



Civic University
Network

Case Study:

Our place at the heart of the region: Sheffield Hallam's journey to a Civic Agreement



Jacqui Robinson, Director of Communications and Marketing at Sheffield Hallam University outlines Hallam's journey towards a civic agreement so far, including their approach to phasing, consultation, engagement and civic choices.

Getting started

Core to our approach has been the [Guide to Creating a Civic Agreement](#). We found the core themes outlined in this guide have been really helpful in guiding our work. This case study touches on how we approached each of these:

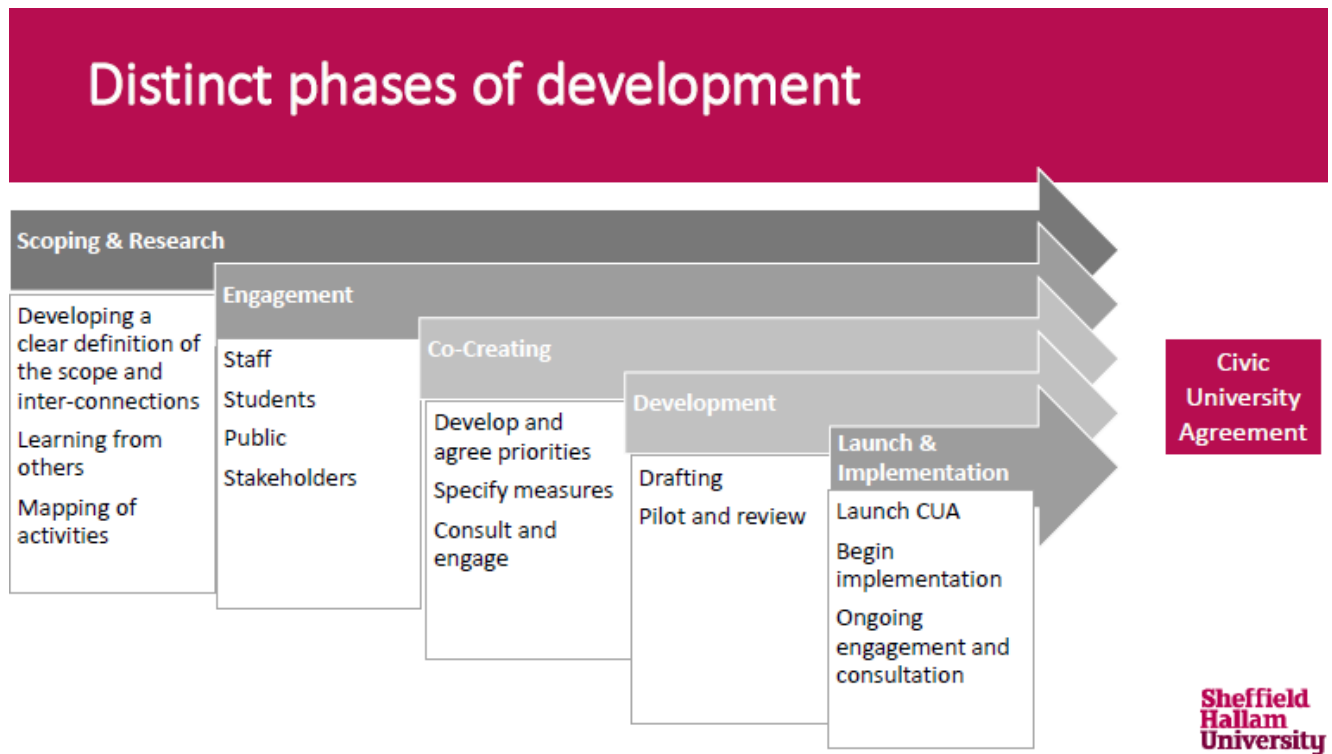
- Put the public at the heart of the Agreement
- Be clear about the role of the university in the partnership
- Be clear about the geography of the Agreement
- Identify the required resource, leadership and institutional capacity
- Recognise and manage risks
- Aim to be perceived as "our university"

This case study is based on a presentation given by Jacqui at the CUN's launch webinar.

You can access her full presentation here on the [Civic University Network Members' Area](#).

Phasing of the work

This diagram identifies the key stages we worked through, starting with initial scoping work where we stepped right back to think about our purpose and context; followed by lots of engagement activity to ensure what we did was really informed by our stakeholders internally and externally; before moving into the co-creation, development and implementation phases.



Scoping and research

Where we started was to take a step back and invest in a lot of scoping and development work. The commission's report highlighted the fact that there's all sorts of different questions that we had to ask ourselves. We also wanted to look at what others were doing. Importantly – there was lots of work going on at SHU 'under the radar' – so we also wanted to get a better understanding of this by mapping out what we currently do. Our goal was to take this opportunity to really think about what you could do differently – not just carry on doing what we were doing. So our initial focus was on clarifying the scope of what we want to include in the agreement, at a of strategic level.

Engagement and co-creation

Then we went back to the core principle of the public and key stakeholders being at the heart of the partnership, informing the role of Hallam is as a civic University. So we developed a number of different engagement exercises and thought really hard about how to do co-creation: what are the actual practicalities around how to co create a civic agreement with a number of different stakeholders, and what does that look like in reality?

Definition and scope

Defining what civic is	Regional priorities	Hallam's Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic versus core activities• Location as a large employer• Corporate social responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Industrial Strategy• Strategic Economic Plan• Devolved local government• LEP• Combined Authority• Local Authorities• National Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly stated aims relating to leading locally• Identified areas of focus starting to be implemented• 'Heart of the Region' external communications campaign to showcase activity and impact

Focusing on definition and scope is time really well spent. It forced us to really focus on clarifying what is civic for us at Hallam. There are a number of things that we do at this university - core activities that clearly impact and help and, and feed into the regions that we are part of and are based in. And that can be as simple as the fact that we're a large employer in different locations, and therefore contribute in lots of different ways just simply by being a large employer. We also explored how the Civic related to other areas like corporate social responsibility, and to our contribution to regional priorities.

In the South Yorkshire region we have a number of different strategies that were feeding into. For instance the Regional Industrial Strategy and the regional strategic economic plan which is still being developed. We have a number of different regional bodies that we have to deal with. Clarifying these links helped us to focus on regional need and to identify some of the gaps that we were not addressing through the existing relationships that we had, and existing partnerships.

This work dovetailed with our existing strategic ambitions - we already had some clearly stated aims in our strategy, related to how we wanted to lead locally and with specific areas of focus, which we started to implement, and which had been identified through need analysis and the discussions that we've had with our regional partners. And we'd also been doing a lot of work around externally communicating Hallam's role at the heart of the region. All of this fed into what we wanted to achieve with our Civic University Agreement.

Engage, engage, engage

I have already talked about some of the work that we did around engagement – which I think must lie at the heart of any approach to developing a Civic Agreement. So it is important to say a bit more about how we approached this.

Who	What
Staff	A combination of workshops, survey and data gathering exercises to understand what we currently do across the University, what we should do more of and opportunities to stop doing some activities
Students	In conjunction with the Students' Union, workshops to consider opinions of engaged and non-engaged student groups, survey for qualitative feedback
Public	YouGov Public Perceptions research with target demographics across Sheffield City Region to understand unprompted and prompted awareness of Hallam's civic role and activities
Public	Public listening exercise through an online survey, 5 weeks, promoted and communicated widely, outreach events in non-traditional areas to capture responses face to face
Key stakeholders	Written communications to outline development of CUA and partnership co-creation approach – meetings to follow with a 'prospectus' for consultation
All	Civic and regional webpage created to communicate the process and the development of the CUA

We identified a number of key stakeholder groups, with the goal of better understanding how they currently feel about Hallam but also, what are their needs, going back to the recommendations from the commission's report. This work was focussed internally and externally.

We delivered a number of different engagement activities with our staff. Part of this was to help build a better picture of what we currently do across the university, but also ask the staff what are the things that are opportunities that we could do more of?

We engaged in conjunction with our students union with our students, and particularly targeting groups of non-engaged students that we wouldn't typically always be able to get input from.

Importantly, we did a couple of steps around engaging the public. So we commissioned a You Gov public perceptions piece of research, and to go out and target some specific demographic groups across the Sheffield city region, exploring unprompted and prompted awareness about our civic role and the activities that we do. And then we also did a more general public listening exercise with an online survey. We also went out and did some outreach events in other areas to make sure we captured responses.

While this was going on we were in regular contact with other key stakeholders on an ongoing basis, keeping them informed and engaged in the process.

What did our engagement activity reveal?

The process threw back a lot of questions for us around, how much are we communicating and making our region aware of what we do. This was the most striking finding that we had. Beyond the fact that the public know that we teach, and, we're a University, there was very little awareness of some of the other kind of civic activities that we do.

This forced us to consider - is this just about talking more and communicating more with our local region about what we do? Or should our focus be more on the need analysis and looking at the strategic impact that we can have?

Civic choices

Where we ended up was confronting what I have called 'civic choices', outlined in the diagram below: and these are choices and decisions that we are still working through.

Civic choices

- Level of ambition:
 - embedding civic role into institutional culture and outlook
 - minimum 10 year framework for genuine civic partnership
 - regional agenda of equal prominence to global focus
- Geographical scope:
 - SCR vs the wider region; challenge of defining edges
- Maximising impact:
 - Opportunities within existing initiatives, e.g. research focused on local needs but for global scale, procurement
 - focused on our strengths
 - not an open cash-machine for the city region
- Channelling our resources effectively:
 - optimising or re-prioritising existing resources
 - more strategic coordination to attract funding to the region



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These choices concern strategic ambition. We realised that – given the ambitions we have – we need to take a much longer (10 year) planning horizon. We had to clarify the geographical scope. The map above shows the extent of our regional reach, far beyond Sheffield City Region (SCR). The process has forced us to think hard about the actual impact we realise through this work – and whether we could organise ourselves better to maximise our contribution to the region. This triggered another key challenge and choice – about how best to channel our resources, and how to prioritise or reprioritise our existing resources around this work.

Next Steps

The process of developing a civic agreement has been a really useful exercise to help and sharpen our thinking, providing opportunities to reflect and re-evaluate our civic priorities and aspirations. Further targeted stakeholder engagement to test the thinking is underway alongside internal engagement to ensure clear planning throughout the institution.