

## Submission to the Civic University Commission: How can cities and communities get the universities they need and deserve?

**Introduction and Executive Summary:** Plymouth College of Art (PCA), working with Third Life Economics (3LE), is delighted to submit evidence to the Civic University Commission.

In summary, we suggest the Commission consider the following propositions for future developments of university contributions to and impact on places where they are located:

1. Self-evidently, large universities have large impacts – many of them positive - on the places where they are located. However, incidental impact – however significant – should not be taken as evidence of ‘civic-ness’. The future civic university needs to be defined by how its purposes and interventions contribute to and are shaped by the places where they are located, and the communities on whom they have most impact – NOT solely by the needs of the universities themselves as institutions.
2. In assessing those purposes and interventions, it may be useful to distinguish between those that reinforce the status quo and existing trajectories of cities and communities; and those that disrupt them and catalyse transformational change. Both intervention strategies will be necessary for successful cities and communities in the future.
3. There is some evidence that smaller, specialist HEIs may sometimes be better-placed than larger HEIs to play important, positive, transformational change roles in place-based industrial and inclusive growth strategy, social mobility, education and skills reforms. This needs further and more robust investigation and analysis.
4. However, public policy drivers of university performance are almost entirely national in character, and designed for large, traditional, often research-intensive, universities. This fails to make the most of the potential of smaller specialist HEIs. Reforms of national and sub-national policy systems, and enhanced devolution, are probably a prerequisite to a new purposeful Civic University fit for the 2020s – ***to give cities and communities some levers and incentives to enable them to get the universities they need and deserve.***

Our submission is based on a major case study the authors undertook of PCA and Plymouth in 2017; earlier work 3LE did for University of Warwick Chancellor’s Commission in 2015 – 16; and an ongoing project to review Newcastle City Futures (NCF) and the five Urban Living Partnerships (ULPs). This, therefore, provides a broad canvas of HEIs and geographical contexts in England – but is far from comprehensive.

NCF and PCA intend to host final deliberative workshops on the ULP review in late-2018, and to produce frameworks and toolkits which universities and partners can use in formulating proposals for place-based Industrial Strategy, inclusive growth, education and skills reforms.

In the meantime, specific suggestions for Commission consideration are summarised on the next page, and their rationale is outlined in the following substantive response. We are available to the Commission to explain and discuss our submission further if that will be helpful.

Professor Andrew Brewerton (PCA), David Marlow (3LE)

**Suggestions for further Commission consideration:** As the Commission begins to formulate its final report, our substantive response below raises the following considerations:

- Plymouth College of Art (PCA) provides a highly distinctive contribution to Plymouth’s development as a city which does have wider relevance to the Commission’s deliberations. In particular, we request the Commission to reflect on PCAs experience as a small, specialist HEI, with distinctive pedagogies and civic partnership working, and a strong cradle-to-grave continuum of provision, and identify issues arising from this.
- The assumptions underlying ‘traditional’ anchor university-civic collaboration need major challenge and testing. For instance:
  - Many large anchor HEIs’ social purposes conflate global, national, local and institutional interests and impacts. They should be encouraged to make more explicit their local and regional purposes and impact legacies; involve key partners in their formulation; and ensure meaningful monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to assess progress against them.
  - Many cities and regions have different university configurations to a single dominant provider. A typology of different configurations in different places, and propositions of what works best in which context will be useful for future civic collaboration.
  - Sub-national and local leadership teams where large anchor HEIs engage should ensure they are open to radical challenge to avoid complacency, group-think, the blurring of civic and institutional priorities and cosy deals between partners. In some places, this constructive challenge might be provided by smaller specialist HEIs.
  - Many large anchor HEIs have secondary campuses in London, other centres and overseas. How these relate to the primary city, and what their roles and responsibilities in these secondary locations should be merits further consideration.
  - Future impact studies commissioned by HEIs should augment quantitative measures with a much more nuanced assessment of incidental and purposeful local impacts.
- New frameworks are required to demonstrate universities’ commitment to the places where they are located and redress the negative narratives of universities as large, opaque, supply-side institutions commanding increasing proportions of local resource for modest local return. The framework elaborated as part of the 2015-16 University of Warwick Chancellor’s Commission, and that from the 2017 PCA ‘anchor institution revolution’ project are examples that may be useful.
- Smaller specialist HEIs are already an important sector in their own right. The growth of this sector may be a consequence of Government policy. They also represent part of a possible risk mitigation strategy in response to existential threats facing some large traditional anchor HEIs. As such, more attention needs to be given to the specificities of these institutions.
- There is a case for major recalibration of national and local policies and systems to incentivise deeper and broader HEI civic engagement. This includes:
  - National regulatory and funding systems
  - Some elements of HE policy being ‘in scope’ in devolution deals and agreements
  - Breaking down policy silos between HE and the education and skills ladders of progression in schools; between basic research and regional innovation systems; and between science-led technical education, and arts-led creativity.
  - Clearer understanding and definition of short- and long-term impacts and objectives.
- There are still major gaps in understanding between universities and other civic partners in their respective business drivers, cultures and operating styles. How to bridge those gaps, and scale-up examples where the gaps have been closed, should be assessed.

**Background and context:** Plymouth is the major UK city region South West of Bristol. It has a primary catchment up to 500,000 population and £9bn GVA. It hosts the largest naval port in Western Europe, branding itself as Britain's 'Ocean City' and capital of marine and blue-tech industries. Nevertheless, peripherality from UK and global markets, detachment politically and culturally from much of its rural hinterlands, and lagging growth and skills performance, contributed to Plymouth voting heavily for Brexit in the 2019 referendum. This places it clearly in the 'left-behind' typology of non-metropolitan cities.

The city has three HEIs. University of Plymouth (UoP), with around 20,000 students and £250m annual turnover, plays a major anchor role in the city. It is one of Plymouth's largest institutions in employment, purchasing, real estate and investment terms. It is a key participant and sometimes funder in all city and sub-regional leadership teams. The other two universities are small HEIs with specialist niche focuses. They tend to be marginal and hardly visible in major forums of leadership and governance of the city and the sub-region.

Plymouth College of Art (PCA) is the smallest HEI in Plymouth. PCA has evolved from the Plymouth School of Drawing, established in 1856, through transition as one of the last surviving specialist Arts and Design FE Colleges in the UK by the early-2000s, to now being a small specialist HEI (currently entering the report stage of its application for Taught Degree-Awarding Powers (TDAP)). It is the anchor of an internationally distinctive cradle-to-grave 'arts continuum' in the city of Plymouth.

Over the last decade PCA made the transition from FE to HE – itself very unusual in the UK – hosting over 1300 undergraduates (mainly full time), and a postgraduate cohort. In 2013 it established a 3-to-16 all-through school – the Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA) – again a very unusual education innovation in UK school reforms, which in September will reach full enrolment of 1050 pupils. Concurrently PCA operates a 500-student, 16-19 pre-degree campus at Palace Court.

Alongside this continuum of nursery – postgraduate education, PCA hosts the city's [FabLab](#), a range of studios and galleries. The college has established Makers HQ, a 'Cut, Make & Trim' fashion manufacturing business community interest company in partnership with [Millfields Trust](#).

It is one of five universities nationally, and the only one in the South West, to have been awarded the Social Enterprise Gold Mark – in recognition of its impact locally both with students, pupils (at PSCA) and with the city's communities. The Gold Mark is matched by a distinctive pedagogical ethos that places making and creativity at the heart of learning and personal development. It is a Founder Associate of the Tate Exchange, UK Advisory Council Member of the Creative Industries Federation, runs and participates in a number of European Projects, and is a member of the Advisory Council of the Shanghai International Art City project – one of the largest creative industries campuses in the world, which acknowledges PCA's work in Plymouth as a formative inspiration.

PCA is part of Plymouth's transition from traditional naval base, the last major urban centre before Lands End, to becoming a contemporary, innovative, outward-looking City nationally and globally. Yet, this transformation has largely occurred outside the mainstream of Plymouth's growth and development. Even in the arts and culture fields, PCA is not a member of the City's Culture Board. It's involvement in key investments and initiatives like Plymouth's unsuccessful 2017 City of Culture bid, the Box (formerly History centre), or the impending Mayflower400 festival has been marginalised, although that situation has improved recently.

Similarly, in education terms, the enduring success of the PCA continuum is far from assured. Its TEF data refer to a period preceding its extraordinary growth trajectory in more recent years.

PCA is unrecognisable as the FE institution it was 4-8 years ago. The College outsourced its DLHE survey in order to ensure objectivity on data such as the destinations of PCA graduates. This is evidence by the consistency of PCA's TEF and LEO data, in contrast to the sharp negative differentials between DLHE and LEO in returns for benchmark HEIs. PCA is still in the process of gaining its own degree-awarding powers. Similarly, PSCA pupils have not yet transitioned to post-16 futures to enable the outcomes of their school experience to be assessed. Formula-based funding systems and inertia in the use of historical, as opposed to real-time data fail to account for unusual growth, innovation or development.

Over the coming period, the case for a robust evaluation of the PCA journey might be merited. However, the Continuum's footprint on the city, whilst modest in quantitative scale terms, is now distinctive, important and at some scale. Direct responsibility for around 3% of ALL pupils and over 5% of ALL students in the city is significant. PCAs unremitting focus on arts, culture, design and related industries, and the strong physical footprint of facilities and services in the city centre and inner city's most deprived communities, amplifies impact and performance.

The PCA story's relevance to the impending tasks for cities and regions of managing change in the face of profound global, national and societal changes, motivated a joint project with 3LE during 2017. This sought to explore the case for an 'anchor institution revolution', drawing on PCA's experience in Plymouth, and follow up discussion with other HEIs at the GuildHE Annual Conference.

The work suggests that ***without major changes in the way Government and local leadership teams think about and act on University relationships to place, place-based development policies in general, and the National and Local Industrial Strategies in particular will inevitably stall in many places.*** The later sections of this paper outline evidence and arguments that support this proposition.

**'Size isn't everything' (or even the most important thing) in University contributions to place:** The Commission will already have considered the size and diversity of the HEI sector, and the considerable literature on 'anchor institution' characteristics and performance. The work of John Goddard – one of your Commissioners – on 'civic' universities is hugely important in moving from a context where very large universities have huge impacts based on their size; to one where universities have explicit purposes which shape and influence their local and regional impacts.

Typically, however, both academic literature, the plethora of impact studies (every university feels it has to have one with prominent 'big numbers'), and ongoing practice, focuses on relatively consistent implicit models and assumptions of interaction – each of which the commission might unpick:

- *that these institutions have large, relatively immobile footprints within the city or town:* But, in recent years many HEIs have opened (and closed) London and overseas campuses, and facilities in locations which is not their main HQ city. Not much work has been done on leveraging overseas, London and secondary campuses for the benefit of primary host cities; nor on civic obligations of universities to the places where they establish 'spoke' operations.
- *that they have some degree of social purposes which are relevant and important locally:* Whilst this appears self-evident, all too frequently the articulation of 'social purposes' moves seamlessly from global to national to local – with no sense of relative priorities or specifics. It would be useful if universities could be encouraged to formulate specific statements of local and regional intent and purpose in their strategic plans; do this exercise collaboratively; and put in place performance management and reporting systems to enable progress against these purposes to be assessed and reviewed.

- *that leadership and management collaboration is intrinsically a 'good thing':* We deal with this further in the relevant section below. However, a modus operandi where leaders of large anchor institutions, together with a small number of selected 'usual suspects', meet to 'do deals' might be diagnosed as one of the contributors to the breakdown of trust and confidence with the motives and methods of anchor institutions in contemporary Britain. In recommending future increased university-place collaboration the commission should consider how to avoid and even reverse this risk.
- *that policies and interventions can be agreed to improve both collaboration and outcomes:* There are two issues the Commission may wish to consider in this context. Firstly, is there a menu or toolkit of instruments, intervention strategies and activities that can assist HEIs and partners in formulating and delivering improved local and regional outcomes from collaboration? PCA is working with Newcastle City Futures (NCF) and their Urban Living Partnership (ULP) partners (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and York) to consider this issue. Second, how far can we rely on and incentivise partnership working to ensure that institutional self-interest aligns with optimum societal and place-based requirements?
- *that civic-university relations can accommodate the different configurations of HEIs in their cities and sub-regions and regions:* Too often models of collaboration assume a single dominant anchor HEI on whom collaborative activity is focused. In the Plymouth case this is clearly UoP, and their scale and reach does make this focus understandable. However, the Commission may wish to consider whether a typology of different configurations of HEIs in local places may be helpful – e.g. the single dominant HEI and several much smaller (perhaps specialist) institutions; the two-university city of which there are many (perhaps one research intensive, one more teaching oriented); and the multi-university city or sub-region. London, with its literally tens of HEIs, is a special case. The emergence of metro-mayors might also need new forms of engagement – and this is an important area of policy and practice worthy of further work. Universities themselves need to consider how regional associations develop beyond tactical alliances of convenience to meet local and regional challenges of the 2020s.

In summary, therefore, the arguments that universities are crucially important in place-shaping has largely been won. The next generation of civic university relationships needs to move from establishing size and scale of impact; to shaping character and purposes of involvement. Related to this, it would be useful if the methodologies of impact studies which many universities commission periodically was to evolve from superficial and challengeable quantitative modelling to a much greater focus on identifying the differences between incidental and purposeful impact.

**From incremental to transformational change:** In the post-Brexit context, issues of university-civic relations are of increasing importance. Alongside profound societal challenges (aging, sustainability, digital etc), there is a deep lack of confidence in traditional ways of working by national and local elites. A narrative has developed (even in some parts of Government) of universities as out-of-touch, unaccountable, 'remainder' institutions. They are led by 'fat cat' Vice Chancellors, full of privileged 'experts'. They masquerade as 'charities' with all sorts of local tax reliefs (council tax and business rates), whilst acting as rapacious real estate developers of the urban fabric. Their students cause major disruption to local communities, housing and labour markets whilst becoming trapped with levels of student debt that will either blight their family life for decades, or never be repaid.

Against this backdrop of profound challenge and some societal distrust, improving anchor institution cohesion and collaboration may be necessary to address some societal challenges and some aspects of spatial rebalancing (between prosperous and struggling communities). However, it is very unlikely to be sufficient to deliver better local leadership and governance without wider reforms.

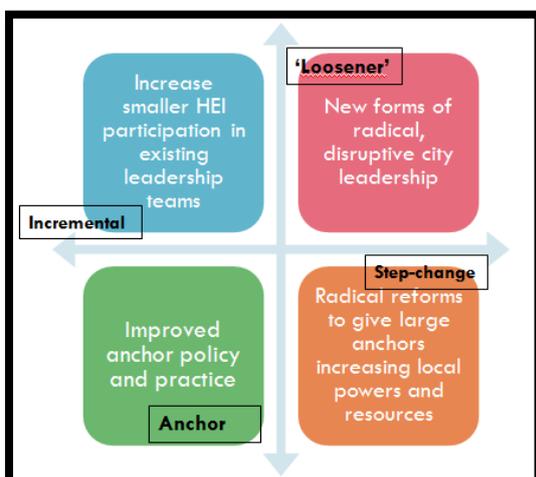
Since 2015, 3LE has worked on three significant projects that seek to throw some light on these issues. In 2015-16 the Chancellor's Commission of University of Warwick (UoW) explored how UoW might reset its relationships with and to Coventry, Warwickshire and the Midlands to increase positive impact in the second fifty years of its history (UoW was established in 1965).

The UoW Chancellor's Commission proposed a framework for University anchor institutions' relationship to place with three key dimensions - leadership, partnership, and citizenship. Universities need to be proactive members of relevant local leadership teams - clearly articulating their regional and local priorities, and willing to take responsibility for specific components of them. Their local interventions should be undertaken in genuine partnership with local role players and beneficiaries, rather than being driven solely by academic requirements. And they need to be a consistently 'good citizen' in the way they engage with those communities where they have the most impact; and manage negative externalities effectively.



The PCA project, from which this submission comes, takes a very different and provocative starting point. The whole metaphor of an 'anchor' institution might suggest a large, heavy object, holding the ship (of state) in place. Are the largest University anchor institutions inherently bureaucratic super tankers, part of incumbent local elites, and therefore unlikely to lead and deliver radical change? The project considers the positive contributions small challenger institutions like PCA can have in cities and communities. These are important and relevant - with over 60 HEIs with enrolments under 10,000 students located in every region and nation of the UK.

Putting these two projects together resulted in the formulation of a matrix that might be useful in thinking about university-place relations as we move through both the national uncertainties of BREXIT, and the more granular challenges of local industrial strategy.



Cities and sub-regions need to make the most of their large anchor institutions for obvious reasons. But they should also understand, welcome and involve what we have termed 'loosener' institutions - smaller, sometimes disruptive, challengers. These can be equally passionate about and committed to place - but more agile and flexible in experimenting and demonstrating new approaches.

Cities and sub-regions need to be able to engage HEIs in delivering business-as-usual evolution of infrastructure, services and 'offers'. However, in this era as much as any, they must also enable radical transformation.

The PCA provocation includes the hypothesis that most national and local interventions tend to gravitate towards the bottom left-hand quadrant of the matrix - the hugely important task of increasing anchor institution collaboration and making it more effective. Certainly, if one re-reads the UoW Chancellor's Commission report, all the 'easier' suggestions are in that quadrant.

Arguably, Government's Industrial Strategy tends towards a similar approach. Expectations of universities are high - but predominantly within existing business models and trends. Fundamental reforms of HEIs as institutions or of place-leadership are not proposed. More practically, programmes like Local Growth Academy or Leading Places have emphasised improving anchor institution mutual understanding and increasing project activity - rather than majoring on radical reforms of the way places do business.

One should not underestimate the importance of the bottom-left quadrant, and how much scope there is for improved results through activity in that quadrant. In one sense, the UoW Chancellor's Commission illustrated a new type of approach to determining future priorities; to measuring and maximising impact. This will be relevant and adaptable in most regional and local geographies.

However, many places will require transformation to successfully navigate the coming period. They may need new types of institutions in leadership and delivery roles. Large university anchors themselves will not be able to ride out the current turmoil without serious reflection on their local purposes, priorities, and the business models through which they deliver them. This is all work in the other three quadrants of the matrix.

To progress this analysis, earlier this year, PCA and 3LE agreed to collaborate with Newcastle City Futures (NCF) and their four Urban Living Partnership (ULP) pilot programme partners. The exercise, which is ongoing, is exploring whether NCF and other ULPs represent a model where large anchor HEIs can act in a similar manner to PCA – agile catalysts for piloting radical, disruptive change; and the conditions where these types of intervention may be scaled up to transform city performance. This third project will finalise its recommendations later in 2018 – but we will be happy to share emerging findings with the Commission if that is of interest and useful.

There are positive opportunities - new local leadership teams, some headed by metro-mayors; possible further devolution; local industrial strategy exercises; taking forward the science and innovation audits; future or smart cities initiatives amongst others. If we want the positive narrative about universities to prevail over the opening paragraph of this section, we request the Commission to give some attention to all four quadrants of the matrix, and to suggest how activity might be improved in each of them.

**Greater attention needs to be given to smaller and specialist universities:** A further aspect of our work has tested whether PCA is genuinely sui generis (which to some extent all universities are), or whether other small and specialist HEIs might share similar potential impacts on their host cities and sub-regions. To that end we presented and enabled a discussion at the GuildHE Annual Conference 2017 on this analysis.

Whilst further work needs to be done, the case that smaller specialist universities are important is compelling. In the publicly-funded sector, there are over 60 HEIs with enrolments/FTEs under 10,000 students – in every region and nation of UK. They amount to 300,000 enrolments in total (+/-15% of UK total). These HEIs deliver a lot of nationally-endorsed excellence – about 1/3 with GOLD TEF and many producing very high REF GPA scores in their focal areas.

Smaller HEIS can be akin to anchor HEIs in some LEP geographies (e.g. From Cumbria to Cornwall, the Welsh Marches, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire etc), or in their individual cities (e.g. Winchester where the GuildHE 2017 conference was held – but literally from Falmouth to Teeside). Where they sit alongside large anchor HEIs, they can offer alternative approaches and ethos that complement the major university – IF the synergies can be identified and leveraged. Some of these were present in the Plymouth case, although many of the potential synergies remain unrealised. And many smaller specialist HEIs have a specialist focus - business schools, arts colleges, agricultural and land-based institutions, education, medical etc. – of major relevance to industrial strategy and inclusive growth.

So existing scale and capabilities of smaller specialist HEIs do merit some attention. But the major reason why we urge the Commission to spend some time considering their roles are because of the potential ‘perfect storm’ of risks for the large traditional anchor cohort of HEIs.

Large traditional HEI anchors are facing unprecedented competition between themselves for student numbers. They have Brexit-related pressures on international recruitment and research funding, a Government intention to open up the market to new challenger institutions, and many have taken on long term financial obligations to expand and upgrade their estates.

The Commission will be aware how some research-intensive and Russell Group universities increasingly promote themselves and align their grade tariff entry requirements with cohorts who might traditionally have gravitated towards post-1992 institutions. In these circumstances, the risk of institutional failure of larger HEIs (and potentially some smaller ones as well) has increased significantly – indeed arguably Government may even be encouraging this. If that failure was to occur in a ‘left-behind’ place, the economic and social consequences will be acute and traumatic.

We argued in the sections above of the need for the Commission to consider how large bureaucratic HEI ‘supertankers’ might encourage their own highly-flexible, ‘speedboat’ capabilities. Our project with NCF will seek to progress this.

There is a need for places to make the most of their smaller specialist HEIs, and even to attract new ones. There may be a case for some type of national ‘challenger institution’ policy to consider the reasonable expectations of new entrants to have some levels of engagement in their locations.

**Giving cities and communities some levers and incentives to get the universities they need and deserve:** Finally, we wish to support the Commission’s thinking on national and public policy changes that might enable greater civic contributions from universities to place.

Despite the civic genesis of many of the UKs greatest and more recent universities, the HE system is overwhelmingly determined nationally. It also tends towards being strictly bounded when it comes to linkages with wider education and skills reforms, national and regional innovation systems. Even where Government has encouraged universities to engage locally (e.g. at the top tables of LEPs, or through place-based programmes like LGF and UEZs), these remain Government policies and funding assured by national departments and agencies.

We urge the commission to consider:

- recalibration of national and local policies towards higher education to provide some level of incentive for local radical reforms. University regulatory and funding systems remain overwhelmingly national. There are no a priori reasons, however, why Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), Research Excellence Framework (REF), and the proposed Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) cannot provide modest incentives for local relevance.

- Devolution ‘deals’ and agreements give minimal influence to local leadership teams in tailoring higher education policy and practise to local priorities. Can the Commission suggest some HE areas that might be ‘in-scope’ for enhanced devolution? For instance, RSAs ‘Universities’ report made some proposals in this regard.
- Alongside improved incentives and devolution, there is a need to break down policy silos. The boundaries between HE and the rest of the education and skills system can be dysfunctional in encouraging ease of ladders of progression, and holistic business involvement in technical, managerial and employability domains. PCA’s education continuum in Plymouth – from nursery, to ‘through’ school, to pre-university, university, to work and practice-based support – may be a model that could be replicated in other cities and other subject areas
- As Government grapples with the new skills needed to meet societal and technology challenges, a focus on technical and vocational reforms should sit alongside new pedagogy which welcomes creativity, arts and cultural skills. The concept of ‘higher vocational education’ avoids the false polarisation of ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ learning, and in Europe is the proper domain of specialist institutions. Universities – large and small – have the potential to develop new ways of encouraging interdisciplinary interventions IF systems, structures and processes enable it to happen. This is one of the early areas of investigation for the NCF project and university contribution to ‘Urban Living’.
- Possibly the most difficult issue for enabling cities to more closely ‘get the universities they need and deserve’ is how cities (and sub-regions) themselves formulate and articulate what those needs are. Having done that, negotiating changes they can reasonably expect from their incumbent and possibly new universities, also needs further attention. All three projects in which 3LE has been involved – UoW, PCA, and NCF//ULP – suggest that the levels of understanding between universities and civic partners remains patchy at best.

**Concluding remarks:** This submission from PCA and 3LE is a further milestone in our work, which is now gaining traction within the wider GuildHE formal representative body for Higher Education. It is intended as a provocation for debate about the direction and character of the ‘anchor institution revolution’ we consider is going to be needed IF civic universities are to play their optimum roles in places as we face the huge challenges of the next decade.

We recognise we do not have the answers, and our analysis is far from comprehensive. However, we hope the Commission will appreciate that we are asking at least some of the right questions. We submit this piece as a constructive contribution to the Commission’s deliberations. We are willing to make further contributions if that will be helpful. And we very much hope the Commission’s findings will move these important agendas forward.

Professor Andrew Brewerton (PCA), David Marlow (3LE)