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**Innovation Districts and Local Communities:**

# A FIELD GUIDE FOR ACTION

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## Foreword by **Katherine Oliver**

Principal, Media & Digital Strategies,  
Bloomberg Associates

**At Bloomberg Associates, we believe cities thrive when innovation is used to solve real problems and improve everyday life for residents.** That belief is at the core of this Field Guide to Community Innovation—a resource not just to inform, but to be used. Developed in close collaboration with the Greater London Authority, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Innovation District and the Knowledge Quarter at King’s Cross, this guide provides a practical toolkit for connecting innovation with community impact.

What sets this report apart is its focus on **actionable solutions**. While much has been written about inclusive innovation in theory, this guide is grounded in the **replication of successful, real-world projects**. It is built for use by local authorities, land developers, anchor institutions, and community organizations—to help them design and implement initiatives that deliver tangible, visible benefits to the vibrant communities neighboring innovation districts.

This is a pivotal moment for cities. As they navigate economic transformation and rapid digital change, it is no longer enough for innovation to exist in isolation. It must be intentionally shared. Innovation districts offer tremendous potential—but only when paired with thoughtful engagement and investment in the communities that adjoin them.

Drawing on cross-sector case studies and global insights, the report highlights how academic institutions, hospitals, museums,

tech companies, and others are working in partnership with local residents. The result is a **step-by-step field guide**, complete with evaluation tools, checklists, and a framework for impact—designed to be adapted in London and beyond.

As a philanthropic consultancy that advises cities globally, Bloomberg Associates helps mayors and local leaders turn ambitious ideas into results. Our Digital Strategies team supports cities in using technology to foster transparency, engagement, and access. This report reflects that mission: to ensure that the transformative power of innovation delivers real value for local governments, communities, and the people they serve.

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park already stands as a model of urban transformation. Through initiatives like UCL's Integrated Legal Advice Clinic—which provides free legal support to local residents—this district shows how anchor institutions can respond directly to community needs. This guide seeks to make such success stories easier to replicate, scale, and sustain.

We are deeply grateful to our partners at the Greater London Authority, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the Knowledge Quarter for their vision and leadership. We hope this report will serve as a practical tool to advance inclusive innovation—sparking new projects, deeper collaboration, and long-term impact for the people and places that need it most.

**Warm regards,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katherine Oliver". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Katherine" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Oliver".

*Katherine Oliver*

**Principal, Media & Digital Strategies**

*Bloomberg Associates*



## Shaping London's Future Growth Together

# Howard Dawber

**Deputy Mayor of London  
for Business**

London is one of the world's most exciting centres of innovation. It's a place where new ideas, technology, and creativity come together to shape the future. Our city is seeing investment and growth, especially in exciting areas like artificial intelligence, life sciences, and climate tech. But economic growth is hollow unless opportunities are shared by all our residents and communities, which is why our commitment to inclusive growth is so important.

The London Growth Plan, developed jointly by the Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan and London Councils, sets out a clear goal: to grow London's economy by £107 billion by 2035 and to help create over 150,000 good jobs by 2028. We want to see growth that works for everyone, not just a few. That means making sure all Londoners, in every part of the city, can share in the opportunities innovation brings.

Innovation districts like the Knowledge Quarter, White City, and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park are key to this. These zones are all situated at the heart of long-standing communities, and were historically economically entwined with their neighbouring residents.

That's why communities must be at the heart of change. As we drive forward regeneration and innovation, we must ask "What are the

benefits for local people?” and “How can local people help shape what happens?”. London is made up of 400 villages, and dozens of communities, each with its own culture and strengths. If we want to build on those strengths and tackle the challenges that hold some people back, it must be done working in an open and honest partnership with the people it’s meant to help. In this way we can create real, lasting benefits—better jobs, stronger communities, and a fairer city.

To make this happen, we need to bring together the best ideas, talent, and investment from around the world—and connect them with local needs. London & Partners the growth agency for London and Opportunity London our promotional partnership will play key roles to achieve our London Growth Plan ambitions, attracting investment businesses into the capital that fit with our goal of inclusive growth.

This report is a call to action. London is ready for investment that helps its innovation districts grow in a fair and sustainable way that Londoners and communities can benefit from. We are proud of the progress already made and committed to working together to ensure London’s innovation continues to benefit all its communities.



## A Perspective on Community-Driven Innovation

# Shazia Hussain

**CEO, London Legacy  
Development Corporation**

At a time when cities must do more with less, and placemaking becomes ever important, innovation districts offer a powerful promise to deliver not just growth but inclusive, purpose-driven progress. This is best done when innovation is made local and belongs to everyone so that knowledge transcends from merely information to something that actively influences or alters society's impact for the better.

Innovation is the lifeblood of cities – a catalyst for opportunity, transformation, and shared progress. At the London Legacy Development Corporation, we have seen first-hand how investment in innovation, when combined with civic ambition and local collaboration, can begin to reshape economies and communities alike.

This report comes at a crucial time. Innovation districts have become powerful engines of growth across London – from Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in the east, to White City in the west, and the Knowledge Quarter at the capital's heart. Each district is evolving with a unique identity, yet all are united by a common challenge: to ensure that the benefits of innovation are not locked behind institutional walls but are felt and shaped by the communities who live alongside them.

Innovation districts are more than just clusters of start-ups and universities. They are living ecosystems, where places, people and possibilities come together. Co-creation with local communities is central to the long-term success and legitimacy of innovation districts.



The energy, knowledge and perspectives of local people enrich the innovation economy; and in return, that economy benefits from opening itself up to new voices, needs and aspirations. True innovation isn't measured in patents or prototypes, but in people's lives by improving access to opportunity, good jobs and thriving communities.

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is an innovation district with a metropolitan centre acting as an economic cluster. Its purpose is to create opportunities that improve people's lives. The Park's development since the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games reflects the growing role of cities in bridging opportunity gaps through purposeful design and partnership. A successful innovation district understands its spatial significance. It requires urban amenities, and neighbourhoods where people live, work and visit with urban characteristics that attract innovation.

London's global reach is unmatched, but its real strength lies in how innovation can reach every type of community, bridge divides and unlock talent across the city. We want innovation to belong to everyone, and when designed with intent innovation districts can become engines of inclusive growth. They can blend economic growth with social policy for accelerated improvements, and high tech with human connections. To realise this vision, we need bold partners who share our ideals, along with the will to co-design with the communities we serve, not just for them. At Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park we have welcomed world-class institutions which have transformed themselves as well as the communities they surround. We are working together to ensure their presence delivers local value – through skills programmes that create the jobs of tomorrow, enterprise support for new and existing start-ups, co-designed spaces and community-led governance.

This report shows how that kind of work can be made more deliberate, more consistent, and more impactful. Drawing on the experience of London's innovation districts and examples from further afield, it offers practical guidance on how to plan and deliver inclusive community programmes. It is also honest about the barriers: rising housing costs, fragmented delivery, and short-term funding models all make it harder for local people to benefit from change.

The case studies in this report demonstrate what is possible when civic institutions, businesses, universities, community organisations and residents come together with a shared vision. From community-designed health centres to youth-led innovation challenges and neighbourhood entrepreneurship schemes, the examples presented here offer a blueprint for a future fit for everyone – one in which innovation is not imposed on communities, but created with them.

This work is not finished. The next decade will see continued growth in London's innovation sectors, and new sites of opportunity will emerge. If we are to unlock their full potential, we must do so in a way that supports fairness, strengthens local identity and enables participation from all.

I welcome the recommendations in this report – particularly the call for sustained civic leadership, shared investment in community infrastructure, and a coordinated approach to engagement. I am proud that Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is contributing to this movement and to this learning, and I look forward to working with partners across London to embed these principles more deeply into how innovation is planned, funded and delivered.

Let this report be both a guide and a call to action – to shape innovation districts that are open, rooted in place, and driven by the values of collaboration and community.



# Executive Summary

Innovation districts are an engine for growth, but can also work with communities to deliver tangible local benefits. This report offers a practical guide to developing and implementing community programmes, setting the economic and policy scene, then presenting a range of case studies to inspire and inform local strategies.

The report's primary focus is on London, Europe's leading innovation hub, and it has been prepared in collaboration with Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and Knowledge Quarter, forming part of Bloomberg Associates' strategic programme of work with London. But it is hoped that its case studies and recommendations will be useful more widely—including for planners, developers and anchor institutions, in emerging and established innovation districts.

## Innovation districts are a powerful engine for urban economies

- Innovation—the development and application of new products and processes—is a lifeblood of social and economic progress
- Open innovation has moved from closed laboratories to urban networks, bringing start-ups together with public bodies and anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals
- Clustering together shares access to a pool of skilled staff, enables collaboration, and offers a focal point for investors and policy makers, boosting productivity by as much as 25 per cent

## but can be criticised for minimal or negative community impacts

- The jobs and other opportunities they offer may not be accessible to locals

- Their urban environments can be seen as unwelcoming
- They can add to pressure on house prices and local services

**so working to engage and support local communities is not only an ethical and political imperative, but also a practical priority.**

- Innovation districts depend on urban buzz and vitality, which local people help to create
- Local communities offer knowledge and are potential partners in and users of new innovation
- Public policy requires measures to mitigate impact and enable local people to benefit
- Universities and health institutions have recently renewed their focus on their 'civic' role as anchor institutions

**London is one of the world's leading 'frontier innovation' centres**

- Alongside New York, the San Francisco Bay Area and Boston, London regularly tops rankings for life sciences, for climate tech, for artificial intelligence investments and for tech start-ups
- The innovation sector's workforce has grown faster than the rest of the economy
- Three principal innovation districts – Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Knowledge Quarter and White City – are at the heart of the innovation economy, alongside smaller specialist clusters

**but the capital's innovation ecosystem faces challenges.**

- As in many other cities, innovation districts are bringing new investment to previously neglected areas
- The juxtaposition of innovative energy and persistent lack of resources creates a specific set of challenges for public authorities, investors, developers and anchor institutions



## London's three principal innovation districts have very different origin and evolution stories

- Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park grew as the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and has refined its innovation missions as new institutions have arrived on the Park
- Knowledge Quarter has its roots in discussions between knowledge institutions around King's Cross, and has partnered with local authorities to deliver local benefit as well as world-class innovation activity
- Imperial College's new campus at White City became the core of a new innovation district led by a partnership between Imperial and the local authority

but all three show the importance of civic leadership and close collaboration with local communities.

## Case studies first look at the process of developing and implementing community plans, and building coalitions for action:

- **Assets, evidence and engagement:** basing plans on a review of innovation districts' and communities' assets and needs, supported by a process of open engagement

Case studies include citizen-led research into prosperity, a co-designed community health facility and a joint project to support local community organisations

- **Planning and building coalitions:** developing integrated programmes and a clear sense of local priorities

Case studies include setting out menus of community actions, investment in local community organisations and the regional linking of innovation districts with manufacturing areas

## Then project-specific case studies fall into three broad categories:

- **Opening up and inviting:** making facilities available and accessible to local people and organisations, but also actively inviting them in

Case studies include museum open days, co-created art, maker workshops, community entrepreneur programmes and innovation challenges

- **Inspiring and supporting:** showing local people the opportunities available in innovation districts, inspiring and helping them to access these, and providing other services that local people need

Case studies include school programmes, local festivals, skills programmes, business support, legal advice and dental care

- **Collaborating and handing over:** working with local people to research and create, handing over assets, helping community innovation and problem-solving to flourish, and diffusing innovation beyond innovation districts themselves

Case studies include co-produced research, a community-run health centre, a local community investment programme and youth governance participation

**Reflecting on interviews and round table discussions with innovation districts, universities, government bodies and community representatives, the report identifies opportunities to enhance community partnership and impact. They include:**

- Innovation districts should review assets, co-ordinate community engagement and programmes, seek opportunities to scale up successes, and ensure recruitment and procurement create positive outcomes for communities
- Local authorities should provide civic leadership, and use their networks and existing programmes to support innovation districts
- The Greater London Authority should plan for future innovation districts and their role in pursuing missions, develop sustainable funding and specialist training programmes, and connect London's innovation system, in line with the London Growth Plan
- The UK Government should recognise the importance of London's innovation ecosystem, and devolve growth and skills funding to enable regional skills planning



## Chapter 1

# Introduction





## Chapter 1

# Introduction

## Innovation districts and growth

Innovation, the “development and application of new products and processes”, is a lifeblood of economic and social progress.<sup>1</sup> Innovation emerges from experimentation, research and development, but critically also involves real-world application of new ideas –through commercial channels, public policy or social action.

The importance of innovation to growth and prosperity is not new. It can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution and beyond, but the way in which new ideas are developed and implemented has changed in recent decades. Where commercial discovery once took place inside secluded science parks and the secretive laboratories of large corporations, it has now moved into tightly-meshed urban networks of anchor institutions such as universities and research organisations, businesses (both start-ups and more established), and public sector bodies –the ‘triple helix’ of innovation.

These organisations benefit from clustering together – through sharing access to specialist equipment and facilities, through attracting and drawing from the same pool of skilled staff, through serendipitous collaborations, and through offering a focal point for investors and policy-makers. The locations where such organisations come together are ‘innovation districts’, which can range in scale from a small, shared campus of workspaces to a substantial mixed-use neighbourhood.

<sup>1</sup> Lee N, *Innovation for the Masses: how to share the benefits of the high-tech economy*, University of California Press 2024

**Innovation has a positive economic effect. Research and development-intensive firms pay 20 per cent more for workers at all levels, and every ten jobs created in a high-tech business leads to seven more being created in other parts of the local economy.<sup>2</sup>**

In recent years, innovation districts have been at the forefront of thinking on how to boost both local economic revival and national productivity; research has found productivity to be 25 per cent higher in innovation districts than in the cities where they are located.<sup>3</sup> In 2014, the Brookings Institution (a Washington DC-based think tank) heralded innovation districts as leading the revival of “compact, amenity rich enclaves in the cores of central cities”.<sup>4</sup> Since then, UK research has explored the growth of innovation districts in London<sup>5</sup> and nationwide, where the UK Innovation Districts Group (UK IDG) has led research and network development,<sup>6</sup> and Government policy has put innovation at the heart of its industrial strategy.<sup>7</sup>

But there has been criticism of innovation-led growth in general, and of innovation districts in particular. Innovation is accused of fostering inequality when its rewards flow to the wealthiest people in the wealthiest places.<sup>8</sup> And many of the people working in innovation come from a fairly narrow echelon of highly-educated and relatively privileged people. **Innovation districts, which are frequently located in post-industrial or other areas with high land availability and affordability, can be specifically criticised for their impact on local people,** who may already be dealing with low income, high unemployment, poor health, high housing costs and a range of other challenges. The jobs innovation districts create may be perceived as extremely specialised and highly paid,

<sup>2</sup> UK Innovation Districts Group, *Opening the Innovation Economy: the case for inclusive innovation in the UK*, UK IDG 2023

<sup>3</sup> Business Of Cities, unpublished research for UK IDG, based on ONS small area GVA estimates, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Katz B and Wagner J, *The Rise of Innovation Districts: a new geography of urban innovation*, Brookings Institution, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Hanna K, *Spaces to think: innovation districts and the changing geography of London's knowledge economy*, Centre for London 2016

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ukinnovationdistricts.co.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> Department for Business and Trade, *The UK's modern industrial strategy*, 2025

<sup>8</sup> Lee N, op cit



offering few opportunities for high-quality employment for local people. The buildings and urban amenities created in innovation districts may also seem exclusive and off-putting to local residents – even if this is not the intention. Plus, pressure on land and housing markets may displace residents, and the businesses and amenities they depend on.<sup>9</sup>

This report focuses on what innovation districts can do to engage with and deliver for local communities – going beyond planning obligations and corporate programmes to make local people into full partners; **turning the ‘triple helix’ of anchor institutions, businesses and public sector bodies into a ‘quadruple helix’ which brings local communities right into the network.** In many innovation districts, local community programmes sit alongside

<sup>9</sup> Zandiatashbar A and Kayanan C, ‘Negative consequences of innovation-igniting urban developments: empirical evidence from three US cities’, in *Urban Planning*, Vol 5 Issue 3, 2020



and intersect with initiatives to widen participation in the innovation economy, and those focused on achieving social and environmental, rather than simply commercial, value.<sup>10</sup> However, these other categories are broader; this report will focus primarily on the role that innovation districts can play in connecting with the communities living in and around them.

The bulk of the report is taken up with case studies (many from London but some from across the UK and beyond), based (in almost all cases) on interviews with the people involved. The report looks first at the ethical, policy and practical drivers for better community involvement, before focusing in on London's innovation ecosystem, and at case studies of planning and delivering community benefit.

<sup>10</sup> Coyle D and Selvi B, *Making innovation inclusive*, Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, 2024



## Chapter 2

# Community and place

The Breakfast Club





## Chapter 2

# Community and place

Ethical, economic and policy considerations all make the case for innovation districts to work with and seek to benefit local communities. At one level, the argument is simply an ethical one. Many innovation economy organisations have a social mission at their heart. Anchor institutions such as universities and hospitals exist to serve society, but are also deeply rooted in place, by mission and history. Other businesses – for example start-ups, and small-and-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) – may not have local roots or even explicitly social missions, but succeeding at the expense of the places where they operate, and the people living in them, goes against the grain of decent business practice (and against the expectations of employees, board members and customers). Even when businesses are purely focused on commercial goals, investors, shareholders and other stakeholders generally expect ethical and neighbourly behaviour.

**The economic benefits of working with local communities are multifaceted.** Firstly, innovation districts are places, and successful places need local people. Innovation districts need to attract the best talent, so need safe public spaces, amenities, leisure opportunities and a quality of life that will strengthen their 'offer'. Some of these attractors can be walled off and reserved for innovation district workers, but urban innovation districts are not science park campuses – they draw their vitality, their 'buzz', from city centre locations and from the mix of uses and people that fill their spaces. Cafes, restaurants, bars and shared workspaces are a form of 'innovation infrastructure', where talented people think, meet and create.<sup>11</sup> Locking local people out muffles vitality, and dilutes an innovation district's appeal to investors, developers and innovators.

<sup>11</sup> Credit K et al, 'Third places, the connective fibre of cities and high-tech entrepreneurship', in *Regional Studies*, Dec 2024, Vol. 58 Issue 12

### **Engaging and including local communities creates opportunities too.**

As a recent report by UK IDG observes, innovation is held back by ‘lost Einsteins’ – people from a wider range of backgrounds who could potentially create new inventions if they were only brought into innovation networks.<sup>12</sup> Local communities also have a deep understanding of the challenges they face and the opportunities to tackle them; they are an asset – a repository of knowledge that may not be available to academics, potential partners in the creation of new knowledge and potential users of new innovation, whether commercially or socially implemented. Finally, working with local communities can create a virtuous circle, with more money circulating, more opportunities opening up and better skills attracting more good jobs for local people in long-term growth sectors.

Alongside ethical and practical concerns, **national, regional and local UK policy prioritises social value and community benefit.** UK public authorities have a responsibility (under the Procurement Act 2023) to look beyond cost when buying goods and services, having “regard to the importance of maximising public benefit”.<sup>13</sup> The Mayor of London’s 2021 London Plan, the strategic policy document for London’s growth and development, identified ‘good growth’ (“growth that is socially and economically comprehensive, and environmentally sustainable”) as its core objective.<sup>14</sup> This theme is echoed in the 2025 London Growth Plan, prepared jointly by the Mayor of London and London boroughs, which states “our ambition is to create an economy that works for all Londoners, making our city more equal as well as more prosperous”.<sup>15</sup>

In line with these statements of policy principle, community benefits are often secured through the UK planning process. ‘Section 106’ agreements negotiated between developers and local planning authorities require measures to mitigate the impact of new development; these can include commitments to delivering affordable housing, to building new community facilities and amenities, and to putting in place health and employment programmes. Since 2010, local authorities have also been

<sup>12</sup> UK Innovation Districts Group, op cit

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.socialvalueportal.com/news-and-insights/the-procurement-act-2023-social-value-what-authorities-and-suppliers-need-to-know>

<sup>14</sup> Mayor of London, *The London Plan*, Greater London Authority 2021

<sup>15</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, *London Growth Plan*, 2025



entitled to charge a 'community infrastructure levy', which enables them to pool developer contributions to support strategic infrastructure.

Anchor institutions are also seeking to play a more active part in supporting their localities. The late Bob Kerslake, who chaired the UPP Foundation Civic University Commission in 2018–19, wrote that universities were “hugely important to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the places in which they are located”; the Commission found great enthusiasm for a civic role, and many admirable initiatives, but “few examples of a systematic and strategic approach to the civic role, based on an analysis of the needs of the place”.<sup>16</sup> Since the Commission's report was published, **many UK universities have reconsidered and restated their strategy as civic universities.**

A similar process of reflection within the UK health sector has been given additional urgency by growing evidence about the

<sup>16</sup> UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, *Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places*, 2019





impact that ‘social determinants’ – factors such as housing conditions, quality of employment and access to public space – have on individuals’ health and on health disparities.<sup>17</sup> **So for NHS bodies, operating as anchor institutions to deliver community benefits also feeds into their mission – to “improve health and wellbeing”.**<sup>18</sup> Within London, NHS institutions formed an NHS Anchors Programme in 2020, working together on issues such as workforce pay, procurement and small businesses, and net zero.

This combination of factors – ethical considerations of ‘being a good neighbour’, the value of placemaking, the opportunities of working with local expertise and the policy imperative for good growth – makes working and sharing benefits with local communities intrinsic to the success of innovation districts. The next section considers the innovation economy in London, before exploring the evolution of London’s innovation districts and their plans, and examining specific case studies in more detail.

<sup>17</sup> Reed S et al, *Building healthier communities: the role of the NHS as an anchor institution*, The Health Foundation 2019

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england/the-nhs-constitution-for-england>



An aerial photograph of London at sunset. The River Thames flows through the center, with the Tower Bridge on the left and the City of London skyline on the right. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow over the water and the city. A large ferry is visible on the river in the foreground, and several smaller boats are docked along the right bank. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds.

## Chapter 3

# London's innovation assets and challenges

## Chapter 3

# London's innovation assets and challenges

London is one of the world's principal centres for innovation. Alongside New York, the San Francisco Bay Area and Boston, it regularly tops league tables and other rankings for life sciences,<sup>19</sup> for climate tech,<sup>20</sup> for artificial intelligence investment<sup>21</sup> and for tech start-ups,<sup>22</sup> and ranks as one of Europe's leading regions for innovation.<sup>23</sup>

Standard statistics do not easily describe the scale and evolution of London's innovation economy as 20th century industrial classifications do not match 21st century economic activity. Some broad-brush figures:

- Taking a definition<sup>24</sup> that includes most computer and telecommunications-related services, scientific research and development, technical testing and higher education, the sector's workforce has grown by around 80 per cent since 1998 (compared to 50 per cent for London jobs overall), and has grown faster than broadly equivalent sectors across the UK (see Figure 1).
- By this definition (which includes higher education teaching as well as research), the innovation economy accounted for around 460,000 jobs in London in 2022. If healthcare, publishing, broadcasting and creative arts are added in, there are around 930,000 jobs in total – 17 per cent of London's employment.
- At a more granular level, recent UK Government research found that life sciences accounted for 34,800 jobs in London in 2021/22, and had grown faster in the capital in recent years than in other regions (by 30 per cent since 2018/19).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Medcity London, *Life sciences global cities comparison report*, November 2024

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.uktech.news/climate-tech/britains-climate-tech-boom-20250226>

<sup>21</sup> <https://media.londonandpartners.com/news/london-leading-global-city-for-ai-businesses-to-grow>

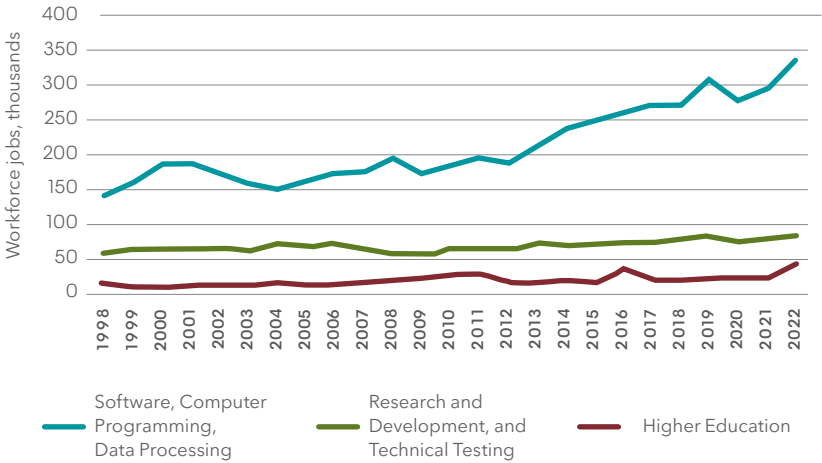
<sup>22</sup> <https://startupgenome.com/article/global-startup-ecosystem-ranking-2024-top-40>

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, *Regional Innovation Scoreboard*, 2024

<sup>24</sup> GLA Economics, *More detailed jobs series*, Summer 2024 update. Includes SIC groups 582 and 612-639, 712-722, and 854.

<sup>25</sup> Office for Life Sciences, *Bioscience and health technology sector statistics 2021 to 2022*, May 2024.

Figure 1: Innovation Sector Jobs in London, 1998-2022 <sup>24</sup>



Historically, innovation economy sectors have been concentrated in central London. The broad ‘Information and Communications’ category, which includes tech sectors but also publishing and broadcasting (but does not include scientific research and life sciences), shows an increasing clustering in and around central London; not only in the cities of London and Westminster, but also in Camden, Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark and Kensington and Chelsea.

Innovation districts in London have emerged on the fringes of these clusters (see Figure 2). In some cases this has been a spontaneous process; for example, the growth of ‘Tech City’, on the edge of City of London, Islington and Hackney, in the early 2000s was driven by creative and start-up businesses seeking affordable workspace with good internet connectivity, rather than by public policy or investment.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, **new investment by universities, research institutes and other anchor institutions has been pivotal**. Following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, investment by national government, individual institutions and private investors realised a legacy of cultural, educational, research and scientific facilities on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. In the Knowledge Quarter, the ongoing redevelopment

<sup>26</sup> Hanna K, op cit

Figure 2: selective map of Londons innovation districts



of King's Cross Central enabled new institutions, including University of the Arts London, the Francis Crick Institute and Google, to join the long-standing network of knowledge economy institutions such as the British Library, Wellcome and University College London.

In White City, Imperial College worked with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to build an innovation ecosystem around Imperial's investment in a new campus. The evolution of these innovation districts is discussed further in Section 4 of this report.

As set out in London's Growth Plan, alongside these three innovation districts are specialist life science clusters, generally anchored by hospitals, such as the London Cancer Hub in Sutton (anchored by Royal Marsden Hospital and the Institute for Cancer Research), SCI in Lambeth and Southwark (anchored by Guys and St Thomas' Hospital, King's College Hospital and King's College London) and Barts Life Sciences in



Whitechapel (anchored by Barts NHS Trust and Queen Mary University of London). The London Growth Plan also identifies a number of 'green innovation clusters', though these are at an earlier stage of development.

**Given London's access to talent, finance and global networks, and the 2025 London Growth Plan's ambition for two per cent annual productivity growth, the economic and social potential of innovation districts is considerable.** The Growth Plan highlights London's strengths – "globally leading universities; a deep and diverse talent pool; access to global capital; a large market for innovation; and a culture of entrepreneurship" – and sets out an aspiration to turn frontier innovation (encompassing "life sciences, deep tech and climate tech... [and] transformative technologies that cut across traditional boundaries: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, bioengineering, advanced robotics and materials science") from "a powerful but relatively smaller sector into one of the main powerhouses of the London economy."<sup>27</sup>

However, almost all of these emerging and established innovation districts and clusters are located near previously neglected areas, which face a range of economic, health, housing and other problems). Most of the residential areas around Knowledge Quarter's King's Cross core, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and White City were identified among the 20 per cent most deprived in England in 2019.<sup>28</sup> This is not surprising, and is mirrored in other parts of the country; these opportunity areas are the places with available and affordable land, where innovation district development forms part of a regeneration strategy.

**But this juxtaposition, of innovative energy and persistent lack of resources, creates a specific set of challenges for the public authorities, investors, developers and anchor institutions in innovation districts in London,** a city characterised by extremes of wealth and poverty, and complex community politics in relation to development. How can innovation districts ensure that communities – locally as well as regionally and nationally – can participate and share in the benefits of innovation, rather than just experience exclusion and other negative impacts such as being priced out of homes and commercial premises? This report next looks at how London's principal innovation districts have evolved, before turning to case studies of collaborating with and delivering long-term benefits for communities.

<sup>27</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, op cit

<sup>28</sup> Lower super output areas, reviewed on [https://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod\\_index.html](https://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html)



An aerial photograph of London, showing a dense urban landscape with a grid-like street pattern, green parks, and the River Thames winding through the city. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the chapter title. Labels for 'London Stadium', 'City of London', 'The O2', and 'Greenwich Park' are visible on the map.

## Chapter 4

# The evolution of London's innovation districts





Innovation districts are not clones. They differ in their governance structure, membership and purpose, and in the specific circumstances of places where they are located. Community benefit initiatives in turn need to reflect this context. This section of the report looks in more detail at the evolution of London's innovation districts, their scope, governance and purpose.

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## Chapter 4.1

# Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

One of the central objectives of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and Legacy project was to

**"transform the heart of east London... by turning one of London's most deprived areas into a world-class district for living, leisure, business and sport, with safe and sustainable neighbourhoods, new parkland, new homes, jobs, and social and leisure facilities for generations to come."**<sup>29</sup>

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) was the main precinct for the London 2012 Games. Located in the Lower Lea Valley, an area of historic industrial innovation, but more recent social and economic challenges, the London 2012 plans built on a local vision for economic and environmental revitalisation, to accelerate and enhance the long-term regeneration of the area. After the Games, London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), a new public body accountable to the Mayor of London, was set up to manage QEOP's transformation. 560 acres of parkland were reopened to the public, and world-class sporting venues such as the London Stadium, Velodrome, Copper Box Arena and London Aquatics Centre were adapted for legacy use.

<sup>29</sup> Department for Culture Media and Sport, *Before, during and after: making the most of the London 2012 Games*, DCMS 2008



Alongside these, the Press and Broadcast Centre was converted into an innovation campus, Here East, which now hosts faculties for four universities (Staffordshire, Teesside, Loughborough and University College London (UCL)) and start-up workspace Plexal.

Successive mayors of London also worked with the four Olympic Park boroughs (Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest) to create East Bank, a global cultural and educational powerhouse, comprising BBC Music Studios, University of the Arts London - London College of Fashion, Sadler's Wells East, UCL East and V&A East. The university campuses opened in 2023, and other facilities will be opening in 2025 and 2026. Alongside these, and new offices housing the British Council and Cancer Research UK, among others, around 33,000 new homes will be built in and around QEOP by 2036,<sup>30</sup> creating **a rich mix of residents, sport fans, students, workers, leisure visitors and local businesses.**

Innovation was embedded in the strategy, design and delivery of the post-2012 development programme: it set new standards for accessibility in the built environment, for sustainability and environmental regeneration, and for community engagement. Formal and informal collaborations were developed between Park-based organisations and neighbourhood anchors, resulting in innovative approaches to tackling local challenges and opportunities, and working in partnership with local communities.

**QEOP's unique mixed urban neighbourhood already serves as a testing ground for innovation.** With a mixed urban environment, a diverse population, and systems to record and analyse data about visitors and environmental conditions, QEOP can support rapid testing of innovations in a 'microcity', helping technology to develop from idea, to prototype, to market-ready product. To date, partners have collaborated to focus on three challenges that affect local communities as well as the regional and national population:

- Responding to the climate emergency
- Boosting health and wellbeing
- Upgrading mobility

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/about-us/queen-elizabeth-olympic-parks-london-campaign>

By spring 2025, 35 innovation trials had been completed, addressing issues as diverse as road design, bike theft, air-quality monitoring, removing plastics from food systems, helping venues adjust noise levels and acoustic design to meet the needs of people with hearing loss. Some of these innovations have been showcased at Urban Frontiers, an exhibition in UCL East. Partners have also developed their Digital Frontiers plan, which sets out a vision to integrate physical and digital assets in testing and showcasing new technology, and have run three phases of the Future Industries Demonstrator, which supports London-based startups and SMEs to develop and test solutions to challenges with an east London as well as a global impact.

In 2025, as planning powers were returned to the boroughs, and Suki Kalirai and Shazia Hussain took over the leadership of LLDC as chair and chief executive, **QEOP entered the next stage of its evolution, relaunched as an innovation district that tackles global urban challenges to make cities more liveable.** This mission will be supported by QEOP's unique urban and digital infrastructure, building on its success as a testbed to realise the potential of the communities and places around it.



### **What's been unique about QEOP's approach to innovation?**

Focusing on inclusive innovation from the start with an ambition that has local impact. This means involving stakeholders from the ecosystem and potential beneficiaries at discovery, design, test and implementation stages.

### **What's been the biggest success in terms of partnering with communities and delivering community benefit?**

Asking the question 'who is missing from this?' and then working hard to identify and extend invitations for participation. Designing events, opportunities and access with the widest range of stakeholders in mind.

### **What's the next big challenge?**

Scaling. How do we scale our initiatives and engagement to make a noticeable difference in our communities?

### **What have you learnt along the way?**

Problems are shared problems that many stakeholders are trying to solve as well. Collaboration, and sharing resources and knowledge, will help tackle the biggest and most urgent.



**Abdul Rahim,**  
Chief Innovation Officer,  
Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park



## Chapter 4.2

# Knowledge Quarter London

The Knowledge Quarter (KQ) is a consortium of academic, cultural, research, scientific and media organisations, based around King's Cross, Euston Road and Bloomsbury.

KQ's origins lie in discussions between the leaders of three of the area's largest institutions – the British Library, which had been in the area since 1997, the Francis Crick Institute and University of the Arts London – Central St Martins, with the latter two having moved near King's Cross in the 2010s. Change around King's Cross, which had begun with the arrival of Pan Macmillan (now Springer Nature) and the British Library in the 1990s, accelerated with the arrival of rail services from continental Europe at St Pancras International from 2007, the construction of King's Place from 2005–2008 and the redevelopment of King's Cross station from 2008–2012.

Against the backdrop of this regeneration, **these leaders asked what it might mean to have a critical mass of leading cultural, educational and scientific institutions in one place, and how opportunities to work together could be explored.** They identified 35 different knowledge-based organisations within the area, including longstanding anchor organisations such as University College London (UCL), University of London, ARUP, the British Museum and Wellcome, and invited these to contribute to setting up a collaboration network.<sup>31</sup>

KQ was launched as an informal partnership in 2014. Led by Jodie Eastwood and initially hosted by the British Library, KQ's initial focus was on understanding the priorities of different members, developing networks between them and in particular encouraging collaboration between different types of organisations from tech firms to community associations.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Jodie Eastwood, 9 January 2025

KQ was formally incorporated as a not-for-profit limited company in 2016, with directors from the founding members and the two local authorities (Camden and Islington), and six more elected by members, from sectors including culture, education, life sciences, community and research. Members pay an annual membership fee on a sliding scale depending on size. Benefits include access to networking events, advocacy support, and engagement on public realm and local community issues.

In 2017, KQ was selected for a UK government-supported science and innovation audit (SIA), one of 25 studies seeking to understand the UK's local innovation networks, and to help them achieve their potential. The SIA, published in 2019, found that **KQ's cluster of scientific and knowledge-based organisations was exceptional in scale and breadth, and was already having a significant economic impact**, but also noted shortages of lab space and other space for new and growing businesses. It recommended expanding the offer to start-ups, making more use of the National Health Service estate, building the KQ brand, and strengthening networks within KQ and with other innovation districts.<sup>32</sup>

The KQ 2025 strategy<sup>33</sup> and KQ 2050 spatial plan<sup>34</sup> reflected the findings of the SIA. The latter, developed jointly with Camden and Islington councils, set out a vision for KQ to be “the best place in Europe for collaboration, innovation and research; a place that delivers opportunities for local residents, regardless of their means, to fulfil their social and economic potential”. It has been backed by joint work on local planning policies, public realm, and programmes to support local people seeking to work in KQ and to support KQ businesses to be good employers.

KQ is still growing. New developments in the pipeline include the new Oriel eye hospital, built on the site of the former St Pancras Hospital, and MSD's London Discovery Centre at Belgrove House, both due to open in 2027, alongside 600,000 square feet of laboratory space at the Tribeca development, and plans by British Land to transform Euston Tower into a life sciences and innovation hub. Overall, KQ expects to add nearly three million square feet of lab space by 2032.

<sup>32</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *Knowledge Quarter Science and Innovation Audit: summary report*, 2019

<sup>33</sup> Knowledge Quarter, *KQ 2025 strategy*, 2019

<sup>34</sup> Knowledge Quarter, and London boroughs of Camden and Islington, *KQ 2050: a Knowledge Quarter unlocked*, 2023





**KQ has a truly global profile, as highlighted by work with UCL and Elsevier to measure performance against international innovation district benchmarks in the USA, South Korea, Australia, Singapore and Japan.** In November 2024, the project dashboard showed KQ leading in policy and health impacts, and in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and lower-to middle-income nations.<sup>35</sup> "We purposely measured ourselves against some of the best innovation districts in the world," says Jodie Eastwood. "And the data is incredibly compelling".<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> London Knowledge Quarter, University College London, and Elsevier, *UCL / Knowledge Quarter Innovation District Comparator*, November 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Jodie Eastwood, 9 January 2025

**What's been unique about KQ's approach to innovation?**

We've brought together world-leading institutions across disciplines, through a democratic, collaborative model, where all voices are valued equally, to drive place-based innovation that responds directly to real-world challenges and delivers tangible local impact.

**What's been the biggest success in terms of partnering with communities and delivering community benefit?**

Our partnership on Camden STEAM has been a standout success, creating meaningful pathways for local young people into the creative, science and tech sectors. It's a model of how institutions, schools and communities can work together to open up opportunity and shift outcomes.

**What's the next big challenge?**

The next big challenge is ensuring that the major transformation of places like Euston brings long-term, inclusive benefits, not just for our member institutions, but for the people who live, work and grow up here. That means staying accountable and keeping communities at the heart of the conversation.

**What have you learnt along the way?**

We've learnt that true innovation doesn't come from any one organisation acting alone, it happens when you build trust, listen deeply and commit to sharing power. Collaboration across difference is where the real breakthroughs begin.



**Jodie Eastwood,**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Knowledge Quarter



## Chapter 4.3

# White City Innovation District

The White City Innovation District's (WCID) roots are in Imperial College's purchase of land north of the A40 flyover in 2009. The original plan was for a residential and commercial development. However, further land south of the flyover was acquired in 2013, and Imperial commissioned research on how they might develop an innovation ecosystem on these sites. **The scoping report found that an Imperial-led development at White City "could be well placed to position itself as Europe's leading innovation district, rivalling some of the most innovative and entrepreneurial "high-buzz" places around the world".<sup>37</sup>**

The 23-acre Imperial White City Campus now comprises molecular science and biomedical engineering research centres, a school of public health, two innovation and start-up hubs, a hackspace and societal engagement hub, and a postgraduate residential centre, as well as close links to Hammersmith Hospital, a few minutes' walk away. Further phases south of the A40 are under development, alongside the Scale Space business growth hub, and the wider district includes commercial premises for companies including Novartis, L'Oreal and Jellycat, as well as EdCity, a youth and education hub.

In 2016, Stephen Cowan, Hammersmith and Fulham Council's leader, began working closely with Imperial, and in 2017, the **Council's industrial strategy launched a joint growth partnership to create "a global beacon for**

<sup>37</sup> ter Wal A and Corbishley C, *Imperial West as a world-leading Innovation District A guide to best practice and feasibility*, Imperial College London Business School, April 2014



**innovation and growth and a leading place for tech and creative businesses, education and research” centred on White City.**<sup>38</sup> This ambition and partnership was restated in Upstream London, the 2024 ‘second phase’ of the industrial strategy, which presented the WCID as part of ‘West Tech London’, and set out plans for the Upstream Pathway Bond, a programme to support local young people in accessing the opportunities offered in growth businesses in White City and beyond.<sup>39</sup>

Imperial has bought a further ten-acre site on the nearby Old Oak industrial estate, part of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, to enable new businesses incubated within White City to scale up with spaces for prototyping, pilot and advanced manufacturing, while remaining close to the innovation hub – one of the recommendations of the 2014 scoping report. A small team, Nexus, is based in White City and funded by the Council and Imperial to act as a “networking asset”,<sup>40</sup> supporting connections within the science, tech and creative clusters both within the WCID and the wider Hammersmith and Fulham ecosystem.

<sup>38</sup> Hammersmith & Fulham Council, *Economic growth for everyone: An industrial strategy for Hammersmith & Fulham*, 2017

<sup>39</sup> Hammersmith & Fulham Council, *Upstream London The Innovation Borough: Accelerating Inclusive Growth*, 2024

<sup>40</sup> Katz B and Wagner J, *The Rise of Innovation Districts*, Brookings 2014





## Chapter 4.4

# Leadership, partnership and adaptation

These three innovation districts have different origin stories and growth trajectories, but they share some common features too. In each case, **leadership has been provided by a mix of anchor institutions and elected politicians.**

In the case of QEOP, the initiative was civic, with the vision emerging from mayoral agencies and borough leaders, working increasingly closely with a partnership of educational and cultural anchors after the 2012 Games.

In the Knowledge Quarter, University of the Arts London and the British Library took the initiative in bringing together a coalition, and quickly began working with the two local authorities in the area – particularly on some of the community programmes that will be profiled later in this report. In White City, Imperial College formed a strong alliance with Hammersmith and Fulham Council, which put the innovation economy and White City at the heart of its economic plan.

**All three innovation districts – whose roots go back more than ten years – have seen their plans evolve over time,** responding to changes in policy and the market, and refining their mission and priorities. QEOP has shifted focus from urban development to realising social and community value. The Knowledge Quarter has developed a closer collaboration with local authorities to support community programmes and placemaking. Imperial College's ambition at White City was transformed from a purely commercial investment to a programme that seeks not only to transform White City, but also to anchor a new tech corridor for west London.



**All three districts are also positioned to make the most of current and future transport infrastructure**, including the Elizabeth Line and Thameslink connections to London's airports, HS1 connections to continental Europe, and HS2 connections to the UK midlands and north-west.

Lastly, **all three innovation districts have also prioritised working with local communities**, engaging them in the innovation economy and delivering tangible benefits. The next section looks at examples, from these innovation districts and beyond, of how this has worked.





## Chapter 5

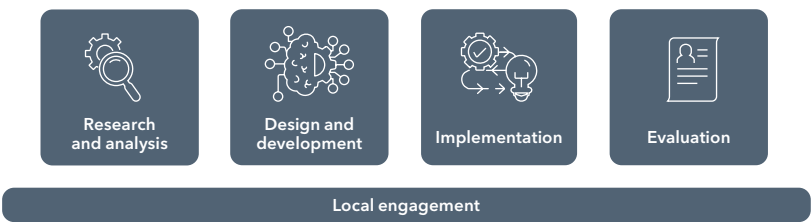
# Making plans with and for communities



The remainder of this report draws on case studies of how innovation districts and anchor institutions have planned and implemented community benefit programmes. Short summaries of each are linked to fuller narratives (in an online annexe) that explore rationale, success factors, impacts and lessons learned, including observations from people involved. Some case studies are referred to several times, to support different points.

While these case studies are intended to be inspiring and instructive, few can be simply transposed from one context to another. Just as every complex innovation challenge requires fresh thinking, **successful community benefit programmes emerge from understanding, creativity and community engagement**, as well as from feedback through the implementation and evaluation process. This section focuses on research, community engagement and developing plans for community benefit (see Figure 3); the next looks at specific interventions emerging from those plans.

Figure 3: designing, implementing and learning from community programmes



## Chapter 5.1

# Assets, evidence and engagement

A good starting point for planning community programmes is to consider the assets that different partners bring (see Figure 4). For innovation districts and institutions, these include:

- **Spaces and facilities** – buildings, public spaces, specialised equipment, data, meeting rooms, workspaces
- **Opportunities** – for employment, for supply, for participation in the innovation ecosystem
- **Expertise** – technical and entrepreneurial skills that can be applied to individual, commercial or social challenges
- **Funding** – grants and investment funds, and the potential for reinvestment

But the assets are not all on one side of the relationship. Local communities have assets too, even if these are sometimes perceived as hard to access. These assets include:

- **Knowledge of the place and its people** – the nature of the community, its needs and aspirations, the character of the neighbourhood in which an innovation district is being built
- **Networks, markets and ideas** – fresh ideas and perspectives, new connections, and opening new markets and uses for innovation



Figure 4: Community and Innovation District Assets



Dialogue with communities is essential to developing an understanding of assets and local needs, challenges and opportunities. Once these are understood, innovation districts and their leaders can continue the dialogue to set priorities, identify the levers that will make the biggest difference, and plan how these can be used to augment and complement existing programmes. Community engagement should continue to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes, so that these can be adjusted and enhanced over time to sustain effectiveness and respond to changing circumstances.

**Community engagement should be sustained, responsive and non-exploitative – a process of ‘doing with’ rather than ‘doing to’** – and should take time to understand the actual challenges faced by local communities and community organisations. One long-term approach has been in east London, including Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), where University College London (UCL) academics have worked with local citizen scientists on a long-term project to understand and track ‘prosperity’. In the Knowledge Quarter (KQ), a local community association reported a positive partnership developing a community centre at the Crick Institute, while locating a UCL community worker in the offices of an east London community organisation inspired a new skills-sharing programme.

## Long-term study of the impacts of regeneration in east London

In 2021, UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity launched a ten-year study on the effects of regeneration in east London, recruiting and training citizen scientists locally to research what local communities saw as 'the good life' and how it was changing. The programme has developed a prosperity index, and will be tracking progress against this in east London, feeding into a London Prosperity Board comprising public bodies, local employers and communities.

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## The Living Centre at the Crick, Knowledge Quarter

The Living Centre is a community centre within the Crick Institute in King's Cross. The idea for the project was developed in partnership with Somers Town Community Association (STCA), which also operates the centre. The Association was involved in everything from making sure the Centre's public health programmes would be valuable and accessible for local communities, to practical decisions on building design.

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### **What's been the biggest success for Somers Town Community Association (STCA) in terms of partnering with Knowledge Quarter (KQ) institutions, such as the Crick?**

Partnering with the KQ institutions allows us to be seen. It gives us a profile we would not otherwise have, and a validation almost of our work and what we do.

### **What's the next big challenge?**

Unfortunately there is still a large amount of misunderstanding around what the voluntary and community sector is and does, which does lead to a lack of recognition/appreciation/value of the knowledge, skills, and expertise held within the voluntary and community sector. So the challenge is to now work to balance the equation to ensure all are valued for what they bring.

### **What have you learnt along the way?**

That it takes time, energy and respect from all involved, as organisationally we are all very different, but in reality everything has a commonality; you just need to work together to find it.



**Sarah Elie,**  
Executive Director,  
Somers Town Community Association



## The Evaluation Exchange, east London

The Evaluation Exchange project arose from discussions with a UCL community engagement officer working in the offices of Compost, which supports east London community groups. Noting the challenges that local groups faced demonstrating impact to funders, UCL and Compost worked together on a project linking postgrad students with community groups to develop and implement innovative approaches to evaluation.

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Several interviewees, both from community organisations and innovation districts, identified problems with how developers and other stakeholders engage with communities, particularly in areas such as King's Cross and east London, which have seen decades of successive regeneration programmes. In some cases engagement was seen as tokenistic ("just to get over the line for planning"), duplicative ("in areas of change like this, there's an awful lot of community engagement consultants tripping over each other") and even extractive, with local community representatives being expected to give their time and expertise for free, when their counterparts are being paid. One response to this has been to pay, or otherwise compensate, local people for undertaking community engagement work. In QEOP, partners have also sought to establish a community network to enable different organisations (community and innovation district) to plug into the same conversation.

## Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Community Anchor Network

The Community Anchor Network (CAN) is being established to enable a more equitable partnership between community organisations and the ecosystem of organisations located on QEOP. The proposal was developed by a working group of community organisations, following a survey that found more than 150 operating in the local area. The plan is for partners to sign up to a 'CAN Commitment' that will set out how the network can participate in projects and what each side should expect.

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## Chapter 5.2

# Planning and building coalitions for action

Innovation districts, and the organisations within them, are essentially inclined to innovate: to experiment with new approaches, to refine and iterate, to test and evaluate. Some of the case studies featured in this report were the result of individual initiatives; others formed part of a district-wide or more extensive plan for co-ordinated action, set as a priority by political leadership or emerging from a coalition of partners.

The Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park testbed, described in the last section of this report, has set out its priority areas for action: climate emergency, health and wellbeing, and mobility. In Hammersmith and Fulham, the Upstream Pathway Bond seeks to galvanise businesses to sign up to offering young people living in the area a clear pathway into the careers of the future. Similarly, the Knowledge Quarter's KQ 2050 Strategy, developed with the London boroughs of Camden and Islington, invites anchor institutions, developers, businesses and civic institutions to participate in borough-led work experience and skills programmes, such as Camden STEAM.

### Case Study

#### Upstream Pathway Bond, White City

The vision for the Bond was developed by Hammersmith and Fulham Council, working closely with local teachers and youth workers. It looks at what young people need at every stage of their development to remain on a 'pathway to success', and invites local businesses to sign up to support them on this journey. Businesses that commit to the Bond can choose from a menu of ways to provide support.

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## Camden STEAM

Camden STEAM works with employers and schools to place local pupils into a work experience programme, with a common framework that enables all parties to maximise the impact of the programme without requiring individual companies to design their own programmes.

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In other cases, leaders of political and anchor institutions have agreed to work together to pursue shared priorities, as with the London Anchor Institutions Network, which has particularly focused on issues such as procurement and employment. In Cambridge, innovation organisations themselves have designed a programme to support local communities.

## London Anchor Institutions Network

London Anchor Institutions Network was established in March 2021. Leaders from NHS London, Met Police, London universities and the Greater London Authority came together to identify how their organisations could help the city achieve a fair and green recovery, and develop its resilience to future shocks. The Network initially focused on five areas: helping a wide variety of groups across London to find and retain jobs; mentoring; procurement to support local businesses; net zero; and place-based partnerships

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## The Cambridge Pledge

The Cambridge Pledge was founded to ensure that the city's world-leading innovation success has a positive impact on the wider community. Innovators and entrepreneurs are invited to commit five per cent of their future returns into a fund that will be invested into social projects in Cambridge and the surrounding area, working closely with local community organisations and local authorities.

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**Political leadership also has a part to play in connecting individual innovation districts, research hubs and industrial areas, so that they can form part of a regional (and inter-regional) innovation ecosystem.**

The Mayor of London has committed in his Growth Plan to support the development of “industrial innovation corridors in which we will both build new industrial innovation facilities to scale up frontier innovation and support existing manufacturers to adopt innovation”, and to make London’s public sector an innovation accelerator, through acting as “a buyer of innovation, a creator and curator of data, and as an enabler of tests and pilots”.<sup>41</sup> In Greater Manchester, the government-funded ‘innovation accelerator’ was used to develop links between central innovation districts and peripheral industrial areas.

Case Study

### **Innovation Greater Manchester – from Oxford Road to Atom Valley**

Innovation Greater Manchester (Innovation GM) was established in 2022 as a partnership between business, political leaders and universities. Innovation GM is seeking to strengthen links between the central innovation districts (e.g., Manchester’s Oxford Road Corridor), and growth areas such as Atom Valley, around ten miles further north, where Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, has established a mayoral development zone.

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Successful community programmes for innovation districts are based on a deep understanding of assets and challenges, on sustained and constructive partnerships with local communities, and on a shared sense of purpose between them and the networks of institutions and leaders that make up innovation ecosystems. The next section of the report looks in more detail at the range of interventions that have emerged from these partnerships.

<sup>41</sup> Mayor of London and London Councils, op cit





## Chapter 6

# Opening up, inspiring and collaborating

Community benefit initiatives bring local people and businesses into innovation districts and ecosystems, deploying physical assets, expertise, opportunities and funding to share the dividends of innovation. In setting out the case studies below, this report uses three broad categories:

- **Opening up and inviting in:** making facilities and other assets available and accessible to local people, but also actively inviting them in, through programming and outreach, showing what innovation districts and ecosystems can offer.
- **Inspiring and supporting:** showing local residents, particularly younger people, the employment and procurement opportunities available in innovation districts, inspiring and helping them to access these, and providing other services that meet local needs and priorities.
- **Collaborating, coproduction and handing over:** working with local people and community organisations to research and create, handing over assets to local control and spreading innovative practice beyond the innovation district.

The case studies reflect a range of definitions of the 'local community'. In some cases this is very local, comprising the people living in the immediate neighbourhood; in others the locality is seen as the local authority area, or even the city/region as a whole.



## Chapter 6.1

# Opening up and inviting in

Leading innovation districts and institutions have come a long way from the defensive architecture and urban design of earlier business parks and sealed campuses. The shift towards **open innovation values networking and serendipity, not secrecy, and this is reflected in architectural and urban designs** that provide openness, transparency, a mix of uses and the provision of ‘third spaces’ – cafes, restaurants, performance spaces – where innovation workers and local residents can meet and mingle.

For example, at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, UCL East’s campus has open and accessible ground floors in the two principal buildings – One Pool Street and Marshgate – with cafes and art works bringing life to the spaces.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the Granary Square fountains in King’s Cross have proved a major draw for families, and the designs for the planned British Library extension include community gardens and open access to the residential communities of Somers Town as well as to King’s Cross and the wider Knowledge Quarter.<sup>43</sup>

However, as many stakeholders interviewed during the research observed, opening up is only part of the story. **People need to be shown that buildings, spaces and ecosystems are for them; they need an invitation as well as an open door.** Arts programming has been one way to signal that institutions are open – both in new campuses such as UCL East and in established institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. In White City, a shared makerspace has been opened up to young people to build their creative skills and strengthen community connections.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-east/connect-and-collaborate/visitors-campus>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/rshps-1-1bn-british-library-expansion-to-start-next-year>



## UCL East community cultural programmes

University College London's new Stratford campus is intended to be "open, engaged and accessible". This is reflected in programmes such as Trellis, a collaboration and knowledge exchange between artists, academic researchers and local residents, and City Mill Skate, which installed a temporary skate park, offered training to local young people and researched longer-term ways of incorporating skateboarding into the campus public realm.

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## Brooklyn Museum community programmes, New York City

Brooklyn Museum's landmark programme is First Saturdays, which have been attended by 1.5 million people since they began in 1998. On the first Saturday of each month, the Museum's hours are extended until 11:00PM, with free entrance after 5:00PM. Local artists are prioritised as hosts, and programming includes craft markets, poetry readings, dance and musical performances, film screenings and storytime for children. All programming is free, though advance registration is required.

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## Maker Challenge, White City

The Maker Challenge was one of the first community programmes introduced by Imperial College at its White City Campus. The project is based in the Dangoor Reach Out Maker Space on the edge of the Campus, where 120 14-18-year-olds join a free after-school programme every year, learn skills such as 3D printing, laser cutting and woodworking, and are encouraged to develop their creative and innovative skills.

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Innovation districts are not just buildings, however, but ecosystems of creativity and exploration – albeit ones that can be dominated by people from a relatively narrow range of backgrounds. Inviting people from the wider community to participate seeks to remedy that imbalance, so that innovation economies and society at large can benefit from a wider



range of ideas and lived experience, and community-led solutions can be supported to maximise their long-term growth potential and sustainability. Challenge prizes have been used to engage local entrepreneurs on big environmental missions in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), and to widen the pool of entrepreneurs in Leeds and Glasgow.

Case Study

## **Future Industries Demonstrator, QEOP**

In 2023, QEOP and partners launched the Future Industries Demonstrator, to support London-based startups and SMEs to develop and test solutions that tackle challenges with an east London as well as a global aspect. Participants receive grants, one-to-one support, and access to workspace and the QEOP testbed. The three challenge themes to date have been Natural Cities, Sustainable Structures and Food Systems.

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Case Study

## **Innovative Entrepreneurs, West Yorkshire**

The Innovative Entrepreneurs programme, delivered by Leeds Nexus and funded by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, offers nine months of intensive support to aspiring entrepreneurs from across West Yorkshire. Local recruitment activities – such as workshops and drop-in sessions – are tailored to local contexts, in order to reach the variety of communities in West Yorkshire, particularly in some of the towns and cities outside Leeds.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

Case Study

## **Glasgow Social Innovation Challenge Fund**

The Glasgow Social Innovation Challenge Fund aims to improve take-up of business support among local entrepreneurs. Council officers noted that first contacts with business support were from across Glasgow's communities, but that there was a significant drop-off in follow-up from some groups. In the first phase, £250,000 of grants were made to organisations to support local entrepreneurs, by directly providing advice and support, or through forming better connections with existing advice services.

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## Chapter 6.2

# Inspiring and supporting

From the outside, innovation districts can look like impenetrable citadels of highly qualified people pushing the boundaries of possibility – in tech, in life sciences, in sustainable design. While frontier innovation can be incredibly complex and specialised, this is not the whole story: **40 percent of new roles in life sciences by 2030 are forecast to recruit below degree level.**<sup>44</sup> Innovation districts recruit academic high achievers, but also offer jobs in data management, laboratory support, clinical administration, IT, marketing and design, and as wide a range of support functions as in any workplace. Showing people the scope of opportunities, and helping them to access them, is at the core of many innovation districts' and institutions' community programmes, though some interviewees observed that employers can inadvertently lock out local talent by using degree qualifications as a pre-requisite for jobs where they are not strictly needed.

Several innovation districts have put in place programmes targeted at young people. These aim to showcase the opportunities that the innovation economy offers, while at the same time boosting the creative and social skills of people who can be underserved by the formal school system, and by the depletion of alternative youth provision. In the Knowledge Quarter, the London Borough of Camden's STEAM programme has been developed closely with anchor institutions such as Google, while in and around Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Here East and The Yard Theatre have developed programmes to inspire and engage local schoolchildren. In Newcastle upon Tyne's Helix innovation district, storytelling, youth activity days and skateboarding have helped break down 'glass walls' between the project and local communities.

<sup>44</sup> Science Industry Partnership, *Life Sciences 2030 Skills Strategy*, 2022

## Camden STEAM, Knowledge Quarter

Camden STEAM was established in 2018, aiming to build young people's awareness of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) careers, to provide routes to access those careers, to engage young people from across Camden's communities and to strengthen the STEAM community in the borough. Around 60 local employers have signed up to send ambassadors into schools, offer work experience opportunities and support teacher training.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

## Google London engagement programmes, Knowledge Quarter

Google will soon occupy its new King's Cross headquarters, but has already opened the doors of its existing office for monthly school tours, working with Camden STEAM, and hosts 100 students each summer through the STEAM work experience programme. However, their biggest programme has been the London AI Campus, which opened in November 2024. The Campus, based in Somers Town, offers two-year programmes to inspire, inform and educate local sixth formers about AI and its uses.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

## Here East Tech Masters and Tech Stars, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

The Tech Masters and Tech Stars programmes were developed to ensure long-term local availability of the skilled workers that Here East needs, while helping local people from all backgrounds to find jobs in tech. Tech Masters brings around 300 local primary school children into Here East for site visits. Tech Stars sets a challenge for secondary pupils, allowing winners from each school to develop their ideas, through field visits to Here East and its university partners, and to present them to a panel of judges.

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### What's been the biggest success in terms of partnering with communities and delivering community benefit?

Our relationship with the employment and skills team at London Legacy Development Corporation has unlocked a huge amount of potential in larger projects and for engagement. However, we have also been working more and more directly with the boroughs. Our youth engagement schemes in Newham continue to be in demand and we have now rolled these into Hackney, with engagement at junior, senior and sixth form/college levels. Scholarship programmes also continue to be successful, both at masters (the Inspiring Success programme) and at undergraduate level. Applications are high and the benefit to each student is significant: evidence consistently shows that a degree or other HE qualification significantly improves wage growth and life outcomes for those who gain them.

### What's the next big challenge?

Adapting to a new park-wide-inclusive narrative when we have placed inclusivity and community at the heart of what we do.

### What have you learnt along the way?

Collaboration is key, but maintain your own identity. If something is important to you or the organisation, and you believe it is right, sometimes taking the group approach waters down what you are trying to achieve and why. Secondly, taking a long-term view on growth will deliver short-term rewards too, and many of them.



**Gavin Poole,**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
HereEast

## The Yard Young Artists, Hackney Wick

The Yard Young Artists programme, run from a theatre just outside QEOP, builds creative and personal skills for local young people. For children aged seven to eleven, youth facilitators visit local schools to talk about theatre. For older children, workshops and special performances are held, and some go on to work with professionals to develop a new piece of theatre. As well as building skills, organisers have found that the programme helps integrate older and newer populations in an area of rapid change.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

## Newcastle Helix community strategy, Newcastle upon Tyne

Newcastle Helix, on the old Scottish and Newcastle Breweries site, has brought in a journalist and filmmaker to explore and promote stories about the innovations taking place on site – from melanoma treatments to advances in healthy ageing. Helix also worked with partners to bring around 200 local schoolchildren to the site for a day of immersive, playful experiences in data, AI and coding.

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In both Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and the Knowledge Quarter, youth-targeted programmes, which aim to inspire and engage, have been supplemented by ones that are more directly targeted at helping local people to develop skills and secure jobs, and to build their own businesses.

## Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Inclusive Growth programmes

As QEOP enters the next phase of its development, partners are seeking to scale up and extend employment programmes. These include the Good Growth Hub, which supports local young people to secure work on QEOP, including through a shared recruitment service, paid internships at cultural institutions and an apprenticeship programme, as well as through Build East, a centre for green construction skills.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

## Leading Inclusive Futures Through Technology (LIFT), London

LIFT was launched in 2021 as a partnership between the London boroughs of Camden, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, with the aim of building a knowledge economy that is locally engaged, creating opportunities for residents from all backgrounds and supporting employers to connect with communities. LIFT offers locally-tailored community engagement, training and employability support, plus subsidised or free workspace for start-ups.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

## UCL School of Management and London College of Fashion Business Builder, QEOP

Alongside the opening of their new campuses in Stratford, University College London and London College of Fashion launched a programme of business support targeted at micro-businesses based in the four boroughs adjoining QEOP. Participants receive 18 hours of support during a six-week programme, covering everything from vision, to financial management, to marketing and growth planning, in addition to individual mentoring.

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Hammersmith and Fulham Council have asked local businesses to commit to a programme of employability support for young people. London NHS institutions have also sought to support people from local communities into work – helping to address worklessness, a significant social determinant of poor health, at the same time as meeting the needs of one of London’s largest employers.

Case Study

### **Upstream Pathway Bond, White City**

Hammersmith and Fulham Council’s keystone programme is the Upstream Pathway Bond. Businesses that commit to the Bond choose from a menu of ways to provide support to young people in the Borough. These include providing apprenticeships and work experience; making facilities available for extra-curricular activities; offering mentorships, work placements and sponsorship for overseas trips; and providing learning and employability support.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

Case Study

### **Barts Life Sciences HealthTech SME project, east London**

As part of the development of a new life sciences hub at Whitechapel by Queen Mary University of London and Barts Health NHS Trust, this programme helped local startups and small- and medium-sized enterprises to develop new products for the NHS, offered training on procurement and intellectual property, recruited local people for paid internships in these businesses, and developed and communicated clear pathways to collaboration.

[LEARN MORE...](#)

Case Study

### **Barts employment programmes, east London**

Barts Health NHS Trust provides hospital healthcare to more than 2.5 million people in north east London, employing more than 20,000 people. Seeking to open up opportunities for local residents, Barts has developed three schemes, working with local authorities to place local candidates in jobs, providing supported internships to young people with severe learning disabilities and autism, and running a programme in local schools telling pupils about the range of careers available in the health service.

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In some cases more direct support to communities has been provided. In east London and Greater Manchester, legal and dental clinics provide access to fully qualified professional services that local communities have trouble accessing, as well as providing educational benefits and broader experience to university students.

Case Study

### **Integrated Legal Advice Clinic, Stratford**

University College London's (UCL) Integrated Legal Advice Clinic (ILAC) offers free legal advice and support to east London residents. The Clinic's roots are in UCL research that examined the way that unresolved legal issues have negative impacts on health. The clinic, based in Stratford Town Centre, provides advice and support on welfare benefits, housing, community care and education. It has full-time, fully qualified solicitors and administrators, and law students volunteer to work alongside them to take notes, follow up and generally support case resolution.

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Case Study

### **Working Well Roots to Dental, Greater Manchester**

The Roots to Dental project germinated when partners observed that dental health problems and lack of access to a dentist were a common challenge for people looking for work in Greater Manchester. Setting up a joint clinic with University of Manchester Dental School has made a tangible difference for jobseekers, and enabled dental students to benefit from working on a range of different dental challenges.

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## Chapter 6.3

# Collaborating, co-producing and handing over

Some community programmes go further, bringing community representatives into positions of power and influence, directly involving people in research and innovation, handing over resources or facilities to local community groups, and spreading the benefits of innovation beyond the innovation district itself. In White City, the WellHome programme helped to form connections with communities while addressing an issue of local significance, while citizen scientist research in east London became part of the evaluation framework for regeneration.

### Case Study

#### **WellHome domestic air pollution study, White City**

The Imperial College WellHome study into air pollution in the home partnered with local people, thereby demonstrating the practical relevance of Imperial's work for local communities. Following extensive community engagement, 100 households were recruited to measure particles, gases, temperature and humidity at home using air pollution sensors over two 28-day periods. Community engagement continued throughout the study period, and findings have been reported back to households with some general recommendations, using a co-designed reporting format.

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## Long-term study of the impacts of regeneration in east London

In 2021, UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) launched a study to research what local communities saw as 'the good life'. IGP recruited citizen scientists from the local community, using local organisations to spread word of the opportunity. The scientists are trained in social research, helped develop the methodology and are paid for their time; several are now members of the London Prosperity board, which connects the research to policymakers. Their findings, and the Prosperity Index that they have helped to develop, form the basis of UCL's ten-year study of the impact of 'regeneration' on local people.

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Handing over or sharing assets so that communities can deploy them to meet their needs goes further still, and minimises risks of duplicating effort or undermining organisations and networks already working in an area. The Living Centre in Knowledge Quarter, the Cambridge Pledge and The Loop are three very different approaches to sharing resources in this way.

## The Living Centre at the Crick, Knowledge Quarter

The Living Centre at the Crick Institute in King's Cross is operated by the Somers Town Community Association (STCA), which was set up in the 1980s. Handing over operations has meant that the Living Centre complements, rather than overlaps, the services delivered at STCA's existing Ossulston Street centre. STCA hopes to build on the relationship to form a deeper research and public health partnership with the Crick and other health organisations in years to come.

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## The Cambridge Pledge

The Cambridge Pledge asks local innovators and entrepreneurs to commit a proportion of future returns to supporting social projects delivered by local community organisations and local authorities in Cambridge and the surrounding area. The explicit aim is not to duplicate what is already happening but to support and help the many under-resourced community organisations already working in the area.

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## The Loop, Hackney Wick

The Loop is a community-run circular economy hub based just outside Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). Set up and operated by Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust, with initial financial support from QEOP's Future Industries Demonstrator, The Loop has secured a 99-year lease virtually rent-free for a 7,000 square foot workspace, which The Loop will use to host and support businesses working on everything from plastic reuse to zero-waste food.

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Local communities can also participate in the governance of innovation districts. In QEOP, the Elevate Youth Board has observer status at board meetings and committee meetings, and feeds into all critical strategies and planning decisions.

## Elevate Youth Board, QEOP

Elevate is the youth engagement and leadership programme for Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The Elevate Board comprises fifteen 18-25-year-olds young people from the surrounding area. The chair of the Board has observer status on the London Legacy Development Corporation Board, as do other members on other committees. Elevate feeds into planning applications, strategies and business plans, and has helped to design facilities and programmes on the Park, involving 500 young people since 2008.

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Finally, community programmes are not always about bringing communities into innovation districts; they can also take innovation out into the community, as illustrated by the Innovation in Action Energy Challenge in South Yorkshire.

Case Study

## **Innovation in Action, South Yorkshire**

The Innovation in Action Energy Challenge was developed by Sheffield City Council to spread innovation in local manufacturing businesses, and to enhance business networks. The team worked with seven enterprises from across South Yorkshire. Each was allocated a mentor and also supplied with technology to monitor energy use. The 12-week programme resulted in tangible cost savings from better understanding energy costs through retooling and changing processes.

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An aerial photograph of London, England, showing the River Thames flowing through the city. The Shard is prominent on the left, and the London Eye is visible in the distance. The foreground shows a mix of residential and commercial buildings along the riverbank.

## Chapter 7

# Success factors and opportunities

This report has presented a selection of case studies showing what innovation districts and anchor institutions are doing to partner with local communities and lock in community benefits. The range of case studies illustrates the creativity and passion of those involved in the innovation economy and local community organisations, as well as local authorities' appetite for new ways of working, but also highlights persistent systemic issues. There is still work to be done in maximising community participation and benefit in the innovation economy, not least in making sure that core functions, such as procurement and recruitment, offer open access to opportunity.

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## Chapter 7.1

# Success factors

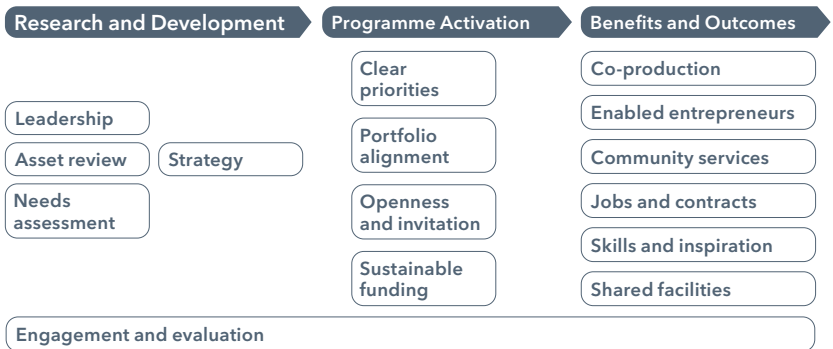
During interviews, workshops and desk research, a few common themes have emerged, as success factors for delivering community benefit (see Figure 5):

- **Leadership:** innovation districts thrive with collaborative, consistent and generous civic leadership, based on partnership, openness to different ways of operating, and a willingness to support and enable as well as deliver.
- **Strategy:** successful innovation districts work with local authorities and communities to consider their assets and those within the local area, and to identify how they can collaborate to have a positive impact, including through supporting community innovation, and prototyping and testing solutions to civic problems.
- **Effective and equitable engagement:** good community engagement is based on a fair, coordinated and collaborative relationship. Needlessly repeated engagement programmes can leave local people feeling that organisations are going through the motions without really hearing what is being said; and when community members are the only participants not rewarded for their time and expertise, the process can feel unbalanced and unfair.
- **Accessibility and invitation:** opening facilities and networks to local communities is important, but successful innovation districts understand that they need to go further, both in actively inviting local communities to

connect as equal partners, and in making sure that their recruitment and procurement practices can draw on the full width and depth of local talent pools. Large anchor institutions can be particularly complex for partners to engage, with internal rivalries and fiefdoms stifling and slowing partnership working, so clear and sustainable ‘routes in’ are valuable for all parties.

- **Aligned programmes:** similar programmes can be re-invented or duplicated within an innovation district; schools programmes were given as an example of several organisations doing similar things in the same place. While complete uniformity and control is neither desirable nor achievable, innovation districts can work together to create a portfolio of mapped and aligned resources and programmes, to evaluate different models and to find ways of working together to scale up those interventions that have the greatest impact.
- **Sustainable funding:** many successful programmes featured in this report have been piloted through short-term funding programmes –from Section 106 funds, to government pots such as the Shared Prosperity Fund. However, given the scale of challenge faced by some communities, and the time it can take to develop trust and build up momentum, short-term funding (e.g., over three years) may only scratch the surface. And running a programme, then shutting it down, can have a negative impact on public trust and community engagement, particularly if the cycle is repeated.
- **Mid-level skills:** helping local people to access mid-level roles, such as data analysts and lab technicians, was seen as a significant opportunity –but not always easily realised, owing to gaps in training provision and some employers’ recruitment practice.

Figure 5: success factors for community benefit programmes





# Opportunities

The success of innovation districts in delivering community benefit is not a matter only of what individual programmes and institutions do, but also of how they form part of an innovation system that extends across the city and beyond. Reflecting that systemic perspective, there are opportunities for local, regional and national government, as well as for individual innovation districts and their members, to strengthen links between innovation districts and local community benefits.

### For innovation districts:

1. Plan and implement community programmes on the basis of a deep understanding of local context and assets, along with effective and ongoing dialogue with local communities.
2. Co-ordinate community engagement activity with each other and with existing networks, ensure that local organisations and people are compensated for their contributions, and make sure that language used is clear, demystifying and engaging.
3. Consider operating a 'plug and play' model so that new occupiers—from large corporations to start-ups – have networks and partnerships they can plug into, both for community dialogue and for community programmes.
4. Work together to share, replicate, adapt and scale up successful programmes.
5. Review recruitment practices, including assessing what qualifications are really required for roles, developing and scaling up training and job readiness programmes, and demystifying roles and recruitment processes.
6. Find opportunities to share power and resources with communities—through co-producing projects and research, and through offering a 'seat at the table' to local representatives.

### For local authorities:

1. Provide collaborative, generous and consistent civic leadership, supporting innovation districts and working with them to maximise community engagement and benefit.
2. Ensure clear liaison points for innovation districts, seek to ensure broad political buy-in to their work that can be sustained through political cycles, open community networks and programmes to innovation districts.



### For the Greater London Authority:

1. Work with London's political, business and research leaders to plan for the future growth of, and collaboration between, innovation districts, and their connections with the rest of the UK, in land use and investment plans; support and encourage information sharing and collaboration between London innovation districts, and their connection with industrial innovation zones and clusters.
2. Consider where new or existing innovation districts could play a part in addressing regional or national missions, tackling specific local problems or working with central government to develop and trial solutions that could be applied more widely.
3. Help innovation districts and local authorities develop models for sustainable funding, through making longer-term grants, underwriting programmes, endowing community programmes with specific assets, setting up a pledge fund, membership fees or district-based levies, or co-funding between public bodies, philanthropists and investors.
4. Work with employers to scope out, as part of London's inclusive talent strategy (ITS), strategic apprenticeship and training programmes for mid-level data and lab skills, to benefit London's communities and innovation districts alike.
5. Use the ITS to identify and spread best practice in opening-up recruitment and procurement, and promote its adoption through the London Anchor Institutions Network, and in existing and emerging innovation districts.

### For the UK government:

1. Recognise the national importance of London's innovation districts, and support stronger inter-regional collaboration in innovation and diffusion, between London, its universities and innovation institutions, and other UK cities and regions.
2. Ensure that funding settlements for London and other mayoral authorities can be tailored to enable local leaders to develop and implement programmes to build the specific talent pipelines that innovation districts and local economies need.



# Case studies annexe

## 1. Long-term study of the impacts of regeneration in east London Using citizen scientists to track change in east London

The London 2012 Games were intended to transform the lives of people living in east London, but how should this be measured? When University College London (UCL) decided to build a new campus on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) in 2015, they began discussing with partners what they could do to be a good neighbour, and in particular how a citizen-led approach to defining and measuring prosperity locally could be adopted.

UCL's Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) led a pilot project using 'citizen scientists' to research what prosperity meant for communities in neighbourhoods immediately next to QEOP (Stratford, East Village and Hackney Wick). A team of ten citizen scientists carried out research with 250 local residents to identify what people saw as essential to 'the good life'.

IGP recruited its citizen scientists from the local community, using local organisations to spread word of the opportunity. The scientists are trained in social research and paid for their time. They help develop the research questions and methods, as well as carry out the research and champion the findings.

Saffron Woodcraft, who leads the IGP's Prosperity Co-Lab UK, says the programme has been founded on some core principles: lived experience is as relevant as formalised knowledge, citizen scientists should be remunerated just



as professional researchers are, formal education should not be a barrier to participation, and collaboration should take place throughout the research process.<sup>45</sup>

One of the citizen scientists, Twinkle Jay, responded to a social media post from Compost, a community development organisation working with IGP. Twinkle was already involved in community work, so was keen to get involved. Her application was successful, and after training in research techniques and ethics she began interviewing local residents around Beckton and other parts of Newham, where she lives, asking them what they thought made a good life.<sup>46</sup>

Some were reluctant to talk. "Some people simply don't trust you," Twinkle Jay says. "So getting people to do interviews was challenging, but when they saw us day after day in the same place, and saw other community members getting involved, they were happier to talk." She emphasises the importance of transparency in how the data is used, as critical to building trust.

People were not just worried about personal aspects of prosperity, Twinkle Jay found, but also in the social and community aspects – from community facilities to crime levels. She enjoyed the research process, and is now pursuing further research projects: "the programme brought me out of my shell. I have always liked working with local communities, but I became much more confident in approaching people, empathising with them and talking to them about what matters in their lives."

The aspects of prosperity identified through the pilot formed the basis of a local survey, which also covered areas of West Ham, Hackney, Dagenham and Poplar, comparing local results with borough and London averages.<sup>47</sup>

IGP brought together a London Prosperity Board, whose members include London Legacy Development Corporation, local authorities, community groups, businesses and academic institutions, to collaborate on the project. Saffron Woodcraft, who co-chairs the Board, says it has been essential to ensuring the Citizen Prosperity Index is widely used

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Saffron Woodcraft, 6 March 2025

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Twinkle Jay, 2 April 2025

<sup>47</sup> Anderson B, *Prosperity Index Pilot Wave 2017 – summary of methodology and description of indicators*, UCL ICP 2018



to understand the impact of 'regeneration' in a granular, local and community-led way. It also ensures that there is a direct link between policy-making and the work of the citizen scientists, several of whom now sit on the Board.

The pilot project has formed the basis of a longer-term research project in broadly the same east London areas that participated in the pilot, which will involve three waves of data collection. Each wave will include a household survey of 4,000 people, investigating how experiences and perceptions of prosperity have changed, and also more in-depth work by a changing panel of citizen scientists, exploring the barriers to prosperity that different groups of people face.<sup>48</sup> Initial findings were published in 2024.<sup>49</sup>

The IGP has also established UCL's Citizen Science Academy to offer practical training for citizen scientists, drawing on live examples, and projects are being delivered across London and more widely. "If you give people the opportunity to carry out their own research, tell their own stories, then you will get very different insights", says Saffron Woodcraft. "People are very sophisticated and articulate narrators of their own lives, and of how neighbourhoods, families, life chances are all influenced by global economic trends, and national and local policy."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Woodcraft S and Chan G, *Prosperity in east London 2021-2031: about the study*, UCL IGP 2024

<sup>49</sup> <https://londonprosperityboard.org/research-and-publications>

<sup>50</sup> Interview as above



## 2. The Living Centre at the Crick, Knowledge Quarter

Working with local communities to scope and deliver community and health facilities

The Somers Town Community Association (STCA) is based in the residential area between St Pancras and Euston stations – one of London’s most deprived neighbourhoods. STCA was founded in the 1980s and has played a part in the Knowledge Quarter from the outset.

When partners agreed to establish a new medical research and innovation centre (which became the Crick Institute) alongside St Pancras Station, community engagement began with STCA, which operated from a community centre in Ossulston Street.

Executive director Sarah Elie admits that there was a level of scepticism: “this community, which is in the middle of a massive regeneration project, had seen a lot of organisations coming into the area, saying what they plan to do and making big promises – some just to get over the line for planning. The Crick’s community team didn’t do that. They said they wanted to build a community facility in the Crick, but they worked with us on what should go in it and what would work. For example, they wanted a revolving door, and we said that wouldn’t work for people with buggies, so that was changed.”<sup>51</sup>

STCA worked closely with the Crick’s team in developing the concept, alongside residents and local councillors, and then stepped back as the Crick invited bids to run the centre (having been advised that this was needed under procurement regulations), drawing additionally on community engagement and research undertaken by Well London’s ‘World Cafés’ initiative.

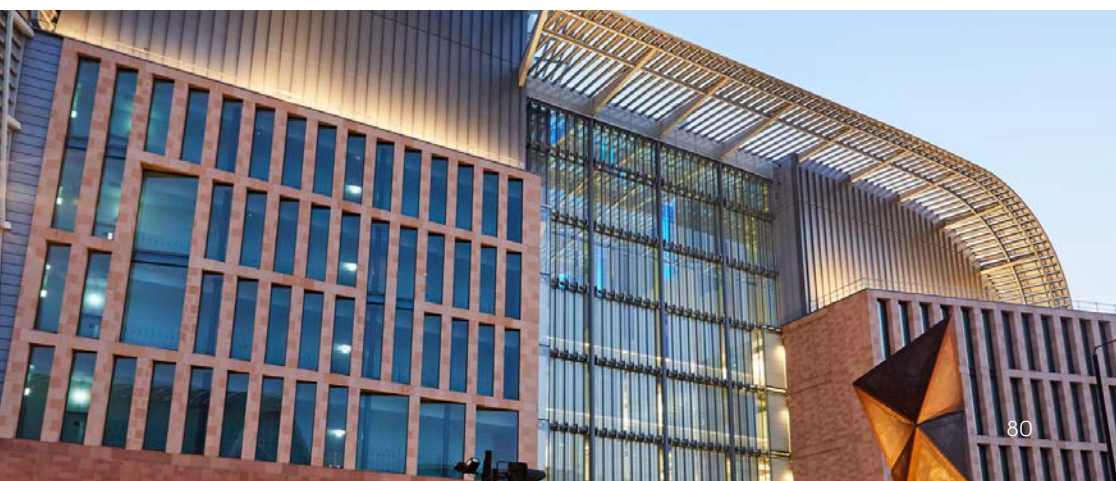
Local community organisations were offered a grant of £10,000 to enable them to participate in the procurement exercise, and STCA and its consortium partners used this to work with local residents on their bid, which was successful. The STCA consortium has a 20-year lease and service contract for the Living Centre with regular reviews, and draws its funding from the Crick, Camden Council, one-off grants and some earned income from hiring out its facilities.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Sarah Elie, 24 March 2024

Health was at the heart of the Living Centre concept, but was defined by the expansive World Health Organisation's understanding of health as a matter of physical, mental and social wellbeing, rather than simply the absence of illness. While the Centre's objectives encompass improving health and wellbeing, reducing deprivation and tackling the climate emergency, Sarah Elie notes that the Crick was persuaded to drop the word 'healthy' from the title as the word can be off-putting for some local residents.

Services offered include a job hub, a nutrition programme, support and signposting for people experiencing food shortages or homelessness, a community midwife service, mental health support for pregnant women and mothers, storytelling for young children, exercise classes for older people, support for women experiencing violence, and topic-focused sessions and courses addressing issues of concern such as endometriosis.

Sarah Elie says that some residents were initially sceptical about the Crick and the Living Centre, but that long-term commitment to engagement had paid off, with more than 20,000 people each year now using the Living Centre and the Ossulston Street Centre. The next stage, she says, is to better integrate the work of the Living Centre with the Crick's research programmes: "we need to be involved earlier in the conversations, because once someone needs medical support, it's often more complex and more expensive in terms of any medical intervention. The Crick has earned their stripes, but the indices of deprivation show that there is still work to be done."



### 3. The Evaluation Exchange, east London

Community groups working with postgraduate researchers to demonstrate impact

The Evaluation Exchange is a partnership project delivered by University College London (UCL) together with Compost London CIC, which supports voluntary and community organisations in east London and north central London.

The project arose from discussions between UCL and the Community Involvement Unit (CIU), Compost's predecessor, soon after UCL had decided to open its new campus on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The CIU offered space in its offices to the UCL community engagement team; Compost director Caroline Rouse recalls discussing the challenges facing local organisations: "funders increasingly want evidence of impact when considering grant bids, and a lot of small community organisations struggle to demonstrate that."<sup>52</sup>

In response, after some initial training sessions on evaluation, UCL and Compost created the Evaluation Exchange, matching small voluntary sector organisations with teams of postgraduate researchers from different disciplines to collaborate on bespoke evaluation approaches to demonstrate their impact. For example, one charity providing day care services for people with dementia was struggling to persuade its service users to fill out satisfaction questionnaires. Working together, the team developed an alternative, creative approach where service users hung a coloured 'leaf' on a 'tree' to show their mood when they arrived in the morning, and again when they left. Photographs were taken and the change in leaf colour was used to assess the difference that the service had made.

In 2021/22, in collaboration with Voluntary Action Camden, the programme supported 13 organisations across Newham and Camden, ranging from community gardens, to advice services, to storage centres for homeless people's possessions.<sup>53</sup> The UCL and Compost London partnership has since worked on other iterations of the Evaluation Exchange project with artists, and health and

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Caroline Rouse, 21 March 2025

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/environmental-design/sites/bartlett\\_environmental\\_design/files/evaluationexchange-posters-all\\_teams-web-final.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/environmental-design/sites/bartlett_environmental_design/files/evaluationexchange-posters-all_teams-web-final.pdf)

climate research projects. At the time of writing, partners were awaiting decisions on future funding to continue their work with the voluntary sector. In the meantime, evaluation toolkits and training courses are sustaining the Evaluation Exchange legacy.<sup>54</sup>

## 4. **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Community Anchor Network**

**A fairer model for working in partnership with local communities**

The Community Anchor Network (CAN) aims to put in place a more even-handed and long-term approach to partnerships between local communities and the institutions within Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) – a partnership of equals that goes beyond one-off exercises in consultation. It builds on community engagement structures and programmes that have been developed throughout the lifetime of London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC).

The CAN will aim to strengthen community networks, share knowledge and expertise, build a collective voice, and enhance access to QEOP assets and facilities. It will also enable QEOP partners to be more open and transparent, to pool resources, to measure impact and satisfaction, and to benefit from consistent and informed community input to new projects, development proposals, and other initiatives. The ultimate aim is for community organisations to have a stronger voice and influence in how resources and opportunities are made available to local people, and for this to deepen and strengthen connections between east London's communities and QEOP.

In developing their proposals, LLDC first undertook a mapping exercise of the area within a one-mile radius around QEOP, and found more than 150 community organisations and groups operating, with very different scales and remits. Following a series of co-design workshops with community organisations and Park institutions, an action group of 15 community organisations was selected to take part in a six-day design sprint to identify what was holding back effective community engagement, and to consider ways that the CAN might address these challenges.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.compostlondon.org.uk/projects/the-evaluation-exchange>



Layla Conway, LLDC's head of education, careers and youth engagement said, "One of the biggest learnings from the co-design process was how everyone stepped into shared space, leaving their own organisational interests at the door and sharing their expertise and experience."<sup>55</sup>

Specific ways of working with the CAN – for example, through specific engagements and commissions or longer-term participation in boards and committees overseeing specific projects – will be tested out with QEOP partners when it launches, based on a 'CAN Commitment'. This will outline what CAN participants can expect from QEOP partners (receptiveness to views, fair reward for expertise, time devoted to collaboration), and what QEOP partners can expect in return (committed collaboration, deep expertise and support in enhancing commitments to east London).

## 5. Upstream Pathway Bond, Hammersmith and Fulham

Local businesses pledging to support young people on a 'pathway to success'

The Upstream Pathway Bond is a central initiative of 'Upstream London', Hammersmith and Fulham Council's economic plan. The plan, published in late 2024, builds on the Council's 2017 industrial strategy, on its partnership with Imperial College and on the rapid development of the White City Innovation District to position Hammersmith and Fulham as an 'innovation borough' at the heart of a new 'West Tech Corridor' spreading out from White City.

The vision for the Bond was developed by the Council, working closely with local teachers and youth workers. It looks at what young people need at every stage of their educational and personal development to remain on a 'pathway to success', and invites local businesses to sign up to support them on this journey. Businesses that commit to the Bond can choose from a menu of ways to provide support.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Layla Conway, 10 January 2025

These include:

- inspiring young people to pursue studies and careers in science, technology, engineering, maths, medicine and media
- providing apprenticeships and work experience
- making facilities available for extra-curricular activities
- offering mentorships, work placements and sponsorship for overseas trips
- providing learning and employability support

The Council offers businesses that sign up an official endorsement, the opportunity to develop the skills of their long-term workforce, a raised profile and an opportunity to engage better with local communities.

## 6.

### Camden STEAM

#### Making schools engagement straightforward for innovative businesses

The Camden Council has experienced rapid economic growth in recent years. Camden's contribution to the UK economy doubled in the decade prior to 2019, driven in large part by the growth of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) sectors in and around the Knowledge Quarter.<sup>56</sup>

Noting this rise in activity, The Council established a commission to ensure Camden's residents could benefit from this growth, and Camden STEAM was established in 2018, aiming to build young people's awareness of STEAM careers, to provide routes to access those careers, to engage young people from underrepresented backgrounds and to strengthen the STEAM community in Camden.

<sup>56</sup> Tobin D et al, *Strategy 2022-25*, Camden STEAM 2023

One core programme is the Camden STEAM Pledge. Around 60 local employers have signed up to a programme that includes sending ambassadors into schools, offering work experience opportunities and supporting teacher training.

STEAM programme director Danielle Tobin explains the ambassador programme: “we often find that employers have a real interest in working with schools, and may have an idea of what they want to do, but it may not fit with the curriculum or what schools need. And schools don’t have the connections or the bandwidth to reach out to invite people into the classroom—for example, a data scientist joining a maths lesson. We make the connections.”<sup>57</sup>

Camden STEAM also works with local businesses to offer work experience for around 450 local young people each summer, promoting the programme to employers, and helping them to set a challenge and recruit groups of young people who can work together on these challenges, then present their findings back to senior management.

Working with schools ensures that the young people who participate include those from groups that otherwise might not have access to work experience, which has been shown to be associated with upwards social mobility.<sup>58</sup> Employers participating in 2023 included Google, Lendlease, Camden Spark, Camden Council Inclusive Economy, Camden Council Digital Services, Hoare Lea, BAM Nuttall, Bennetts Associates, British Library, Moonbug, Labtech, British Land, and Arup Architecture.<sup>59</sup> In 2024, Camden STEAM also launched the London AI Campus, based in Somers Town, in collaboration with Google (see Google case study on page 108).

Around 7,000 young people were engaged by Camden STEAM activities in 2024/25, but the plan is to grow the programme so that all Camden young people (around 22,000 each year) will participate in STEAM programmes in coming years.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Danielle Tobin, 28 February 2025

<sup>58</sup> Donnelly M et al, *An Unequal Playing Field: Extra-Curricular Activities, Soft Skills and Social Mobility*, Social Mobility Commission, 2019

<sup>59</sup> Camden Learning, *2022/23 Annual Review*, Camden Learning 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Interview as above

## 7. London Anchor Institutions' Network

Bringing anchor institutions together to tackle the capital's problems and boost resilience

The London Anchor Institutions' Network (LAIN) was established in March 2021, as a response to the COVID pandemic and the vulnerabilities that it exposed in the capital. Supported by the mayor of London, leaders from organisations including the NHS in London, Met Police, London universities and the Greater London Authority came together to identify how their organisations, which employ tens of thousands of people in London and spend billions of pounds, could help the city achieve a fair and green recovery, and develop its resilience to future shocks. LAIN now has more than 22 members, including individual large public-sector employers, representative bodies including London Higher and BusinessLDN, and private infrastructure providers such as Thames Water and London City Airport.

The Network, which is convened by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and is supported by Bloomberg Associates, initially focused on five areas for action: helping Londoners to find and retain jobs; mentoring young people; supporting local, smaller and diverse-owned businesses in supplying goods and services; supporting net zero; and developing place-based partnerships.

In each of these areas, a working group drawn from LAIN members develops a plan for action, including shared programmes, training sessions, good practice guides and performance measurement. For example, the hiring and skills programme includes training recruiters to support disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, developing better workforce data on disability and new approaches to data gathering, and (more recently) a focus on training line managers to help people from these groups remain and progress in employment.

An impact report for the Network's first two years of operation found that it had signed contracts worth £1.75bn with small

businesses, had provided more than 4,000 apprenticeships and transferred £2m of apprenticeship funding to smaller employers, had lifted the pay of 7,200 Londoners through new commitments to the London Living Wage, and had secured £130m of funding for decarbonisation programmes.

In the words of Souraya Ali, who heads the programme at the GLA, “seeing LAIN as something that responds not just to the needs of London and Londoners, but to the needs of our member institutions as well, has been critical to success. Our members can see the business case for the way we operate, whether that is about meeting workforce needs, fulfilling net zero requirements, or addressing social and economic determinants of health.”<sup>61</sup>

Future plans include more support for parents – particularly mothers – to enter and remain in the workforce, as well as expanding private-sector membership. Souraya Ali argues that telling positive stories about the impact the Network is having on the lives of Londoners has also generated momentum: “in this day and age, having human stories to tell as well as the big numbers, is key. That’s why we make videos for our website, telling stories about individuals who have got into work or been able to grow their business as a result of employment and procurement opportunities provided by our member organisations. These celebrate success and inspire more engagement.”

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Souraya Ali, 17 January 2025



## 8. The Cambridge Pledge

Enabling innovative entrepreneurs  
to support transformative change

The Cambridge Pledge, launched in late 2024, aims to raise £100m for social investment in Cambridge by 2031, to ensure that the city's world-leading innovation success has a positive impact on the wider community.<sup>62</sup> The Pledge emerged from the Innovate Cambridge Strategy. Innovate Cambridge was founded by Cambridge Innovation Capital, the University of Cambridge and Cambridge Enterprise to promote and develop the innovation economy.

The Cambridge Pledge asks local innovators, entrepreneurs and investors to commit five per cent of their future returns into the fund (to be paid when entrepreneurs see a return). This funding will be invested into social projects in Cambridge and the surrounding area, delivered by local community organisations. Cambridge City Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority are both making significant investments alongside The Cambridge Pledge and others.

Edward Benthall, chair of Cambridge Innovation Capital and an early Pledge-maker, explains the approach: "though there are a lot of problems in Cambridge, there are a lot of people trying to fix those problems – often in small organisations run by highly-skilled and experienced people who are under-resourced. We have an opportunity now to learn, to understand the nature and complexity of the problems facing Cambridge's communities, and to help them to increase their impact."<sup>63</sup>

Projects will focus on:

- **disadvantaged young people (school/skills)**
- **children in care**
- **care-experienced young people**
- **families in poverty and crisis**
- **people who are homeless**

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Sara Allen, 24 February 2025

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Edward Benthall, 5 March 2025

Executive director Sara Allen says that the aim is to cluster projects in order to support people in these groups – simultaneously addressing needs such as housing, skills, mental and physical health, and employment: “we won’t just make a series of individual investments. We’ll use the investments to drive very deep change for participants, collective work between voluntary sector organisations and strategic relationships with local government, which may in itself unlock savings over time as well.” The Cambridge Pledge is developing its theories of change and evaluation frameworks, which will contribute both to overall evaluation of the programme and to generating returns through delivering agreed results.

Sara Allen says that the reception from local entrepreneurs has been extremely positive: “it’s a very simple approach – we’re matching our fundraising strategy to Cambridge’s growth strategy. What’s really interesting, when you talk to the people that have pledged, is that most of them connect deeply to the mission. They’ve founded organisations to solve problems, to make the world better. This is just an extension of that.”

Edward Benthall is optimistic about the model’s potential: “there is broad support across the whole innovation community in Cambridge to do something about the region’s problems – I have a strong sense that our community can play an important role alongside experts in helping to tackle them. And wouldn’t it be amazing if we were able to demonstrate that we could do that – to tackle things like homelessness and child hunger? We could not only make a huge difference to Cambridge and the wider region, but we could be an example of how place-based community engagement can be transformational.”



## 9. Innovation Greater Manchester – from Oxford Road to Atom Valley

### Spreading innovation opportunities across Greater Manchester

Innovation Greater Manchester (Innovation GM) was established in 2022 as a 'triple helix' partnership between business, political leaders and universities, as part of Greater Manchester's Innovation Accelerator programme. This was one of three pilot programmes sharing in £100m UK government funding to accelerate high-potential innovation.

The pilot programme ran until 2025, but Innovation GM will have a longer lifespan, developing and implementing projects across Greater Manchester. As part of its longer-term plan, Innovation GM is seeking to strengthen links between Manchester's central innovation districts (Oxford Road Corridor, Salford Innovation Triangle and the new Sister Innovation District), and growth areas such as Atom Valley, around ten miles further north, where Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, has established a mayoral development zone to attract investment and integrate it into the regional economic strategy. These sites also form the heart of Greater Manchester's £160m 'investment zone' (another UK government programme).

One project that links these assets is the Centre for Expertise in Advanced Materials and Sustainability (CEAMS), a 115,000 square foot facility on the Gateway North site in Atom Valley, which is partnering with University of Manchester to build a cluster of expertise in designing and manufacturing advanced and sustainable materials. Offering teaching, R&D and scale-up space, CEAMS will help communities and businesses in Greater Manchester's deprived northern suburbs to access the opportunities opened up by innovation successes elsewhere in the city region.

"After covid hit, we started to think about how we could 'build back better' in Greater Manchester," says Matthew Kershaw, senior policy officer for innovation at Greater Manchester Combined Authority.<sup>64</sup> "We realised that, actually, we had

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Matthew Kershaw, 10 January 2025

real strengths in the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Salford, but we needed to bridge the gap in getting the really strong research that's done in those centres into actual economically beneficial products and services that are being brought to market by businesses who are based here. Atom Valley offers that translational facility."

## 10. | **UCL East community cultural programmes** **Collaborative research and creation with east London communities**

University College London (UCL) began their community engagement programme in and around Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) before their campus opened in 2023. The new campus is "open, engaged and accessible", as reflected in the open building design, with cafes and artworks on the ground floor of the two principal buildings, and in programmes that engaged with local residents long before the doors were opened.

One such programme was Trellis, a collaboration and knowledge exchange between artists, academic researchers and local residents.<sup>65</sup> The programme started in 2018 and exhibited its fifth year of commissions in early 2025. Each year, artists and researchers are invited to an informal mixer to discuss potential collaborations. Ten partnerships are granted a small sum to develop their ideas, then five partnerships, each including community representatives, are funded to co-create a commission.

The 2025 exhibition, 'A place of our making', explored ways of improving life in east London and was the first based at UCL East; previous exhibitions were in nearby community centres such as Hoxton Hall. Commissions include 'East London Smells', delivered in collaboration with Beyond Sight Loss, which explores the sensory landscapes of Brick Lane, and 'Priced Out', which tells the stories of residents experiencing gentrification and housing instability. Previous years focused on inequality and the urban environment, and on global challenges such as climate change, food waste and the experience of migrants.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ucl-east/trellis-knowledge-exchange-between-researchers-artists-and-communities>

Sam Wilkinson, head of public art at UCL, says that learning and collaborating with local partners has been key to the project's success, and was embraced by the research groups based at UCL East: "there is an absolute commitment to the value of engagement, as much for the value that the communities bring to the institution as vice versa."<sup>66</sup> All local collaborators are paid, and collaboration is also supported by seed funding grants made available every year for academics who want to work with local communities.

Sam Wilkinson believes that Trellis, along with the art works shown in the lobby of UCL East, has helped to bring more local people into QEOP (alongside attractions such as ABBA Voyage), as well as enrich the work of researchers. She expects footfall to increase in 2025, as the East Bank institutions open. Other programmes that have engaged and brought local people into QEOP have included City Mill Skate, a project that has installed a temporary skate park, and run summer schools to train local 12-to 14-year-olds in skateboarding, photography and filmmaking, in addition to developing their social and collaboration skills, and understanding of urban design. As one outcome from the programme, the team is looking at longer-term ways of incorporating 'skate dots' (integrated skateable objects) in the design of public realm for the UCL East campus.<sup>67</sup>

## 11. **Brooklyn Museum community programmes,<sup>68</sup> New York City**

### **Opening a museum to its communities**

Brooklyn Museum receives funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

With a collection of over 500,000 objects across 560,000 square feet Brooklyn Museum is the second-largest museum in New York, welcoming close to half a million visitors per year.<sup>69</sup> The museum is noted for its expansive collections of antiquities, Japanese art and American Colonial paintings, but is also known

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Sam Wilkinson, 31 March 2025

<sup>67</sup> <https://citymillskate.com/about/>

<sup>68</sup> Research by Lauren Hartz

<sup>69</sup> Bahr S, *Brooklyn Museum to Receive £5 million Gift from City of New York*, *New York Times*, 22 November 2021



for its long-established commitment to community programming in a borough noted for its diversity, but also for housing affordability and gentrification challenges in recent years.

The museum's landmark program, First Saturdays, began in 1998 and has attracted 1.5 million visitors since then. On the first Saturday of each month, the museum's hours are extended until 11:00 PM and entrance is free after 5:00 PM. Programming ("putting the 'art' into 'party' ") includes craft markets, poetry readings, dance and musical performances, film screenings and storytime for children. Local artists are prioritised as hosts of programmes, and all programming is free, though advance registration is required.

Lauren Argentina Zelaya, director of public programs, has described the programme as a "love letter to Brooklyn": "it's a place where people –I've heard this from many visitors and many artists –where they feel affirmed, they feel seen, they feel reflected by the art on the walls, as well as the programming that we have."<sup>70</sup>

Brooklyn Museum also offers tailored educational and careers programmes. Housed in a dedicated Education Center, there is programming specific to families, teens, adults and visitors with disabilities. Courses range from art classes for kids, adult literacy classes, summer camp for teens, American Sign Language-guided art classes and more.<sup>71</sup> Museum tours are also available in Spanish and Russian, the most popular languages in Brooklyn besides English.

For high school students, there is the paid Museum Apprentice Program, where students have the chance to develop a tour to give visitors, and lesson plans to teach at summer camp.<sup>72</sup> For college students, the museum has a competitive summer, fall and spring paid internship program.<sup>73</sup> Museum interns also facilitate an annual 'Intern convening', where interns and emerging arts professionals from across New York City come together to learn about, and debate arts and curatorial issues, industries and careers.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Richardson K, *Brooklyn Museum Celebrates 25 Years of First Saturdays*, New York Times, 3 February 2023

<sup>71</sup> Graeber L, *Hands-on Art at the Brooklyn Museum's New Education Centre*, New York Times, 25 January 2024

<sup>72</sup> Brooklyn Museum: Museum Apprentice Program

<sup>73</sup> Brooklyn Museum: Paid Internships

<sup>74</sup> Brooklyn Museum: Intern Convening 2024

## 12. **Maker Challenge, White City** Hands-on creative workshops for young people to explore innovation

The Maker Challenge was one of the first community programmes introduced by Imperial College at its White City Campus. The project is based in the Dangoor Reach Out Maker Space, part of the Invention Rooms on Wood Lane at the edge of the campus, a space where “the local community and Imperial College come together to collaborate, innovate and make”.<sup>75</sup>

Every year, 120 14- to 18-year-olds join a free 12-week after-school programme, where they learn skills such as 3D printing, laser cutting and woodworking, and are encouraged to develop their creative and innovative skills. The Maker Challenge programme culminates in a showcase where students present their ideas to a panel of judges, with one participant winning a 3D printer. A companion programme, the Proto-Maker Challenge, works with local schools and teachers to bring younger children into the Maker Space to tell them about the programme and to encourage them to apply for the full programme when they reach the required age.

The Maker Challenge has now run for seven years, and is heavily oversubscribed. More than 2,300 young people have participated in the Challenge and related programmes, with around a third coming from the neighbourhoods immediately around White City, and more than 70 per cent from low-income neighbourhoods and households.

Students who have completed the programme are invited to join a Move Up programme, with weekend sessions where they can further develop their skills. Boosting applications to Imperial College itself from local people was never a core aim, but from the last cohort, around 25 former participants applied and around ten secured a place. Mentors and instructors on the programme now include former participants who are Imperial undergraduates and others who have completed degree apprenticeships.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/white-city-campus/community/the-invention-rooms/>

<sup>76</sup> Briefing note provided by Imperial College

Professor Maggie Dallman, Imperial's associate provost for societal engagement and professor of immunology, explains that the programme has been transformative for many participants: "the impact has been extraordinary. Not only did they acquire useful technical skills, but they also grew their confidence. They learned how to prepare things, how to present things, how to work with people they didn't know from other schools and so on. So it's had this huge knock-on effect that we never expected."<sup>77</sup>

Farial Missi, Imperial's senior partnerships and community engagement manager, believes that the Invention Rooms also strengthen community connections: "twice a year we run community partner lunches, where we use local caterers and invite everyone that we've collaborated with, or just want to build a relationship with—individual members of the community as well as community groups, representative organisations, and local councillors. One thing that we learned, when we did a big listening exercise two years ago now, is that people now saw us as local conveners. A lot of them had developed connections with other community groups or services or the local council because of us."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Maggie Dallman and Farial Missi, 6 February 2025

<sup>78</sup> Interview as above



# 13.

## Future Industries Demonstrator, QEOP

### Tackling global challenges with local entrepreneurs

In 2023, QEOP launched the Future Industries Demonstrator (FID), its flagship innovation testbed programme. The FID programme, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Mayor of London, was created to support London-based startups and SMEs to rapidly develop and test solutions to challenges that have an east London as well as a global impact.

QEOP and partners (Plexal, University College London, and Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust) have issued three innovation challenges to London's innovators, with the aim of supporting 215 organisations. These have addressed:

- **Natural Cities** –building healthier, greener and more resilient cities for people and planet
- **Sustainable Structures** –shaping the future of buildings and energy systems for a net zero future
- **Food Systems** –fostering healthy, affordable and sustainable food systems in urban areas

Successful bidders (around five in each cohort) receive:

- £25,000 funding to develop scaling plans and support use of the QEOP testbed, with additional grants for some bidders
- Expert support and 1-to-1 coaching
- Access to workspace, including The Loop shared workspace
- Access to investors, including at a 'knowledge exchange workshop and demo day' and additional grants

Participants have included:

- **FibreLab**, which recycles commercial textile waste into new fibres, found new partners, and enhanced and accelerated its processes through the programme
- **CarbonCell**, which develops fully compostable foam and insulation panels that remove carbon from the atmosphere
- **Shaded**, which designs easily fitted awnings that can provide shade to combat the effects of heating in cities

Each of these has delivered local community impact through activities such as knowledge exchange programmes, school visits, prototyping products locally and collaboration with local construction skills academies.

Alongside the innovation challenge programme, the Future Industries Demonstrator has also supported [The Loop](#), a shared workspace and demonstrator hub for circular economy and cleantech innovators, including several innovation challenge participants. The Loop, owned by Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust, and operated by Arbeit Studios, has 'meanwhile use' premises in Hackney Wick, but will temporarily relocate in 2026, returning when its current site has been redeveloped.





## 14.

### **Innovative Entrepreneurs, West Yorkshire**

**Business support for regional innovators backed by localised community engagement**

The Innovative Entrepreneurs programme is led by Nexus, University of Leeds' innovation centre, though it operates across West Yorkshire and is backed by a consortium of 12 anchor institutions, including local universities and businesses.

The programme, funded by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, offers nine months of intensive support in three phases to aspiring entrepreneurs from across West Yorkshire, and has recruited four cohorts, comprising around 75 individuals. The first part focuses on idea development and business modelling, delivered through academic modules from the University of Leeds' Business School. This foundational phase includes workshops, peer-to-peer sessions and one-to-one coaching.

The second phase is facilitated by NorthInvest and prepares participants for pitching to investors and other funding opportunities. It culminates in a pitch day, where participants can win £5,000 in grant funding.

The third phase focuses on implementation, with ongoing coaching, targeted workshops, and support in planning for growth and implementation. Participants are also granted a year of free access to shared workspaces including Nexus in Leeds and others across West Yorkshire, which offer workspace and business support. Follow-on programmes support entrepreneurs as they take products to market and seek to grow their business, though some innovations generated through the programme are socially- rather than commercially-focused.<sup>79</sup>

The programme emerged from a 12-week pilot programme, BUILD, which supported start-ups seeking to tackle problems such as climate change, health and wellbeing, and access to education. BUILD in turn was developed through Leeds leaders' participation in MIT's international Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme. In widening the programme to cover

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Gareth Scargill and Megan Reid, 17 March 2025

the whole of West Yorkshire, Nexus sought to increase academic input, including in ensuring the programme was accessible to all communities. Following a workshop session with community leaders, more financial and local network support was put in place, and the language and selection procedure made more accessible.<sup>80</sup>

To make sure that participants reflect the make-up of the local population as much as possible, outreach is decentralised. These managers coordinate recruitment activities – such as workshops and drop-in sessions – tailored to local contexts, with a strong emphasis on reaching communities in some of the towns and cities outside Leeds. A continuous registration-of-interest portal, targeted digital campaigns and strong word-of-mouth networks help maintain a diverse applicant pipeline, as reflected in the programme’s performance indicators.

The programme was extended for an additional year in 2025, and an evaluation is underway, alongside ongoing engagement with former participants to understand how their innovative ideas have progressed following the programme.

Gareth Scargill, Nexus director, explains that the programme targets people who might not otherwise access support: “many of these innovators are people who may be sat at home in their bedroom, or may have a job, but wouldn’t dream of coming to a university or a big corporate for support. That’s why we have prioritised inclusiveness in attracting people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds from across the region. These programmes are not just pipelines for places like Nexus, but pipelines of ideas for the cities and region that we live in.”

## 15. **Glasgow Social Innovation Challenge Fund** Working with community groups to make business support more accessible

The Glasgow Social Innovation Challenge Fund was set up by Glasgow City Council, to improve representation of different groups in the city’s innovation ecosystem. Council officers noted that first contacts with business support services in the city were

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/school-of-health/2023/12/innovative-entrepreneurs/>

fairly representative of the city's ethnic diversity, but that there was a significant drop-off in take-up of support. Following further research, the business growth team identified a number of barriers: advertising did not always use the right channels, networking sessions and council offices were not always accessible, and many communities were dispersed across the city, limiting the value of local campaigns.

The Challenge Fund arose from this research. Councillor Susan Aitken, Leader of Glasgow City Council, said: "There are many entrepreneurs and innovators within Glasgow's underserved communities. Our job is to help unlock and nurture the potential amongst those who've operated too long under the radar of support. The Social Innovation Challenge Fund can do just that, changing how we deliver business support and lifting the barriers to many Glaswegians becoming successful entrepreneurs."<sup>81</sup>

Dominic Dowling, the Council's group manager for business growth, adds: "it was about ceding control, and saying 'we think our business support services are good, but you guys aren't using them, so how can we work with you to design something that has a similar outcome but is more bespoke for particular communities?' We wanted to enable the communities themselves to bring the solutions."<sup>82</sup>

The Fund was launched in December 2024, with £250,000 of grants available in the first wave for organisations who could help support minority entrepreneurs, by providing advice and support or through forming better connections. 200 organisations attended information sessions, 50 completed expressions of interest and 19 made formal applications that were reviewed by a community panel before recommendations were made to the Council. The first four awards were made in June 2025.

The team had to work hard, Dominic Dowling says, to make sure that applications were genuinely additional, and to encourage different organisations to team up and work together. It was also a learning experience, helping the council team to understand how everything from community spaces to catering at events can be tailored to work for different groups, but also helping them to see the value of collaborative policy design.

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/11284/New-Challenge-Fund-to-help-under-represented-groups-in-Glasgow-to-become-entrepreneurs>

<sup>82</sup> Interview, 13 March 2025

## 16.

### Google London Engagement Programmes, Camden

A local community engagement programme finding the sweet spot between tech skills and local needs

Google's main UK offices are based in the London borough of Camden and they will soon open a major King's Cross office. As the new building was planned, Zoe Stern, newly-appointed head of community affairs for Europe and London lead, began engaging with Camden Council and Knowledge Quarter to understand where Google could be helpful. This led to community training days, to programmes supporting local grassroots organisations and SMEs and to a strong focus on youth opportunity. She recalls local MP Keir Starmer (before he became prime minister) telling Google "that those growing up in the shadow of your shiny building don't believe that they'll ever be able to work there. And that completely shaped our thinking."<sup>83</sup>

Google open the doors of their existing office for monthly school tours, working with Camden STEAM, which makes connections with the right people in individual schools, manages the paperwork and ensures that the opportunities are made available to children from disparate backgrounds. It also hosts 100 students each summer through the Camden STEAM work experience programme.

More recently, Google has partnered with Camden Learning to launch the London AI Campus, which opened to its first 32 students in November 2024. The Campus, based in Somers Town, offers two-year enrichment and mentoring programmes for STEM A-level students. The AI-focused programme offers students access to cutting-edge resources, one-to-one mentoring and industry expertise from Google, Google DeepMind and other Knowledge Quarter partners, allowing students to explore the how AI can be used to address global and local problems. The Campus has also opened an after-school workspace with more informal support and mentoring, and is working with teachers to enable safe and responsible adoption of AI in education.<sup>84</sup> Google's aim is for the campus to be both a resource that engages partners from across the Knowledge Quarter and a resource that can inspire similar provision elsewhere in the UK.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Zoe Stern, 5 March 2025

<sup>84</sup> <https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/united-kingdom/google-launches-ai-campus-london/>

The broader community programme has evolved over time, reflecting community and partner feedback: community events have been moved from Fridays to Thursdays to enable more people to participate, for example, and the idea of the AI Campus, originally envisaged as a stand-alone academy, was refined so that it could offer support to schools across the borough. "I very strongly believe in an approach of 'listen, learn and deliver'," says Zoe Stern. "We're all well placed to offer various programmes, but co-creation and partnership helps identify the sweet spot where those programmes will be genuinely helpful to our neighbours."

## 17. **Here East Tech Masters and Tech Stars, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park**

**Outreach and challenge programmes to engage local children in tech**

Here East, the innovation and technology campus in the north west corner of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP), has been delivering the Tech Masters and Tech Stars programmes since 2022. The programmes were developed to support long-term workforce planning, and to ensure that more local students, regardless of background or gender, can see themselves pursuing opportunities in the tech industry.

Tech Masters is for children aged seven and above, bringing around 300 children from the five primary schools nearest QEOP into Here East for World of Work (WOW), which explores possibilities for their future at a crucial period of their development. On these visits, they meet business leaders, explore workspaces and understand the types of careers available in tech, with the aim of strengthening aspirations to join the sector. Onaba Payab, Here East's head of community and partnerships, explains the thinking: "Stereotypes around careers are often formed from primary age and it is therefore essential to enable children to have a range of experiences during their formative years that allow them to visualise themselves in different jobs. Misconceptions around non-stereotypical gender roles are one of the main causes of underrepresentation in sectors such as technology."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Onaba Payab, 10 March 2025



Tech Stars is delivered at secondary schools in the four growth boroughs around QEOP. The programme sets a challenge ('Develop ideas for science related zero waste businesses' in 2024), and the schools stage mini-competitions at Here East to respond to these. Finally, students take part in a pitching competition, where they showcase their business ideas to a panel of industry experts.

The programme enables pupils to gain a deeper understanding of the technology and media industries, and enhances pupils' core skills in teamwork, problem-solving and communication. In 2024, 180 students were invited to take part in the programme. Longer term, there is continuing work to ensure a good gender balance in the two programmes, and the Here East Team is working closely with local schools to achieve that. However, Onaba Payab reports that young women from Plashet Girls School, who won the Tech Stars competition in 2023, are already engaging with other tech and data science initiatives run by the Newham Council – an early indication of lasting impact.

## 18. The Yard Young Artists, Hackney Wick

Creative engagement for young people in a fast-changing neighbourhood

The Yard Theatre was founded in a disused warehouse in Hackney Wick, just outside London's Olympic Park site, in 2011. With a programme of plays and club events, The Yard has played a pivotal role since then in the neighbourhood's growing reputation as a cultural and leisure district. From the outset, The Yard sought to embed itself in community life, rehearsing plays in the local community centre and offering free tickets for local people.

In 2016, London Legacy Development Corporation asked The Yard to develop programmes of activity for a temporary community space, Hub 67, built from materials left over from London 2012 and legacy construction projects. The Young Artists programme was launched there, introducing local children and young people to theatre, working with them to develop new works, and in doing so helping to build creative and personal skills.

The programme has different offers for different age groups: for children aged seven to eleven, youth facilitators visit local schools on a weekly basis to give an introduction to theatre. For older children, workshops and special performances are held, linked to current shows at The Yard, and some join weekly sessions working with professionals to develop a new piece of theatre.

Since Hub 67 closed for planned construction work in 2022, The Yard has delivered the Young Artists programme in schools and local community centres, but The Yard itself is being rebuilt in summer 2025. The new building will include workshop and studio space that can accommodate community programmes.

Ashleigh Wheeler, executive director at The Yard, explains that the programme continues to experiment with different models: “for some young people who face a lot of challenges in their lives, building a relationship through long-term weekly engagement is really important, but shorter, more intensive engagement can be better in terms of generating momentum and making a new show with young people.”<sup>86</sup>

The Young Artists programme, which has been funded from a variety of sources, but now largely relies on community infrastructure levy, has also played a role in forming links within a rapidly changing community. In the early years, participants were all from relatively deprived local catchment areas. As new residents moved in over time, The Yard has worked more actively with local schools to ensure a mix of children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

“There’s a really important role for grassroots organisations like The Yard in fast-changing areas, in bridging between the lower-income community that has been here for decades with newly-arrived, better-off residents,” says Ashleigh Wheeler. “A lot of what we’ve deliberately done is create spaces, especially for young people, who may live within ten minutes’ walk of each other, but go to different schools and have very different starts in life, to meet and make stuff together.”

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Ashleigh Wheeler, 17 March 2025

## 19. Newcastle Helix community strategy, Newcastle upon Tyne

### Planning a long-term community strategy for Newcastle Helix

Newcastle Helix, a 24-acre innovation district on the old Scottish and Newcastle Breweries site in the heart of Newcastle upon Tyne, was originally envisioned as a 'Science City' in the early 2000s. A new partnership between Newcastle University, the Newcastle City Council, and Legal and General was formed in 2015 to take forward the development, and this partnership has attracted national innovation centres for ageing, data and rural enterprise.<sup>87</sup>

Although the original 2015 vision had included commitments to social impact and building links with the communities surrounding the site, the project had become heavily focused on development, leading to criticism from the leader of the City Council among others, "that we had constructed glass-walled buildings, full of very intelligent well-paid people, but with no connections to or impact for local communities", in the words of estates director John Seager. In response, a renewed three-year community engagement strategy was launched in 2022.

Central to this has been the emphasis on storytelling and accessibility. To breach the literal and metaphorical glass walls, Helix brought in a journalist and filmmaker to explore and promote stories about the innovations taking place on site. These stories, about everything from melanoma treatments to advances in healthy ageing, were transformed into films, podcasts and events to explain what was happening to local audiences.

Helix has also focused on youth engagement. Working in partnership with the regional combined authority and Newcastle United Foundation, whose community hub NUCASTLE is on the edge of the site, Helix launched its 'Building Blocks' initiative in 2023, bringing around 200 local schoolchildren aged 10 and 11, many from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs, to the site for a day of immersive, playful experiences in data, AI and coding. The visits were preceded by a competition, where classes were sent a big sheet of paper and asked to draw the city of the

<sup>87</sup> Interview with John Seager, 17 March 2025

future; safety, sustainability and technology emerged as big themes. In 2025, the programme will run over two days and expand further thereafter.

Equally important was the recognition that physical access to the space matters. Site security guards had been chasing skateboarders away, and Helix asked them not to do so as long as skateboarders didn't do damage to buildings or public spaces. John Seager recalls talking to some of the skateboarders, and being told that the spaces in Helix felt safer than some official skate parks.

Looking ahead, John Seager is hoping to develop a longer-term plan for community engagement, particularly focused on supporting children and young people, including through a structured work experience that will bring local businesses together with school groups. He is also exploring funding models, from drawing on estate charges to taking on some partnership-owned real estate that can ensure long-term funding is in place. "Filming our work and getting it documented really helped make the case for funding. We've reached the point where there is absolute recognition from the partners that we are doing something valuable; the next phase is about unlocking bigger and better investment for the long term."



## 20. Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Inclusive Growth programmes

Widening and deepening programmes to engage and create opportunities for local people

One of the central objectives of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and Legacy project was to “transform the heart of east London ... by turning one of London’s most deprived areas into a world-class district for living, leisure, business and sport, with safe and sustainable neighbourhoods, new parkland, new homes, jobs, and social and leisure facilities for generations to come.”<sup>88</sup>

As Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) re-opened following the 2012 Games, London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) developed a suite of community engagement and community benefit programmes, including schools outreach, youth engagement, and skills and training initiatives. Initiatives implemented by ‘Park partners’, such as Here East and its tenants, University College London and the sports venue operators, complemented these.

In early 2025, QEOP re-oriented itself. Planning powers were returned to the Olympic Park boroughs, and ownership and management of the London Stadium was separated from the rest of the Park. With UCL’s campus fully operational, the cultural facilities of East Bank nearing completion and continuing growth within Here East, LLDC is focusing more on realising QEOP’s full potential as a hub for economic and social innovation.

Michelle May, LLDC’s executive director of inclusive growth, describes the priorities for this phase of the project: “In this next phase of regeneration and development, we need not just to focus on scaling up activity, but also on ‘scaling deeper’. This means not just reaching more people but ensuring that previously underserved communities benefit from our investment and from opportunity on the Park.”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Department for Culture Media and Sport, *Before, during and after: making the most of the London 2012 Games*, DCMS 2008

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Michelle May, 14 February 2025

LLDC is now working with the surrounding London boroughs and park partners to scale up, extend the scope of and secure sustainable long-term funding for programmes, which include:<sup>90</sup>

- **The Good Growth Hub**, which works with employers and locals on programmes to enable local young people to secure work on QEOP, including through a shared recruitment service, paid internships at cultural institutions and an apprenticeship programme that works with local small businesses to train up local people. More than 250 young people have been supported into well-paid jobs between the Hub opening in 2021 and early 2024.
- **Build East**, a centre for green construction skills, which includes experimental development of new materials and retrofit techniques, and is a London-wide training centre for excellence (part supported by Transport for London), as well as providing specific programmes for local people. More than 1,300 local residents had been trained and 174 helped into relevant jobs between 2021 and 2024.
- **East Ed**, which brings park partners into 81 local schools to help young people develop their creative skills and understand the potential of STEAM and cultural careers, as well as running summer schools, careers fairs and teacher development programmes. 25,000 young people participated in East Ed schools programmes from 2021–2025.

## 21. **Leading Inclusive Futures Through Technology, London** Helping people to access innovation-sector opportunities across four London boroughs

Leading Inclusive Futures through Technology (LIFT) was launched in 2021 as a partnership between the London boroughs of Camden, Islington, Hackney and Tower Hamlets – an innovation arc that extends from the Knowledge Quarter, through the tech cluster at Old Street, to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

<sup>90</sup> LLDC meeting paper, May 2024



Experiencing rapid growth in advanced knowledge economy sectors such as tech, creative industries and life sciences, the boroughs wanted to create opportunities for residents from all backgrounds to succeed in those sectors, through employment and starting businesses, and to support employers to connect with communities and employ local people.

With initial funding from London Strategic Investment Pot (SIP), a pooled fund of business rates reserved for projects contributing to sustainable economic growth, LIFT has four main strands of work:

- **Community engagement and outreach:** dedicated officers in each of the four boroughs work directly with community organisations to inspire and inform local people about opportunities, and to connect them to the support on offer, focusing on the different groups in each borough that are underrepresented in the knowledge economy.
- **Employability and business support:** includes a wide range of training and employability resources, with a particular focus on supporting paid internships, where LIFT has paid 50 per cent of wages at smaller businesses for interns on a three-month placement, and on helping entrepreneurs in access capital and advice.
- **Workspace:** LIFT offers subsidised or free desk space at co-working sites across the four boroughs, and has also worked with businesses based in those spaces to host events and internships.
- **Thought leadership:** LIFT has undertaken extensive work to identify and promote innovative practice across the boroughs. A major focus has been on neurodivergent workers: following an employment and internship programme targeted specifically at neurodivergent people, LIFT is working with employers and other partners to develop a digital tool to better support neurodivergent colleagues.

The programme is targeted at people from underrepresented backgrounds, and has supported people of all ages, including those returning to the workforce after a break, as well as disabled people, care leavers and refugees, including some from Ukraine and Afghanistan.

After initial funding for three years, three of the four boroughs have now funded the programme for a further two years from March

2025. Senior programme manager Hamish Mackay hopes that the programme has become embedded in the mainstream of the local authorities' work: "When the programme started, we focused on building strong community partnerships and raising awareness of LIFT – both in the community and within the industries we work with. And I think we've been successful in doing that; LIFT has good recognition locally, and people can see the impact we've made. As we move into the next phase, we want to build on that and help businesses and innovation districts make inclusion and local engagement a core part of how they operate. We've seen how much talent exists in our communities – our role is to help open the door into these sectors".<sup>91</sup>

An evaluation report completed in early 2025 found that LIFT had created 304 jobs, and had secured 95 apprenticeships, 1,405 work experience opportunities and 81 paid internships. 137 start-ups had been supported and £3.7m raised by start-ups. 53 per cent of outcomes were for women, 71 per cent for people from ethnic minority backgrounds and 18 per cent for disabled people. Overall, the programme had generated £1.26 of social value for every £1 invested. The evaluation found that tailored support, relationships between community engagement officers and participants, and connections to other local authority employment support had been important success factors.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Hamish Mackay, 14 February 2025

<sup>92</sup> Hatch Associates, *LIFT–final evaluation*, April 2025



## 22.

### **UCL School of Management and London College of Fashion Business Builder Programme, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park**

**Business school support for east London entrepreneurs and micro-businesses**

At the same time as opening their new campuses in Stratford, University College London and London College of Fashion launched a programme of business support targeted at micro-businesses based in the four boroughs adjoining Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Participants receive 18 hours of support during a six-week programme, covering everything from vision, to financial management, to marketing and growth planning, as well as individual mentoring from UCL's School of Management, based in Canary Wharf.

The first cohort, comprising 20 entrepreneurs and business owners including architects, construction companies and fashion start-ups, completed the programme in summer 2024. One participant, Fabian Danker, explained that the programme had helped him with marketing in particular, helping him to become more focused in targeting specific clients and their needs. A second cohort will run in summer 2025.<sup>93</sup>

Simon Magness, partnerships manager for UCL East, said, "It's been really good to develop relationships with local entrepreneurs, so they can see some of the opportunities associated with us moving into the area. And it's plugged a gap, where businesses with fewer than five employees can't access support from government's 'Help to Grow' programme."<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.mgmt.ucl.ac.uk/blog/business-owners-perspective-ucl-som-lcfs-business-builder-programme>

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Amy Lightstone and Simon Magness, 23 January 2025

## 23.

### Barts Life Sciences HealthTech SME project, east London

#### Helping startups to connect with the NHS and communities

Barts Life Sciences, a partnership between Barts Health NHS Trust and Queen Mary University of London, is developing a new life sciences innovation hub around the rebuilt Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel. Its ambition is to “transform health life expectancy and opportunity for our community through innovative precision healthcare solutions that can be translated directly into patient benefit and to generate investment in the local economy”.<sup>95</sup>

The HealthTech SME project ran for two years to March 2025 and has been extended for a further year, with support from the mayor of London and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It aims to support start-ups and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing and supplying innovative products for the NHS, to benefit the NHS itself, local SMEs and the local economy.

Sven Bunn, Barts Life Sciences programme director, explains the thinking behind the project: “if we can start to build up an ecosystem of health and tech start-ups, then that helps with the attractiveness of Whitechapel as a life sciences hub, but also starts to provide opportunities for local people who have got ideas and products that they want to develop as well.”<sup>96</sup>

The programme has three main elements:

- **SME support services:** including ‘navigation days’ to help businesses understand how to develop and supply products for the NHS, masterclasses offering support on issues such as intellectual property, and one-to-one sessions providing specific advice for individual businesses
- **Internship programme:** providing ten east London residents with fully-funded eight-week work placements
- **NHS HealthTech Ecosystem:** making working with Barts Health easier, including through establishing and communicating clearer pathways to collaboration and product adoption

<sup>95</sup> Barts Life Sciences, *Evaluation—Healthtech SME project*, April 2025

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Sven Bunn, 16 April 2025

The evaluation report for the programme has identified positive impacts for the more than 150 SMEs involved and for the NHS. Several bids have been submitted and are being developed with Barts Health, and the Trust has also developed a clearer understanding of what innovations are in the pipeline.

## 24. **Barts NHS Trust employment programmes** Integrated programme to support NHS workforce planning and local community health

Barts Health NHS Trust provides hospital healthcare to more than 2.5 million people in north east London. When the Trust was formed by merger in 2012, it recognised the health inequalities and deprivation faced by many local residents, and established a public health team to seek to address these issues. Barts is also a major economic actor, employing more than 20,000 people, so opening up opportunities to as many local people as possible was an early priority. Barts has developed three principal schemes in this area:

- **Community Works for Health** offers recruiters across the Trust an opportunity to search for candidates locally through a network of local job centres, colleges and local authority job brokerage services, before advertising vacancies more widely. The service, which has been running since 2012, helps around 100 local residents into work every year, the majority of whom were previously claiming state benefits.<sup>97</sup>
- **Project Search** focuses on young people with severe learning disabilities and autism, who undertake internships at three of the Trust's hospitals, together with coaching and other support, delivered in partnership with Flourish Learning Trust. More than 70 per cent of participants have secured employment after completing the programme,<sup>98</sup> many at Barts, but others using the skills they have developed to find jobs elsewhere.
- **Healthcare Horizons** was developed in response to the lack of knowledge among local young people about the range of jobs available in the NHS or the skills needed to take advantage of

<sup>97</sup> Williams P et al, 'A public health perspective on 10 years of developing an anchor institution approach in a National Health Service Hospital Trust in England' in *Perspectives in Public Health* vol 145 number 1, January 2025

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/news/spotlight-on-project-search-6116>

those opportunities. The programme includes careers talks in 37 local schools, careers events, work experience placements and mentoring for sixth formers, and a pre-employment training programme for young people who are not in education, employment or training. An evaluation in 2022 found that the programme had met its targets, was “making clear headway in attracting young people to a healthcare career as well as improving their knowledge and skills related to the sector”, and had generated a social return of £3.30 for every pound invested by the Trust, Barts Charity and the JP Morgan Chase Foundation.<sup>99</sup>

Andrew Attfield, associate director of public health at Barts, says that improving the life chances and health of local communities is central to Barts’ mission, but that working in partnership and looking for alternative funding has been vital, particularly when working with some groups who might need a lot more than simple employability support to enable them to secure and sustain employment. “The value of education and jobs is something the NHS needs to reflect on more. It’s a prevention agenda really, and does deliver value for money, but it can be hard to make that case.”<sup>100</sup>

## 25. Integrated Legal Advice Clinic, Stratford

Full-service free legal advice and representation in east London

University College London’s (UCL) Integrated Legal Advice Clinic (ILAC) offers free legal advice and support to east London residents. The Clinic’s roots are in UCL research that examined the way that unresolved legal issues have negative impacts on health, as people experience a ‘cascade’ of problems, including stress, poor housing conditions and financial difficulty.<sup>101</sup>

The Clinic provides advice and support on welfare benefits, housing, community care and education. It has 3.5 solicitors and advisors, a trainee solicitor and two administrative staff (one temporary). Law students volunteer to work alongside the solicitors and administrators to triage enquiries, take notes, follow up and generally support the resolution of the case.

<sup>99</sup> Enback S et al, *Evaluation of the Healthcare Horizons programme*, Barts Health NHS Trust, February 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Andrew Attfield, 16 April 2025

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/access-to-justice/research-policy>



This approach, which means that the Clinic can litigate cases as well as provide one-off advice, contrasts with some other advice clinics that offer a more limited service. The service is also unique among university legal services in that it has a Legal Aid contract, which means cases can be pursued using Legal Aid funding and without plaintiffs being held liable for costs. Core costs are met by UCL.

Demand has risen exponentially, particularly on housing issues, according to Rachel Knowles, director of the UCL Centre for Access to Justice, which runs the Clinic. In 2023/24 the Clinic received more than 1,100 enquiries, and was able to provide support for more than 170 cases – prioritised on the basis of team expertise and capacity, and client location. Outcomes included 21 clients who secured temporary or settled accommodation, and £500,000 in compensation, backdated benefits and other payments.<sup>102</sup>

The Clinic hopes to expand, says Rachel Knowles, but budget constraints make this challenging.<sup>103</sup> In the meantime, the Clinic has developed partnerships with private-sector legal firms to support local communities. Eversheds Sutherland provides support for clients filling in forms to apply for personal independence payments (PIP), which are provided to people with long-term physical or mental illnesses or disabilities. The support is provided online, but clients can use the Clinic's facilities to join calls, and to scan and copy documents.

The Clinic also works with Clyde & Co and the Magpie Project, which supports mothers and young children living in poor-quality accommodation. Volunteers attend the Clinic with staff and volunteers from the Magpie Project to assist in completing forms for welfare benefits and housing, while service users can access support with childcare, travel costs and interpreting.

<sup>102</sup> UCL, *Centre for Access to Justice Annual Report 2023.24*, 2025

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Rachel Knowles, 31 March 2025

## 26.

### Working Well: Roots to Dental, Greater Manchester

Helping people into work through access to dental health services

Roots to Dental arose from insights gathered as part of Greater Manchester's Working Well programme which recognises the links between work and health, and provides personalised, holistic support to people facing a wide range of barriers to work, including health conditions, disabilities, long periods of unemployment, low skills, debt and housing issues.

Data gathered from over 80,000 participants accessing Working Well found that 15 per cent had oral health problems, rising to more than half of those who were not registered with a dentist. In many cases, the pain of dental problems was making job-seeking difficult and life miserable, and problems such as missing or damaged teeth were undermining confidence in interviews and work.<sup>104</sup>

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) worked closely with University Dental Hospital of Manchester (UDHM) to address the problem by creating an alternative pathway to NHS provision, mobilising Manchester dental students (under the close supervision of a dental consultant), who, as part of their clinical experience, needed to treat people with a broad range of dental issues – including more challenging conditions.

Similar programmes previously had struggled with attendance levels, but the Working Well programme's key worker-led holistic approach enabled individualised support to help people attend appointments, including support with the costs of travelling to UDHM.

An evaluation of the pilot programme found relatively high attendance rates, and high levels of satisfaction both among participants and dental students, who reported a boost to technical and soft skills from seeing patients from a wider range of backgrounds. One participant said, "This is a massive thing for me

<sup>104</sup> SQW, *Working Well: Roots to Dental: evaluation findings*, February 2024

... I just couldn't find a dentist and if I had, the cost would have been too much ... I think it does affect my chances of working because in a café – who wants to see a person working there with bad teeth?"<sup>105</sup>

Thomas Britton, who leads Working Well for GMCA said, "It's just one part of Working Well, but if you were to pick a case study of the interrelationship of health, work and skills, Roots to Dental is a great example: we're addressing the health needs of people that otherwise don't engage with health services; we are growing our dentists of the future; and through addressing these barriers (amongst others), we are supporting people to achieve meaningful employment."<sup>106</sup>

## 27. **WellHome domestic air pollution study, White City** Co-produced research connecting Imperial College to White City communities

The WellHome study into air pollution risk in the home was developed by Professor Frank Kelly and colleagues at the Environmental Research Group (ERG), one of the first Imperial College faculties to move to the new White City campus. "We wanted to make our mark on the community as part of Imperial's new campus, and as a group that were really interested in the health of the local community and the impact the environment could have on that," Professor Kelly explains.<sup>107</sup>

The WellHome study built on previous research that indicated that children were as exposed to air pollution at home as they were when travelling to school. Learning from their work with social scientists during that research project, and from a pilot study in early 2020, the team recruited a dedicated coordinator, Esther Lie, to lead an extensive community engagement programme. This included community meetings, appearances at events, online workshops during the COVID pandemic, and working with paid 'community ambassadors' representative of the different communities within the study area.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in SQW, op cit

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Thomas Britton, 14 April 2025

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Frank Kelley and Angela Lewis, 13 February 2025

Angela Lewis, director of operations at the ERG, observes: “Esther was a key player in building those relationships with the ambassadors and with the members of the community. So I would say it’s important to know the skillsets and the experience that you do not currently have, and to make sure you recruit the right people who can complement your team.”

100 households, half of which included a child with asthma or allergies, were recruited to measure particles, gases, temperature and humidity in the home, using air pollution sensors over two 28-day periods between 2022 and 2024, with questionnaires and activity diaries tracking behaviour, health and perceptions of pollution levels. A further ten households, all with at least one child suffering from asthma, would take measurements over a 12-month period.

Community engagement activity continued throughout the study period, including open days at the ERG laboratories, art events and after-school clubs, delivered jointly with local community organisations, to strengthen relationships with local families. Individual findings have been reported back to households with some general recommendations, using a co-designed reporting format.

The ERG team is analysing and writing up the study as a whole, and is seeking funding for a further phase to enable more tailored advice and collaboration with Hammersmith and Fulham Council on their social housing retrofit plans.

Community ambassadors continue to be involved. “As we transition from WellHome to hopefully WellHome 2, we are keeping the ambassadors on board to help develop our ideas,” says Frank Kelly. “And the majority of them are keen to continue. This wasn’t just about a single project, this was about becoming part of ERG in the longer term.”

## 28.

### The Loop, Hackney Wick

Working with community organisations to create a new innovation hub

The Loop is a circular economy hub based in Hackney Wick, just next to Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). Based in a vacant building, for which a new development is planned, The Loop will have a long-term lease and be virtually rent-free in the new development.

The Loop is managed by Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust, a local community organisation set up to respond to the rapid pace of change faced by start-ups and creatives in the areas alongside QEOP. Initially the Trust focused on preserving local cultural assets, then developed a focus on the emerging circular economy in east London, which seeks to redeploy waste materials as raw materials.

The idea for The Loop was developed as part of the QEOP Future Industries Demonstrator programme. The Trust partnered with Halcyon Developments, whose proposals for a mixed-use development at Wallis Road, including 7,000 square feet for The Loop, were approved as London Legacy Development Corporation's last planning decision before handing powers back to the boroughs.

By the end of 2024, The Loop had supported 17 businesses, from re-used plastics to zero-waste food systems. It will temporarily relocate in 2026, before moving back to Wallis Road when the development is completed. Patrick Scally, executive lead at the Trust, is excited about the potential: "at the moment, we are just doing little experiments, but if you look at the potential to support local economic development, in a way that is fully circular – that keeps economic value locally and reduces waste locally – with the larger players operating in QEOP, this could be something that really gets steam."<sup>108</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Patrick Scally, 25 March 2025

## 29. | Elevate Youth Board, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

### Comprehensive youth involvement in legacy planning

Elevate Youth Board is the youth engagement and leadership programme, 'designed for young people by young people', for Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). The Board, which has its roots in pre-London 2012 youth engagement programmes and is funded by London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC), seeks to use young people's lived experience to shape QEOP designs and programmes.

Through engaging in high-level discussions, consultations and design processes, participants feel greater ownership and empowerment in relation to the Park, develop transferable skills and build confidence. Elevate has helped shape QEOP strategy and delivery by feeding into planning applications, strategies and business plans, and by helping to design facilities and programmes on the Park.

Elevate has two main structures:

- **Elevate Youth Voice** (formally Legacy Youth Voice), established in 2008, comprises 45 young people from the growth boroughs, aged 14-21, many of whom are referred through schools, borough youth and social services, and local community organisations. Their role is to help shape all plans on the Park, and to ensure that the Park meets the needs of the local community, with a particular focus on young people.
- **Elevate Board** (formally the Legacy Youth Board), established in 2019, comprises fifteen 18-to 25-year-olds local young leaders from the growth boroughs, who influence decisions at LLDC and lead in the evolution of the Elevate programme. The Chair of the Board has observer status on the LLDC Board, as do other members across all LLDC committees.

All members of Elevate receive leadership development training and are paid London Living Wage for their time. Elevate is available to all QEOP partners as an accessible model for engaging local young people from across all growth boroughs on park-wide matters, with training provided to support Park partners to understand how to effectively engage with young people.



## 30. | Innovation in Action, South Yorkshire

### Supporting innovation across existing small businesses

The Innovation in Action Energy Challenge was developed by Sheffield City Council to spread innovation in local manufacturing businesses, and to enhance business networks. The aim was to make innovation more accessible, through helping businesses respond to a common challenge.

The programme is a spin-off from AMID (the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District), which comprises four innovation campuses, accommodating start-ups, research institutes and manufacturing businesses across more than 500 acres in Sheffield and Rotherham. It is supported by local and regional authorities, and Sheffield's two universities.

With energy costs rising in 2022 and 2023, the first challenge focused on energy efficiency. The team worked with seven local small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from across South Yorkshire. Each was allocated a mentor, and supplied with 'plug-and-play' technology that could monitor electricity use.

The 12-week programme in early 2024 resulted in tangible cost-savings from better understanding energy costs. One participant fitted new timer switches to power down tools when not needed, another brought forward replacement of a compressor, an investment that will pay for itself in 12 months. Others changed staffing arrangements to boost productivity and efficient use of machines.

Richard Bland, AMID programme manager at Sheffield City Council, said the benefits went beyond the immediate efficiency and productivity enhancements: "we wanted to make it as comfortable and easy a process as possible, and that worked really well. Everyone gave different kinds of feedback, but very positive."

"Some gained loads just from coming together, and sharing and shared learning, and others really valued the access to the tech they weren't aware of before. Overall, the program has been successful in fostering peer-to-peer networking, with many participants maintaining relationships beyond the project."<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Richard Bland, 11 February 2025

The next phases of the programme, which will involve several SMEs who were part of the first phase as well as some new participants, are being planned in discussion with interested businesses. Possible broad topics include productivity and engineering recruitment, and partners are exploring what types of innovation can be unlocked.





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Media and Digital Strategies practice at Bloomberg Associates

Bloomberg Associates  
Media and Digital Strategies  
Katherine Oliver, Principal  
Todd Asher and Serena McIntosh

## Bloomberg Associates

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Bloomberg Associates is an international consulting service founded by Michael R. Bloomberg as a philanthropic venture and is dedicated to supporting city governments improve the quality of life of their citizens.

## The Knowledge Quarter

The Knowledge Quarter is a partnership of over 100 academic, cultural, research, and scientific organisations within a one-mile radius of King's Cross, London. The Knowledge Quarter is the **UK's largest innovation district** and home to a **dense cluster of knowledge-based organisations to rival anywhere in the world**. The KQ's partners range from internationally significant research institutes to emerging organisations in the creative industries. Partners include the British Museum, Google, UCL, University of the Arts London, Digital Catapult, Wellcome, and the British Library. The partners might be vastly different, but they all share one common purpose: the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Within the KQ, choreographers are meeting surgeons, biochemists are meeting poets and activists are meeting archivists. The more disparate the worlds, the deeper the connections that are being formed.

## Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Innovation District

Spanning 560 acres in east London, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park is a vibrant hub where people can live, work, learn, and engage with culture, technology, and innovation. The Park offers a unique blend of landscaped gardens, historic waterways, iconic sporting venues, diverse food and drink, a rich events programme and is home to cultural and education quarter, East Bank.

At the centre of this is the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Innovation District – a thriving ecosystem of over 270 startups, scaleups, community-based non-profits, leading universities and renowned cultural organisations. This collaborative network connects to test and demonstrate new ideas in a real-world environment – developing and scaling solutions to urban challenges such as climate change, health and wellbeing, and sustainable mobility.





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