



**CiviCon22**

Universities Working in Partnership

A Week of #TrulyCivic Events

16<sup>th</sup> June 2022

# The role of HEIs in the climate action agenda

This session will commence at 10:30



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**Institute for  
Community Studies**

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# The role of HEIs in the climate action agenda

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# Aims of the Project

- ❖ Explore how the civic agenda could be a route to support HEIs role in the climate action agenda.
- ❖ Understand how different universities have defined the challenge with their particular local area.
- ❖ Understand what HEIs are already doing to support transition within their communities.
- ❖ Develop an emerging framework supporting HEIs to prioritise and scale their work to support all aspects of how places and communities must transition within the climate action agenda.

# Policy and sector context

- ❖ “Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution”, published in 2020 through BEIS.
- ❖ 2021: UK Government net zero strategy “Build Back Greener”, with universities seen as potential partners.
- ❖ Main role of HEIs across both strategies envisaged to ‘scale research and innovation to accelerate decarbonization’ (HMG) and ‘create a green industrial revolution, bringing new high skilled, high wage jobs’ (BEIS).
- ❖ “Levelling Up Agenda” identifies the “net zero transition could create huge opportunities for many of the UK’s left-behind places” with HEIs as a key partner – again in education and innovation.
- ❖ 2022 the UK’s Department for Education also published it’s “Sustainability and Climate Change” strategy
- ❖ ...but still considerable clarity needed about what needs to happen and what support provided.



# Approach

- ❖ Review of policy and available literature to conceptualise the contributions HEIs can make.
- ❖ Clustered member institutions according to common *place challenges*.
- ❖ Four roundtables engaging over sixty institutions.
- ❖ Analysis, report and recommendations.
- ❖ Only stage one of a three stage programme.



Roundtable 1: Northern Powerhouse and the post-industrial/new industrial cities of the North and Midlands.



Roundtable 2: Coastal Economies with strong reliance on tourism and small city or small-town economies; often but not always with high inequality and deprivation.



Roundtable 3: London Mega-City region and the South-East Home Counties commuter belt.



Roundtable 4: In-land, rural and highland economies with largely second cities and market town economies, primarily in the central belts of England and Scotland and the South West of England.

# Framing the local challenge

- ❖ Distinctive ‘place profiles’ are identifiable in net zero transition with distinctive challenges across all domains of place (social/welfare, the economy, transport, biodiversity, and so forth).
- ❖ HEI engagement is typically concentrated on one or two domains: i.e supporting industries to transition.
- ❖ Very few local areas working under concept of a ‘just transition’ – though many have declared a climate emergency on campus, or in partnership with Councils.
- ❖ Around 1/3 of HEIs have Sustainability and Civic Leads working closely in partnership to address the holistic challenge in their local areas.

“

*[The HEI] has very much adopted an environment and climate emergency response, acknowledging we face an environmental crisis with multiple components. We are really keen to ensure that biodiversity and the natural environment aren't forgotten in this race to net zero. – HEI from the coastal and small towns place group.*

”

# Areas of Practice

HEI's current role commonly led from:

- ❖ Own research strengths (and individual academics)
- ❖ Campus or estate assets
- ❖ Local innovation partnerships
- ❖ Internal sustainability strategy.

Student demand and student-led initiative as a key driver for HEIs supporting their local areas in the climate action agenda.

Many exemplary case studies and initiatives of individual areas of practice within the report.

## Areas of practice

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Knowledge exchange  
partnerships

Strategic and operational  
partnerships

Transition of industries

Greening and innovation  
models

Green curriculum

Working directly with the  
local community



# Coordination and Gaps

- ❖ Strategies often hampered by disconnect between university's and local, combined authority and national goals and timescales.
- ❖ Local authority-led working groups common – but much work still silo-ed within individual partnerships.
- ❖ EAUC Scorecard upheld as best practice for supporting HEIs to set their own Sustainability strategies.
- ❖ No cross-institutional forum at a strategic or thematic level coordinating and driving good practice within the sector.

“

*The city council has really been pushing ahead with some of their strategic developments and there's some really good collaborations and the partnerships are developing. But what we need to do as a university... is drill down what we are going to prioritise so that it fits with our other strategic agendas. – HEI from Northern powerhouse and post-industrial place group.*

”



# Emerging Framework for Place Transition

Tracking the alignments and gaps between institutions' Sustainability and Civic strategies in order to support a holistic place transition.

## Current gaps in:

- ❖ addressing skill diversity in local workforce
- ❖ mapping course provision against future green – local - jobs
- ❖ supporting public service transition to net zero
- ❖ community and public engagement
- ❖ growing biodiversity within *urban* areas
- ❖ contributing to mitigating climate-related poverty (fuel, food and indirect poverty)
- ❖ supporting evidence-based leadership of the climate action agenda.

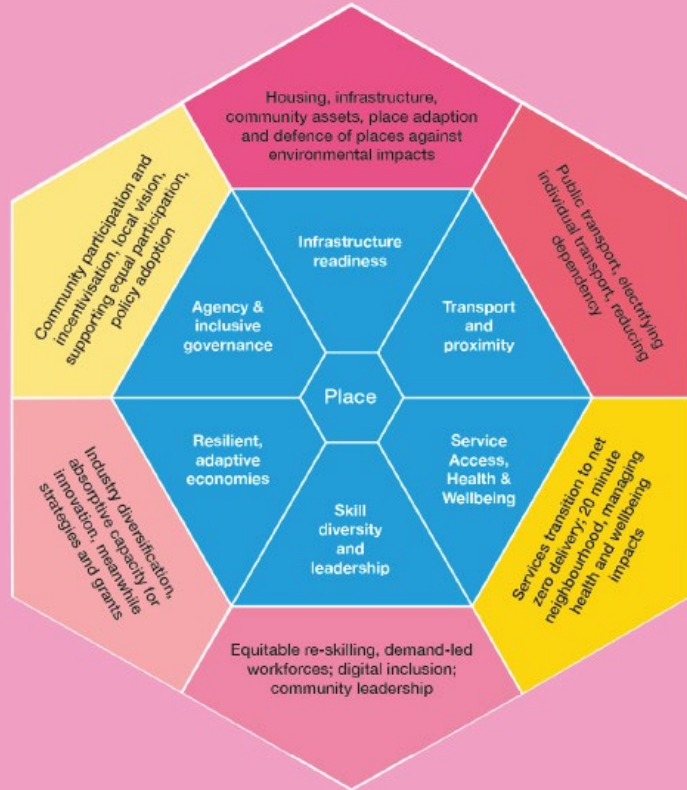


Figure 1: Domains of place that will be affected by net zero transition in the UK. Source: Morrison, Snell, Middlemiss et al, for the Institute for Community Studies, 2022.





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# Thank you

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**



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