

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Strategic Narrative



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To be an exceptionally effective cluster of research, innovation and training excellence, delivering benefits to the economy and communities in the North of England and beyond.





The N8 is the strongest, most enduring alliance between universities in the UK.

- We connect the research expertise and excellence in our universities and build trusted relationships with, and between, our members and the wider ecosystem.
- We support people from across our partner universities to develop collaborative solutions to the problems facing society.
- We **build** critical mass in areas of common interest where it does not already exist.
- We enable the flow of knowledge around the N8 universities and beyond, forming a web of intangible infrastructure and social capital.
- We **demonstrate** the value of research and innovation to the economy and communities in the North of England and beyond.
- We showcase the diverse range of world-class facilities, skills and people across the N8.

This is the glue that bonds the N8 universities together and is a rich source of new thinking and approaches.



The N8 universities individually deliver highquality research and innovation.

However, no single university has all of the skills and expertise required to solve the complex socio-economic challenges we face today and will face in the future.

Working together, we can draw on a broader range of skills and knowledge making us more effective and agile; without the collective effort and resources of the N8, there would be less collaboration and cooperation between the universities, reducing impact on research, innovation, and economic growth in the region.

The N8 provides a platform for the universities to work together to tackle complex scientific and societal challenges, improve the research environment and promote economic development, which would not be possible if the partnership did not exist. The N8 also provides a means for the member universities to share risk and create efficiencies and new ways of working.

Additionally, the N8 universities can leverage their critical mass to advocate for the region by drawing on their collective resources, expertise, and influence.

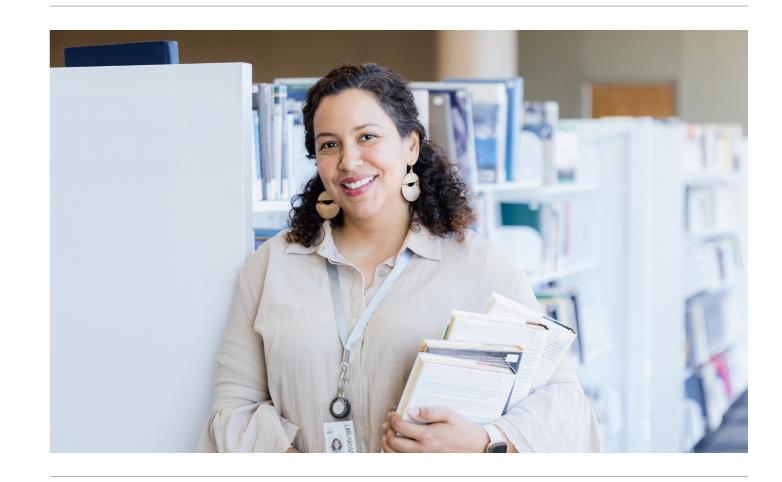


Our members

- Conduct research that highlights the strengths and opportunities in the region, and use the findings to inform policy makers and stakeholders.
- Engage in discussions with key decision makers, including politicians and business leaders, to promote the North of England's priorities and needs.
- Collaborate with regional organisations, such as local and mayoral combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships, to provide evidence-based advice and support on regional initiatives and policies.

- Host events and provide forums that bring together different sectors and stakeholders to facilitate discussions and promote collaboration on regional issues.
- Use their networks and reputation to raise the profile of the North of England, and promote it as a dynamic and innovative region with a strong academic base.





Our universities individually are diverse and strong with deeply rooted connections to their places and are recognised as amongst the top places globally in delivering teaching, research and impact.

Separately, they are strong. Together, they form in a network of knowledge generation and critical mass of research excellence unrivalled in the UK.

Harnessing the potential of this cluster involves collaboration, which requires the right environment, culture, incentives and relationships for success. When those are in place our people can be catalysts for new ideas, driving novel and innovative routes to impact.

The N8 enables the process of collaboration across the N8 universities, creating focal points for staff at all levels and from all parts of the institutions to come together, building vital relationships and trust. Only then, empowered to act, can people build collaborative communities that transcend institutional boundaries.

The N8 has championed new ways of working in the sector:

- Shaping policy in equipment sharing and efficiency, the place-based agenda and the role of research intensive universities in economic growth.
- Providing a voice to champion research and innovation from the North of England.
- Exploring ways of collaborating and delivering real-world impact through collaborative research programmes.





The N8 Directorate team brings leadership to deliver the ambitions of our members.

We do this by:

- **Providing opportunities** for people across the partnership to come together and explore ideas and challenges from different perspectives.
- Identifying areas where there is the potential for N8 collaboration to add value to the universities' individual research strengths.
- Ensuring the partnership is **agile and able to respond** to new opportunities and changes in the research policy and economic environments.
- Acting as an **honest broker** in partnering relationships between N8 universities and with other collaborators.
- Exploring different ways of working together.
- Articulating a single voice for the partnership on research and innovation policy issues with a regional dimension.

We show that we are effective by:

- Creating **unique multidisciplinary collaborations** and a **pipeline of potential programmes** which build on regional excellence in research and innovation.
- Supporting applications for funding that align to N8 strategic priorities.
- Evidencing the benefits of partnership working, capturing financial and other benefits.
- **Demonstrating engagement and influence** with key stakeholders nationally and across the North.
- Improving the environment for collaborative research, innovation and training across the partnership.

Regional Context Headline Figures



For every direct job at a university, 1.8 more jobs are supported in the wider economy.

Universities in the North receive over £1.1bn in UK research grants and contracts.

Around 81% (£900m) of this funding is awarded to the N8 universities.





Universities in the North directly employ ~84,000 FTE and support ~233,000 FTE indirectly.

Over half of these are through the N8 universities:

~47,000 direct FTE ~131,000 indirect FTE



N8 universities are integral to economic growth in the North of England.

Northern Universities contribute £13.3bn to the UK economy.

£8.0bn of this comes from the N8 universities

N8 universities are anchor institutions in their place.

What makes an **N8** Programme work?

N8 looks for value-adding collaborations between partner universities and other regional stakeholders.

When we are stronger together, we go together. Identifying this 'sweet spot' for collaboration is key for success and to the N8 as a whole.

We have identified 6 key features of a successful N8 partnership:

Positive Indicators	Negative Indicators
Balanced Partnership	
 Individual partners' strengths and 'personalities' are complementary. 	 Unbalanced partnership; 1 or 2 universities have significantly larger scale and volume of activity.
Collective Sense of Purpose	
 No single university has the necessary knowledge base/expertise. Sharing risk increases appetite for transformational approaches. 	 A challenge that a single university could tackle. Not enough shared purpose to override politics, the temptation to compete or the opportunity costs of collaboration.
Willingness to share power and resource to solve the problem. Lobbying with a single voice strong.	• Withholding of ideas/plans/details.
Collective Se	nse of Purnose

- Builds and enables excellence: delivers benefit regionally and beyond.
- Represents distinctive regional strengths within and outside the N8 universities.
- Co-creation and delivery with local external stakeholders e.g. civic, commercial, charity.

- Playing 'catch-up'.
- Could be done anywhere in the UK.

- The 'right' thing for N8 to do, right now - brings a sense of urgency and pace. If we don't, who will?
- Opportunity for N8 to take a leadership role.
- Opportunity to take the long term view plays to strengths of universities.

Research Leadership

- Senior leader (SEG) Champion(s) willing to drive proactively.
- Research leaders (not necessarily the star researchers) can be mobilised within universities.
- Depth and breadth of institutional Engagement that supports diverse participants, (in all senses).

Sustainable Financial Model

- Awareness of potential sources of funding if required for a long term programme.
- Links in to existing activity and resources.
- Clear understanding of success factors, value and return on investment. Has to be an opportunity 'too good to miss'.
- Exit strategy / review points so that all can leave with grace especially if priorities change.

• Others are better placed to lead, or already leading.

- No SEG member sufficiently enthusiastic • to lead.
- Researchers within universities unwilling • to prioritise/take part in an N8 activity.
- Leaders that do not actively ensure diversity of views, perspectives, disciplines etc.

- Indefinite N8 support required / expected.
- Wrangling about value / budget.



Introduction

The N8 Directorate retains Influential, a Marketing and Communications agency based in Liverpool, to develop content for our communications channels. The main channels used are Twitter and LinkedIn, with Influential also developing relationships with key regional and national news publishers (e.g. FT, i News, Yorkshire Post, Business Insider).

The communications strategy is delivered through two modes of activity:

- **Pro-active,** to drive awareness of the N8 Research Partnership, our programmes, events and activities, and to advocate for or lay the groundwork for particular initiatives.
- **Responsive,** to amplify positive news from our member universities and funded programmes, in response to policy announcements, or when invited to participate in an event led by others.

Pro-active Communications

N8 uses communications pro-actively so that we can:

- Raise awareness of, and engagement with, N8 programmes, events and activities primarily with the research and innovation community in the region, including universities, businesses and the charity sector.
- Advocate on behalf of the N8 universities and our researchers with policy makers and other stakeholders.

Pro-active communications activity can take many forms, for example social media campaigns (e.g. Northern Innovation Women), the N8 email newsletter, or a campaign approach using mixed media.

 The launch of the N8 Rights Retention Statement, involved a physical event in an iconic venue, an interview for Times Higher ahead of the event, a post-event blog for WonkHE, a social media toolkit and infographics for the member universities and video content for the website and social media.

In 2023, **Advocacy** will be a key part of the N8 communications strategy, in order to increase our profile. We will do this in partnership with other organisations, for example, the Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

The purpose of this is to demonstrate that the N8 universities contribute significantly to the economy of the region and will be integral to economic, social and cultural development through our discovery science and graduate talent pool, offering major opportunities to attract investment, drive innovation, productivity and business creation and growth.

We will do this by advocating for increased levels of both public and private investment in research and innovation that will enable the North to fulfil this potential and become a globally-leading hub in the green industrial revolution, with unique strengths in sectors such as clean energy and advanced manufacturing.

The campaign is based on three primary goals with associated calls to action.

Goal

To influence key stakeholders on the strengths of the N8 universities on the basis of evidence for excellence, impact and added value.

To make the case that the uplift in RandD budgets is of most benefit to the UK if focussed on rebalancing RandD towards the North of England.

To enhance the reputation of the N8 universities as places with healthy research cultures.

Targets for the increased advocacy activity will be local, regional, and national policy-makers with an increased focus on political figures across the political spectrum; with an election due in 2024 there are increased opportunities for advocating for the value of the N8 universities.



Through strong relationships with the universities, N8 and Influential are able to amplify news stories to demonstrate the excellence and impact of our research, as well as provide commentary and blogs on policy announcements.

This approach also drives traffic to the N8 website, expands awareness of the N8 universities and the N8 Research Partnership, and maintains the N8 in the eye of key stakeholders.

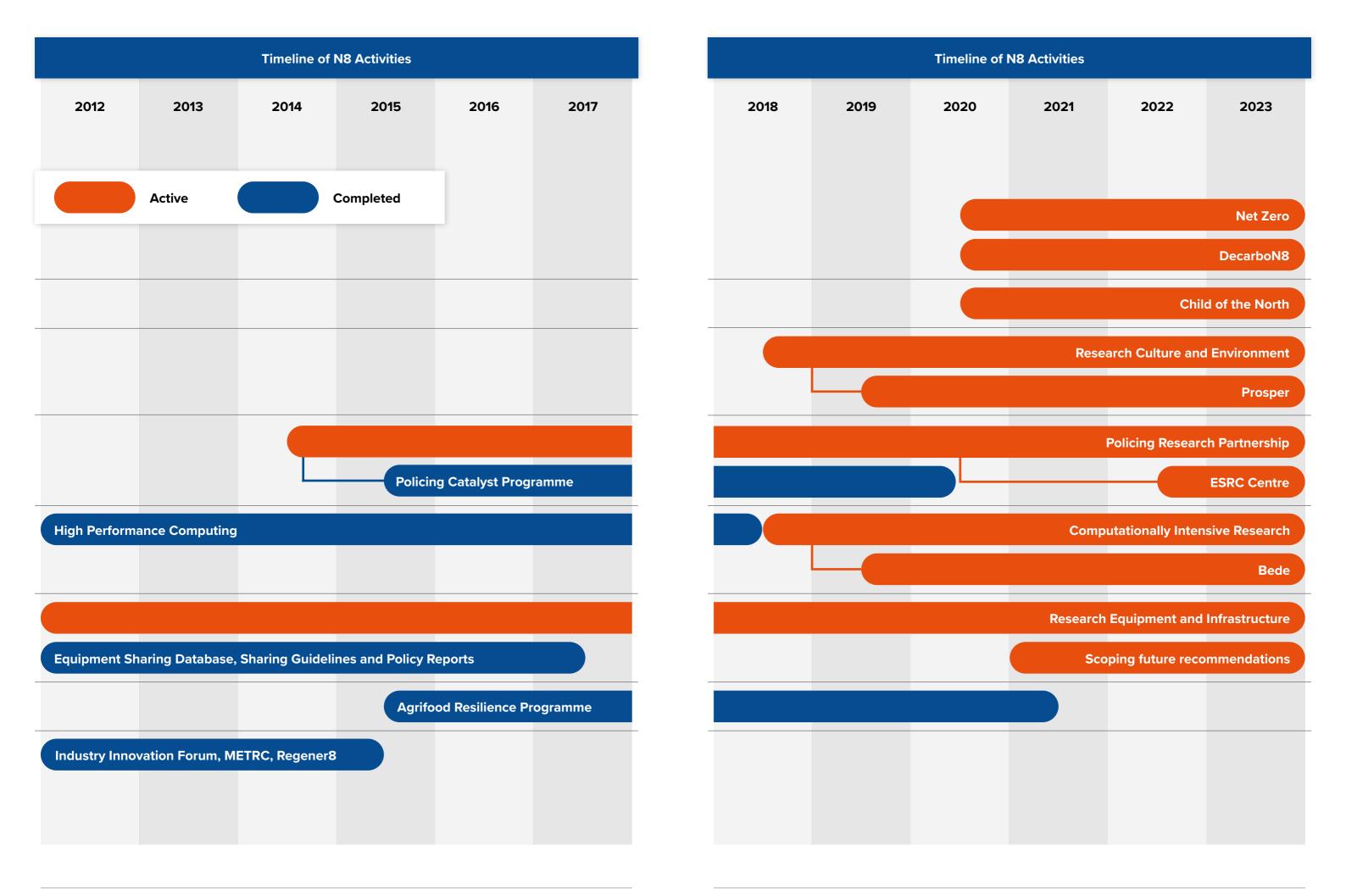
Call to Action

To invest in R&I clusters and zones in the North of England centred on the N8 universities.

To choose N8 universities for their next career move.

To recognise that the N8 universities combine Randl excellence with a forwardthinking approach to research culture, and the ability to collaborate to achieve change.

A weekly round-up of news stories and events is posted to Twitter to drive engagement.





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