



Raising the Anchor

**Leading Places Phase Two:
Findings and Reflections**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Leading Places is a pilot programme that supports councils, universities and other local institutions to work together on meeting key challenges facing their local residents and businesses. This note sets out key lessons from the 15 places that participated in the second phase of the pilot.
- 1.2 We are aware that the publication of this note coincides with the work of the UPP Foundation's Civic University Commission which is exploring how universities can successfully serve their place¹. One of the ideas that has emerged in discussions as part of the Leading Places programme is that of 'Learning Councils' working alongside 'Civic Universities', a point explored further in this report.
- 1.3 This note explains the background to Leading Places Phase 2. It also summarises the context in which universities, councils and other partners currently operate. The note goes on to describe the key learning from the programme in a way which we hope will be helpful to other places which are exploring new forms of collaboration between anchor institutions, particularly councils and higher education institutions.
- 1.4 This note complements the evaluation of Leading Places Phase 2 Programme carried out by Dr Peter O'Brien Deputy, Local Growth Consultant at HEFCE which focused primarily on the delivery of the national programme and where the national partners may seek to expand their work on this agenda.²

¹ For further information on the UPP Civic University Commission, see: <http://upp-foundation.org/civic-university-commission/>

² A summary of findings from Dr Peter O'Brien's evaluation is available at: www.local.gov.uk/leading-places

2 Leading Places Two

- 2.1 Leading Places has been developed in partnership between the Local Government Association, the Higher Education Funding Council for England,³ and Universities UK. The programme builds on research by Professor John Goddard and Louise Kempton which highlights the opportunities for councils, universities and other anchor institutions to work together, to help drive growth, re-design public services and strengthen civic participation.⁴
- 2.2 The second pilot phase of Leading Places ran from July 2017 to March 2018 and involved 15 partnerships across England.⁵ The key themes addressed by the partnerships included: health and wellbeing, physical activity, health and care integration, inclusive economic growth and employment and skills.
- 2.3 Shared Intelligence (Si) was commissioned to deliver Phase 2 of the programme. This involved: facilitating meetings of senior leadership groups and project teams in the places; facilitating an action learning set bringing together the project leads from the 15 partnerships; and facilitating a national event for the partnerships in November 2017.
- 2.4 This report was prepared by Si as part of their support for the programme. It draws on the findings from the sessions they facilitated, from presentations by the partnerships to a national conference in March 2018, *Delivering the Industrial Strategy – the role of local anchor institutions*, and from the concluding learning sessions and telecons we have had with most of the partnerships. In so far as is possible, these findings have been anonymised.
- 2.5 Many of the 15 partnerships also highlighted the key learning points from their projects in their presentations to the March 2018 national conference. These points are summarised in **Annex 1**.

³ HEFCE closed in March 2018. Most of its functions will be continued by the Office for Students and Research England.

⁴ 'The Civic University – Universities in leadership and management of place', John Goddard and Louise Kempton (2016)

⁵ The 15 places were: Bedford, Blackburn with Darwen, Brighton, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Hull, Keele, Lambeth and Southwark, Lewisham, Lincoln, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield, Shropshire and Tees Valley. Further information on each of the partnerships can be found at: www.local.gov.uk/leading-places

3 The Context

- 3.1 Effective partnership working at a local level is more important than ever. It is key to the development of effective local industrial strategies. It is essential to the promotion of health and wellbeing and to the integration of health and care. Universities are increasingly recognised as significant anchor institutions in these place-based partnerships in a way that was not the case ten or even five years ago.
- 3.2 Leading Places Phase 2 coincided with a period of massive change in the worlds of higher education, health and local government. These developments both reinforced the importance of collaboration and, in some cases, made it more difficult to achieve. It is important to understand that context in order to make sense of the lessons from this work and their applicability elsewhere.
- 3.3 In his presentation to the March 2018 conference Professor John Goddard referred to the higher education sector as being “in turmoil”. He quoted PA Consulting’s 2018 survey of Vice Chancellors⁶, saying: “The sector is at a pivot point. The very strong [universities] are getting stronger while the weak are under considerable threat. Those in the middle are trying to figure whether to stick or twist. There could be carnage.” He added that the universities facing the most severe pressure are located in disadvantaged towns and cities.
- 3.4 The pressures facing universities include:
- their new legislative framework, the closure of HEFCE and the creation of the Office for Students;
 - the fees review and pressure to use fee income on provision for students; and
 - wider financial pressures impacting on the higher education sector.
- 3.5 In terms of the place agenda and concepts such as the civic university this means that there are two competing and potentially conflicting pressures on universities: the need to demonstrate public good (to which the place agenda and universities’ role as anchor institutions is critical); and the need to be competitive and have an increasingly international focus.
- 3.6 The financial pressures on local councils are also acute. The rising costs associated with children’s and adults social care, coupled with ongoing reductions to funding, are restricting the ability of councils to fund other activities. Another significant development has been the creation of combined authorities and the election of ‘metro mayors’ to drive action on the economy, infrastructure and, in certain cases, public service reform across wider geographies.
- 3.7 Partnership working and collaboration between organisations at a local level is key to action on many of these pressing issues and the emerging opportunities facing local places.
- 3.8 The Industrial Strategy White Paper, for example, makes repeated references to higher education as a key player in action at a local level to raise productivity and stimulate economic growth through

⁶ For further information on the survey, see: www.paconsulting.com/insights/2018/higher-education-report-2018-forecasts-of-storms

local industrial strategies. Priority is also being given to action to integrate health and care and deliver preventative activity to promote health and wellbeing. Partnership structures such as health and wellbeing boards, sustainability and transformation partnerships, academic health science networks and integrated care systems are increasingly important.

- 3.9 Given this context, many councils are reviewing their partnership arrangements to ensure that they are fit for purpose. They are also developing a capacity to work across different geographies from the very local through sub-regional arrangements to the wider focus of initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.
- 3.10 This is the context in which the Leading Places Phase 2 projects were delivered: acute pressures, particularly financial facing local partners combined with an increasing emphasis nationally and locally on the role of place-based partnerships in driving economic growth and improving health and wellbeing.
- 3.11 This report outlines some of the key themes reflected in the work of partnerships to strengthen local collaboration between anchor institutions in this current and emerging context.

4 The 'Civic University' and the 'Learning Council'

- 4.1 There is a growing body of literature on the concept of the civic university which is being reinforced by the work of the UPP Foundation's Civic University Commission. One of the themes of the discussion in Leading Places Phase 2 has been the concept of the 'Learning Council' sitting alongside the 'Civic University'.
- 4.2 Professor John Goddard and Louise Kempton identified seven dimensions of a civic university, which are:
- actively engaging with the wider world and the place in which it is located;
 - taking a holistic approach to engagement as an institution-wide activity;
 - having a strong sense of place;
 - having a sense purpose;
 - being willing to invest in order to have an impact beyond the academy;
 - being transparent and accountable to its stakeholders and the wider public; and
 - using innovative methodologies in its engagement activities.
- 4.3 While there has rightly been a strong focus on strengthening the civic role of universities, Leading Places participants have also highlighted the need to consider how local authorities might need to strengthen their 'learning' function to facilitate more effective local collaboration.
- 4.4 Reflecting on the experience of the partnerships involved in the Leading Places programme it is possible to identify a number of characteristics of a 'learning council'. These include being a local or combined authority that:
- is keen to make better use of data and evidence to drive what it does;
 - wants to better understand the bigger issues and devote some time to thinking about the longer-term;
 - engages in genuine pilots and learns from what works well and less well;
 - is generous with its data and helps partners and citizens use it for the common good;
 - incentivises learning throughout the organisation;
 - collaborates closely with local partners including further and higher education;
 - creates opportunities for academics to carry out research locally.

4.5 It is important to note that while universities are sources of learning, a number of the suggested characteristics of a 'learning council' are applicable to universities in the context of fostering place-based collaboration.

4.6 Key themes emerging from the experiences of local partnerships seeking to build stronger institutional links and strengthen their role as a 'civic university' or a 'learning council' are outlined below.

Developing a long-term vision for a place

4.7 In many places involvement in Leading Places established a wider, deeper awareness of the different ways in which universities can contribute to local initiatives and programmes. At the same time, it has highlighted the different timescales which drive the work of different partners. Councils and many other organisations delivering public services locally are very much focussed on the here and now due to the financial constraints they are faced with.

4.8 Conversely, much of the research undertaken by universities has a longer-term timescale, including work which has an explicit futures focus. Several of the councils involved in Phase 2 are exploring ways of working with higher education to feed longer term perspectives into their work, including creating spaces for political leaders to consider this. This approach can be particularly helpful for councils which are seeking to develop longer term visions for their places.

The role of the university as an 'honest broker'

4.9 At least one Leading Places project lead spoke of the potential role of the university as an honest broker locally. This can be important in, for example, discussions on health and care where other players have particular concerns, pressures and organisational imperatives. Academics also have an important role to play in providing constructive challenge and critique in a way that it is often difficult for council officers. In other places, however, the autonomy of the university has been viewed cautiously by some within the council. This highlights the importance of creating a relationship of trust between the anchor institutions.

Building a partnership across the local institutional landscape

4.10 While strengthening the relationship between councils and universities has been a key focus of Leading Places Phase 2, it is important to acknowledge that all of the partnerships have involved a wider group of local partners. Significant features of the arrangements within the wider partnerships that have been put together include:

- the role of further education colleges as anchor institutions in some case working with one or more universities to offer integrated and co-ordinated opportunities to businesses and other employers;
- the importance of engagement with health commissioners and providers, but a number of places found it challenging to treat health providers as local anchor institutions given the organisational pressures they face and the extent to which they are directed nationally;
- the fact that in some areas collaboration between individual universities was found to be particularly challenging.

The need to establish and retain a focus on 'place'

- 4.11 Everyone we have spoken to says that creating the conditions for collaboration of type and scope involved in Leading Places is hard work. There are competing priorities to be negotiated, different cultures to be managed and perceptions to be addressed. But people have also spoken about the way in which the focus on and commitment to place can be a way of overcoming those challenges. The focus on place was referred to by a number of project teams as the key driver of progress. Reasserting that focus on place was referred to by many participants as a way of overcoming obstacles and maintaining progress, reinforced in some areas by factors such as organisational coterminosity and a sense of place and self-identity.

The importance of understanding institutional structures

- 4.12 Many participants in the programme, from universities and elsewhere, have referred to the importance of knowing how to navigate universities. In most institutions the scope of a Leading Places project spans the remit of three pro-vice chancellors responsible for teaching, research and engagement respectively. It is also essential to have effective links with the relevant school or department. We understand that these divides are the most entrenched in research-intensive universities. At least one of the Leading Places projects lost momentum because the relevant school was not as fully involved in the discussions about it as the corporate core of the university.

5 Anchor people

- 5.1 There is a lot of discussion about the role of ‘anchor institutions’⁷. In the Leading Places programme, however, ‘anchor people’ have also played an important role in the success of local collaboration.
- 5.2 The way in which senior leaders work together is seen as being crucially important in shaping how their colleagues respond. The attitude of Vice Chancellors has been singled out for particular attention: if they have an appetite for driving change across the local system the project is likely to be successful. In one place participants reported that the ambition of the Vice Chancellor to revive the civic mission of the university was a key success factor. The attitude of senior councillors can also be important including their appetite to create space for longer-term thinking.
- 5.3 In several of the projects in Phase 2, momentum was lost because of changes in personnel at a senior level. Other places have navigated similar changes more successfully because of the quality of relationships at an operational level. In some places specific individuals played a personally important role in maintaining the network of relationships. Many of the people we spoke to highlighted the value of at least one person having dedicated time to drive the project as opposed to simply being subsumed “within the day job”.
- 5.4 In several places, the key person driving the collaboration in the university system had previously worked in a local authority, often in a partnership or central policy role (though interestingly we are not aware of any people involved in Phase 2 who have moved in the opposite direction). These individuals had brought to the university a rich understanding of how local government works plus, in many cases, good contacts.

⁷ An anchor institution is one that, alongside its main function, plays a significant and recognised role in a locality by making a strategic contribution to the local economy.

6 Zooming in or panning out? It's all about the story

- 6.1 There are essentially two versions of the Leading Places Phase 2 story. Some places have focused on a narrowly defined project, treating it as a “proof of concept” for wider scale collaboration. Others began by seeking to establish a wider vision and collaborative framework before focussing in on a particular project.
- 6.2 Not surprisingly our learning discussions with the places suggest that there is no one right answer. It is clear from those areas which have pursued the latter approach that establishing a broad based shared vision can take longer than expected. It is, however, seen as key to building the groundwork for future collaboration.
- 6.3 Those who have adopted a more focussed approach from the start refer to the value of taking “baby steps”. They also stress the importance of focus and avoiding mission creep while remaining open to serendipity and creative opportunism.
- 6.4 What is clear, however, is that the most important success factor in the projects is the existence of a compelling narrative which answers the “why does this matter?” question. In one case it was the need to address the recommendations of an independent commission; in another place it was a shared ambition to exploit smart city opportunities; and in a third it was pressing skills and workforce challenges. In places which lacked a credible narrative there was always a danger that commitments entered into around a partnership table would not survive competing priorities when people returned to their “day jobs”.
- 6.5 Finally, it is important to note that the majority of project leads found that the Leading Places timescales, and in particular the expectation that places would be in a position to present findings to the March conference, helped to build momentum for their project.

7 Place assets

- 7.1 One local authority project lead said that a key benefit of the Leading Places programme was that he and his council colleagues now had a really good understanding of the opportunities for collaboration with their local universities and what they can bring to the table.
- 7.2 We were struck by the comment by an academic involved in one of the projects that her university had more people carrying out research in Africa than in the city. Creating opportunities for, for example, PhD-related research to be carried out locally, aligning research priorities with the place, is an important building block for collaboration between councils and universities.
- 7.3 In many places new investment by higher and further education has been one of the biggest contributions to new development, often in town and city centres. University campuses have the potential to be used as learning laboratories - for example tracking the movement of people to inform physical and transport planning. Students are also an important resource through, for example, delivering research and as a pool of volunteers. Finally, creating multiple links between universities and employers is important in terms of knowledge transfer and as a bespoke way of filling skills and training gaps.

8 Final Reflections

- 8.1 The projects pursued under Leading Places Phase 2 demonstrate the value of closer collaboration at a local level between anchor institutions, particularly universities and local councils. Continuing financial pressures make that collaboration more challenging but also more important, while policy and service developments such as the Industrial Strategy and health and care integration reinforce the importance of place-based collaboration and present clear opportunities to strengthen this⁸.
- 8.2 There is currently a substantial discussion about the idea of the civic university, but if places are to get the most of the civic university there must be a parallel conversation about the learning council, and the role of local government in fostering the conditions necessary for higher education to make a substantive contribution to place.
- 8.3 The place focus is increasingly important in public service reform. It is the golden thread that links all the Phase 2 projects. As some universities become more embedded in their place than others, as genuine anchor institutions, it will be interesting to see the extent to which this plays out in the resolution of the turmoil in the sector to which Professor Goddard has referred.

⁸ See, for example, the recently announced Strength in Places Fund, with bids expected to demonstrate strong engagement from local partners. Further information is available [here](#).

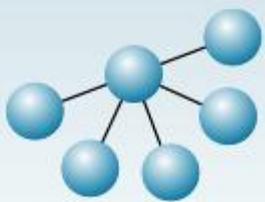
Annex 1 – Key learning points from Phase 2 Partnerships

These learning points have been extracted from the slides presented by Phase 2 partnerships at the national conference on 28 March – full presentations from the partnerships are available at:

www.local.gov.uk/leading-places

Lessons from Learning Places	
Brighton and Hove	Bedford
<p>Key challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alignment of priorities: council focused on delivering service improvements, the universities on winning research grants and publications; • managing business expectations: councils may expect universities to behave like consultancies; universities have to balance work with councils and teaching and research commitments; • lack of financial incentives to collaborate. <p>Positive outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • councils exposed to broader, more rounded perspectives and the potential of universities to deliver innovation; • universities exposed to challenges of civic service delivery, local accountability and place-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasingly stretched resources means that prioritising Leading Places has not always been easy; • the long-term impact of Leading Places on the borough and its anchor institutions remains to be seen; • Leading Places has created a genuine partnership: we share the same values and want the very best for young people in the borough.
Blackburn	Gloucestershire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established a solid infrastructure and foundation for further work; • shared sense of place and purpose; • stimulated and created innovation as well as a greater appreciation of the opportunities for collaboration; • agreement to take a “whole college” approach with users at the heart; • enabled other successful opportunistic collaborations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify opportunities for collaborative working; • recognise the strengths and weaknesses of each partner’s position; • ensure transparency and role clarity; • develop trust through assured delivery; • commit to discretionary effort.
Hull	Lambeth and Southwark
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an opportunity to reconnect with the university’s founding purpose: returning to being a “civic” university; • exploring what a “learning city council” involves; • a positive partnership hinges on proactive places; 	<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diversity of thought; • catalyst for partnership; • development of joint working; • identifying and maximising synergies. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding and resources;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the focus on working together was re-affirmed by Leading Places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competing organisational priorities; project and programme legacy.
Lewisham	Nottingham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership buy-in is vital; have a set point of contact at officer level; leaders then allow officers to get on with it; have a narrative to work from; learn from previous partnership work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> different timelines: cities need to fix things now; academics are developing solutions for the longer term; takes time and a commitment of resources; need to allocate key staff members in each organisation – needs to be more than just part of the day job; seed funding (HEIF) is effective in engaging academics; campuses are great test-beds; don't be constrained by a plan – remain agile in response to opportunities.
Sheffield	Staffordshire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> don't underestimate the time taken to generate a shared vision; understand that a boundary is porous; the beginning is a good place to start 	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aren't universities just big schools? poor understanding of the university's role in innovation; some mistrust of partners; how evidence-based approaches fit in a political world.



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