

# City Futures and the Civic University



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## 1: Introduction: why this report now?

This report is a product of its time. It is being published at a point in British history at which:

- Cities in the UK are gaining new financial and political power, and need research-based knowledge to make the most of the opportunities.
- The resources of cities remain constrained by government spending cuts.
- Cities no longer regard universities as passive urban landowners.
- Students want a more connected university experience with stronger links to possible future employment derived from work based learning in the city.
- Research funders are prioritising societal challenge by focussing on areas such as ageing, social cohesion and environmental sustainability that have a clear urban dimension.
- Support for academic research may be altered by changes in the dual support system and the establishment of an over-arching research council, emphasising the importance for universities of mechanisms to support civic engagement.
- Globally competitive research often involves collaboration between STEM subjects and the arts, humanities and social sciences. Cities are the natural scale for such activity, not least through collaborative projects linked to shaping the future of the cities where academics are citizens.

Alongside public administration and commerce, higher education is one of the principal activities of most major cities across the world. Few cities lack a university, and most have several, with a range of missions and cultures.

Because universities are among the biggest employers in most cities, they have always been economically important to them. Many have expanded their role in the

local economy by means of science parks, spinout companies and other technology-based initiatives.

But the way in which universities interact with the city in which they find themselves is now outgrowing this science push model, dependent as it is on the idea that research can be carried out in an isolated academic setting before being transferred into the commercial world where it will turn into profitable products or services.

A new and more integrated relationship is now emerging which requires universities to re-appraise their role as civic institutions. This way of working can present significant challenges to cities and universities. But when it works well, it can bring massive benefit to cities facing deep social and economic challenges and dwindling budgets, and to universities challenged to demonstrate their contribution to the public good.

This report describes and promotes moves towards a new and deeper relationship between universities and the cities of which they form part, as “anchor institutions” that are not only ‘in’ the city but also ‘of’ the city. These developments can be attributed in part to the challenges facing both cities and universities. Cities are increasingly being expected to take on more responsibility for the local economy, for the health and education of their citizens, and for the physical and human environment in an era of climate change. City governments find it difficult to address these multi-faceted challenges in a synoptic way, because of their institutional inflexibility, their overt concerns with short-term fixes, their lack of institutional memory and their inability to engage citizens in a meaningful way. Because of the lingering effects of the 2008 financial crisis, and the continuing application of market logic to the public sector, they are having to take on these demanding roles with diminished resources. For their part, universities are being expected to undertake original research, to teach ever more demanding students, and to engage with business and the community in a meaningful way, not least by addressing societal challenges in their locality.

The realisation is growing that universities can be an essential partner with cities, as trusted local organisations, conduits to knowledge, and sources of skilled judgement, to the benefit of both partners.

This means that city engagement is not just a new and onerous responsibility for universities. It is a chance for them to explore new research avenues, interact with possible students, and perhaps to bring in new revenue. At the same time, our work in Newcastle, described in more detail below, shows that civic interaction can inspire university leaders and unlock the creative potential of the academy.

Universities have always been full of people who want to change the world. Their new enthusiasm for a growing civic role for their institution reflects the growing expectation that they will do this in a more active and less accidental way in future. Reward mechanisms in academic life will increasingly need to reflect these changed priorities. Academics have traditionally been seen as excellent on the basis of their research. But in recent years both teaching and external impact have been added to the mix.

The university of the future will need to regard its local setting as inherent to its operations, with financial, business and cultural exchanges, a range of joint and part-time working arrangements, and a flow of formal and informal contacts. Cities and universities will need to set priorities jointly (healthy ageing has already emerged as an example) and work together to achieve them, in the knowledge that this new activity benefits both sides and is recognised as a core activity for cities and universities alike. Newcastle University's own strategy is organised around three big societal challenges – ageing, social renewal and sustainability – that are global in nature but which also confront the City of Newcastle upon Tyne.

This report is intended to look at universities' growing civic engagement from the point of view of the institutions themselves and of the cities and communities of which they form part, using the authors' experience of Newcastle University and the city of Newcastle upon Tyne as a case in point. It will show that this strategy can bring academic and institutional rewards which would be hard to obtain in any other way, including benefits for teaching, research. At a time when the future for

our cities, and for our higher education systems, are both cloudy, deeper civic engagement may be one key to a more prosperous outlook for both.

## 2: Why cities need engaged universities

Cities need their universities to engage more closely.

- They are subject to “double devolution.” The devolution of power and money to new Combined Authorities is important, but it is also essential to ensure that different communities within devolved areas participate fully in governance and place shaping.
- They have growing, long-term, social, economic and environmental needs that existing short term policy processes are not addressing, and which are exacerbated by austerity and spending cuts.
- They are increasingly expected to promote inclusiveness and citizen participation, but often struggle to develop innovative approaches against a backdrop of political and media scrutiny.

Universities have resources of people, knowledge and trust that can be applied to these issues, within the context of their overall mission of global excellence.

There is a growing realisation politically and societally, both in the UK, and beyond that cities need to do more for their citizens. The public are interested in the future of their places; they are concerned about the delivery or loss of public services, the cost of housing, the reliability of transport, the availability of jobs, the range of shops and entertainment venues, and the extent of green spaces and clean air. But the opportunities for citizens to engage with public bodies on their terms on a broad range of issues affecting the future of cities are limited. Universities, located in many cases at the heart of our cities, are in an obvious place to assist in this challenge.

The British government's interest in devolving decision-making and money to cities, especially in the North of England, offers an opportunity for universities to play a more prominent role in shaping the future of the cities in which they are located. This is in part a matter of devolving operational functions such as health and social security. But in addition, it inherently implies cities taking more responsibility for their own futures and for being more inclusive in the way they carry out their duties. Universities are a logical partner for cities in this new world of higher expectations and fewer resources.

The example of Newcastle upon Tyne, discussed in detail in section 5 below, shows that cities that are thinking about their long term future can work creatively and innovatively with universities to facilitate new forms of citizen and business engagement and access new resources, both material and intellectual. We expect other English cities to take an increased interest in this approach if the Government's Northern Powerhouse initiative gains momentum. The Northern Powerhouse devolves substantial financial power and political decision-making to individual cities. It is bound to create demands for capacity to think about and solve major problems, ideal for the civic university approach. This new way of working is appreciated by the UK's Government Office for Science, which has taken a key role through its Foresight Future of Cities programme to develop city visions across the UK and fund a series of city futures studies that are collaborative in form. This in turn has attracted the interest of major corporations, other public bodies, the community and voluntary sectors, and higher education institutions. And it has contributed to recent research funding calls centred on both the urban and cross-sectoral partnerships.

Many city leaders are interested in social innovation and in new ways of delivering services. They are also taking a strong interest in activities that may bring with them a physical or intellectual competitive advantage. The EU states: "A smart specialisation strategy needs to be built on a sound analysis of regional assets and technology..... Smart specialisation needs to be based on a strong partnership between businesses, public entities and knowledge institutions." Universities are



vital partners in deciding on and implementing smart specialisation. There is also increasing enthusiasm for the idea of “smart cities” and “digital public services” (see section 5). While these ideas sound attractive in an era of reduced local government resources, a full range of government, academic and civil society organisations collaborations are needed to deliver them, and should be involved in their design from the outset. Universities have two roles here: as participants, and as trusted intermediaries, whose involvement underwrites the objectivity and impartiality of the overall process. For example, a university could help design digital public service platforms in which ethical behaviour was a specific design feature.

This approach builds upon the existing “Triple Helix” model in which universities, business and government collaborate to use research mainly for economic benefit. It adds civil society as a fourth element to make a “Quadruple Helix” that stresses social as well as business innovation. Both the Triple and the Quadruple Helix ideas reject the much-criticised but still widely-accepted “linear model” of research leading to innovation, in favour of a matrix model whereby society and citizens can drive research priorities as well as reacting to research findings.

In the Quadruple Helix model, civil society is a source of the knowledge needed to shape and test university-led research. Social networks involving civil society organisations such as schools, the health service, NGOs and social enterprises can be regarded as the soft tissue of a modern city. These might be local bodies, or national ones with a remit to act locally. By contrast, business can be seen as its hard skeleton. The complex ways in which these players interact mean that all types of university, not only older research-led universities, have a role to play in civic engagement.

There is already a wealth of academic research on the commercial and non-commercial transactions that go together to make up a local economy. This literature emphasises the importance of social interaction and is clear that major social

division and inequality are damaging to economic progress. The challenge for cities is to make the most of universities as partners that can help apply these insights. We believe that the key to success is to encourage collaboration between businesses, government, academia and citizens. Each of these have their own mindsets, expectations, incentives and motivations. Getting them to work together means finding people with the ability to mediate across and between the sectors and find a common purpose.

There are significant barriers to aligning the agendas of these diverse organisations. While dealings with the business sector are often now seen as part of the overall relationship between a university and civil society, it is not so clear that businesses have a responsibility to participate more broadly. It tends to fall to the university to maintain the debate and dialogue.

As we explain below, experience in Newcastle upon Tyne shows that this alignment of interests and city-wide collaboration can be achieved. A recent example is Newcastle's designation as an age-friendly city. This initiative involves higher education, the city council and a Quality of Life partnership of local people and organisations which comprises Age UK, the principal NGO in this field. Newcastle University has been a pioneer, and remains a leader, in ageing research in all its aspects from the social to the biological. It has an interest in issues such as housing for older people, and its work with them extends far beyond the university's medical school. The focus for this work is at the General Hospital campus to the West of the city centre, a genuinely Quadruple Helix institution with links into society and into the economy, in the shape of businesses with an interest in ageing. This is also the proposed location for the National Institute for Ageing Science and Innovation, a £40m centre of excellence announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 2014.

Using the university's expertise, research and outreach, and this recent Treasury award, as platforms for city and regional engagement, the next step is for this work to be extended to the lifecourse as a whole, not just to the concerns of

older people. It is also important to build on our growing awareness of the “silver economy.”

This activity connects into the local region via Voice North, a 3000-person group whose members are both experimental participants and sources of insight and information. They help make Newcastle and the broader North East a living laboratory for ageing research. Newcastle’s leadership in ageing constitutes a prime case of “smart specialisation” in action. It brings social and economic benefit to the city and the people in it, and can help to counteract the perceived hollowing-out of strategic thinking in councils whose main concern is short-term service delivery.

In this case, as in others, the university contributes knowledgeable people to the mix, and acts as a trusted partner which can connect a wide range of interests. The university acts as an incubator to generate common purpose within a fragmented governance landscape. It may not be a partner in all of the alliances that result from these interactions, but will nonetheless play a brokerage role in their development.

At the same time, involvement in these activities expands the university’s role as a research centre in ageing. It is leading the ageing aspects of a European Institute of Technology initiative on health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on keeping individuals in the workforce for longer.

Civic engagement of this type involves high-level coordination, the sharing of knowledge and collaborative problem-solving workshops, and – crucially – the ability to speak, or at least understand, another person’s specialist language. Success is about individuals as well as systems. For cities and for universities, people who can work across boundaries are a scarce asset. Their numbers will grow if this boundary-spanning activity is seen as important and if there are incentives for academics housed within existing institutions to think and work in this cross-cutting way.

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Experience to date suggests that despite the challenges of working across boundaries and aligning common interests, closer city links are so productive that they tend to accelerate once they become established. Even in a city that believes it lacks work with universities, there are usually a surprising number of joint activities that can form the basis of further action. An important step is for the initiative to become part of the working life of line managers and executives, not just chief executives, and this means building trust between academics and non-university personnel. We have learned in Newcastle that the civic approach requires both sides to nominate boundary-spanning individuals who have the time and inclination to immerse themselves in both of these worlds, and in local communities, businesses and non-profit organisations. It is far too easy to focus on problems and barriers, when the real task is to identify assets and opportunities. Finding ways to uncover and resolve some of the wicked problems that cities experience routinely cannot be done in isolation. Cities across the globe tend to have ageing populations, overstressed transport systems, newly-arrived immigrant communities, and other severe sustainability challenges. One role for the civic university is to connect to its peers around the world in search of research-based ideas that might help all sectors to understand and deal with these difficulties.

### 3: Why universities need civic engagement

Universities are under pressure from:

- More demanding students
- More demanding graduate employers
- The need for bigger and more synoptic research ambition in response to major societal challenges
- A shifting research funding landscape towards more directed programmes
- The need to be seen to have public value

All of these pressures direct them towards a greater civic role. A possible new regulatory body for the sector could insist on this as one of their core duties.

Universities of all kinds can benefit from civic engagement. The institutions we discuss in this report are mainly public universities which have an undeniable responsibility to the communities of which they are part. But any university which occupies a large amount of prime city centre property risks being regarded as little more than a passive real estate developer. Civic engagement is the most direct way of dispelling this impression. In the UK, universities have remained largely immune to the UK's recent economic turmoil, especially the effects of austerity, but cannot expect this immunity to be permanent. Effective civic partnerships are one way of anticipating this change.

Different universities take different approaches to this public responsibility. Some think they have accomplished their public mission if they produce educated graduates and novel research. And it is certainly true that universities can benefit their local economies and labour markets by supplying skilled people and supporting business innovation. But a growing number of institutions want to go

beyond this important role by ensuring that their resources are used in ways that match the needs of society at large, globally and locally. This priority is highly consistent with the European Community's embrace of Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) as a principle underlying its Horizon 2020 research programme. RRI incorporates traditional research ethics, and adds a further dimension by asking whether a research programme engages a range of societal actors in a process of co-production of knowledge when addressing an important societal challenge.

Universities have been globalising rapidly in recent years, and the OECD has shown that nearly five million students now study outside their home country. The civic university approach is not antithetical to the globalisation of higher education. Instead, it is a way of ensuring that universities are addressing major global challenges through their research and teaching, many of which arise on a city scale. These include energy and resource use in cities, health and ageing, transport, housing, public safety and many others. Civic engagement means that universities cease thinking of issues such as these in isolation. Instead they become institution wide challenges involving many academic disciplines coming together to address threats and opportunities in a specific location and context. Universities can choose how deeply they engage in such a civic process. At a basic level, they all hold reserves of valuable global and local knowledge, and making it more widely available in a structured form to others is perhaps the simplest approach. At the other extreme, they can become involved in significant city place-shaping.

This new interest in civic engagement is gaining momentum at a time of growing competition between cities and between universities. Civic links are a potential student attractor because of the skills students can gain by work in the community, thereby enhancing their employability. For graduates, too, a strong and vibrant economy to which their university contributes provides greater employment opportunities. For researchers, city connections offer scope for applied research as well as an engaged group of subjects and participants. Universities which work in this way go beyond the spinout model of commercialising research via technology transfer. They move to supporting a co-production model, which promises deeper

findings and simpler routes to innovation, and, where appropriate, commercialisation. A range of mechanisms exists for these forms of engagement, including student placements in business and local government as well as higher-level research cooperation.

However, it is not possible to turn an introverted institution of higher education into an engaged civic university overnight. The best approach is to start with individuals who already have an interest in issues that also concern the surrounding city or region, not to restructure the university from the top down. Once a few successful interactions have been noticed, interest is likely to grow.

And for all its potential advantages, civic engagement is time-intensive and needs to be resourced. A solution has not yet emerged as to how civic engagement can be paid for, but there are certainly ways in which civic engagement can become core business for a university. Increased student attraction is part of the picture. Graduates who have worked in the community or in business are likely to have developed the soft skills favoured by employers. Civic engagement also implies more multidisciplinary teaching. It suggests, for example, that future engineering students will regard it as normal to find out about societal challenges and engage with them.

Civically-engaged research is also likely to produce innovation, whether in devices and processes, or in ways of working, for example in service delivery. Contracts will be needed that recognise the joint ownership of such innovations and which allow universities their fair share of the rewards.

In addition, a UK research funding stream related to non-academic impact should be highly favourable to civic engagement. Many observers have pointed out that despite its apparent attractions as a methodological approach, multidisciplinary research has yet to gain the same acceptance as single-discipline work. It is not regarded as producing top findings published in top journals, and is sometimes seen as damaging to research careers. So any such funding stream should encourage multidisciplinary research, not individual subjects.

A civic engagement approach may offer other ways of validating multidisciplinary. In Newcastle, the National Centre for Ageing Science and Innovation, a £40 million investment by the University and government based on basic and clinical science, will need to extend and deepen links with business and the city to generate innovations that contribute to healthy and active ageing through the life course. We have often been told during the course of our work on the civic university that it is easier for an academic to apply for a research grant than to get involved in messy dealings with a local community group. But many now realise that academic excellence and civic engagement can go hand in hand, especially when addressing a societal challenge such as ageing.

This development also suggests that a new cadre of academics who can work across subject boundaries is beginning to emerge. This is a difficult skill for people whose career incentives are mainly based on success in a single discipline. Contemporary society is suspicious of experts and their claims to knowledge. At the same time, interest groups ranging from NGOs to business want a say in the future of their city. So academics who join in these debates can expect to journey well beyond the scholarly comfort zone. However, they do have some natural advantages in these multi-faceted debates. One is that universities and the people in them enjoy wide trust. In addition, universities can shape public agendas as well as responding to them. An example of national importance is the role of Professor Tom Kirkwood and colleagues at Newcastle in turning ageing into a significant public issue encompassing opportunities as well as threats.

A key question is how the civic approach fits into models of university governance and management. We believe that it will encourage universities to work with a wide range of other organisations in ways that are valued by both sides. The effect is to help universities decide their own future rather than having change forced on them by government or big, dominant funders. It also encourages diversity. No one university or type of university can contain all the resources needed for civic engagement. An institutional emphasis on engagement can be a



further spur to over-arching strategic leadership, and to management that highlights not only what the institution is good at but what it is good for. It can transform the university from a loosely-coupled consortium of individuals and departments, produce closer integration of teaching and research, and turn routine transactions with society into transformational changes. It may generate physical and intellectual assets that are the joint property of the university, the city and other people and organisations.

In summary, the Civic University is not only characterised by what it does, but also how it does things. A focus on the “how” ensures that activities are not just determined by individuals or small groups, but take place within a holistic framework, and in an enabling environment that encourages and promotes active institutional citizenship.

A Civic University can therefore be identified by its:

1. *Sense of purpose* – It strives to ensure that its cumulative impact on society as a whole is greater than the sum of the parts of individual activities;
2. *Active engagement* with the wider world, the nation in which it operates and the local community in which it is located, through dialogue and collaborations with individuals, institutions and groups locally, nationally and globally;
3. *Holistic approach* which sees engagement as an institution-wide activity and not one confined to specific individuals or teams;
4. *Sense of place*. While the university may operate on a national and international scale, it recognises the extent to which its location helps to form its unique identity as an institution;
5. *Willingness to invest* in its objectives to have an impact beyond the academy, including releasing financial resources to support certain projects or activities, or to “unlock” external sources of funding;

6. *Transparency and accountability* to its stakeholders and the wider public with clear benchmarks and performance indicators which help it to express its civic mission in practical ways, not only to measure it but also to encourage others to assess the value of its actions.

7. *Innovative methodologies* used to build and sustain engagement activities locally and with the world at large.

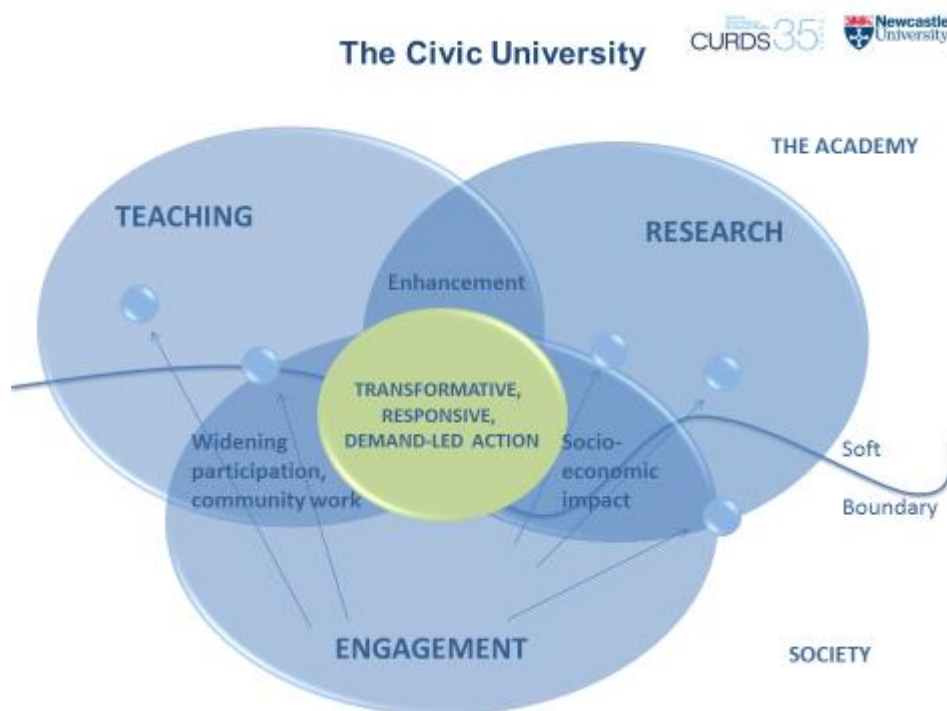
## 4: The way ahead in turbulent times

There is widespread support in many circles, in the UK and around the world, for universities to adopt a civic role. But problems remain in delivering on this agenda. The barriers to culture change in universities can be formidable. Nor is local government, a key partner in the civic enterprise, always a byword for flexibility. Overcoming these problems at a time of financial retrenchment is the task for the next phase of civic university development.

The first issue is whether universities can be incentivised towards greater engagement with cities. At the time of writing in October 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (the UK finance minister) is pushing his Northern Powerhouse vision for English cities. Knowledge-based industries are a key part of this plan. By definition, this concept involves universities engaging with their city economies and requires a new level of planning and futures thinking by universities and local government.

Universities that opt to take the civic engagement route will need to review their academic incentive and organisational structures. At the moment, research and teaching are separate functions with their own measures of academic success. Citations and research impact assessments allow research effectiveness to be quantified, while the National Student Survey and the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework can give an idea of teaching quality. Measures for long-term, complex and unpredictable innovations arising from civic engagement through both teaching and research will be less simple to devise. A key challenge for university leaders will be to connect the research interests of academics in generic issues relevant principally to a single discipline, to the needs and opportunities of their home city, which often require collaboration between several disciplines. One approach is to present the city as a test-bed for developments bigger in scale than a university laboratory, and where new funding might be available for translating research into innovation, broadly defined. At the same time, organisational change will be required to integrate this approach into teaching programmes that engage

students in activities that can enliven their learning and enrich the lives of citizens, the performance of businesses, and the delivery of public services. In this way the civic university integrates research, teaching and engagement, and opens out the institution to the wider world.



This civic university approach could be seen as an extension of procedures that are well established in the medical sciences. Here hospitals, universities, companies and non-profit bodies work together in a way that benefits universities and allows them to fulfil their public obligation to medical teaching and research. It also supports public health, one of local government’s key duties.

UK universities are almost all non-profit bodies whose autonomy is assured by statute. However, they are also dependent upon government, directly or indirectly, for most of their income. This gives government some leverage, as does the fact that many people in higher education have a strong sense of public service. It follows that explicit government support for a civic engagement would be one way of accelerating interest in it.

Unfortunately, current government policies on higher education stress teaching, research and *national* economic benefit as the principal things the government wants from universities. Government does not place these requirements in the context of the role of universities as anchor institutions in towns and cities. Nor does it stress their role in the cultural and social development of cities, or in local service delivery.

Such a civic priority for higher education would require closer links between policy for schools and further education colleges than exist at the present time. Equally, business support in England, which has been centralised into bodies such as Innovate UK, would need to have a heightened level of regional and city awareness.

There is also a European dimension to this agenda. The European Commission supports higher education, research, and regional development. Significant European resources are taken up by UK universities under these various headings. Each of these areas are relevant to the role of the civic university. The link between research and economic competitiveness is well recognised in European policy, and the role of universities in territorial development is acknowledged at the European level within regional policy. The civic university could become a theme uniting education, research, and city and regional development across Europe.

Notwithstanding this European influence, the Higher Education Funding Council for England has to date been the organisation best-placed to encourage civic engagement if only indirectly, through the Research Evaluation Framework's emphasis on impact scheme, and through its Higher Education Innovation Fund. Whilst these do not have a specific cities focus, Hefce's Catalyst Fund called for proposals that would help anchor universities in their cities.

All of this could change in the light of possible shifts in the funding of research, which may give greater responsibilities to the research councils or to a new single council. The picture might also be altered by the further encouragement of a higher education market place for teaching, following the introduction of student fees and

the possible removal of the cap on the number of students universities scoring well in the planned Teaching Excellence Framework can recruit. The Higher Education Green paper recognises the possibility of divergence of institutional performance in this more competitive market place. The legislation for these reforms may include provisions relating to what higher education and research are provided where, within the remit of a higher education regulatory body that might replace the current funding council. Such a regulator might be in a position to take account of the civic role of universities, and priorities such as the Northern Powerhouse, using metrics agreed between universities and their civic partners. In the final section of this report, we illustrate one aspect of such a partnership in operation in Newcastle.

## 5: The Newcastle experience

Newcastle's pioneering work in civic engagement has involved the city council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, a wide range of local businesses, public and voluntary organisations, and both Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. An example of their alignment of interests is the Newcastle City Futures events series and exhibition held in the city centre – not on campus – in May and June 2014 (see box). This activity formed part of the Government Office for Science's Newcastle City Futures 2065 Foresight project.

One of the aims of this project was to establish ways in which universities can participate in helping citizens and businesses in cities and regions to think about change and imagine their future. It deliberately went beyond traditional models of consultation to generate city-wide forms of community engagement. This extended exercise gathered a wide range of visual data on Newcastle – for example on how it has developed and why it has the shape and form it has today - much of which had never been used in a coordinated and accessible way before. To this it added ideas about where the city may be going, to encourage citizens and businesses to debate the city's possible future. The information fed into the City Futures report led to the development of three long-term scenarios. Each imagined future is outlined in depth through the contributions of a plethora of academic and non-academic stakeholders.

The connections made in the course of this project allowed its findings to be distributed in new ways to a range of publics, using the visual resources of the exhibition as an initial entry point and as a common language for a range of diverse interests. The report then summarised possible directions for the future. Since its publication, the university has commenced working with organisations from all walks of life to think through possible physical development projects as

demonstrator initiatives. These organisations include Newcastle and Gateshead Councils, Age Friendly City, the business networks Developing Consensus and Chamber of Commerce, and the Newcastle Community and Voluntary Service. Newcastle City Council has led the creation of the 'City Futures Development Group,' with senior representatives of businesses, government, public bodies, community groups and the two universities who aim to identify long term project ideas, match existing research to policy and development, and identify the research needs of city partners.

While academics are often major contributors to Foresight projects, it would be wrong to think that the University's civic engagement is mainly at an abstract level. The guiding principle is to connect top-quality academic input to the city's real needs. For example, the civic role is central to the mission of the University's Institute for Social Renewal, whose remit includes a broad civic mission. It harnesses a vast range of projects to address the tensions and pressures of city life such as poor housing, business closures, and dependency on under-resourced service provision.

The Institute for Social Renewal, the Institute of Sustainability and the Institute of Ageing, are three cross-disciplinary fora in the university that deliver civic engagement. As we saw in section 3, the ageing initiative combines the efforts of business, the health sector, the university and the city to tackle a priority concern for the region.

However, the North East presents opportunities as well as problems, and has a long history as an innovative part of the UK. It was the pioneer of electric lighting and the electric railway, and has a long history of business links to Japan. The region is now a major centre for the production of the Leaf, Nissan's electric car. With the help of university engineers, the city is becoming a test bed for the use and recharging of electric vehicles. This could provide competitive advantage for the city as a green transport hub. For the university, involvement in this programme could mean a larger-scale experiment in engineering, transport systems and human behaviour than it could build on its own. This type of advantage goes some way



towards solving the perceived problem that civic engagement takes time and costs money. For a start, the civic university is not only about engagement; it provides a clear benefit to the university that would enhance its ability to attract researchers and research funds. The civic university context also allows research questions to be raised and trialled in new ways. For example, how does the presence of a new generation of silent vehicles interact with the commitment to make Newcastle an age-friendly city? We regard issues such as this as being at the heart of responsible research.

A further example is the University's work on Digital Civics, which involves local councils in the North East, local businesses, the non-profit sector, and major corporations. This programme, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council through a PhD training programme and a new Centre for Digital Economies, makes use of links to local government and local people to develop ethical and appropriate platforms for the design of digital public services. Central and local government are keen to deliver more services digitally, and the pressure to do so will grow as the impacts of austerity continue. While this idea sounds attractive in an era of reduced local government resources, a full range of government, academic and civil society organisations are needed to deliver it, and are involved in its design from the outset. The university has a key role here as a participant and as a trusted intermediary whose involvement guarantees the objectivity and impartiality of the overall process. The Digital Civics approach will help the social sciences to play a full role in developing appropriate services for groups such as those with Special Educational Needs or with rare diseases, and to support community activity as well as individual service users.

Social scientists are also closely involved in the University's work on "smart cities." This concept has been developed mainly by technology firms who may not have fully appreciated the users and their needs. The aim is to allow cities of the future to use high technology, especially big data, for purposes such as crime reduction and the management of energy and water use. An engaged civic

university could extend the power of this concept by adding the wisdom of the social, economic and behavioural sciences to the mix, while ensuring that the smart cities agenda is socially inclusive.

These examples show that involving individuals from a wide range of backgrounds can unlock far-reaching creative thought in a purposeful way.

But it is important to stress that the civic university can achieve little without an appropriate organisational context and support. The City Futures Development Group Newcastle has been set up in part to provide this framework. Ageing, digital innovation, young people, and infrastructure development, topics of direct relevance to the needs of the city and where the assets of the city have been identified, are among its initial priorities. It also has a remit to inform and educate the Newcastle public about futures activity, centred on what people want to see in their own city.

We believe that there are several tests for the value of civic engagement by universities. One is whether it provides genuine academic advantage for the university in its mission to produce creative research and educate a diverse student body. Experience in Newcastle suggests that it does. But a bigger test is whether such engagement can change the face of the city, the economic activity that goes on there and the lives of the people who live there. These examples show that it can. We are confident that even greater benefits can be won by a yet deeper pattern of engagement.

The next stage of development for the civic model will build beyond existing links to bodies such as local government, business or the NHS, connecting to community organisations and individuals directly. This will be a new and demanding stage of the civic mission.

The civic role of Newcastle University complements and depends upon its status as a World-Class University carrying out research and teaching of global importance. These roles are of equal importance to the university and we expect that over time, they will become indistinguishable.



*Images from Newcastle City Futures exhibition. Photo credit: Zander photography*

## **The Newcastle City Futures Exhibition**

- The exhibition was organised by the University but held in public space in the city, making it a prime example of the civic university in action.
- It looked at how visions of the future for Newcastle and Gateshead have changed since 1945, and at many plans for Newcastle that had been created and never implemented. Over 2500 people came to see it and give their views about how the city had developed and where it could head in future. Rather than being a University activity that members of the public could attend, it was designed to allow 24 partner organisations across all sectors to stage their own free event and generate their own ideas (over 100 of them) about the future of the city. Local businesses got involved alongside non-profit bodies. One favourite activity asked visitors to answer the question “What would you protect?” by pinning a sign to a big aerial photograph of the city.
- The exhibition made use of a range of imagery from the city’s past and present. The images stress the point that Newcastle is an innovative place which has always thought about the future, especially with ambitious schemes, partly completed, for a complete re-envisioning of the town in the 1960s.
- The exhibition ran for 19 days. It was designed to be family-friendly and accessible, and generated ideas ranging from the further pedestrianisation and development of cycle lanes in the city centre to the provision of more affordable housing there, and a new approach to refugees arriving in Newcastle.
- This initiative succeeded in its main aim, which was to demonstrate a new approach to public engagement in city futures. The number of people who attended, and the involvement they generated, far exceeded the levels of engagement associated with traditional planning methods. Their insights were long-term and strategic, demonstrating the value of tapping public imagination in futures work.

## Coda

These two paragraphs from Newcastle City Futures 2065 sum up the issues that have prompted this brief report.

Significant challenges lie ahead for councils, service providers, universities and citizen in facing the future. In particular, efforts must be harnessed to:

- Provide a voice for the public, private, community and voluntary sectors;
- Mobilise all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the city region, despite a competitive environment within higher and further education;
- Avoid duplication of forums where university and city partners are in dialogue;
- Collectively respond to national and European funding calls for research and innovation projects;
- ‘Learn by doing,’ by working on collaborative projects with midterm measurable outcomes;
- Overcome the disjuncture between the technological focus of many recent funding programmes and much HEI research, and the local requirement for service and social innovations that could fundamentally shape how the future city functions;
- Shape the priorities of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). It controls substantial European and national uncommitted funding and has its own ‘smart specialisation’ futures priorities that are often poorly linked to societal challenges;
- Work across local authority boundaries;

- Actively mine the intellectual resources within HEIs to contribute to city futures (not simply an audit of current work);
- Connect top-down and bottom-up processes within HEIs and local authorities. Managers can fail to see the linkages and opportunity costs of responding proactively to city challenges and taking opportunities to engage with the future of the city;
- Engage with the process of setting national and international agendas around city futures and the potential role of higher education; and
- Measure the impact of the collaborative endeavour and benchmark the local against best practice elsewhere

None of these challenges is insurmountable. As this report has demonstrated, through a pilot study of emerging relationships and collaborative commitments within Newcastle, building capacity for collaboration in city futures is possible, achievable and practical politically and institutionally. We conclude by setting out the key issues for cities and their universities to address if they wish to consider city futures as a broader agenda:

- Use a city futures perspective to get around the 'here and now' challenges of collaboration;
- Appoint a dedicated city futures partnership manager jointly between the university and the local authority and with access to senior officers in both organisations;
- Create a value-added knowledge base by linking primary research in HEIs with policy and practice research produced by the public and private sector;
- Launch a professional development programme for key individuals expected by institutional leaders to play a boundary-spanning role between higher

education and the city region, covering the 'know what' and 'know how' of futures work;

- Develop an action learning programme for those individuals around selected mid-term projects; and
- Link up with other cities and universities nationally and internationally to create a community of practice around city futures.

City-wide forms of public engagement in our metropolitan areas currently remain the exception rather than the rule. The time has come for universities within cities to engage actively with local government. The development of customised urban intelligence platforms to inform policy development, and the design of new participatory techniques – inclusive of citizens and businesses – to allow cities to think long-term and creatively should be considered an integral part of devolution and civic dialogue.

**The key points from this report are summarised in a video interview with Emeritus Professor John Goddard and Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones from September 2015. This video is available on the Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal website:**

 <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/socialrenewal/research/civicuniversity>

**Full staff profiles are available from:**

 <http://www.ncl.ac.uk>