

Leading Places Peer Review Conference – Report Prepared by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, Dec 2016

The Leading Places (LP) project, developed in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Universities UK (UUK), launched in May 2016. Its objectives and aims are to support devolution, public service reform, closer civic partnerships and economic growth. At the heart of this project is a process of action learning facilitated by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE). This method enables true partnership working as it promotes co design in the delivery of practical solutions.

The project draws on [research](#), originally commissioned by the LFHE on 'place based leadership' authored by John Goddard, Emeritus Professor of Regional Development Studies, Newcastle University. The project is set to run until March 2017. Deliverables post this date will include a national learning event and the dissemination of a report from the LFHE.

For the pilot, six localities were chosen across England. These were Newcastle and Gateshead, Manchester, Coventry and Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Bristol and Brighton. Each partnership is steered by a Senior Leadership Group, with a Challenge Team convened to carry through the project to its end. To date, the six action learning partnerships have been engaged in a process of action based learning to arrive at a single priority theme on which to focus:

ALP	Theme
Newcastle and Gateshead	Building a Community Research & Innovation Infrastructure: Healthy Eating and Food Takeaways.
Manchester	Health innovation with an emphasis on collaborative activity on this theme that links to the recent inter-institutional 'Science and Innovation Audit'.
Coventry and Warwickshire	Reducing health and well-being inequalities focusing on developing a healthy, age-friendly city and the place of sport in improving health for all.
Gloucestershire	Development of a 2050 and beyond vision and agreement on a range of strategic, economic initiatives to transform Gloucestershire.
Bristol	Focus to be on developing the new Mayor's office as a truly collaborative space for partner organisations across the city. One outcome may be an innovation hub that the city is planning in collaboration between both universities and local authorities and the mayor's office.
Brighton	Developing strategies to increase self-managed care amongst older people living in Leach Court to reduce, delay or prevent escalation in the cost of care.

Note: Some partnerships are in the process reshaping their themes as a result of reflection and peer challenge during conference. Lessons learnt and next steps for each partnership can be found in Appendix A.

Peer Review Conference

A critical phase in the project, the Peer Review Conference took place Monday 21 November and this was designed to give opportunities for the partnerships in each locality to reflect, review and impact assess the current status of their projects. Their fellow participants were

also able to provide support and challenge. This was made possible through LFHE facilitators, Alastair Work and Louisa Hardman leading a process of cross-peer review, friendly critique and challenge, within a collaborative, cross-organisational space.

Teams were asked to prepare an elevator pitch to present as well as, an illustrative timeline of their projects up to March 2017. Representatives pitching from each locality team were drawn from higher education institutions, local authorities and other relevant organisations; many in substantive and senior leadership roles.

Keynote speech - Professor Markku Sotarauta's reflections

The conference opened with a keynote speech, delivered by Professor Markku Sotarauta, a professor of regional studies at the University of Tampere, Finland and an international expert in collaborative place-based leadership. Two key themes around the need for a coherent strategy and questioning what it means to have a shared vision became identifiable as being of specific stimulation to the partnerships. These were often referred to throughout the day and are expanded on below:

Strategy

Within collaborative projects, leadership is needed at multiple levels to reach beyond familiar fields of activity to exert influence. Professor Sotarauta reinforced the need to have a strategy and to stick with it, as place based leadership needs consistency and stability. A further observation was that the LP project requires significant trust in the leadership character and competency of all stakeholders. On reflecting how to get LP to lift off in HEIs, it needed to be system led, at all levels. Finally, as place based leadership takes on the cultural complexities of the country or locality in which it is being exercised this would enable the HEI sector in the UK to evolve its own version.

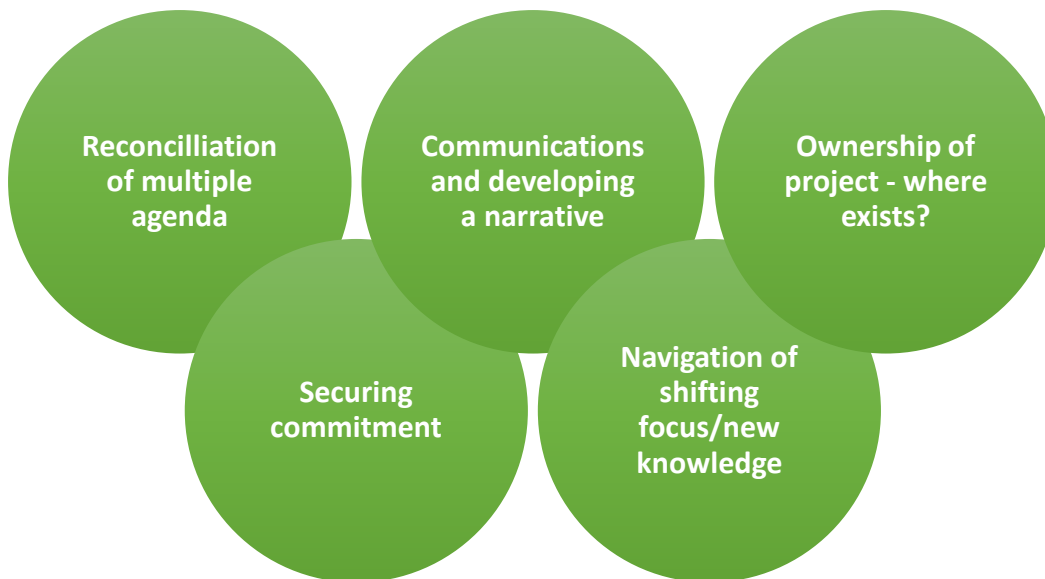
Shared vision

Professor Sotarauta dismantled the importance of having a 'shared vision' as differences of opinion in what vision actually means and priorities and actions are inevitable (due to realities of information sharing) and leads to a weakening of commitment and trust. Instead, he suggests we need a shared language, as agents are drawn from differing sectors so key is the use of a straight forward, shared language (no acronyms). This would enable all to be faithful to ambition and understanding of the project. This is crucial to LP as groups are drawn from HEIs, LAs and multiple organisations with contrasting languages and work flows. Understanding how colleagues work and therefore how they will undertake their share of the project is fundamental to any success.

Following Professor Sotarauta's keynote address, participants were led, by LFHE facilitators Alastair Work and Louisa Hardman, through a number of group work sessions that enabled each partnership to reflect on the intent and purpose of their project, as well as the challenges experienced in its genesis.

Summary of key challenges faced by partnerships in relation to the project

This graphic shows the outputs from a World Café session, wherein the facilitators asked each group to identify three key challenges of collaborative working. These were then clustered around the following themes:



Key challenges emerging from the process of collaborative working unpacked

During plenary sessions, participants were able to unpack these themes and begin to reflect on actions that could be taken to overcome such challenges. The cross-organisational and peer-review learning that took place within these sessions was particularly important.

- Attendees from all partnerships see LP as a foundation to further work. Taking a longitudinal approach to their projects, the partnerships are using the LP framework as a basis to set up networks that enable a collaborative cross-organisation approach to be taken. LP has in many cases opened the doors, with the facilitated meetings enabling effective relationship building. These will enable greater success in navigating competing agendas.
- LP has enabled partnerships to create a better environment in which they can suggest challenging and ambitious decision making.
- A strong theme of social consciousness runs through all of the projects showcased, seeking to improve outcomes for local communities, not just linked to LAs or HEIs. Partnership of HEIs and LAs brings a distinctive knowledge pool and capacity to innovate. Many of the projects fielded highlighted improving health and health outcomes.
- Many could see the process of collaborative learning and leadership as possibly more significant than the outcomes of the project in March. This ties back to the longitudinal approach being taken and using LP as a building block in the journey.
- The event highlighted the importance of cultivating relationships of trust within the project team – trust of each other's expertise, trust in facilitators, trust in the steering group and trust in external organisations.

Next Steps

As the project enters its final phase, the partnerships will be participating in their final facilitated challenge group meetings and preparing for the national event, due to take place on Tuesday 28 March. The national learning event will provide a platform to showcase the outcomes of the projects and future intentions as well as, an opportunity for interested parties to gain an understanding of the pilot.

You can find further information via the Leading Places website:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/leading-places>

Appendix A: Lessons learnt and next steps for the partnerships

Brighton

- A. Learning around the personal nature of collaboration and need for trust in all involved. Relationship building takes time and is difficult to do in a formal space
- B. Amount of progress depends on level of buy in from all partners, challenges faced so far have been due to this lack of buy in from all involved so need to articulate clearer objectives for project in order to bring in all on periphery

Gloucestershire

- A. Realisation that project is tackling big questions about the role of the university within the locality and length of journey extends beyond project life of LP
- B. Need to clarify agenda for project aiming to create a positioning in locality and develop place for HEI as a long term trusted strategic contributor to the community

Coventry

- A. Felt that project is on track and helpful to have space to focus discussion and prioritisation, learning regarding personal nature of relationships and establishing these in formal/informal settings
- B. Need to leverage funding and social engagement aspect of project so that outcome of project can be realisable and appreciated to communities, take next steps to make project of public value

Manchester

- A. Positive about position in relation to other partnerships and helpful to have a dedicated, collaborative structure and space to hear from alternative perspectives
- B. Need to map relationships of all stakeholders, commit to further research with key players, important to distil what project will achieve and communicate this with partners in spirit of collaboration

Bristol

- A. Clearer conceptualisation of two strands of work: setting up city officer then beginning work of wider focus issues, project has acted as a slight reality check regarding collaborative leadership with political partners and all stakeholders (and their respective roles in project)
- B. Need to take map out timeline to March and focus on what is achievable within timeframe

Newcastle

- A. Useful to see diversity of projects, learning how to manage project through LP process and beyond, co-ownership of project is key
- B. Need to develop rationale for what project is and why and expand on detail, grounding it in individual organisation and what they are doing already, identifying and understanding transactional issues on how it can be transformational