

## CUA Preliminary Analysis

### Rationale: why sign a Civic University Agreement?

- Cement and formalise existing activities and initiatives
- Build on what, at present, might be ‘gentleman’s agreements’ between different institutions and stakeholders
- Use it as a mechanism for self-assessment and peer evaluation to hold the institution to account in terms of reaching different objects and targets (but not driven by metrics)

### Partnerships and stakeholders

- There are differences in terms of how universities see themselves as part of the agreement
- The university as a broker, intermediary or ‘critical friend’. Institutions didn’t necessarily want to see the university as the central actor of the agreement, they wanted to move away from a self-centred approach
- Strong emphasis being placed on the idea that the agreement should be more about the university doing ‘with’ people, rather than ‘to’ people
- The agreements are likely to be made up of different types and levels of partnerships (networking > collaboration > integration)
- Interesting idea around an ‘asset-based approach’. This means identifying the key assets and strengths of partners to find common ground and facilitate workable synergies

### Geography

Not to say a dichotomy exists, but there have been two broadly different approaches to how institutions have conceptualized the geographies of their agreements:

- *Porous boundaries*: this is a much more open and flexible approach based on retaining a local focus but not wanting to limit or exclude activity based on a identifying hard delineation around civic engagements
- *Hard boundaries*: this is much more of a ‘laying out our territory’ approach based on having a clearly defined geography. This is often linked to the geographies of existing partners and institutional/governance structures (e.g. LEPs, Combined Authorities)

Other issues include:

- Challenge surrounding civic activity going on close to where academics live but not close to the university: how can this be approached in a more structured way to maximise beneficial outcomes?

- Not always the case but there might be tensions between universities trying to maintain a global/international image while at the same time engaging locally. The local/global isn't an either/or but needs to be balanced appropriately
- Common theme that the CUAs are most powerful in their local and regional intention

### **Resource, leadership and capacity**

Again, not a dichotomy, but two broadly different approaches in terms of how to structure and resource the actual process of civic engagement:

- *Formal:* Centralized, departments, official roles. More of a systemic approach in terms of process and capacity building.
- *Informal:* Decentralized, spread civic engagement throughout units/departments, 'get everyone involved'. No centralized department or office. Take a more widespread approach; let it happen naturally which might make it more sustainable. 'Grease the wheels'.

Other issues include:

- Common theme that the middle level, coordinated engagement is most missing. Academics having individual connections with the local community but this might not be recognised or align with wider institutional priorities. There is a need to provide support around how to develop more structured relationships (link up top and bottom)
- The cultural element really came through strongly. Emphasis placed on catalysing culture change throughout the university and normalising the importance of civic engagement as part of university life
- With limited resources, common approach to prioritize spending time and enhancing the civic activism that is already occurring. Maximize the outcomes.

### **Guidance and thinking forward to the July event...**

A number of key questions emerged which can help structure the areas through which guidance can be offered:

- How do you keep momentum together when people move on?
- How do you manage the relationships with and expectations of stakeholders and partners (conflicting time scales, priorities, accountabilities)?
- Greater clarity required in terms of time-scales: the agreement, action plans, and annual reviews?
- What do we mean by civic? Do we risk turning it into a meaningless term?

- Question surrounding how much ‘new work’ will come from the agreements. Could universities just relabel existing activity and not make new contributions?
- Best practice examples seen as important, but so are the failures. Emphasis placed on the need to learn from failure. Provide and explain cases that were unsuccessful. Why didn’t they work and how can institutions avoid similar scenarios?
- Resounding agreement that the document should be high-level guidance; no nuts and bolts. It should provide overarching support (what does a CUA broadly look and feel like) but allow institutions to be flexible and developed tailored agreements to their specific challenges and place-based demands