



The Civic Engagement Network for Universities, Colleges and Schools

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Supported by



The Civic Engagement Network for Universities, Colleges and Schools

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The Civic Engagement Network (CEN) seeks to collaboratively advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by bringing together young people, educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities, and local communities, to strengthen civic engagement activities and to empower pupils and communities as change agents. A central aim of this network is to support engagement and social change by developing partnerships between a diverse set of stakeholders and creating ecosystems of civic engagement. For example, by sharing our collective resources, expertise and passion for civic outcomes across environmental, educational and social justice issues, our network seeks to nurture and support long term inter-institutional collaborations; share good practice connected to a range of civic engagement themes; improve the learning outcomes and experiences for young people and help to support the co-creation of place-based solutions through a collaborative approach to community action.

In a nutshell, the network aims to support the development of ecosystems of civic engagement and social change aligned with the UN SDGs. Through practices and partnerships, these ecosystems will support young people and educational institutions to work with local communities to create social change in collaborative, inclusive and equitable ways. As United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (2020) states:

“Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.”

The network was established in 2021 by a core group of universities, including the University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Strathclyde and Lancaster University², with support from the Edge Foundation. The aim is to expand this membership of the network to include educational institutions who also share our vision for supporting civic engagement around the UN SDGs and to improve the learning outcomes for young people.

Finally, to expand the network and develop a wider ecosystem of collaboration and support, the CEN has joined forces with the Civic Universities Network (CUN). Under the umbrella of the Civic, additional support will be provided to connect different education sectors involved in civic engagement (such as schools, further

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and higher education institutions with local communities). The aim is to expand the CEN pathway (within the CUN) to enable these different educational institutions to collaborate, share good practice and support the development of place based educational ecosystems of civic engagement through their work with local communities (see the final section on *Taking the Civic Engagement Network Forward*).

Network Vision and Aims

At the CEN, our long-term vision is to build ecosystems of educational institutions (EIs) working with local communities (with citizens, public and private sector organisations, and charities) and young people to support positive, bottom-up and effective change. Three guiding approaches set us apart from other civic engagement efforts:

1. To support community action and social change in the spirit of the United Nations' SDGs.
2. To enhance pupil and community empowerment, agency and engagement in driving change.
3. To support curriculum-based approaches that enable positive social change and improve learning outcomes.

The three aims connect through the vision of a collaborative ecosystem working with young people, EIs, and local communities to enable social change. In particular, the SDGs provide a set of collective challenges that can spark civic engagement at the local, national and global levels. These seventeen internationally recognised goals provide a ready structure for collaborative civic engagement efforts that can, in turn, empower pupils and communities as change makers (Carton & Andreasson, 2020; United Nations, 2022). Furthermore, the UN SDGs, change maker mindset and theme of empowerment can be brought into focus with EIs (such as schools, colleges and universities) working as hubs through partnerships that enrich and broaden curricula (Oxfam, 2019). Specifically, teachers can develop more integrated holistic and community-engaged approaches to classroom learning with the support of these ecosystems. These include curriculums embedded with pedagogies and approaches to learning (such as place-based, real world, enquiry-based, and project-based learning) and various initiatives within higher education (Living Labs at the University of Manchester and vertically integrated project work at the University of Strathclyde). By building on the SDG framework, changemaker movement, and these approaches and pedagogies, the CEN seeks to provide a framework of collaboration, integration and support that connects young people, schools, colleges, universities with local communities around civic engagement and social change.

Why is the work that the CEN sets out to do necessary?

As outlined in the UN SDGs (United Nations, n.d.), there have been many different and unprecedented challenges that have faced us this century including climate change and extreme inequalities. These require creative and coordinated efforts to overcome. The CEN was born out of the recognition that schools, colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to help drive positive change by deepening their civic connections and becoming communal hubs. This is because places of learning reach millions of people each year, play central roles in many communities, are hubs of resources, and can influence how entire

generations think and act in the world. Take, for example, the academic year of 2020/21, when 8.9 million pupils attended schools in England alone (UK GOV, 2021) and a further 2.66 million students were enrolled at UK higher education institutions (Bolton, 2022). When educational staff and pupil family members are added to this calculation, the influence of EIs expands to at least a quarter of the UK's population that year. Our network aims to leverage the education sector's huge potential for driving environmental and social change by helping EIs connect in ways that empower pupils and communities alike. EIs cannot achieve this alone. A collaborative effort is required to make a real difference - one that unites young people, EIs and communities together to drive positive change.

Another issue for EIs has been the economic and competitive pressures on educational institutions and a subsequent focus on looking inwards. Universities, colleges and schools are increasingly forced to compete against each other to survive in marketplaces that sell educational experiences (Greaney et al., 2014). An emphasis on competition and reductions in financial support have often weakened collaborations between EIs and their respective civic engagement agendas. Combined with the devastating impact of the pandemic on civic life, the need for EIs to renew their civic engagement efforts is clear. The CEN seeks to galvanise the growing counter movement of collaboration across EIs, a movement that seeks to rethink the purpose of education, civic engagement and outcomes for pupils, communities, institutions, nature and society at large (UKSCN, 2022; Teach the Future; n.d.; Civic University Network, 2020; Rethinking Assessment, 2021).

Through the development of ecosystems of civic engagement and partnerships between EIs, young people and communities, this network seeks to tackle issues of equity, inclusivity and sustainability in our local and global communities. The aim is to work together to address these issues in a collaborative and co-creative way. For example, rather than adopting an approach to EI partnerships, where universities are viewed as "teachers" to schools and colleges, the CEN envisions an ecosystem where EIs, communities and young people work together to empower and learn from each other's expertise through mutually beneficial collaborations.

Such mutually empowering approaches are gaining traction in the world of higher education through participatory research methods (Gratton, 2020; Banks & Armstrong, 2012). However, some universities are largely missing a trick when it comes to civic engagement, especially in terms of working collaboratively through ecosystems that include schools and colleges. Large sums of money are invested by universities to connect with primary and secondary schools to promote their own institutions in accordance with widening participation agendas. While it is important to enable more access to higher education for all young people, some of these initiatives can result in rather superficial interactions with pupils and minimal support for schools. The CEN proposes to make these connections more impactful by infusing them with a purpose beyond widening participation. This purpose would be three-fold: to further progress the SDGs, to empower young people and their communities, and to improve the UK education system at large by broadening curricula and learning outcomes. Developing these ecosystems of civic engagement are also more likely to improve the learning outcomes of these children who have less access to higher education. Not only do these initiatives seek to increase a broader range of learning outcomes for every child, they also enhance their sense of empowerment and agency and a greater level of engagement and connection with learning.

Building Civic Engagement Ecosystems of Social Change

Partnerships among EIs and between EIs and external groups provide more effective hubs of learning (Hodgson & Spours, 2013). For example, the development of densely connected educational and community ecosystems can benefit pupils and the learning process (e.g. through exposure to more role models, expertise and learning opportunities). These educational and community ecosystems also have the potential to orchestrate change. However, a key component of change is the role young people play within these complex ecosystems of civic engagement. Young people can play an active role in co-creating change and connecting up these different hubs, producing benefits to many different people and organisations within these ecosystems (Oxfam, 2019). The CEN therefore seeks to support current and new partnerships between EIs, communities and young people focused on positive social change. This includes sharing good practice to help in the development of effective ecosystems of civic engagement within different local communities.

Our network seeks to foster connections across a range of EIs, young people and local communities to support change. Although not widespread, one area where there has been some incredible work is the development of partnerships between universities and schools (see examples below). These partnerships are particularly key as schools impact pupils from a young age, influencing their self-perceptions and aspirations (Leat, 2017), and so interventions focused at this early stage of education can be especially meaningful. Schools are also spaces where parents, staff, pupils and local community groups can come together in civic engagement. However, there are many possibilities for developing this role of a school as a hub for civic engagement (for example, through our School Citizen Assemblies pilot project). Through the CEN, it is hoped that more schools can be supported to become civic hubs that help citizens - young and old alike - to collaboratively tackle SDGs most pertinent to their lives.

How can the CEN cultivate a collaborative culture of civic engagement across schools?

A major aim of the CEN in connection to the development of these ecosystems is to provide schools with more real world, project and place-based approaches to learning and changemaker opportunities in the classroom (McLean, 2023). These pedagogies seek to complement the traditional subject-based educational model by introducing inquiry- and project-led modes of discovery (Sfard, 1998; Leat, 2017). Evidence suggests that these pedagogies help improve a broad array of pupil outcomes including sense of agency, creative problem solving, leadership, communication, and mindsets of empathy and perseverance (Leat et al., 2021; McLean, 2023). They can also lead to improved community outcomes if a topic of local import is chosen for pupils to focus on and engage their community around. In this way, universities can help support schools to become civic hubs through sharing resources, responsibilities and expertise.

Universities are also seeking to take on this role of civic hubs by supporting young people to engage in project-based work through their undergraduate studies. There are already exciting examples of ecosystems of civic engagement emerging around the UN SDGs, connecting UK EIs, young people and communities. For example, the Living Labs at University of Manchester supports students to apply their research skills to real world problems by developing SDG-oriented projects with external organisations (University Living Lab, n.d.). Similarly, at University of Strathclyde, undergraduates are given the opportunity to work together across disciplines and year groups, alongside research veterans and external partners on a real-world project that tackles the SDGs.

What are the CEN's key goals?

At the CEN, our approach to inter-institutional collaboration is dynamic and evidence based. We wish to explore new ideas and practices that can help us think and act differently and innovative and unconventional approaches that can have positive social impact on our communities and the wider world. What unites us is our commitment to leveraging the potential of EIs, young people and communities through ecosystems of civic engagement. The aim seeks to achieve this aim through the following goals:

- 1) **Collaboration:** We want to turn the dial towards a more collaborative paradigm that can nurture a robust, densely connected educational landscape to take root.
- 2) **Community Hubs:** We wish to support schools, colleges and universities to become hubs of civic engagement, exposing students to more opportunities in a way that brings their communities along with them and provides more young people with opportunities to build their social, cultural and professional capital.
- 3) **Equity and Inclusivity:** There is an unequal distribution of resources and empowerment across UK schools (Pells, 2017), young people and communities. We want to help equalise access across all pupils through developing EI ecosystems that share resources and support positive engagement.
- 4) **Authentic learning:** Increasingly, education and admission to different stages is becoming more exam focused. This limits the young person's exposure to forms of learning that are more authentic, transformative and interdisciplinary. The CEN supports the development of real-world, enquiry-based, project-based, change maker education and place-based learning to help broaden and enrich outcomes for young learners.
- 5) **Employment:** Employers and young people can experience a substantial leap from studying to working. This has prompted calls for schools, FEIs and HEIs to develop pupils' employability skills, attitudes and knowledge in order to prepare young people for their future lives and careers. We want to support EIs to prepare young people to enter the world of work through supporting school-employer partnerships, school-community collaborations and EPBL methods in the classroom. We also need to reflect on the admission criteria at different educational stages to ensure that these reflect a wider set of knowledge, skills and values and support better futures for young people and their contributions to society.
- 6) **Environmental and social justice education:** Global ecological and climate crises are escalating, and young people, teachers and parents want education to prepare pupils for these challenges to come. This includes understanding the social, political and historical dimensions of environmental issues (Newton, 2020; Teach the Future; n.d.). We want to heed these calls by supporting the integration of SDGs (which seek to address a wide range of issues) into education and across every stage of learning.

How will the CEN work towards these goals?

At the CEN, our approach is constantly evolving in response to emerging evidence. Based on the findings of our literature review conducted in 2022, we plan to build upon the following best practices as we learn more about what works and what doesn't:

- 1) **To foster collaboration** between EIs, communities and young people, the CEN aims to build partnerships between schools, colleges and HEIs that, wherever possible, build on the following best practices (Greaney et al., 2014):
 - Universities integrate school partnerships into their overarching strategy, recognising partnerships as a key channel for civic engagement.
 - Universities resource the partnership, relieving schools from time, labour, administrative and financial burdens.
 - EI partnerships cater to specific school and college needs and universities are responsive to changes in these needs.
 - A "third-space" is created to foster a culture of work distinct from either institution.
 - Input from partnered schools and university staff is equally valued and we engage with others in the community and a more diverse set of organisations, to support these initiatives.
 - A leader or leaders are assigned in each partnered EI to help organise and facilitate the partnership, including "blended professionals" hired to work across the institutions. Young people are also involved in this process to ensure better levels of engagement.
 - The partnership model is well planned to give schools and teachers adequate preparation time.
 - The wider community are welcomed as members of the partnership and accounted for in the design of the partnerships.
 - Sustainable funding strategies are put in place to ensure the longevity of the connection.
 - Sustainable university-wide mechanisms for future engagement programs are set up so that partnerships are not lost when key contacts leave.
 - An enquiry approach is applied to curriculum development, focused on solving "locally defined problems".

- 2) **To help strengthen communities** the CEN envisions EI-partnerships that prioritise community wellbeing. These partnerships can help schools become civic hubs by embedding community-based pedagogies into curricula, such as service learning, real world learning, community funds of knowledge, and place-based learning. These pedagogical approaches may take many different forms, including field trips, local advocacy work, and schools partnering with community groups to further a common mission. Through community-oriented partnerships a mutually enriching dynamic can arise whereby community knowledge enhances pupil learning and pupil engagement enhances community life. Making a difference in their local communities can also give young people a sense of their own agency to affect positive change going forwards. Benefits extend to schools and colleges as they form a robust network of employers, parents and education professionals that helps boost

resilience to disruptions such as education policy changes and economic recessions (Hodgson & Spours, 2013). The goal of strengthening communities is central to the CEN's mission, which is to turn places of learning into spaces of civic engagement through partnerships, shared paradigms, and broadened curriculum.

- 3) **To address inequities** across places of learning, the CEN advocates scaling up EI partnerships to create regional civic ecosystems through which resources can be redistributed in a self-organised way and complementing top-down government policies. Partnerships between EIs, community groups and employers can help expose young people to a diversity of experiences and perspectives that, in turn, raise their aspirations and prospects. CEN also supports the integration of changemaker skills and sensibilities into curricula that can further empower young people to address injustices and instigate change.
- 4) **To create more opportunities for authentic learning experiences**, the CEN proposes to integrate traditional subject-striated teaching with place-led, EPBL, value-driven and real-world learning pedagogies that deepen learners' sense of place, civic responsibility, and personal potential. In addition to excelling at exams, young people deserve the time and space for discovery, curiosity and real-world learning. For too long, EPBL methods have been depicted as the opposite of/mutually exclusive with traditional subject-based teaching. In fact, these are complementary approaches that, when combined, can lead to wider educational outcomes. Question-led and without rigid learning objectives, EPBL flexes students' curiosity, research skills and intellectual engagement. EPBL also provides a natural opportunity for schools to partner with community groups and businesses around curriculum-specific themes. Along these same lines, EPBL practices often feature a public-facing showcase of pupil work, which can, in turn, help schools become hubs for local communities and attract new connections. Notably, schools that practise EPBL and value the broad set of associated outcomes often do remarkably well by conventional standards.
- 5) **To help schools prepare young people for employment** the CEN supports the development of school-employer partnerships. Currently, these types of partnerships often fall to resource-scarce schools and over-stretched teachers to organise around employer constraints. Universities can help broker these relationships by connecting schools with employers around particular themes, projects or mutual needs. Research shows that these partnerships are most likely to succeed if strong relationships are developed across senior staff in schools and businesses and when there is a coordinator employed to manage these relations. Employers should be invited to co-design placements and projects so that they feel a genuine sense of ownership over the success of the partnership. Universities are especially well placed to help schools with staff who do not already have employer connections or the time to develop these partnerships. Government policies can further help to nurture a culture of employer-school relations, as seen in Scotland where a Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce has launched online "match-making platforms" that connect schools and colleges with workforce volunteers (DYW, n.d.). The School Citizens Assemblies initiative also seeks to connect schools, colleges, HEIs, businesses, other organisations and communities through the 'Meet the Experts' directory. If executed well, these kinds of multi-stakeholder partnerships present win-win opportunities for pupils, schools, employers and beyond.

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- 6) **To advance environmental and social justice education**, the CEN supports the integration of the SDGs into teaching across primary, secondary, further and higher education. Since launching in 2015, schools, colleges and universities worldwide have been encouraged by the UN to incorporate SDGs into their curricula. This has been further incentivised by new ranking systems such as the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. Given the environmental and social justice focus of the SDGs, their incorporation into curricula means that students will gain deeper understandings of these issues. There are an infinite number of ways to engage with the SDGs and the CEN hopes to support learning places as they experiment with meaningful, tailored approaches. Early evidence suggests that there is a link between Education for Sustainable Development and improved outcomes such as increased pupil motivation and attendance (Malone & Somerville, 2015). The CEN aims to facilitate further research on these themes so as to develop a robust evidence base.

Examples of the CEN member initiatives:

The Civic Engagement Network currently has members from the University of Manchester, UCL, Newcastle University, The London Interdisciplinary School, University of Strathclyde, Lancaster University, The Brilliant Club, and The Edge Foundation. Among our member institutions, several civic engagement initiatives are already underway that the CEN hopes to bring to light and build upon. For example:

- **Ignite Chester Zoo Project:** The Ignite Teaching School Alliance partnered with Chester Zoo to put biodiversity and environmental conservation at the heart of school curricula (Learn at Chester Zoo, 2019). The project has worked with over 83 schools to bring environmental education into young people's learning and illuminating links across subjects such as maths, music, art and science. It focuses on several SDGs including 12 and 15 (responsible consumption and production, and life on earth, respectively), helping pupils engage with real world issues in a way that strengthens their sense of personal agency to drive positive change. Participating pupils have advocated for sustainable palm oil, campaigned against illegal wildlife trade and put on public-facing exhibitions of their work. The University of Manchester is working with the others on this project to explore ways of expanding this approach into other schools, regions and different community partnerships.
- **School Citizen Assemblies Project:** Education and schools provide an ideal environment for young people to learn about, understand and impact on climate change within their local communities and the wider world that surrounds us (McLean, 2023). The School Citizen Assemblies (SCA) approach is being developed at the University of Manchester and with many different partner organisations. The approach seeks to support learning and community engagement by connecting knowledge, skills, agency, empathy and action around climate change and developing learning partnerships between schools, young people, environmental experts and local communities. SCAs can range from simple workshops and events within schools, between schools or with the community, to a more extensive process that seeks to embed the process deeper into school curriculum design. The main aims of this project is to bring together universities, schools, colleges, businesses, third sector and community experts to develop a greater understanding of the local and global issues connected to climate change and develop specific local actions to tackle climate change within these communities. More specifically, this highly interdisciplinary project and approach seeks to:

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- Develop universities and schools as hubs who can engage with local organisations and communities to make a real difference through education and social action.
 - Tackle problems of environmental sustainability and climate change by bringing together schools, climate change experts, young people and communities to enact change within their local communities.
 - Encourage greater agency, creativity, inclusivity and empathy of different stakeholder perspectives through approaches such as challenge led learning and other innovative pedagogies and practices.
 - Promote equity, equality and diversity by creating spaces for different voices and perspectives around social justice issues and climate change.
 - Embed greater levels of knowledge, skills, higher order thinking, empathy, collaboration, creativity and real-life problem solving into curriculum design and pedagogies within schools and universities.
 - Develop templates, toolkits, platforms and prototypes that can be scaled up nationally (and internationally) to support and empower change and encourage processes of civic and community engagement, learning, collaboration.
- **Community Curriculum Making:** At Newcastle University, the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching is working with local schools and teachers to promote enquiry and project-based learning. Their approach to enquiry-based and project-based learning (EPBL) has a distinctly communal flavour. University researchers work directly with teachers to design projects that draw on the local community and area as educational resources. They call this practice “community curriculum making” and see their role as connecting teachers with relevant resources, people and places by asking: where could students go locally that would deepen their understanding of course content and who lives locally who could share a perspective that would enrich learners’ experiences? Although “community” is not limited to local life, deepened local connections is a key outcome of this approach. Most recently, they worked with the Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to apply project-based learning techniques for students from Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units. The team provided introductory training sessions for VRU officers to help them facilitate enquiry-led projects on the theme of domestic abuse. Pupils were motivated to work toward putting on a showcase hosted by Pride Radio that would reach a wide audience and provide a safe space for them to freely explore their feelings and questions about domestic abuse. Anecdotally, EPBL initiatives like this one have been transformative for students intellectually (through developing research and critical thinking skills), socially (through shifts in relations among students and with their teacher), and personally (boosting self-esteem and developing a complex identity). At the societal level, the research centre advocates for the integration of EPBL methods into school curricula as a way of reducing inequalities across UK schools and students, linking quality education (SDG 4) with reduced inequalities (SDG 10). EPBL exposes pupils to more people, places and things than they would have had the chance to encounter otherwise such as encounters with employers, cultural institutions and technology, evening out disparities in cultural capital that beset incoming students.

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- **Vertically Integrated Projects:** The University of Strathclyde is leading the way in the higher education world when it comes to integrating SDGs into their undergraduate curricula. Launched in 2012, the award-winning Vertically Integrated Projects for Sustainable Development (VIP4SD) allows Strathclyde students to earn academic credits through real-world research projects that tackle the SDGs (University of Strathclyde, n.d.). Inspired by the innovative work happening at Georgia Tech, USA, where the VIP model originated, Strathclyde became the first university in the UK to develop its own VIP programme with an SDG slant and horizontal, as well as vertical, integration. This meant that students could work on research projects with peers across disciplines (horizontal) as well as across year groups (vertical) focused on one or more SDGs. Each project is led by a faculty member and offers a chance to gain credits through an experiential learning project lasting multiple years. Many VIPs give students the opportunity to work with pupils at local schools in some of the most deprived areas of Glasgow. For example, the “TextLab” project connected Strathclyde students with school pupils interested in the intersection between STEM and Humanities subjects. Students across Humanities and Computer and Information Science disciplines built, implemented, and presented to pupils new tools for analysing Shakespeare’s plays through digital text analysis. Similarly, the “STEM Education and Public Engagement” project helps build STEM literacy among primary school students through STEM clinics, knowledge exchanges and inquiry-based-learning practices. As a result, pupils’ argumentation skills improved by 20%. One pupil enjoyed this project so much that they participated throughout primary school, keeping in touch when they moved to secondary school, and even enrolling at Strathclyde to study a STEM undergraduate degree despite never expecting to go to university. The cutting-edge VIP model has been recognised nationally as a best practice, winning the Student Engagement Award at the 2019 Green Gown Awards.
 - **Living Labs Project:** The University of Manchester organises Living Lab projects with external partner organisations. The projects are based on real-world sustainability challenges connected to the UN SDGs. These projects enable the students to make a real difference in the world and gain additional skills and experience to help with their future lives and careers. So far, there have been over 100 student-led projects completed, each associated with at least one SDG. These projects go on to inform student researchers’ dissertations or assessments, ensuring that students have the opportunity to work on projects of genuine impact (see <https://www.universitylivinglab.org/>).
 - **Morecambe Bay Project:** Lancaster University has partnered with the Eden Project to develop the Eden Project North (EPN). The EPN chair of education and engagement is stationed at the university where a community-centred approach is in the works, designed to make lasting improvements to Morecambe Bay where the new Eden Project tourist attraction will be located. EPN’s approach to education and civic engagement exemplifies how multiple SDGs can be achieved when quality education (SDG 4) is pursued in a holistic way. The Morecambe Bay area is home to some of the most deprived communities in the UK, with high unemployment, child poverty and crime rates. In an effort to boost its economic growth and reduce poverty, EPN seeks to employ local people and has teamed up with community-run networks to provide locals with training for relevant work. They also bring environmental learning into local schools where they help pupils grow food and community to transition toward a locally sustainable food system. By working directly with local businesses, organisations and education providers, EPN is co-constructing an educational approach that

empowers Morecambe Bay residents to apply learning to and from their area. Together with Eden Project International, Lancaster County Council, Lancaster University, Morecambe College and Local Enterprise Partnership, EPN is innovating the Morecambe Bay Curriculum (MBC). MBC reimagines what education means in an era beset by inequalities and a global climate crisis. It is driven by the question: *'how can we design a local, global curriculum that can engage with and impact upon the health of our ecosystem, human health and wellbeing?'*³ Spanning ages zero to 25, the educational programme offers five “powerful projects” focused on nature and the community. Together, these projects illuminate the interconnections between ecological, mental, physical and economic health. Through practices of storytelling, learner-driven study, playfulness, expedition, and community-collaboration, learners co-envison sustainable solutions for the future of Morecambe Bay. From the age of four, learners have the opportunity to visit local businesses and work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships are integrated into the 25-year programme. This holistic approach to education as civic engagement illustrates how economic, educational and environmental issues can be solved in tandem when local communities are empowered to partake in and shape change.

Taking the Civic Engagement Network Forward

The CEN is merging under the umbrella of the Civic University Network in order to expand and develop the network further.

Sheffield Hallam University is proud to lead the Civic University Network, a national network which aims to maximise the impact of civic universities in their place. The Civic University Network supports universities across the UK to develop and embed civic aspirations at an institutional level, including through developing and publishing Civic University Agreements. The Network team works with governments and strategic partners to ensure that a university's geographic role and responsibility is used more effectively as an agent to drive positive societal change. The programme of work includes webinars delivering practical support, virtual case study showcases, and in-depth analysis of opportunities for – and barriers to – maximising civic impact. A current key project is exploring the role of students and young people in civic engagement.

The civic agenda has opened new ways to understand the student experience in higher education. The focus on the civic life of universities has encouraged innovation and change in the civic culture and activities on campuses across the country. The role of students has been recognised as integral to truly Civic Universities, and higher education institutions across the UK have sought to develop imaginative new ways of engaging with industry and connecting students to local places to increase their transferable skills and employability. The civic experiences of students have been enhanced through innovations in teaching and learning, work placements, service learning, and extra-curricular engagement in volunteering and social action. Students are thus increasingly seen as civic partners in inclusive learning, research, and public engagement communities which extend across and beyond the campuses where they study.

For more information, visit <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/civic-engagement-network-for-universities-colleges-and-schools/>.

³ [Morecambe Bay Curriculum | Lancaster University](#)

The Civic University Network will provide a wonderful opportunity and exciting possibilities for the CEN to expand and grow. We are looking forward to working together to develop the aims and objectives of the CEN and build collaborative, dynamic and vibrant educational and community ecosystems of social change and civic engagement.

If you wish to find out more about the Civic Engagement Network please following [this link](#).

If you have a case study or an example of good practice that you would like to share with others, please follow the link above where you'll also be able to download the case study template form.

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