

Knowledge Exchange Plan

HEIF Accountability Statement 2026-31

Contents

01	Strategic overview	Page 3
02	Equality, diversity and inclusion	Page 5
03	Oversight and governance of HEIF	Page 7
04	Strategic Priority Areas	Page 9
	• Medtech and Life Sciences	Page 9
	• Health, Work and Productivity	Page 12
	• Energy and Environment	Page 14
	• Advanced Materials	Page 17
	• Digital Economy	Page 20
	• Cultural Regeneration	Page 23
	• Skills for Growth	Page 26
	• Keele Innovation District	Page 28
	• Commercialising Research Insights	Page 31
	• Strengthening the Institutional Environment	Page 34

1. Strategic overview

Innovation-led Growth in complex place-based environments

Keele's approach to knowledge exchange is rooted in its role as a research-intensive, civic university, operating within a local environment characterised by both significant economic opportunity and structural challenge.

Located in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, the University works within an economic context defined by relatively low levels of business R&D, productivity constraints and longstanding health and workforce inequalities. These conditions have shaped a long-standing institutional commitment to working in partnership with businesses, public services and communities, including extensive engagement with SMEs and public sector organisations.

At the same time, the region presents a distinctive opportunity: the ability to test, apply and scale innovation in complex, real-world environments, where the translation of research into practice is often most challenging—and most critical to delivering sustainable economic growth.

Keele's knowledge exchange strategy is therefore focused on enabling innovation-led growth in demanding contexts, supporting both the development of frontier technologies and their effective adoption across the wider economy, in line with the UK's modern Industrial Strategy priorities.

Research strengths and areas of economic opportunity

The University's approach is grounded in a set of established and emerging research strengths, with clear potential to contribute to economic

growth and industrial strategy priorities. These include:

- Life sciences, pharmacy and bioengineering, with growing opportunities for commercialisation, clinical innovation and industry partnership
- Energy and environmental systems, including whole-system approaches to decarbonisation, resilience and sustainability
- Materials innovation, including ceramics and advanced materials, aligned to regional industrial capability and national manufacturing priorities
- Digital and data-enabled innovation, including applications across health, industry and public services

These areas align closely with national priorities in deep technology, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital transformation, and provide a foundation for the development of IP-rich, scalable and investable opportunities.

They are complemented by strengths in health and work, social science and interdisciplinary research, enabling Keele to address complex challenges that cut across traditional sector boundaries and to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

An Innovation Framework for place-based growth

In response to both institutional strengths and regional opportunity, over the last year, Keele has worked with local authority partners to develop an [Innovation Framework](#) for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

As well as informing research priorities, this supports engagement with business communities, health partners, regional and national bodies and UK Govt innovation agencies.

It is already guiding Local Authority approaches to economic development and the emerging Growth Plan that will underpin devolution to the Mayoral Combined Authority.

The Framework provides a structured approach to:

- aligning research, skills and infrastructure with priority areas of economic activity and industrial strategy
- supporting the development of cluster-based engagement, bringing together businesses, academics and partners
- enabling a more coordinated approach to programme development, investment and delivery

It reflects a deliberate shift towards a more integrated, system-level model, capable of supporting innovation, adoption and growth across sectors, and of developing coherent, investable propositions. It aligns with emerging opportunities linked to devolution and place-based economic development.

Pathways to growth: from research to adoption and scale

Keele's knowledge exchange activity is evolving from a strong foundation of engagement at scale towards a more focused model centred on clear pathways to economic impact.

These pathways include:

- Translation of research into application, including through collaboration with industry and public sector partners
- Strategic place-based partnerships, both convened by other anchors and those
- Commercialisation, through licensing, partnerships and selective venture development
- Adoption and diffusion, supporting businesses and organisations to implement new technologies, practices and approaches
- Skills and talent development, particularly at higher levels, to support sector growth and workforce capability
- Development of innovation-enabled environments, including testbeds, demonstrators and place-based initiatives

The University has undertaken an initial analysis of skills needs and gaps across its priority clusters, which has informed local skills planning and engagement with partners. This includes a particular emphasis on higher-level skills (Levels 6-8) and the role of universities in supporting both specialist capability and broader workforce development.

Together, these pathways enable Keele to support not only the creation of innovation, but its adoption, scaling and economic impact.

Partnership-led, system-based

A defining feature of Keele's approach is its emphasis on partnership and system building, recognising that innovation-led growth depends on effective collaboration across institutions and sectors.

This includes:

- Working with businesses, public sector organisations and intermediaries to codevelop programmes, solutions and investment propositions
- Contributing to regional initiatives, including collaboration through Midlands Innovation and other networks
- Supporting the development of cluster-based activity, bringing together academic expertise and industry capability

The University's Partnership Development function, supported through HEIF, plays a central role in enabling this activity, working across faculties and with external partners to identify opportunities, build relationships and develop programmes that support innovation, growth and investment.

Inclusive innovation and sustainable growth

Keele's approach to knowledge exchange is underpinned by a commitment to inclusive and

sustainable economic growth, ensuring that the benefits of innovation are widely shared.

This includes:

- Supporting participation from SMEs and underrepresented groups
- Addressing barriers to engagement in innovation and commercialisation activity
- Embedding inclusive approaches within cluster activity, skills development and partnership working

The University's work in areas such as health and work, community engagement and cultural regeneration further supports this agenda, linking innovation activity to wider social, economic and place-based outcomes.

Strategic objectives for knowledge exchange

Within this context, Keele's strategic objectives for knowledge exchange are to:

- Support innovation-led economic growth across priority clusters, including energy and environment, materials, digital and life sciences
- Strengthen the translation of research into commercial and economic value, aligned to industrial strategy priorities
- Develop skills, talent and workforce capability, particularly at higher levels, to support sector growth
- Enable adoption and diffusion of innovation, supporting businesses and organisations to implement new approaches
- Ensure inclusive participation in innovation, supporting broad-based and sustainable growth
- Strengthen the University's role as a partner in place-based innovation systems, contributing to regional and national economic priorities

These objectives are delivered through an integrated set of activities spanning research, skills, infrastructure and partnerships, supported

by HEIF and aligned to the University's wider strategic framework.

2. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to Keele's approach to knowledge exchange and innovation-led growth, and fundamental to wider research culture. The University's ambition is not only to broaden participation in knowledge exchange activity, but to ensure that innovation systems, partnerships and outcomes are inclusive in design and impact.

This reflects both institutional priorities and the characteristics of the University's regional context, where improving access to opportunity, addressing inequalities and supporting inclusive growth are central to long-term economic development.

Inclusive innovation and economic impact

Keele's approach is grounded in the principle that inclusive innovation strengthens economic outcomes, by improving relevance and enabling innovation to be applied more effectively across different sectors and communities.

Across its strategic objectives, the University will:

- Support innovation activity that addresses real-world challenges, including health inequalities, workforce participation and environmental sustainability
- Ensure that pathways from research to application consider diverse users, communities and markets

- Contribute to the development of sectors and clusters in ways that support broad-based participation and benefit

This includes working in sectors that may currently be less diverse in composition, and taking steps to broaden participation over time, including through engagement, skills development and partnership working.

Participation, pathways and skills

A central priority is to widen access to opportunities to engage in knowledge exchange, innovation and commercial activity. This includes:

- Supporting participation from underrepresented groups in research, commercialisation and business engagement activity
- Expanding access to higher-level skills (Levels 6–8) and professional development, including through flexible and place-based provision
- Providing all students with opportunities for work-based learning, enabling a broader range of learners to access pathways into innovation-led sectors
- Working with employers and partners to address skills gaps and barriers to progression, particularly in priority clusters

This approach supports both individual opportunity and sector growth, ensuring that skills development contributes directly to economic outcomes.

Commercialisation, enterprise and inclusion

Keele is taking active steps to ensure that commercialisation and consultancy activity is more inclusive and accessible.

This includes:

- Supporting initiatives such as the Staffordshire Black Business Network, which provides a platform for engagement, visibility and opportunity for

underrepresented entrepreneurs and professionals

- Implementing revised approaches to consultancy and contract research that broaden participation, including incentivising early-career and female academics to engage in externally facing activity
- Strengthening recognition and visibility of diverse role models, including through institutional mechanisms such as the Breaking the Mould awards

These interventions are designed to address structural barriers to participation and to support a more diverse pipeline of researchers, founders and partners engaging in commercialisation activity.

Designing inclusive systems and engagement

As the Innovation Framework is implemented, particular attention will be given to ensuring that systems, structures and engagement approaches are inclusive by design.

This includes:

- Ensuring that cluster-based activity and governance brings together a diverse range of participants, including academics, businesses and community partners
- Designing engagement activities that are accessible in terms of: location and format timing and flexibility routes into participation, recognising different starting points and levels of experience
- Using a range of engagement methods to ensure that innovation activity is accessible beyond established networks

This approach supports the development of a more open and representative innovation ecosystem.

Regional and system-level collaboration

Keele will also work with partners, including Midlands Innovation, to better understand and improve the EDI outcomes of innovation and commercialisation activity at a system level.

This includes:

- Understanding participation in programmes and access to support
- Identifying barriers to progression through commercialisation and innovation pathways
- Contributing to the development of more inclusive regional approaches to innovation and investment

This collaborative approach recognises that inclusive innovation requires system-level change, not just institutional action.

Monitoring Progress

The University will adopt a proportionate and learning-focused approach to monitoring EDI within knowledge exchange, aligned to EDI work-streams overseen by the University's Research Culture Committee.

This will include:

- Using existing data and insights to understand participation and engagement
- Gathering feedback through networks, partnerships and programme activity
- Identifying areas where targeted interventions may be required

The focus will be on continuous improvement, ensuring that approaches evolve over time in response to evidence and experience.

3. Oversight and governance of HEIF

Keele maintains a centrally coordinated approach to the use of HEIF and wider knowledge exchange funding, ensuring that resources are deployed effectively, compliantly and in line with institutional priorities.

Oversight of HEIF is embedded within the University's wider governance and management structures, enabling strategic direction, resource allocation and performance distributed across senior leadership, academic governance and professional services, while maintaining clear central accountability.

Strategic alignment and decision-making

The use of HEIF is aligned to the University's strategic priorities, previously set out in the Knowledge Exchange Plan and now reflected in this Accountability Statement. Priorities have been developed through engagement with academic leadership, including the University's research leaders' group (StRIVE), and are approved by the University Executive Committee (UEC) prior to submission, with final sign-off by the Vice Chancellor.

Ongoing oversight is provided through reporting to Research Committee, ensuring alignment between knowledge exchange activity, research strategy and institutional priorities.

Decisions relating to the overall allocation of HEIF, including the balance between pay and non-pay expenditure, are taken annually through the University's budget-setting process, with approval by UEC and Council.

Operational management and resource allocation

Day-to-day management of HEIF is coordinated centrally, ensuring consistency, compliance and alignment with strategic priorities.

Key elements include:

- The Partnership Development budget, managed by the Head of Partnership Development, supporting business engagement, partnership development and commercialisation activity
- A central HEIF non-pay budget, managed by the Director of Engagement & Partnerships and KUSIP, from which targeted investments and initiatives are supported.
- An Impact Fund, representing the only devolved element of HEIF, used to support the development of impact activity and case studies. Decisions on its use are taken jointly by Faculty Deans for Research and Partnership Development Managers, ensuring alignment between academic priorities and external engagement
- Investment decisions (eg. Midlands Mindforge Ltd) are taken through the University's Budget Finance and Capital Group)

More significant in-year expenditure is subject to approval by senior leadership, including the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research & Innovation or Deputy Vice Chancellor, while other allocations are agreed through appropriate management groups (e.g. Science Park Strategy Group), ensuring decisions are taken at the right level and with appropriate oversight.

This model provides a balance between central control and targeted flexibility, enabling responsiveness while maintaining accountability.

Governance, assurance and compliance

The University maintains robust processes to ensure that HEIF is used appropriately and in line with funding requirements.

- Policy development and changes are subject to formal approval through Research Committee, University Executive Committee and Senate
- Significant programme and development activity is shaped through an Executive Group, bringing together senior academic and professional leadership to ensure alignment and coordination
- Narrative submissions (including this Accountability Statement) are approved by UEC prior to Vice-Chancellor sign-off
- Data returns, including HE-BCI, are subject to formal quality assurance processes through the University's Governance team, and have recently been reviewed through an internal audit process

The central management of HEIF, supported by the Partnership Development function, plays a key role in ensuring appropriate use of funds, including addressing risks associated with noncompliant or inconsistent application of knowledge exchange funding.

Evolving governance and integration

Building on this strong foundation, the University is continuing to evolve its governance approach to support a more integrated and place-based model of delivery.

This includes:

- The development of an interim Innovation Board, providing a mechanism to bring together academic and

- professional leadership across research, skills and place-based activity
- Ongoing discussions with partners on the development of cluster-based governance arrangements, aligned to the Innovation Framework
- Exploration of how governance structures can better support joined-up decision-making and programme development across the University's contribution to regional economic growth

4. Strategic Priority Areas

Strategic Priority 1 | Medtech and Life Sciences

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen the translation of research in life sciences, health innovation and medtech into economic value, supporting the development of innovation activity, commercialisation pathways and sector growth, ensuring that this benefits from high quality public and patient involvement.

The objective focuses on supporting applied innovation within demanding real-world environments, including clinical settings and community and industry contexts, where translation requires integration across research, practice and commercial pathways. Keele's role is to connect research capability with clinical partners, patient and public communities, businesses and investors, enabling the development, testing and adoption of new technologies, products and approaches.

To support this, we will establish Keele Health Partners - a place-based quadruple-helix vehicle to accelerate adoption of medtech and life sciences products and services in the NHS,

building on the early successes of the Staffordshire and Shropshire Health Economy Research Partnership (SSHERPA).

We will also seek to consolidate and grow the Life Sciences business base on Keele's University Science & Innovation Park, capitalising on two key anchor organisations arriving shortly, and continue to enhance research and education relationships across this community.

This area builds on Keele's strengths in bioscience, clinical and applied health research, alongside established partnerships with NHS organisations and wider system stakeholders. It also reflects the opportunity to develop stronger links between research, innovation and industry activity in life sciences and medtech, both within Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and across neighbouring areas.

As well as playing an active role in Midlands partnerships, there is an opportunity to strengthen connectivity with life sciences and medtech businesses in Cheshire East, particularly in and around Crewe, building on existing regional capability to support a more integrated and outward-facing innovation ecosystem.

HEIF will support:

- Contributions by the Partnership Development team, supporting engagement with NHS organisations, life sciences and medtech businesses, and regional partners.
- Selective academic KE time linked to Keele Health Partners, enabling researchers to engage with clinical partners and industry to shape applied activity and innovation pathways
- Support for student placements, graduate projects and applied briefs, including within clinical, laboratory and industry settings, enhanced for high value firms with growth potential constrained by skills gaps
- Enhanced partnership development and grant application support for potential

inward Science & Innovation Park investors

- Seed-corn and bridging support, enabling feasibility work, early stage collaboration and development of externally funded projects
- Convening and coordination activity, bringing together clinical, academic and industry partners to identify opportunities and align priorities
- Targeted engagement to strengthen links with life sciences and medtech businesses in Cheshire East, including opportunities to connect with activity in and around Crewe
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes, including regional and national life sciences and innovation initiatives
- HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, supporting partnership development, translational activity and programme design.

Outputs will include:

- A small number of focused collaborative and translational projects
- Strengthened partnerships across clinical, academic and industry organisations
- Improved connectivity with regional life sciences and medtech ecosystems
- A pipeline of externally funded projects and commercialisation opportunities
- Increased student and graduate engagement in applied life sciences activity.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through increased innovation activity, commercialisation and sector development.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased engagement between research, clinical partners and industry, supporting triple and quadruple helix innovation activity

- Development and progression of medtech and life sciences

This objective will contribute to economic growth through increased innovation activity, commercialisation and sector development.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased engagement between research, clinical partners and industry, supporting triple and quadruple helix innovation activity
- Development and progression of medtech and life sciences
- Innovation pathways, including opportunities for commercialisation
- Growth in life sciences and medtech-related economic activity, including strengthening of local and regional supply chains and NHS access
- Increased external investment in life sciences, health innovation and translational programmes
- Improved connectivity between Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and wider regional life sciences clusters, including Cheshire East.

Longer-term impacts include:

- Strengthening of the regional life sciences and medtech ecosystem
- Increased contribution to national priorities in health innovation and life sciences growth
- Development of scalable models for translation and collaboration between research, healthcare and industry.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

This is a core area of focus for the use of business and commercialisation supplement, which will support:

- Development of commercialisation pathways for life sciences and medtech innovation, including progression of IP and venture development
- Strengthening links between research, clinical innovation and investment opportunities
- Targeted support for venture creation and scale-up readiness, particularly in areas of applied bioscience and medtech commercialisation pathways for life sciences and medtech innovation, including progression of IP and venture development
- Strengthening links between research, clinical innovation and investment opportunities
- Targeted support for venture creation and scale-up readiness, particularly in areas of applied bioscience and medtech.

In addition, Keele's participation in Midlands Innovation partnerships is expected to provide complementary support, including access to regional commercialisation programmes, investment networks and ecosystem development.

Monitoring Progress

Over the full statement period, we would expect to:

- Complete the relocation/expansion of three Life Sciences organisations on the Science & Innovation Park and secure two further major Life Sciences investments during the plan period
- Develop and agree three commercial strategic partnerships, working across R&I, skills and infrastructure
- Launch Keele Health Partners, achieving the active co-leadership of five industry

partners, and a network of at least 50 medtech and life sciences companies

- Enable at least 60 student placements in the Life Sciences and Medtech Sectors over the full plan period

Progress and impact will be monitored in three key ways:

- The ongoing identification and monitoring of **key development milestones** (e.g. Science & Innovation Park development and investment)
- **Quantitative data** e.g volume of interactions and projects with businesses in these Sectors, reported on an annual basis, cohort monitoring and economic impact assessment
- **Qualitative data**, such as feedback routinely collected for placements, events and apprenticeships, Sector-based workshop contributions.

Data sources will include:

Internal data (annual)

- Number and nature of partnerships with NHS organisations, businesses and research partners
- Development of project, programme and commercialisation pipeline, including external funding secured

External and system-level data (annual)

- HE-BCI indicators relating to business and public engagement
- Evidence of activity and growth in life sciences and medtech sectors, where available
- Partner-reported data on clinical and innovation activity, where accessible

Partner and employer feedback

- Engagement through network events and collaborative forums,
- Routine feedback on events, placements and apprenticeships
- Partner survey every five years, capturing: value of engagement evidence of

progression and impact opportunities for further development

Cohort and trajectory analysis

Where appropriate, Keele will use tools such as TheDataCity to track:

- Development and growth of businesses engaged in life sciences and medtech activity with Keele
- Evidence of sector development and clustering effects

Specific EDI Considerations

This activity will support inclusive participation in life sciences and health innovation, including widening access to research, clinical and industry opportunities, and ensuring that innovation pathways reflect the needs of diverse populations and communities. By way of example, Keele is supporting Life Sciences businesses on its Science & Innovation Park to work with Public and Patient Involvement & Engagement Groups.

Strategic Priority 2 | Health, Work and Productivity

Objectives and Activities

This area of activity will strengthen the integration of health, workforce and economic systems to support increased economic participation and productivity in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. It will build on the work of Keele's Work and Health Research Group, and draw on the broader interdisciplinary strengths of Keele Institute for Social Inclusion.

This objective reflects the significant impact of long-term health conditions and workforce inactivity on regional economic performance, and the opportunity to address these challenges through more coordinated approaches across health, skills and employment systems.

Focusing on its strengths around musculoskeletal disorders, mental health and work, population health, economic policy, econometrics and skills, the Centre will complement major UK Government investments in this area. It will support the development of established place-based partnerships through improved intelligence and insight, and potentially utilise student and graduate capacity to enable novel initiatives to be piloted and evaluated.

Again this objective focuses on applying research and innovation within demanding real-world environments, particularly business environments, where incentives can be weak, and barriers complex, as well as health and care systems, where outcomes depend on effective integration across clinical practice, workforce development and economic participation. Keele's role is to connect its research strengths in health, rehabilitation and population health with partners across the NHS, local authorities and employers, enabling the development and adoption of new approaches that support individuals to enter, remain in and return to work.

This aligns with Keele's broader commitment to inclusive economic growth, and to supporting scalable, place-based approaches to workforce participation and system reform.

HEIF will primarily support the people, relationships and enabling activity required to connect research capability with partner demand and develop investable programmes. Activities supported will include:

- Supporting relationship development with NHS, local authority and employer partners, and identifying opportunities for collaborative activity
- Selective academic time, enabling KE-active researchers to engage with partners, shape programmes and translate research into practice
- Selective seed-corn and bridging support, used to initiate collaboration, develop pilot activity and prepare proposals for externally funded programmes

- Convening and coordination activity, including targeted workshops and partner engagement to align priorities and co-design solutions
- Support for student placements and graduate projects, aligned to specific partner needs and opportunities
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes, including local and national growth initiatives, where HEIF-supported activity can strengthen the innovation focus.

Outputs will include:

- Active involvement in providing evidence to inform delivery of major UK Govt programmes
- Strengthened and more coordinated partnerships across health and economic systems
- A pipeline of externally funded programmes and interventions
- Targeted student and graduate engagement in applied settings, including engagement with employers.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth by addressing a key structural constraint: workforce participation and productivity.

Expected outcomes include:

- Improved employer engagement with this agenda, understanding of the relevant evidence around work and health, and confidence and skills to support employees with health issues
- Improved pathways into and back into work, particularly for individuals affected by long-term health conditions
- Increased workforce retention and productivity, supported by better integration of health and employment approaches
- Adoption of more effective, coordinated service models across health, skills and employment systems

- Increased external investment in health-related innovation and service transformation activity, enabled by strengthened programme development
- Strengthened local economic activity linked to health and care systems.

Longer-term impacts include:

- Improved regional productivity through a healthier and more engaged workforce
- Reduced economic costs associated with inactivity and ill health
- Development of scalable, place-based approaches with relevance to wider regional and national policy.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

Business & Commercialisation Supplement (B&CS) is unlikely to be used in this area.

However this objective has a strong relationship with Local Growth activities, such as the development of a Local Growth Plan, which subject to other demands on this quite limited funding line, could be a focus for use of B&CS

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators

- Shape and put in place the partnership required across industry, health, patients and public groups, local authorities, HE and delivery partners to optimise the University's impact on this agenda (by April 2027)
- To secure external R&I funding for at least three related projects over the Statement Period, and ensure this adds value to local delivery and impact
- Support the direct engagement with over 100 businesses and other employers over the plan period, including at least 30 through student experiences on this agenda

- Ensure the societal impacts already achieved from recent research in this area are realised for the local area (KPIs tbd).

Monitoring will draw on a combination of:

Internal/local data (reviewed annually):

- Number and nature of active partnerships and collaborative activities
- Development of project and programme pipeline, including external funding secured
- Student placements and graduate engagement in health-related activity
- Qualitative evidence of influence on service design, delivery and practice.

External and system-level data (reviewed annually):

- HE-BCI indicators relating to knowledge exchange and partnerships
- Regional labour market data (e.g. economic inactivity, employment rates)
- Relevant health system indicators and clinical pathway data, including outcomes associated with established approaches and tools (e.g. MSK pathways and interventions such as StartBack).

Approach to evaluation:

- Use of case studies and partner, patient and public feedback to evidence how activity contributes to changes in practice and outcomes
- Periodic review of how HEIF-enabled activity is contributing to programme development and external investment
- Alignment with existing partner monitoring frameworks, particularly within NHS and local authority systems.

This approach ensures that monitoring remains focused, proportionate and aligned to existing data sources, while providing a clear view of how HEIF-supported activity contributes to economic

participation, service improvement and wider system impact.

Specific EDI Considerations

This activity has a strong equality and inclusion dimension, with a particular focus on supporting individuals and communities disproportionately affected by long-term health conditions and economic inactivity, ensuring that improvements in workforce participation are inclusive and accessible.

The development work in this area will include a review of existing evidence, both qualitative and quantitative to provide a baseline for Keele's input into the wider health, employment and social systems impacting on this area of policy. This work is likely to be funded via Policy QR. The approach to evaluation will be informed by that work.

Strategic Priority 3 | Energy & Environment

Objectives and Activities

Keele will support the development and deployment of integrated energy and environmental solutions to drive productivity, cost reduction and new economic activity in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and beyond. This builds on the extensive track record of Keele's campus-wide Smart Energy Network Demonstrator, which has attracted 3,000 visitors over the last 9 years, and supported a suite of projects to inform localised energy systems development.

It is also supported by the Midlands Innovation Energy Research Accelerator, which has led nationally significant projects such as Hydex, building knowledge and awareness of the benefits of hydrogen technologies.

This objective also captures emerging opportunities backed by high quality research in

biodiversity, natural capital and environmental solutions, with potential benefits across the economy, including everyday and foundational industries. This work is brought together through Keele's Institute for Sustainable Futures.

Keele's focus is in the application of research and innovation within demanding real-world environments, including industrial sites, public sector estates and land-based systems, where energy, environmental and land-use challenges are closely interconnected. Its role is to connect its strengths in energy systems, environmental science and biosciences with partner demand, working closely with strategic industry, public sector and delivery partners to enable the adoption and scaling of solutions.

This aligns with national priorities in net zero, environmental improvement and green growth, and positions Keele within a wider ecosystem of partners contributing to place-based transition and investment.

HEIF will continue to support a range of activities to accelerate technological development in sustainable energy systems, their adoption, and the commercialisation of related intellectual property.

Via the Institute for Sustainable Futures it will support a continued leadership role for the University in place-based activities encompassing wider environmental systems, strengthening partnerships with policymakers and communities

HEIF non-pay expenditure to be used selectively and at modest scale, prioritising activities that strengthen partnerships, support programme development and unlock external investment.

This will include:

- Continued support for activities led by Keele's Institute for Sustainable Futures
- Contribution to the Partnership Development team, supporting the development and management of

relationships with businesses, local authorities and strategic partners

- Selective support for academics, enabling researchers in energy systems, environmental science and biosciences to engage with partners and shape collaborative activity
- Seed-corn and bridging support, enabling early-stage collaboration, feasibility work and the development of proposals for externally funded programmes
- Convening and coordination activity, including targeted workshops bringing together partners
- Support for student placements and graduate projects, aligned to partner-led challenges and opportunities
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes, including local and national initiatives, where partnerships enable innovation to be embedded within delivery.

Outputs will include:

- A small number of focused pilot projects and demonstrators, developed with partners (more subject to available programme funding)
- Strengthened strategic partnerships, including with major delivery organisations and regional stakeholders
- A pipeline of externally funded programmes and investment opportunities
- Development of a small number of high value early stage commercialisation opportunities
- Targeted student and graduate engagement in applied settings
- Environmental leadership and professional development programmes.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective contributes to economic growth through the rapid collaborative development and testing of novel sustainable energy technologies and techniques, with potential for

commercialisation through both partnerships and academic spinouts. This spans all aspects of energy systems – generation, storage, management, use, finance and carbon sequestration, drawing on interdisciplinary insights across chemical and physical sciences, engineering, data science, life sciences, geoscience and accountancy.

The objective includes strong potential for UK-based professional services growth. For many commercial partners it also delivers significant cost reduction and productivity gains.

Expected outcomes include:

- Clear routes to market and associated investment in key innovations emerging from non-health related Life Sciences research
- Reduced energy and operating costs for businesses and public sector organisations
- Increased adoption of low-carbon and environmental solutions, enabled through partnership-led delivery
- Growth in low-carbon and environmental goods and services activity linked to energy systems innovation, biodiversity and natural capital markets
- Development of opportunities linked to net biodiversity gain (BNG), nature recovery and land-use change, with associated economic value
- Increased external investment in energy, environmental and place-based transition activity, supported by strong programme and partnership development
- Strengthening of regional supply chains, including SMEs engaging with larger delivery partners.

Longer-term impacts include:

- Improved productivity through more efficient and resilient systems
- Development of new economic capabilities and markets in energy and environmental sectors

- Positioning of the region as a credible location for investment and delivery of complex transition programmes.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

The business and commercialisation supplement has the potential to support:

- Development of commercial pathways for energy, environmental and bioscience-related innovation
- Strengthening links between research, innovation and investment opportunities, including through partnership with industry and delivery organisations
- Targeted support for venture development and scale-up readiness, where opportunities arise.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators (over Statement period):

- Support least six significant commercial research & development projects using the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator facilities
- Enable at least 170 private sector employees to benefit from related professional apprenticeships
- Deliver 'Leadership in Sustainability' Bootcamps to 30 learners
- Develop three Strategic Partnerships with key commercial partners, spanning research & innovation, skills and infrastructure;
- Significant engagement with at least 50 SMEs to support diffusion and adoption
- At least 300 visitors to SEND per annum.

Internal data (annual)

- Number of engagements with the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator,
- Number and nature of partnerships and collaborative activities with industry,

- Development of project, programme and investment pipeline Student placements and graduate engagement Evidence of deployment and application of technologies and techniques.

External and system-level data (annual)

- HE-BCI indicators relating to business and public engagement
- Evidence of activity and progression in low carbon, environmental and natural capital sectors, where available
- Partner-reported data on implementation and operational use of solutions
- Direct measurement of cost savings or financial impacts may be evidenced where available.

Partner and employer feedback

- Thematic network events and roundtables, enabling partners to share: o experience of adoption and implementation barriers and enablers emerging opportunities
- A partner survey every five years, capturing perceived value of engagement evidence of adoption and progression insights into business and operational impacts.

Cohort and trajectory analysis

Where appropriate, Keele will use tools such as TheDataCity to track:

- Growth and development of firms engaged in energy and environmental activity
- Evidence of sector development and clustering effects.

Approach to evaluation

Evaluation will emphasise case studies demonstrating adoption and application, as well as supporting learning on engagement method and industry priorities.

Specific EDI Considerations

Activity will also consider the distributional impacts of energy and environmental transitions, supporting approaches that improve affordability, resilience and access for households, communities and smaller businesses, and enabling broader participation in emerging low-carbon and natural capital opportunities

Strategic Priority 4 | Advanced Materials

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen the translation of research in advanced materials and manufacturing systems into economic value, supporting higher-value industrial activity, supply chain development and inward investment.

This builds on regional strengths in ceramics and manufacturing, alongside emerging capabilities in advanced materials and their applications. It also reflects national priorities in advanced manufacturing and materials innovation, including alignment with the Henry Royce Institute framework, which emphasises the importance of connecting research, infrastructure and industry to accelerate impact. Technologies areas such as sustainable energy and ceramics matrix composites will be among the key areas of focus, alongside biomaterials, which already benefit from a strong clinical application ecosystem.

Again the objective focuses on developing applied innovation pathways within demanding real-world environments, where materials innovation must be integrated into production systems, supply chains and commercial contexts.

Keele's role is to connect its research capability, skills, facilities and partnerships to support the development, testing and adoption of materials solutions, with a particular focus on strengthening pathways from research to application, commercialisation and scale.

A key element of this approach is the development of [Advanced Materials Technology & Engineering Centre](#) as a focal point for applied activity, supporting the creation of clearer and more effective pathways for impact and commercialisation.

Keele will also continue to work with local authorities, regional partners and UK Government to develop viable proposals for advanced ceramics and materials-related capital investment, building on strong existing capability and shared strategic ambition. While recent funding opportunities have not been secured, there remains a clear opportunity to align future proposals with emerging devolution arrangements and national priorities, ensuring that the region is well positioned to realise this longer-term vision.

HEIF will support activity to strengthen translation pathways, partnerships and programme development in advanced materials. We envisage Professional Services contributions across Partnership Development and Impact, Commercialisation, Skills and KE Leadership.

This will include:

- Partnership Development support for relationships with manufacturers, supply chains and strategic partners in materials and advanced manufacturing
- Targeted support for the development of AMTEC, including shaping its role in applied research, industry engagement and commercialisation pathways aligned to the Royce framework
- Specialist Skills and Partnership Development support to develop a Materials Science
- Apprenticeship Degree (subject to feasibility) the first in the UK to be led by a research-intensive provider.
- Seed-corn and bridging funding, supporting feasibility work, early-stage collaboration and the development of externally funded projects

- Convening and coordination activity, bringing together partners to identify opportunities and align research, industry need and investment
- Support for student placements, graduate projects and employer-led live briefs, particularly within engineering and materials-related programmes, enabling businesses to engage directly with student talent on real-world challenges
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes, including regional and national initiatives
- Continuing to progress the development of strategic proposals and partnerships relating to advanced ceramics and materials capability, including engagement with local authorities, national funders and industry partners.

HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, focusing on activities that strengthen partnerships, develop pipelines and unlock external funding.

Outputs will include:

- A small number of focused collaborative and pilot projects
- Strengthened partnerships with industry and supply chains
- Development of AMTEC as a platform for applied activity and engagement
- A pipeline of externally funded projects and commercialisation opportunities
- Increased student and graduate engagement in applied materials challenges.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through increased industrial innovation, productivity and investment.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased business engagement in materials innovation and applied R&D

- Improved productivity and competitiveness of manufacturing firms through adoption of new materials and processes
- Growth in higher-value manufacturing activity, including diversification into new markets
- Strengthening of supply chains, including increased SME participation in innovation activity
- Increased external investment in materials-related programmes, facilities and ventures, supported by clearer translation and commercialisation pathways
- Improved energy options for parts of the sector currently reliant on fossil fuels
- Development of opportunities for commercialisation of materials-related research and IP
- Increased direct industry engagement in biomaterials, alongside strong existing clinical impact pathways

Longer-term impacts include:

- Positioning the region as a location for advanced materials innovation and application, including a development focus for Keele Innovation District in this area
- Development of new capabilities and markets linked to advanced materials
- Contribution to national priorities in advanced manufacturing and industrial strategy
- Progression of investment-ready propositions in advanced ceramics and materials capability, aligned to regional and national priorities.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

The Business and Commercialisation supplement is likely to contribute to:

- Development of commercialisation pathways for materials-related research,

including progression of IP and venture development

- Strengthening links between research, industry and investment opportunities, including engagement with manufacturing and deep-tech investors
- Targeted support for venture creation and scale-up readiness, particularly where aligned to the Advanced Materials Technology and Engineering Centre and wider materials activity.

In addition, Keele's participation in Midlands Innovation partnerships is expected to provide complementary support, including access to regional commercialisation programmes, investment networks and ecosystem development aligned to advanced manufacturing and deep tech.

Monitoring Progress

- A refreshed, place-based multi-partner agreement to enable the realisation of an Advanced Ceramics Campus as part of Keele Innovation District (by year two)
- A flourishing materials innovation industrial network linked to the
- Advanced Materials Technologies & Engineering Centre, achieving interactions with at least 100 businesses over the plan period,
- Formal industry. partnering on at least three externally funded grant proposals
- At least two industrial doctoral projects developed and agreed over the plan period
- Introduction of a Materials Science apprenticeships programme for 2028/29 entry at the latest (subject to viability)

Monitoring will draw on:

Internal data (annual):

- Number and nature of industry partnerships and collaborative activities
- Development of project, programme and commercialisation pipeline, including external funding secured

- Student placements, graduate projects and engagement with employer-led live briefs
- Evidence of development and utilisation of AMTEC as a platform for applied activity.

External and system-level data (annual):

- HE-BCI indicators relating to business engagement and commercialisation
- Evidence of investment and activity in materials and manufacturing sectors where available
- Partner-provided data where appropriate.

Approach to evaluation:

- Case studies demonstrating how materials innovation is translated into application and commercial outcomes
- Review of how HEIF-enabled activity contributes to external funding, investment and commercialisation pathways
- Alignment with partner and programme-level monitoring frameworks.

This approach ensures monitoring remains focused and proportionate, while evidencing how HEIF supports industrial innovation, investment and economic growth.

Specific EDI Considerations

Equality, diversity and inclusion will be embedded within Keele's approach to Advanced Materials, recognising both the opportunities for innovation-led growth and the need to broaden participation in this traditionally less diverse sector.

This includes contributing to sector-wide efforts to increase the participation of women in engineering and materials-related disciplines, through curriculum development, employer engagement and the promotion of visible role models across academic and industry-facing activity. In parallel, the University will support

more inclusive pathways into materials and manufacturing careers, including through skills development, work-based learning and engagement with a diverse student and graduate population.

Keele's strengths in engineering and applied research linked to disability and assistive technologies also provide an opportunity to connect materials innovation with inclusive design and application, supporting the development of solutions that improve accessibility and quality of life. This ensures that materials research and innovation contribute not only to industrial capability, but also to wider social and economic benefit.

Strategic Priority 5 | Digital Economy

Objectives and Activities

Keele will support the development of the digital economy, strengthening both the growth of digital sectors and the adoption of digital technologies across the wider economy. This reflects the central role of digital capability in driving productivity, competitiveness and innovation, alongside the opportunity to grow specialist activity in areas such as data, AI and applied digital technologies. While digital sector activity is developing within the region, adoption across non-digital sectors remains uneven, limiting the full economic potential of digital innovation.

The objective focuses on applying digital capability within health, manufacturing, energy and public services, where digital tools need to be integrated into existing systems and practices. Keele's role is to connect its strengths in data, digital and interdisciplinary research with partner needs, enabling both sector growth and cross-sector adoption.

This aligns with national priorities in digital and AI, and with the need to ensure that

digital innovation contributes to broad-based economic growth, rather than being concentrated in a small number of sectors or locations.

A key element of this objective is the development of future-facing digital and AI capability within the graduate workforce. Keele is undertaking a major review of its educational approach to ensure that students develop holistic literacy, confidence and competence in the use of AI and digital technologies, aligned to employer expectations. This work will explore how digital and AI capability can be embedded within core curricula, rather than treated as an add-on, ensuring that graduates are equipped to operate effectively in data- and AI-enabled environments.

HEIF will support activity to strengthen translation pathways, partnerships and programme development in the digital economy, including:

- Contributions (through HEIF-funded staff time, including Partnership Development and Skills/Apprenticeship teams) to the development of employer-informed approaches to digital and AI capability within education and training provision
- Support for engagement with employers and partners to shape requirements for AI literacy and digital skills, and to test emerging approaches through placements, live briefs and collaborative activity
- Contributions from to the Partnership Development to support engagement events such as the annual Digital Revolution Day, and subsequent partnership development and bid development
- Seed-corn and bridging support, enabling early-stage collaboration, feasibility work and development of externally funded digital and data-driven projects
- Convening and coordination activity, bringing together partners across sectors to explore digital applications and shared challenges
- Support for student placements, graduate projects and employer-led digital briefs,

enabling organisations to test and adopt digital solutions

- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes, including those supporting digital adoption, AI and innovation
- Supporting employer engagement in curriculum development (eg Data Science).

HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, focusing on activities that enable programme development, strengthen partnerships and support adoption.

Outputs will include:

- A small number of targeted digital adoption and innovation projects
- Strengthened partnerships across digital, public sector and industry organisations
- A pipeline of externally funded digital projects and initiatives
- Increased student and graduate engagement in digital projects.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through productivity gains, sector development and improved competitiveness.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased adoption of digital and data-driven approaches across businesses and public service
- Measurable improvements in productivity and efficiency
- Growth in digital sector activity, including new and expanding firms
- Improved capability in data, AI and digital technologies across the regional economy
- Increased external investment in digital innovation and adoption programmes
- Strengthening of SME competitiveness, including through access to digital tools and expertise.

Longer-term impacts include:

- A more digitally capable and productive economy Growth of specialist digital activity alongside wider adoption Contribution to national priorities in AI, data and digital innovation
- Development of graduates with stronger digital and AI capability, aligned to employer needs
- Improved alignment between education, skills provision and emerging workforce requirements in AI-enabled environments.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

The business and commercialisation supplement has the potential to support:

- Development of commercial pathways for digital and data-driven innovation, including AI-enabled solutions
- Strengthening links between research, innovation and investment opportunities in digital sectors
- Targeted support for venture development and scale-up readiness, where opportunities arise.

In addition, Keele's participation in Midlands Innovation partnerships is expected to provide complementary support, including access to regional digital innovation and commercialisation initiatives.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators:

- Enable at around 100 employees in the Private Sector to benefit from Data Scientist Apprenticeships over the plan period
- Provide AI Leadership Apprenticeships to at least 20 employees from the Private Sector, delivering nationally as well as supporting local cohorts
- Place at least 20 students over then plan period in digital economy businesses with growth potential.

- Achieve at least 100 business interactions through the Institute for Digital Futures and related Employer forums.

Monitoring will draw on:

Internal data (annual):

- Number and nature of digital partnerships and collaborative activities
- Development of project and programme pipeline, including external funding secured
- Student placements, graduate projects and employer-led digital engagement
- Qualitative evidence of digital adoption and application.

External and system-level data (annual):

- HE-BCI indicators relating to business engagement
- Evidence of digital adoption and sector growth where available
- Partner-provided data where appropriate.

Approach to evaluation:

- Case studies demonstrating productivity improvements and adoption of digital solutions
- Review of how HEIF-enabled activity contributes to externally funded programmes and investment
- Alignment with partner and programme monitoring frameworks
- This approach ensures monitoring is focused and proportionate, while evidencing how HEIF supports productivity growth, sector development and digital adoption.

Specific EDI Considerations

Equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to Keele's approach to the Digital Economy, particularly in ensuring that digital innovation and adoption support broad-based economic participation and do not reinforce existing inequalities.

This includes addressing well-established challenges in the digital sector, including underrepresentation in digital roles and disparities in access to digital skills and opportunities. Keele will work with partners to support more inclusive pathways into digital careers, including through skills development, work-based learning and employer engagement, with a particular focus on widening participation in higher-level digital skills.

The University will also support businesses and organisations to adopt digital technologies in ways that are inclusive, responsible and trustworthy, combining skills development with increased awareness of issues such as bias in AI systems, data ethics and equitable access to digital tools and services. This approach recognises that trust, inclusion and accessibility are essential to enabling effective digital adoption and ensuring that innovation delivers sustained economic impact across the wider economy.

Strategic Priority 6 | Cultural Regeneration

Objectives and Activities

Keele will support cultural regeneration and creative communities as a driver of economic vitality, place attractiveness and inclusive growth in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

This reflects the strong and growing emphasis placed by local authorities on cultural offer, urban vibrancy and identity, alongside initiatives such as Screen Staffordshire and wider investment in the creative and cultural economy. It also reflects the distinctive strength of the area in delivering inclusive, community-engaged cultural activity, supported by a collaborative ecosystem of organisations and practitioners.

The objective focuses on three interconnected areas:

- Audience-focused cultural regeneration, strengthening cultural participation, town centre vitality and place attractiveness
- Arts-based research and community engagement, enabling communities to shape narratives, services and policy
- Creative industries development, supporting emerging activity and entrepreneurial growth.

Keele's role is to connect its academic strengths, cultural assets and partnerships to support place-based cultural and economic development, working with key partners and contributing to a distinctive, inclusive cultural ecosystem.

HEIF will support enabling and catalytic activity, focused on partnership development, programme design and community engagement, leveraging in significant additional internal and external contributions from both the academic community and cultural organisations.

Activities include:

- Support for activity led through ArtsKeele, including partnership development with Local Authorities and Cultural Organisations, programme design and contribution to wider cultural initiatives
- Cultural and arts-based activities in Keele in Town, in line with Newcastle-under-Lyme's focus on 'University Town' regeneration
- Contributions to Stoke Creates, the Region's cultural compact.
- Collaboration with key partners such as New Vic Theatre, Appetite and ReStoke to support cultural regeneration and audience development
- Support for arts-based research and engagement, including activity delivered through CoCreate, enabling collaboration with communities and external partners
- Seed-corn and bridging support, enabling development of new projects, partnerships and externally funded programmes

- Support for student placements, graduate projects and creative briefs, including activity linked to current and new creative programmes (games design, media, music, creative writing and graphic design)
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded cultural and regeneration programmes, including those supported by Arts Council England and local authorities.

HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, focusing on partnership development, programme design and unlocking external funding.

Outputs will include:

- A small number of collaborative cultural and community-based projects
- Strengthened partnerships across cultural, community and public sector organisations
- A pipeline of externally funded cultural and regeneration activities
- Increased student and graduate engagement in creative and cultural projects.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through enhanced place attractiveness, increased cultural activity and support for creative enterprise.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased cultural participation and audience engagement, contributing to town centre vitality and local economic activity, including strong participation role from students
- Strengthened cultural offer, supporting the area's ability to attract and retain talent, visitors and investment
- Growth in cultural and creative sector activity, including support for emerging

creative businesses and entrepreneurial activity

- Contributions to successful externally funded programmes, including Arts Council-supported activity
- Enhanced role of arts and culture in community engagement and service design, supporting more effective and inclusive approaches.

Longer-term impacts include:

- A more vibrant and attractive place, supporting wider economic development
- Strengthened creative and cultural ecosystem, including pathways into employment and enterprise
- Contribution to a distinctive model of inclusive cultural regeneration, with relevance beyond the region.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

Business & Commercialisation Supplement will not play a central role in this objective, but could at points enable the:

- Development of commercial and entrepreneurial activity within the creative industries, including digital media, games design related ventures
- Strengthening of links between creative practice, research and market opportunities.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators

- Public Engagement across all platforms with at least 40,000 participants and audience members each year
- At least three significant partnership-based funding proposals in this area involving Keele academics
- Support for least 10 urban centre activities each year, including two significant events in North Staffordshire
- At least five students engaged in activities with external partners such as Arts

Council National Portfolio Holders each year

- Exposure to entrepreneurial activities and learning available to all students on creative. practice programmes through appropriate placements and projects
- Year-on-year growth in student and graduate entrepreneurship in the creative industries.

Monitoring will draw on:

- Internal data (annual): Number and nature of cultural partnerships and collaborative activities
- Development of project and programme pipeline, including external funding secured
- Student and graduate engagement in cultural and creative activity and entrepreneurship
- Qualitative evidence of audience engagement, community impact and programme delivery.

External and system-level data (annual):

- HE-BCI indicators relating to public and community engagement
- Data relating to cultural participation and programme reach, where available through partners
- Evidence from Arts Council and partner reporting frameworks Approach to evaluation:
- Case studies demonstrating contribution to cultural regeneration, community engagement and economic activity
- Review of how HEIF-enabled activity contributes to externally funded programmes and partnerships Alignment with partner monitoring frameworks.

Activity in this area is characterised by inclusive, community-engaged approaches, developed in partnership with organisations such as Appetite, New Vic Theatre and ReStoke, co-ordinated and enabled through Stoke Creates. Through these partnerships, Keele contributes to programmes that widen access to cultural participation and support underrepresented communities to engage with and shape cultural activity.

Examples include:

- Collaboration with Appetite to enable children and young people from refugee communities to access ArtsKeele performances and cultural experiences
- Work with the New Vic on ageing and creativity, supporting participation and wellbeing among older communities
- Support for artists from diverse backgrounds to develop and showcase their work, including through initiatives linked to Three Counties and wider regional platforms
- Engagement with former mining communities and other underserved groups, using arts-based approaches to enable storytelling, representation and influence “...supporting pathways into creative education, employment and enterprise for individuals from underrepresented communities.”

Through CoCreate and related activity, arts-based research provides a mechanism for communities to inform services, policy and representation, ensuring that cultural activity contributes to more inclusive and responsive systems.

Collectively, this work supports both social inclusion and economic participation, by widening access to cultural opportunity, supporting creative talent development, and strengthening the role of culture in inclusive growth.

Specific EDI Considerations

Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to Keele’s approach to cultural regeneration, reflecting both institutional priorities and the distinctive strengths of the local cultural ecosystem.

Strategic Priority 7 | Skills for Growth

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen the alignment between skills provision, research capability and employer demand, supporting productivity growth and enabling participation in emerging economic opportunities.

This builds on analysis undertaken through the Innovation Framework, which has identified skills needs and gaps in provision across key innovation clusters, including materials, energy, health and digital. This analysis highlights challenges at multiple levels, including shortages in higher-level technical and professional skills, as well as gaps in progression pathways and employer engagement. It has informed wider local skills planning, including contributions to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

The objective places particular emphasis on higher-level skills (Levels 7–8) reflecting the importance of advanced technical, professional and research capability in driving innovation-led growth. Keele's role is to work with employers, sector groups and partners to develop responsive, applied and accessible provision, ensuring that skills systems support both economic growth and inclusive participation.

This includes strengthening pathways into and through higher education, expanding access in underserved areas, and ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills required to operate in digitally enabled and innovation-driven environments.

HEIF support will be focused on partnership development, programme design, alignment of provision with employer need and place-based coordination.

This will be enabled through a multi-disciplinary professional services employer engagement team of 6.0 FTE working across employer engagement

with curriculum development, advisory boards architecture, business development for apprenticeships and professional learning, student placements and projects, pathway co-ordination, and local, Regional and national skills policy.

Many of the team work across into innovation and Science Park activity, enabling holistic conversations about employer/partner needs. Use of non-pay includes selective skills analysis by key academics working in this area.

This also includes:

- Support for development of modular and professional education, including provision in digital and deep-tech specialisms
- Development of engineering and materials-related apprenticeship pathways, aligned to regional capability and employer demand
- Development and delivery of short form professional learning such as Help to Grow and DfE Bootcamps and the potential development of new innovation leadership provision
- Expansion of provision in areas such as Telford and Shropshire, improving access to higher-level skills and professional development
- Support for student employability and work-based learning, including Keele's commitment to providing all students with a guaranteed work-based learning opportunity, often in partnership with local employers.
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded skills and workforce programmes, including local and national initiatives.

HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, supporting programme development, employer engagement and the creation of new provision.

Outputs are likely to include:

- Development of new or enhanced professional, modular and apprenticeship provision
- Strengthened partnerships with employers and sector groups
- Increased student engagement in work-based learning and applied projects
- A pipeline of externally funded skills and workforce programmes.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through improved workforce capability, productivity and access to opportunity.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased supply of higher-level skills (Levels 6–8) aligned to priority sectors and innovation clusters
- Improved alignment between skills provision and employer demand, particularly in areas linked to research and innovation.
- Enhanced graduate employability, including stronger pathways into local employment
- Increased participation in higher-level education and professional development, including in underserved area
- Reduced skills gaps constraining business growth and innovation
- Strengthened employer engagement in co-designed skills provision.

Longer-term impacts include:

- A more skilled and adaptable workforce, supporting productivity and competitiveness
- Improved retention of talent within the regional economy
- Greater participation in innovation-led growth across a wider range of individuals and communities
- Development of a more responsive and integrated skills system, aligned to economic and industrial priorities.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

Business & Commercialisation Supplement is not currently a source of funding for this is being used in activity, but that may change if commercialisation opportunities emerge in this area.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance indicators

- Clear professional pathways into higher education across all shortage occupations of relevance to the local economy, Keele playing a full role in delivery alongside other providers
- Employer and Learner satisfaction exceeding national benchmarks across all apprenticeships and professional learning
- Increase in locally retained graduates' access to structured progression pathways with their employer (current baseline tbc).

Monitoring will draw on:

Internal data (annual):

- Number and nature of employer and sector group partnerships
- Development of skills programmes and provision, including modular and apprenticeship pathways
- Student participation in work-based learning, employability and entrepreneurship activity
- Evidence of graduate outcomes and progression.

External and system-level data (annual):

- HE-BCI indicators relating to skills and workforce engagement Graduate outcomes and labour market data
- Evidence from LSIP and partner reporting frameworks.

Approach to evaluation:

- Case studies demonstrating how provision supports employer needs and economic outcomes
- Alignment with partner and regional monitoring frameworks.

This approach ensures monitoring is focused and proportionate, while evidencing how HEIF supports skills development, employability and economic growth.

Specific EDI Considerations

This objective places a strong emphasis on inclusive access to higher-level skills and progression pathways, including expanding opportunities in underserved areas and supporting participation among groups currently underrepresented in higher-level education and professional development.

Strategic Priority 8 | Keele Innovation District

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen the role of its Science & Innovation Park and proposed Keele Innovation District as a platform for innovation-led growth, supporting business development, inward investment and cluster formation.

The objective focuses on two linked priorities:

- Maximising the value of existing assets, including strengthening relationships with tenants, supporting innovation activity and rebuilding a programme of engagement
- Developing the next phase of the Innovation District, including investment readiness, partnership development and alignment with regional growth and devolution opportunities.

Already home to over 60 high value businesses employing over 1,000 people, Keele's Science & Innovation Park is currently operating at very high levels of occupancy, constraining the growth of

both existing companies and opportunities for targeted attraction of tenants. The University has been working for some years with Local Authorities to plan its expansion, Local Plan approval for an extension to deliver over £1m square feet of new space in June this year

That finally gives us the green light to realise the vision for a new mixed use Innovation District for the North Staffordshire urban conurbation. Keele's role is to connect its research capability, partnerships and convening power to support cluster development, business growth and investment, while working with public and private partners to address long-term constraints, including viability and infrastructure.

HEIF will support development activities with Local Authorities, the Office for Investment and Midlands Innovation Universities to progress the business case for Keele Innovation-District. HEIF will fund KE Leadership time with a focus on realising the Innovation District. This comes with significant professional services match across the VCO, Finance and Estates.

Workstreams include:

- Further development of the vision and masterplan
- An inward investment proposition aligned to R&D strengths
- Continued Market Analysis and pipeline development
- The development of a Masterplan aligned to this Infrastructure planning, aligned to the proposed industrial base and the continued development of the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator
- Viability assessments and full business case development.

Alongside this the Science and Innovation Park will benefit from HEIF-funded activities that include:

- Contributions from the Partnership Development Team to support

- relationships with existing tenants, prospective occupiers and strategic partners,
- Targeted support for tenant engagement and development, including identifying opportunities for incubation, collaboration, innovation and growth.
- A convening function, working across the institution and with partners to build a consistent and high-quality programme of innovation-focused activity on the Park, including the bi-annual Breaking the Mould business awards
- Academic KE time, enabling engagement with businesses on the Science Park and alignment of activity with research strengths and priority clusters
- Co-funding for Local Growth and Skills activities using Science & Innovation Park Facilities.

Outputs will include:

- A strengthened and more active innovation community within the Science Park
- Delivery of a programme of innovation events and engagement activity
- Enhanced relationships with existing tenants and partners
- A pipeline of inward investment opportunities and development propositions.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through business development, cluster formation and inward investment.

Expected outcomes include:

- A pipeline of inward investment opportunities and development propositions
- Successful attraction of high-value tenants aligned to priority sector

- Progression of development opportunities, including expansion projects and new facilities
- Increased external investment in innovation infrastructure and activity, supported by stronger propositions
- Increased innovation activity and collaboration among tenants and partners
- Strengthened alignment between business activity and research strengths supporting cluster development

Longer-term impacts include:

- Development of the Innovation District as a recognised location for innovation-led business activity
- Growth in high-value employment and enterprise activity
- Strengthened regional positioning for investment and economic development

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

Whilst this area is not a primary focus for Business and Commercialisation Supplement (which is very limited relative to HEIF), the Science & Innovation Park has been earmarked as a location for newly established and potential academic-led enterprises in development. These have already benefited from Keele's participation in Midlands Innovation partnerships which will continue to provide complementary support, including access to regional investment networks and commercialisation initiatives.

Subject to other demands and complementary funding sources, B&CS may also support the incubation of businesses on the park, including academic and student start-ups and spinouts.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators

- Confirmed development of three existing development plots within the next three years
- Evidenced business growth consistently above reference levels in the local area by year 5.
- Strategic Partnerships in place for at least half of the large businesses on the Park encompassing R&D, skills and student experience
- Student placements on the Science & Innovation Park, already well embedded, increasing by 50% over the plan period
- Increased alignment of end-user enquiries with cluster development and Keele research strengths.

Monitoring and evaluation will focus on:

- Understanding progress around business growth, collaboration and innovation;
- Evidence of investment progression and cluster development; and Alignment with local and
- Regional R&D Strengths Milestones achieved in the development.

Progress will primarily be monitored through an annual review cycle, aligned both to HE-BCI and institutional planning cycles.

Internal data (annual)

- Pipeline and occupancy profile, including alignment with priority sectors
- Level and nature of tenant and partner engagement with the University (via Keele's business database
- Attendance and feedback data for innovation-related events and activity, including events and programmes
- Development of investment and development pipeline, including inward investment opportunities.

External and system-level data (annual)

- HE-BCI data relating to engagement
- Evidence of business growth and activity within the Science Park, where available

Partner and tenant feedback

A light-touch, structured approach will be adopted, including:

- Feedback gathered through regular engagement and network events
- Annual tenant and partner survey, capturing: value of location and engagement, collaboration and innovation activity future needs and opportunities.

Cohort and trajectory analysis

Tools such as TheDataCity will be used to track:

- Growth, innovation and investment trajectories of businesses on the Park
- Evidence of cluster development and sector alignment.

Periodic assessment

- A periodic economic impact assessment (approximately every five years).

Specific EDI Considerations

The ongoing and future development of the Science & Innovation Park includes a wide-range of EDI considerations, ranging from stakeholder engagement in building design and campus accessibility, marketing and business development approaches, incubation and eco-system development, the EDI profile of the University's presence. We are continuing to learn and develop our approaches in these areas. Activity will also support inclusive access to innovation opportunities, including engagement with a diverse range of businesses and ensuring that pathways into high-value sectors are accessible to a broad range of individuals and communities.

Strategic Priority 9 | Commercialising Research Insights

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen its ability to translate research into commercial and economic value, through a focused, partnership-led and capability-driven approach to commercialisation.

The University fully supports the recommendations of the UK Government's Spinout Review, including the Impact First approach, which prioritises the creation of long-term economic and societal value over short-term or volume-driven metrics. Keele's approach reflects this by focusing on the quality, viability and impact of opportunities, rather than the number of spinouts generated.

Keele will strengthen its ability to translate research into commercial and economic value, through a focused, partnership-led and capability-driven approach to commercialisation.

The University fully supports the recommendations of the UK Government's Spinout Review, including the Impact First approach, which prioritises the creation of long-term economic and societal value over short-term or volume-driven metrics. Keele's approach reflects this by focusing on the quality, viability and impact of opportunities, rather than the number of spinouts generated.

Historically, commercialisation activity at Keele has been relatively limited, reflecting the University's disciplinary profile and research base. However, this is now changing. There is a growing pipeline of credible commercial opportunities, particularly in areas such as life sciences, pharmacy and bioengineering, alongside emerging capability linked to new engineering programmes.

These opportunities are expected to progress through a range of routes to market, including:

- Licensing of intellectual property, particularly where research aligns with established industry demand
- Partnership-based routes, working with businesses already active in relevant markets
- A small number of academic-led ventures, where opportunities demonstrate clear potential and are supported by appropriate capability and investment pathways.

This approach aligns with the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and innovation priorities, including the focus on:

- Deep technology and IP-rich innovation
- Life sciences and health innovation
- Advanced manufacturing and engineering capability
- Strengthening the translation of research into scalable, investable opportunities across Regions.

Keele's model reflects this direction by focusing on professionalisation, partnership and progression, and by aligning commercialisation pathways to areas of research strength and market demand.

HEIF will support enabling and capacity-building activity, focused on strengthening capability and improving progression pathways.

This will include:

- Contributions to supporting identification and development of commercial opportunities across Faculties
- Academic KE time, enabling researchers to engage in commercialisation activity, including opportunity development, partnership building and early-stage validation
- Development of a more structured, transparent and timely commercialisation support environment, including:
 - A specific focus on strengthening Keele's ability to identify and assess genuinely strong commercial opportunities, including building

internal capability, confidence and consistency in decision-making

- Support for academics to engage in commercialisation, including development of founder capability, confidence and incentives
- Seed-corn and bridging support, enabling feasibility work, early-stage validation and preparation for external funding or investment
- Support for skills development, including training, mentoring and peer learning in commercialisation, entrepreneurship and industry engagement
- Ensuring that IP and commercialisation arrangements are clear, transparent and supportive of successful translation, in line with Spinout Review principles
- Contributions (through staff time) to externally funded commercialisation programmes, including those aligned to national innovation priorities.

Integration with Midlands Innovation

Keele's approach is to develop a complementary local commercialisation capability, aligned to and integrated with Midlands Innovation's regional offer.

Locally, activity will focus on:

Early-stage opportunity identification

- Academic engagement and Ensuring that IP and commercialisation arrangements are clear, transparent and supportive of successful translation, in line with Spinout Review principles development
- Initial validation and pathway definition

Opportunities will then be progressed through Midlands Innovation programmes, including initiatives such as Forging Ahead, which provide structured support for:

- Founder and leadership development proof of concept and early validation investment readiness and venture

development access to regional and national capital (e.g. Midlands Mindforge)

Outputs would include

- A growing pipeline of commercial opportunities, including licensing, partnerships and ventures
- Increased academic engagement in commercialisation activity and skills development
- Strengthened links to regional and national commercialisation ecosystems
- Development of a more coherent, accessible and professional support offer.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through increased commercialisation, innovation activity and investment.

Expected outcomes include:

- Increased progression of research towards commercial application, particularly through licensing and partnership routes
- Growth in collaborative innovation activity with industry, supporting product and service development
- Development of a small number of high-quality academic-led ventures, where appropriate
- Increased external investment in research-driven innovation activity
- Strengthening of Keele's role within a regional and national commercialisation ecosystem.

The objective will also contribute to national priorities in innovation-led growth and industrial strategy, including the development of scalable, IP-rich opportunities aligned to priority sectors.

Longer-term impacts include:

- Increased generation of economic value from research
- Enhanced institutional capability to identify, assess and progress high-quality opportunities
- Contribution to the development of a more investable and coordinated regional innovation ecosystem.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

Business and Commercialisation

Supplement will be central to this objective, supporting:

- Development of commercialisation capability and infrastructure, including access to expertise and support mechanisms
- Progression of selected high-potential opportunities, including early-stage validation and preparation for investment
- Strengthening links to regional investment and commercialisation ecosystems.

This will be complemented by Keele's participation in Midlands Innovation partnerships, including:

- Regional commercialisation capacity-building initiatives (e.g. Forging Ahead)
- Access to investment platforms such as Midlands Mindforge
- Integration into a wider ecosystem of investors, accelerators and innovation partners.

This combined approach enables Keele to focus on building internal capability and pipeline, while leveraging regional scale, expertise and access to capital.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators

- Creation of a University-wide commercialisation fund, partially supported through donor contributions,

with a focus on funding 'Valley of Death' activities to support societal and commercial impact

- Establishment of a Community of Practice in commercialisation to enable peer to peer support and learning
- Progression to TRL6 of at least two high value early stage opportunities, and investment secured for at least one mid stage opportunity.

Progress will be monitored through a proportionate, annual review cycle, aligned to HE-BCI and institutional processes, with a focus on pipeline development, progression and outcomes.

Internal data (annual)

- Number and nature of commercial opportunities identified and progressed
- Development of pipeline, including licensing, partnerships and ventures
- Academic engagement in commercialisation activity and training
- External funding secured for commercialisation and innovation activity

External and system-level data (annual)

- HE-BCI indicators relating to commercialisation (e.g. IP, licensing, spinouts)
- Evidence of investment and activity linked to commercialisation pathways
- Data from regional ecosystem platforms where available.

Partner and stakeholder feedback

A light-touch, structured approach will be adopted, including:

- Feedback from partners and investors engaged in commercialisation activity
- Insights from Midlands Innovation programmes and networks.

Cohort and trajectory analysis

Where appropriate, tools such as TheDataCity will be used to track:

- Development and growth of businesses linked to Keele research activity
- Evidence of longer-term commercial and economic outcomes.

Periodic assessment

A periodic economic impact assessment (approximately every five years) will provide a deeper view of:

- Contribution to commercialisation, investment and economic value
- Effectiveness of the University's approach to developing and supporting opportunities.

Approach to evaluation

Evaluation will emphasise:

- Case studies demonstrating progression from research to commercial outcome
- Evidence of pipeline development, investment readiness and leverage
Alignment with regional and national commercialisation frameworks.

Specific EDI Considerations

Equality, diversity and inclusion will be an important consideration within this objective. Keele will work with Midlands Innovation partners to better understand the EDI outcomes of regional commercialisation activity, including participation in programmes, access to support and progression through commercialisation pathways.

This will inform a shared approach to identifying and addressing barriers to participation, supporting a more inclusive pipeline of researchers, founders and partners engaging in commercialisation activity.

Locally, Keele has already taken steps to address structural barriers to participation in commercial and consultancy activity. This includes support for

initiatives such as the Staffordshire Black Business Network, established through research into the value of inclusive business networks, which provides a platform for engagement, visibility and opportunity for underrepresented entrepreneurs and professionals.

The University has also introduced a revised approach to consultancy and contract research, which strengthens recognition and reward for collaborative, externally engaged academic activity, and is designed to broaden participation in commercial engagement. This includes incentivising early-career and female academics to engage in consultancy and commercial projects, alongside changes to reduce reliance on traditional models of private consultancy. In addition, institutional recognition mechanisms such as the Breaking the Mould awards now explicitly recognise academic engagement with business and commercial activity, supporting greater visibility and recognition of diverse role models in this space.

Together, these activities will support a more inclusive and representative approach to commercialisation, ensuring that capability development, engagement opportunities and pathways to impact are accessible to a broader and more diverse academic community.

Strategic Priority 10 | Strengthening the Institutional Environment

Objectives and Activities

Keele will strengthen its institutional environment to support high-quality, integrated and impactful knowledge exchange, aligned to the University's Keele Research and Innovation Strategy 2025–29 and informed by the development of the Innovation Framework.

Building on the foundations established through the Knowledge Exchange Concordat, the University is evolving towards a more integrated,

system-level model, bringing together research and innovation, skills and education, and infrastructure and place-based development.

A key priority is to embed the Innovation Framework as the organising model for external engagement and delivery, enabling the University to operate more effectively within complex, place-based innovation systems and to align activity with regional economic priorities. HEIF will support enabling and coordination activity, focused on strengthening institutional capability, improving alignment and supporting delivery across the University's research & innovation system.

This will include:

- Continued development of the Partnership Development function, enabling more consistent and strategic engagement with external partners
- Supporting academic engagement with cluster activity, programme development and partnership building
- Support for training and capability development, including:
 - working with business and external partners commercialisation and consultancy activity
 - interdisciplinary and applied research approaches
 - working with communities
- Strengthening the integration of skills, apprenticeships and professional education within the wider KE and innovation system
- Supporting the embedding of the Innovation Framework, including:
 - convening cluster-based activity aligned to priority sectors (e.g. materials, digital, life sciences, energy and environment)
 - working with partners, including the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce and local authorities, to bring together businesses, sector bodies and academic expertise o

- supporting these clusters through HEIF-funded Partnership. Development Managers, who will facilitate engagement and help translate opportunities into programmes and partnerships
- Supporting a more coordinated approach to programme and proposition development, including alignment across research, skills and infrastructure
- Contribution (through staff time) to externally funded programmes and partnership activity, including those linked to regional growth and devolution
- HEIF non-pay expenditure will be used selectively, supporting coordination, capability development and programme design.

Outputs

- Strengthened and more consistent institutional capability for knowledge exchange
- Development of cluster-based engagement structures and activity
- Increased alignment between research, skills and place-based initiatives
- A more coordinated pipeline of programmes, partnerships and investment propositions.

Outcomes and Impacts

This objective will contribute to economic growth through more effective, coordinated and scalable delivery of knowledge exchange and innovation activity.

Expected outcomes include:

- Improved alignment between University capability and regional economic
- Increased effectiveness of external engagement and partnership
- Enhanced ability to develop and deliver integrated programmes spanning research, skills and infrastructure

- Strengthened role of the University within place-based innovation and economic development systems
- Increased external investment supported by more coherent and investable propositions knowledge exchange and innovation activity.

Expected outcomes include:

- Improved alignment between University capability and regional economic
- Increased effectiveness of external engagement and partnership
- Enhanced ability to develop and deliver integrated programmes spanning research, skills and infrastructure
- Strengthened role of the University within place-based innovation and economic development systems
- Increased external investment supported by more coherent and investable propositions.

Longer-term impacts include:

- Development of a more integrated and responsive institutional model, capable of supporting innovation-led growth
- Improved contribution to regional productivity, sector development and inclusive growth
- Enhanced institutional reputation as a strategic partner in place-based innovation systems.

Business & Commercialisation Supplement

The business and commercialisation will play a selective role in this objective, supporting commercialisation as a specific area of institutional capability. However, activity supported through this objective will enable more effective use of the supplement in other areas, by strengthening the pipeline of opportunities, partnerships and commercialisation pathways.

Monitoring Progress

Key Performance Indicators:

- Establishment of place-based cluster groups in collaboration with industry partners and local authorities (2026), achieving high levels of industry engagement (by 2029)
- Establishment of shadow strategic oversight arrangements linked to the Strategic Mayoral Combined Authority (2027).

Monitoring will focus on the delivery of key milestones associated with the development of a more integrated approach:

- Progression of discussions with key partners, on cluster-based innovation governance arrangements
- Establishment of agreed approaches to cluster convening, including academic and partner participation
- Development of transition arrangements towards a more integrated model of delivery and coordination
- Progress towards implementation of revised governance and coordination structures, where appropriate.

Indicative milestones include:

- Agreement in principle on cluster-based governance approaches by December 2026
- Establishment of transition arrangements by April 2027.

Activity and engagement (light-touch monitoring)

Alongside milestone tracking, Keele will maintain a light-touch view of activity and engagement, including:

- Academic participation in training, networks and collaborative activity
- Development of projects and programmes involving external partners
- Engagement within cluster-based activity and convening structures.

This will be used to provide a directional understanding of progress, rather than detailed quantitative reporting.

Partner feedback

A light-touch feedback approach will be adopted, drawing on:

- Insights from cluster groups, network activity and partner discussions
- Feedback from key stakeholders on: effectiveness of coordination quality of engagement emerging opportunities and challenges.

This will provide a qualitative view of how the institutional environment is evolving.

Outputs and early indicators

- Monitoring will also consider early indicators of progress, including:
- Development of new or strengthened partnerships
- Emergence of projects and programmes seeded through cluster activity
- Evidence of improved alignment between research, skills and external engagement activity.

Periodic review

Progress will be reviewed on an annual basis, with a focus on:

- Delivery against key milestones
- Effectiveness of the emerging model
- Implications for future development.

Specific EDI Considerations

Equality, diversity and inclusion will be embedded within the development of the University's institutional environment for knowledge exchange, ensuring that emerging approaches to innovation, engagement and governance are inclusive by design.

As the Innovation Framework is implemented, particular attention will be given to ensuring that diverse voices are represented within cluster-based activity and governance arrangements, including participation from a wider range of academics, businesses and partners than may traditionally be engaged in innovation-led activity.

This includes recognising that some priority sectors may be relatively monocultural in composition, and taking steps to broaden participation over time, including through:

- Active engagement with underrepresented groups within relevant sectors
- Ensuring that cluster activity is open, accessible and welcoming to new participants
- Working with partners to identify and address barriers to engagement.

The University will also seek to strengthen the visibility of diverse role models within innovation and commercial activity, including through:

- Recognition and celebration of a wider range of academic and business engagement
- Ensuring that events, networks and communications reflect a diversity of participants and experiences.

In addition, practical considerations will be addressed to support inclusive participation, including:

- Location and accessibility of events and engagement activity
- Timing and format, to enable participation from those with different roles and responsibilities
- Use of a range of engagement approaches, recognising that not all participants will engage in the same ways.

These measures will support the development of a more inclusive and representative innovation ecosystem, ensuring that opportunities to

engage, contribute and benefit are accessible to a broader range of individuals and organisations.