
Universities: delivery partners for industrial strategy

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University Alliance Position Paper

 **University
Alliance**

Making the difference

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Front page image: A student working with Sheffield Hallam University's wind tunnel simulator.

Introduction: universities and place

'Place-based' policy is the new norm in Whitehall. From the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine to the emerging industrial strategy, the government is set on improving growth and productivity in the regions to help rebalance the UK economy.

For universities, the concept of place has particular meaning. Most institutions are deeply rooted in their surrounding region with missions that support local people and communities. In many cases, universities are instrumental in putting regions on the map. They not only attract students and staff from elsewhere but also businesses which choose to invest in places where the skills, knowledge and facilities of a university are readily available.

The benefits that universities bring to regional economies are significant. Coventry University and the University of Warwick, for example, are investing £1 billion in local infrastructure, sustaining the region's construction industry and expertise in research and development. Teesside University in the North East supports more than 2,500 jobs and makes an annual GVA contribution of £124 million to Middlesbrough and the Tees Valley.

The value of universities can also be understood in cultural terms. Their involvement in galleries, museums, theatres and arts venues attracts a global audience to Britain's towns and cities.

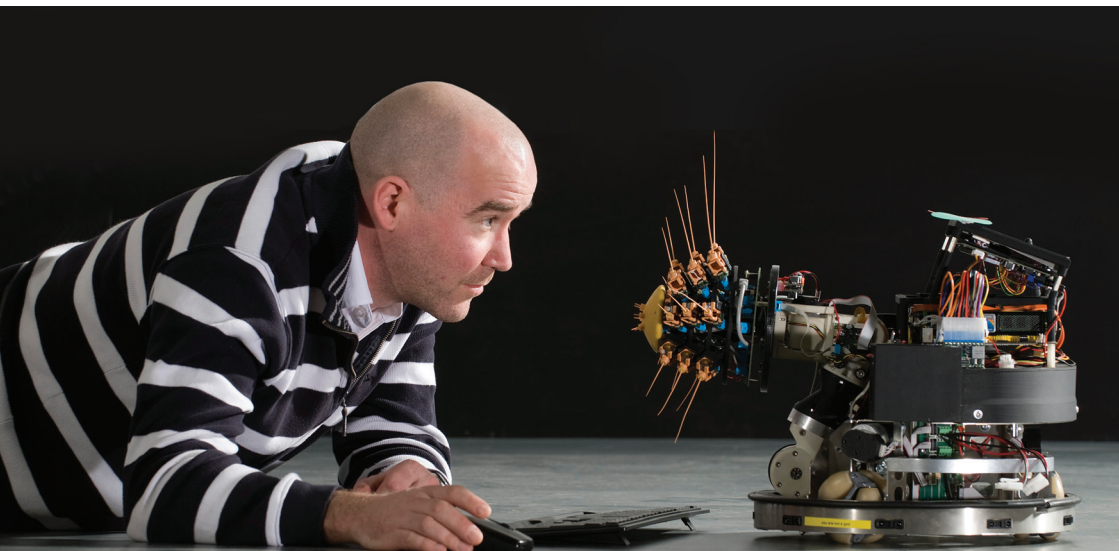
*University Alliance has two core strengths in relation to industrial strategy. Working closely with business, we produce **high-level skills** and we support **high-value innovation**. These are both imperative for securing **high-performance industry**.*

The role of universities in industrial strategy

Universities are intrinsic to industrial strategy and to economic performance more generally. If Britain is to prosper in the decades ahead, it is essential that we maintain a strong supply of graduates with skills demanded by industry and the resilience to adapt to a fast-changing labour market.

We also need university research and innovation to keep pace with Europe, North America, Australia and increasingly China and the other BRIC nations in the global knowledge economy. Britain's universities have unparalleled connections to growth markets in other parts of the globe and do much to connect with home-based industries as well.

Anchored in their cities and regions, the 19 institutions in University Alliance maintain thousands of industrial partnerships between them and work particularly closely with SMEs. They are one of the first places the government should look in coordinating a place-sensitive approach to industrial strategy.



Bristol Robotics Laboratory, a collaborative partnership between the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol, is the most comprehensive academic centre for multidisciplinary robotics research in the UK.

First, university networks span different economic and administrative boundaries...

The anchor role of universities in national and regional ecosystems puts them in a unique position to join the dots.

In the East Midlands, the University of Lincoln works with the food and drink industry in a cluster that stretches across the East of England, from Suffolk up to Hull. The automotive industry, on the other hand, has an East to West Midlands geography – from an aerospace focus at Rolls Royce in Derby, to Coventry University and Jaguar Land Rover’s car expertise, to Siemens and the University of Lincoln’s turbine technology in the east.

Each of these industries has supply chains spanning the entire Midlands and East Anglia region which the universities are able to connect. This networked leadership role can further be seen in the involvement of universities with regional administrations.

For example:

- **University of Brighton** is working with Brighton and Hove City Council and others on one of the national ‘Leading Places’ pilots, trialling innovative ways to promote healthier, more independent ageing. The programme draws on the institution’s expertise in pharmacy, allied health, digital design and architecture.
- **University of the West of England (UWE Bristol)** has collaborated with Bristol City Council, NHS Trusts and the University of Bristol to integrate the health and care community of the South West.

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Universities are also represented on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and city region structures and have research and innovation strengths that are aligned to local sector strengths.

- **The Open University** is on the board of the South East Midlands LEP with research and knowledge exchange alignments in information and digital technology and transport systems.
- **University of Lincoln** is on the board of the Greater Lincolnshire LEP with alignments in applied agricultural science and technology, manufacturing and engineering, low carbon economy and health and care.



BBC Breakfast presenter and Teesside University honorary graduate Steph McGovern delivering a talk at a business breakfast event at The Forge.

Second, universities are closely linked to high-value industry in the regions...

The skills, knowledge and facilities that universities provide are crucial to the day-to-day operations and growth of Britain's major employers. University-industry partnerships are helping to meet the long-term strategic needs of regions including skills shortages. Overall, University Alliance has relationships with more than 20,000 businesses.

- **Coventry University** | Recognising that the West Midlands manufacturing sector suffered from a skills deficit, Coventry University and Unipart Group jointly invested in a new Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering and 'faculty on the factory floor'.
- **University of Greenwich** | Ford UK and Greenwich offer degree apprenticeships in mechanical and electrical engineering and IT to address skills gaps identified by the car manufacturer.
- **University of Lincoln** | Lincoln's Engineering School was opened in response to an engineering skills shortage and has led Siemens and its supply chains to stay put in the Lincolnshire region. Having worked closely with the university for many years, Siemens has recently awarded Lincoln global principal partner status for research and development.
- **University of Salford** | A broadcast engineering degree was developed with the BBC in response to a shortage of multi-skilled broadcast engineers during the London 2012 Olympics.
- **University of South Wales** | GE Aviation, which maintains and repairs commercial aircraft engines at a site near Cardiff, runs a talent scheme with USW to ensure a long pipeline of skills.

The Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) is a collaboration between Coventry University and Unipart Group.



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Third, universities are the hub and spoke in SME growth and innovation...

Start-ups and spin-outs may grab the headlines but they represent only a fraction of the entrepreneurial activity supported on university campuses. In addition to maintaining industry clusters where entrepreneurs and investors meet, universities provide knowledge and talent for SMEs while helping innovators navigate complex funding opportunities through a 'one-stop-shop' model.

For businesses with growth potential, a local university will often be the best place for advice, guidance and support.

- **Liverpool John Moores University** | A new business support programme LCR4.0 will connect the region's manufacturers and help them harness digital technologies.
- **Nottingham Trent University** | The Hive is a purpose-built Centre for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise which helps turn innovative ideas into reality.
- **Plymouth University** | The Growth, Acceleration and Investment Network (GAIN), founded by Plymouth University, Plymouth City Council and Tamar Science Park, accelerates business growth and investment in the South West and provides a contact point for firms through a B2B portal.
- **Sheffield Hallam University** | 'Fix It Friday' drop-in sessions offer firms free targeted help from academic staff and business experts.
- **Teesside University** | Based at Darlington, the Forge offers themed networking events from cyber communication to leading and working in international markets.
- **University of Huddersfield** | The 3M Buckley Innovation Centre caters for all business needs, from start-ups and SMEs to large corporates.

But universities also need help with this activity...

In particular, there need to be long-term assurances on funding. A reduction in government support for innovation or knowledge exchange would result in universities scaling-back their industry-facing activities.

The absence of EU Structural and Investment Funding, for example, would limit universities' capacity to help businesses grow and access the skills they need. After Britain leaves the EU – and likely loses its entitlement to existing programmes – a British Growth Fund should be launched with a tailored focus on UK needs.

Finally, the emerging industrial strategy should make the most of the connections of universities and formally include them in policymaking at every level. The government must view universities as a delivery partner in waiting.

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Next steps...

University Alliance will be engaging with the government as it consults on industrial strategy in 2017.

For information or any queries, please contact Tom Frostick (tom@unialliance.ac.uk).

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We are universities with a common mission to make the difference to our cities and regions. We use our experience of providing high quality teaching and research with real world impact to shape higher education and research policy for the benefit of our students and business and civic partners. We innovate together, learn from each other and support every member to transform lives and deliver growth.

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