Innovation, ingenuity and inclusion from Britain’s modern universities
What are modern universities?

Modern universities make up over half of the UK’s higher education sector, educating over a million students a year.

These universities are powerhouses for and are anchored in their communities across the length and breadth of the UK.

Since the creation of modern universities in 1992, these dynamic institutions have grown into powerhouses of pioneering teaching and research, whilst retaining their mission of improving access to education and ensuring jobs and growth in their region and place.

Modern universities transform the lives of people and ensure a highly skilled workforce for employers of many kinds.

MillionPlus universities

- Are forward looking and responsive to change
- Work collaboratively with business and boost the public sector workforce
- Drive social mobility
- Deliver excellent teaching which provides the skills for students to succeed
- Are placemakers in their local area
- Produce innovative applied and translational research
Modern times call for modern solutions and modern universities thrive at meeting this challenge.

With little fanfare, these universities have an enormous impact across the UK, and do much of the hard work in developing the key skills for the future jobs market.

Therefore, if government wants:

- To boost productivity through strongly work-related education and growing degree apprenticeship
- to address the gap in the recruitment and retention of teachers for schools
- to boost the public service workforce to deliver for the NHS and key services – from nurses, social workers, police, environmental officers, town planners etc
- to help industry innovate and improve through the application of real-world research
- to identify and drive technological advancements to meet tomorrow’s challenges
- to increase the aspiration and opportunities for people from all walks of life by ensuring flexible pathways into higher education, supporting them on their learning journey.

...they need to #ThinkModern

#ThinkModern explores this through key facts, case studies, interviews and opinion pieces revolving around six themes – Making Britain Work; Pathways, Partnerships and Productivity; Creative and Technological Skills for the 21st Century; Innovation and Research; Aspiration, Opportunity and Inclusion; and Entrepreneurial, Enterprising, Enriching.

Modern universities are some of the UK’s greatest assets in driving growth and social mobility, addressing the challenges we face in society. Across the country, it’s time to embrace what they offer and unlock the potential of their students.
Modern universities are directly responsible for training thousands of the backbone public service staff that keep Britain working.

From high-profile roles such as teachers, nurses, social workers and police officers to the less well acknowledged town planners, architects or environmental health officers, year after year modern universities create the highly skilled workforce that keeps the economy growing and society thriving.

The Graduate Market 2023 annual review of vacancies and starting salaries predicted that public sector organisations will remain the second largest recruiter of graduates, with a record 4,822 entry level vacancies available for university leavers.
Modern universities provide a much-needed pipeline to the NHS in areas of the UK where there is no other local study option, playing an integral role in the regions by providing new cohorts of registered nurses.

Modern universities have a long and well-established tradition of training a major part of the nursing workforce in the UK. 70% of nursing students were at modern universities in 2021-22. 70% of midwifery students were at modern universities in 2021-22.

64% of all the universities with adult nursing courses approved by the Nursing & Midwifery Council are modern universities.²

Modern universities have partnerships with 209 NHS Trusts in England, 93% of all NHS Trusts.

Modern universities have partnerships with every NHS Board in Scotland, covering the full length and breadth of the country’s healthcare provision.
Allied Health Professionals (AHP) are the third largest workforce in the health and care sector in England. There were 318,187 registered allied health professionals working for the NHS (more than the number of GPs) in 2023. They are a vital pillar in the delivery of healthcare and support, upon which the NHS and the citizens of the United Kingdom rely.

In 2021–22...

78% of environmental and public health students...

69% of those studying nutrition...

63% of those studying subjects allied to medicine...

62% of medical technology students...

Over 1,955 postgraduate research students in fields allied to medicine...

...were at modern universities.
Modern universities have a long history of teacher education, and despite a diversification of routes into teaching over recent years, these institutions continue to be at the forefront of the field, both in terms of research into pedagogy and the practice of initial teacher training and education.

In 2021–22, modern universities accounted for 63% of all initial teacher training students in the university sector, and 75% of those were studying the undergraduate pathway.

In 2021–22, 55% of all those studying education at university were at modern universities.

In 2020–21, 87% of HEI-led teacher trainers were awarded Qualified Teacher Status.5

In 2021–22, 52% of university postgraduate students were 25 and over and 28% were of minority ethnic groups.4

73% of teacher training university students from the 2020–21 cycle were teaching at a state school within 16 months after completing their course.6
Modern universities lead in the education of social workers, teaching the majority of the next generation of practitioners, developing students with the skills needed to address regional demand across the UK. Social work is also an area that has traditionally attracted high numbers of mature students, a demographic that has been a key focus of modern universities for many years.

In 2021–22...

**73%** of social work students...

**56%** of social policy students...

...were at modern universities.

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**59%** of research carried out at modern universities in social work or social policy was judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent.⁷
Modern university graduates go on to make up a substantial proportion of the workforce that design, construct and shape our public urban environment.

Modern universities equip students in these areas with skills and knowledge that are used in urban development, regeneration and infrastructure projects across the UK.

In 2021–22...

**60%** of architecture students...

**41%** of urban, rural and regional planning students...

...were at modern universities.

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1. High Fliers (2023), the Graduate Market in 2023 annual review of graduate vacancies and starting salaries at the UK’s leading employers
2. Nursing & Midwifery Council list of approved courses
3. Health and Care Professions Council, Registrant snapshot 1 March 2023
6. Ibid.
7. Overall averages calculated from REF 2021 results

*HEI = Higher Education Institution. All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refer to undergraduates unless otherwise stated. Throughout, KEF data relates to KEF3 published in September 2023.*
Vocational, technical and professional education has been the beating heart of modern universities from the very start. Working in partnership with employers, often in their local regions, they have created high-quality, work-focused courses that ensure graduates are fully equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to be job-ready on day one. These modern universities are driving forward the degree apprenticeship agenda that will create new opportunities for young people.
In 2021–22 modern universities received...

...£17 million in income from regeneration and development programmes.

...over £45 million in European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) income.

Modern universities are vital actors in their local areas, with the latest KEF data showing strong performance in contributing to local growth and regeneration with a score **68.4%** (3.42 out of 5).

The data also shows that these universities are playing a significant role in driving local regeneration and development projects, again scoring **68.4%**.

All modern universities offer professional business advice to start-ups, provided by the university or in collaboration with a partner organisation.

In KEF, modern universities scored **54.6%** (2.73 out of 5) for working with the business sector.

In terms of public and community engagement, these universities scored **57.8%** (2.89 out of 5).
Across modern universities in England and Scotland, the number of students beginning degree apprenticeships in 2021–22 is 22,191, representing year-on-year growth of more than 8%.

Modern universities have partnerships with...

...209 NHS Trusts in England, which amounts to 93% of all NHS trusts.

...Every NHS Board in Scotland, covering the full length and breadth of the country’s healthcare provision.

60% of universities on the apprenticeship training provider register are modern universities, showing that these institutions are at the forefront of the development of degree apprenticeships.¹
Pathways, partnerships and productivity

MILLIONPLUS UNIVERSITIES BUSINESS EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS

Air Canada, Alcumus, Amazon, Amey, Asda, Ask Electronics

Bamabasanani Partnership, BAE Systems, Barclays, Brandmovers Inc, British Judo, BSW Timber Group, BT

Calex, CBRE, Celtic Connections, Chartered institutes for the management of sport and physical activity, Chartered Management Institute, Clugston, Clyde Union Pumps, Cogital Group, Compton Care, Consalia, Creative Bath, Credit Suisse

DEFRA, Deloitte

Eddie Stobart, English Chamber Orchestra, Enterprise car rental, Epic Games

F5 networks, FHL Cloud Solutions, Forestry Commission

Goldman Sachs, Grain Branding and Design

HAL Robotics, Hewlett Packard, Hexcel, Holiday Inn

IBM, Imprint group, Industrial Biotechnology Centre, Institute of Sales Management, International Space Education Trust, IPSE, ITV

JD Sports, John Lewis

Kent Cricket, KPMG

Leonardo, Lloyds Bank

Margaret Howell, Marks and Spencer, Morgan Motor Company, Morgan Stanley, MySircles

National Trust, Nissan, North Lands Creative

O2 Arena, Oxfam

Port of Dover

Rank Group, Rear Clear, Rolls Royce, Royal Mail

Santander, Scottish and Southern Energy, Scottish Construction Innovation Centre, Sellafield Ltd, Siemens, Sony, SSE Renewables, Stagecoach, Systech international


Vauxhall, Viper 10, Vodafone, Volkswagen

Waburtons, Wm Grant and Sons

Pathways, partnerships and productivity

1 Education & Skills Funding Agency, Register of apprenticeship training providers. All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refer to undergraduates unless otherwise stated.
Modern universities have found ways to unleash ingenuity by placing entrepreneurialism at the centre of the curriculum. They support students in creating businesses, social enterprises and charities well before they have graduated. This provides them with enriched expertise and experience which benefits them whether they become employers or employees.
BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

In 2021–22, modern universities provided services\(^1\) to:

- **21,201** SMEs (small and medium enterprises).
- **2,696** non-SMEs.
- **10,624** non-commercial organisations.

SPIN-OFFS AND START UP COMPANIES

The most recent KEF data shows strong modern university performance in the area of graduate startups, scoring **65.4%** (3.27 out of 5), indicating a vibrant entrepreneurial culture among students.

Graduate start-ups linked to modern universities are estimated to have generated **£834 million** in turnover.

Graduate start-ups linked to modern universities are estimated to have employed **19,472 people**.
The most recent KEF data shows that modern universities are investing in the area of CPD and graduate startups, scoring **66.8%** (3.34 out of 5).

Indicating a strong commitment to continuing professional development and continuing education in the workforce, modern universities scored **62.2%** (3.11 out of 5) in the latest KEF in the area of HE-BCI CPD/CE Income, normalised by HEI income.

Graduate start-ups linked to modern universities are estimated to have generated **£42 million** in external investment.

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1 Services include contract research, consultancy and facilities/equipment. All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refer to undergraduates unless otherwise stated.
Modern universities are crucial regional anchors.

Researchers and academics at these universities are vital in ensuring that businesses – especially the small and medium enterprises that are the lifeblood of the UK’s towns, communities, regions and nations – can benefit from expertise in research and innovation. Modern universities are essential in bringing these experts closer to business, supporting them in providing solutions to major challenges and driving economic growth in all parts of the country.
Research at modern universities judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent...

...58% overall...

...70% in Allied Health Professions, Nursing and Pharmacy...

...68% in Art and Design...

...67% in Communications, Cultural and Media Studies.¹

In terms of impact, 63% of research carried out at modern universities was judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent.²

In 2021–22 modern universities received...

...£99 million from UK research councils for research contracts.

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Percentage of modern university research found to be world leading or internationally excellent in REF2021...

62.6% overall in terms of impact

71% in Architecture, Built Environment and Planning

70% in Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy

68.2% in Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

66.6% in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

62.6% in Engineering

59.3% in Social Work and Social Policy

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1 Overall averages for modern universities calculated from REF2021 results.
2 Ibid.
All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refer to undergraduates unless otherwise stated.
Modern universities have pioneered new degrees to ensure that the businesses of the 21st century can benefit from a high-calibre workforce, skilled in Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Maths.

Innovative courses once seen as huge risks are now well-established in the higher education sector, combining new and traditional skills across diverse, once separate disciplines.

This age of STEAM is digital.
The creative industries employ over 2 million people in the UK and are projected to create an additional 1 million jobs by 2030.\(^1\)

The UK video games market was valued at £7.16 billion in 2021, one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy.\(^4\)

The creative industries exported £36 billion in services worldwide and accounted for almost 12% of UK services exports.\(^2\)

It is estimated that the creative industries will be worth £128.4 billion by 2025.\(^3\)

71% of research carried out at modern universities in Architecture, Built Environment and Planning.

63% of research carried out at modern universities in the category of General Engineering.

...was judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent in terms of its originality, significance and rigour.\(^5\)
In 2021–22...

- 92% of computer games students...

- 78% of cinematography and photography students...

- 73% of creative arts students...

- 38% of computer science students...

- 70% of software engineering students...

- 83% of design studies students...

- 44% of ecology and environmental biology students...

- 69% of architecture, building and planning students...

- 43% of civil engineering students...

- 49% of computer generated and visual effects students...

- 72% of maritime technology students...

- 100% of minerals technology students...

...were at modern universities.

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2 Ibid.
4 The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment, 2021.
5 Overall averages for modern universities calculated from REF2021 results. All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refers to undergraduates unless otherwise stated.
Modern universities have increased the opportunities for people from all walks of life to experience the transformative impact of higher education. Mature learners, people already in work, and all those who thought higher education was only for others have been able to unlock their potential and create new careers for themselves and new lives for their families. This diversity of approach and student profile is a key pillar of the modern university sector.
LEADING THE WAY IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION...

97% of entrants to modern universities went to a state school.

In England...
64% of all HE entrants from a low participation background were studying at modern universities.
Modern universities accounted for 79% of full-time mature entrants to higher education.

In Scotland...
A third of universities are modern, but they account for 56% of full-time entrants to university from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and 68% of mature students.¹

In 2021–22, 64% of Black students in the UK were at modern universities.

All modern universities identified widening participation/access as one of the principal areas in which they contribute to the local economy.
89% of modern universities provide distance learning courses.

88% of modern universities provide continuous work-based learning courses.

171,306 people attended free performance arts events organised by modern universities in 2021–22.

37,918 people attended paid exhibitions at modern universities.

1,129,828 people attended free public exhibitions at modern universities.

161,748 people attended paid performance arts events at modern universities.

802,891 people attended free public lectures at modern universities.

1 Scottish Funding Council, Report on Widening Access 2020–21. All data taken from HESA records 2021–22 and refer to undergraduates unless otherwise stated.