



Abertay University®

ABERTAY UNIVERSITY AND OUR CIVIC MISSION

What is civic engagement?

There are many definitions of civic engagement, however we have adopted this version:

*“Universities are critical to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of their cities and regions. Civic engagement means **working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities** and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community.”*

(Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, Ehrlich)

What is Abertay’s role in civic engagement?

Our ambition is:

- For our Staff and Students to be embedded at the heart of our *communities
- To create economic, social, and cultural influence and impact
- To continue to lead and champion widening access, supporting students from diverse backgrounds to realise their potential
- To continue to engage with industry, supporting regional ambitions
- To support the UN Sustainable Development Goals- <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Why is this important?

Abertay University plays a key role in Dundee and the region. In a city of c150,000ⁱⁱⁱ people, Abertay directly represents 3% of the population through our staff and current students. Our reach is greater, if we also include the connections we have with the business community through Knowledge Exchange Partnerships, research activity, employment of our graduates and student placements or projects. Many of our alumni are parents of current students, local employers or employees.

Abertay is an anchor institution in Dundee and has been embedded in our city and its ‘communities’ for its entire history. We also have the ambition to ensure that we meet the

(*Note that the use of ‘communities’ in this document includes business, the third sector - registered charities and community groups), the public sector (health boards, police, fire, schools, criminal justice, councils), the cultural sector (museums, galleries, theatres, performing arts) government and the general public.) The term ‘anchor institutions’ refers to ‘large employers with a strong local presence in an area. They can exert sizable influence through their commissioning and purchasing of goods and services, through their workforce and employment capacity, and by creative use of their

facilities and land assets. Positive use of these aspects can affect social, economic and environmental change in an area. Anchors can be your local council, University, college, housing association, NHS health board or large local private sector employer. As an institution our impact and reach will of course extend beyond our local geographies - our research may be international, our work may be digital and our 'communities' may be wider than the local area.

This Strategy document was developed following consultation with staff across the University- both in person and via an on-line survey and sets out Abertay's current and potential role in civic engagement and provides a strategic framework and recommended actions in the following structure:

1. Civic Engagement in Abertay University Plans
2. The context - Dundee and the Tay Cities Region
3. The context - current civic engagement activity
4. Summary of Context and Rationale for Civic Engagement
5. Our People, Place and Plan- Working to make a difference through Civic Engagement

It is expected that this strategy and its implementation plan will develop and evolve and will be revisited and updated as required. Our Implementation Plan is published internally.

1. Civic Engagement in Abertay University plans

a. Strategic Plan and Research and Knowledge Exchange:

Our [Strategic Plan](#) and our [Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#) both talk particularly about Abertay University's aspirations to support Civic Engagement, for example:

Our Strategic Plan focuses on Abertay's ability to add value to the Scottish economy. It also expresses our vision for the future and continues to build on work that will improve social, cultural and economic outcomes. It talks about our wider contribution where Abertay '*will be an active and committed partner in the ongoing cultural and economic development of Dundee and the region*'.

Our Research and Knowledge Exchange strategy says: '*Staff will be encouraged to maintain close links with business/ industry/ professional disciplines*' and '*we will offer work-related learning opportunities on all programmes. We will give all students the opportunity not only to learn new knowledge and skills but also to apply their learning in practical situations.*'

In addition, Abertay is committed to the principles of the UKRI [Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research](#).

*'Public engagement enhances research so that it contributes positively to society and results in greater relevance, accountability and transparency..... We believe that engaging with the public should form part of the role of researchers in any discipline. By engaging with the public researchers can benefit from improving the quality of research and its impact, by widening research horizons or providing user perspectives; enhancing researchers' communication and influencing skills; higher personal and institutional profiles; new partnerships. **Public engagement can also help universities actively contribute to positive social change and the 'public good'.***' (Prof. Alan Thorpe, OBE)

b. The International Strategy also talks about the importance that our international students have on the cultural impact of the city:

‘We will contribute to the City of Dundee’s Cultural Strategy and build on our reputation as the UK’s first and only UNESCO International City of Design and creativity through increasing the number and diversity of international students living and studying in the city. By encouraging international students to study at Abertay we will celebrate and promote global citizenship for both our international and our home-based students.

Further to the recruitment of international students, we will enable and encourage our international students to engage with the wider community in Dundee and surrounding areas. We will provide opportunities for our international students to contribute to both our academic and civic communities through curricula activities, projects, volunteering and community work.

We will explore opportunities for international students to get involved with Dundee schools to share experiences from country of origin and potentially get involved in supporting language classes. The integration of international students into the city will form a component of our Civic Engagement.

We will work closely with Abertay’s Students’ Association to support and enable international students to engage with, and enhance the social, economic and cultural activities at Abertay and throughout the City of Dundee.’

c. Estates Vision:

Abertay University has an ambitious [Estates Plan](#) to redevelop our city centre campus. The Estates Strategy is in progress at the time of writing this document, with major improvements already delivered (cyberQuarter development/Cladding the north exterior of the Kydd building and room upgrades).

Subject to final approvals and the funding, there are ambitious plans to greatly improve the campus. We are seen as an ‘anchor institution’ in Dundee as we embark upon an Estates masterplan to *‘become more physically and visually permeable and to showcase our learning and activity to the wider community and enhance our campus experience’*

There are a number of campus development plans which would augment and change our campus as part of the vision and allow us to engage more with our communities. These are part of our [Estates Strategy](#).

2. The context - Dundee and the Tay Cities Region

Abertay University is located in the city centre of Dundee, a small city of around 150,000 residents. Of course, our sphere of influence extends beyond Dundee, to the wider local regional area, including Angus, Perth, and Fife, where the overall 'commuting' population is estimated to be 400,000. However it is important to note that our civic engagement may extend beyond the communities of Dundee and Tayside. Our engagement may be digital, national or international, without geographic boundaries.

Dundee is the UK's first and only City of Design. This global designation as a Creative City acknowledges Dundee's rich design heritage, the thriving contemporary design sector and a city committed to using design to solve problems and to help make Dundee a better place to live^{iv}.

Dundee is also home to the Scotland's first Design Museum, the [V&A Dundee](#). Abertay University is a founding partner of the V&A Dundee and supporters of [Unesco City of Design](#) and is actively involved with both organisations. Dundee is building a reputation as a sustainable city too, supported by the Port of Dundee's work in decommissioning oil and gas, the promised arrival of the [Eden Project](#) to the city, and the [Michelin Innovation Parc](#) supporting sustainable businesses. In 2019 the city was named as the [best place to live in Scotland](#) and in 2022, as one of the best places in the UK to own an electric car due to the density of EV charging points^v.

Dundee however still has significant levels of poverty and deprivation. The latest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) reported that 70 of Dundee City's 188 data zones were ranked in the 20% most deprived in Scotland. Dundee also has one area in the Top 10 most deprived areas in Scotland.^{vi} Key facts from [Dundee City Councils 10 Year City Plan](#) 2022-2032 include:

- 31% of all households in Dundee City are estimated to be fuel poor
- 22.5% of children in Dundee City are living in poverty after housing costs, compared to 20.9% across Scotland.
- 54,497 (36.6%) people in Dundee City live in a data zone ranked within the 20% most deprived. This compares to 53,435 (36.0%) in SIMD 2016.
- 10,506 (43.8%) children (aged 0-15 years) live within the 20% most deprived data zones.
- 19.5% of households in Dundee are workless (Scottish benchmark is 18.1%)
- Dundee has the highest number of drug related deaths in Scotland (45.2 per 100,000 population for the 5-year period 2017-2021)
- Dundee has the second lowest male life expectancies of all Scottish areas (73.8 compared to the Scottish average of 76.8)

The identified strategic priorities in the Plan include to:

Reduce child poverty and inequalities in incomes, education and health.

Deliver inclusive economic growth (including community wealth building.)

Tackle climate change and reach Net Zero emissions by 2045.

3. The context - current civic engagement activity

Abertay University staff engage in a wide range of outreach activities - either through their work (particularly academic research and enhancing teaching practice through community engagement) or through personal motivation.

A survey was undertaken in 2022 to identify the range of activities currently undertaken. **The breadth of current civic engagement identified in the survey was very wide and included the following** (this list is not exhaustive and does not include the outreach work specifically supporting student recruitment or delivered through academic research):

- **Archive work** with the community- talks/volunteers and using our students to support this work. As an example- see the school project work with St Pauls' Academy creating games inspired by our archive - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SONGS35pUaE>
- Many staff are **Board Members/Trustees of charities** (national and local supporting all sorts of causes- education, housing, food, leisure and culture, law, health, sport, criminal justice, care, domestic violence, digital and cyber, refugees and international immigrants)
- Social and Political **Debates** - hosted by the Sociology Division
- **Establishment of a Law clinic in 2023**, in collaboration with a local law firm- run by our law students who are also involved in the TayPer community law advice project. Our law students also support CAB and a law clinic in Perth.
- Staff involvement in supporting **local events**- Science Festival/Games Jams/Café Science/V&A and McManus, Dundee's Art Gallery and Museum, exhibitions when they have the time.
- **Outreach events in combat sports and with selected athletes**- the accompanying information booklet was downloaded over 2,600 times in 2022
- **Engagement with performing arts and cultural organisations**- through a range of outreach and research projects
- **Outreach support with the military** and veterans- supporting the transition to university and engaging with the children of military personnel to support university attendance
- **Public talks / workshops/ exhibitions** – with a wide audience- schools and colleges/community groups/charities/professional bodies
- **Staff supporting service improvements** with Ninewells Hospital and other charities
- **STEM engagement** through collaboration with a range of professional and voluntary groups, giving talks, attending committees as Abertay University ambassador and collaborative events with a wide range of partners
- **Student Placements**- students going out on placement with business and charities, the impact of which has been evidenced in relation to sports sessions delivered by our students within the city's schools
- **Students solving business problems** with local employers through the **Innovation for Global Growth Competition run by the Dundee Business School for their students**
- **Students creating prototype games and involved with games companies/games expo (EGX)** through the Dare Academy summer programme
- **Tayside Centre for Counselling (TCC)** - a free community resource, staffed by our MSc counselling students
- Delivery of the **Upskilling programmes** (on-line micro-credential modules), free of charge in a range of subjects, delivered to a wide audience in Dundee and beyond- nearly 1,000 people engaged with this in 2022
- **Work placements** - In the academic year 2020-21 1,111 student placements were completed. This represents about 25% of the total student population.

- Abertay is a platinum member of **Tayside Chamber of Commerce** and is involved in supporting events, talks and collaboration visits to support business in the area

4. Summary of Context and Rationale for Civic Engagement

Abertay University has an important role to play in supporting civic engagement. There is potential to do more civic engagement, using our People actively working across Schools and Services (staff and students), our Place (the communities we can engage with, our Estate and through Partners) and through a Plan.

Civic Engagement brings benefits to our communities and to Abertay, specifically it offers our staff and students:

Opportunities to learn from and engage with our communities, to enhance our teaching practice, and to provide opportunities for participatory research.

Networking opportunities that lead to future collaborations in teaching, research, recruitment, and other initiatives.

Opportunities for personal development and on-going learning through volunteering/work placements or internships. These opportunities support staff development. Student employability is also assisted by enabling the demonstration of relevant skills and experience in an applied work or community setting.

These diverse activities delivered by staff and students, when supported corporately, provide the University with the opportunity to enhance and elevate the Abertay brand as staff and students engaging with our community will be seen as 'Abertay ambassadors'.

Civic Engagement will allow Abertay to '**work to make a difference in the civic life in our communities**' for shared benefits.

5. Civic Engagement Strategic Plan – ‘Our People, Place and Plan- Working to make a difference through Civic Engagement’

Abertay’s ambition is to provide impact to the community that we are a part of. The underpinning of our Civic Engagement Strategic Plan is that we will **‘work to make a difference in our communities’**. The activities to support civic engagement will develop and evolve dependent on resourcing/uptake and are seen to be university- wide, delivered by academic and professional services staff at all levels and involve our student body and our Students’ Association.

a. Strategic Aims:

1. **We will enable our staff and students to engage with our communities (as defined on Page 1 and 2) through a range of academic and non-academic activities.**
2. **We will improve the available information for staff and students on civic engagement activities and opportunities to widen our civic engagement activities and reach.**
3. **We will invest in our Estate and city centre campus to support our civic engagement.**
4. **We will embed civic engagement activities within our daily work.**

Why will we do this?

- To support social, economic, cultural and community benefits and enhanced well-being in our region taking cognisance of local challenges and by encouraging more staff and students to take part in activities locally.
- To learn from diverse communities and enrich our teaching, practice, and research.
- To provide opportunities to enhance the Abertay University brand through staff and students who act as university ambassadors and through wider public engagement.
- To engage with our community to support our teaching practice, business networks, research activity/support case studies.
- To enhance the sense of ‘community’ at Abertay University by providing opportunities for students to engage locally and to gain valuable practical experience interacting with business, charities, and the public.
- To provide opportunities for student development through volunteering, placements, RKE and engagement with the business and local community.
- To enhance employability of our graduate population through networks and work experience.
- To support more engagement with our communities by enhancing the information on opportunities for students and staff to get involved locally.
- To provide opportunities for students and staff to engage with our communities through activities on our estate.
- By improving the physical environment and offering opportunities for social/leisure/green spaces, we will provide an enhanced place for all that improves well-being.

Ends