



TITLE

Setting widening participation, knowledge exchange and collaborative partnerships for place transformation in a civic and place leadership context for HEIs: The UK Government's 'Going for Growth' regional agenda

PRESENTER

Professor Joyce Liddle Professorial Research Fellow, Centre for Policy and Practice, University of Durham, Visiting Professor, University of Newcastle (2022-5) & Emerita Professor, Northumbria

Annual 2025 Distinguished Regional Studies Award Holder, RSA

Up until August 2024- Director of Inclusive Growth, Insights NE (INE) and invited regional academic representative on NECA Investment Planning panel

Structure of presentation

The changing policy context for widening participation, knowledge exchange and collaborative partnerships & place transformation in a context of civic and place leadership role for HEIs.

The highly fragmented devolutionary landscape of regional and local growth, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) driving leadership in collaboration with other agencies, including Universities/HEIs

Some recent government reports, and evidence from personal involvement in joined-up and collaborative practice across North-East Universities/HEI & other sectors

Some innovative proactive examples of Universities/HEIs engagement in the Devolution & Growth agenda, and forthcoming Industrial Strategy

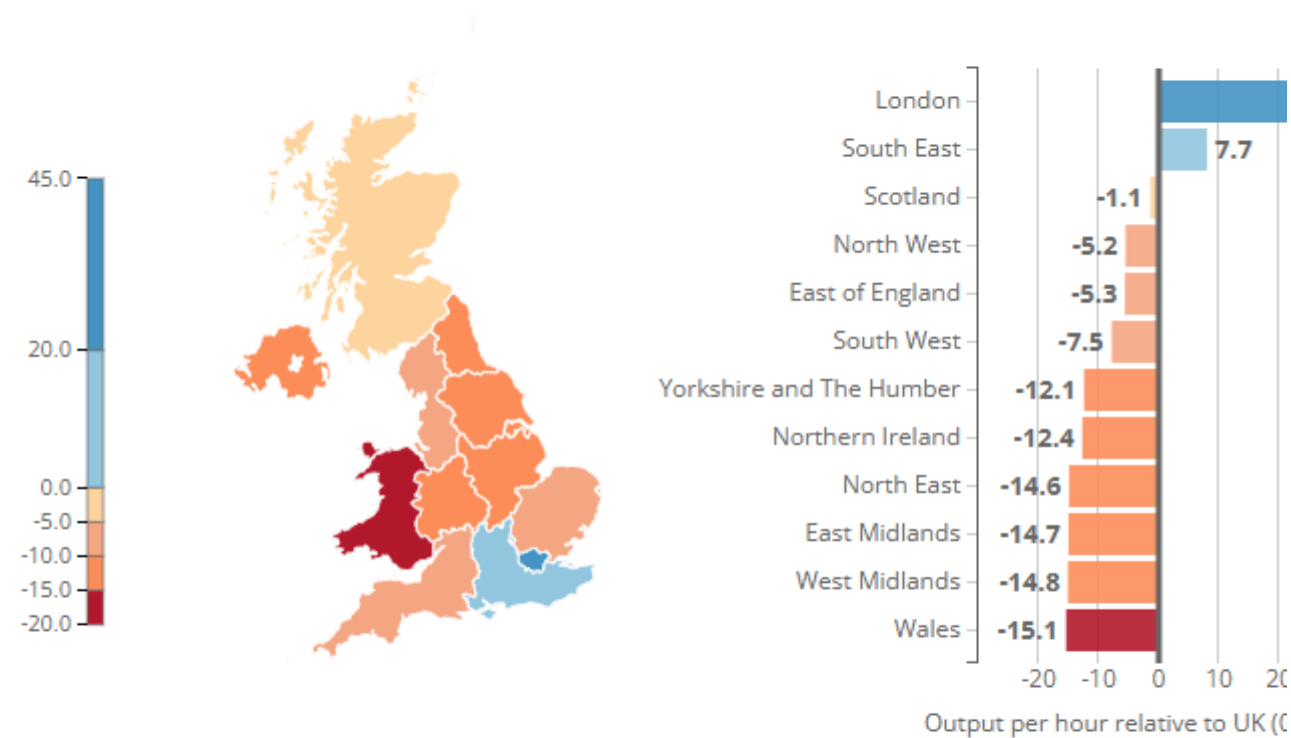
Discussion & tentative conclusions

NEW DAWN OF REGIONAL POWER



Figure 1: London was 28.5% more productive than the UK average in terms of output per hour worked

Output per hour worked by International Territorial Level 1 region relative to the UK average, UK, 2023



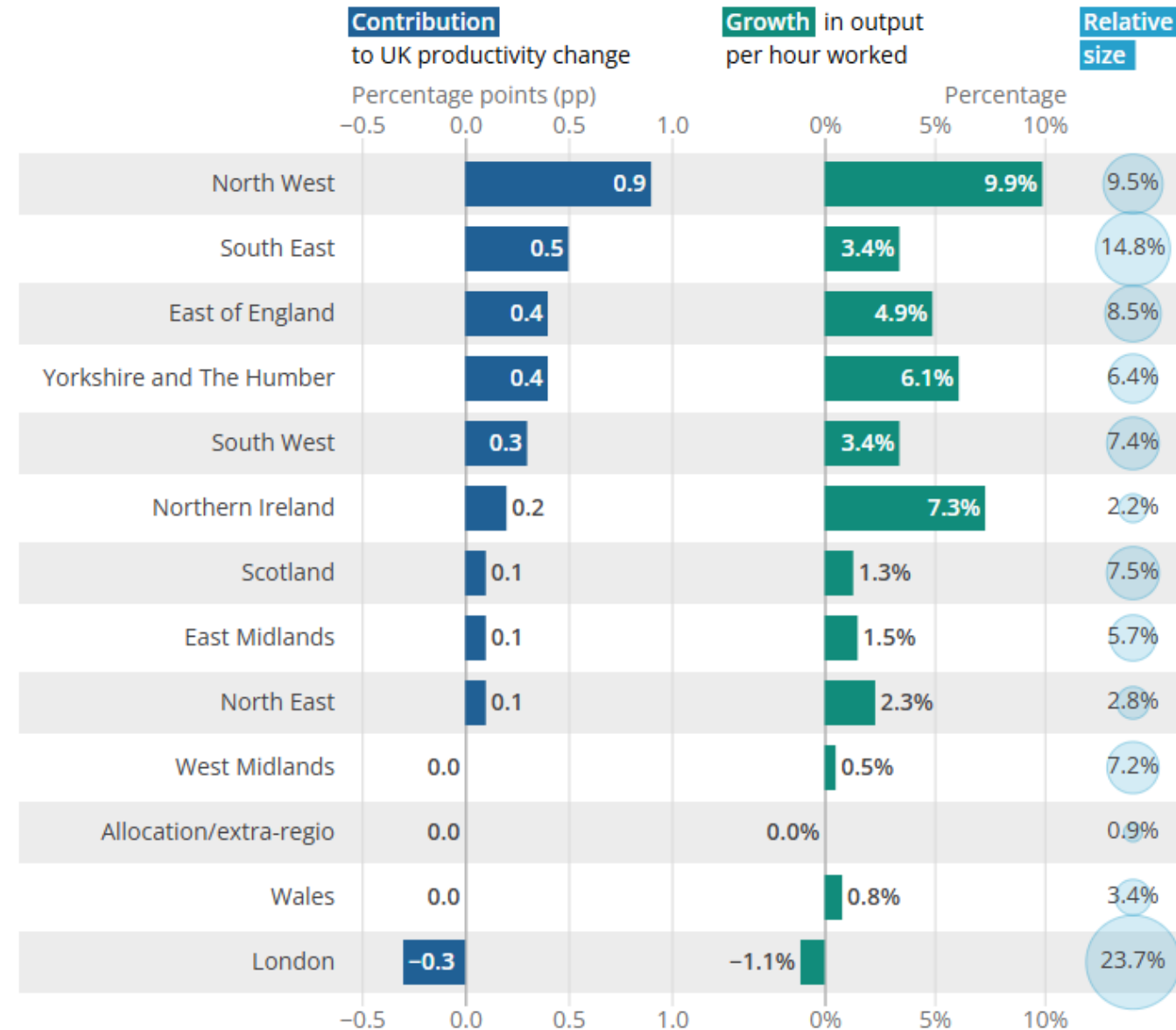
Source: Regional productivity from the Office for National Statistics

[Embed code](#)

Notes:

1. The baseline (0.00) in the figure is overall productivity level for the UK.

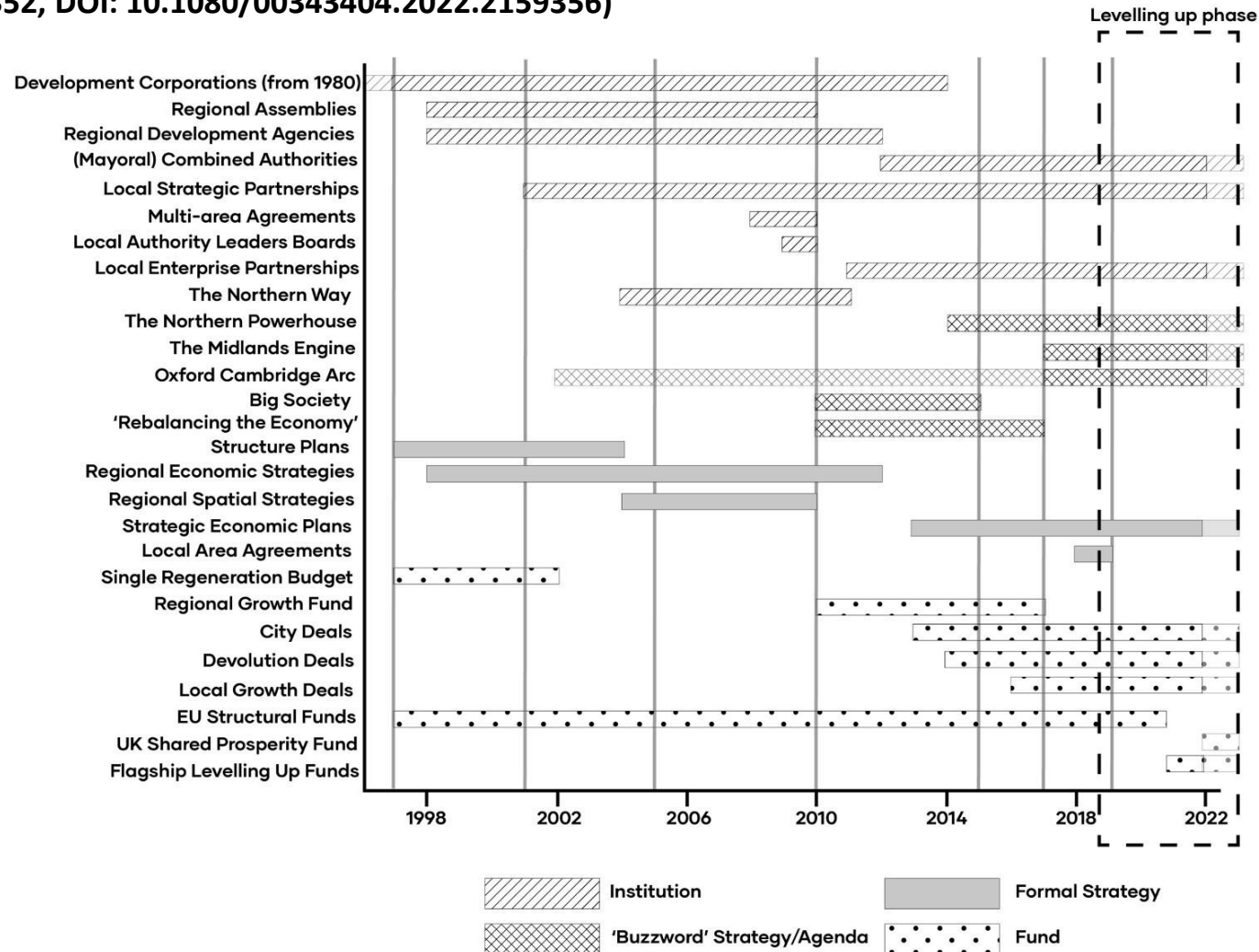
Contributions to UK growth in output per hour by International Territorial Level (ITL1) region, UK, 2023



Source: Regional productivity from the Office for National Statistics

Policy Churn in England

Institutions and agendas in subnational economic development in England, 1997 – 2022 (Source: Mark Fransham, Max Herbertson, Mihaela Pop, Margarida Bandeira Morais & Neil Lee (2023) Level best? The levelling up agenda and UK regional inequality, Regional Studies, 57:11, 2339-2352, DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2022.2159356)



Regional institutional architecture – is it ‘Fit for Purpose?’

Fragmentation, complexity, incoherent institutional framework and state architectures

(Elliott, Liddle and others, The Fragmentation of Public Administration: Differentiated and Decentred Governance in the (Dis)United Kingdom, **Public Administration**, 2022)

Cross cutting meshes, silos, multiple tiers, spheres, organisations & initiatives (Mulgan, 2024)- see UCL Geoff Mulgan Website

<https://profiles.ucl.ac.uk/76510-geoff-mulgan/about>

Summarised history since 2010

Double devolution to Scotland, Wales, NI, London- then to English regions-

Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), now referred to as Strategic Authorities (SAs) in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, 2025,- a crucial part of the new 'devolution agenda' for England since 2010 promising the transfer of powers and resources from central to local government. Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are expected to drive leadership in collaboration with other agencies, including HEIs.

Initially 39 business led Local Enterprise Partnerships were established between 2010-2012 to drive economic development, and supported by city and growth deals to enable local leaders to deliver strategies for employment, skills, investment, and business support (HM Government, 2011)- LEPs now absorbed into MCA (SAs).

Combined Authorities (CAs), alongside directly elected Mayors and Devolution Deals have been the 'preferred method of formulating public policy and resource allocation' (Pike et al, 2016.15).

Since the establishment of the first MCA in Greater Manchester, these institutions have evolved and accrued extra powers and responsibilities, depending on the strength and 'voice' of each Mayor and how convincing their narratives on transformation are. Each Mayor also has 'soft' convening powers to enable them to draw partners across their sub regions to work together.

Since Starmer Government (2024) in terms of resources into sub-national regions- MCAs/SAs THE ONLY SHOWs IN TOWN !!.....but.....

All universities in dire financial straits plus

4th Sept 2025 Announcement-Patrick Vallance hits pause on REF (THES) to review whether £2bn annually can support governments economic & social missions

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/patrick-vallance-hits-pause-research-excellence-framework>

Northern Mayors and University VCs respond to the exclusion of northern universities from the Global Talent Fund (UKRI) August 2025

North East council debts tops £4.3bn amid worries over 'unsustainable' funding system. The amount owed to lenders by the seven local authorities in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham jumped by almost £200 million in the 12 months to April 2025

The Chronicle Newspaper, 25th August 2025

National & regional policy: recent changes

Nationally

Starmer Government Manifesto Commitment to
'Going for Growth' and dispersion of sub-national-power
to local leaders (MCAs-now CAs)

2025-Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill-
changed from MCAs to SAs, Devolution LG Reform,
Devolution Priority Programme, and Deputy PM
commissioned an analysis of the whole of LG Finance -

Innovate UK

New Skills Council

Industrial Strategy- 8 clusters nationally- regions to
choose their own clusters in Growth Plan

British Business Bank, National Wealth Fund, +New
Quangos created –see list at the rear

Continuance of some earlier programmes- Levelling Up
and many others now absorbed into MCAs

New Trailblazers, and Neighbourhood Governance

Regionally

Growth Plans-every CA (SA) to submit one to
national government over the Summer Of 2025

Dispersion of power

Place Based strategies- Universities have a central
role to play in helping to drive growth

Choose Growth Clusters within National Industrial
strategy

Economic development zones

R & D- NE still has low % spending

Northern Powerhouse

All RDAs in 9 regions abolished after 2010, 39 LEPs
created (but now absorbed into CAs)

NE did relatively well on Inward Investment, but
since the demise of ONE (RDA) no coordinated
effort

Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

LGA, CCN, District Councils Network, LGIU, London councils all very concerned at the recommendations for MCA/SAs and local government reform.

Proposals seen as top down from central government, and limited seat at the regional tables for lower tiers- Districts the most angry but LGA and CCN going to read more fully before making any responses

LGIU SAY

No real fiscal DEVOLUTION- no new money

Powers just reshuffling the pack from existing bodies

No clarity or coterminosity of Public Service geographies

No details on how new SAs will work with Unitaries to achieve PS Reform

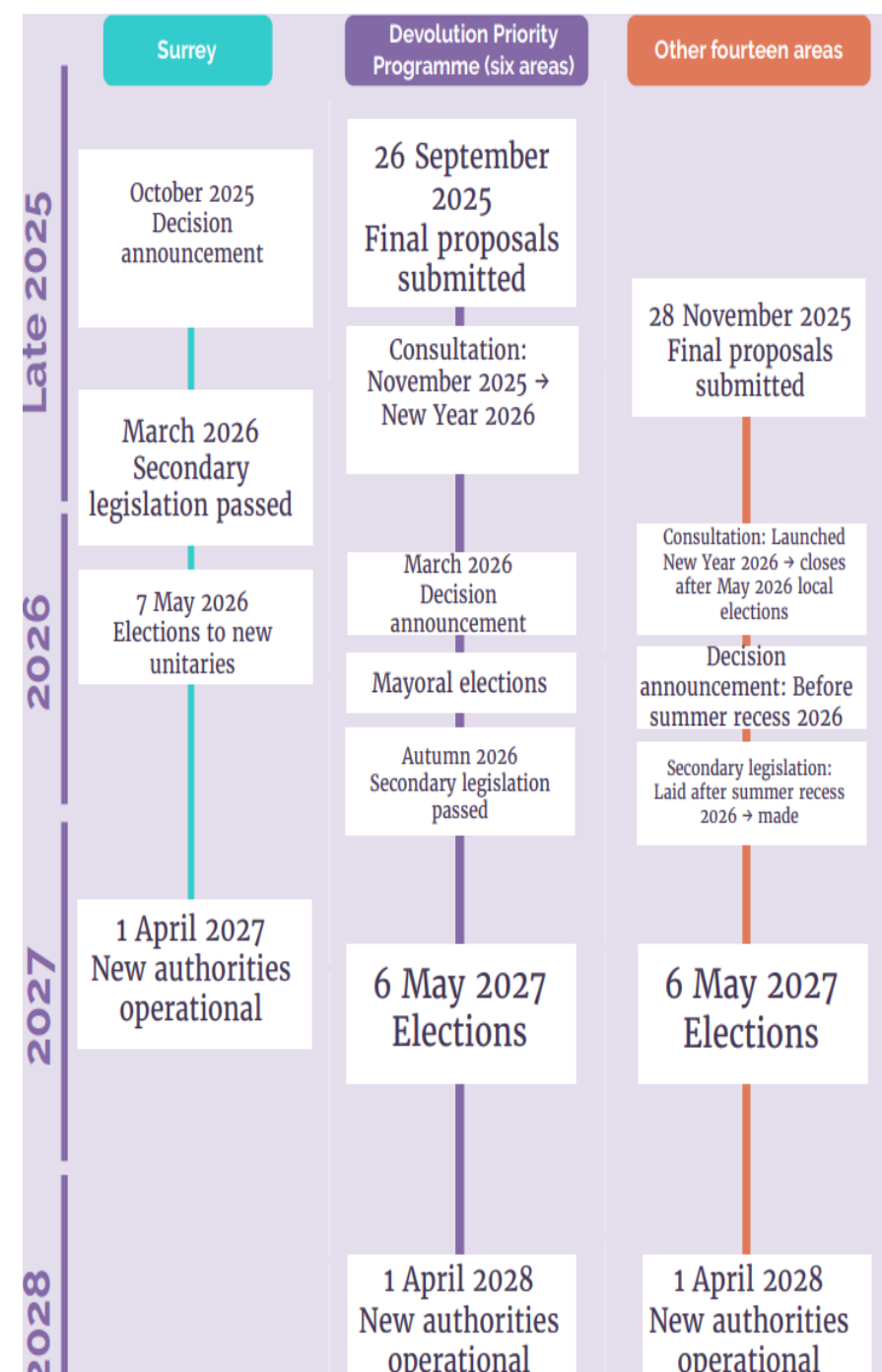
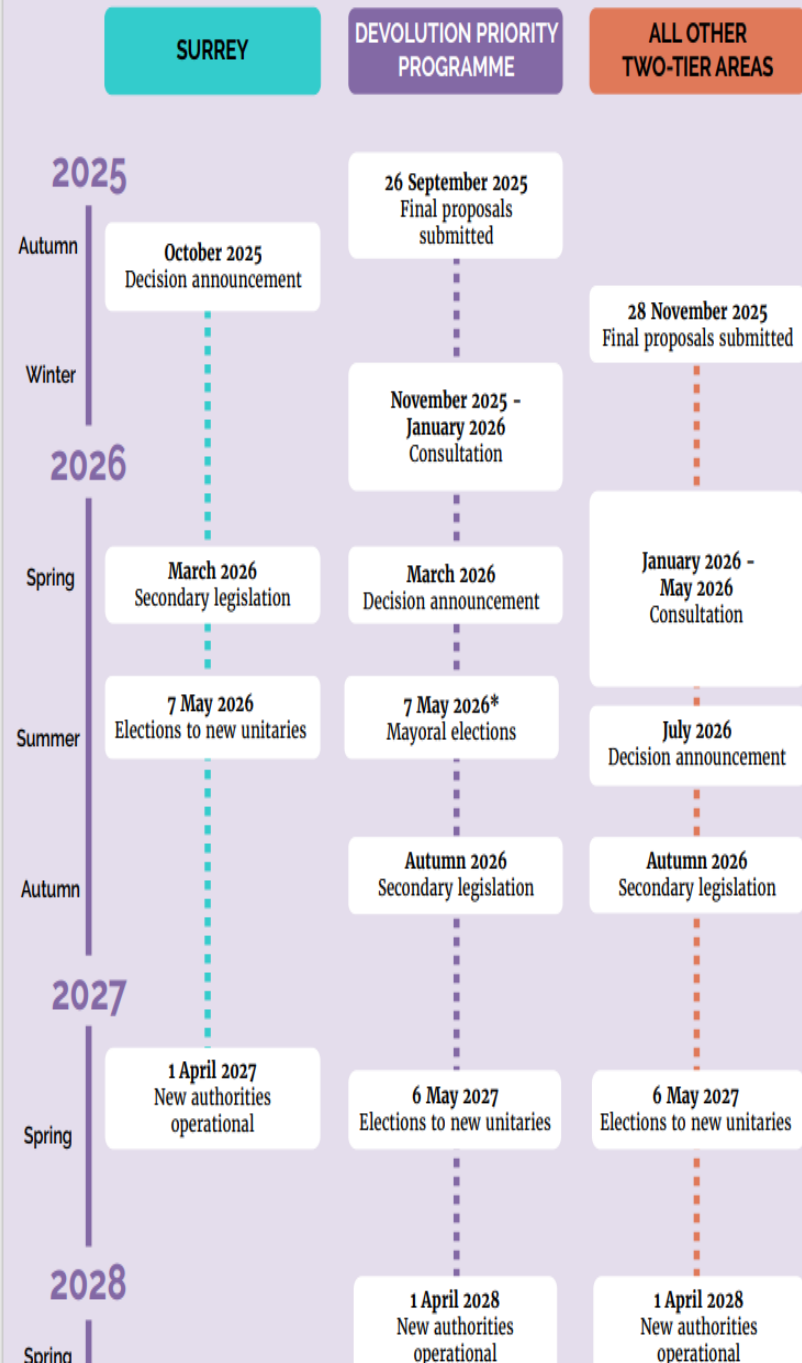
New Voting system for Mayors and PCC- no longer first past the post but Supplementary Voting system

The only bodies who seem to be happy are existing MCAs (now referred to as Established SAs) and the business representative bodies, as well as the National Assoc of local councils, representing parish and town councils who seem to be reassured that neighbourhood governance wont get rid of parish and town council- though
DISTRICTS SEEM TO BE THE MAJOR LOSERS

LGA response to Devolution Bill

https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-lga-briefing-0?utm_source=Dynamics%20365%20Customer%20Insights%20-%20Journeys&utm_medium=email&utm_term=N%2FA&utm_campaign=Devo%20and%20LGR%20bulletin%2003-09-25&utm_content=Devo%20and%20LGR%20bulletin%2003-09-25#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=4bea5cde-9d04-4da2-8dc6-a32015280000

LGR Timeline



Industrial Strategy Priorities 2035

The industrial strategy will focus on the sectors which offer the highest growth opportunity for the economy and business. Eight growth-driving sectors have been identified:

- advanced manufacturing
- clean energy industries
- creative industries
- defence
- digital and technologies
- financial services
- life sciences
- professional and business services

The new modern industrial strategy – Invest 2035 – is the UK government’s credible, 10-year plan to deliver the certainty and stability businesses need to invest in the high growth sectors that will drive our growth mission.

The strategy will focus on tackling barriers to growth in our highest potential growth-driving sectors and places, creating the right conditions for increased investment, high-quality jobs and ensuring tangible impact in communities right across the UK.

The strategy’s goal is to capture a greater share of internationally mobile investment in strategic sectors and spur domestic businesses to boost their investment and scale up their growth – an essential step in achieving sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth.

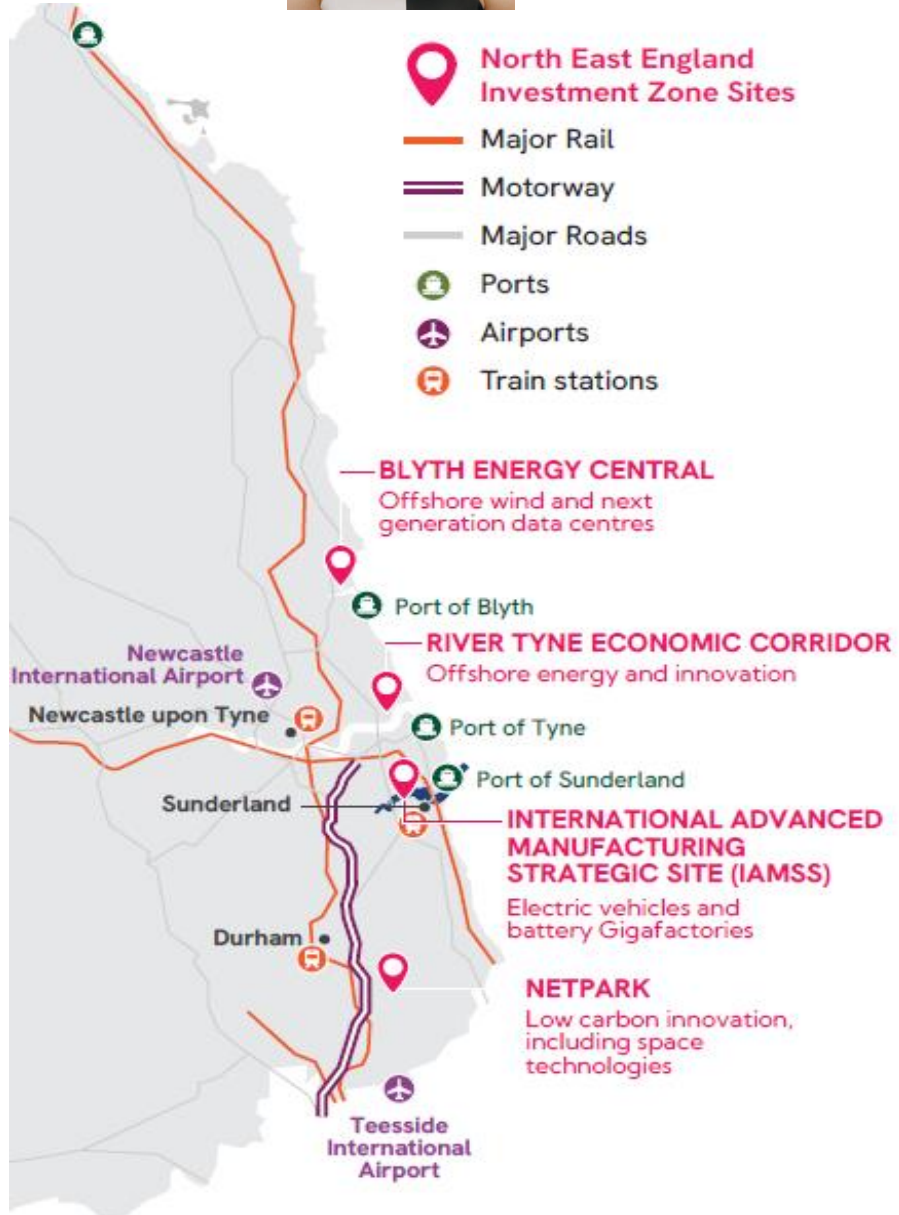


Figure 1: Geography of the Tees Valley Combined Authority

The NE of England- very complex governance landscape

Territorially- the Council of Nations & Regions (chair Starmer), The Mayor's Council (chair Rayner), Leaders Council & Greater North (all Northern Mayors)

Nationally- 29 MPs & a few people in the House of Lords who speak on regional issues e.g. Lord Shipley, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson Lord Beith. **Also** an All Party Parlt Gp on the NE

Pan-Regional : Part of Northern Powerhouse & The Greater North

Regionally & Locally- Two MCAs (SAs) TVCA & NECA & their constituent Local Authorities –which are still multi-purpose with constrained funds

2 tier Unitary Authorities plus we still have parish & town councils but LG Reform will change these to more MCAs and Unitaries

Darlington Economic Campus- HM Treasury, Department for Business & Trade, (was) Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Office for National Statistics (ONS), Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Competition and Markets Authority, Department for Education and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Plus

Transport for the North, Nexus Passenger Transport Authority, Ports Authorities, Airport Authority, Buses ,–Invest North-East- all now part of MCAs

Police & PCC, Fire and rescue Services, Probation & Prisons, Ambulance Trusts- all have Boards-Police and Crime Commissioners (3 across the region)

NEPO – Membership Organisation (all LAs and some Universities)- purchases goods on behalf of the region e.g. energy, bulk orders of anything

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, National Parks Authorities (DEFRA locally),

Regional Tourism, Sports & Arts Boards, Arts Council and Sports Council North

The NE of England- very complex governance landscape

NGI , Active Northumberland, and Visit Durham

NE Cultural Partnership, NE Heritage Lottery Fund

NHS Foundation Trusts and Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards to replace Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)

ICB/ICPs to have an emphasis on PLACE

9 x Housing Associations and ALMOs- run on behalf of LAs as private entities to rent out what used to be council housing but now known as social housing- 3 of the biggest HAs are Karbon Homes, Gentoo, North Star and they are regulated by the Homes and Communities Agency

Resilience Boards, made up of all blue light and emergency service organisations- very influential during COVID 19

Chamber of Commerce, NE CBI, Institute of Directors, Engineering Employers Federation, Federation of Small Business, NE Regional Business Forum, Entrepreneurship Forums, etc are all drawn into decision making forums across the region

Think Tanks such as IPPR North, Urban Foresight, Trade Unions , Trade Associations (such as Nissan Supplier Forum), etc, Business Angels, Investors UK

PLUS HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF PARTNERSHIPS AND LEGACY PROGRAMMES FROM PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS

Importantly for this session
we have

5 Universities, including Teesside

1159 state schools, 43 private schools, 1 in 4 schools is now an Academy run on a commercial basis, 18 FE Colleges, Careers Service

Examples of what NE Universities/Colleges are doing

All Universities working with business, schools, FE, governance agencies- lots of examples eg INTU Centre, mentoring, Summer Schools, Apprenticeships, space scientists visiting schools, opportunity grants for low income students/mature students

Universities for the NE (All 5 Universities including Tees)-Lots of activities & strategies produced – not very coordinated

4th Sept 2025- The Mayor launches *Colleges for the NE*- A transformational partnership for leading colleges across the region to work together to drive economic growth, reduce inequality and boost skills

Newcastle/Northumbria- aligning University Strategies to NECA strategies esp Growth Plan-**see below- also aligning Accessibility and Participation Plan (24-28) to Regional Agenda**



All VCs and Regional Development Officers meet regularly, as do Deans of Business Schools

Many Universities have MCA senior people/Mayors on Boards

Insights NE (INE) - initially Ncstle& Northumbria- now extended to Durham and Sunderland (does not include Teesside)- Policy-Academic KE

I was one of the original Directors (Inclusive Growth)- funded £2.5 m by Research England, £2.5m from NECA,NHS, 2x Universities, other agencies-

Similar Policy Exchanges elsewhere eg City Redi, WYPERN, Hesletine Centre Liverpool, Manchester Productivity Institute,, NTU driving the establishment of a similar body in EMs, as are Bath and Bristol , NE and NW University networks on Net Zero –the latter pre-empting potential Devolution Deals in Cumbria and Lancashire

A group of regional academics (myself included) were part of the initial *Investment Planning Process* to feed into the *Growth Plan*

Fellowships (CAPE) where academics are sited in NECA for 1 to 3 years –CAPE was led by Sarah Chaytor of UPEN and UCL- UKRI has funded (£5m) extension of this LPIP network to include Durham and other Universities

UNE Technical Support Network established

Examples of what NE Universities/Colleges are doing

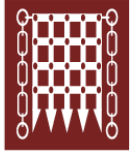
Durham working closely with *Darlington Economic Campus*-HMT & Govt offices decentralised to the region-DEC also speaking to all regions's Universities about potential teaching programmes for civil servants

All 4 Universities apart from Tees gave evidence to a *HOL Social mobility select committee* earlier in the year

Individual academics from all 5 universities pitching for research with MCA (SAs)

- Home to *National Catapults and innovation centres*, and world-leading research expertise
- *Pipelines of STEM talent* to support new investment in R&D.
- Durham University leads on a *Space Science network*
- Northern Powerhouse highlighted University of Durham report and lead on *NE Innovation Ecosystem* to drive productivity and unlocking economic potential (July 2025)

Some recent reports



Next steps for universities and their local economies in the UK, Monday, 13th October 2025

Institute of Economic Development and AtkinsRéalis (July 2025) How Universities Can Help Drive Local and Regional Economies

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy>

Innovate UK (2025) Tees Valley Local Action Plan

<https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/about/tees-valleys-strategic-economic-plan/>

<https://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk/local-growth-plan>

LGIU (July 2025) Capacity and governance challenges in English Devolution, London

HOL Select Committee on Social Mobility <https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/aa211f70-3a6c-4a09-9d5e-2b2a77fee6c3>

OFS (July 2025) Uni Connect: A review of collaborative support in access to higher education

Developing a theory of change for a future national collaborative outreach programme

Equality of opportunity

Social Mobility Commission (4 June 2025) Rethink failed social mobility policy to improve opportunities for UK's poorest communities

RISE calls for urgent action on persistent regional inequalities, 1st Aug 2025

Devo Agency, 7th July 2025, Podcast 'Have Mayors got the "A" Factor?'

Clarifying the devolution dividend: Final Report of Investment in Places Policy [The Productivity Institute, University of Manchester, September 2025](#)



Discussion & conclusions

All Universities will need to be aware of divergent Growth Plans and Industrial Strategies peculiar to their own MCA/SAs and seek ways to engage with governance mechanisms

In the NE – two very different Growth Plans (and I would argue Local Industrial Strategies to come)

How to prioritise in a region with so many social/economic and sustainability issues- legacy of de-industrialisation?

NECA Mayor pursuing a Foundation Economy , Inclusive Growth & Clustering Strategy-emphasising social and economic issues, though innovation, business growth considered important too

TVCA Mayor pursuing a Net Zero, Clustering & ‘Trickle Down’ and property driven/infrastructure and economic Strategy- in collaboration with Innovate UK

No regional narrative and overall strategy- both Mayors ‘going their own way’ but working together on a few Trailblazer programmes & Neighbourhood Governance

Uncoordinated policies on different issues esp innovation & business growth between the two CAs and a focus on industrial strategy clusters

Fragmentation of governance and delivery mechanisms- **implementation will be the key-** can they **deliver** on current resource base?

Role of Reform Party on County councils? Durham CC now led by RP- will they make gains next year on other councils?

Relationships between MCAs and local government and other agencies- which agencies will deliver? Can Universities/HEIs help to deliver regional plans?

Capacity issues throughout public services and Universities/HEIs (policy and administratively)

Diminished role of LG and planning role and increased debt levels – Universities parlous financial situation

Shrinking resources, despite Mayoral rhetoric- can they achieve all their strategies without drawing on lower levels of governance, or greater levels of funding from HMT- remains to be seen !!

Assumption that MCA/SAs can draw in funds from private sector investment or borrow from the National Wealth Fund/British Business Bank- central state public finance very strained

Finally

All Universities focused on widening participation & social mobility, reducing inequality, equitable skills, employment and life-long learning opportunities for 'left behind', or hitherto 'excluded' communities.

Despite on-going financial pressures facing the whole HEI sector and broader public services, Universities have an opportunity as effective, transformative Place Leader anchor institutions to fulfil their civic missions, at the same time as becoming a key catalyst for longer term, co-ordinated and joined up activities with partners.

Thus, HEIs have the capacity to simultaneously fulfil

DUAL CONTRIBUTION TO

- **Starmer's national economic growth agenda**
- **Place Based place-based wider social impacts to enhance levels of access, success and progression of under-represented groups in HEI**

In my experience of working in all 5 regional Universities (as well as in other UK and overseas Universities) over the years, often the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing- mainly due to the size, bureaucracy and immense scale of activities they undertake

Often it relies on individual academics with a long- standing interest in their regions , and those who have worked in/and can move between academia, governance & the world of practice to proactively seek out opportunities and feed them into the hierarchy

Des McNulty (City Redi podcast, 5/6/25) says we need Place advocates in Universities, academics who can help to 'shape' regional policies, rather than Universities as one way 'imparters of knowledge'- need co-creation of policy & people skilled in doing this – those who want to impact on society & link into the political world

All of this will take lots of energy, proactivity, commitment, joined up thinking **WITHIN & BETWEEN** Universities and Governance agencies

See also

Liddle J & Addidle G D (2022) The role of Universities & HEIs in the Vulnerability agenda- (Palgrave)

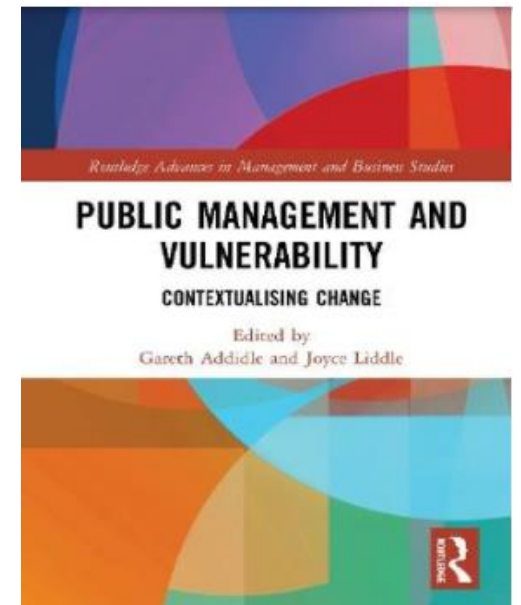
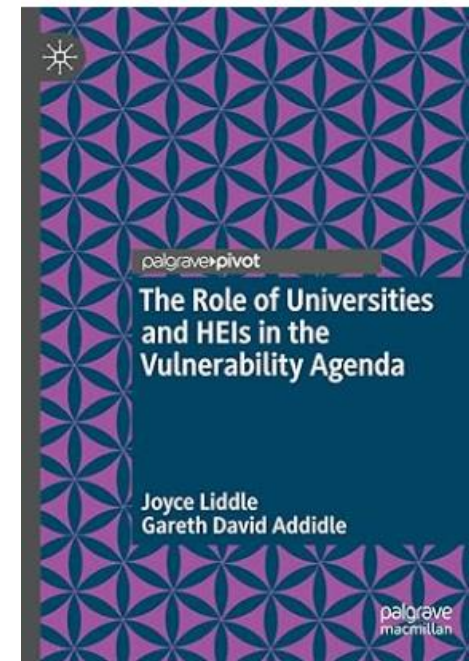
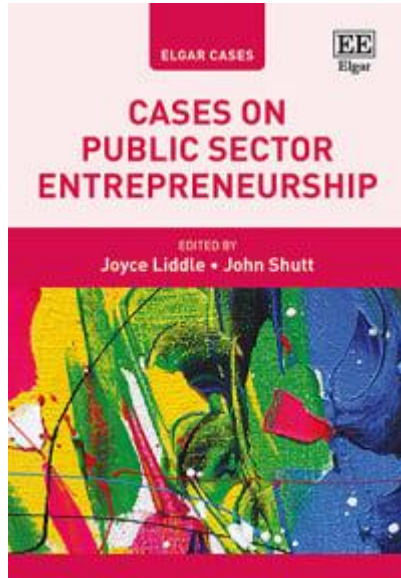
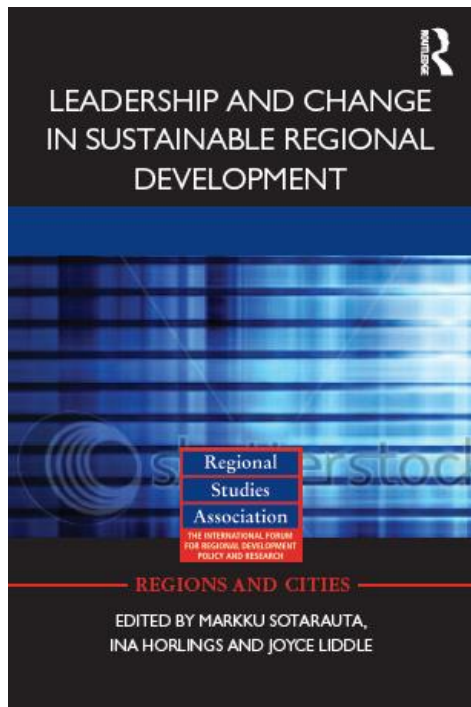
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- Lekakis N, Liddle J (2022) Cities City politics under austerity in Greece: Place-Based Leadership for a resilient Thessaloniki, 2011-2021, **Cities** - <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103984>, 4*
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- Liddle J , Shutt J and Addidle G D (2022) Overview of Levelling Up and Build Back Better, in Liddle J , Shutt J and Addidle G D (2022) (eds) Place Leadership and Governance to address social, economic and environmental issues: Leading and Governing 'Places' in a Post-Brexit world of 'Levelling Up, Special edition., **Local Economy**,- DOI: [10.1177/02690942221099835](https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942221099835)

Recent references

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsoc21/current>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21582041.2023.2281591>
- John Gibney, Joyce Liddle, John Shutt and Markku Sotarauta (eds) (forthcoming 2025), **Leadership in city and regional development: new perspectives from within and beyond borders**, a themed special issue of *Regional Studies* journal. To follow the development of this new collection through 2025, go to: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cres20/collections/Leadership-in-city>
- Gibney, J., Liddle, J. and Shutt, J. (2021) **Brexit disruption and transborder leadership in Europe**, *Regional Studies*, 55 (9), pp. 1596-1608 (this paper received the 2022 Regional Studies Association (Policy Debates) 'Best Paper Award').
- **Prof Liddle Publications available on:-**
<https://www.stchads.ac.uk/research/publications/>
<https://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?user=lK3QE98AAAAJ&hl=en>
<https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Joyce-Liddle-2176827342>
<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joyce-Liddle>
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Some recent publications



APPENDICES

References-Recently established Quangos

National Violent Disorder Unit
Border Security Command
Returns and Enforcement Unit
Industrial Strategy Council
Great British Railways
Great British Energy
National Wealth Fund
Skills England
Armed Forces Commissioner
Council of the Nations and the Regions
Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons
Covid Corruption Commissioner
National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority

National Data Library
Regulatory Innovation Office
National jobs and careers service
Single Enforcement Body
Local prevention partnerships
School Support Staff Negotiating Body
National Music Education Network
Windrush Commissioner
Independent football regulator
Community Pharmacist Prescribing Service
National Care Service
Independent Ethics and Integrity Commission
Clean Power Alliance

NE Region

Very diverse region Berwick to Barnard Castle -Northern Pennines & Dales to Coastal & Coalfield (size, geographically, rural/urban, administrative & political structures, different needs/social & economic problems, diverse business communities

Procurement spend- only 30% of goods & services spent are purchased within the region-over 70% spent on external goods % services

Productivity low due to dominance of the PS

The Chronicle Newspaper, 25th August 2025

North-East council debts tops £4.3bn amid worries over 'unsustainable' funding system. The amount owed to lenders by the seven local authorities in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham jumped by almost £200 million in the 12 months to April 2025

Snapshot of the NE in 2025

Facing significant economic challenges, including the UK's highest [economic inactivity rate](#) and rising unemployment, alongside a The region's employment rate hit its lowest point in the UK in 2025, further highlighting the difficulties in the job market.

Regional Priorities:

[North East Mayor Kim McGuinness](#) identified key priorities for 2025 as public transport, high street revitalization, childcare improvements, and climate change initiatives.

Tourism Potential

The [Destination North East England](#) sector looked to capitalize on trends such as noctourism, [sports tourism](#), and [wellness tourism](#) to boost the local economy and attract more visitors.

[Adult Skills](#) Investment:

The North East Combined Authority continued to allocate funding for adult skills and [Skills Bootcamps](#), with positive outcomes for enabling people to enter employment.

Property Market Shifts:

The residential property market was expected to become more of a buyer's market in 2025, offering buyers more negotiating power and choice, although sellers might face challenges.

Youth & Regional Inequality

Continued

Shrinking [employment rate](#). However, there were also efforts towards revival, with the Regional Mayor prioritizing public transport, high streets, childcare, and climate action, while the tourism sector aimed to leverage trends like noctourism, sports, and wellness.

Meanwhile, the residential property market began to shift towards a buyer's market, and efforts continued in adult skills and local devolution.

Economic Challenges

High Economic Inactivity:

The region experienced the highest economic inactivity rate in the UK in 2025, with a significant rise from the previous year, indicating a substantial portion of the working-age population is not employed or seeking work.

Rising Unemployment:

The unemployment rate in the North-East also increased, surpassing the national average and indicating growing challenges for job seekers.

Falling Employment Rate:

Generational Disadvantage:

The "State of the North" report highlighted that regional inequality exacerbates challenges for young people (Gen Z), with shrinking opportunities for social mobility and declining satisfaction with democracy.

Political and Democratic Engagement:

The report also pointed to barriers for young people's political participation and a perception that democracy is not delivering for them, posing a threat to the region's long-term health.

Political Landscape

Devolution Focus:

There was an emphasis on promoting further devolution to regional mayors to secure needed investment, a perk already seen through a subsidised bus fare system within the region.

Levelling Up Absence: With the previous government's [Levelling Up bidding process](#) abolished, the focus shifted to how regional mayors could secure investment in other ways.

The latest UK regional productivity data was released by the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) on June 19, 2025

, covering the year 2023 and presenting cumulative average annual growth rates from 2019 to 2023. Key findings show that the North West experienced the largest regional productivity growth from 2019 to 2023, while London had the largest fall. This trend suggests a potential narrowing of regional disparities, contrasting with previous decades of divergence, though London's productivity decline remains a point of interest.

Key Findings from the ONS Report (2019-2023)

UK Growth:

Overall UK output per hour worked grew at a cumulative average annual rate of 0.7% from 2019 to 2023.

Regional Growth Leaders:

The North West saw the largest regional growth, with a 2.4% annual increase in output per hour worked.

London's Underperformance:

London, which historically led in productivity, recorded the largest regional fall, with a 0.3% decrease in output per hour worked during the same period.

Productivity Convergence:

The data suggests a potential shift towards interregional productivity convergence, where regional disparities may be narrowing, a notable change from earlier decades.

Broader Context

The release is the fourth annual publication of regional labour productivity data since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Productivity data is available for the 13 UK regions and nations, measured by output per hour worked and output per job.

While the North West is a strong performer, other regions like Yorkshire and the Humber, the East of England, and the South East also showed robust post-pandemic growth.

Regions such as **Scotland, Wales, the Midlands, and the North East** have experienced relatively weak productivity growth

Foreword

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness

My vision for the North East is for it to be known as the home of real opportunity, a region where everyone thrives.

This 10-year plan sets out how we will grow our economy, support our businesses and improve living standards for people across our great region.

As the first North East mayor I will unlock world-class opportunities and build inclusivity into every element of our economy, ensuring that – even as our trailblazer region contributes ever more to the UK's economic success – we do so in a manner that improves lives for all.

Within 10 years we will have made substantive progress against our five key missions:



Home to a growing and vibrant economy for all

Thousands more good jobs will have been created, contributing to higher levels of employment and rising take-home pay.



Home of the green energy revolution

The North East will be at the forefront of the low-carbon economy, with the region a national leader on the path to net zero.



A welcoming home to global trade

We will continue to welcome international companies to the North East, exceeding national average levels of foreign direct investment, while also seeing the proportion of international visitors increase.



Home of real opportunity

Every child will have access to opportunity, while we will also have seen an improvement in skills, digital inclusion and health outcomes, alongside a substantial reduction in child poverty.



A North East we are proud to call home

More affordable and social homes will have been built, alongside a green, integrated, transport network which connects everyone.



The North East has huge potential, and I am determined to be the mayor who delivers for all our brilliant people and businesses.

This Interim Plan has been developed with the Combined Authority's Cabinet and with the support and input of partners from across the region. It is intended for wider consultation and input, and to identify our key investment and delivery priorities, with a final version published in the summer after the Government's Spending Review.

I'll ensure we build on our strong track-record of attracting investment and public-private partnerships to bring further jobs into our Great North East, putting this region back on the world stage.

We have current investment opportunities of more than £14bn, including in:



Offshore wind and energy transition

Current state

About 550 renewable energy companies have North East sites, with an estimated 17,000 staff.

Comparative advantage

9% of the UK's offshore wind businesses are located in the North East.

Recent / projected growth

Aim to grow the regional offshore wind workforce to 24,000 by 2035.



Advanced manufacturing including electric vehicles

Current state

3,900 businesses in advanced manufacturing employing 67,000 people.

Comparative advantage

44% of England's employment in battery and accumulator manufacturing.

Recent / projected growth

Employment in battery and accumulator technology has more than doubled since 2015.



Creative industries and content

Current state

61,000 jobs in the wider region's creative industries.

Comparative advantage

Outside of South East England, 6.3% of jobs in screen sectors and 6.6% of music/visual arts.

Recent / projected growth

67% jobs growth in the wider region's creative industries in past decade.



Defence, security and space

Current state

£14bn turnover and 48,000 jobs across defence and the fast-growing space cluster.

Comparative advantage

One of the largest and longest-established defence clusters, with links to space and digital.

Recent / projected growth

UK defence sector expected to grow by 50% over next five years.



Life sciences, pharmaceuticals and process industries

Current state

7,500 employed in life sciences in the North East CA area.

Comparative advantage

Over 10% of England's employment in pharma manufacturing - about 3,800.

Recent / projected growth

Value of pharma exports 2.4 times higher than a decade ago.



Supporting growth across our region, including our rural and coastal economy

Current state

Rural and coastal areas account for almost a third of regional GVA across a broad range of sectors.

Comparative advantage

3,000mi² producing distinctive and world-class food and drink; opportunities in carbon markets.

Recent / projected growth

Opportunity to be a rural innovation trailblazer.



Tech, digital and AI

Current state

About 45,000 jobs in the wider region's digital sector, with 8,400 employees in broad AI sectors.

Comparative advantage

8.4% of UK employment in computer manufacturing outside the South East.

Recent / projected growth

37% digital jobs growth in past decade; advanced digital skills are critical to all sectors.



£14bn
Investment
Opportunities

NECA

The North East is home to a dynamic and diverse business community, with around 55,000 firms spanning industries as diverse as manufacturing to software engineering. The region benefits from a large base of SMEs, working alongside nationally-leading large businesses – including Caterpillar in Peterlee, Sage Group and the country's favourite baker, Greggs.

With 4 universities and 9 national Catapults and innovation centres, we can offer world-leading research expertise and a pipeline of STEM talent to support new investment in R&D.

Success over the next 10 years means ensuring that all the factors for business success and investment are in place – from skills to sites, and innovation to finance.

NECA

Increasing investment, innovation and business dynamism

The North East has low rates of private sector R&D and innovation reflecting weaker adoption and diffusion of technologies in the region. A reboot is needed to raise levels from a low base, and to increase business start-ups and scale-ups across the board.

Business investment and innovation are fundamental determinants of economic growth, helping firms remain competitive through the development of new facilities, products and processes. To be successful, the North East – like the UK as a whole – needs to increase levels of investment and export-led growth.

We will accelerate the rate of innovation and R&D activity through an Inclusive Innovation Deal and Action Plan. This will include working with Innovate UK, UKRI, our regional universities and Catapults to drive business R&D and investment.

The introduction of Universities for North East England provides new opportunities to harness the collective strengths of the universities; including to increase spinouts and improve commercialisation, whilst supporting wider adoption and diffusion of innovation and research.

NECA

We will build on current delivery to support entrepreneurs and SMEs to scale up, and larger businesses to participate in R&D to grow.

We will provide businesses with a clear framework of business support, including digital adoption, product and process innovation.

We will promote opportunities to improve access to finance for businesses across our region, particularly for those groups underserved at present.

We will work with the Government to develop regional investment mechanisms, including via the National Wealth Fund.

And we will ensure that we have an attractive pipeline of locations for businesses to grow, including in our leading innovation districts, including Newcastle Helix and NETPark.

NECA

North East Investment Fund

The Combined Authority is investing £70m to create a new North East Investment Fund. This will help to provide regional businesses with the finance they need to start and to grow - unlocking growth, building confidence in our SME base, turbo-charging university spin-outs and ensuring that the region is a great place to scale a business. The Combined Authority's investment will be re-cycled multiple times and it is anticipated that £390m will be invested in regional SMEs over 15 years, including private sector co-investment of £170m. As a result, the funds will support a minimum of 470 regional businesses with over £300m of investment needed to innovate and grow and will support the creation of 2,300 jobs.

This needs to be about boosting productivity and growth in our business base, as well as increasing the stickiness of inward investment.

Success also means ensuring that we are able to unlock the potential of all our unique economic opportunities.

TVCA

Growth Plan to be submitted over the Summer 2025

Focus on job creation, economic growth

Circular Economy, Net Zero,

High Value, Low Carbon

Using up the remnants of UK Shared Prosperity Funds on various programmes and Trailblazer programme to drive productivity and business development

Some talk of an 'Inclusive Economy' and 'Communities of Place' but all from a local business support and skills perspective- reliance on the local authorities to drive social agenda

Revival of town centres- Neighbourhood Governance seems to be restricted to town centre revival- however the local authorities all have either have a local Well Being Strategy or Inclusive Growth Strategy- but none aligned with TCVA overall Growth Plan

Transport & Digital

Investment Plan focus on jobs, investment 'trickle down' policies'

Digital and Creative sectors

In collaboration with Innovate UK plans to boost the economy & business productivity and clusters of economy- enhance capacity & Investment- provide business support and drive innovation

Currently have a bid out for consultants to help deliver the Growth Strategy

TVCA

Tees Valley Combined Authority's
(TVCA) growth plans

Aim to create a high-value, low-carbon, diverse economy through a strategic focus on six key areas:

Transport, education, employment & skills, business growth, culture & tourism, and research, development & innovation

.

A key ambition is for the region to become a global leader in clean energy, hydrogen, and a net-zero carbon industrial cluster by 2040. These plans are supported by significant investment through the [Tees Valley Devolution Deal](#), the [Indigenous Growth Fund](#), and other initiatives, targeting job creation, economic benefits, and improved public services.