

The Role of Higher Education Regional Associations (HERAs) in Regional Development: Case Study of Universities for the North East (England)

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Higher Education Regional Associations (HERAs) in England

- All nine English regions have higher education regional associations / 100% membership
- All HERAs act as a collaborative mechanism for HE regional engagement and represent the collective requirements of their members in the regions
- Very variable in size, operation and effectiveness depending on national and regional political and economic context and the institutional make-up of the association

Strengths

- Provide strategic leadership for HE in and for a region
- Mechanism for delivering active membership of regional collaborative partnerships working together to enhance regional economic, social and cultural life
- Neutral territory brokering regional relationships and working collectively across HE institutional boundaries
- Provides a flexible framework for collaboration, strategic alliances, and brokerage between diverse institutions
- Actively identifies business opportunities for HE, works with regional partners, collectively levers in additional funding, supports and manages cross-HE activities and projects, promotes best practice
- Awareness raising, advocacy and representational role, and acts as an effective voice promoting HE and its region locally, nationally and internationally

Critical Success Factors - External (1)

- Regional coherence and identity
- Government recognition of political importance of regions with a degree of devolution of powers and resources
- HE active involvement with a range of Government departments on regional issues including policy development and delivery, managing innovative projects within regions, provision and management of information, dissemination of best practice
- Appropriate provision and balance of HE institutions within the region and complementary academic strengths
- HERAs well integrated into HE networks / Positive involvement of HERAs in HE representative organisations regionally, nationally and internationally
- External stakeholder recognition of HERA as an important strategic partner

Critical Success Factors : Institutional (2)

- Securing parity of esteem in working relationships across a diverse range of HE members
- Serving equally the diversity of interests and needs of all members regardless of their capacity to be involved
- Ensuring top level involvement and buy-in to decision-making and institutional commitment at all levels
- Building consensus about collaborative activities and their management
- Managing unnecessary and unproductive competitive behaviour
- Maintaining HERA staff morale in an uncertain economic and political environment
- Ensuring value for money and financial sustainability

Universities for the North East (Unis4ne)

- Voluntary, unincorporated regional association for all the universities in NE England
- Five members (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland, Teesside) / Northern Office of Open University an associate member
- Established in 1983 as HESIN (Higher Education Support for Industry in the North) / Reconstituted as Unis4ne in 1999 as a response to growing regionalism
- Governed by Board consisting of all the Vice Chancellors supported by Executive, Policy, Subject and Project Committees working under a Memorandum of Agreement / Rotation of positions biennially
- 20 Staff (3 core and 17 project) / Financed by institutional subscription (£6000 per annum) and project management income / Since 1990 has raised over £52m for NE universities

Universities for the North East

Examples of Collaborative Regional Projects

- Aimhigher (Widening Participation into HE)
- Knowledge House (HE Regional Business Consultancy Service)
- Train to Gain HE (Employer Engagement in Higher Level Skills Development)