

# Generating growth and opportunity in the East of England

# Contents

Overview	2
Training public sector workers	3
Small and medium-sized enterprises and business growth	4
Research and development	6
Building pride in place and local communities	7



Cambridge

# Overview

The impact of universities on people and places can be truly transformational. Universities are crucial to sparking growth and opportunity, by bringing together student populations, research partners, local businesses, and employers to create vibrant communities, jobs, and opportunity across the UK.

## Universities in the East of England: in numbers

Number of universities: **9**

Number of full-time UK undergraduate students: **76,800**

Number of part-time UK undergraduate students: **8,180**

Number of UK postgraduate students: **25,140**

Number of international students: **52,990**

Total number of students: **163,115**

Number of staff (full time equivalent) employed: **30,955**

Gross output of universities: **£9.6 billion**

Universities in the East of England are located across the region in cities and towns such as Cambridge, Norwich, Chelmsford, and Luton. Some institutions, such as Anglia Ruskin University, have campuses in cities and towns across the region.

Analysis by London Economics estimated that universities in the East of England had a **total economic impact of £19.5 billion** in 2021–22. This figure includes the economic activity generated by employing people, purchasing of goods and services, the local spending power of staff and students, as well as the impact of research and knowledge exchange activities.

In 2021–22, universities in the East of England spent **£2.3 billion** on staff. Staff spend a proportion of their income with local businesses and on local services, which supports a thriving economy.

# Training public sector workers

Training key public sector workers is one of the most visible ways in which universities contribute to their local communities. Even at the height of the pandemic, universities were able to continue teaching students on vital medical courses and support them into front line key work.

Universities work closely with their local NHS services to train the doctors, nurses, paramedics and other allied health professionals of the future, but also to refresh the skills of key health workers to ensure top quality patient care.

Since 2021, universities across the East of England have trained around:

- **14,050** nurses
- **3,050** medics
- **6,500** teachers

## Case study: University of Bedfordshire's investment in Higher Technical Qualifications

The University of Bedfordshire is investing over £500,000 in the development of twelve Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) courses aimed at filling skills-gaps and providing an alternative to the standard three-year degree. Nine of the 12 courses are in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences (HSS).

*'We take great pride in training and supporting future healthcare professionals and HTQs will provide an alternative route to that outcome. Our HTQs will align to existing occupational standards and provide our students with entry-level competence, and allow them to enter or return to their chosen profession or progress further in the higher education system.'*

Dr Louise Grant, Executive Dean, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences

# Small and medium-sized enterprises and business growth

Universities support existing businesses of all types through their infrastructure, facilities, and expertise. They also encourage the creation of new businesses and social enterprises.

In the East of England universities support entrepreneurialism across local communities and within their student populations to spark the development of new businesses. Start-up companies founded by students and graduates of universities in the East of England turned over more than **£3 billion** in 2023–24, and spin-out companies with some university ownership turned over more than **£62 million** in the same year.

Spin-out, start-up and social enterprise companies founded at universities in the East of England attracted more than **£10.7 billion** in external investment in 2023–24 and created more than **26,200 FTE** job positions.

Universities also support existing businesses to grow, especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses. SMEs are critical employers across the UK, particularly in areas that don't have larger employers or well-developed economic clusters. They are typically the businesses that have the greatest potential for growth and job creation, but the least time or resource to achieve this. Universities in the East of England provided consultancy to SMEs over **6,370 times** in 2023–24.

## Case study: SME support from the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership

An Accelerator run by the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) offered free support to help SMEs rapidly innovate during the Covid-19 crisis.

The accelerator delivered support through a combination of one-to-one business support, capacity building and mentoring, as well as convening partnerships, and drawing on the collective knowledge of CISL's global network.

*‘We hope that by mobilising our expertise, and that of CISL’s global network of leaders and sustainability practitioners, we can offer the tools, knowledge and support to help small businesses survive this critical period and emerge stronger and more productive in the future.’*

Dame Polly Courtice, Director, CISL

# Research and development

Universities' research activities attract investment, make world-leading discoveries, generate knowledge, and create and nurture new, innovative businesses and jobs across the UK.

Universities support existing businesses of all types by using their facilities and expertise to drive local collaboration. They also encourage private sector investment into research and development by developing collaborative relationships with businesses.

In 2023–24, higher education providers across England provided the use of facilities to companies **29,747 times**, including, for example, a wind tunnel and a digital media suite.

The research universities conduct in partnership with business, the NHS, charities and other organisations is diverse in discipline and scope. University research is responsible for major scientific and medical breakthroughs, but also plays a major role in our day-to-day lives.

## Case study: Research into wearable baby monitoring sensors at Anglia Ruskin University

Anglia Ruskin University is collaborating with experts in Jordan to develop innovative wearable sensors to monitor newborn babies in poor areas.

Researchers were alerted to the scale of the issue through their work in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, where they saw the effect that limited access to respiratory monitoring had on access to appropriate healthcare.

Inkjet-printing technology will create stretchable and biocompatible sensors for the monitor, and the project team will work closely with industry to ensure the designs conform to medical standards and can be easily commercialised.

*'There is an increasing need for remote, low-cost, reliable, and comfortable respiratory rate sensors that provide physicians with accurate readings and to assess the health condition of newborns [...] We're delighted to be working with our partners in Jordan to create this vital piece of technology. We believe it will have a real tangible benefit which can save the lives of vulnerable babies.'*

Professor Dingchang Zheng, Anglia Ruskin University

## **Case study: Cranfield University leading global initiatives in hydrogen production**

Cranfield University hosts the Global Hydrogen Production Technologies Center (HyPT). Here, research explores how to make low-cost, large-scale, Net Zero hydrogen production a reality.

Recently Cranfield supported a ground-breaking hydrogen refuelling trial, led by easyJet, at Bristol Airport. Hydrogen was used to refuel ground support equipment demonstrating that hydrogen can be safely and reliably used in a busy airport environment.

The trial was in development for over a year and involved leading organisations from across aviation, engineering, logistics and academia.

*'It's without doubt that hydrogen is an important fuel of the future for short-haul aviation as demonstrated by the rate of innovation we're seeing.'*

David Morgan, EasyJet Chief Operating Officer



# Building pride in place and local communities

The UK's creative industries are one of the economic success stories of the past decade, growing at four times the rate of the UK economy as a whole between 2010–19. They bring international production teams to the UK, while employing local and regional talent.

Universities play a key role in supporting the creative industries and cultural life in the UK, from producing skilled creative graduates to working with local councils and supporting the UK's cultural prosperity and social wellbeing.

A recent study by Savanta ComRes for Universities UK revealed that more than two-thirds (69%) of parents think students gain vital creative skills at university, which are essential to powering the UK's creative industries.

The East of England region is rich in culture. In 2023–24, over **2.1 million attendees** accessed cultural events run by universities in the region, including museum and gallery exhibitions, public lectures and dance and music performances. Universities in the East of England make sure culture is free for everyone to access: free events and material (such as podcasts and online lectures) were accessed **over 24.4 million times**.

## Case study: Art centre at University of East Anglia

The University of East Anglia (UEA) is home to one of the most prominent university art galleries in the UK, the Sainsbury Centre.

The permanent collection is best known for its remarkable works by artists such as Henry Moore, Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti. The Sainsbury Centre also hosts an array of exhibitions and an award-winning learning programme of talks, lectures and workshops.

The centre is currently directing a major cataloguing project, funded by the Gatsby Foundation, to enhance public access to collections research through an online catalogue.

Universities UK is the collective voice of the UK's universities, bringing them together to pursue a common cause: thriving universities, serving society.



Woburn House  
20 Tavistock Square  
London, WC1H 9HQ

☎ +44 (0)20 7419 4111  
✉ [info@universitiesuk.ac.uk](mailto:info@universitiesuk.ac.uk)  
🖱 [universitiesuk.ac.uk](http://universitiesuk.ac.uk)  
✖ @UniversitiesUK  
in /universities-uk



November 2025

ISBN: 978-1-84036-538-2