

Regional self-evaluation – How did we do it? Case study: North East England

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Role of Universities for the North East (England)

- North East England identified as UK Case Study region for the OECD Project Phase 1
- Unis4ne the NE England Higher Education Regional Association
- NE HE designated Executive Director of Unis4ne the OECD Project Regional Coordinator who managed the Self Assessment Process
- Unis4ne has 6 University Partners (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, Teesside, Open University Northern Office)
- Board of Vice Chancellors + Subject / Project Committees
- Strategic NE Regional HE representational and ambassadorial role
- Sources and selectively manages regional HE collaborative projects

Expected Outcomes for North East Higher Education

- Robust evidence base on HE institutional and collective regional contribution
- Policy influence through national and regional government engagement in the Project
- Increased awareness of HE and improved productive partnerships with regional stakeholders
- Tailored advice and guidance from OECD Peer Review Team
- HE institutional capacity building through learning best practice from international comparative analysis
- An enhanced profile for NE HE regional work

Institutional Commitment

- Vice Chancellors members of OECD Project Steering Group ensuring institutional responsiveness
- Cross-Institutional Operations Management Team (HE Institution's Regional Officers) acted as the Project Working Group who managed institutional engagement including information gathering, case study identification, Peer Review Team visit etc
- Academic individual's and staff team's direct project involvement including sourcing expertise on regional development, project information and case studies
- Recognised opportunity for international links for HE institutions, HE collaborative partnerships including Unis4ne, and individual staff

Regional Steering Group

- Top level representation from Universities and key regional organisations (12 members)
- Independent Chair (Business Leader)
- Members selected for their regional position, expertise, and took project ambassadorial role(eg regional and local Government, business, culture, health)
- External members often had overlapping interests and responsibilities including membership of University Governing Councils
- Steering Group well supported by Cross-Institutional Operations Team and Academic Expert Network
- Good individual and collective working relationships of Steering Group with Regional Coordinator

Collecting the Evidence

- Steering Group including regional stakeholders helped source and validate evidence, select case studies, oversee and agree report
- Academic research on HE and Regional Development in NE commissioned
- HE Regional Impact study commissioned
- Universities' Expert Academic Network in support
- Institutional questionnaires on mission, institutional governance and regional activities managed by HE Regional Officers
- In-depth interviews with national Government Departments (Treasury, Education, including HEFCE, Industry) and key regional stakeholders
- 2 Regional Workshops with HE and regional partners
- Select targeted events (eg Business Dinner)

Peer Review Critical Success Factors

- Be flexible and acknowledge peer review process is a learning experience for all parties - NE first Region in first Programme
- Long-term planning essential - Vice Chancellor and key national and regional stakeholder involvement is key to success and credibility
- Need for balance between including all key activities to be profiled and selectivity for Panel - a large, intensive programme exhausts the Panel
- Balance institutional and external partner interests and involvement – recognise that honesty and not PR is the best policy
- Maximise relationship building and open dialogue with Panel - combine formal and informal sessions
- Ensure a quality outcome - minimise presentations/ power-point and maximise Q and A and discussion
- Clarify process of joint agreement on final Report to reduce the possibility of dispute at this point

Dissemination: Key Success Factors

- Ensure public recognition of the value of the investment made by the region's HEIs into the OECD programme, eg enlist ambassadorial support of external Steering Group members
- Collectively manage institutional and stakeholder buy-in to the report recommendations, combined with sensitive management of potentially critical aspects
- Assess relative effectiveness of Big-Bang Events and / or selective roll out to target audiences
- Seamlessly integrate ideas into existing activities and informing of future developments
- Actively promote work in Government, including participating in national and international policy debate
- Incorporate findings into academic research, staff development programmes, conferences and events
- Monitor and celebrate achievements