



3LE Portfolio 2015

Universities, cities and regions: Every year since I established 3LE has seen 1-2 'signature' projects where I have learnt a lot about a relatively new area of work, and where I hope I have contributed to new thinking about that area. The signature intervention in 2015 was as Executive Commissioner of the [University of Warwick Chancellor's Commission](#) considering the future role of the University in Coventry, Warwickshire and the Midlands.

Not only has it been a real privilege to get to know how the University of Warwick 'works', but the Commission has enabled me to think through how different types of Universities contribute to 'place'. This has stimulated a number of exercises including this April [LGIU policy briefing on 'universities as anchor institutions'](#), this October [contribution to a UUK Conference](#), and a November piece on the [University's spatial planning implications](#).

For the signature Commission report, however, I think we shall have to await May 2016 - with finalisation delayed, first pending the West Midlands devo-deal, and latterly for local elections.

Devolution, devolution, devolution...: And talking of 'devo-deals', much of the year has been spent trying to make sense of Osborne's 'devolution revolution' for local and regional clients. Advising local leadership teams, literally from Cornwall to the North East has spawned multiple publications for LGA, LGIU, Planning as well as reports for individual clients. If you want a flavour of my contributions, have a look at:-

- [Leadership and governance of local growth: pre-general election round-up](#), March 2015
- [Enhanced devolution-2015-20: building the case](#), June 2015
- [Scotland and England local government devolution: lessons and issues](#), October 2015

As a member of a CURDS team undertaking an **ESRC Research Impact Acceleration project on decentralisation**, like the Warwick commission above, expect a more composite major report on this during early 2016.

...without obscuring local growth: One of the characteristics of the focus on devolution (as practiced by this government) is it can tend to be a political conversation about leadership - taking the eyes off the enduring challenges of local growth.

I have been pleased to assist a number of local authority clients evolve their growth perspectives in the face of multiple distractions and continuing acute resources constraints. Exercises have included involvements with cities like **Greater Peterborough, Sunderland and Wakefield; Gloucestershire** county; the four **Outer London boroughs** of Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Thurrock and Basildon, and districts like my 'home' strategic advisor role with **South Kesteven**. I was able to showcase some of the bigger issues arising from this type of work in a major [presentation to an LGA conference](#) after the December Spending Review...and in this [piece on the 'powerhouses' and engines](#), October 2015.

Other notable commissions

It is pleasing to continue the association with **Ashridge** on Local Authority leadership development, and with **Penna** on technical assessment (for executive recruitment).



A new departure in 2015 was as presenter/facilitator on **Smart Specialisation (S3)** at a major Regional Studies Association **EU Conference in Riga** presenting the England approach. An extended version of the paper is due to be published in European Planning Studies S3 special edition in 2016.

Commentary, conferences and events: I am particularly proud to work as:-

- Visiting Professor of Practice at **CURDS, Newcastle University**
- Research Associate at **Ashridge Business School**
- The author of a monthly Planning column for **Planning/Placemaking**. This replaced the bimonthly economic development blog I had posted since 2011, and is now behind the journal's pay wall - something of a sign of the times!
- An associate of the **Local Government Information Unit** - producing briefings this year on the aforementioned devolution, local growth and university agendas; but also specialist commentary on apprenticeships, and on labour market intelligence.
- I am a regular speaker, facilitator and participant at conferences and events

General election 2015 and its aftermath

It is difficult to feature 2015 without reflecting on the outcome of the general election and its profound implications for the remainder of this decade.

With support from 24% of eligible voters, the UK is now subject to the first Conservative majority government since the 1990s. [My immediate response](#) cost 3LE the relationship with one major client whose Chairman valued his perceived relationship with the victors more than free speech and political discourse. My subsequent ['Tech Nation' commentary](#), therefore, became a more exclusive 3LE production.

Once the dust had settled, I found some insight in read across from Latin American soccer commentary. As my piece suggested - "[it's all about the narrative...](#)". Of course my professional work is about much more than this - but I hope it will continue to contribute to a progressive narrative in 2016 and beyond.