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TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS 2013

From hundreds of submissions, and the dozens that made the shortlists, our judges have selected 18 universities, individuals and teams as the best of the best.

It has been an inspiring process, and those that won exemplify the extraordinary things that are going on in our universities and colleges day in, day out.

Many congratulations to every single entrant who made it on to our shortlists this year, and especially to those who took the awards in the face of such tough competition.

The quality that has shone through in every category is yet another reminder that higher education is a sector in which the UK truly excels. All who work in it should be proud.

John Gill, Editor, Times Higher Education



JUDGES

Keith Burnley

Chief executive officer, National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE)

Chris Cobb

Chief operating officer and university secretary, University of London

Patrick Finch

Bursar and director of estates, University of Bristol

Martyn Harrow

Chief executive, Jisc

Sir Deian Hopkin

President, National Library of Wales

Philippa Levy

Deputy chief executive (academic practice), The Higher Education Academy

Ben Marks

Managing director, YouthSight

Paul Marshall

Chief executive, Association of Business Schools

Janet Metcalfe

Chair and head, Vitae

Joanna Newman

Director, UK Higher Education International Unit

Toni Pearce

President, National Union of Students

Mark Pegg

Chief executive, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Shearer West

Head of the Humanities Division, University of Oxford

John Widdowson

Principal and chief executive, New College Durham



THE LORD DEARING LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Roger Brown

Roger Brown has had a number of leading roles within higher education – from senior civil servant to vice-chancellor – but he describes himself above all as a “policy analyst”. Few people in this country have offered more informed and often unsparing analysis of changing government policy on funding, quality assurance and widening participation, but he has always combined incisive criticism with a willingness to set out alternatives.

Speaking on behalf of the editorial board, which judges the award, Bahram Bekhradnia, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, described Professor Brown as “one of a, sadly too small, group of people holding senior positions in higher education who are not afraid to speak truth to power – in Roger’s case taking no prisoners on his way”.

Since leaving his position as vice-chancellor of Southampton Solent University in 2003, which “he nursed through to the achievement of university title”, he has joined “a select and distinguished group who relinquished their trappings of office to become humble professors of higher education”, in his case at Liverpool Hope University. But although it is in this last position that he has come into his own as “a highly visible and highly respected – indeed, in some quarters, feared – commentator”, Mr Bekhradnia saw Professor Brown’s whole career as very much of a piece.

His time as chief executive of the Higher Education Quality Council was notable for “its pioneering work on standards”. Before that, at the Department of Trade and Industry in the Thatcher administration, he stood out as “effectively a champion for higher education”. He has continued to be one until this day.

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EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN THE ARTS

University of Derby

In 2012, the University of Derby launched the “Learning Theatre”, a groundbreaking new model for nurturing the next generation of theatre-makers.

Based at Derby Theatre, a well-established regional venue acquired by the university in 2009, it represents a unique creative symbiosis between the theatre itself, the university and the surrounding city, combining a strong commitment to the local community with the cultural imperative to invest in emerging talent.

The project is strongly supported by Arts Council England, whose incoming chairman, Sir Peter Bazalgette, singled it out in his inaugural speech as “really innovative” and “a novel and enterprising idea” to give an ailing theatre “a new lease of life, not only as a live venue but also as a training centre”.

Audiences, critics and students have all responded enthusiastically to the initiative. The theatre now puts on six of its own shows per year as well as receiving touring companies. A production of *The Seagull* secured four- and five-star reviews across the national press, while a musical version of *Angela’s Ashes* was taken on tour to Limerick, where much of Frank McCourt’s memoir is set, and acclaimed by his widow as “brilliant in its simplicity”.

Meanwhile, the project affords those studying on the university’s theatre arts courses an opportunity to work in a fully equipped city-centre theatre alongside professional artists, thus developing the industry-focused skills that will equip them for their future careers.



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

University of Manchester

As one of the largest universities in the UK, Manchester is a huge employer in the North West, but it is also close to some of the most deprived parts of the region. With this in mind, and a commitment to social responsibility, the university set out to use its influence to change the lives of local people for the better.

“The Works” project, which was developed by the institution’s human resources directorate, offers jobseekers in areas neighbouring the university, such as Moss Side and Hulme, help to improve their skills and, crucially, employment opportunities. This second goal has been achieved through a partnership with other large local employers, including Royal Mail, Barclays and Manchester Metropolitan University, that ensures that a number of jobs at the university and beyond are ring-fenced for local people.

As a result, since March 2011 more than 3,600 people have benefited from the support of The Works, which now runs from three different sites, and the 1,000th local unemployed person to find a job through the project was announced this April.

Sir Deian Hopkin, president of the National Library of Wales and one of the judges, called the programme “unique” for its direct method of helping unemployed people.

“Working on three sites in the community, the programme offers a one-stop shop: trained staff help local people to search for jobs, prepare their applications and rehearse interviews, and a range of training and educational programmes, including literacy and numeracy, are provided in order to equip people for work,” he said.



WIDENING PARTICIPATION OR OUTREACH INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

London College of Fashion

In 2007, the government-commissioned Corston report highlighted the plight of vulnerable women in the criminal justice system and made recommendations for a more female-focused approach towards their rehabilitation. This inspired the London College of Fashion at the University of the Arts London to work with female prisoners and to offer them access to new skills and opportunities.

As a result, a group of female prisoners worked with the college to write and illustrate a fashion magazine for inmates at HM Prison Send in Surrey. Students on the college's fashion media courses played a key role in guiding the inmates in producing the publication while staff also supported the process.

As well as giving a major boost to the prisoners' confidence, the project prompted a number of the women to embark on study in further or higher education upon their release. The magazine has also inspired the college to extend its work with female offenders by creating a garment manufacturing and training unit at another prison.

John Widdowson, principal and chief executive of New College Durham and one of the judges, said that by partnering inmates with academics and students, the project helped the women to "think constructively not just about their life outside prison but also their previous, often unsatisfactory, experience of education".

He added: "The judges were also impressed by how the project enhances the experience of students by showing how their specialist discipline can inspire and motivate others to achieve."

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BUSINESS SCHOOL OF THE YEAR

Brunel Business School

Brunel Business School described 2011-12 as a “watershed” year during which many of its plans and initiatives came to fruition, and the judges agreed that its winning submission showed “ambition, commitment and impact”.

During the year it moved into a new £28 million purpose-built building, and it shot up the rankings in the National Student Survey.

Despite a chilly funding climate, it managed to maintain its spending on research and now believes that its long-term strategy of becoming a more mixed teaching and research business school has been successful.

During 2011-12, the school also adopted a new recruitment strategy, increasing its entry tariff from BBB at A level to AAB+ in a bid to improve quality. It boosted its offer conversion rate by inviting applicants to take part in a residential “business boot camp” offering lessons in voice skills and presentation and also engaging them in business-themed games. The model is now being introduced elsewhere in the university.

Graduate prospects improved significantly as well. Following an increased emphasis on employability in the curriculum, the percentage of leavers winning graduate-level jobs has grown more than 12 percentage points to 62.8 per cent, and the proportion unemployed has halved.

“The school has been able to demonstrate, without being boastful, genuinely impressive progress towards achieving a set of transformational strategic targets within the year in question,” the judges said. It has taken significant steps towards its ambition of being a “genuinely international quality business school”, they concluded.

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RESEARCH PROJECT OF THE YEAR

University of Leicester

The University of Leicester's key role in the high-profile discovery of the remains of Richard III under a car park has been singled out as research project of the year.

In collaboration with the Richard III Society, Leicester academics identified the likely resting place of the last Plantagenet king in the grounds of a former priory and then successfully excavated the site to find human remains. These were identified as the king's using a variety of techniques, including a novel method of DNA analysis, carbon dating and comparison of the remains with historical accounts of Richard's scoliosis and battle wounds.

The project, which began in 2011, involved a multi-disciplinary team that included geneticists, archaeologists, engineers, Latinists, osteologists, historians, English scholars, forensic pathologists and genealogists.

It attracted worldwide attention when the positive identification was announced in February this year, generating more than 1,500 news articles. The find's impact on the regional economy, through tourism and other activity, has been estimated by Leicester Chamber of Commerce to amount to £140 million a year.

The journal *Nature* said Leicester had "managed to unite the two cultures of science and humanities in a way that few have before".

Mark Gardiner, president of the Society for Medieval Archaeology, described the scholars' work as "faultless" and "absolutely stunning".

The judges said it "represents the highest quality of archaeology investigation and discovery, while stimulating the imagination of publics throughout the world".

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OUTSTANDING SUPPORT FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

Queen's University Belfast

Early career researchers are increasingly encouraged to develop skills that help them to apply their work outside academia. A new postgraduate certificate in entrepreneurship at Queen's University Belfast has been so successful at this that 400 universities worldwide are adopting it.

Created in 2011, the certificate is compulsory for all early career researchers at Queen's. More than 5,000 students have completed the course, which includes a chance to apply research in an external organisation and a five-day intensive programme involving drama, music, social media and pitching ideas.

More than 200 students have since set up part-time social or commercial enterprises. Early career researchers have also established 10 collaborations with peers in China, India and the US, while their employability has risen by more than 15 per cent. Universities around the world, including 60 in the UK, have since adopted the programme. Queen's estimates that this year it will be made available to more than 500,000 researchers worldwide, and training will be given to more than 5,000 course facilitators.

Janet Metcalfe, head of the researcher development organisation Vitae and a judge, said the panel members were impressed by the "scale and intent" of the Queen's course.

"Through a combination of blended learning, training programmes, project work and reflective practice, over 5,000 participants have explored how to be more innovative and enterprising in their professional development and application of their research outside higher education," she said.

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OUTSTANDING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

University of Edinburgh

In considering entries for this award, the judges were on the lookout for new ways of working with employers backed by evidence of high-quality, flexible provision that meets employer and employee needs. Selecting the University of Edinburgh as the winner, the judges noted that its submission at once met these criteria while also being well received by the people it sought to benefit.

“Making the Most of Masters is an innovative taught postgraduate programme in which students can undertake work with an employer in lieu of a traditional dissertation,” said Sir Deian Hopkin, president of the National Library of Wales and one of the judges. The course – a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh and the universities of Stirling and Aberdeen, coordinated by Edinburgh – “enables students to demonstrate their employability through undertaking a project proposed by the employer with the help of a specially designed toolkit”.

The partnership forges new relationships between universities and employers while at the same time enabling master’s students to demonstrate and enhance their employability. Projects are proposed by employers and negotiated with relevant master’s programmes. The MMM toolkit and guidance help students to engage with industry partners, while dedicated members of staff help the master’s courses and employers to work together in adapting resources to specific needs.

In 2011-12, MMM engaged with 281 employers and 67 master’s programmes, and a total of 244 projects were agreed (110 taken by students). A further 335 projects have been added in 2012-13.

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OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

University of Greenwich

From a shortlist full of “heavyweights” in the field, the judges recognised the remarkable achievement of the University of Greenwich in “attaining and sustaining a standard that not just matches best practice elsewhere but introduces its own innovations”.

Its winning entry was the result of three years of hard work that helped the institution to move from “laggard to leader” in sustainable development by rising 102 places in the People and Planet Green League to top the rankings in 2012.

Under head of sustainability Kat Thorne, the university developed a “permaculture” change framework – an approach focusing on relationships aiming to minimise energy consumption, environmental damage and waste and to maximise synergy, productivity and well-being.

The list of achievements included: a 22 per cent reduction in the university’s carbon footprint compared with 2005, with a further 40 per cent cut envisaged by 2020; 200 solar panels installed in student accommodation; 100 per cent of university computers benefiting from power-down software; and achieving ISO 14001 accreditation – which provides assurance that environmental impact is being measured and improved.

“The methodology devised by the university to achieve this was particularly noted as having clear potential for use by other institutions with similar ambitions to make a step change in their sustainability performance,” said judge Patrick Finch, bursar and director of estates at the University of Bristol.



OUTSTANDING ICT INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

University of Central Lancashire

With its Digital Shift project, the University of Central Lancashire set about transforming the online learning experience of its student body with an ambitious programme of cultural change.

The university produced a set of minimum standards for integrating pedagogy and technology, which had to be met by all 350 first-year core modules. These included uploading course information; ensuring that tutors' reading lists and key lectures were available online; allowing remote submission of assignments; and giving students the option to offer digital feedback about courses.

The project, which was introduced in 2011-12, resulted in a 136 per cent increase in electronic coursework submissions and a 312 per cent increase in the number of feedback reports submitted online.

The Digital Shift process has been embraced by staff, who have taken the opportunity to develop their digital skills by moving their seminars online and embracing a "blended" approach to teaching. More than 4,000 staff attended academic and technology development workshops, underlining how university employees have bought into the project.

"The panel was very impressed with this entry and judged that the Uclan Digital Shift project had best embraced all the criteria for the award," said Martyn Harrow, a judge and chief executive of the higher education technology consortium Jisc.

"It demonstrated in particular an innovative approach, and considerable skill and effort in successfully embracing both staff and students in the process."

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MOST IMPROVED STUDENT EXPERIENCE

University of Stirling

This category is not judged, but is instead based on the results of a survey of more than 14,000 students at institutions across the country.

Between October 2012 and June 2013, market research company YouthSight asked respondents to rate their university on 21 variables covering academic reputation, teaching, social life and facilities.

The results were then compared with a poll conducted in 2011-12, and the winner – the University of Stirling – is the institution that has achieved the biggest rise in its ranking position and the greatest overall increase in the satisfaction level of its students.

Only institutions with a sample size of more than 50 are included in the final dataset, and this year a total of 111 institutions met the minimum threshold. Ninety institutions had a sample size of 100 or more.

“By climbing 39 places in the rankings and improving its overall score by 4.9 points, the University of Stirling was our winner,” said Kyla Steenhardt, associate director at YouthSight.

“Stirling’s ‘campus feel’ clearly resonates with its students. The institution scored particularly well on having a good environment on campus and centralised, convenient facilities, and also scored highly on having good sports facilities.

“Stirling’s achievements were also recognised in *Times Higher Education*’s recent ‘100 Under 50’ university rankings, where it ranked as the number one university under 50 years of age in Scotland,” she added.

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INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION OF THE YEAR

University College London

The judges noted that there were a number of strong entries in this category, but an initiative by University College London to test a new treatment for tuberculosis in Africa “stood out for the quality of its research and the international collaboration that it entailed”.

TB still leads to about 1.4 million deaths across the world each year, according to the World Health Organisation, despite treatment being effective and cheap. The problem is a lack of quick, accurate diagnoses. The UCL project set out to test the effectiveness of new diagnostic technology in Tanzania and Zambia. The test was found to be simple to use, gave a result within two hours, and could also detect drug-resistant forms of TB.

Medical research in Africa is still dogged by a “colonial mindset”, according to those working on the project, with publications about the continent routinely led by non-African scientists. But this project aimed to offer a “new model” for collaboration with African countries, providing training and capacity development to those involved.

The project was part of a broader TB testing network that linked 12 African institutions with 11 universities in Europe, and focused on training African scientists.

“Tuberculosis is a global emergency that has needed a breakthrough badly. That breakthrough is now at hand thanks to this year’s winning entry,” the award judges said. “The sheer persistence of those collaborating means that a faster, more reliable way of testing TB is now available – and it represents real hope for sufferers and those attempting to halt its spread.”

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OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Aberystwyth University

The winning combination of excellence in “challenge-led” and interdisciplinary research and a strong entrepreneurial culture is behind the successful plant-breeding programme at the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences at Aberystwyth University.

The researchers being honoured with this year’s award developed new strains of grasses that can make beef, lamb and dairy farming more productive and more environmentally friendly.

Aber High Sugar Grasses, developed through traditional breeding techniques to have increased sugar levels, allow cattle and sheep to use more protein from the grass. Tests show that this increases the production of meat and milk by 24 per cent while reducing emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas, and other pollutants by up to 20 per cent.

Marketed through a partnership with seed company Germinal Holdings, varieties of the grasses now account for some 175,000 hectares of UK grassland. Supermarkets Asda and Sainsbury’s, which promote the grasses on their farms, estimate that their use has cut carbon dioxide emissions by 186,000 tonnes a year and increased profitability by £10 million a year.

Some varieties also provide sugar for conversion into bioethanol, a source of renewable energy.

Awards judge Chris Cobb, chief operating officer and secretary of the University of London, said Aberystwyth’s innovations won out against an excellent field. “The combined impact on food production and the environment makes this bid doubly compelling and a worthy winner.”

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OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Welsh Crucible

The Welsh Crucible's "game-changing" efforts to develop future research leaders for Wales have been recognised by the judges of this category.

The initiative provides interdisciplinary researchers with a "collision space" where they can interact and make new connections. It is run by the St David's Day Group – Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, Cardiff University, Swansea University and the University of South Wales – and is supported by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

Over three months, the programme comprises three intensive, two-day residential workshops, or "skills labs". At these events, participants hear guest speakers, engage in seminar skills sessions, take part in informal discussions and receive input from senior government, research policy and media representatives.

Participants can bid for a share of £50,000 seed funding to make their ideas a reality. Since 2011, they have also had a column in the *Western Mail* to showcase their research. In addition, the programme allocates places to applicants from public, private and third-sector bodies as diverse as the NHS, Tata Steel and Barnardo's Cymru.

Welsh Crucible has also introduced a research-themed study visit to Brussels, which promotes greater awareness of European policy and interdisciplinary funding opportunities.

Mark Pegg, chief executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and a member of the judging panel, said: "Feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with game-changing impacts on attitudes and behaviours."

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Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

Inspiring
Leadership
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OUTSTANDING SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

University of Essex

The University of Essex's Frontrunners initiative is a bold, innovative approach to improving campus life that has empowered students to tackle problems themselves.

Once staff had identified specific projects, students were invited to apply for part-time paid work placements to lead them. More than 200 students were involved in 176 projects across almost every academic and professional department in 2011-12. They addressed particular problems faced by their peers, providing their own insights into campus issues while developing problem-solving and project management skills required by future employers.

One impressive project involved students undertaking a five-month investigation of why Chinese undergraduates and postgraduates did not access support services. Their work helped to inform a more targeted approach.

Several student Frontrunners praised the scheme for helping to build their CVs and providing work experience that enabled them to secure jobs upon graduation.

The scheme is well resourced. Essex's Employability and Careers Centre received a 33 per cent budget increase in 2011-12, and it took on a dedicated officer to run the project. The initiative also supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds and will benefit from almost £2 million in access agreement funds by the end of the financial year.

"This is an outstanding initiative, not only one that provides students with paid work during study that gains them relevant experience to seeking employment, but actually enables students to shape the services and the experience for the student body at Essex," said Toni Pearce, a judge and president of the National Union of Students.

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MOST INNOVATIVE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Simon Kemp, University of Southampton

Simon Kemp's imaginative approach to teaching, particularly by putting students in high-pressure, real-life business situations, hugely impressed our judges.

Moving away from traditional classroom-based lessons on environmental management courses, the senior teaching fellow in engineering and the environment asked students to conduct professional audits for several major organisations in Southampton, including Southampton General Hospital, Skandia Insurance and West Quay Shopping Centre, under his supervision.

Students presented their work to the clients and received feedback on their services – inspiring some to set up their own consultancy firms on graduation. They have worked with nearly 100 local businesses, prompting many firms to improve their green credentials.

Students praise Mr Kemp's teaching as "brilliant", "extremely well designed", "totally unique" and "incredibly academically rewarding", and laud his dedication to providing an outstanding learning experience. Mr Kemp has also embraced technology, filming his lectures and using Twitter to extend debates beyond the classroom.

"Simon's teaching exemplifies the best in innovative and inspirational teaching in UK higher education today," said lead judge Philippa Levy, deputy chief executive of the Higher Education Academy.

"His imaginative approach to teaching sustainability and environmental management systems challenges and supports students to learn actively and to develop crucial employability and professional skills."

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ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR

University of Strathclyde

The University of Strathclyde was founded 200 years ago as a “place of useful learning”, and its modern leadership takes that purpose very seriously.

The university’s Enterprise Academy teaches entrepreneurial skills to its researchers while its Student Enterprise Challenge pairs interdisciplinary teams with entrepreneurs over two semesters – and two such teams have already successfully commercialised their ideas.

Strathclyde has also launched a £3 million fund to support selected spin-off companies over their first three years. Its 10-year-old network of alumni and businesses that supports emerging local entrepreneurs recently opened a new chapter in Dubai. A formal mentoring scheme for early-stage entrepreneurs also exists, and the university has built an Enterprise Hub staffed by advisers. A specific career pathway has been created for staff who want to advance by concentrating on knowledge transfer.

The university has spun off more than 50 companies, employing over 700 people. Principal Sir Jim McDonald chairs the Glasgow Economic Leadership group – a business-led body charged with driving regeneration.

Keith Burnley, chief executive of the NCEE and a member of its judging team, was impressed by the university’s commitment to “challenging traditional boundaries”, “questioning our own approaches” and “encouraging innovation in all that we do”.

What made it stand out in particular was its “commitment to developing an environment that fosters entrepreneurial thinking and delivers significant entrepreneurial impact”.

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Entrepreneurship in Education

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR

University of Huddersfield

The University of Huddersfield impressed the judges with a UK first in teaching excellence, the establishment of a new innovation centre, and continued commitment to being “a university that is at the heart of its home town”.

Huddersfield’s official vision is: “To be an inspiring, innovative university of international renown.”

The university created the 3M Buckley Innovation Centre in collaboration with conglomerate 3M to foster business partnerships leading to new research, technology transfer and entrepreneurial ideas.

The university’s quadrupling of international income since 2008 was this year recognised by a Queen’s Award for Enterprise – International Trade, and also a top 10 position in the 2012 International Student Barometer.

And as for inspiring, the university’s strategy for enhancing excellence in teaching and learning saw it set a bold target for 100 per cent of academic staff to achieve fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Huddersfield rose to the challenge – in 2012, it became the first and only university in the UK to attain that goal, described as a “remarkable achievement” by the head of the HEA.

John Gill, *Times Higher Education* editor, said: “Huddersfield shone through in the toughest of categories on the strength of an exceptional year.”

The university’s achievements, he continued, “were backed up by impressive figures for both student satisfaction and employability, and a clear sense that Huddersfield is a university that is at the heart of its home town, as well as making a very real contribution to the wider region, the higher education sector, and country as a whole”.

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