



Civic University
Network



National Civic
Impact Accelerator

How Civic Universities support the UK Government's Missions

How place-responsive universities work in partnership to drive inclusive economic growth, create jobs, break down barriers to opportunity, and support health and wellbeing.



What is a Civic University?

Civic universities are higher education providers that actively seek to benefit their local places and populations and see this as central to their role and mission. They work to make a positive difference within their localities whilst recognising they are not the only, or the most important, organisation in their place.

These institutions engage in civic activities through collaborative and inclusive relationships with local partners. These practices aim to benefit the place and its people, working towards shared, meaningful outcomes co-produced with local institutions, leaders, and communities.

Most civic universities develop and publish civic missions, demonstrating their commitment to investing in the value of their civic activities. Many formalise this commitment through a Civic University Agreement (CUA), a strategic plan to deepen their civic impact. These agreements are rooted in a robust, shared analysis of local needs and opportunities, often co-created with or endorsed by local partners.

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We welcome the work of the Civic University Network to establish peer review learning to support and expand the work of universities in responding to the needs of their local communities.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Blunkett

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Civic universities
have made over
1,250
commitments
aligned to
Government
missions

based on desk research of commitments
made in published Civic University
Agreements in the UK

Civic Universities in England

Civic Universities aim to harness their skills, knowledge, experience, leadership and resources to drive societal, economic, and environmental advancements in their regions and localities.

Civic University Agreements are civic strategies co-created with local partners, rooted in a robust and shared analysis of local needs and opportunities.

- The Civic University Network has engaged with 85% of universities in the UK.
- So far, more than 60 universities have published Civic University Agreements.
- There are 4 national projects enabling civic universities to deliver for their places / communities.

Key

University with a Civic Agreement 

Civic Research 

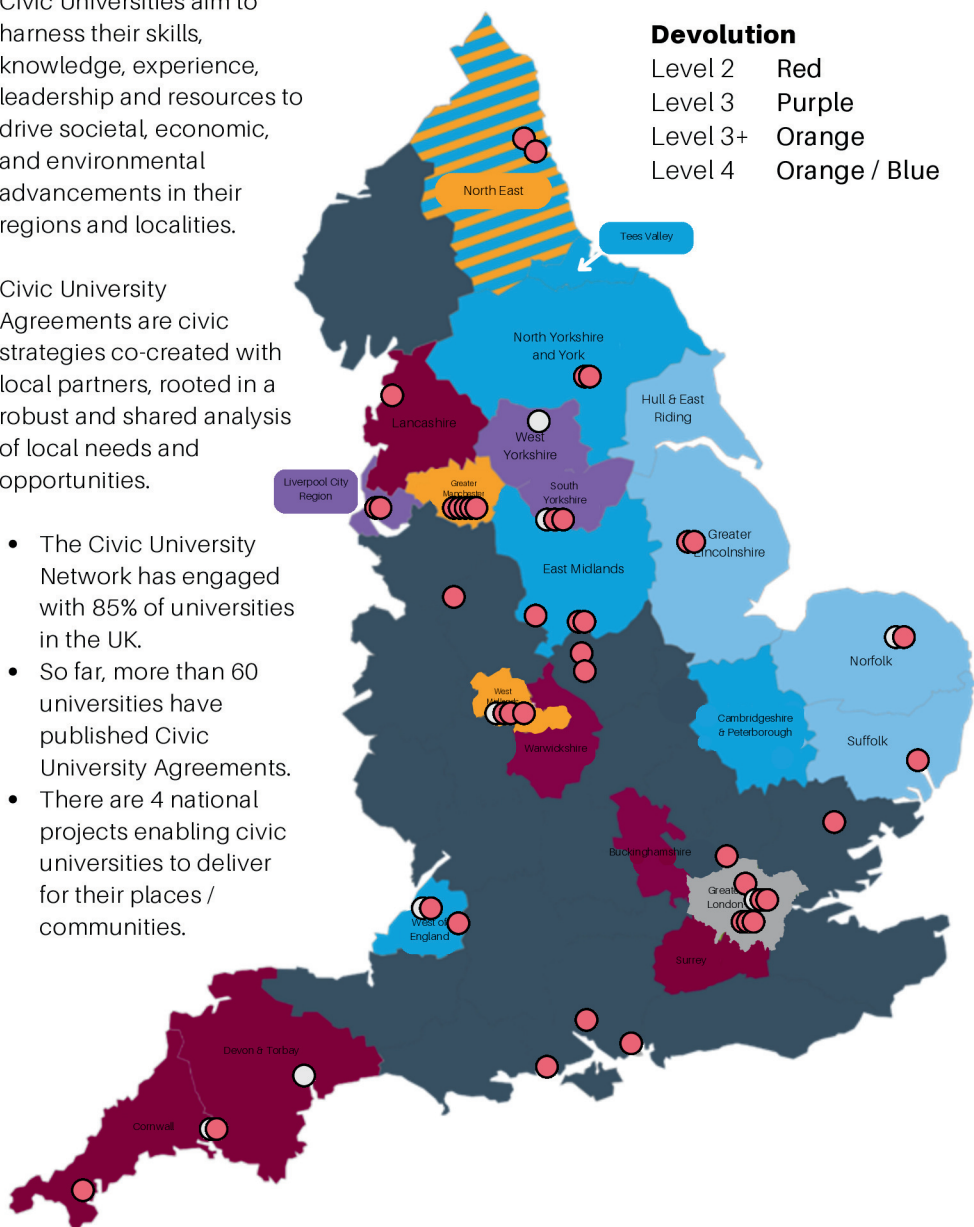
Devolution

Level 2 Red

Level 3 Purple

Level 3+ Orange

Level 4 Orange / Blue



Kickstarting economic growth

- Deliver growth by working in partnership with businesses.
- Ensure every nation and region realises its full potential.
- Drive innovation, investment and the adoption of technology to seize the opportunities of a future economy, from AI to net zero.
- Help people get a job, stay in work, and progress in their careers, with good employment opportunities across the country.

Civic Universities are already uniquely placed to support the Government's plans to kickstart economic growth.

- Universities are often one of the largest employers (if not the largest) in their region.
- They hold leadership and convening powers to bring together local stakeholders in their regions and places.
- They have a track record of developing and delivering innovation to drive new business opportunities.
- They have experience and capacity to help regions develop economic impact assessments.
- Civic University Agreements deliver projects focused on economic growth in their places, working with local partners to co-create robust shared analysis of local needs and opportunities.
- Universities act as engines of economic development by fostering entrepreneurship, supporting new business creation, developing workforce skills, and driving innovations that translate research into marketable technologies.



With the right support, civic universities could become powerhouses of regional economic transformation. They have the power to establish innovation hubs, fostering ground-breaking research and development to directly address local industry needs and community priorities. These hubs can serve as catalysts for new business creation, attracting significant inward investment and creating thousands of high-quality jobs across various sectors. Universities could also spearhead comprehensive regional skills programs through their civic university agreements, tailoring their educational offer to meet specific local economic demands.

Examples from Civic Universities

Universities around the UK are already delivering on many aspects of this mission but have the potential to do much more. These examples demonstrate how civically-engaged universities can leverage their research, skills training, and partnership strengths to directly contribute to the government's goal of revitalizing economic growth through innovation, job creation, and regional development.

Leading Local Skills Systems and Driving Growth

The **University of Birmingham** contributes significantly to economic growth in its region, with a total economic impact estimated at £4.4 billion. It helps start over 60 new businesses and trains a large number of professionals including teachers, social workers, and healthcare workers. The university engages in research and innovation activities that align with government growth priorities, making it a key regional economic driver.

Boosting Productivity

Sheffield Hallam University's research centres at the Sheffield Olympic Legacy Park represent over £25 million of investment. They aim to unlock the potential of the area and attract further external funding, building on the success of its Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre (AWRC) and the Advanced Food Innovation Centre (AFIC). It is developing a major hub of innovation, working with local employers to boost productivity across the region.

Delivering Jobs and Opportunities

University of Bristol and its partners are developing the Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus, ensuring benefits for local communities and the wider city. It provides dedicated space for around 300 enterprise partners, including SMEs and international companies, collaborating to translate world-class research into commercial opportunities. The campus is a catalyst for the wider transformation of Bristol Temple Quarter, the UK's largest regeneration project, that aims to deliver 22,000 new jobs and 10,000 new homes, alongside new public and green spaces, and a £1.6 billion annual boost to the regional economy.

Further examples

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Make Britain a Clean Energy Superpower

- Work in partnership with businesses and the sector and provide long-term certainty, with catalytic public investment.
- Power up infrastructure across the country.
- Harness cutting-edge technology as we build out clean power. The UK is home to some world-leading green-tech companies and researchers, pioneering the way to a clean future.
- Ensure the public enjoy the full benefits of home-grown clean power, as the UK accelerates to net zero.

Civic universities have the skills, experience and knowledge to support the Government's mission to make Britain a Clean Energy Superpower.

- They deliver a range of energy-sector-specific qualifications and support to enable people to secure employment in the green economy.
- They have experience, knowledge and research about regional and national energy systems.
- They have expertise in mapping out skills and employment needs within cities and regions, and developing skills and employment pathways with other education providers and industry to meet local needs.
- They work with key stakeholders to develop research and innovation to track and improve the conditions of rivers, and the wider environmental impact.



Given proper support, civic universities could revolutionise Britain's clean energy landscape. They could establish world-leading clean energy research centres, driving innovation in renewable technologies, energy storage, and smart grid systems. These centres could attract global talent and investment, positioning Britain at the forefront of the green energy revolution. Universities are also well placed to analyse and respond to skills needs in the green economy locally, and could offer cutting-edge training programs in clean energy technologies, training a new generation of highly skilled workers ensuring Britain has the workforce needed to power its clean energy future.

Examples from Civic Universities

These examples demonstrate how UK universities play a crucial role in education, research, and industry collaboration to support national clean energy targets through skills development, innovation, and sustainable technology adoption.

Harnessing Science & Innovation

The **Greater Manchester Universities** partnership directs research, innovation, courses and the management of its own estates to support the city's 2038 zero-carbon target, harnessing its science and innovation base, study programmes and policy expertise to ensure its institutions fully embed low-carbon knowledge and training.

Creating a Just Transition to Net Zero

Queen Mary University of London and its partners including Tower Hamlets Council, the Canary Wharf Group and New City College have joined forces on its Net Zero Carbon Partnership Action Plan, aiming to achieve net zero carbon by 2045. The alliance works to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and offset remaining emissions by finding ways to lessen energy consumption, create sustainable supply chains and nurture biodiversity through planting trees and greening the borough, focussing on a fair and just transition towards net zero.

Generating Sustainable Innovation

The **University of York** and its Higher York partners' **Bio Yorkshire** programme is a 10-year plan for sustainable innovation, steering the region to a vibrant and profitable bioeconomy by using renewable biological resources to create greener products which minimise waste and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. The plan aims to provide 4,000 high-skilled jobs and tackle some of the world's major economic and environmental challenges, with an overall ambition to become the nation's first carbon negative region.

Further examples

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Safer Streets

- Police back on the beat.
- Community-led policing.
- Clear performance standards and professional excellence.
- A new neighbourhood policing career pathway.
- A crackdown on anti-social behaviour.
- Safer town centres.

Universities leverage their research capabilities, community connections, and educational resources to address crime and antisocial behaviour.

- They conduct research on effective policing strategies and share findings with local police forces, and have supported police-led violence reduction initiatives to map crime hotspots to target their resources effectively.
- They offer criminology and sociology expertise to inform community policing approaches.
- They can provide legal expertise to review and recommend sentencing guidelines, and many offer free or low cost legal clinics and services to their communities.
- They provide training and expertise to police forces on trauma-informed approaches.
- They often offer spaces and resources for youth hubs on or near their campuses
- They can also provide mentorship and educational programs for at-risk young people.



Given their deep community connections and research expertise, civic universities can leverage their academic resources to develop evidence-based strategies for crime reduction and community safety.

By collaborating with local police forces, social services, and community organisations, universities can help design and implement targeted interventions to address the root causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. Additionally, civic universities can contribute to youth engagement programs, offering mentorship, educational opportunities, and skills training to at-risk young people, thereby helping to prevent crime before it occurs. Through these efforts, civic universities could become key partners in creating safer, more cohesive communities across the country.

Examples from Civic Universities

The following examples universities demonstrate how academic research, student involvement, and community partnerships contribute to the government's Safer Streets objectives through targeted projects, knowledge exchange, and applied innovation.

Intervening Early to Protect Children

Sheffield Hallam University has worked with the South Yorkshire Police's Violence Reduction Unit to analyse crime data trends in the local area, developing an interactive map predicting 'trauma hotspots' where children are likely to experience higher rates of adverse childhood experiences, so the police force can more effectively target their resources to the greatest areas of challenge and need in the local community.

Building Partnerships for Community Cohesion

The universities in Bristol and their partners are engaging with local communities, taking proactive steps to ensure community cohesion, diversifying their programme of public events, building partnerships with cultural organisations and increasing access to their collective assets.

Leading Neighbourhood Safety Initiatives

Solent University collaborates with partners and residents to enhance neighbourhood safety and cohesion. Its staff and student community work closely with Hampshire Constabulary to raise awareness of important safety campaigns, while providing employment opportunities across the force.

Further examples

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Break Down Barriers to Opportunity

- Roll out government-funded childcare support to improve access.
- Work in partnership with the sector, reforming training and support for the workforce to drive up standards.
- Strengthen and join up family services.

Civic universities across England have been key partners, using a range of approaches to break down barriers to opportunity.

- Universities work with businesses and local industries to meet the employment needs of their local regions.
- Many civic universities convene local FE colleges, schools and industry partners to develop seamless career pathways through the education system that meet local needs and growth opportunities.
- Some civic universities are developing innovative research and projects to support the Early Years sector.
- They work with their anchor partners in education to develop curriculums, careers advice and wider support to prepare young people for regional employment.
- Many are developing research focused on communities and finding out what types of resource and provision can unlock their potential.



Given the right support, civic universities could become transformative forces in dismantling societal barriers. Universities can pioneer innovative interventions throughout all phases of education, partnering with local authorities and anchor institutions in places across the country to embed high-quality, research-informed early childhood, school, and further education. This could help close attainment gaps before they begin, ensuring all children have the best possible start in life.

Examples from Civic Universities

These examples show UK universities' multifaceted approach to breaking down barriers through community engagement, partnership working, targeted outreach, and inclusive educational innovations, aligned with the government's priority to ensure opportunity for all.

Fixing the Foundations

Sheffield Hallam University and its partners established an **Early Years Community Research Centre (EYCRC) and Meadows Nursery** a community nursery and research hub aiming to transform early years education and care while offering 40 much-needed full-time nursery places. This unique partnership between Watercliffe Meadow Primary School, Save the Children UK, Sheffield City Council and the university also provides placement opportunities for students to learn about real-life challenges and contribute to pioneering educational research.

Developing Seamless Educational Pathways

The Durham Learning Alliance is a partnership between **Durham University**, New College Durham, East Durham College, Derwentside College and Bishop Auckland College. The alliance will focus on creating seamless pathways from school to further and higher education, addressing skills gaps in the local economy, and improving access to education for underrepresented groups to boost the region's economic growth and social mobility.

Breaking Down Barriers to Creative Careers

Goldsmiths University of London with its partners Lewisham College, Trinity Laban and Lewisham Council, strengthened the work of Lewisham's Strategic Learning Partnership and Lewisham Arts Education Network to deliver a Creative Skills Pathway to help understand and break down the barriers to careers in the creative sector.

Further examples

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An NHS Fit for the Future

- Transform how elective care is delivered.
- Transform patients' experience of care.
- Transform the model of care to make it more sustainable.

Civic universities work with their anchor health partners in their region to help them prepare and build an NHS for the future.

- Many civic universities are already working with their local NHS partners to understand the current and future skills needs of the local healthcare systems and are convening other educational partners to develop seamless pathways to meet those needs.
- Universities are developing and testing innovative practice and technology that can help to cut waiting lists.
- Many are conducting research and testing preventative health-based approaches that will help reduce demand on the NHS.
- Many are developing research focused on their communities and what types of resource and provision can help them to lead happier healthier lives.
- Universities also work with their students to develop mental health provision that meets their needs.



With enhanced resources, civic universities could work hand-in-hand with NHS partners to create a revolution in healthcare innovation and delivery. By leveraging their research capabilities to design and implement evidence-based preventative health programmes in collaboration with NHS partners, they could significantly reduce the burden on the NHS by promoting healthier lifestyles and early intervention.

Furthermore, universities could be supported to use their Civic University Agreements to create comprehensive healthcare workforce development programs, addressing critical skills shortages and ensuring the NHS has the highly trained staff it needs to meet future challenges.

Examples from Civic Universities

These examples show UK universities embedding research, innovation, and workforce development into NHS priorities to achieve a resilient, future-ready healthcare system.

Rapidly Scaling Health Innovations

University of Birmingham and its partners have developed the **Birmingham Health Innovation Campus**, offering the full circle of translational medicine from drug development to real world studies, to promote healthy living and develop new treatments for disease. It provides direct access to the university's clinical trial ecosystem and research capabilities, to help scale innovations for rapid adoption into the healthcare system.

Working Collaboratively to Transform Healthcare

Newcastle University leads **Insights North East**, a partnership between the University and the region's NHS Trusts, the City Council and Combined Authority to enable regional policymakers to better address the needs of local communities. The University is also part of the unique **Collaborative Newcastle**, an innovative partnership which aims to transform the health, wealth and wellbeing of everyone in the City.

Creating Inclusive Healthcare Systems

Several Universities and their partners are leading projects funded by **UKRI's "Mobilising Community Assets to Tackle Health Inequalities"** programme, aimed at reducing health disparities in the UK's poorest communities. By fostering collaboration between health systems and local communities, these initiatives focus on integrating resources like arts and green spaces to address issues such as mental health and chronic conditions. This approach enhances public engagement and aims to create a more resilient, inclusive healthcare systems that effectively meet local needs.

Further examples

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Utilising Agreements between Universities and Regional Partners to Support Local Growth

Central to the UK Government's agenda is their mission to "kickstart economic growth". Universities with civic agreements are well placed to utilise these agreements to help deliver this mission.

To date, civic agreements have seen more than 45 universities convene key regional partners to agree (in some cases the first ever formal regional agreements) over 1,250 commitments that align with the Government's missions. Utilising the four principles of *place*, *public*, *partnership* and *measurement of impact*, these agreements include commitments that each partnership will work on together to deliver for their communities.

Below are some examples of how these commitments align with planned local growth plans and can help to "kickstart economic growth" across every region of England:

- **Delivering on regional economic potential:** our analysis found that civic agreements have 265 commitments to leverage organisations' expertise to help deliver on the region's economic potential, including how they can work together to deliver greater value for money.
- **Support the creation of a data library:** our analysis found that civic agreements have at least 75 commitments to leverage and share best practice and findings, utilising crosscutting themes and opportunities, helping to develop data driven analysis on what works and why.
- **Gain the confidence of all involved:** The *place* and *measurement of impact* components of civic agreements aim to develop regional confidence in what can be achieved and recognise future approaches the region could undertake.



About us

The Civic University Network

The Civic University Network, established in response to the UPP Foundation's Civic University Commission, has been instrumental in supporting universities to develop Civic University Agreements. Through a diverse programme of events, webinars, workshops, and publications, the Network has shared best practices, case studies, tools and resources to meet the needs of the higher education sector.

Led by Sheffield Hallam University since 2020, in partnership with a consortium of leading institutions, the Network helps UK universities work for the good of their places, deepen their civic impact, and amplify their contributions. This work was made possible thanks to initial funding from the UPP Foundation, Arts Council England, the Department for Education, and Carnegie UK.

National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA)

The NCIA Programme emerged from the Civic University Network in response to sector demand for evidence on effective civic engagement. Funded by Research England, the NCIA is an ambitious £4.3 million three-year programme designed to gather evidence and intelligence on impactful civic engagement, providing universities with frameworks and tools to deliver meaningful, measurable civic strategies and activities.

As we approach the end of our programme, we remain focussed on capturing, curating, and generating evidence across seven domains of civic impact, driving collaborative learning and innovation. We have amplified this impact through publications, reports, toolkits, roundtables, webinars and in-person events including our annual *CiviCon* conference.

Find out how the NCIA support's civic universities

We're on a mission of our own - to transform universities into dynamic engines of local progress and national advancement.

Together, we can forge a new era of higher education that responds to the needs of communities while addressing our nation's biggest challenges.

Since 2023, the NCIA programme has:

- supported a cohort of universities and community partners through our *Action Learning* process.
- developed a *Civic Impact Framework* to help universities measure and enhance their civic work.
- shared insights and fuelled discussion via our *CiviCast* podcast series and *Debate Stage* blog.
- delivered a range of compelling research, reports, roundtable discussions, webinars and events
- and much more! Scan the QR code for details or visit <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk>



Scan the QR code to find out more!

Need an accessible version of this booklet?
Scan the QR code above!

Coming soon!

- ***Civic Field Guides*** practical toolkits, case studies and principles on *Place, People, Partnership, Purpose, Practice, Process and Policy*.
- ***Equitable Partnerships Toolkit*** to build partnerships rooted in trust.
- ***CiviCon25*** - our annual conference on 14-15 Oct in Sheffield.
- Our final ***NCIA & Civic University Network Roundtable*** in collaboration with **Universities UK** on Thu 6 Nov (online).



**Civic University
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**National Civic
Impact Accelerator**

The Civic University Network was made possible thanks to our initial funders: the UPP Foundation, Arts Council England, the Department for Education, Carnegie UK and Sheffield Hallam University.

The National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) is powered by the Civic University Network, with funding from Research England. It is led by Sheffield Hallam University in partnership with The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), The Institute for Community Studies, City-REDI and Queen Mary University of London.

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