raised questions around the relationship between universities and the more comprehensive educational systems in which they operate.

A report produced by the Social Mobility Commission established that funding and expertise invested in widening participation in further education has increased the number of young working-class people at university. Closing the educational attainment gap usually focuses on the underachievement of students and the widening of participation, but this ignores the need to tackle institutional barriers or inequalities. Although academic pathways provide the opportunity for social mobility, individuals who get to a higher education stage have had to navigate a fragmented system. These barriers create consequences of social division, restricting the career progression of various communities.

Universities have an important role in bettering the educational attainment of the UK and developing a workforce that can support a digitalised economy. It is considered that education is the most significant driver for social mobility. So, how can universities participate?

Higher education has become detached from the school and skills system, and as the quality of lower education can have a considerable impact on an individuals' prospects, it is a good place to start. In recent times, universities are shifting to create partnerships with local colleges or further education facilities to develop a joint educational framework for students. It means that students of a lower age are able to access innovative facilities and mentoring opportunities, building on their individual social capital.

Considerable impact on an individuals' prospects, it is a good place to start. In recent times, universities are shifting to create partnerships with local colleges or further education facilities to develop a joint educational framework for students. It means that students of a lower age are able to access innovative facilities and mentoring opportunities, building on their individual social capital.

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3.3 What can universities do to improve the educational attainment of their localities?

University of Birmingham
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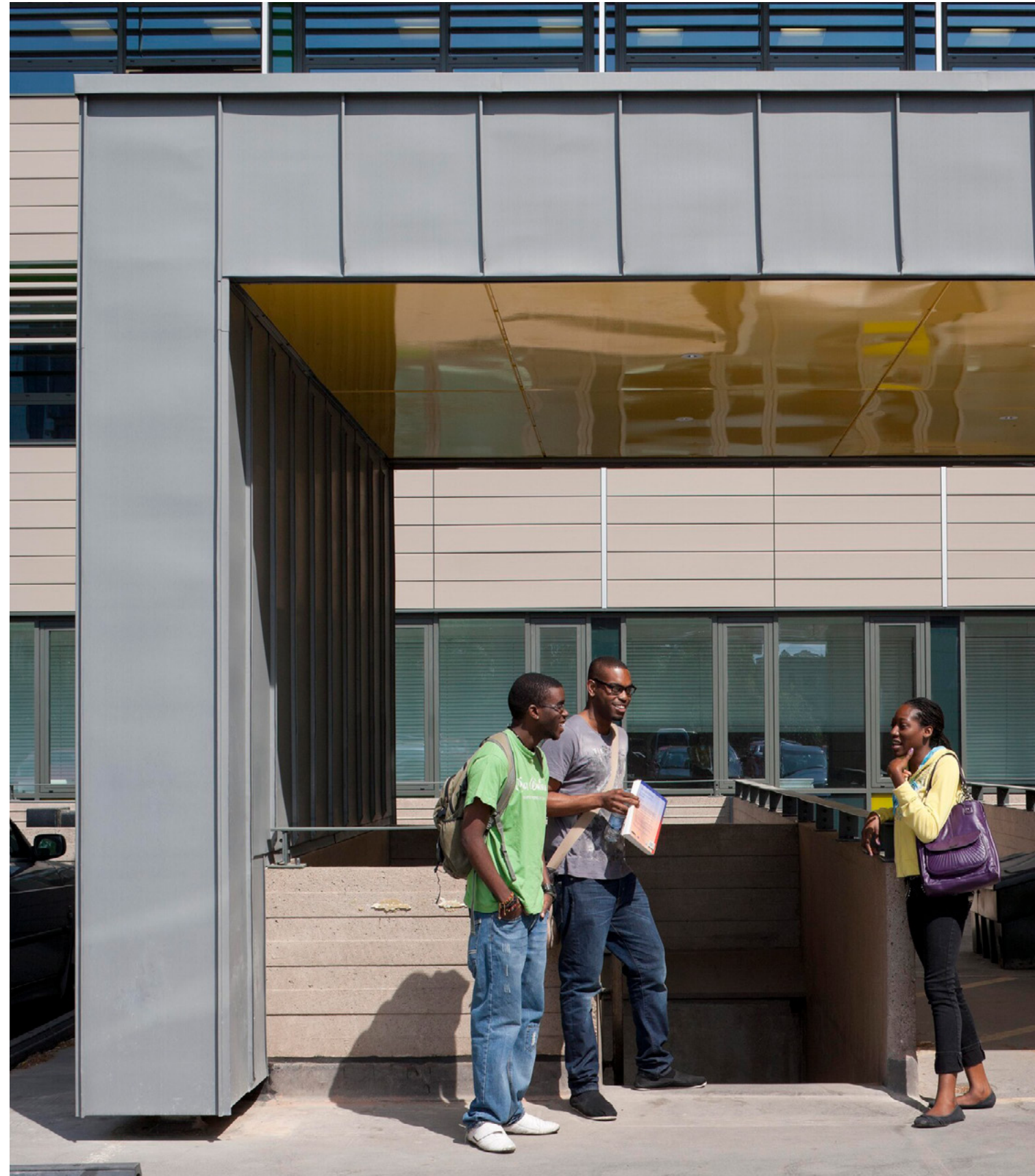
CASE STUDY: University of Birmingham

The University of Birmingham has understood their changing role in the current social context and the importance of bridging the current skills gap, stating that "universities need to do more of their bit".

As part of their civic commitment, they have established the University of Birmingham School, a non-selective admission policy, creating a diverse and dynamic cohort of students from across Birmingham.

The school utilises the facilities and campus of the University to their benefit, bridging the gap between higher and lower education and the concept that the physical campus is not a public space.

Additionally, the university has established initiatives like Access-to-Birmingham, which helps students with no experience of higher education understand the opportunities and experiences of higher education – supporting the transition from school to university, which can be identified as a key barrier to further learning (financial support opportunities as well as guidance in the process).

This does not overcome all barriers – it requires eager and innovative students to apply, who understand and have knowledge of the opportunity.

They also participate in the partnership called Aim Higher West Midlands, which is a partnership of universities supporting the academic pathways of students, identifying how they can further their careers.

The university has also partnered with local organisations and companies to address skill gaps by providing Degree Apprenticeship programmes; this develops on the point of adult education and the need for continuous upskilling when is it necessary.

3.4 How can universities be more mission orientated in their local areas?

There is a long history of policy interventions to mobilise universities to support urban and local regional areas. Nevertheless, there have been considerable challenges in connecting universities' ambitions to help shape and resolve local strategic needs and objectives.

A mission ordinated approach is to seek to provide a systemic approach towards achieving a specific goal, using a solution-based, outcome-oriented approach. The impact of such a solution-based approach has the potential to be both far-reaching and transformative in how we understand and address today's challenges.

Before the resurgence of the civic agenda in 2018, university strategies for teaching and research were more limited regarding place. This had tended to mean that local authorities, other anchor institutions, and stakeholder groups have neglect higher education as a significant economic and social actor, focusing more on a narrow aspect of the contribution universities solely make to economic development. Furthermore, across the county, there are differences in the degree to which partnerships between universities and their places are embedded and unevenness to the extent to which they co-operate with each other in adopting a collaborative approach with local institutions. These trends are reflected in academic research and how universities have traditionally been internally organised.

There has been a growing movement for how universities can contribute resources to help improve specific local needs and objectives of their surrounding geography, mainly if the local area is disadvantaged from particular health, education, social and economic opportunities.

Together with underlying differences in the social welfare and community challenges faced by local stakeholders in different places, has propelled universities to search for locally ordinated solutions. This increased mission ordinated approach to supporting local places was naturally accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and in many places, been a catalyst for change, with new collaborative links being forged, irrespective of whether relationships and cooperation pre-pandemic were strong or weak.

While universities are currently facing significant challenges to their funding and business models due to the crisis, they have been presented with opportunities to connect and collaborate with NHS, local authorities, businesses and the community, and the voluntary sector in the areas they serve. In many instances, universities are making significant contributions as anchor institutions with significant economic and employment impacts and as sources of expert advice and support as knowledge institutions.

Nevertheless, there are risks that the uneven distribution of research expertise and resources across the country, coupled with financial pressures on individual universities, variations in local government and other institutional capacity and uncertainty about the replacement of European regional funds, might further disadvantage 'left behind' places.

Going forward, and through aligning themselves to the civic agenda and network, universities are developing a pipeline that is more place-based research, innovation, partnerships and capital development programmes to serve local people and bring about positive social, economic and environmental impact.

Research and projects are becoming more mission ordinated driven. This civic approach would embed universities more strongly within local and regional governance structures. Through improved connections and collaboration, universities can shape their contribution to the common good and have it recognised and utilised by the university themselves and other anchor institution partners, including businesses of all sizes and from all places, local and national.

University of Lincoln Library
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3.4 How can universities be more mission orientated in their local areas?

CASE STUDY: University of Lincoln

In recent times, the University of Lincoln has become more mission ordinated in helping to resolve local issues and provide economic and societal solutions with a coalition of local, regional, and national partners in Greater Lincolnshire.

Campus for Future Living – Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire

The university has partnered with East Lindsey District Council and Mablethorpe to help the development of the Campus for Future Living. The campus will be the centre of a new cluster of health and care-related jobs and businesses, drawing in support of the university's new medical centre, Health Education England, and local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group have committed to working with the site as a national testbed for health innovation.

Mablethorpe is an isolated coastal seaside town with long term high levels of poor health compared to England. With a desire to improve the health and wellbeing of their residents, the Campus for Future Living sits at the heart of Mablethorpe's Town Investment Plan with the mission to improve the health and wellbeing of their residents, the Campus for Future Living sits at the heart of Mablethorpe's Town Investment Plan.

The Campus for Future Living has created an opportunity to work collectively to respond to the local community's needs with the potential to improve the quality of healthcare for Mablethorpe.

*National Centre for Food Manufacturing
– Holbeach, Lincolnshire*

The National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) is the food science campus of the University of Lincoln, situated at Holbeach in the south of Lincolnshire.

National Centre for Food Manufacturing is committed to helping food industry employees advance their careers. The satellite campus was opened in 2017, providing an industry-tailored offer of skills and support for research and innovation. The NCFM has a sector-leading approach to apprenticeships and innovation in food manufacturing robotics, automation, and process technologies, along with its specialist agriculture and food factory research facilities.

Furthermore, support from the Greater Lincolnshire LEP South Holland District Council, Lincolnshire County Council and the Midlands Engine, the NCFM has been funded a Food Enterprise Zone to be allocated on-site, which will build on the success of the NCFM, and further encourage research, innovation and technology for a variety of agri-food industries.

Artist's impression of Campus for Future Living, Mablethorpe
© East Lindsey District Council

National Centre for Food Manufacturing
© Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership

4. Funding landscape for universities

The concept of a place-based agenda sits amid a growing call for universities to become more 'civic', in short, to ensure their activity is aligned to local public need and rooted in place. The increasing dominance of the civic agenda has increased more place-based funding and outcomes. Furthermore, as part of the 'levelling up' agenda, the government has committed to balancing the allocation fund of its Research and Development Roadmap to assign more of this increased funding outside of the Greater South East, which has traditionally seen the majority of the financing.

As well as the shift towards place-based funding, we also see a correlating change in funding geographies, from a central/ regional funding streams (previously RDAs and then LEPs) to more locally channelled funding streams (primarily through local authorities). This can benefit from having very locally based projects funded within their locality. However, for more 'cross border' regional-scale projects that universities want to pursue, particularly collaborative projects than do not necessarily stay within 'neat' geographical boundaries, such funds could be harder to leverage.

The government's shift has resulted in funding being increasingly linked to the delivery of local outcomes. While universities have strong track record of securing research funding, new locally focused funding programmes also provide opportunities for it to pursue ambitious projects or initiatives that result in local impact.

Universities needs to be ready to capitalise on one predominant fund in the future pipeline: the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The fund pre-launched in February 2022 and is expected to substitute the European Structural and Investment Funds to level up and create opportunities for people and places across the UK.

The 2021 Spending Review suggested that the UK government will "at least match current EU receipts" with the SPF, reaching around £2.6 billion over the period to 2024-25.

We the Shared Prosperity Fund will include:

– A place-based portion which will target places most in need across the UK, such as ex-industrial areas, deprived towns and rural and coastal communities; and

– A second portion will be targeted differently to people most in need through bespoke employment and skills programmes. This will support improved employment outcomes for those in and out of work in specific cohorts of people who face labour market barriers.

The R&D Roadmap and UKRI

It is also worth noting that the UK Government's R&D roadmap published in July 2020, and before that, the formation of UKRI (UK Research and Innovation), have seen an increase in coordinated funding towards place-based research and innovation. The R&D roadmap included a pledge by the Government to publish a dedicated UK R&D Place Strategy, which has yet to be published at the time of writing. However, the Government have created an R&D Place Advisory Group (formed in October 2020) and identified 'Institution and places' as one of four pillars within its recently published (July 2021) UK Innovation Strategy. As a result, the new UK Innovation Strategy, and UKRI Strategy, have continued uplift in place-based research and innovation funding. Press releases accompanying publication of the Innovation Strategy noted:

"In addition to the Strength in Places Fund, £25 million of funding for the Connecting Capability Fund will help drive further economic growth through university-business innovation, and eight new Prosperity Partnerships will establish business-led research projects harnessing the power of science and engineering to develop transformational new technologies that benefit companies, with £59 million of industry, university and government investment."

Various commentators have noted the role of universities in supporting, delivering and ensuring the success of these funding schemes, including articles published in Higher Education Policy Institute, with associated HEPI & UCL analysis, and on the Universities UK website. Overall, it is clear that funding is becoming increasingly civic and place-based focussed. Universities need to ensure its projects, research and capital development can demonstrate the place-based outcomes specified in the future funding landscape.

The Exchange - University of Birmingham
© Arup

5. Eight steps to forming a successful Civic Agreement

Becoming more 'civic' and creating a framework through an agreement needs steady and considered action rather than rushing into a piecemeal approach. These steps intend to help break down the challenge based on our research, interviews and experience of assisting universities in developing and delivering civic agreements.

Eight key steps to establishing a successful Civic Agreement

1. Own	2. Mapping	3. Plan	4. Collaborate	5. Prioritise	6. Resourcing	7. Implement	8. Learning

Find a senior owner to co-ordinate and lead on the approach. Reach out to key civic partners to establish the role and what the university in the local area context.

Assess the key contributing causes and local impacts to understand the challenges of your locality.

Agree targets, set milestones, identify what needs to be done, by when, to meet the target.

Engagement with a wide variety of organisations, partners, businesses and government will be necessary.

What action can you take that will have the biggest impact?

Cost your actions and understand how these activities will be supported.

Set out a detailed implementation programme and stick to it.

Monitor and evaluate your progress to understand lessons learnt for future resilience.

5. Eight steps to forming a successful Civic Agreement

1. Own: Be it an individual or small core team of people – whose focus is to plan and facilitate action across the university, monitor progress and hold people to account, challenging usual approaches and helping to find beneficial solutions. This will require the support of senior leadership, as well as engagement from individuals involved in local business services, local stakeholder engagement, or political and civic affairs within the university.

2. Mapping: You will need a thorough understanding of the fundamental causes and local impact to identify where and who are your key stakeholder. An evidence-based approach will help you to uncover all challenges, identify synergies and opportunities, and leverage the scale that will be required.

3. Plan: Once you have identified primary focus areas and themes, develop a plan of action that sets out what needs to happen, when it should happen, who will need to make it happen, and how. Next, you will need to estimate the impact of your actions to see how far each action takes you towards achieving your goals. Finally, consider how actions might be programmed to build on each other over time.

4. Collaborate: Successful action involves numerous stakeholders, anchor institutions, businesses, local government bodies, and the university's internal community. You can promote change through indirect action and influence, using existing and new connections to facilitate collective, large-scale action. This exposes the potential of the university's civic capacity.

5. Prioritise: Recognise that spreading your effort and resources too thinly across too many actions at the start also has risks. Instead, consider what actions offer the most significant impact and which will bring co-benefits like job creation, health or environmental improvements, economic growth, etc. These aspects can help you prioritise and ensure that each civic action is aligned with other local needs.

6. Resourcing: Estimate the costs and benefits of each action with key partners to help develop a pipeline of projects and initiatives to create a sustained programme of civic actions as part of the agreement.

7. Implement: Failure at this stage is often due to a lack of resources, funding, support and leadership, so ensure these are in place. In addition, you will need to engage working groups and keep in touch with various stakeholders, anchor institutions, businesses and local government bodies to drive the civic agreement.

8. Learning: Learning is essential to know you are meeting your goals and to drive continued progress. It allows evaluation of delivery, communication of performance and helps build evidence for further investment and more ambitious goals. In addition, it should feed into the continuous review of your plan and keep you on track to meet the targets and milestones you have set.

5. Eight steps to forming a successful Civic Agreement

CASE STUDY – Universities of Nottingham

Civic Agreement – University of Nottingham
& Nottingham Trent University

Arup was involved in the production of the first ever Civic Agreement as part of the Universities for Nottingham initiative in 2020; this included supporting the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University in a pioneering collaboration to bring together the offers of both universities in order to address some of the challenges facing Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. As part of the process, Arup hosted workshops sessions with both universities to explore trends and challenges against the themes of: economic prosperity, educational opportunity, environmental sustainability, health & wellbeing and 'unlocking the universities'. This helped identify a small number of 'game changing' projects that could drive real change for the city and its region.

Through clear and visible senior leadership from the two Vice Chancellors, and engagement at a senior-level with key stakeholders, the universities identified collective challenges and opportunities and subsequently hosted a virtual summit with local institutions to explore the key findings in greater depth and inform actions to be taken forward. Finally, the outcomes of our engagement were summarised and utilised to inform the preparation of a Civic Agreement that captures the universities' joint civic missions.

The universities still work together and have an active working group that strives to achieve the aim, projects, and initiatives outlined in the agreement. An example of this is the successful roll out of the Green Rewards App across both universities and local authority partners, which has already led more than 6,500 people to adopt more sustainable behaviours, equating to half a million kilos of CO_2 saved across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

Since the agreement was signed, the universities have worked with stakeholders to refresh and revitalised the agreement to continue evolving commitments and projects with their partners.

Place-based Priorities – University of Nottingham
Continuing to work with The University of Nottingham, Arup worked with the university to produce a place-based priority report to enable the university to be more locally grounded. We undertook a virtual workshop with each faculty across the university to see what positive local impact could be achieved by shifting research and projects inward. Feedback was used to produce a summary document setting out the place-based priorities that will deliver beneficial local impact beyond students and campuses for future capital investments and research projects.

Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement 2022
© University of Nottingham

6. Call to Action - Moving beyond civic activities to becoming a truly Civic University

It is great to see all the place-based civic projects and programmes happening in the UK, despite some of the challenges we have highlighted in this paper. These don't always have easy answers, and some are not entirely new issues. Alongside our research, we feel there is a call to action for universities to formalise their civic work into agreements so the strategy for places between partners can be targeted and make a real difference to the prosperity of people, economy and place. After all, the UK is now all about levelling up.

Reaffirming a role for Civic Agreements:
The power of Civic Agreements in promoting and setting out the strategy of our institutions working in partnership has real value. However, there has been slow take-up, and our research has shown that there is still some convincing that formal agreements are necessary. There are many examples of universities undertaking a civic approach and projects that contribute to local place needs, and some have Vision documents with a place focus. However, the Civic Agreement can formalise and promote these approaches in a more public manner and appear to have increased value where existing partnerships are not as strong. Universities should seek to find an approach in the local context that shows a return on investment to being more civic, given some of the wider pressures they face in maintaining their core delivery focus on education. This will deliver mutual benefits for the university and the place.

Capturing the local in Civic Agreements:
The Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges for universities, and they have had to adapt and change like other institutions. However, questions remain that have moved to a more digital world, what does being local mean to such institutions, and how can they

contribute when other industries are changing their property strategies with impacts on places (including the decline of the high street)?

Another question becomes apparent for universities with satellite campuses that cover large geographies and different partners – do you need more than one Agreement? This only increased the need for Civic Agreements as a way to clearly set out how universities benefit the places in which they serve and operate.

Mobilising Anchor Institutions
and Building a Broad-Base Coalition for Change:
One of the main findings from our interviews is that universities can face barriers when forming partnerships with other universities, colleges, local authorities, LEPs, businesses and so on. Issues include historic disagreements, differences in opinion, misperceptions about roles, and a lack of genuine senior commitment to the partnership. These can be overcome through a clear sense of mission, a focus on the big-picture and winning hearts and minds, visible senior university leadership on this agenda (at Vice Chancellor / Deputy Vice Chancellor level), and by engaging senior leaders and decision-makers in partner organisations. The partnerships should be two-way, focusing not just on how universities can support local partners, but also how local stakeholders can help maximise the positive civic role of universities. Creating a solid foundation for institutional partnerships requires a duty to cooperate between all significant stakeholders to maximise the strategic decisions needed when forming and going beyond a civic agreement.

Developing a flexible framework and avoiding overstretch:
A main finding from our research is that Civic University Agreements work best when they set a clear high-level statement of intent in terms of the "why" not just the "what", are focused on implementing a few priority collaborative initiatives, which can be changed and updated over time. There is a risk of Civic Agreements being too wide-ranging, seeking to cover in a very detailed and technocratic way every interaction between the university and local partners. This creates the risk of effort and resources being dissipated, and all partners losing sight of the wood for the trees in terms of the principal mission and purpose. Instead, Civic Agreements work best when they set a clear direction of travel, are focused on a small number of genuine priorities, can be updated over time, and can also act as a broader framework to encourage collaboration.

6. Call to Action - Moving beyond civic activities to becoming a truly Civic University

Joining-up the education and skills system:
It is clear from our work that there are real benefits of different universities working together on joint Civic Agreements. There is also scope for greater collaboration between universities and FE colleges, and for universities to build on their work on widening participation and educational improvement, and incorporate education to play a role in helping bring the education and skills system together. This can help universities and colleges understand and play to their respective strengths, and support people to transition between different parts of the system.

Creating a Legacy:
It is vital that the civic agenda is adopted for the future and not just the present. Institutions can improve the lives and well-being of local communities, stimulating positive economic growth that will benefit all and promoting social justice. Therefore, universities need to consider their legacy when adopting the agreement and what impact they would like to be recognised for. From our interviews, different legacies have evolved; for the University of Birmingham, it relates to the Commonwealth Games, creating a Games for everyone that will put Birmingham back on the map as a powerful and attractive city to see. The University of Lincoln has recognised engineering and agricultural legacy capability and desires to elevate and support its growth by developing educational attainment and upskilling the local population. Establishing a legacy at the forefront of a civic agreement helps to maximise its success.

Placing the Civic University at the heart of university's digital and campus strategies:
As universities think about the future of their campus in the context of digital transformation, climate change, and changing patterns of innovation, they should also focus on how to support their physical role. This could include considering how best to enhance the visibility and use of the campus by the community, and how the campus can support economic growth and regeneration, for example through innovation districts and how some universities are developing new campuses in more accessible locations, and even repurposing city centre department stores. Some universities are developing a more visible and prominent presence, sometimes in partnership with FE colleges, in places that haven't previously benefited from having a local university. While the university campus has an important continued role to play – face-to-face collaboration remains important – digital learning can widen access to university education.

Implementing the agreement and holding partners to account:
It needs to be reminded that once the agreement has been formed and signed, yes - it's a milestone; however, its implementation defines overall success. Therefore, universities need to lead the way in creating stringent arrangements, such as; functional and recurring working groups and appointing civic leaders for each institution to help progress aims, ambitions and projects through clear designated actions. There should also be periods of reflection through the civic journey to see if the agreement still aligns with the government or society's current requirements and challenges. Universities should be encouraged to refresh and revitalise their agreement when needed; to evolve aims, commitments and projects with their partners.

Old Market Square, Nottingham
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Key Links

Civic University Commission
https://upp-foundation.org/about-us/civic-university-network/

UPP Foundation: Truly Civic report
https://upp-foundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Civic-University-Commission-Final-Report.pdf

Innovation district work: UK Innovation Districts Group report:
https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/innovation-districts-how-can-we-drive-growth-in-major-uk-cities

The Future Ready University
https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/the-future-ready-university

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