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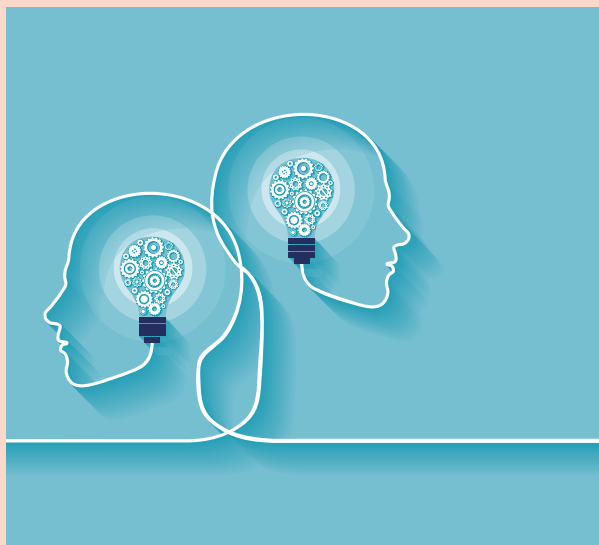
UK ACADEMIC SALON 2022 REPORT

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS
AND DISCUSSIONS



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Photos: Huawei, iStock

Introduction

Bringing together leaders from business and higher education, the 2022 UK Academic Salon hosted a series of discussions that unpacked recent developments in UK research and addressed the most urgent challenges facing the innovation ecosystem. Subjects for debate included trade regulations and the UK's post-Brexit innovation landscape, entrepreneurship as a driver of regional prosperity, and how the government's levelling-up agenda could be translated from white paper to practice.

The importance of collaboration was a recurring theme. Investment had a role to play but collaboration was crucial to tackling

systemic economic and societal issues. Working together, universities could attract industry partners with knowledge and talent.

It was vital for the higher education sector, business and government to form deeper partnerships to drive innovation. Jeremy Thompson, executive vice-president of Huawei UK, noted that all in attendance shared similar goals and challenges – it made sense to face these challenges together.

“Collaboration not only helps to support the wider UK economy but creates an open market for science and technology to help the UK maintain its leading status in years to come,” Thompson said.

Levelling up: Harnessing innovation districts to drive regional growth

THE PANEL

John Gill, editor, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)

Dame Nancy Rothwell, president and vice-chancellor, University of Manchester

Universities can leverage the power of partnerships with business, government and fellow higher education institutions to tackle regional inequality and increase social impact. With the levelling-up agenda steering government policy, Dame Nancy Rothwell, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Manchester, said universities should seize the moment. “We have a unique opportunity to use innovation to drive prosperity, but also to drive the role of universities as anchor institutions in their regions,” she said.

Dame Nancy said universities must use their powers of convening to bring together local authorities and industry, and for seeking out like-minded universities for collaborations that could play a pivotal role in stimulating economic growth – particularly those located in post-industrial cities across the north of England. There was no question that the UK had a strong research knowledge base, she said. What was needed now was impact.

In July 2021, seizing on the government's levelling-up agenda and plan for growth



Universities should seize the moment

Dame Nancy Rothwell

in the north of England, the universities of Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds formed an independent investment company, Northern Gritstone, to commercialise university start-ups and spin-outs. Such models served as an example of how universities could find common cause, pooling resources to improve economic growth.

Dame Nancy said innovation districts such as ID Manchester – developed in partnership with the University of Manchester and Bruntwood SciTech – supported entrepreneurship by offering a location for start-ups to develop, and a pool of graduate talent to draw from. “We did this for the long-term benefits to the university of places for collaboration, to jointly develop ideas, opportunities for students to have internships, to have graduate employment,” said Dame Nancy.

What will it take to unlock economic and social transformation in the North?

THE PANEL

John Gill, editor, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)

Henri Murison, director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership

The north of England's universities will be crucial if the UK government's levelling-up agenda is to successfully boost regional economic growth. Henri Murison, director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, said the region had several world-class institutions whose research strength would be essential to attracting big corporates with transformative research and development budgets. "These institutions have always been embedded in places and always played a significant role in driving their local economies," Murison said. "We are rediscovering the very significant role that the north's strength in universities could play in unlocking economic growth. You need dynamism in the economy and fast-growing businesses. Universities and our translation institutions have a key role in that and also in addressing the wider needs of the northern economy."

Murison said the UK had often struggled to connect its higher education sector with the wider economy. There were signs this was changing. "We are starting to join the dots between academic and



We are starting to join the dots between academic and research excellence

Henri Murison

research excellence and the innovations that come out of those institutions, and the link from that to the economy," he said, noting the success the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre in Rotherham has had in attracting companies such as Boeing, Rolls-Royce and McLaren. While he welcomed the content of the government's levelling-up White Paper, Murison said that the situation was more complicated in practice. "We absolutely need to keep the treasury engaged with this detail in the policy area in order to understand what it can do for them, which is to close that north-south divide," he said, adding that if the Treasury needed an example of how large investments can yield dramatic results, it could look to Blyth, where Britain's first gigafactory was being built, attracting £16 of private investment for every £1 the government spent.

International collaboration for future innovation

THE PANEL

Jeremy Thompson, executive vice-president, Huawei

In his keynote, Jeremy Thompson, executive vice-president of Huawei UK, reaffirmed the company's commitment to international research and development collaborations, and stressed the importance of collaboration and investment across borders. Huawei, he noted, has partnered with 35 higher education institutions across the UK, offering direct funding to support research.

"Progress is possible when organisations invest in innovation," Thompson said. "The UK has a long history of innovation and leading the world in this area, and it is essential that all regions are able to fully realise their potential."

Huawei and academia were in the same business; they shared a desire to seek out technological breakthroughs that will have real-world impact when brought to market. "Researchers are highly motivated when the research questions posed are deeply informed by practical challenges. That is something that Huawei brings to collaboration," Thompson said.

Thompson offered Imperial College London's Leonardo Centre as an example of how industry and academia can work together on large-scale projects. Huawei



Progress is possible when organisations invest in innovation

Jeremy Thompson

was a founding partner of the Leonardo Centre, which facilitates research into societal problems around the world. "We hope that this research and insight, coming from this partnership, will help and have far-reaching benefits," he said.

It was vital that the UK remained a leader in innovation and entrepreneurship. Collaboration between academia and industry must extend beyond research and into private sector innovation, nurturing spin-outs and start-ups while sharing expertise and resources to support their growth. "We hope that business, academia and government will continue to seek out new opportunities to work together," Thompson concluded. "Huawei, for its part, will continue to share our expertise, our innovation, with others to build a stronger research and technology ecosystem here in the UK and beyond."

Does international trade regulation inhibit innovation?

THE PANEL

Simon Baker, data editor, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)

Michael Hill-King, collaboration director, Huawei UK

Maggie McGowan, director of research and innovation, University of Hull

Geraint Rees, vice-provost of research, innovation and global engagement, University College London



The world had changed dramatically since 2015, said Michael Hill-King, collaboration director at Huawei UK. Brexit, the rise of third-party export controls, the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine were complicating international trade. Universities and their research partners were having to improvise to adjust to global uncertainty and maintain collaborations across borders. “We need to find the best way to, one, assess the impact on international research collaboration, and two, the activities that we have got to do to maintain compliance and find the best pathways for working,” Hill-King said.

Not all regulations had a negative impact, Hill-King added, noting that patents and standards offered clarity. Geraint Rees, vice-provost of research, innovation and global engagement at University College London (UCL), acknowledged the challenges posed by Brexit. There were indirect impacts from the political uncertainty surrounding

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Brexit was making it harder for smaller businesses to compete globally

Maggie McGowan

the Northern Ireland Protocol that threatened Horizon Europe funding. “The UK as a whole is a major beneficiary of inbound research and innovation funding from those sources,” Rees said. “UCL is particularly good at winning those rewards. That is a major concern – an indirect impact.”

Maggie McGowan, director of research and innovation at the University of Hull, said higher education was not a focus in trade negotiations. Brexit was making it harder for smaller businesses to compete globally. UK institutions needed to replace European Union funding, and income from international students was crucial to maintain research competitiveness. “[International students are] a huge source of income for universities that can then get converted into research and innovation and really drive us as a research force globally,” McGowan said.

Partnerships for regional growth: How do we place entrepreneurship at the heart of innovation?

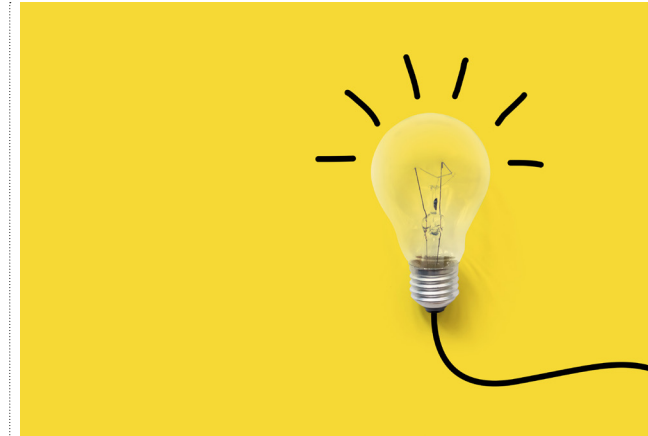
THE PANEL

Andrew Carter, chief executive, Centre for Cities

Lynn Sheppard, director, Masood Entrepreneurship Centre, University of Manchester

Francisco Veloso, dean of Imperial College Business School, Imperial College London

Tom Williams, reporter, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)



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Government can't drive levelling up in the absence of the private sector

Andrew Carter

There is no shortage of research success stories in the UK, but how can they be replicated across the country? Andrew Carter, chief executive of Centre for Cities, acknowledged that the innovation landscape was uneven. But he argued that too much of the conversation was about redistribution when economic dynamism and growth should be the target. Key to this was improving the performance of cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, which lag behind OECD peers. “Levelling up will be achieved when the private sector is more dynamic, more entrepreneurial, more innovative,” Carter said. “Government has a role to play in that, but government can't drive that process in the absence of the private sector.”

Francisco Veloso, dean of the Imperial College Business School at Imperial College London, said levelling up should be

considered within the wider context of the industrial and economic transitions that are shaping economies. “You need to think about creating longer-term capabilities, addressing the digital infrastructure, increasing the digital capabilities,” he said.

Lynn Sheppard, director of the Masood Entrepreneurship Centre at the University of Manchester, said innovation was about people and education was critical. She urged universities to make entrepreneurialism accessible and called for interdisciplinarity.

“One of the biggest problems we have is the siloed nature of so many of our organisations and institutions, and that doesn't work in the space of innovation,” she said. “It is where people can work across the divides, spotting opportunities, addressing challenges, and having the capacity and capabilities – and confidence – to be able to take them forward.”



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Our sector experts contribute their insight and knowledge, tackling the
challenges and opportunities of closer collaboration between academia and
the business community

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