

Generating growth and opportunity in the South East

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Southampton

Universities in the South East: 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 South East: in numbers

Number of universities: **18**

Number of full-time UK undergraduate students: **186,250**

Number of part-time UK undergraduate students: **139,745**

Number of UK postgraduate students: **46,560**

Number of international students: **61,320**

Total number of students: **300,615**

Number of staff (full time equivalent) employed: **51,715**

Gross output of universities: **£16.9 billion**

Universities in the South East are located in key student cities such as Brighton and Hove, Oxford, Portsmouth, Reading, and Southampton.

Analysis by London Economics estimated that universities in the South East had a **total economic impact of £36.28 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 South East spent over **£4.4 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 South East have trained around:

- **18,775** nurses
- **6,100** medics
- **26,150** teachers

Case study: Brighton and Sussex University Hospital Pathology Department

Every year, the Brighton and Sussex University Hospital (BSUH) Pathology Department recruits placement students from the University of Brighton's Biomedical programme. University of Brighton students are hired due to the Biomedical Science degrees being accredited by the Health and Care Professions Council.

'It's good for the department, good for the professionals working in the department, and essential for continuing recruitment. They are certainly contributing from a very early stage, and once they are up and running, they're really worth their weight in gold.'

Lindsay Dixon, Chief Biomedical Scientist, BSUH

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 South East 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 South East turned over more than **£417 million** in 2023–24, and spin-out companies with some university ownership turned over more than **£794 million** in the same year.

Spin-out, start-up and social enterprise companies founded at universities in the South East attracted more than **£1 billion** in external investment in 2023–24 and created more than **19,400 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 across England provided consultancy to SMEs **18,300 times** in 2023–24.

Case study: Expert advice for SMEs at Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Brookes University provided expert advice to SMEs in Oxfordshire on how to reduce their carbon footprint and reach net zero at six engaging networking events in 2022.

Each of the six two-hour sessions covered topics including how a business can calculate its carbon footprint, integrating net-zero targets into short and long term planning, advice on energy usage, how to turn your product greener, and how to embed a net zero culture in the workplace.

‘This programme provides SMEs with a great opportunity to get detailed insights, helpful advice and resources from experts, as well as connecting with others interested in the low-carbon agenda.’

Giles Orr, Head of Business and External Engagement, Oxford
Brookes Business School

Case study: Wind propulsion training at Solent University

Solent University have used Regional Innovation Funding to develop a partnership with Union Maritime Limited (UML), a leading innovator in wind propulsion for the shipping sector. UML have recently invested in wind technology, alongside vessel design, fuel efficiency and data-led performance analytics, in an effort to make a meaningful contribution to a sustainable and environmentally responsible future for the maritime sector.

Solent and UML will collaborate to develop and deliver tailored wind propulsion training programs for both shore-based professionals and seafarers operating UML vessels. This will accelerate progress towards the International Maritime Organization’s net zero target for 2050.

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: University of Oxford Environmental Change Institute

The University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute has developed modelling tools to help decision makers identify risks from climate-related infrastructure failure and build long-term resilience.

Over the decade, research teams have worked to create tools and methodologies to map infrastructure system interconnections and help decision makers manage the risk of failure.

These approaches have been used in the UK by Infrastructure UK, National Infrastructure Commission, Department for Transport, Environmental Agency, High Speed 2 and many others.

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 South East region is rich in culture. In 2023–24, over **3.7 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 South East make sure culture is free for everyone to access: free events and material (such as podcasts and online lectures) were accessed nearly **64 million times**.

Case study: Civic University Agreement at the University of Southampton

A historic pledge to drive economic growth and tackle social challenges has been made by University of Southampton leaders and councillors from the region.

This Civic University Agreement intends to improve the quality of life for people in the city and surrounding areas by connecting communities through culture, education and enterprise.

Pledges have been made for collective action on six priority areas, which include creating more opportunities for education and new skills, reducing inequality, generating jobs and economic growth, sustainability, and investing in arts and culture.

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



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