

Breaking Down Barriers Report by the Purpose Coalition





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1: Forewords

1.1 Rt Hon Justine Greening,
Chair of the Purpose Coalition
and Former Secretary of State
for Education



It is still too often the case that where you are from affects how well you do in life. Communities that are persistently left behind experience lower participation rates in higher education, high unemployment, significant health inequalities and a lack of inward investment – a cycle of disadvantage.

Recent research from the IFS has shown that it is harder now for a person born into those communities to move up the social ladder than at any point over the last 50 years. It also highlighted the strong regional disparities that exist in people’s ability to move up income and wealth brackets, including in the North East. That entrenchment of poor social mobility is a problem that needs to be fixed if the economy is to properly recover and if we are to make full use of the talent that undoubtedly exists in these communities.

Purpose-led organisations are leading the way in breaking down barriers, and universities are at the forefront of these efforts. As anchor institutions, they can deliver results on a number of fronts. Their extensive outreach work with schools raises standards but also aspirations, giving young people a taste of what is possible with a university degree. Cutting edge research informs the teaching they provide for their students and also links them up to employers so they can access rewarding and well-paid jobs and supply businesses with the green, high tech skills they need. That pipeline of talent then attracts other businesses into the area. The translation of their research capabilities into commercial products and services are having a significant social and economic impact on the communities they serve.

Durham University, with its strong local identity and tradition of academic scholarship, is synonymous with the City. As this report shows, there are many practical examples of how it is working to widen access and participation in higher education so that the chance to go to university, and to benefit from the close links it has with local businesses, is open to anyone who has the talent and potential, regardless of background. Most notably, it is using its research capacity to transform the region into an attractive proposition for entrepreneurs and technology companies who are looking for a location for innovative businesses.

Durham University has the potential to be a key player in driving further change through its contribution to the cultural and social vibrancy of the North East and to local, regional and national economic growth. Its collaborative approach is critical to the region with the introduction of new mayoral combined authority in May 2024 – with local partners working together to achieve better outcomes for their communities.

1.2 Nick Forbes CBE,

Chair of the Breaking Down Barriers Commission and Former Member of Keir Starmer's Shadow Cabinet



Universities are uniquely positioned to drive place-based change. In May this year, the creation of a mayoral North East Combined Authority (North East CA) brought together seven local authorities for the first time, devolving powers over transport, skills, strategic planning and regeneration and economic development. It will give higher education institutions in the area the opportunity to shape a changing landscape and contribute to a regional partnership that can improve the lives of people and communities.

As someone who grew up in County Durham, I know first-hand the impact that Durham University has on the region and, importantly, the potential for it to go even further and address some of the inequalities that still exist.

As this report shows, Durham University is already shifting the dial on place-based change, with research showing that it generated £1.9bn Gross Value Added (GVA) for the UK in 2020/21 and supported over 17,000 jobs. Through the

goods and services it buys, it extends that impact significantly. The strategic partnerships it maintains – with other universities in the region as well as organisations including local authorities and businesses – help it to identify and develop opportunity through a range of successful projects.

Durham University has developed relationships and partnerships with local, regional, national and international businesses which are mutually beneficial. Its links with business, and the mutual sharing of expertise and resources, are further extended by the fostering of entrepreneurship amongst its students as well as the community.

The Northern Accelerator initiative – another collaboration between universities in the North East – provides essential support and investment opportunities for them, creating real-world impact from world-leading research and commercialising innovation. Its partnership with Durham County Council is yet another example of its commitment to community, driving economic and social growth.

This report showcases the range of Durham University's achievements, mapped against the Purpose Goals which set out the barriers that block social mobility. By advancing education, fostering skills, enhancing research and preserving culture and heritage, it is playing its part in tackling regional inequality and ensuring that opportunity is available to everyone with the talent and potential to succeed. Alongside that commitment to equality of opportunity, its cross-sector collaborations will enable it to play a full and constructive role as a prominent stakeholder in the new mayoral partnership. As a proud North Easterner myself, I am looking forward to the fairer and more prosperous future that it can deliver for the region.

1.3 Professor Karen O'Brien,

Vice-Chancellor and Warden of Durham University



As we approach our 200th anniversary in 2032, Durham University has a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to making a positive impact in our region, country and beyond.

We were founded with the explicit aim that we would enrich lives and change the world through the “advancement of learning”. Drawing inspiration from our founding mission, this report shows how we are endeavouring to align our education and research to the goals of social uplift and fair prosperity.

Within our University, we foster an inclusive and diverse community where every student can excel. In recent years, we have made significant progress in this area, and now one in four of our new UK undergraduates come to us through a widening access scheme.

In the years ahead we will go further still: increasing the proportion of our intake from lower socio-economic backgrounds and from Black and Asian heritage backgrounds; and, through targeted outreach, enhanced support systems,

and innovative teaching strategies, ensuring outstanding access, success and progression for all students.

Our region, North East England, has persistently low higher education participation rates. We want to play our part in changing that: through our faculties, departments and colleges, and through our museums and libraries, as well as our extensive work with schools and FE colleges.

We make our educational expertise a benefit to an increasingly broad range of learners. Our research, in areas such as violence against women, online harms, neurodivergence and sport, or urban futures in the context of climate change, brings about beneficial changes in law, practice and policy.

We see our responsibilities as extending beyond ourselves and our campus. Our purpose extends to enriching lives and changing the world beyond the relatively small number of people who will join us as students. This includes offering employment opportunities through apprenticeships. Working with others locally, regionally and nationally, we can be a catalyst for a multi-agency, collective social effort to improve life chances and promote prosperity in our region and nation.

Universities are crucial, and particularly so in our region. Our economy needs universities to be leading innovation and change, and the North East’s universities are united in their resolve to do so. The creation of a North East Combined Authority and election of a first North East mayor provides a unique opportunity to make a step change.

We welcome this report and look forward to continuing to work with partners including The Purpose Coalition to break down barriers and to hold ourselves to account as an institution with a steadfast sense of social purpose.



2. Breaking Down Britain's Barriers

The Purpose Coalition measures organisations against a set of sector-relevant social impact criteria. The Purpose Goals outline 14 interconnected impact barriers to opportunity. By drawing on expertise provided by academia and business, the goals are designed to specifically address some of the unique challenges facing the UK.

The Coalition's cross-party work brings together the UK's most innovative leaders, Parliamentarians and organisations to improve, share best practice, and develop solutions for improving the role that organisations can play for their customers, colleagues and communities by breaking down barriers to opportunity.

The Purpose Coalition is chaired by Rt Hon Justine Greening, the UK's former Secretary of State for Education, Transport and International Development; and led by Nick Forbes CBE, who recently served in Sir Keir Starmer's Shadow Cabinet, who leads the Purpose Coalition's work with the Labour Party; Rt Hon Anne Milton, former Minister for Apprenticeships and a Minister in the Department for Health and Social Care; and Lord Walney, former No 10 Advisor to Gordon Brown and Labour Member of Parliament for Barrow and Furness.

The Goals were designed following Justine Greening's experience - as Secretary of State for International Development - leading the UK's delegation to the convention of the United Nations (UN) that established the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Purpose Goals apply the SDGs in a UK context.

The SDGs as interlinked goals emphasised the interdependent environmental, social, and economic aspects of development and centralised the role of sustainability. At the time, Justine recognised how transformative a common set of accessible but ambitious goals could be in galvanising action to effect change.

After leaving Government in 2019, Justine established the Purpose Coalition and Social Mobility Pledge with the intention of galvanising UK economic and social actors to improve social mobility in the UK.

The Purpose Goals focus on key life stages and highlight the main issues that need to be resolved to break down barriers to opportunity in the UK. The Goals are intended to guide ambition, provoke action, and measure progress.

3. Introduction to Durham University and its purpose

3.1. Background to Durham University

Durham University is a global leader in higher education provision, rooted in history and dedicated to enriching lives through the advancement of learning. Since its founding in 1832, it has established itself as a key anchor institution across County Durham and the wider North East region.

Central to its standing is the commitment the University has retained to its founding principles - nurturing a sense of community and inspiring individuals to achieve their fullest potential.

Today, Durham University continues to uphold its esteemed reputation as one of the world's leading higher education institutions, recognised for its forward-thinking approach to addressing pressing environmental, social, and governance challenges through world-class research and engagement.

Ranked joint 89th in the QS World University Rankings 2025 and 32nd in Europe, it offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses across a wide array of disciplines.

At the heart of Durham University's success is its diverse and vibrant community. With over 4,300 staff members, representing more than 120 countries, and a student population of 21,500, the University fosters an environment of inclusion and collaboration critical to world-class higher education.

Durham University also offers a unique collegiate model where each college has a dedicated student support team and welfare volunteers,



and the mix of subjects allows students to socialise with those different perspectives and from different backgrounds. The colleges also support around 1,000 student-led clubs and societies, providing the bedrock of Durham's enrichment experience.

Central to its mission is the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, and wider student experience. Guided by a recently refreshed statement of institutional purpose, the University aims to inspire and support its staff and students in creating and translating knowledge for the betterment of society. Through a commitment to inclusion, civic responsibility, sustainability, social justice, and societal wellbeing, Durham University aspires to leave a lasting positive impact on present and future generations.

Looking ahead, the University has ambitious plans for the future, including producing ever more impactful and transformative research, delivering a step change in widening access, and further enhancing the wider student experience. As it continues to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of society, Durham University remains dedicated to its core values of excellence, integrity, and service.

3.2. Durham University's purpose

Durham University's Strategy for 2017-2027 was formally adopted in 2017. However, due to considerable changes to the external environment since then, a refresh was undertaken during 2022/23.

Brexit, COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, inflation and environmental challenges all meant that the University was operating in a very different space than it was in 2017.

The refreshed Strategy is framed by a new statement of institutional purpose and values.

This refreshed purpose is:

We enrich lives and change the world through the advancement of learning. We achieve this by:

- Inspiring and supporting staff and students to create and translate knowledge and enhance understanding, locally and globally.
- Promoting inclusivity, civic responsibility, sustainability, social well-being and prosperity for the benefit of present and future generations.



The University also has a number of core lived values that set out the principles by which it will act.

Inclusivity

Together we celebrate difference, value one another, and are each responsible for creating an inclusive community that is respectful and fair to all.

Integrity

We are open, honest, ethical, lead and manage by example and follow through on our commitments.

Collaboration

We listen to each other, disagree well with a commitment to academic freedom, are compassionate, and work as a team to achieve our goals.

Commitment to Excellence

We strive for the highest standards of achievement in everything we do with an enthusiasm to learn, succeed, and flourish.

Citizenship

We develop well-rounded people who make a positive difference to local, national, and international communities and change the world.

Durham University's refreshed Strategy is made up of 13 strategic areas that set out the direction of travel for the University. It includes three academic core strategies, four transversal strategies and six enabling strategies.

Durham University is also developing its new Access and Participation Plan (APP) for 2025-26 to 2028-29 which reinforces its dedication to fostering an inclusive and diverse community, and removing barriers to higher education for underrepresented groups. Through targeted outreach, improved student support systems, and innovative teaching strategies, the University aims to ensure equitable access, success, and progression for all students.

The University prioritises a diverse student body, acknowledging its importance in enriching the learning environment, encouraging critical thinking, empathy, and cross-cultural communication skills. Interaction with peers from varied backgrounds leads to a more nuanced understanding of course material, preparing students for a globally interconnected world. Similarly, a diverse faculty brings varied teaching methodologies and perspectives, inspiring underrepresented students to pursue their goals confidently. This diversity is essential for personal development and the advancement of knowledge and innovation.

The strategic aim of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) is to enhance equality of opportunity in higher education, particularly for underrepresented backgrounds, by improving educational attainment and supporting schools. The University aims to foster an inclusive environment, broaden intellectual horizons, and prepare students for an interconnected world.

Across these strategic areas and its APP, as will be evidenced subsequently, there is strong alignment across the multiple Purpose Goals:

Purpose Goal 1 - Strong Foundations in Early Years

Getting the best possible start in life is crucial - a strong foundation in early years education is the cornerstone of social mobility.

Research suggests that on average 40% of the development gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their peers has already emerged by the age of five. Language and literacy skills - in particular a child's word count and knowledge of vocabulary especially matter to enable them to make the best out of their initial education, and also forming friendships and relationships and with emotional development.

Purpose Goal 2 - Successful School Years

Every child deserves to successfully achieve their potential in attainment and development throughout their school years.

Successful school years are a crucial part of not only a young person's academic development but also their wider personal development. The so-called attainment gap between the most and least privileged remains stubbornly high. Even prior to COVID-19, research suggested that by the time disadvantaged young people finish secondary education the difference in learning between them and their peers equated to 19 months by Key Stage 4. COVID-19 and the schools shutdown has made this challenge far greater, with disadvantaged young people being far less able to manage to lessen disruption to their learning than their more advantaged counterparts.



Purpose Goal 3 - Positive Destinations Post 16+

Every young person and adult should have the choice between a high-quality route in education, employment or training.

Traditionally, we've pushed our young people down an academic path, to A-Levels and then onto higher education and a degree at university. We're seeing more young people become the first person from their family to get to university. Equally important is a strong choice for a non-academic route, latterly through apprenticeships and the growing availability of T-Levels.

Purpose Goal 4 - Right Advice and Experiences

Access to the right advice and experiences at the right time can help to unlock opportunity throughout a person's life.

Getting great access to career advice and the chance for those wider experiences that broaden horizons and set schoolwork in context are vital. It really makes the difference between a young person being able to know about opportunity and then understand the steps towards it and not. Working out how we can consistently provide high quality careers advice, support, mentoring and access to work experience is a vital step in improving social mobility.

Purpose Goal 5 - Open Recruitment

Careers and professions should be open to people of all backgrounds through transparent, accessible and open recruitment practices.

Britain needs open opportunities and open recruitment so that our nation's talent can make the most of its potential. Ensuring that all careers are open to the widest possible range of young people really matters. We invest billions in our education system every year, so we need to make sure it's not blocked from thriving as young people leave education and then go into careers.

Purpose Goal 8 - Good Health and Wellbeing

Improving mental and physical health at all ages is vital to boosting overall wellbeing to allow people to fulfil their potential.

Health and wellbeing inequalities lie at the heart of improving social mobility across the UK. Good health and wellbeing are often a precursor to a person being in a position to make the most of their talents and in work, feel they can consider taking the next step in their career. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a stark light on the health inequalities our country has and how they impact on wider life. The statistics on diverging life expectancy give a clear sense of how communities even living side by side can have very different outcomes.

Purpose Goal 9 - Extending Enterprise

Extending private enterprise and entrepreneurship to all people and communities.

Bringing opportunities to communities and having more opportunities on the doorstep is often discussed in terms of inward investment and getting businesses to be able to invest in places that have been social mobility coldspots. But enabling people and communities to create their own jobs is perhaps the most powerful way of really driving opportunity on the doorstep.

Purpose Goal 11 - Infrastructure for Opportunity

Developing the physical infrastructure that connects people and places to opportunity.

For communities with less opportunity on the doorstep, being able to get to opportunities where they are is essential. That's why investment in the roads and railways that connect people up with opportunities matters so much. It's an enabler that can unlock people's chances to go for roles that might not be on the doorstep but can turbocharge their careers.

Purpose Goal 12 - Building Sustainable Communities

Ensuring people can live in safe and sustainable communities.

Communities that are safe, with a good quality of life and homes people can afford are communities that are sustainable in the long run. For communities that aren't, they risk losing their talent and driving away the very opportunities from business investment that could transform their fortunes. It's why place-based approaches matter so much, both from the government but also from businesses.

Purpose Goal 13 - Harnessing the Energy Transition & Net-Zero

Ensuring the energy transition is fair and creates opportunities across the UK.

People and the planet are two sides of the same coin. As we progress further with the energy transition it will become an ever more fundamental part of the debate on social mobility. Investment in the green economy is already bringing brand new opportunities to areas across the country; and it's crucial that the transition is one that is equitable for people and communities everywhere.

Purpose Goal 14 - Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion

Creating a level playing field on opportunity for all, to fully unleash Britain's potential for the first time.

Diversity matters. The research is clear that more diverse companies make better decisions because they have a wider perspective and avoid groupthink. Diversity extends beyond gender and ethnicity to sexuality, disability and other challenges that can lead to disadvantage. When we look across the leadership roles in business, the judiciary, government and politics, there is a continued skew towards those from the most privileged backgrounds. Britain will not succeed unless and until its leadership roles, wherever they are found in our society, better reflect the wider society at large.

Purpose Goal 15 - Working in Partnership

We need organisations to work in partnership to boost opportunity.

Now more than ever, amidst challenges such as the rising cost of living and global trade tensions, collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential to address barriers to opportunity effectively. The private sector, representing over 82% of the UK workforce, plays a pivotal role in facilitating equal access to opportunity and breaking down barriers. However, there have been significant missed opportunities in leveraging the private sector's potential as a delivery partner for social and economic progress. By fostering strategic alliances with both public and private sector organisations, purpose-led businesses can take the lead, harnessing diverse talent and perspectives, and ensure their initiatives are grounded in the needs of real-world communities.

3.3 Durham University's role within the region

Durham University is a global institution, with a student body drawn from around the world. This international perspective brings with it major and varied benefits for the local community, which are felt through the University's role in the city of Durham, County Durham and the wider North East region of England.

The report will illustrate key examples of this community impact and the different projects and initiatives the University is leading on. It will also show the importance of collaboration and partnership in delivering social impact – both within the higher education sector and with a wide range of local stakeholders, both public and private.

All of this is set against the backdrop of significant political change within the North East. May 2024 saw the election of a North East Mayor for the first time. The North East Combined Authority (North East CA) is a legal body established by

Parliament that brings together seven local authorities: Northumberland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Sunderland, and County Durham.

This is in addition to the Tees Valley Mayoral Authority which was established in 2017. Durham already has close links to Tees Valley and will continue to build these alongside the new Combined Authority.

The North East now holds devolved powers over transport, skills, planning and regeneration, and economic development. The creation of a new Authority offers Durham University the opportunity to contribute and shape a changing landscape using its research and academic expertise. This report goes on to outline the social and economic impact the University is already having – both globally and locally – and explores ways in which this can be enhanced.



4. Reviewing Durham University's strategies against the Purpose Goals framework

4.1 Durham University's Core Academic Strategies aligned to the Purpose Goals

4.1.1 Research and Engagement

Durham University's Core Academic Strategy – Research and Engagement – emphasises the importance of ground-breaking academic research and purposeful engagement to use the knowledge created to deliver impact in the world beyond academia. Through engaging in research and social impact, students at Durham University are equipped with essential skills for a changing world.

Durham University is recognised for its research on early childhood education through, for example, the Durham University Evidence Centre for Education (DUECE), which promotes, evaluates and monitors the translation of high-quality educational research into policy and practice in schools. DUECE brings a rich blend of perspectives, from educational sociologists and psychologists to economists, geographers, health scientists, enabling researchers to look beyond attainment and cognitive development to broader outcomes including mental health, wellbeing, attitudes and aspirations, personality, trust and civic participation.

A topical example of policy impact is in oracy education, where a collaboration between Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Professor of Classics Education and Public Policy at Durham, and Voice 21 has contributed to the launch earlier this year of the Commission on the Future of

Oracy Education at the Voice 21 Speaking Summit. Professor Holmes-Henderson served as an expert advisor to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Oracy during their 'Speak for Change' Inquiry and her research on classical rhetoric and international oracy approaches significantly shaped the final report.

Health research is found across all four Faculties in the University, with a focus on 'health beyond the clinic', including social factors (e.g. nutrition) and environmental factors (e.g. air pollution) that impact health outcomes and inequalities. The University collaborates with numerous local authorities in health and social care, including Durham County Council and County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT), for example, on dementia and end-of-life care. At the other end of the life cycle, research in the Durham Infancy and Sleep Centre into infant and cot death has shaped policy in County Durham and Northumberland and has led to impactful public awareness campaigns.

Two interdisciplinary University Research Institutes have a specific focus on health: the Wolfson Research Institute for Health and Wellbeing, which is central to the delivery of the Health@Durham Strategy, and the Institute for Medical Humanities which, supported by a Wellcome Trust Discovery Platform grant, is pioneering new methodological approaches to medical humanities.



The Wolfson Research Institute is organised around nine Challenge Academies addressing human health and wellbeing challenges from the individual to global scales, in areas such as Pain; Women's Health; Race, Culture & Inequality; Physical Activity and Work. The Institute supports the growth of these Academies by fostering networks, building communities of early-career researchers across disciplines, identifying funding opportunities, expanding international collaborations, and ensuring impact through clinical, industrial, or policy partnerships.

Sitting across Sociology and Law, the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) seeks to reveal and understand interpersonal violence and abuse, and how society and professionals respond to it. CRiVA's research includes topics such as sexual violence against older women, police responses to victims of same-sex partner abuse, and the experiences of European migrant women seeking support for domestic abuse. These studies provide valuable insights into addressing and preventing violence and abuse.

Led by the Durham Energy Institute (DEI), researchers at Durham University are at the vanguard of research into a just energy transition to a low-carbon economy. The DEI's interdisciplinary approach integrates social

sciences, humanities, and technological research to develop decarbonisation solutions. Strategic partnerships with industry leaders, such as Ørsted, focus on advancing offshore wind energy, enhancing operational efficiency, and fostering renewable energy innovations. DEI's commitment to experiential learning ensures students gain practical insights into the energy sector. The work of the DEI is complemented by the newly formed Centre for Sustainable Development Law and Policy, which addresses climate change through interdisciplinary research and policy initiatives, promoting sustainable development and contributing to the global energy transition.

Durham University is committed to business engagement, exemplified in the University's partnership with the North East Technology Park (NETPark) where its Orbit business incubator and Centre for Advanced Instrumentation are based. Established in 2004 as a hub for innovation in science, engineering and technology, NETPark supports over 550 skilled jobs and is home to more than 30 pioneering companies. A major expansion of NETPark is currently underway. Durham also leads the Northern Accelerator programme, on behalf of six universities in the North East and Yorkshire, to build a supportive ecosystem for companies spinning out of the universities.

Delivering against the Purpose Goals

Durham University's research and engagement efforts showcase a number of strengths and valuable learnings in delivering social impact aligned with several key Purpose Goals:



Purpose Goal 1: Strong Foundation in Early Years
Durham University's commitment to providing a strong foundation in the early years is exemplified by its interdisciplinary research efforts such as its involvement in Oracy Education across England. Oracy is often a barrier to those from under-resourced and deprived backgrounds and the gap begins early in a child's development, Durham University contributes significantly to Purpose Goal 1 through this focus.

Purpose Goal 8: Good Health and Wellbeing
The interdisciplinary research fostered by the Wolfson Research Institute for Health and Wellbeing demonstrates Durham University's commitment to addressing health challenges. The University also works closely with Durham County Council and CDDFT on research into local health inequalities.

Purpose Goal 12: Building Sustainable Communities
Durham University's strategic partnerships and engagements with industry leaders, local authorities, and international organisations enhance the reach and effectiveness of its research and ground it in the real-world needs of community development.

Purpose Goal 13: Harnessing the Energy Transition and Netzero
The Durham Energy Institute (DEI) represents the University's strength in harnessing the energy transition and advancing towards net zero.





Strengths

Durham University's strengths in delivering social impact are reflected in its interdisciplinary approach and strategic partnerships:

- **Interdisciplinary Research:** The integration of social sciences, humanities, and technological research enables Durham to address complex social issues comprehensively through interdisciplinary research. This approach is exemplified in the University's interdisciplinary Research institutes and Research Centres.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborations with industry leaders, local authorities, and international organisations improve the effectiveness and reach of the University's research. The University's leading role in NETPark and its collaboration with Durham County Council on culture and heritage are examples of successful partnerships driving social impact.
- **Comprehensive Health and Wellbeing Initiatives:** The Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse and the Wolfson Research Institute's interdisciplinary research efforts contribute substantially to improving health and wellbeing across communities, addressing both individual and societal challenges.
- **Commitment to Sustainability and Energy Transition:** Durham University's proactive steps towards achieving net zero, including extensive partnerships through the DEI, driven by innovative research, as well as developing a comprehensive decarbonisation strategy, highlight its leadership in sustainability and energy transition efforts.

Learnings

Durham University's research and engagement core academic strategy offers valuable insights for ongoing improvement and future efforts:

- **Strong Collaborations:** The success of NETPark and the DEI's initiatives outlines the importance of deep collaborations with external partners. These partnerships are essential for addressing specific societal challenges, enhancing the University's outreach capabilities and building economic growth. The University should continue to build external partnerships, regionally, nationally and internationally, to maximise the scope of its research.
- **Policy Advocacy and Resource Allocation:** Learnings from the Evidence Centre for Education highlights the critical importance of high-quality early childhood education. Durham University's leading research is already being used as evidence for policy changes and better resource allocation. With a new government, with new priorities, now is an important time to grow this work and use the University's research expertise to influence the policy agenda.
- **Alignment with Global Goals:** Durham University's commitment to sustainability and the energy transition, as exemplified by the DEI's work, provides valuable alignment of academic research with industry needs and global sustainability goals. This alignment is crucial for achieving long-term social impact and supporting the global transition to net zero.
- **Regional collaboration:** Durham University's global presence and internationally leading research is vital for regional economic growth. With the creation of the North East Combined Authority, Durham should ensure that its research strengths continue to align with the new sectoral priorities for the region. It is also important that this sectoral focus is filtered through to its outreach into schools to raise attainment and aspiration in certain subjects.



4.1.2 Educational Excellence

Durham University is a globally renowned centre of teaching and research excellence, inspiring students to achieve remarkable things. Its Core Academic Strategy, Educational Excellence, aligns with the Purpose Goals through an underpinning purpose of the organisation to break down the barriers to opportunity through educational provision.

A key focus of Durham University is improving digital teaching skills and fostering sector-leading programmes through the Durham Centre for Academic Development (DCAD). This initiative, along with leadership training for educators, ensures a student-centered approach to education. The University strives to maximise diversity and participation through contextual offers and the Foundation Programme, and supports student-led projects addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Durham University is committed to widening access to higher education through an early focus in individuals' development – supporting regional schools through programmes such as the Schools Membership Scheme and activities by the Oriental Museum's Learning Team. The University also aims to create a wider global learning community by enhancing student interactions with advanced learning technology and international study opportunities.

Science engagement is a significant part of Durham's outreach efforts. The Celebrate Science Festival – attracting over 60,000 attendees since 2010 – and the Schools' Science Festival for 13-15-year-olds are leading examples. These festivals, along with other programmes such as Science Ambassadors and various outreach activities, critically promote STEM education and inspire local young learners.

Through its programme of activities, the Oriental Museum's Learning Team reaches every primary and secondary school in County Durham. These activities include 'Little Dragons' for toddlers and pre-school children and the Durham Archaeology Explorers (DAX) club for aged 7 to 11 which provide

enriching experiences and nurture curiosity of museum collections and archaeology.

The Schools Membership Scheme (SMS) is central to Durham University's commitment to social impact and educational equity. This scheme builds strong partnerships with schools, offering tailored activities, access to University resources, and support for both students and teachers. Critically, SMS prioritises schools with high proportions of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Through SMS, the University is directly improving educational outcomes and social mobility.

The University also supports young people in the transition to higher education more widely. One example of this work is research and support programmes, such as those offered by the Durham University Evidence Centre for Education and Research Skills Sessions. These schemes equip students and teachers with essential skills for academic success, ensuring a smooth transition to higher education and promote effective learning practices.

As well as local students across school and college-year education, Durham University engages teachers in its commitment to educational excellence. The School of Education at Durham plays a crucial role in promoting educational research and professional development for teachers, ensuring that research findings benefit the local educational community. Programmes such as Supported Progression offer structured pathways for underrepresented students to secure places at the University, enhancing their academic skills and confidence.

Through initiatives such as the School Science Ambassadors programme, Durham University utilises its role in NETPark to promote STEM education, engaging hundreds of young people and fostering a passion for science. The collaborative networks at NETPark also facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation, while Durham University's NETPark Research Institute contributes to advancements in space science, biophysics, and remote sensing, driving sustainable development and economic growth in the region.

Looking forward, the Durham Mathematics School (DMS) will provide outstanding mathematics education and support students from diverse backgrounds. This initiative aims to strategically address the skills gap in STEM fields and promote social mobility in the North East of England.

Through its Educational Excellence strategy, the University is deeply committed to cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit among its students and graduates, striving to embed enterprise and entrepreneurial skills throughout its curriculum. The Careers and Enterprise Centre collaborates

directly with all departments to tailor entrepreneurship education to each discipline's unique context.

Significant numbers of students actively participate in the Enterprise Society, reflecting a strong interest in entrepreneurial activities. The establishment of the Hazan Venture Lab in 2021 marked a milestone in University's entrepreneurial ecosystem. As the first dedicated co-working space for aspiring entrepreneurs on campus, the Venture Lab provides essential support and resources to budding entrepreneurs.

Delivering against the Purpose Goals

Durham University's strengths in delivering for social impact are reflected in its wide-ranging and inclusive initiatives against its Core Academic Strategy – Educational Excellence. When assessed against the Purpose Goals framework, the University's agenda aligns closely with a number of Goals:



Purpose Goal 2: Successful School Years

The Durham Centre for Academic Development and the Foundation Programme exemplify the University's commitment to enhancing educational outcomes by providing tailored support to diverse student populations.

Purpose Goal 3: Positive Destinations Post 16+

Through the School Membership Scheme

and collaborative partnerships with organisations such as the Sutton Trust, Durham University contributes to widening access and supporting students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Purpose Goal 4: Right Advice and Experiences

The University's initiatives provide customised support and firsthand experiences of University life. These programmes equip students with essential skills and knowledge, empowering them to make informed decisions about their educational and career paths.

Purpose Goal 14: Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion

Durham University's commitment to diversity and inclusion is evident in its comprehensive educational initiatives. It creates pathways for students to succeed academically and fosters an environment that values diversity.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths in delivering social impact are evidenced by its inclusive educational initiatives and strategic partnerships:

- **Tailored Educational Support:** The Durham Centre for Academic Development and the Foundation Programme provide customised support to diverse student populations, improving educational outcomes and promoting academic success during school years.
- **Widening Access:** Durham University's commitment to widening participation will be re-emphasised in its Access and Participation Plan. The School Membership Scheme and collaborations with organisations such as the Sutton Trust demonstrate the University's commitment to widening access to education and supporting underrepresented students.
- **Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion:** By fostering an environment that values diversity and providing pathways for success, Durham University contributes significantly to educational equity and social justice, achieving equality through diversity and inclusion.

Learnings

Durham University's commitment to educational excellence and its critical schemes and initiatives offer valuable insights for ongoing improvement and future efforts:

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Durham has some very good strategic partnership which enhance its Education Excellence strategy. The development of the Durham Mathematics School is a huge opportunity for the University to double down on these strategic partnerships with schools and further education providers in the region to ensure that students are supported throughout the pipeline. The new government will have a strong focus on skills, so it is imperative that Durham's strategy is aligned to other parts of the educational system.
- **Widening access to higher education in the region:** The North East has one of the lowest participation rates in the country for higher education. The University should ensure that its outreach into local and regional schools is focused on raising aspirations to university in general, recognising that Durham might not always be the right destination. Durham should use its links with other North East universities to help with this.
- **Data-Driven Approach:** The development of Durham University's new APP has been driven by data and is targeting its support to those that need it most. It is important to continually refine these initiatives and embrace a data-driven approach to measure impact.
- **Embed entrepreneurship:** Durham University already has a vibrant entrepreneurial eco-system. It should ensure that it is providing the necessary support for budding entrepreneurs to plug into the new sectoral strengths of the North East Combined Authority. Durham should work with the new Combined Authority and the other North East universities to ensure the correct support is provided for these start-ups, especially in emerging industries such as clean energy.

4.1.3 Wider Student Experience

Durham University's commitment to its students' enrichment is represented by its Core Academic Strategy - Wider Student Experience. This acknowledgement by the University reflects its strategic imperative to nurture personal growth and wellbeing amongst all its students, aligning closely with its core values and educational mission.

Central to this approach is an aim to equip students with the resilience and skills necessary to thrive in today's dynamic global environment, fostering a sense of community and inclusion.

An underpinning element of this strategy is accessibility, ensuring all students can actively engage in a diverse range of enriching extracurricular activities. These span seven domains of activity including arts, culture, enterprise, intellectual inquiry, community building, sports, and active citizenship. The University boasts a remarkable 88% student participation rate in extracurricular activities, significantly surpassing national averages. This high level of engagement not only enhances skills acquisition but also promotes student wellbeing and a strong sense of belonging.



Durham University's sports facilities also play a pivotal role as community hubs, hosting activities that benefit students and the local community. From fitness sessions to grassroots sports programmes and talent development initiatives, these facilities foster physical health and community integration. They provide opportunities for students to interact with and contribute positively to Durham and the wider region.

The University's commitment to fostering respectful and inclusive behaviours is evident in its support for student clubs and societies. Mandatory workshops for student leaders and comprehensive training programmes for athletes emphasise Durham's dedication to promoting positive cultures and inclusion across its student body.

In response to evolving student interests, Durham has also embraced new trends including esports and film production. These initiatives not only cater to diverse student preferences but also show the University's adaptability and responsiveness.

Durham University's unique collegiate model enhances its vibrant student culture by fostering diverse and inclusive communities across its 17 colleges. These communities support around 1,000 student-led clubs and societies, providing a framework that transcends academic boundaries, nurturing balanced development and enriching student experiences.

The University also provides a range of volunteering opportunities across its venues, offering students valuable experiences that benefit both their personal growth and future careers.

For example, volunteers play a crucial role in the University's museums and collections, engaging with visitors, supporting educational activities, and assisting archivists and curators.

Delivering against the Purpose Goals

Durham University excels in leveraging its Wider Student Experience Core Academic Strategy to deliver substantial contributions towards a number of key Purpose Goals:



Purpose Goal 8: Good Health and Wellbeing

Durham University's robust participation rates in extracurricular activities demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting good health and wellbeing amongst its students. Internal survey data shows clear links between participation in extra-curricular enrichment activity and mental wellbeing.

Purpose Goal 9: Extending Enterprise

Durham University's proactive approach to nurturing innovative skills among students is evident in its support for entrepreneurial initiatives and emerging interests such as esports and film production.

Purpose Goal 14: Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion

Durham University's collegiate model, which spans 17 distinct colleges, serves as a key approach within its student offering for achieving equality through diversity and inclusion. These communities foster inclusive environments where students from diverse backgrounds can thrive academically and socially with strategic support.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths in delivering social impact through its student offering is reflected in its commitment to health, enterprise, and inclusion:

- **Promoting Health and Wellbeing:** By offering extensive sports facilities and recreational opportunities, Durham University supports and improves both physical and mental health across its students.

In the 2023 Wider Student Experience Survey, those who reported participating in 1-5 hours of enrichment activity per week were 23 percentage points more likely, and those who reported participating in 6 or more hours per week 37 percentage points more likely, to report medium or high wellbeing.

- Among undergraduates from the UK, this association was stronger among Black and Minority Ethnic students than white students, and was also stronger among students from areas where young people are less likely to go to university than among those from areas where university attendance is more common. Emerging results from the 2024 survey show very similar patterns.
- **Nurturing Innovation and Enterprise:** Durham University's support for entrepreneurial initiatives and interests including esports and film production demonstrates its proactive approach to extending enterprise. Its Core Academic Strategy equips students with the innovative skills necessary for global challenges, promoting entrepreneurial thinking and problem-solving.
- **Fostering Inclusivity:** The collegiate model and emphasis on respect and cultural awareness within student clubs and societies reflects the University's institutional underpinning commitment to achieving equality through diversity and inclusion for its students. These efforts create an inclusive campus environment where students from diverse backgrounds can succeed and feel valued.



Learnings

Durham University's efforts towards its Wider Student Experience Strategy offer valuable insights for ongoing improvement and wider future initiatives:

- **Enhancing accessibility and inclusivity:** Despite high participation rates in extracurricular activities, continuous efforts are required to ensure accessibility, inclusion and a feeling of belonging for all students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. Improving outreach and support mechanisms, as well as accurate tracking across the activities, to target greater engagement amongst student groups from underrepresented backgrounds, could further improve the University's impact on health and wellbeing. This is especially important for local students who may live at home during their studies.
- **Share best practice:** Durham University has an extremely successful model around student participation in extracurricular activities. While an element of this is down to its collegiate system, there is absolutely no doubt that there are learnings that others could take from the University. Durham should be prepared to share best practice in this area, both nationally and internationally, so that it is seen as leading the engagement. With ongoing issues around mental health, engagement and participation will become increasingly important.

4.2 Durham University's Transversal Strategies aligned to the Purpose Goals

4.2.1 Global Durham

Durham University's transversal strategy, Global Durham, plays a central role in delivering against Purpose Goals 14 - Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion - and 15 - Working in Partnership - through its comprehensive agenda of international engagement and strategic alliances.

The University can achieve greater impact in research and be a stronger anchor institution locally thanks to its global impact, influence and partnerships.

Durham University seeks to create a welcoming global community in the region it serves. Its diverse community comprises staff and students from over 120 countries, evidencing a globally inclusive environment that enriches its academic and social fabric. This diversity enhances cultural understanding with 32% of students and 40% of staff originating from outside the UK.

Locally, Durham University uses its global standing to ensure it utilises and develops its role as a key anchor institution - collaborating with regional stakeholders through initiatives such as the Durham Global Alliance, which includes Durham County Council and Culture Durham.



This diversity enhances cultural understanding with 32% of students and 40% of staff originating from outside the UK.

This collaborative framework optimises resources for international travel, exchanges, and cultural activities, ensuring impactful global engagements that benefit both the University and the broader community.

Durham University's commitment to its transversal strategy is further outlined by its support for student opportunity through initiatives such as the Turing scheme-funded internships and volunteering opportunities.

These programmes, accessible to eligible students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, provide invaluable international experiences that improve employability and global citizenship among participants.

Strategically, Durham University has established key partnerships across the globe, underpinned by its international strategy. These partnerships with international universities, research institutes and industries are also critical to the region in attracting foreign direct investment, with the University taking a leadership role in this space as an anchor institution across County Durham and the North East.

These strategic partnerships are exemplified by its collaborations across higher education within international networks such as Matariki - an international group of leading, like-minded universities (such as Uppsala in Sweden and Tübingen in Germany), each amongst the most historic in its own country - and Coimbra Group - an association of long-established European multidisciplinary universities of high international standing, committed to creating academic and cultural ties for the benefit of its members.

These collaborations facilitate student exchanges and collaborative research initiatives, enhancing educational opportunities and academic excellence on a global scale. Durham University also participates in the RENKEI Network - a partnership of 11 universities in Japan and the UK aiming to strengthen knowledge exchange and research collaboration between the two countries - supported by the British Council, fosters collaborations between the UK and Japan. Durham University also maintains a strategic partnership with Notre Dame University in the USA. Its reach also extends to partnerships in the Global South, for example in India and Indonesia.



The University's diverse community, including staff and students from over 120 countries, exemplifies its commitment to fostering a globally inclusive environment. This diversity underpins the academic experience, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and prepares students to thrive in an interconnected world.

Delivering against the Purpose Goals
Durham University's Global Durham transversal strategy demonstrates significant strengths in meeting the Purpose Goals:



Purpose Goal 14: Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion

The University's diverse community, including staff and students from over 120 countries, exemplifies its commitment to fostering a globally inclusive environment. This diversity underpins the academic experience, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and prepares students to thrive in an interconnected world.



Purpose Goal 15: Working in Partnership

Durham University's strategic partnerships extend beyond academic collaborations to include regional stakeholders through initiatives such as the Durham Global Alliance. This cooperative framework enables coordinated efforts in international travel, exchanges, and cultural activities, maximising the impact of shared resources and promoting mutual understanding between Durham and its global partners.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths in delivering social impact are reflected in its commitment to inclusion and collaboration:

- Promoting global inclusion: The University's diverse community highlights its dedication to fostering a globally inclusive environment. This diversity enhances the academic experience and prepares students for an interconnected world.
- Facilitating international collaboration: By engaging with international partners through key networks, Durham promotes student exchanges and collaborative research initiatives that contribute to global knowledge. This strategy exemplifies the University's commitment to working in partnership, extending its reach and impact worldwide.
- Supporting equitable student opportunity: Durham University's initiatives, such as Turing scheme-funded internships, emphasise providing inclusive opportunities for personal and professional growth. These efforts ensure that students have access to international experiences and the soft skills that enhance their academic and professional trajectories.





Learnings

Durham University's approach to its international engagement, through its transversal strategy above, offer valuable insights for ongoing improvement and future initiatives:

- Enhancing accessibility and inclusion: While the University's diverse community and strategic partnerships are commendable, there is an opportunity to further deepen inclusion and equitable access across international programmes. By addressing barriers to participation, particularly for underrepresented groups based on intersectional socioeconomic background, the University can amplify the impact of its global initiatives and ensure all students benefit equally from international experiences.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of Global Durham: The benefits of being a global university are numerous but not always well understood by a regional audience. Durham University should ensure that the regional benefit of having a global university is communicated clearly to local stakeholders. These benefits include research capabilities, economic growth and convening power.
- International Alumni relations: Durham University has a strong network of international alumni. This network should be used to communicate the benefits to the local and regional economy – for example, links to international companies or the ability to grow in new geographies.



4.2.2 Civic and Regional Partnerships

Durham University's transversal strategy – Civic and Regional Partnerships – serves as an underpinning for the institution's agenda in championing local inclusive growth and fostering community resilience throughout County Durham.

This Strategy is exemplified through strategic collaborations with Durham County Council (DCC), aimed at stimulating economic development and nurturing innovation through initiatives such as DCC's Inclusive Economic Strategy. Through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017, and updated in April 2022, the University and DCC collaborate on various crucial initiatives aimed at driving economic and social growth, enhancing research, conserving culture and heritage, fostering sustainable communities, and advancing education and skills.

A key element to this strategy is the Aykley Heads development, a transformative project poised to elevate Durham City into a leading Innovation District. Supported jointly by DCC and Durham University, this 60-hectare site will feature high-quality office spaces and a thriving innovation ecosystem, projected to create up to 4,000 jobs. The Durham Innovation District initiative embodies a 'triple helix' approach, integrating business, academia, and government to foster collaborative research, knowledge exchange, and entrepreneurial ventures – driving economic growth and enhancing regional competitiveness.

In parallel, Durham University's partnership with DCC extends to cultural initiatives through the Culture Durham Partnership. Enhanced by collaborative efforts around the UK City of Culture 2025 bid. It is now taking forward *Into the Light*, an innovative programme aimed at sustainable cultural regeneration. Supported by a £1.25 million grant from the Arts Council, this programme focuses on developing a creative workforce, festivals, events, and skills enhancement, enriching community engagement and promoting inclusive cultural participation across County Durham.

Alongside this, the University has good links with the local cultural sector and helps to ensure that local communities can access performance arts, culture and events provision. This is evidenced through events such as the Durham Book Festival and *Lumiere*.

Durham University's commitment to cultural place-making shines through innovative projects such as *Street Museum* and *Street Cosmos*, which aim to bridge gaps between communities and foster engagement with cultural artefacts and scientific advancements. *Street Museum*, in collaboration with the Blackhall Community Centre, brings museum artifacts into the community through treasure hunts and innovative technology, making cultural heritage accessible to all.

Street Cosmos focuses on connecting underrepresented communities across County Durham with the world-changing advances in space science research happening across the North East. It is targeted at communities in County Durham who would benefit most from it, with projects implemented in towns including Blackhall, Bishop Auckland, and Barnard Castle.

Cultural initiatives are also consistently linked to research and educational strategies. For example, The Big Dig in Bishop Auckland drew upon research undertaken in the University's Education and Archaeology departments. It involved test pits being dug throughout the town to gather new evidence for the location, depth and date of archaeological deposits, as well as for the evolution of the town. The Big Dig was part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project by Durham University's Archaeology Department, in partnership with The Auckland Project and pupils from King James I Academy, in Bishop Auckland.

Beyond economic and cultural initiatives, Durham University is committed to community wellbeing through robust health and education programmes. Its partnership with Durham County and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) exemplifies this commitment, with joint efforts focused on improving healthcare provision through research projects and professional development programmes. Formalised by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), this partnership supports shared objectives in research, staff development, and resource-sharing, including initiatives such as 'Bridging the Gap', a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme aimed at addressing emerging healthcare challenges.

Durham University also plays a pivotal role in providing talent for local public services such as social workers and teachers, including through its Masters of Social Work and multiple teacher training programmes.

Durham University has also recently deepened its collaboration with the other North East universities – Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, and Teesside – with the aim of speaking with one unified voice about the region's higher education offering.

One example of this collaboration is the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) which supports regional schools and underrepresented groups. Since 2014, NERAP has delivered activities for over 200,000 beneficiaries in primary and secondary schools. Another is In-TUNE, a project aimed at boosting productivity and innovation across the North East. Supported by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, this partnership with North East universities and local authorities aims to strengthen the region's business base, driving economic growth and fostering collaboration in key sectors.

Another area which evidences Durham University's strong civic and regional engagement is its links with the business community. For example, Durham University recently entered into a five-year memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Durham-based challenger bank Atom bank, solidifying their well-established partnership aimed at mutual growth and community development. This collaboration marks a significant step towards addressing key challenges and opportunities focusing on data science, risk analysis, talent development, and environmental sustainability.

The University also has other innovative private sector links, such as its partnership with Procter and Gamble (P&G) which is aimed at advancing research in experimental, computational, and theoretical physics and chemistry, with significant implications for wider social impact. Through interdisciplinary research projects, novel formulations, and manufacturing processes for laundry detergents have been developed – alongside the design of liquid-repellent surfaces and improved testing methodologies for chemical products.

These private sector collaborations often bring about wider benefits to the region. One such example is the University's collaboration with the Centre for Process Innovation (CPI) to spearhead efforts to drive regional inward investment across the North East, marking a significant partnership aimed at fostering research, innovation, and economic growth in the region.



Delivering against the Purpose Goals

Durham University's Civic and Regional Partnerships strategy excels in advancing several Purpose Goals, demonstrating its commitment to fostering inclusive growth and community resilience across County Durham:



Purpose Goal 1: Strong Foundation in Early Years
Initiatives such as the 'Little Dragons' programme at the Oriental Museum provide enriching early learning experiences for toddlers, fostering curiosity and foundational skills crucial for early childhood development.

Purpose Goal 2: Successful School Years
Through extensive outreach and educational partnerships, Durham University improves educational outcomes by providing schools and community groups with access to knowledge and resources, promoting lifelong learning and educational attainment.

Purpose Goal 8: Good Health and Wellbeing
Collaborations with Durham County and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) advance healthcare provision through research projects and professional development programmes.

Purpose Goal 11: Infrastructure for Opportunity
The Aykley Heads development, supported by

Durham County Council and Durham University, promises to create up to 4,000 jobs and champion a thriving innovation ecosystem. This initiative stands to improve regional competitiveness and drive economic growth by integrating business, academia, and government.

Purpose Goal 12: Building Sustainable Communities
Cultural initiatives such as the Durham Book Festival and strategic partnerships through the Culture Durham Partnership promote community vibrancy and sustainable regeneration.

Purpose Goal 14: Achieve Equality through Diversity and Inclusion
Durham University's comprehensive outreach efforts, including volunteering programmes and initiatives such as Science Ambassadors, promote diversity and inclusion. These programmes engage students and staff in supporting diverse community needs, contributing to social cohesion and inclusive growth.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths in delivering social impact through its transversal strategy – Civic and Regional Engagement – are reflected in its diverse and impactful initiatives.

- Improving educational outcomes: Through extensive outreach and educational partnerships, Durham University supports schools and community groups by providing access to knowledge and resources. These efforts promote lifelong learning, enhance educational attainment, and contribute to successful school years for students.
- Advancing healthcare provision: Collaborations with CDDFT advance healthcare provision through research projects and professional development programmes. This is a critical challenge for the North East of England, which has some of the worst health outcomes in the UK, and will be a crucial partnership moving forward.
- Driving economic growth: The Aykley Heads development, supported by Durham County Council and Durham University, aims to create jobs and foster a thriving innovation ecosystem. This initiative is part of a wider industry-leading partnership with Durham County Council that is contributing to regional competitiveness, driving economic growth, and building infrastructure for opportunity by integrating business, academia, and government.
- Promoting cultural vibrancy: Cultural initiatives such as the Durham Book Festival and strategic partnerships through the Culture Durham Partnership create jobs, develop skills, enrich community engagement, foster local pride, and support sustainable communities. Importantly, some of these initiatives, such as Street Cosmos and Street Museum, are targeted at those who may not otherwise be able to engage in such activity.

Learnings

Durham University's civic and regional engagements agenda offer valuable insights for ongoing improvement and future initiatives:

- Integrating community needs: While the University has made commendable strides in engaging with the community, there is room to further tailor this work. By understanding specific challenges faced by different socioeconomic groups, Durham University can design more impactful programmes. Within the regional community, there are different stakeholders that the University should engage with regularly – including community groups, charities, businesses and local authorities.
- Building sustainable collaborations: The establishment of a North East Combined Authority provides a crucial opportunity for Durham University. The University must ensure that it uses its existing partnerships, with Durham County Council and the other North East universities for example, to leverage its influence. By aligning its research expertise and entrepreneurship activities with the new Combined Authority's priorities, Durham University can position itself as crucial to the overall agenda of economic growth.
- Civic and regional measurement: Measuring civic and regional engagement is a difficult task with no one framework being adopted universally. Many organisations measure inputs when looking at civic engagement, but it is preferable to look at outcomes where possible.

4.2.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Durham University places Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at the forefront of its institutional strategy. This transversal strategy is embedded within a comprehensive Inclusive Durham framework aimed at fostering inclusion across its community, its students, the local region, and across Britain. It supports four key aims that guide the University's efforts to create a welcoming environment for all.

Central to the University's approach is strategic outreach targeting underrepresented groups. Initiatives such as the Space to Explore Potential (STEP) programme exemplify this commitment. The programme supports young Black-heritage students through the higher education residential experience and provides ongoing guidance, equipping them with insights into University life and academic pathways. These initiatives aim to address underrepresentation in higher education by offering tailored support and guaranteed alternative offers to promising candidates.

Durham University's commitment extends beyond recruitment to support during studies and beyond. The Durham Inspired North East Scholarships programme - launched in 2020 with a £1 million fund - facilitates access for students from low-income backgrounds in the region. This financial support helps mitigate barriers to higher education, contributing to increased diversity within the student body. Recognising the varied needs of its community, Durham University also champions initiatives such as the Women in Technology programme. Developed in collaboration with global technology leaders, this programme includes scholarships and mentorship opportunities aimed at empowering female students from underrepresented

backgrounds to pursue careers in technology. By addressing gender imbalance in the sector, Durham University not only supports career development but also promotes diversity in emerging industries.

The University is also actively engaged in improving EDI through its Inclusive Durham framework building partnerships and delivering initiatives. Participation in the Athena Swan Charter and the Race Equality Charter represents the University's commitment to fostering inclusive environments and promoting equality across all parts of University life. The institution's Disability, Health Conditions, and Reasonable Adjustments Hub and various staff networks further support the Inclusive Durham approach to EDI, ensuring a supportive environment for all members of the community. Durham University's commitment to accessibility is also evident in its museums and learning experiences. The University's museums offer a range of accessibility resources, from visual stories and sensory aids to tailored events for diverse visitor needs. This ensures that everyone can fully participate in and enjoy the cultural offerings at Durham University.

Incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum is important and is fundamental to the Inclusive Durham Framework that underpins the University's transversal strategy for EDI. It actively incorporates LGBT narratives and African perspectives on Ancient Egypt, widening educational experiences, promoting critical thinking and cultural awareness among students and visitors to the museums. Co-curation sessions involving local communities further amplify diverse voices within the University's cultural collections, ensuring representation and respect for varied cultural heritages.



Durham University's commitment extends beyond recruitment to support during studies and beyond.



Values such as respect, inclusivity, innovation, curiosity, creativity, supportiveness, and resilience guide the University's approach.

The University encourages access from a diverse student body, particularly underrepresented groups, providing a supportive environment that prepares students for lifelong learning. Values such as respect, inclusivity, innovation, curiosity, creativity, supportiveness, and resilience guide the University's approach. The distinctive collegiate system, world-class research, and commitment to social responsibility and inclusivity define Durham's mission.

Durham University has adopted Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) to guide its roadmap until 2027, focusing on the OfS B3 Student Outcome Conditions and Access & Participation.

Durham University's location in the North East of England brings unique challenges for higher education in this region. The North East has the lowest higher education entry rates in England (30% compared to 37% nationally) and is the least ethnically diverse region. Only 7% of residents identify with Asian, Black, mixed, or other ethnic groups, and 2.4% with white ethnic minorities. Addressing these disparities involves improving educational attainment at the school level.

Through its revised objectives and strategies, Durham University aims to create an inclusive academic community where diverse viewpoints thrive, fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cross-cultural communication skills, preparing students to navigate and contribute to an interconnected world.



Delivering against the Purpose Goals
Durham University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion transversal strategy has impact against several Purpose Goals.



Purpose Goal 4 – Right Advice and Experiences
Through its outreach initiatives, Durham University ensures that young people from diverse backgrounds are given the correct information to make informed decisions on their futures.

Purpose Goal 5 – Open Recruitment
Thanks to its widening participation work, which will be reaffirmed in its APP, Durham University is open to those from different backgrounds and is attempting to remove the barriers to do so.

Purpose Goal 14 – Achieve Equality through diversity and inclusion
Durham University's strategic direction and culture means that the University is a place where people can thrive no matter what their background.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths lie in its proactive approach to EDI, evidenced by its robust Inclusive Durham framework and the delivery of high impact initiatives:

- Tailored support and guidance: The STEP programme provides targeted support to underrepresented groups, preparing them for higher education through mentorship, academic sessions, and application support.
- Financial accessibility: The Durham Inspired North East Scholarships programme addresses financial barriers, enabling students from low-income backgrounds to access higher education and pursue their academic ambitions at Durham University.
- Partnerships and collaboration: Collaborative efforts with external organisations and industry leaders, such as the Women in Technology programme, promote gender diversity in tech-related fields and provide comprehensive support to female students through scholarships and career development opportunities.
- Comprehensive plans: Through its APP, Durham University has identified risks to equality of opportunity across the institution and the wider region and communities it serves. As a result, Durham University will commit to ambitious targets around socio-economic diversity, ethnic diversity, reducing disability gaps, addressing socio-economic continuation gaps, supporting mature students, reducing ethnic attainment gaps and managing mental health disability gaps.

Learnings

Durham University's work against its transversal strategy – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – offers valuable insights for ongoing improvement and future initiatives:

- Enhanced outreach strategies: The development of a comprehensive new APP with ambitious targets gives Durham real momentum in the diversity and inclusion space. While Durham has made significant strides in outreach, continuously refining these strategies to cater to diverse communities, grounded in up-to-date demographic data, will ensure its EDI efforts remain relevant and impactful.
- Ensure staff representation: While a lot of focus is placed on students, it is also important to ensure that staff are representative of the student body. This is throughout all roles, both teaching and non-teaching, but special focus should be given around academics. Durham should start to measure the socio-economic background of their staff to ensure that they are representative. Importantly this will also flag whether there are any sticking points in the career progression of certain groups of staff and give the University the opportunity to change processes if needed.
- Sustained engagement with local community groups: Durham University has built valuable partnerships and networks, yet sustaining and expanding these relationships with diverse local community groups is crucial. This will benefit both students from different backgrounds and local groups who perhaps feel marginalised.

4.2.4 Sustainability

Durham University stands out as a leader on research, development and innovation in sustainability and the pathway to net-zero. This is driven by a robust transversal strategy - Sustainability - aligned with the Purpose Goals.

The Centre for Sustainable Development Law and Policy (CSDLP) at Durham University stands at the forefront of global leadership in addressing climate change and advancing sustainable development. Established just two years ago, the Centre has quickly become a hub for interdisciplinary research and policy initiatives aimed at promoting environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

One notable initiative of the CSDLP was its engagement with COP28, where it secured an official site and hosted events attended by a diverse audience, including prominent figures such as the Executive Director of the International Monetary Foundation (IMF). This intersectional approach, combining academic research with real-world engagement, underpins the Centre's commitment to driving positive change on a global scale and the University's wider social impact approach.

The research expertise of the CSDLP spans a wide range of disciplines, from international environmental law and climate protection agreements to energy law and regulation. With a focus on the energy transition, the Centre explores strategies for optimising government policies, including carbon taxes and energy subsidies, while addressing the political-economy dimension of environmental policy.

At its core, the University integrates sustainability across its operations and initiatives, aiming to set a benchmark as one of the UK's most sustainable institutions. This commitment is steered by a senior-level pan-University group dedicated to developing policies that address global challenges, particularly climate change and biodiversity, while also leading ambitious net-zero targets for the campus.

Central to Durham University's sustainability efforts is its Estates Team - shaping campus infrastructure through the Estates Masterplan (EMP). This strategic framework guides sustainable development, emphasising conservation alongside community connectivity. By embedding principles of environmental stewardship into every project, the University ensures that its growth supports not only campus needs but also enhances the overall quality of life for students, staff, and visitors. Complementing the EMP is the Integrated Sustainable Travel Plan (ISTP), which promotes carbon-reducing transportation options such as walking, cycling, and public transit - reducing the University's carbon footprint and improving community wellbeing.

Another critical aspect of the University's sustainability agenda is its Biodiversity Strategy 2022-2032. This has been instrumental in promoting biodiversity conservation on campus and more widely across County Durham, earning recognition with a Green Gown Award. By becoming a founding member of the Nature Positive Universities Network, Durham University extends its influence in global biodiversity stewardship, contributing to habitat creation and species conservation efforts.



At its core, the University integrates sustainability across its operations and initiatives, aiming to set a benchmark as one of the UK's most sustainable institutions.

Across the institution, Durham University has implemented various initiatives to drive emission reductions in its ambitious journey to becoming net-zero in carbon emissions by 2035. Securing £1.13 million in Salix funding highlights its proactive approach to retrofitting and decarbonising its estate. It also has plans to install 500 kW of Solar PV, complemented by efforts to electrify energy usage and enhance building efficiencies.

The University's Game Changer Programme plays a crucial role in sustainability education, engaging students in UN SDG-focused challenges - fostering entrepreneurial solutions that address environmental concerns. This initiative not only educates but also connects students with industry partners such as Charles River Associates, contributing to the vital career pathways of the future.

Durham University is widely committed to integrating sustainability into skills and career development, one example of this is through its Sustainability Careers Week. This hybrid event equips students with essential skills and insights into sustainable practices across various sectors, preparing them for impactful roles in the energy transition and green technologies.

Looking forward, Durham University remains committed to advancing sustainability through continuous evaluation, extensive community engagement, and strategic partnerships locally, nationally and internationally. It sets ambitious targets and fosters a culture of innovation and collaboration; Durham University not only aims to lead by example within the higher education sector but also to inspire broader social change. As it continues to evolve its Transversal Sustainability Strategy, it stands poised to make a lasting impact on environmental stewardship, driving forward the agenda for County Durham, the North East, and the UK more widely.

Delivering against the Purpose Goals

Durham University's Sustainability transversal strategy is strategically aligned with a number of Purpose Goals, demonstrating its proactive stance towards infrastructure development, community building, and environmental stewardship:



Purpose Goal 11: Infrastructure for Opportunity
Durham University's Estates Masterplan (EMP) serves as a blueprint for sustainable campus development, integrating conservation principles with community needs. It is enhancing infrastructure sustainably, creating opportunities for holistic growth that benefits students, staff, and the wider community alike.

Purpose Goal 12: Building Sustainable Communities
Through initiatives such as the Integrated Sustainable Travel Plan (ISTP), Durham University promotes sustainable living practices across its community. It is driving modal shifts towards walking, cycling, and public transit, reducing carbon emissions and enhancing community wellbeing.

Purpose Goal 13: Harnessing the Energy Transition and net zero
Durham University is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2035, 15 years ahead of the UK's national target. Initiatives include securing funding for energy-efficient upgrades, installing Solar PV across its estate, and developing a decarbonisation strategy that prioritises renewable energy adoption and efficiency improvements.

Strengths

Durham University's strengths in sustainability initiatives are rooted in its proactive approach and strategic implementation:

- **Strategic infrastructure development:** The Estates Masterplan (EMP) guides sustainable campus growth, integrating conservation efforts with community needs to create a conducive environment for learning and living.
- **Commitment to net zero:** Durham University's ambitious target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2035 demonstrates leadership in energy transition. By securing external funding and implementing renewable energy projects, the University paves the way for significant carbon reduction across its operations.
- **Educational innovation:** Initiatives such as the Game Changer Programme engage students in the UN SDGs, fostering entrepreneurial solutions and preparing future leaders to address global environmental challenges through practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Learnings

Durham University's current work and future plans against its Sustainability transversal strategy offers valuable insights for continuous improvement and future initiatives:

- **Enhanced collaboration:** Strengthening regional and international partnerships with external stakeholders and local communities can improve sustainability efforts, fostering broader engagement and support for sustainability schemes. Durham University has a strong relationship with Durham County Council on sustainability and it should translate that across to the new North East Combined Authority.
- **Enhanced education collaboration:** Durham University already has a strong relationship with the other North East Universities in this space, evidenced by ReNU, a Centre for Doctoral Training in renewable energies. It should continue to strengthen this relationship and a focus on renewable energy and sustainability should be considered in other partnerships with local schools and colleges.
- **Innovative solutions:** Continued exploration of innovative technologies and practices can further accelerate progress towards net zero carbon emissions and sustainability goals, ensuring Durham University remains at the forefront of environmental stewardship. Renewable and clean energy is going to be a focus of the new Combined Authority in the North East, giving Durham University the opportunity to play a key role.

5. Summary of strengths and learnings

Durham University's strengths across its core academic and transversal strategies are underpinned by its purpose to enrich lives and change the world through learning.

This can be seen from the very start of the talent pipeline through its targeted outreach into local schools and its work to improve attainment. The University's commitment to widening participation is evident and its new APP will give momentum to the already great work taking place.

Once at University, students are given the tools and support needed to succeed in both their studies and life beyond Durham. The University's impressive extra-curricular offering ensures that students can enjoy everything that higher education has to offer and come out as more diverse and well-rounded individuals.

The University's academic and research strength is often highlighted and should be celebrated for the impact that it has locally, nationally and internationally. The examples noted in this report, and there are many others, highlight the impact that the University is having on healthcare, sustainability, early years education and various other areas.

Durham University is a globally renowned brand that brings in students from all over the world. These students go on to become not only strong advocates of the University, but also of the region. Many start businesses or run companies crucial to the national economies of their homelands. And some who stay in the region go on to develop successful companies, thereby adding to regional economic growth.

Being a global brand has many benefits for the local economy as well. Not only does it help to sustain the University, but it brings in tourism and inward investment and fosters collaboration with powerful economies throughout the world.

The civic and regional impact that Durham University has is sometimes hard to quantify but is invaluable to its communities. From raising aspiration and attainment in local schools to ensuring that local communities can access culture, events and sport, the University touches the lives of many people daily.



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It also recognises that the best way to do this is through strategic and far-reaching partnerships both locally and nationally. One of the best examples of this is its partnership with Durham County Council which has continued to grow and ensures that the University can further its impact.

This report highlights the huge impact that Durham University is having in the City of Durham, County Durham and North East England, as well as within its own communities. Over the last ten years, Durham University has become more engrained in its local community and is now seen as a genuine anchor institution within the region.

The learnings identified earlier in this report are focused on raising awareness of this work, doing even more of it or being more strategic in its efforts.

With a newly formed North East Combined Authority and a new Government, now is the perfect time for Durham University to be ramping up its social impact and going even further. It is encouraging that a lot of the hard work has already been done – strategies have been written, relationships have been formed and, most importantly, a culture has developed within the University.

This culture will ensure that the University meets its ambitious plans and targets that were set out in its APP and refreshed Strategy.

Durham University is already making a real difference through its work, and importantly, there is a desire to go even further.



