

SENATE

Title of paper: University Engagement and Place Committee Minutes

Main purpose of the paper: For information

Presenter(s): Professor Jane Robinson

Date of paper: 12 November 2025

Purpose of the paper

To report on the 8 September meeting of UEPC

Relation to strategy and values

Engagement and Place strategy

Recommendations:

Senate are asked to note the contents of the minutes.

Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome):

UNIVERSITY ENGAGEMENT & PLACE COMMITTEE

8 September 2025

Present (Committee):

Jane Robinson (Chair), Estelle Blanks, Helen Challis, Jack Hunter (representing Estates), Rene Koglbauer, Jen Middleton, Chris O'Malley, Rachel Pain, Paul Tyack, Luisa Wakeling, Carys Watts and Siân Breen (Secretary).

Apologies:

Suzanne Nestor-Robson and Erin Peart.

MINUTES

1. MINUTES

Minutes from the meeting held on 21 July were approved as an accurate record.

Updates were provided on:

- 1.1 KPIs – update to be provided at November meeting.
- 1.2 CNUA – joint Executive Group taking place on 16 October to discuss next phase of work.
- 1.3 Terms of Reference – updated version to be shared at November meeting, currently considering how best to show links to Innovation and Sustainability committees.

2. CHAIR'S UPDATE

Received an update from the Chair of the committee:

2.1 Universities UUK Annual Conference – took place in Exeter 3/4 September. JR spoke on a panel exploring how universities can play a more prominent role in supporting economic growth. Other speakers included Peter Kyle MP (Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology), Professor Sir Ian Chapman (CEO, UKRI) and Phil Smith (Chair, Skills England). Addresses were delivered by Lord Vallance (Minister for State for Science, Research and Innovation) and Baroness Smith (Minister for Skills). Engagement and Place was a major theme throughout the conference.

A number of changes in the recent cabinet reshuffle and engagement across departments remains important. The Labour Party Conference takes place at the end of the month, with colleagues involved in activities.

2.2 UNEE and NECA - interim Local Growth Plan sees political portfolios aligned around the Mayor's Missions:

- Home of Real Opportunity
 - A North East we are Proud to Call Home
 - Home to a Growing and Vibrant Economy
 - Home to the Green Energy Revolution
 - A Welcoming Home to Global Trade
- Plus:
- Finance and Investment
 - Transport

There will be a political lead and advisory lead for each group and UNEE has agreed to send one university representative to each (besides Transport and A North East we are Proud to Call Home, where UNEE will feed in where necessary).

2.3 Clean Energy UK Conference taking place in Newcastle on 4 November.

2.4 Funding allocations from UKRI for 2025/6 confirmed - HEIF £5.3 million, PSF £1 million and will be managed through KEPOC.

2.4 2034 – the University will celebrate our 200th year. We are developing an NU34 programme, which will focus on the Newcastle model for 4GU and business improvement – ensuring sustainability.

2.5 Team Newcastle, Great North Run – 35 colleagues ran to raise money for widening access to higher education for students in the North East. Thanks noted to Paul Tyack's team for this work which also promotes the role of the University in the region.

2.6 Estates Optimisation – project reached mid-point. Final report for EB and Council expected in January. Initial recommendations and proposals shared with EB and tested with stakeholders. Opportunity for committee to feed in to be confirmed, recognising the role of Estates in partner relationships.

3. UKRI AND PLACE

Received an update from Estelle Blanks (Director of Business Development and Enterprise) on funding streams.

Noted:

1. Place is a central theme of Industrial Strategy, Local Growth Plan and HEIF Reform.
2. The Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF) is a major new component of the UK Government's innovation and R&D strategy, designed to decentralise innovation funding and empower regional economic growth through place-based partnerships. £30million over five years is earmarked to 10 regions. Triple helix delivery model, already used by UKRI. Start date of April 2026 means that projects need to be in the pipeline already and discussions are taking place internally to consider prioritisation.
3. HEIF Reform – partial information on changes received at the end of July. Two-phase approach covering two academic years. Reporting on how HEIF is spent will change, better enabling us to demonstrate how our activities impact on social and economic development. Will need to consider what activities are carried out with HEIF funding.
Phase One – outcomes-focused accountability. Metrics on income outputs already captured so the university should be well positioned to respond to the change. However, may need greater focus on IP outputs and improved measures for non-income related results.
Phase Two – metrics currently being worked on by University of Cambridge, considering how to enhance regional economic growth through knowledge exchange. Delivery against other policy drivers will also be considered.
Task and finish group is currently considering how we can be ready for the reform. Working towards a process model will give clearer accountability, making reporting easier and in turn feed in to Phase Two. Expect to discuss at KEPOC in October.
4. HEIF Reform focuses on benefits to economy and society. If Knowledge Exchange is undertaken in the ways defined by HEIF, both drivers should be realized. Guidance indicates that both have equal weighting and this is supported by the HEIF programme theory diagram. However, many performance indicators appear to be skewed towards economy – jobs and GDP for example, but the reality of the work involved is much broader. In defining 4GU and Place – inclusive growth can't be achieved without thinking in a wider sense. Potential tension between UK industrial strategy and local growth plan could see a shift to hard economic outputs but we need to ensure our engagement activities help us secure HEIF.
5. Incorporation of 'People' and skills as a key activity in HEIF reform. This will require a change in narrative to achieve, through curriculum and education strategy a broader category of

learners can be reached. Measuring outputs of education strategy will need to improve, exploring the various strands of the skills piece.

6. Further information to be released in next few weeks and should help understand how the focus on the UK economy may tie into internalisation.

4. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Received a presentation from Jen Middleton (Director of Communications) on the UUK Strategy and work commissioned by WA Comms.

Noted:

1. UUK undertaken research with Stonehaven to understand the reputation of Higher Education in the UK. Considered to be a lot of negative opinion, especially from parts of the media, which makes it harder to make the case to government for additional funding. However, impact on number of student applications not currently impacted.
2. UUK looked at:
 1. Stakeholder Insights
 2. Qualitative research – focus groups with Labour swing voters and Reform voters.
 3. Quantitative research.Results will be used to inform their corporate strategy.
3. Quantitative results demonstrate the public believe the UK is in decline and have a lack of confidence in the Public Sector which extends to Higher Education. 75% of respondents think a university degree is not needed to achieve a good salary. Universities are considered to not be held accountable and are producing graduates for jobs that don't exist. These sentiments were echoed by senior stakeholders, including a Conservative Peer and Tech Venture Capital.
4. Those that do value universities don't support increased funding, seeing spending on defence as more important.
5. An Interactive map will be part of a toolkit produced by UUK which will be helpful to reframe messaging. The toolkit, expected to be available from October, will include recommendations on how to communicate to different audiences based on their opinions, divided into: deeply sceptical, stalled sceptics, change agents, champions.
6. UUK see perceptions of Higher Education as a long-term focus – required to bring more stability back into the sector.
7. Last research carried out at Newcastle University was 2019. A great deal has changed in the intervening 6 years and knowing how our University is thought of is crucial to effectively plan for the future. Perceptions work was undertaken over the summer with parliamentarians, regional leaders, business and sector leaders, prospective donors. WA Comms carried out surveys with 30 stakeholders and interim findings were shared last week ahead of the final report on 26 September.
8. Interim findings were very high level and based on a small number of interviews. Overall, they show mixed views on visibility but good brand recognition, strong civic role and thought of as a high level provider. Lack of clarity on what differentiates Newcastle University from others - what exactly we stand for and how are we supporting the current government agenda. The final report will be used to inform the external comms strategy, designed to bolster our reputation.

5. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Received an update from Estelle Blanks (Director of Business Development and Enterprise) on BDI operations.

Noted:

1. Internal restructure started in earnest in August.
2. Strategic priorities are impacted by UNEE – as our partners they affect what we do.
3. Objective 1 – A supportive environment for B&I. Enterprise Academy to be redesigned - aligning work on engagement training with business innovation training. New Company Creation Manager will join the team at the beginning of October.
4. Enterprise Hub - SCENE project represents a sizeable investment (£9m) on commercialisation.
5. Innovative models – working with FMS to test consultancy spinout models. Recognise these are STEM focused so discussion taking place with HaSS to extend the remit.
6. Objective 2 – Externally focussed and demand led approach – working with external consultants on BDE renaming, opinions sought from internal stakeholders.
7. Communicating to staff taking place through workshops – tested with SAGE during the summer and intend to roll this out to the other faculties. To deliver NU34 and 4GU faculty reps will be crucial to effective organisation.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Members of the committee to note the times of UEPC for academic year 2025-26:

- Thursday 6 November 2025 – 10.00-11.30
- Thursday 15 January 2026 – 10.00-11.30
- Wednesday 4 March 2026 – 10.00-11.30
- Wednesday 13 May 2026 – 09.00-12.00
- Thursday 9 July 2026 – 10.00-11.30