Civic Universities Agreement
Lancashire and Cumbria

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Introduction

Rapid changes in an uncertain and volatile international environment, combined with major national policy drivers such as economic growth through the Industrial Strategy and the Post-16 Skills White Paper, are creating new opportunities and challenges for our region.

At the same time, regional developments — including greater devolution, the implementation of the Lancashire and Cumbria Growth Plans and government investment in key growth sectors such as defence and security, creative industries, clean energy and critical national infrastructure — make this the right moment for the universities in the counties of Lancashire and Cumbria (Edge Hill University, Lancaster University, University of Cumbria and University of Lancashire) to formalise their commitment to working with civic partners through a collaborative Civic Universities Agreement.

This Civic Universities Agreement (CUA), developed as a result of careful debate and deliberation over two years, provides a framework for us to work together in partnership to harness opportunities for our places and to help address some of the challenges our communities face, such as lower-than-average educational attainment and qualifications, high levels of economic inactivity, and stark inequalities in outcomes between our poorest and wealthiest communities. Within the CUA we outline our vision, including our unique context, our **priorities** and the **initiatives and projects** we will focus on in the first phase of the initiative.

Vision

By uniting universities, civic partners and communities across Lancashire and Cumbria, we will foster healthier, more resilient and sustainable neighbourhoods where people can learn throughout life, access good work and thrive. Together, we will harness our shared knowledge, talent and resources, enabling our rural, coastal and urban places to prosper and flourish.

Context for Civic Universities Agreement

Our four universities have a long history of working together on projects for the benefit of the counties of Lancashire and Cumbria and the wider North West.

Through working with key stakeholders nationally and regionally, and harnessing our assets and capabilities, our universities have contributed to attracting major government investment. This has supported significant projects such as National Cyber Force and Eden Project Morecambe, building educational capacity in Barrow Learning Quarter, and winning competitive research and innovation ecosystem funding to grow our regional economy.

Collectively, we are driving economic growth and contributing to positive outcomes for communities - as major employers and through research, teaching, knowledge exchange and campus operations. In 2024/25 we had a combined turnover of more than £950m, employed more than 10,000 staff, spent £122m on capital programmes and educated a combined student population of over 60,000 based in Lancashire and Cumbria.

In 2023, the four universities established a Civic Universities Group to build on previous work and provide a vehicle for collective institutional engagement with new pan-regional initiatives, including devolution, the Lancashire Growth Plan, Cumbria's Economic Strategy and significant national investment in defence and national security infrastructure.

The four universities agreed to work with partners to develop a Civic Universities Agreement (CUA) as a demonstration of our commitment to work collaboratively for regional benefit and take a longer term, strategic approach across Lancashire and Cumbria.

Since then, the increased focus on regional growth, devolution and the emerging Lancashire and Cumbria Combined Authorities' agendas creates even greater opportunity to work collaboratively across our shared geographical footprint

What a CUA is/means

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

Who the partners are

Our CUA is a partnership of further and higher education institutions, local authorities, NHS and third sector organisations from Lancashire and Cumbria

Signatories

- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Blackpool Council
- Edge Hill University
- Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board
- Lancashire Combined County Authority
- Lancashire County Council
- Lancaster City Council
- Lancaster District CVS
- Lancaster & Morecambe College
- Lancaster University
- University of Cumbria
- University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust
- University of Lancashire
- Westmorland & Furness Council

Priority Themes and Impacts

We have identified six priority themes, informed by organisational and regional strategies and government policy. Through this CUA we are committing to collaborate on action which contributes to the following impacts for our communities:

1. **Connected, Cohesive and Resilient Communities**

   Strengthen community connections to local opportunities, including through affordable digital and physical access, with particular focus on vulnerable individuals and families.

2. **Economic Growth and Regeneration**

   Grow an inclusive and resilient regional economy through high-quality employment, innovation, regeneration and built environment.

3. **Skills, Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning**

   Expand equitable, pan regional education opportunities and develop a skilled, inclusive workforce through education, training, career progression, and lifelong learning opportunities.

4. **Health, Wellbeing and Reduced Inequalities**

   Improve overall population wellbeing by reducing health and social inequalities, preventing ill health, and supporting healthier communities.

5. **Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience**

   Support environmental sustainability and increase climate resilience and energy security through personal, societal and organisational responsibility, including learning and action on biodiversity protection and clean en**ergy.**

6. **Strong Collective Identity and Evidence-Informed Place Leadership**

   Strengthen our collective identity, connectivity and prosperity through a shared narrative, robust evidence, and more effective collaboration.

Initiatives and Projects

The CUA is not intended to replace or duplicate activities already delivered by the signatory organisations, either individually or in partnership. Instead, it provides a framework to align, strengthen and enhance existing work, while identifying opportunities for new initiatives that support our shared vision, agreed impacts and that contribute to positive outcomes for communities. The following initiatives and projects have been identified as the focus of joint working during the first phase of the CUA.

Agreed Initiatives Aligned to Priority Themes

Initiative	Priority Theme
1. Create and promote a confident collective narrative for Lancashire and Cumbria and speak with one voice to national policymakers.	6 (Place leadership)
2. Mobilise our collective voice and resources to advocate for, bid for and secure investment delivering social & economic benefit.	1, 2 & 6 (Communities, Economy, Place leadership)
3a. Align relevant strategies to strengthen system leadership.	6 (Place leadership)
3b. Deliver a place leadership programme.	6 (Place leadership)
4. Harness universities' research expertise to tackle key challenges identified by partners.	All themes *(depending on challenge area)*
4a. Develop the Lancashire Data Observatory to provide a trusted evidence base for policymakers.	All priority themes *(cross cutting evidence function)* 6 (Place leadership)
4b. Pilot a collaborative approach to research evidence in priority areas identified by partners (such as sustainable rural communities).	All priority themes, as determined by partners 5 (Environment)
5. Work with regional partners to understand skills needs, routes, and gaps across our geographical footprint.	2&3 (Economy and Skills)
5a. Produce a roadmap enabling universities to work with FE providers to address identified skills gaps.	3 (Skills)
5b. Support students and learners to access learning opportunities for priority skills pathways (as identified through LSIPs and HE/FE collaboration).	1 & 3 (Communities and Skills)
6a. Partner with the third sector to identify and deliver meaningful projects that add value for communities.	1 & 4 (Communities and Health)
6b. Review and align organisational volunteering policies.	1 & 6 (Communities and Place leadership)
6c. Connect learning from Pride in Place activity across Lancashire and Cumbria.	1 & 6 (Communities and Place leadership)

Principles

To underpin this CUA, we have developed a set of principles which will guide how we work together:

- **Partnership working**

  We recognise that we can achieve more for our communities and place by working in partnership with others. We value the diversity of perspectives brought by our partners and will work collaboratively and inclusively to achieve the aims of the CUA.

- **Sustained institutional commitment**

  Each organisation will maintain internal strategic buy-in to the CUA and ensure that their representative has delegated authority to act on behalf of their institution.

- **Shared vision**

  We will work together to set out a clear vision for the CUA and to establish its priorities and specific goals (outcomes and impacts). The agreed goals will guide the activity of the CUA.

- **Funded initiatives**

  We will seek to develop collaborative fundable initiatives and attract funding to build capacity and capability for delivery and impact. These may need to be underpinned by specific agreements which would be contracted through usual governance processes.

- **Shared strengths-based leadership**

  Each organisation may lead on different activities at different times, in accordance with the Civic Universities Agreement, as agreed collaboratively and according to strengths and capabilities. It is anticipated that partners will contribute resource (time or other) in line with available resources and agreed priorities, on a case-by-case basis.

- **Project-based governance**

  Whilst the CUA Partnership operates without a formal legal structure, it has no ability to undertake procurement, or enter into Agreements, directly. Any procurement, or contractual arrangements will be undertaken and managed by governing Members and/or associated contacts, determined by the nature of the transaction and undertaken in line with their own specific governance arrangements.

- **Annual review**

  Suitable governance arrangements will ensure that the CUA's objectives and outcomes are reviewed annually and from the point at which the CUA is signed by partners. Signatories will act as the governing body for the partnership. Activities will be monitored and evaluated so that feedback on outcomes can feed in to support governance and operational processes.

Current Activity

The table below presents a snapshot of the many ways in which the four universities contribute to Lancashire and Cumbria, both individually and collectively. This overview will be refreshed periodically, providing an opportunity to reflect contribution and progress on our collaborative action in the region.

Highlights of the universities' contributions to our priority themes across Lancashire & Cumbria

Economy, Skills & Place	• Major suppliers of regional health and education workforce, including doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, dentists, teachers, allied health professionals and social workers • Knowledge exchange activities supporting SME growth and development through collaborative research, consultancy, IP commercialisation, Continuing Professional Development, student placements and graduate talent • Partnership working, assets and capabilities attracting major government investment: £4BN NCF, £50M Eden Project Morecambe, Barrow Learning Quarter; >£6M in 2024/25 in research and innovation ecosystem funding

Sustainability & Climate	• Substantial research expertise including: Centre for Waste Management, Centre for Global Eco-Innovation, Energy Lancaster, Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business, Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas
	• Working with business to support environmental resilience, for example between 2012-2023, the Centre for Global Eco-Innovation-led initiatives:
	  ○ Supported 700 SMEs
	  ○ Saved an estimated 27,000 tonnes CO2 equivalent, 78,000 tonnes of water use and 60,000 of materials use
	  ○ Supported more than 100 PhD and 50 MRes studentships to embed knowledge in businesses

Health & Wellbeing	• Research, education and facilities in health, care, biomedical, veterinary and medical sciences taking place with NHS partners, social care, charities and other health-related organisations • NIHR-funded Health Determinants Research Centres with Blackpool Council and Cumberland Council • 'Tackling the Blues' project engaging over 3,500 children and young people since 2015 to improve mental health literacy and educational performance • Lancashire Emotional Health in Schools and Colleges (LEHSS) team, comprising experienced NHS clinical psychologists and professional trainers within a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology programme, delivering free training and support to staff at primary and secondary schools and colleges in Lancashire, relating to children's mental health, covering 85% of all education settings and more than 12,000 attendees.
Communities	• Major research centres including Centre for Social Responsibility, Institute for Citizen Society and Change, Centre for Arts & Wellbeing, Imagination Lancaster • Morecambe Bay Curriculum, a community-curated, place-based approach to learning about sustainability from early years to 25 years embedded in nearly 50% Bay area educational settings • Expertise in community embedded engagement practices including In Certain Places, a 20 year-long creative research project about art, place and public space, and delivery of Community Lottery projects • Community wealth building approaches (for example the Preston Model) resulting in increased local procurement • Community engagement activities including free public lectures and festivals, access to language courses, free community library card, and access to campus and sports facilities.

Governance

Signatories to the CUA will provide strategic oversight and ensure that the objectives and outcomes are reviewed annually. Organisational leads and strategic decision makers will form a CUA Steering Board. A CUA Delivery Group, formed of senior operational leads from the signatory organisations, will develop and implement projects and activities to deliver tangible outcomes which contribute to the priorities outlined in this Agreement.

CUA Steering Board

Organisational leads and strategic decision makers

CUA Delivery Group

Senior Operational Leads

Develop and implement projects and activities to support customers

Thank you



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