

Generating growth and opportunity in the South West

Contents

Universities in the South West: overview	2
Training public sector workers	3
SMEs and business growth	4
Research and development	5
Building pride in place and local communities	6



Gloucester

Universities in the South 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 South West: in numbers

Number of universities: **10**

Number of full-time UK undergraduate students: **126,650**

Number of part-time UK undergraduate students: **6,185**

Number of UK postgraduate students: **28,235**

Number of international students: **41,010**

Total number of students: **202,085**

Number of staff (full time equivalent) employed: **31,500**

Gross output of universities: **£7.8 billion**

Universities in the South West are located across several counties, with key student cities including Bristol, Plymouth, Bournemouth, and Bath.

Analysis by London Economics estimated that universities in the South West had a **total economic impact of £17.1 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 West spent over **£1.9 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 West have trained around:

- **11,900** nurses
- **3,350** medics
- **13,150** teachers

Case study: InterCity Place at the University of Plymouth

In September 2023, the University of Plymouth will unveil a new space to train and develop the next generation of nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals.

The new home for the university's healthcare schools, InterCity Place, will complement existing clinical facilities and create an unrivalled location where undergraduate and postgraduate students from a variety of disciplines learn together under one roof.

'The simulation space will give me experience before I go on placement and will prepare me for what to expect while allowing me to develop my practical skills.'

Indra, BSc (Hons) Dietetics student

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 West universities support entrepreneurship 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 West turned over more than **£131 million** in 2023–24, and spin-out companies with some university ownership turned over more than **£43 million** in the same year.

Spin-out, start-up and social enterprise companies founded at universities in the South West attracted nearly **£700 million** in external investment in 2023–24 and created more than **4,800 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 South West provided consultancy to SMEs over **3,170 times** in 2023–24.

Case study: Science Creates spin-out from the University of Bristol

The University of Bristol has helped to establish 'Science Creates', a deep tech incubator that has helped to set up new science and engineering companies.

The incubator space houses 37 scientific and engineering companies (60% of which are University of Bristol spin-outs) working with technologies that will help improve healthcare, the environment, and quality of life.

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: Joint Centre for Excellence in Environmental Intelligence

The Joint Centre for Excellence in Environmental Intelligence (JCEEI) is a strategic partnership between the University of Exeter and the Met Office, in collaboration with the Alan Turing Institute.

JCEEI provides the expertise and capability to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address the escalating threats of climate and biodiversity change.

For example, the Climate Impacts Mitigation, Adaption and Resilience (CLIMAR) framework uses Data Science and AI to integrate multiple sources of data to quantify the risks of climate change on populations, infrastructure and the economy across a range of real-world applications.

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 West region is rich in culture. In 2023–24, over **382 thousand 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 West make sure culture is free for everyone to access: free events and material (such as podcasts and online lectures) were accessed **over 27 million times**.

Case study: Debenhams building in Gloucester

The University of Gloucestershire purchased the Debenhams building which has been a major focal point for the community for 80 years.

The university intends to redevelop the existing fabric of the building to create a vibrant new environment. The new campus will be a modern centre for teaching, learning and community partnerships; playing a vital role in both the regeneration of the city centre and supporting the University's ambitious plans for growth.

'When all is finalised, and after a much-needed facelift, this will be an imaginative use of a grand old building. Our city can be confident of both the future for this iconic building and the buzz in our city centre.'

Richard Graham, MP for Gloucester

Case study: Falmouth University's Games Academy

Falmouth University is ranked as one of the best places to study game development in the world. Students work in multi-disciplinary teams with peers from other faculties; with music and acting students for the creation of voiceovers and soundtracks, and with marketing and business students when the teams launch their own companies. The [Games Academy](#) teaches with a holistic intensity that reflects industry practice, with students making real games from day 1 of their course. Undergraduate students will have participated in two full game design and development cycles and launched at least three functional games before they graduate. This allows them to fail fast, iterate and learn from their experience of failure.

Recently a team of students were employed by the University's Immersive Business project to design and build a [VR space exploration experience](#), supported by the UK Space Agency and Spaceport Cornwall, and launched commercially.

After graduation, many graduates go on to top jobs at existing studios. However, as part of the innovative approach of the Games Academy, student teams keep 100% of their own IP, so they can be entrepreneurial upon graduation and put together their own studios. If they choose to do this, they are supported by the Games Academy incubator space. Many studios stay in Cornwall and build their businesses in the region.

In its [Creative Manifesto](#), Cornwall Council has recognised the importance of the games industry to the creative sector and its importance to the Cornish economy overall. In 2020, UKIE (the trade body for games) valued the games industry market in the United Kingdom at £7 billion.

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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