

SECTOR DEALS

PARTNERING WITH UNIVERSITIES

This guide offers advice for businesses on how to best involve and engage with universities when developing a sector deal, and gives practical advice on how this engagement can occur.

For more information, contact:
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1 WHY WORK WITH A UNIVERSITY?

Universities play an important role in developing world-class sectors. They share their research, partnerships, and national and international links. They provide graduate and postgraduate skills, business support and continuing professional development (CPD). They coordinate economic and social activity, and supply evidence and analysis for strategic planning. They are innovators and investors in places and people.¹

Universities provide business support and help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow. They partner with large companies to increase exports and develop new technologies. Universities also create jobs and high-quality employment, and provide the higher-level skills to meet the job requirements of the future.

Working with a university can help connect different industries. As large and often multidisciplinary organisations, universities can bring experts from different fields together, and offer new insights and build new links. They sit on Local Enterprise Partnership boards and work with councils, while forging international relationships and identifying global opportunities. They are an important link to new discoveries and developments around the world, and also identify and address skills gaps and longer-term trends at the local and sectoral level.

¹For more on how universities contribute to the industrial strategy, see Universities UK's response to the [green paper](#) and [regional briefings](#).

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Universities UK

2 WHAT CAN UNIVERSITIES OFFER SECTOR DEALS?

Research commercialisation

Universities work with their researchers to develop their technologies into commercially viable opportunities through licensing, spinout company formation and consulting. They enable companies to access cutting-edge research through interaction between business leaders and investors with university researchers and spinout companies.

Innovation

Staff and students from universities work with businesses to develop new products and services, and increase productivity. Working collectively, many universities offer equipment-sharing schemes to help businesses access cutting-edge technologies. Small and medium-sized companies have also used voucher schemes to bring the latest university expertise into their business and drive innovation.

Increased exports

As globally connected institutions, universities can combine business knowledge and marketing expertise with international partnerships, helping to increase exports to new markets.

Strong leadership

Universities can help provide the strong leadership needed for sector deals to deliver upgrades in productivity. With their connections and national and international reach, they can also identify shared sectoral challenges, trends and opportunities.

Vital skills training

Universities provide the training and skills to increase sector capacity. But skills needs are often cross-disciplinary: science or engineering-based sectors require business skills for commercialisation, for example.² Universities also identify (and help address) current and future local and sectoral skills needs, and build leadership skills in businesses through executive education programmes.

Access to funding

Universities have historically provided the necessary match funding to unlock investment spending for local projects from European Structural and Investment Funds and the UK government's Local Growth Fund. Yet they can often also offer experience of accessing funding streams such as Innovate UK and Research Council funding, as well as national or international sources of finance such as bonds and loans.³

Regional connections

A comprehensive sector deal is unlikely to be confined to one town or city in the UK. Universities and their staff often have formal and informal networks spanning the UK (and beyond) in sector areas. They have knowledge of centres of excellence and expertise and areas with emerging strengths, and the businesses that often spin out from these areas locate near universities.

²The [Life Sciences](#) industrial strategy report states that there is a crucial role for universities and business schools in providing a high level of management and entrepreneurship training.

³[Innovation and growth factsheet series: funding local development](#), Universities UK (2017)

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3 HOW CAN UNIVERSITIES BE INCLUDED IN SECTOR DEALS?

Many universities have a dedicated team for working with business. To decide which one to approach, the following information may be useful:

- The government is supporting a series of science and innovation audits, bringing local partners together to assess research and innovation strengths, including at universities. The [first](#) and [second](#) sets of reports have been published online.
- The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England have created [Konfer](#), a brokerage platform for UK universities and businesses.
- [Gateway to Research](#) provides a web-based portal to give access to information and academic experts, funded by the seven Research Councils and Innovate UK.
- The Higher Education Funding Council for England has published a [report and maps](#) to help identify opportunities for universities and colleges and SMEs to collaborate.
- Sir Andrew Witty's [review of universities and growth](#) collected data on industrial clusters in the UK.
- A recent [government report](#) mapped local innovation strengths onto Local Enterprise Partnership geographies.
- The Smart Specialisation Hub has provided an accessible [mapping of England's Innovation Activity](#) and information on [innovation by Local Enterprise Partnership](#).

Once you have identified a university or group of universities to work with on a sector deal, you may decide to approach the business engagement team, if there is one. Alternatives include the university careers office (especially if you are interested in exploring student placements), technology transfer office (although not all universities have one), or individual support staff or academics.

For more general guidance, the CBI have produced a [practical guide](#) for university business collaboration. NCUB's annual *State of the Relationship* [report](#) provides examples of and data on university business partnerships.