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potential to have a
future”

The role of Teesside University in Levelling Up

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Foreword

Teesside University is at the heart of the Tees Valley, driving aspiration, ambition and innovation for the region. 'Stay local go far' could be our battle cry. From galvanising the economy through skills provision, job creation and acting as a magnet for global investment, to delivering social impact, generating civic pride and developing the socially responsible leaders of the future, we fulfil our mission: to transform lives and economies. Or, in other words, 'levelling-up opportunity'.

The deep-seated socio-economic inequalities and challenges faced by those in our immediate community have never been more clearly highlighted. At Teesside University, we are not daunted by these challenges; we tackle them head-on, with energy, passion and focus. We see our role as a convenor of power, people and purpose to affect positive change.

The Tees Valley is an area that has been heralded as a trailblazer for levelling up. As this report shows, Teesside University plays a pivotal role. Showcasing the breadth and depth of the institution's contribution, this report demonstrates the potential role universities can play in levelling up. However, despite concerted effort to develop civic agreements, engage the public and connect with policymakers, the phenomenal difference we make in our wider engagement activity has been overlooked. Many have noted that the Levelling-Up White Paper could do more to acknowledge the potential for universities to contribute to this agenda more broadly.

At TU, social mobility and unlocking potential are inherent to our mission. We are a catalyst for civic transformation. There is much to celebrate in this report and it is clear that our work is making a difference. But there is still more we can do. Whilst focussing on Teesside University's efforts, this report demonstrates what can be achieved if the power of universities is mobilised.

The simplest and most effective way to deliver on the promise to level-up is to empower regions to develop and deliver the necessary solutions. As an educator, a knowledge creator, a convenor and a facilitator, Teesside - like other universities - is well positioned to bring together partners to develop a shared vision and action plan for their region.

The Higher Education sector is already doing so much and is willing and able to do more. I hope this report prompts a conversation about what could be achieved if universities were enabled as the change agents of levelling-up. We urge policymakers to take stock of our ongoing impact and build on this to realise the Levelling-Up ambition, rather than starting afresh.



Professor Paul Croney OBE

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive

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Summary

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper, published February 2022, provided a comprehensive vision for how the Government believes it can drive regional rebalancing, regeneration and productivity.

Teesside is commonly recognised as a priority area for economic growth and levelling up. It is an area with significant socio-economic challenges, including low levels of employment, particularly high skilled employment; low productivity and wages; and lower educational outcomes than the rest of the UK. But it is an area that is at the same time seeking to transform itself, and the external perception of the region, as a thriving hub for Net Zero and the digital industries, and as a place people are proud to work, study and live.

Teesside University, understanding the importance of its role in the levelling up agenda in the region, therefore commissioned Public First to undertake the University's first levelling-up impact study. They asked us to focus specifically on their direct impact on human, social, economic and physical capital in and for the Tees Valley region. This research included desk research, focus groups and data analysis to map how the University responds to the broad objectives set out in the Levelling Up White Paper¹:

- 1. Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging.**
- 2. Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest.**
- 3. Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost.**
- 4. Empower local leaders.**

These are the overarching themes set by the Government to help structure its approach to levelling up, separate from the 12 distinct and specific "missions". We felt they provided a helpful framework through which to structure our analysis, and all four areas are closely linked to Teesside University's articulation of its own mission and role in the local area.

¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

We found that:

1. **Teesside University is making significant contributions to its local community, supporting economic growth, training, civic pride and employment in the region.** It is correct in its analysis that it is an “anchor institution” in the Tees Valley region, and support for this is widespread.
2. **Teesside University is contributing to all four objectives laid out in the recent Levelling Up White Paper.** This contribution takes place across a vast range of activity, and the contributions of staff and students – most significantly in boosting productivity, raising aspirations for local students, its support for hundreds of local SMEs, and as a route to high skilled, high paid jobs for local graduates.
3. **The people of Teesside are optimistic about the economic outlook of the region .** They could see that the University has the potential to play a leading role in the economic regeneration of the area, particularly as the local economy transitions.
4. **However, they did not know much about what the University did outside its traditional undergraduate and postgraduate education provision.** There was a low level of understanding about the University’s degree apprenticeship offer, its links to business and the potential impact of its research, and the wider civic and cultural contribution of the university.
5. **The benefits of local student recruitment are welcome.** Teesside’s undergraduate student body is unique – 73% of their home undergraduate students are recruited from the North East, with 46% from within a 15 mile radius of Middlesbrough.² For many local people, Teesside University is the reason they were able to attend higher education. Those we spoke to in our focus groups were especially keen to talk about – unprompted – a sense that the University’s presence prevents a brain drain of potential graduates leaving the area and then not coming back.
6. **The University is hugely respected as a trainer of public sector professionals.** It trains over 7500 students a year who go into teaching, hospitals and the police force locally. Its role in training nurses, midwives and teachers is a very real source of civic pride – and is seen as very tangible evidence of its impact.

²Teesside University [Access and Participation Plan 2020](#)

7. **There is significant work taking place to grow businesses, skills and emerging economic sectors in Teesside, particularly in digital and green tech.** The University was ranked in the top 10% in England for their work to grow skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship, and in the top 20% for promoting local growth and regeneration, and for working in partnership with businesses³.
8. **The economic impact of the University's research and business support is not well known at all – and is hard to understand.** Despite extensive outreach into the business community, and a range of support for start ups and local employers, our focus group participants had essentially never heard of it.
9. **While there is a positive economic outlook, levelling up is not well understood as a concept.** There is a reasonable level of recognition of the term, but most participants were significantly knowledge-poor on the details.
10. **But when prompted, people embrace the idea that the University should play a big part in levelling up.** Participants instinctively understood that the future success of the region is intimately tied to the future success of the University.

³ Teesside University: Institutional Context to the [KEF 2021](#)

Introduction and Methodology

Teesside University commissioned Public First to undertake the University's first study of its impact on the local region - the Tees Valley area covering Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar & Cleveland and Darlington. This research included desk research and data analysis of their role in the region, the impact of their staff and students, and their position as a civic leader, a local business and employer.

While extensive, we know the examples used in the report represent only a small part of the work taking place across the University. What we present here is therefore a snapshot of the total activity and impact Teesside University is having.

We also know that the University is having a broader impact nationally and internationally, as well as across the wider North East. However, for this report we focused where possible on the impact of the University in the five Teesside local authority areas listed above.

The University possesses a wealth of data to evidence its impact. We believed that speaking to local residents about how it is perceived and whether it adds to the civic life of the region would help us get a better, more tangible, sense of its role in sparking new life into the Tees Valley.

This thinking was informed by previous Public First work looking at both the role of universities in building economic potential, the importance of civic pride in making a success of levelling up and the nexus between the two. We had a hunch that, if not unique, Teesside University's place in the Tees Valley would be fascinating to research within the context of levelling up - and so it has proved.

As part of this work, we carried out five focus groups over an eight week period in February and March, spread across towns in the Tees Valley. These took place online, for 60-75 minutes, and from a range of different backgrounds:

The groups were recruited to reflect the socio-economic reality of the area that we were investigating. We also worked to ensure the voting patterns of our participants were reflective of the most recent general election. Finally, we filtered out any participants who were connected to or work in the higher education sector in any way.

Group One: Participant, from Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar & Cleveland and Darlington, two of which had attended Teesside University

Group Two: Participants from Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees, four of which had attended and were graduates of Teesside University

Group Three: Participants from working class backgrounds from Hartlepool who had not attended university

Group Four: Young working class participants who had not attended university, living in Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Darlington

Group Five: Participants from working class backgrounds who had not attended university, currently living in Hartlepool, Stockton-on Tees, Darlington and Middlesbrough

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Context and Background

“There is a bit of snobbery about Teesside. I just don’t understand it myself at all, why anybody would look down on it or see it as any different? I’m very proud to be from the area. I think so many things have happened lately to really elevate us” –

Focus Group Participant

“Stay local, go far.” This was the rallying cry on a recent poster in Teesside. Teesside is making good on that ambition, with the recent rebirth of its high tech, high skill, high wage economy” – **Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove MP, in the forward to the Levelling Up White Paper**

Teesside and Tees Valley

The foreword of the Government’s landmark Levelling Up White Paper starts with Teesside⁴: A story of its ambition, through the new combined authority, and of its emerging high tech, high skill and high wage economy emerging from the region’s industrial heritage.

Most of the focus group participants we spoke to were deeply proud of being from the area, praising its community spirit, its people, and the local football club.

But it is an area that has many of the ingredients associated with economic decline, and a heavy historic reliance on declining industries such as manufacturing, mining, steel production and shipbuilding. Unemployment is higher in Tees Valley (6.5%) than both the national average (4%) and when compared to the rest of the North East (5.9%)⁵. Even before the pandemic, Tees Valley had the second lowest employment rate of the nine metro mayor areas⁶.

It is an area with significant social and economic deprivation. 35/99 Tees Valley wards are in the most deprived in the country⁷. Of the 316 local authorities in England, Middlesbrough was ranked the most income deprived in the country; of 86 neighbourhoods in Middlesbrough, 49 were among the 20% most income deprived in England⁸.

⁴ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

⁵ Monthly Unemployment January 2022 – [Tees Valley Combined Authority](#)

⁶ Three policy priorities for the Tees Valley Metro Mayor – [Centre for Cities](#)

⁷ Teesside University [Access and Participation Plan 2020](#)

⁸ Office for National Statistics: [Combined Authority Economic Indicators](#)

Table One: Levels of income deprivation in the Tees Valley

Local Authority	Local authority ranking - ONS income deprivation	% population income deprived	Number of neighbourhoods in bottom 20% by income deprivation	Percentage of neighbourhoods in bottom 20% by income deprivation
Middlesbrough	1/316	25.10%	49/86	57%
Hartlepool	5/316	22.80%	32/58	55.17%
Redcar	28/316	18.60%	32/88	36%
Stockton on Tees	50/316	16.40%	39/120	33%
Darlington	70/316	15.30%	21/65	32.31%

And across multiple metrics, Tees Valley lags behind the UK and the rest of the North East⁹:

Table Two: Socio-economic indicators

	% 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training (2020/21)	% secondary school pupils eligible for free school meals (2021)	GDP per head at current market prices (2019)	Gross disposable household income (per head population) (2018)
Darlington	5.90	20.6	27,583	17,140
Hartlepool	4.10	34.2	18,406	16199
Middlesbrough	4.30	35.1	24,697	15469
Recar & Cleveland	5.30	24.5	16,306	16068
Stockton	5.10	22.3	28,931	17,737
Tees Valley	4.90	27.3	23,815	16,619
North East	4.70	24.5	24,068	16,995
National	2.80	18.9	32,876	21,109

Research by the Bennett Institute found that the urban cluster around Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Sunderland has not generated as much economic growth for the surrounding towns as other regions; these towns and cities are not providing the kind of economic spill over to their nearby towns as more economically vibrant areas in Britain.¹⁰

Tees Valley also has a comparatively under-developed business base and workforce; a lower than average employment rate; a business density 66% that of the national average¹¹. And it is a region with a significant skills deficit – with 27,000 more qualifications needed at NVQ4¹².

⁹ Multiple sources, taken from [Tees Valley Data Insights](#)

¹⁰ Townscapes: The North East – [Bennett Institute for Public Policy](#)

¹¹ Teesside University: Institutional Context to the [KEF 2021](#)

¹² Teesside University: Institutional Context to the [KEF 2021](#)

However, it is also an area that has been undergoing massive changes during its post-industrial transition and already contributes more than £60bn to the UK economy each year.¹³ The UK2070 Commission Teesside Task Force¹⁴ report highlights areas of development in energy, steel, pharmaceuticals, the civil service and port operations that are seen as creating a 'Corridor of Growth' for Tees Valley.

The Tees Valley is a combined authority area established in 2016. Now at the centre of the new political red-wall, and governed by Mayor Ben Houchen, it covers the five council areas of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees. This development has stemmed from huge residential, commercial, retail and infrastructure projects.

"The social identity of this region has completely changed...how do we adapt to that?" 24 year old male junior project manager from Middlesbrough

The region is also leading the charge towards Net Zero. In conjunction with the freeport, the compulsory purchase of the former SSI Steelworks Site – reborn as Teesworks, the largest industrial zone in the country – has created thousands of high quality wind turbine manufacturing jobs and placed Tees Valley at the heart of the UK's green industrial revolution.¹⁵ Alongside this, the region is set to become home to the UK's largest Energy Recovery Facility (valued at approximately £2.1bn) and will also feature the nation's first hydrogen and transport trials

Key towns within the region are also experiencing rapid regeneration. Darlington is set to become the government's new economic campus, with Treasury North and Trade North being set up there, alongside the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Middlesbrough has been named by the Financial Times as one of the 'Top 10 Small Cities in Europe' citing its strategy to attract foreign direct investment. An expanding and diverse cluster of innovative companies in developments like the Boho Zone are driving to make Middlesbrough the digital capital of the UK. In Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees, local councils have been focusing heavily in retail and invested around £20m each in developing their respective waterfronts.¹⁶

¹³ Tees Advanced Manufacturing Park - [Tees Valley Combined Authority](#)

¹⁴ Setting the Foundations for the Next Generation - [UK2070 Taskforce](#)

¹⁵ "On Teesside, we have seen how 'levelling up' works in practice". Ben Houchen writing in the [Guardian Oct 2021](#)

¹⁶ Future Development & Regeneration Plans - Tees Valley - [Built Environment Networking](#)

"I think [Teesside] has struggled over the past sort of maybe 5-10 years ... There's been a lot of closure of like the steel work sites, which has had a huge impact on the economy. So there's been lots of job losses, a lot of people would have worked in that industry. And they've really struggled because of that. But now they're sort of bringing in more to Teesside and developing it more. There's more job opportunities coming, so hopefully, that's going to pick things up again" **48 year old male insurance adviser from Hartlepool**

Teesside University

Founded in the 1930s to support the needs of the local shipping industry, Teesside University has been at the heart of the technical skills and education provision of the region ever since. It remains the only university to be fully based in the Tees Valley area, and provides the vast majority of the skills, education, R&D and business support provision in the area.

At its heart, it is a regionally focussed institution. Every year, it supports and educates thousands of students from the region as well as nationally and internationally. 73% of their home undergraduate students are recruited from the North East, with 46% from within a 15 mile radius of Middlesbrough. The student body is diverse with many learners from a disadvantaged or non traditional background, including many mature students.¹⁷

"It was a local university if there wasn't a university in my town, would I have gone? I don't know. I don't think I would have moved away for that" **26 year old female customer services manager from Stockton-on-Tees & Teesside University graduate**

"I did nursing there and I only went there because it was the local university. If I'd never got in, I would never have gone to university" **36 year old female nurse from Stockton-on-Tees & Teesside University graduate**

¹⁷ Teesside University [Access and Participation Plan 2020](#)

Table Three: Teesside University home undergraduate students numbers 2020/21

Stockton-on-Tees	2500 (17%)
Middlesbrough	2275 (16%)
Redcar and Cleveland	1815 (13%)
County Durham	1590 (11%)
Tyne and Wear	1080 (7%)
Hartlepool	955 (7%)
Darlington	835 (6%)
North Yorkshire	800 (6%)

Outside its role as an educator and employer, the University is a key civic actor in the region, with a wider social and cultural impact across the local community. This is demonstrated by the recent KEF exercise¹⁸, in which Teesside University scored highly for skills, enterprise and entrepreneurship, local growth and regeneration, and for working with businesses and with the public sector.

Its mission, stated in their institutional strategy, articulates how it perceives its contribution to the region:

“Teesside University generates and applies knowledge that contributes to the economic, social and cultural success of students, partners and the communities we serve. Through education enriched by research, innovation, and engagement with business and the professions, we transform lives and economies” **Teesside University Corporate Strategy 2027**¹⁹

Our focus group research is covered in more detail at the end of this report, but a key finding was a sense that the University brought a lot to the region - and had improved substantially in recent years. Its focus on local recruitment was particularly welcome, giving people a chance to either stay in their local area to upskill, or to come to the region from elsewhere but be encouraged to stay as a result of the low cost of living, the people, and the new high skill jobs becoming available in growth industries.

¹⁸ Teesside University: Institutional Context to the KEF 2021

¹⁹ Ambition delivered today **Teesside University Corporate Strategy**

"I would say that Teesside University's image has improved over the last decade or so. Maybe 15-20 years ago it was looked down upon...but I think the image they put across now and the way people view them now, you'd be happy to go to it in your area, you're not having to look further afield" **38 year old mum of two from Darlington**

Levelling Up

Following the release of the government's Levelling Up White Paper, it is clear that levelling up as a broad policy area is here to stay. In the White Paper, the government committed to four key objectives, and enshrined 12 individual 'missions' into law, giving the policy area a permanence which has been lacking in previous policies such as the Industrial Strategy. It aims to encourage both the expansion of opportunity, economic growth and productivity in the regions where these have historically been lower, and the narrowing of gaps between the most deprived and the most affluent regions.

The White Paper also revealed the importance the government puts on civic pride, with the dedication of one mission to 'pride in place' which includes commitments to regenerate twenty town centres, improve the high street and invest in local parks. Underlying this, and all of the other commitments, seems to be an emphasis on devolution as a key mechanism to levelling up.

The role of universities is conspicuous in its absence from the paper. In their recent report on the role of universities in levelling up the UK, Jonathan Grant and Andy Westwood sketch out how universities can and do make significant contributions which are under-recognised by Government. The White Paper does not, as they set out, "land an inspiring vision of how universities could in fact be one of the main drivers for regional rebalancing and regeneration so desperately needed in the UK."²⁰

Our focus group work found that people in Teesside also did not automatically make a link between the University and the levelling up agenda as defined by the Government. But when prompted, or when presented with a series of ways in which the University contributed to the local economy, even those more sceptical about the University could be convinced of its wider benefit

²⁰What is the role of universities in levelling up the UK? [Bennett Institute for Public Policy](#)

"You've changed my view a little bit ... I didn't realise how much went on behind closed doors. You don't know how many businesses are linked with it. And it would be bad for the economy if it did go bust" **39 year old male wagon driver from Stockton-on-Tees**

"Learning about what it does, it's made that lightbulb go off and think, actually yeah, the University does play a big part in many ways. It's made me feel a bit of gratitude for the fact that we do have a university close by" **37 year female old food process operator from Hartlepool**

"if people aren't really that bothered [about the University] they should be making people bothered, so that people know about it and what comes out of it" **25 year old female receptionist from Darlington**

This remainder of this report will expand on the University's contribution to this idea of levelling up through its education provision, its civic agenda, its research and innovation input and its overall economic contribution. It will organise these findings according to the four main objectives set out in the Levelling Up White Paper:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- Empower local leaders

This work has predominantly involved desk research and analysis of data from Teesside University and from publicly available data sets including HESA. It will use the insights from our focus group work to guide the areas which local Teesside residents felt were most important to them - and the areas in which they challenged the University to be doing more.

Objective One: Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging

“If you mention a university with any town or city, it does bring a certain name about the place, it brings a lot of opportunities, and certainly with Teesside, having only heard positive things in the last five years from friends who’ve done courses, it’s obviously doing something right” 40 year old female social media coordinator from Darlington

“It’s probably one of the sole biggest employers in the area ... I can’t think of many companies in the area in Middlesbrough that would employ more than 5000 people” 28 year old male rolling stock engineer from Middlesbrough

As we set out in the previous section, the Tees Valley is an area with significant socioeconomic challenges, including comparatively low skills, low productivity, and an under-developed business case. It is therefore unsurprising that it is one of the key target regions for levelling up - a place which can be described in data as lagging behind the rest of the country.

The Levelling Up White Paper defined this objective as:

“Unleashing private investment, encouraging enterprise and supporting a dynamic business sector that can create jobs, nurture skills and invest in innovation; secure adequate access to finance, particularly among rapidly-growing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and improve access to good infrastructure – physical and digital – allowing people to connect and collaboration.”

We found that Teesside University contributes to this agenda through:

- Its significant overall economic impact on the region, through its overall GVA, its role as a local employer, the spending power of the students it attracts and retains in the area and through its supply chains
- By acting as a central point for the region's private sector businesses to access the skills and expertise they need to grow, modernise and develop - with a particular focus on digital businesses
- Through providing the capability and facilities to support start ups, new businesses and SMEs

Overall Economic Contribution.

Teesside University has a total of 21,276 students across all courses, studying both full time and part time. These students contribute across the local economy - creating jobs and demand for bars, shops, restaurants, sports and other cultural activities. But the Teesside University community is made up of more than just students - it includes 830 academic staff who contribute to teaching and research, and supports 1000 in additional non-academic and professional services roles²¹.

- Economic Analysis completed by New Skills Consulting in 2020 estimated that Teesside University generated £141 million GVA per annum. £99 million of this was a direct benefit in Tees Valley, with a spillover of £28 million in the wider North East²².
- **This is in addition to direct University spending:** which totalled £143 million in 2018/19; £86.7 million in Tees Valley.
- **The overall human capital impact:** taking into account increased earning potential of graduates, Teesside University's overall human capital impact is estimated to be £1.4 billion.
- Teesside University students spend an estimated £12 million per annum in the local area, directly supporting 103 additional jobs.
- The University is also a key employer for the region, directly employing 1,875 staff, and supporting an additional 489 FTE jobs in Tees Valley alone.

In our focus group research, there was some knowledge of the economic impact of the university in the region - most notably the impact of its staff and its role as an employer

²¹ HE Staff by HE provider and activity standard occupational classification 2020/21 - HESA

²² Economic analysis for Teesside University - [New Skills Consulting 2020](#)

"It's a massive network of staff ... for Middlesbrough it is a big employer. If it wasn't here it would be very notably missed" **44 year old male working for a housing association, from Middlesbrough**

"The quality of their staff actually expands out into our workforce as well" **38 year old male father of two from Darlington.**

The most well understood was the impact of student spending on the high street and in local bars and restaurants.

"It's massive. It brings a lot of people into Teesside, a lot of students are spending in Teesside, accommodation in Teesside, eating in Teesside" **45 year old male working in trading standards from Middlesbrough**

"I think, without the University, Southfield Road would probably die. I think all of the pubs and restaurants on that road are kept going from 9am to 8pm every day by all the students. If they weren't there I can't really see that that would be a thriving area for people to go on weekends" **26 year old female customer services manager from Stockton-on-Tees**

"Yes, I do think it's important to the economy. There are quite a lot of students who have come from far and wide ... hopefully they'll study there, get jobs in the area and possibly stay. It is bringing in that extra economy to the shops and restaurants and everything around that area as well" **48 year old insurance adviser from Hartlepool**

But other significant areas of University income and investment - including business support and research and development, went unnoticed:

"You wouldn't really think of the University as putting that much money in because I think, unless you really stop and think about it, you don't really think of it as a business as such, but obviously it is" **38 year old female administrator from Hartlepool**

"In our area, I don't think investing in universities in science would be of benefit to our area. I think maybe investing in more areas of engineering would be more beneficial. So, universities investing in engineering and growth that way" **48 year old female insurance adviser from Hartlepool**

Support for the private sector, particularly SMEs

While little was understood about it in the focus group research, data from the University shows they have strong links with businesses in the region, through their research and across a range of business engagement schemes.

Through its Enterprise and Business Engagement strategy, Teesside University makes a significant contribution to business growth in the Tees Valley region. This is particularly the case for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and business start ups.

“If I was to run a local company, [the University] would be my first point of call if I was after a new intake of people to give a new opportunity to” **28 year old male rolling stock engineer from Middlesbrough**

The Grow Tees Valley²³ programme, for example, uses the expertise available at the University to help ambitious SMEs accessing funding and expertise to grow and develop new products or to enter new markets. This offers a range of support, including a business growth diagnostic to help businesses identify the best way to support their growth plans. Links between the University, students and local businesses are strong. Between 2017-2019, over 439 students undertook an internship with a local employer, allowing students to gain valuable work experience and strengthening links between the University and local industries.

Teesside University has a particular strength in growing businesses in the region's digital sector:

- **Digital City²⁴**: since 2001, the University has supported 650 digital and creative businesses to grow and transform – supporting a leading digital business cluster in the Tees Valley, growing digital skills capacity in the region, and supporting a new generation of modern digital businesses²⁵. Digital City Scale Up programme has additionally worked with 37 small business owners in the last two years, designed to support business growth.
- **The Industrial Digitalisation Technology Centre²⁶** supports SMEs to engage with and take advantage of innovative developments in industrial digitalisation. It is the only organisation and facility in the region providing this kind of support, and offers consultancy and mentoring for business digitalisation projects.

²³Grow Tees Valley [Teesside University](#)

²⁴Digital City [Teesside University](#)

²⁵ Setting the Foundations for the Next Generation – [UK2070 Taskforce](#)

²⁶ Industrial Digitalisation Technology Centre – [Teesside University](#)

- The Creative Fuse programme, delivered in partnership with the five universities in the North East, sees academics work alongside firms in the creative, digital and IT sector, as well as cultural organisations, charities and public sector to explore how they can build a sustainable future for their organisation in the region. It provides fundings, internships and business support.

Creating space for collaboration, connection and growth

In 2021 Middlebrough was ranked the third best place in the UK for start ups, as remote working offered start ups the opportunity to locate themselves outside of large cities²⁷. We found that the University is contributing significantly to Middlebrough's success in attracting and supporting new businesses in the region, particularly by providing low-risk access to space and expertise, and by supporting graduates to remain in the region and grow their businesses.

Case Study: Power UP

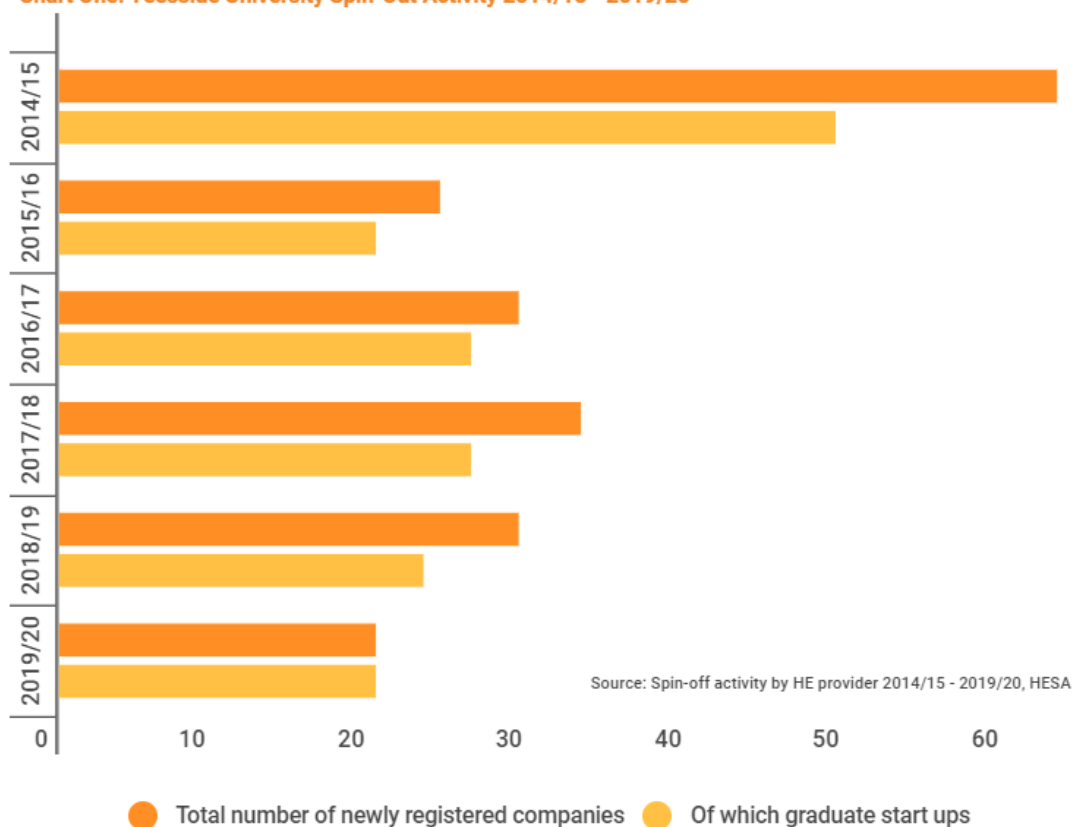
The UK games industry is worth an estimated £7 billion to the UK economy. Power UP is Teesside University's purpose built accelerator programme for early stage independent video games studios. It provides dedicated studio space, equipment and software, as well as access to industry mentors. Six new game studios were accepted onto the inaugural accelerator programme in 2021.

This ambitious approach saw the University ranked in the top 10% in England for enterprise in the 2021 KEF²⁸. 198 new companies have been registered by the University as a result of spin out activity between 2014 - 2019, of which 82% were Teesside University graduate start ups.

²⁷ Best place to launch a business in the UK - Resst

²⁸ Teesside University: Institutional Context to the KEF 2021

Chart One: Teesside University Spin-Out Activity 2014/15 - 2019/20



Some key examples of this activity include:

- The Launchpad facility²⁹, established in 2015, aimed to support the University's next generation of startups and company founders, providing them with the facilities, space and mentorship they needed to succeed. This includes expert led workshops, networking events, and access to a low cost physical space, including co-working and mini workshop areas. **131 new startups have been supported by Launchpad since 2016, employing 240 people.**
- **The Microbiz Academy**, which launched in 2019, is a 16 week programme designed to create the next generation of entrepreneurs and student startups. It enables students to gain the skills and experience they need to set up a business, from defining an original idea, marketing and recruitment, through to pitching for funding.

²⁹ Launchpad - Teesside University

Table Four: Total number of start-ups supported by the Teesside University Launchpad Programme

Academic Year	Number of start ups supported
2016/17	27
2017/18	27
2018/19	21
2019/20	21
2020/21	23
2021/22	12
Grand Total	131

Case Study: WanderFilms

Supported by the Launchpad programme, Wander Films is an award-winning full-service video marketing company. It was awarded Business of the Year at the Annual Enterprise Awards at Teesside University in 2019, and has recently recruited two apprentices and a non-executive director. Its CEO was named as one of Forbes 30 under 30 in the creative Sector.

Objective Two: Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest

“People who are from the area and live in the area don’t have to move away for courses. It might put some people off if we didn’t have the uni and they had to move to Newcastle or commute to Newcastle for uni, it might put people off actually starting uni which means they would never go” 27 year old female from Stockton-on-Tees

“Without the University, I think the level of education in the area would struggle. Here the level of education tends to be quite low ... I think we already have a bit of a feeling that we have a bit of a failing education system in Hartlepool, if the University closed down, that would really have a negative effect on the area” 37 year female old food process operator from Hartlepool

The Levelling Up White Paper defined this objective as:

“Improving people’s health, education, skills and employment prospects will ensure that everyone, wherever they live, has the opportunity to live fulfilling, healthy and productive lives”³⁰

In particular, it was noted that improving people’s education, skills and employment health projects is central to the overall economic and social wellbeing of people and places. Investment in people – termed “human capital” in productivity and improves local services.

We found that Teesside University contributes to this agenda through:

- Its significant progress in providing education, training and skills opportunities for people in Tees Valley from a diverse range of backgrounds, across a diverse range of qualifications suited to local business needs.
- The contribution it makes to widening participation, with a high number of its undergraduate students coming from disadvantaged areas of Tees Valley.
- Its role as a training provider for a range of public services, particularly in healthcare.

³⁰ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

Widening participation to university

For many local people, Teesside University is the reason they were able to attend higher education. It is the only university in the region, and widening participation is at the heart of its overall mission. As it notes in its access and participation plan, the socio-economic reality of the region, combined with the high percentage of students recruited locally, means the experience it delivers for students is both educationally and socially transformative.

“The only reason I went to Teesside is because I got in on the foundation degree, where the others, I wouldn’t have got in on the foundation course. It set me up with the potential to have a future” **24 year old male junior project manager from Middlesbrough & Teesside University graduate**

“If there wasn’t a university in Teesside, I probably wouldn’t have gone to university” **45 year old male working in trading standards from Middlesbrough & Teesside University graduate**

Teesside University welcomes approximately 17,000 new students a year, from a diverse range of backgrounds – over 80% of its UK home undergraduate students are classed as widening participation students.³¹ As we have already set out in earlier chapters, a significant number of its students come from the Tees Valley region itself; 73% of students are recruited from the North East, and 46% of full-time undergraduate students come from a 15 mile radius of Middlesbrough.

It is committed to its widening access and participation agenda, spending £2.7 million³² per year on widening participation projects and financial support for students. Teesside University delivers an extensive outreach and widening participation programme, targeting groups who are traditionally under-represented in higher education, supporting them through the process of applying to university through to graduation:

- The University’s widening participation team worked with 71% of schools in Teesside between 2019 and 2021
- In partnership with the five universities in the North East, it works with young people as part of the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership, with activities for students, teachers and parents. The partnership aims to improve higher education progress in the region.

³¹ Teesside University [Access and Participation Plan 2020](#)

³² Teesside University [Access and Participation Plan 2020](#)

- Through the Future Me programme the University works with schools and colleges in the region to help under-represented students understand their HE and training options at level 4, 5 and 6.

And this work, as well as making a difference for students, is being noticed externally. Teesside University was named the University of the Year for Social Inclusion in 2022 in the Times and the Sunday Times Good University Guide, recognising its commitment to social diversity, social mobility and greater participation in higher education for under-represented groups.

Case Study: Summer and Winter University Programme

Teesside University offers a series of short courses, now delivered online as a result of the pandemic, aimed at supporting students to return to study after taking a break from education, change career direction, gain a new qualification, or trial a new topic of study. Delivered by Teesside University staff, each course costs £50, with fees waived for students who go on to be given a conditional offer to study a full degree level course at the University.

526 residents in Tees Valley took a Summer/Winter University course in 2020/21, in subjects including digital marketing, computer science and mathematics.

Widening participation obviously goes beyond access to university - and includes supporting students to succeed during their studies and to progress to high skill graduate employment. A particular strength identified for Teesside was the number of mature students who studied at the University in order to access jobs in the local area, particularly in healthcare:

"If you've got kids and you're a mature student who's not gone to university until you're in your 30s, 40s, and you want to get in that environment, you want to be doing your placement somewhere near. You don't want to be moving away to Exeter and doing your placement at Ilfracombe. You want to be here" **33 year old male full time carer from Stockton-on-Tees**

"It also means that people who are from the area and live in the area don't have to move away for courses because it might put some people off if we didn't have the University and they had to move to Newcastle or even commute to Newcastle for university. It might put people off actually going and starting university, which means they would never go" **27 year old female participant from Stockton-on-Tees**

Data on graduates outcomes shows that between 60–66% of Teesside graduates³³ who stay locally are in high skilled employment – slightly lower than the national average of 69³⁴%

Table Five: Percentage of Teesside University graduates in highly skilled jobs 2017/18 and 2018/19

Area	% of graduates in highly skilled jobs	
	2017/18	2018/19
Darlington	63%	60%
Hartlepool	73%	56%
Middlesbrough	63%	61%
Redcar and Cleveland	65%	55%
Stockton-on-Tees	72%	63%
Total	66%	61%

The economic geography of the region presents a particular challenge to Teesside in this area. It is a local recruiter where a high percentage of students remain in the area on graduating – an overall positive benefit to the region. However, as established in the introduction to this report, the local employment context is a challenging one – and while the number of high skill jobs is growing, it remains a relatively low skill area.

This explains some of the scepticism felt by focus group participants towards the benefit of a university degree, usually informed by the experiences of a friend or relative

“Well, my cousin she qualified, but she still finds it hard now to get actually a decent career in what she studied. Obviously, you get yourself in debt, I know you only have to pay a certain amount after you earn a certain amount, but you just think, she’s been doing that for five years and then she still can’t get the job she wants” **21 year old stay at home mum from Redcar & Cleveland**

“The fees aren’t cheap. I think it’s something like £9,000 a year or something. Whatever it is. You’re sometimes getting yourself in debt, especially if you’re living there as well. About £60,000 and then you’re doing a job that you didn’t even study at university. That’s not the same for everyone. I’ve got people who have done stuff at university and they’ve gone on to get a decent job with it as well, but as I said, the majority of people who I know that have gone to study at university and they’re

³³ Data provided by Teesside University

³⁴ Industrial classification of graduates entering work in the UK 2018/2019 – HESA

not doing anything that they've studied" **24 year old male car valter from Stockton-on-Tees**

Developing local skills

"Through education, that would definitely help ... you're educating the future employees, businesses owners, they are going to need to be a step ahead of us"
38 year old female administrator from Hartlepool

As the only University in the Tees Valley region, Teesside plays an enormous role in the local skills landscape, and has developed strong partnerships in order to provide the education and training needed for the growing high skill economy in the area. In particular, this is highlighted in the activity that takes place alongside the traditional undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses.

The University has worked in partnership with four local colleges as part of the Teesside University College Partnership – Darlington College, Hartlepool College, Stockton Riverside College and Redcar & Cleveland College – to deliver higher education courses which are local and whose provision responds to regional industry leads. HE/FE partnership at this scale is unique amongst the higher education sector. Students are able to attend courses at their local college, delivered in partnership with the university, improving the pathways and collaborations between the institutions. Senior representatives from all partners sit on the TUCP board, and drive its shared strategic decision making.

Table Six: Number of students studying courses as part of the TUCP partnership 2020/21

College	Number of TUCP students
Darlington College	226
Hartlepool College	386
Redcar & Cleveland College	178
Stockton Riverside College	277
Total	1,067

The University became the first higher education institution in the country to have its higher apprenticeships provision rated Outstanding by Ofsted across all five categories of inspection. The University, along with the FE colleges, offers 20 degree apprenticeships to 1200 students in total. 356 students from Tees Valley are currently studying degree apprenticeships at the University, delivered in partnership with 129 local businesses.

Table Seven: Number of students from Teesside studying degree apprenticeships 2020/21

Area	Number of students
Darlington	37
Hartlepool	44
Middlesbrough	99
Redcar & Cleveland	64
Stockton on Tees	112
Total	356

Working with the Department for Education and Institute for Coding, Teesside University is one of the first universities to deliver a digital skills bootcamp – a flexible 16 week accredited programme which allows participants to build sector specific skills in demand in the Tees Valley region and a fast track to an interview with a local employer.

And the University contributes significantly to the upskilling of the local workforce. 676 employees at Teesside businesses a form of CPD training at the University in the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20, from over 169 businesses.³⁵

Table Eight: CPD courses taken by students employed by businesses in Teesside 2018/19 and 2019/20

Area	
Tees Valley Total	676
<i>Darlington</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Hartlepool</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>Middlesbrough</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Redcar & Cleveland</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Stockton-on-Tees</i>	<i>180</i>
Other North East	613
Rest of UK	347

Case Study: Leading Growth Programme

Leading Growth is a fully funded six month leadership and management programme designed specifically for business leaders in the Tees Valley open. It is open to owners or managers of companies based in Tees Valley, who have been trading for more than 12 months and have between two and 250 employees. 74 Tees Valley SMEs have been supported by the programme since 2015.

³⁵ Teesside University data

Improving Public Services

The University trains a significant number of public sector workers each year, many of whom remain in the area joining local healthcare services, police forces, local authority social work teams, and as teachers in local schools.

Table Nine: Training the future public sector workforce

Students studying on public sector related courses 2020/21

Health	5979
Education	998
Policing	352
Social Work	312
Total students on public sector courses	7641

Based on responses to the Graduate Outcomes Survey in 2017/18 and 2018/19, which captured 50%-55% of the total cohort, at least 316 graduates from these cohorts from health, education, social work and policing courses are currently working in Tees Valley, with 281 working in public sector organisations including the NHS, schools, the local council and the police force.

In our focus group work, the universities contribution to public services, particularly in healthcare, was especially well known - often coming up unprompted in the discussion:

"In terms of providing more professionals in public services, I think you can't put a price on that ... the sheer quantity of physios, nurses, midwives that come from Teesside University. If you're from Middlesbrough, you can study and get a job down the road in the hospital or in a public service. So above monetary value, it provides a wider service as a whole anyway" **33 year old male full time carer from Stockton-on-Tees**

"If we can get local people trained up which are going to work in the James Cook Hospital or North Tees Hospital as nurses, rather than coming into the area training up and moving it, so if we can get local people trained up and get them out into our hospitals, that benefits us and our economy" **27 year old female from Stockton-on-Tees**

“Lots of students attend the University for nursing, which leads to more jobs in the hospitals across Tees ... they come from far and wide to come to Teesside University and study here” 38 year old female administrator from Hartlepool

“They do a lot of courses helping people with social care, social workers. It’s developing people in those types of jobs, it’s bringing in people that are going to go into work in those types of fields. So it’s helped us out with the NHS” 48 year old female insurance adviser from Hartlepool

This impact is particularly felt in healthcare. The University works in close partnership with the region’s NHS Trusts and local hospitals, training hundreds of new medical staff in their institutions each year.

As well as its degree and postgraduate degree programmes, Teesside University also delivers a number of degree apprenticeships, with students directly employed by and supporting local public sector agencies as well as studying for a level 6 or level 7 qualification.

Table Ten: Number of students on Teesside University healthcare-related degree apprenticeship programmes

Degree Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Students 2020/21
BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (Adult) (Pre-Registration)	40
BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (Learning Disabilities) (Pre-Registration)	2
BSc (Hons) Nursing Studies (Mental Health) (Pre-Registration)	9
BSc (Hons) Operating Department Practice	14
BSc (Hons) Paramedic Practice	6
BSc (Hons) Professional Policing Practice	108
FdSc Health & Social Care Practice (Teesside University Darlington)	27
FdSc Nursing Associate (Teesside University Darlington)	145
Total:	315

Students, through placements and other training, provide hands-on support to the local community throughout their time at the university. This includes:

- providing accessible and free dental hygiene therapy treatment to patients in the dental clinic
- Student-led engagement activities including out-reach community health clinics, service redesign to improve community mental health & autism and the on-campus wellbeing clinic

- The CBT/PWP programme works directly with local providers to improve community mental health

The close links between the University students and staff and local NHS trusts was perhaps best seen during the pandemic. In 2020, 92% of Teesside's nursing and midwifery students opted to become a member of the NHS workforce during the pandemic, **providing 947 additional staff to local hospitals**. In addition, students on other allied healthcare courses, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy, continued their unpaid placements to support clinical capacity. In addition, the University's School of Health and Life Sciences ran a series of webinars to help health care staff develop the skills they needed to prepare for frontline care³⁶.

Case Study: Improving clinical leadership in local NHS trusts

Working with local NHS trusts and clinical specialists in cancer care, infection control and learning disabilities, the University uses its academic expertise to provide training for local clinical leaders, helping them to develop their resilience and confidence.

³⁶ University offers further support in the fight against coronavirus - [Teesside University](#)

Objective Three: Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost

"We've been voted the best university a few times ... and it's good press for the area, rather than being like "it's the worst high street" or the "worst place to live in the country." We've had that before. It's good press for our town, our area. It promotes us, it's something good" **27 year old female from Stockton-on-Tees**

The Levelling Up White Paper set an ambition that communities had strong civic institutions, assets and relationships that "anchor local pride in place." This includes local economic regeneration; fostering strong communities, and cultural, heritage and sporting activities that are often missed from traditional economic impact analysis.

"People's lives are shaped by the social and physical fabric of their communities. The local mix of social and physical capital – from universities to good quality green spaces, and from libraries to local football clubs – gives areas their unique character and vibrancy, and makes residents proud to live there."³⁷

Our focus group research found that people in Teesside are immensely proud of their communities, particularly the people and of the recent rise of Middlesbrough football club.

"The community and we're quite friendly people and I think a lot of other areas in England put us down, but, because we live here and we know what it's like here, we stick up for ourselves and we are proud. For such a small working-class town, it is actually a nice place to live" **27 year old female participant from Stockton-on-Tees**

"It's a friendly, happy place. You could be anywhere and they'll just be friendly to you" **22 year old administrator from Hartlepool**

"I'd say the football club, to be fair, I think. I know they're not in the Premier League or anything like that, but I think it just gives it a bit of purpose and I think it brings the community together a bit more, especially recently with the FA Cup and stuff like that" **24 year old male car valuer from Stockton-on-Tees**

³⁷ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

Most of our participants did not have a direct experience of the University – meaning it did not feature directly in most answers about what participants were proud of in their local area, or questions related to their cultural identity. This is not to say they were negative about it;

Most just hadn't thought about it – or hadn't heard about what it had done.

"It's not spoken about enough. With other stuff, obviously, like Redcar College, you see that on the TV, you see that on the radio and you see photos everywhere of people "This person's got a job. Get your career now." You never see anything. It's just sat there. You never hear anything on the radio. You never get stuff through the post like you do for Redcar college and 'Brough College. They don't make it known"
21 year old stay at home mum from Redcar & Cleveland

However, we found that Teesside University is contributing particularly to this agenda through:

- Its role in the economic transition of the Tees Valley area
- Its work in the local community.
- Its cultural and heritage activities

Levelling up Teesside's industrial heritage

In our focus group research, one key finding was that while knowledge of the recent industrial decline was extensive – including memories of job losses as a result of factory closures and the decline of the steel industry – people of Teesside were optimistic about the economic outlook of the region, believing that Tees Valley had turned a corner.

"The future of the economy of the area, it's got to change. It's got to develop with the times, developing in new areas is key to our area and our economy" **26 year old female customer services manager from Stockton-on-Tees**

We found that in Teesside, the restoration of community pride came particularly from the new green industrial revolution taking place in the area. The Net Zero Teesside Power project which brings together BP, Eni, Equinor, Shell and Total, is set to be one of the UK's first carbon capture, usage and storage hubs. H2Teesside, led by BP, aims to produce carbon capture enabled blue hydrogen by 2027. The Hygreen project, also developed by BP, hopes to start producing green hydrogen by 2030.

In our focus group research, participants were well aware, and proud of, the transition their local economy was undergoing. Most importantly for this study, they saw the promised green jobs and skills agenda as a key area they wanted the University to be doing more in:

"There's an awful lot going on and you can see this area becoming a place that is taking a lead in the green revolution. It would make absolute common sense for Teesside University to be involved in some way shape or form. If they're not, they are certainly missing a trick" **38 year old Secondary School Teacher living in Stockton-on-Tees**

"I think the University will be missing a trick if they don't align themselves to what's going on with all the Freeport and everything there's a major engineering hub around there, so if the University, draws in people mainly from the local area and, if they don't align their causes and their offering and their specialism around the industries that are moving in, then I think they'll massively miss a trick there" - **33 year old male from Middlebrough working as a team lead in an energy and engineering company**

"Net zero is happening around Teesside, they're going to be looking for local people to be working at these places because it's to save the employers a lot of money ... So yes, Teesside University being there ... it's going to give people that opportunity to be the first at hand for this employment" **24 year old male junior project manager from Middlesbrough & Teesside University graduate**

These are all areas in which the University is working closely with the combined authority, directly with new industries, and directly through its research. However, we find that more could be done to make a direct link between the work of the University and the economic regeneration currently taking place. This could include:

- Its role in the green economy, including the **Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre (NZIIC)** - a new innovative £13m facility based at Teesside University and backed by Ben Houchen, the Tees Valley Mayor as part of the region's innovation strategy to position Teesside at the heart of the UK's green industrial revolution. It forms a key component of Tees Valley Combined Authority's regional innovation strategy.
- The role it has in providing the workforce for new green industry moving into the region - through its degree courses and particularly its degree apprenticeship programme
- In highlighting the role its research and commercialisation capacity acts as a "pull" factor for new green industries, as well as its potential role in upskilling or re-skilling the local workforce to access the high skilled green jobs which will become available.

Case Study: Reinterpreting the North East's industrial past

Research from Teesside University has informed a series of regional arts and culture projects which seek to preserve Tees Valley heritage.

Working in partnership with Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and the SSI Task Force, set up to help the community deal with the closure of the Redcar steelworks, the University contributed to the design and delivery of an award-winning exhibition at Kirkleatham Museum. The 'Steel Stories' exhibition ran from April until December 2019, attracting over 30,000 visitors – a 28% year-on-year increase in visitor numbers for the museum – with 86% of visitors saying that they 'felt pride in Teesside's heritage after viewing the exhibition'

This led to the successful formation in 2016 of a large-scale cultural programme focusing on the arts, which created training and employment opportunities for over 350 local artists and small businesses, and supported over 12,000 local people, children and families to create and enjoy cultural activities.

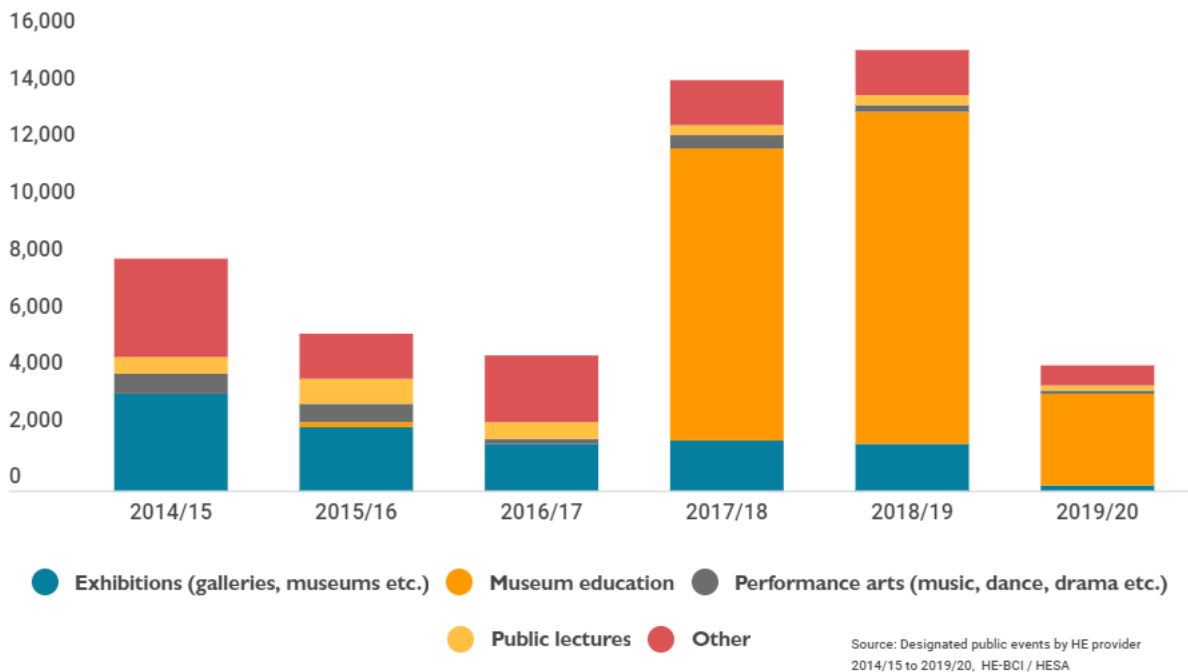
Cultural contribution to the region

Culture helps support and develop communities' civic pride, making an area a more desirable place to live. Culture therefore attracts (skilled) people, allowing places to continue thriving. On the other hand, low levels of cultural engagement often indicate low levels of social capital which may bring negative impacts for levelling up, such as poor quality shops and high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour.

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper recognised this, and also highlighted the unique role that universities can play in improving culture as a means for levelling up, for example such as through acting as anchor institutions within their locality to 'develop the economic, social and cultural well-being needs of the surrounding community'.

52,000 people attended cultural events held by Teesside University between 2014 and 2020. The majority of these events (85%) were free events, with no cost to the attendee.

Chart Two: Attendance at cultural events held by Teesside University 2014/15 - 2019/20



A successful Great Places Fund submission between researchers at Teesside University and Tees Valley Combined Authority, led to the formation of a large-scale cultural programme focusing on five ‘settlement’ arts. The programme increased collaboration across the region, created training and employment opportunities for over 350 local artists and small businesses, and supported over 12,000 local people, children and families to create and enjoy cultural activities.³⁸

And a significant number of cultural events and activities take place through the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), a part of Teesside University since 2014. MIMA’s acts as a national advocate for creative arts in the North of England, as well as providing a range of events for members of the community.

Since 2015, MIMA has held 57 exhibitions, hosted 407 events and attracted over 447,272 visitors, contributing to a positive uplift in Tees Valley’s visitor economy. In 2019, visitor expenditure surpassed £1 billion, with over 23 million visitor days spent in the region³⁹.

Teesside University, through MIMA, is the lead consortium member of the £3 million Borderlands project, delivering 200,000 creative engagement opportunities to residents and communities in areas of high socio-economic deprivation in Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland.

³⁸ Re-interpreting the North East’s Industrial Past - [Teesside University](#)

³⁹ Re-interpreting the North East’s Industrial Past - [Teesside University](#)

Case Study: PS, We Miss You

A collaboration between the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Thirteen Housing Group and North Star Housing group aimed to tackle loneliness and social isolation during the pandemic. It built on MIMA's successful work with older members of the Teesside Community and their caregivers, bringing the community together through creativity and art.

Work in the local community

The role of universities in the local community, defined as its civic role, has always been a key focus for Teesside University - it was originally founded to help transform the lives and economies of the area. The University has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the combined authority and sees this as its civic university agreement⁴⁰, a key recommendation of the Civic University Commission, which set out how universities have the capability, opportunity and responsibility to support the places where they are based to solve their most pressing issues and problems.

Our research found a significant amount of work which is contributing to this civic agenda, working with community partners in a range of key areas, including social housing and community mental health. A snapshot of this work is captured below.

- **Social Housing:** The University recently completed a high profile research project to enhance social housing design across the North East. This was delivered during lockdown, working collaboratively with local and national architects and social housing tenants as participants.⁴¹
- **The Teesside Law Clinic**, as well as providing skills for students on law courses, provides real services for people in the Tees Valley seeking legal advice.
- **Inside Out** is the University's successful prison exchange programme, where Teesside University students are taught alongside serving prisoners to examine issues of crime, justice and society.
- **Volun-tees** - the University's volunteer programme pairs students and recent graduates with 260 providers each year, promoting over 300 volunteering roles in total. In 2019/20, Tees students and graduates carried out 19000 volunteering hours in the community, equating to £189,337 of service given to the local community (if volunteers had been paid living wage).⁴²

⁴⁰ Civic agreements to [Teesside University](#)

⁴¹ User-centred Design for Social Housing [Transforming Construction](#)

⁴² Data from Teesside University

- Members of staff and senior management sit on the governing boards at schools and colleges across the North East including the Endeavour Academies Trust, Middlesbrough, as well as on the boards of local community groups.

Case Study: Volun-tees work with the Samaritans

Interior design and architecture students, through the Volun-tees project, partnered with the Samaritans on a project to redesign the foyer of the local Samaritans centre. The foyer was redesigned and refurbished, creating a new bright but private space available for Samaritans and their clients.

Objective Four: Empowering local leaders

The Levelling Up White Paper set an ambition for strong local leadership which could enhance opportunities for a region.

“Levelling up will only be successful if local actors are empowered to develop solutions that work for their communities. It requires strong leadership, effective decision-making and harnessing wider private-sector leadership.”⁴³

Teesside is already acting as a case study for a local devolution. And Ben Houchen – a figure who was brought up in many of our focus groups – is a key example of how local leaders are strengthening economic opportunities for a region.

“[Houchen] is one of few politicians who’s said he’s going to do something and actually achieved it. The main one being Teesside Airport, bringing it back under public control ... actually renovating the area and trying to make affordable flights to actual places people want to go to. Nothing but positive thoughts for him” **38 year old male secondary school teacher from Stockton-on-Tees**

“There are a lot of prospects towards Teesside and, if you follow Ben Houchen on your LinkedIn or on Twitter, you’ll be able to see that there are a lot of aspirations for the town” **24 year old male junior project manager from Middlesbrough & Teesside University graduate**

We found that Teesside University contributes significantly to local leadership and decision making through:

- Its work with the Tees Valley Combined Authority and the Local Enterprise Partnership
- Its role as the powerhouse within the region’s innovation strategy.
- Its wider work providing strategic advice and expertise across the Tees Valley community

⁴³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)

Case Study: The National Horizons Centre

The National Horizons Centre (NHC) is Teesside University's global biosciences and healthcare sector, located in Darlington. Supported by funding from the Tees Valley Combined Authority, it is helping build an innovation pipeline for the bioindustry, enabling them to discover diseases earlier, develop novel treatments, and deliver life changing medicines.

Founded in 2019, and described by Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen as "a beacon of all we are good at here in the Tees Valley", the NHC centre is a leader in training for the bioindustry, with expertise in biopharma, advanced therapies and vaccine manufacturing. Creating an industry-ready workforce by training the full pipeline of talent in cutting-edge technologies, from school leavers to upskilling the bioindustry. They also partner with businesses on both student placements and recruitment opportunities.

Cutting-edge technologies and facilities help to advance research in the biosciences and healthcare sector, across disease-specific research, biomanufacturing and digital analytics and machine learning. NHC's state-of-the-art laboratories, computing suites and co-creation spaces, allow their researchers, students and industry partners to benefit from access to everything they need to innovate in one place.

Working with local and national policymakers

The university works in concert with policy makers and elected officials locally, contributing time, money and expertise across a range of initiatives, acting as the central part of the region's innovation and growth ambitions:

- Teesside University is a key partner for the Tees Valley Combined Authority, having signed an MoU cementing its relationship in 2018. It currently supports the Mayor with strategy and across key initiatives, particularly in the growth of digital businesses, in emergent Net-Zero industries, and in biological sciences.
- The Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre (NZIIC), as mentioned earlier in this report, forms a key component of Tees Valley Combined Authority's regional innovation strategy.
- The University has played a key role in the development of the Tees Valley, Strategic Economic Plan, the Local Industrial Strategy, and the Skills Strategy, and participates in the TVCA's strategic and operational innovation, business, skills, digital, place and culture groups

- The University's Vice-Chancellor is a board member of the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership, which is helping to devise the region's strategic economic plan.
- The Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Enterprise and Business Engagement are members of the LEP Industrial Collaboration Board, building networks across the Region and were instrumental in the South Tees Development Corporation
- The Teesside University Business School (TUIBS) is a collaborative partner with the Tees Valley Combined Authority A on a £3 million Skills for Growth ESF project, supporting SMEs with skills interventions and providing market research for industrial centres.

It is also supporting both the combined authority and national government's efforts to encourage investment in the UK, and specifically into Teesside, helping the local economy to grow. Working with the Department of International Trade and the Tees Valley Combined Authority, the University created a proposition positioning the Tees Valley as a preferred location for investment.

The proposition focuses on the opportunity to establish precursor and carbon fibre manufacturing plants in the Tees Valley, helping DIT demonstrate the area has the assets, skills and material chemistry expertise which are attractive in overseas markets including Japan, China, Spain, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and mainland Europe.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Delivery Report 2019 - Tees Valley Combined Authority

Conclusion

This report shows the depth and breadth of the contribution of Teesside University to the levelling up agenda, through its role as an anchor institution in Teesside.

It goes beyond traditional GVA calculation, capturing the University's wider social & cultural impact, broader work on skills, with local businesses, and how you are perceived by the community. And above all, it shows the importance of Teesside working with the local partners and at the heart of the economic regeneration taking place in the valley.

This includes:

- Supporting 1986 jobs in Tees Valley directly, as well as an additional 489 full time equivalent roles through its supply chains
- Providing a crucial pipeline for local people to retrain and upskill without leaving the region, addressing the regional skills deficit - not just through undergraduate degree courses, but also through CPD, access to degree apprenticeships, and entry routes via short courses and foundation years
- Providing a large percentage of the local healthcare workforce, particularly in nursing and other healthcare professions
- Working in partnership with schools, FE Colleges and the local community to raise aspirations and provide opportunities.
- Acting as a source of expertise and advice to local policy makers and businesses

In our focus groups, people we spoke to embraced the idea that the University had a big part to play in levelling up - they instinctively understood that the future success of the region is intimately tied to the future success of the University..

But it was clear they didn't know much about the University's impact as a whole, and the ways in which it was facilitating levelling up in the region. We hope this report can support the University to articulate its role to local residents in Teesside, as well as providing them with a starting point for discussions with policymakers and with Government.

