

# Generating growth and opportunity in the North West

# Contents

Universities in the North West: overview	2
Training public sector workers	3
SMEs and business growth	4
Research and development	5
Building pride in place and local communities	7



Salford, Greater Manchester

# Universities in the North West: 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 North West: in numbers

Number of universities: **12**

Number of full-time UK undergraduate students: **156,490**

Number of part-time UK undergraduate students: **11,950**

Number of UK postgraduate students: **43,315**

Number of international students: **57,080**

Total number of students: **268,835**

Number of staff (full time equivalent) employed: **40,095**

Gross output of universities: **£10.4 billion**

Universities in the North West can be found in the major, world-famous cities of Liverpool and Manchester, but also in smaller towns and cities across the region.

Analysis by London Economics estimated that universities in the North West had a **total economic impact of £24.31 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 North West spent nearly **£2.6 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 North West have trained around:

- **29,700** nurses
- **7,850** medics
- **27,150** teachers

## Case study: University of Cumbria's Centre for Excellence in Paramedic Practice

The University of Cumbria contains the Centre for Excellence in Paramedic Practice, which offers undergraduate courses for students starting out on their journey to becoming a paramedic, alongside modules and master's opportunities for existing workers.

*'We're proud that this course supports any learner to realise their ambition to become a paramedic no matter their background or previous academic achievement.'*

Tom Davidson, Director, Centre of Excellence in Paramedic Practice

# SMEs 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 North West 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 North West turned over more than **£173 million** in 2023–24, and spin-out companies with some university ownership turned over more than **£91 million** in the same year.

Spin-out, start-up and social enterprise companies founded at universities in the North West attracted more than **£140 million** in external investment in 2023–24 and created more than **6,800 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 North West provided consultancy to SMEs **1,900 times** in 2023–24.

## Case study: Help to Grow scheme

Universities across the North West are taking part in the government's Help to Grow: Management scheme delivered in partnership with the Small Business Charter.

Business schools in the University of Salford, Lancaster University, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the University of Liverpool are offering courses to senior managers within SMEs.

*'Business growth begins by empowering business leaders to define their future. Our 'Help to Grow' programme is designed to support business leaders to reflect, learn and develop strategies for future growth and development.'*

Dr Sharon Lemac-Vincere, Help to Grow Programme Director,  
Lancaster University Management School

# 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: new walking frames developed by the University of Salford

Researchers from the University of Salford and NRS Healthcare designers have teamed up with Belong to develop a new type of walker. They hope to better understand the biomechanics of adults using walking frames.

The final product will have the potential to help the estimated 22% of UK older adults who use two-wheeled walkers indoors.

*'It has been a pleasure working with Belong's residents to achieve our research goals. Using their insights and studying the biomechanics of how they physically handle the prototype has been instrumental to the design process.'*

Dr Sibylle Thies, Senior Research Fellow, University of Salford  
School of Health and Society

## Case study: Advanced Manufacturing in the North West

The Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Bolton and Salford and Manchester Metropolitan University have clustered together to form the North West's Industrial Biotechnology Innovation Catalyst (IBIC). IBIC is a collaborative initiative which harnesses the region's research expertise to accelerate knowledge exchange, impact, and innovation, while manufacturing food, fuels, and medicines.

IBIC is poised for significant growth with a market potential exceeding £34 billion in the UK alone. The cluster is predicted to directly stimulate £2.5 million cash and £4 million in-kind co-investment, establish 150 collaborative projects, train over 200 students, create up to 100 green jobs, and establish over 20 new commercial ventures which could attract a further £10 million in investment.

# 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 to 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 North West region is rich in culture. In 2023–24, over **2.5 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 North West make sure culture is free for everyone to access: free events and material (such as podcasts and online lectures) were accessed **over 90 million times**.

## Case study: University of Central Lancashire's developed of Newtown Mill

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), working with Burnley Council, acquired the vacant Newtown Mill with funding from the government's levelling up programme.

The university plans to further develop the thriving canalside campus in the historic Weavers' Triangle Area. The redevelopment of the mill will create 35,000 sq ft of space for innovative teaching facilities, a business and enterprise zone, and creating new public spaces for community benefit.

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  
🌐 /universities-uk



November 2025

ISBN: 978-1-84036-540-5