

Westminster Higher Education Forum policy conference

Next steps for UK universities and their local economies

Timing: Morning, Morning, Friday, 8th May 2026

Taking Place Online



WESTMINSTER
HIGHER EDUCATION
FORUM

Draft agenda subject to change

- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 9.05 **Assessing the role of universities in local innovation and supporting skills pipelines**
Greg Wade, Head, Innovation Policy, Universities UK
Questions and comments from the floor
- 9.30 **Key considerations for developing the role of universities in local development and skills planning**
increasing HEI engagement with Local Skills Improvement Plans and collaboration with Local authorities and FE - strategies to attract inward investment - convening regional innovation ecosystems - supporting Industrial Strategy alignment - aligning institutional strategies with devolved funding and combined authority priorities - data, metrics, and evaluation frameworks for HE impact - supporting lifelong learning - university contributions to wider policy goals, including the Youth Guarantee and Growth and Skills Levy - flexible curricula and labour market responsiveness - potential impact of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, local authority
Senior representative, employer
Senior representative, further education
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.15 **Developing university civic engagement and strategies to support local needs**
Richard Brabner, Visiting Professor, Civic Engagement, Newcastle University; and former Director, UUP Foundation
Questions and comments from the floor
- 10.40 **Chair's closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 10.45 Break
- 10.55 **Chair's opening remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
- 11.00 **Developing regional innovation ecosystems and supporting cluster development**
Senior representative, innovation cluster
- 11.10 **University collaboration and supporting commercialisation, spin-outs and knowledge transfer**
options for improving the design of shared university services and new partnership models - strengthening university-industry collaboration and technology transfer - pathways for creating and scaling spin-outs and start-ups - regional networks to support entrepreneurs and emerging businesses - measuring the impact of knowledge transfer on local employment and innovation - developing partnerships between universities, investors, emerging businesses, and local authorities - supporting university financial sustainability through commercialisation - alignment with the AI Opportunities Action Plan and regional AI infrastructure
Senior representative, spin-out
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, investment
- 11.25 Questions and comments from the floor
- 11.45 **Supporting skills development and regional workforce alignment**
Senior representative, combined authority
- 11.55 **Widening higher education access and community engagement**
priorities for widening access and addressing HE cold spots - promoting social mobility and inclusion through outreach and skills programmes - community engagement and partnerships addressing local challenges - leveraging research and innovation to tackle pressing societal and economic challenges - assessing rollout of the lifelong learning entitlement and priorities for reskilling - utilising labour market intelligence to inform local HE provisions
Senior representative, university
Senior representative, employer
Senior commentator
- 12.10 Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.30 **Policy priorities for strengthening university contributions to local economic strategy**
Senior representative, policy
Questions and comments from the floor
- 12.55 **Chair's and Westminster Higher Education Forum closing remarks**
Senior Parliamentarian
Sean Cudmore, Westminster Higher Education Forum