



Core Cities UK and universities joint statement: Unleashing Urban Innovation to Level Up the UK

We are writing with a shared offer from our 11 great cities and their universities, to work with Government to boost economic recovery and growth, helping the UK to become the most innovative country in the world. The Core Cities' city-regions deliver 26% of the UK economy and host almost 40% of UK university students as well as significant public research capacity across councils, NHS Trusts, Health Boards and government agencies.

Our proposal is to establish City Innovation Partnerships (CIPs), to harness the combined power of universities, local authorities and their local and global business links to turn R&D into economic wealth across the UK, reposition the UK internationally, and deliver improved policy solutions to current and future challenges. The UK's urban areas are mutually dependent networks of towns, cities and their universities which have equally critical roles, but where an economically strong Core City, enabled by the measures below can support other places in their network to thrive.

1. Boost Regional Innovation

Innovation built around collaboration between universities, businesses, the public sector and communities – a 'Quadruple Helix' – has long been understood as a driver of local economic development. There are many examples of innovation in our largest cities that have led to job creation in surrounding towns and communities.

We recommend:

- The UK governments should co-create ambitious plans for innovation with UK cities and city regions setting out how the proposed increase in the R&D budget to £22bn a year by 2024/25 working in tandem with the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund, can deliver Levelling Up.
- Increased innovation funding with an explicit focus on Levelling Up and inclusive growth, operating in the more decentralised R&D environment charted in the Westminster Government's R&D Roadmap and channelled through major regional universities, such as those of the Core Cities, to capitalise on existing capacity and relationships with business.
- Within this, funding should be earmarked to support partnerships which build on and exploit business and community networks to address local challenges, through new approaches to urban innovation that are being championed by universities, co-creating Innovation Strategies. These should be shared nationwide through the Civic University Network.
- Programmes should aim to understand the barriers to the commercialisation of innovation by businesses, support entrepreneurialism and enable start-ups and scale-ups to thrive.

2. Reposition the UK internationally to increase trade and exports

Core Cities are global hubs of travel and trade, with their city-regions delivering over 20% of UK exports, and are home to diaspora communities and Soft Power assets (including the international students and alumni of their universities) that promote them internationally. As the UK leaves the EU, cities and their universities with their global networks represent a vital opportunity to recalibrate and grow the UK's global relationships.

We recommend:

- A Cities Trade Package, created by universities, city authorities, business and governments to deliver:
 - UK Urban Trade and Investment Strategy, and Soft Power Strategy: identifying growth sectors, aligning them to global regions, taking action to improve their performance, and leveraging local Soft Power assets.
 - A City Trade Fund, matched to locally tailored business plans, including urban trade missions.
- New funding offer for international academic and city-to-city collaboration, targeting key sectors and export markets for the Core Cities.
- Maintaining links with continental counterparts, as the current Horizon programme comes to an end, and forging new links with centres of scientific excellence around the world.

3. Improve policy design and results

Cities working with their universities and other partners need greater flexibility to coordinate locally across different funds and policies, to deliver the greatest impacts for the economy, society and our environment, based on sound analysis of needs, opportunities and the impacts of policy interventions. Part of our contribution would be to work with local policy stakeholders to improve understanding of the local economic opportunities and improve the precision of interventions and investments at the local level. This includes closer collaboration with a wide range of local stakeholders.

We recommend:

- Greater local flexibility, for example across skills, employment and job creation programmes, to lever knowledge exchange, innovative data use and the combined capacity of local authorities and universities to radically improve the impact of these programmes.
- Building on the collective power of unfunded local partnership working deployed to deal with COVID-19, for more concerted action to address and mitigate the damage caused by the pandemic. For example, combined capacity to innovate around how test and trace data can be used to inform local action, to better mitigate public health risks and economic damage arising from covid-19, and the measures needed to restrict its spread.

Achieving this alignment relies on partnership and dialogue between the centre and local actors, preferably at the start of policy making. So far it has not required additional financing, but to achieve substantive further impact it will, and offers a route to save money and leads to clean, inclusive growth and shared prosperity.

The opportunity is to address not just the direct challenges of the pandemic, but to link it to the Levelling Up agenda and changes to the way business and public services operate, accelerated by covid-19. Charting an ambitious new course means dealing with underlying issues like low productivity, high deprivation and sustainability in the face of climate change. The result will be: a modernised, resilient UK economy and society, trading powerfully on the global stage; with growing business, quality jobs, improved social mobility, health and education back at home.

There are examples of powerfully engaged civic universities in action in all our cities: many have signed, or are pledged to develop and sign, Civic University Agreements and are members of the Civic University Network, as well as Universities UK and other higher education groupings. These proposals are intended to complement and add to such arrangements, and although they come from the Core Cities, like many other Core City UK policies, they can help other places too.

We have come together in this partnership as a statement of commitment to this shared agenda and will commit effort and resource to deliver. We ask Governments to join with us in making this positive vision a reality across, and beyond, all our cities.