The Civic University

Reuniting the university and the city to jointly meet the challenges of social, economic and community development

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OUTLINE

• ‘The Civic University’ - bridging the divide between academia and civil society

• Two examples: Newcastle University and University College London

• Drivers and barriers to city and regional engagement: the policy and academic discourses

• Lessons for institutional leaders
Reuniting the City and the University... the Civic University?

- Historically many universities had their foundations in supporting the economic and cultural life of the city/region (e.g. UK provincial cities, US land grant institutions)
- National higher education policies, reduced state funding, marketisation, corporate governance have contributed to an increasing disconnect between universities and their ‘place’
- However new thinking on regional development away from a narrow focus on economic growth, competitiveness and innovation towards a more multifaceted approach, ‘holistic, progressive and sustainable’ is a potential driver to reconnect the University with its city and its development

Two separate knowledge communities...

**Domain:** Education and Research  
**Focus:** University as an institution  
**Seeking:** International Academic Excellence

**Domain:** Territorial Development  
**Focus:** City and regional development  
**Seeking:** Answers to societal ills
What is a “Civic University”?

- Provides opportunities for the society of which it is part (individual learners, businesses, public institutions).
- Engages as a whole not piecemeal with its surroundings.
- Partners with other local universities and colleges.
- Is managed in a way that facilitates institutional wide engagement with the city and region of which it forms part.
- Operates on a global scale but use its location to form its identity.

Newcastle University: “A World Class Civic University”

- “The combination of being globally competitive and regionally rooted underpins our vision for the future. We see ourselves as not only doing high quality academic work ... but also choosing to work in areas responsive to the large scale societal challenges and demands, particularly those manifested in our own city and region”

Chris Brink, VC
Meeting the ‘grand challenges’ – Newcastle Institute for Ageing and Health

Newcastle Charter for Changing Age

- Increased life spans represent one of humanity’s greatest achievements
- Increasing life expectancy is an economic good
- Ageing concerns us all
- Each individual has an equal place in our society regardless of age
- Much better information about older people is needed
- Older people are an under-acknowledged asset
- We need to use and expand our scientific knowledge about ageing
- We need urgently adapt infrastructure for an ageing population

Meeting the ‘grand challenges’ – University College London “London’s Global University” and the ‘wisdom’ economy

- Working in partnership with government, commerce and society, the best universities can propose robust solutions to the problems articulated by those groups.
- Only universities with excellence across the disciplines, a critical mass of expertise and a commitment to impact can respond with wisdom on the scale and with the speed required by current crises.
- Establishing a culture of wisdom therefore requires transformative action:
  - respecting specialist knowledge, while dismantling the barriers to its cross-fertilisation
  - supporting the synthesis of new knowledge both within and across fields and disciplines
  - facilitating collective, collaborative working practices in order to gain fresh perspectives and, ultimately, wisdom
  - establishing and advocating policy and practice based upon the wise counsel so developed.
Drivers

- Financial and economic
  - Funding, fees and income from consultancy (U)
  - New business creation (C)
  - Inward investment (C)
- Social capital
  - Audience for and contribution to cultural life of the city (C)
  - Evidence of civic engagement (U)
- Research and innovation
  - Responding to grand challenges (U&C)
  - Contribution to health, well being and social inclusion (C)
  - Access to local expertise (U)
- Human capital
  - Supply of students and staff (U)
  - Talent attraction (U&C)

Barriers

- Competence
  - Difficulties in measuring or demonstrating impact or engagement
  - Lack of absorptive capacity externally for research and knowledge
  - Lack of ‘clean’ communication and “boundary spanning” skills
- Leadership
  - Civic partnership not seen as ‘core business’
  - Reward and progression routes for academics do not incentivise “boundary spanning” work
  - Gap between the strategic and operational – constrains implementation
- Institutional
  - Opaque structures and procedures
  - Perception of universities as bureaucratic, lacking urgency, inwardly focussed
  - Size and heterogeneity of institutions – difficult to gain access
- Political
  - Mapping political leadership of the city is complex
  - Lack of political influence
  - Political instability at local level

Finance and Resources

Resource constrains limiting extent of involvement in external projects
Lessons for building civic partnerships

- Leadership is crucial, both internal to the organisation and within city partnerships
- The principal of outreach and engagement needs to be reflected in workloads and reward structures
- Civic partnerships should be independent of transactional relationships between the institutions

A shared vision for the city’s development should be articulated in plans and strategies

- Leaders from the university and the city should be supported to improve their ‘boundary spanning’ skills by focusing on a key challenge to mobilise the intellectual, political, managerial and community knowledge around

- Formal structures and regulatory regimes that act as barriers should be challenged/modernised