

# BRUNELHIVE REVIEW

*A Weekly Journal on University-Industry Partnerships  
and Global Business Growth*

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## Conversations on Impact

*What is the function and contribution of universities  
in a new world of knowledge exchange and sustainable,  
social impact? The conversation has evolved.*

What is the point of universities? Steven Schwartz, writing in the Times Higher Education back in 2003, suggested that “we still have no consensus on the purpose of higher education.” Tomas Hurst further explored this question in the Guardian in 2007. In 2011, Harriet Swain re-stated the same question: what are universities for? Across the Atlantic, in the New York Times Magazine in 2015, Kwame Antony Appiah, a philosophy lecturer, joined the reflective chorus: what is the point of college? These questions reflect the growing focus on the need to re-think tertiary education, and how it has evolved into, in many cases, research hotbeds for cutting-edge technology today.

However, as a new age of entrepreneurial endeavour unfolds, and some companies look into space to create new value, the university identity debate rages on. As apps and algorithms continue to shape how we make critical judgments and go about our everyday lives, this burning question is perhaps more crucial than we might think. Perhaps extending the question may help in placing universities at the centre of the new entrepreneurial revolution.

What is the function and contribution of universities in a new world of knowledge exchange and sustainable, social impact? Some might say the jury is still out. Beyond encouraging critical thinking and generating new ideas across technology, finance, economics and business, some universities have positioned themselves to become drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable value creation. As research commercialisation has received renewed boosts from government, industry and philanthropy, harnessing this intellectual energy for the good of society and planet is perhaps a strong point for having universities. However, as students, their core customers, continue to pay sometimes in excess of £50,000 for university 'products and services' to prepare themselves for the new world of work, the purpose of this skills development service is still in very sharp focus. Perhaps universities can be seen as nurseries, hotbeds, incubators, hatcheries or foundries of new ideas. Or better still, they are idea accelerators - providing a safe environment for young and 'not-so-young' adventurers to explore their



dreams and visions. Whichever way the question is posed, discussed and debated, £50k may seem a high price to pay for the privilege. On the other hand, perhaps it's not a high price at all, when the revenues to be generated from this life-long investment are factored into a 10-year cash flow forecast from graduation day.

On the wider issue of knowledge exchange and sustainable, social impact, stakeholders may also need answers to further questions. How do established companies and emerging entrepreneurs engage with, and apply academic research to build sustainable businesses? How can the communication gap between researchers and entrepreneurs be effectively bridged, for the benefit of both academic investigator and business risk-taker? What role does digital technology play in facilitating this future, value-creation communication? Business school research can be a significant resource for entrepreneurs, as they strive to bring together financial, technical and human resources to create sustainable value for their stakeholders and society. However, gaps still exist in how potentially-useful, evidence-based research is relayed to busy, time-poor, and often cash-strapped venture developers.

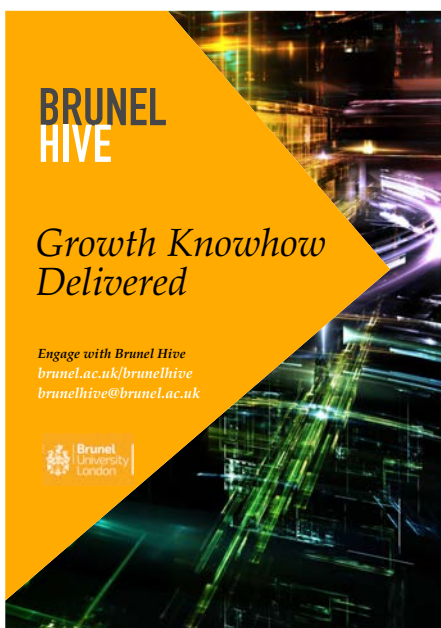


Whilst Schwartz, Hurst, Swain, Appiah and several others continue to force a re-evaluation of role and purpose of universities, policy and regulatory initiatives are also re-shaping the tertiary education story. The UK government's Industrial Strategy and the new Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) will play a role in how universities make sustainable, social impacts. Companies will have better access to impactful scholarship, and academic experts will develop clearer strategies on how they engage with, and support businesses. The future for university-industry communication and collaboration looks bright.

Brunel University's mission and strategy of Engaged Scholarship has been tried and tested over the years, and the KEF will no doubt strengthen the university's impact record. As Brunel Hive, the university's business growth platform, gears up to deliver targeted, research-led, support services to local and international businesses, there are truly exciting times ahead.

At Brunel Hive Review, we will continue to explore and examine the Brunel-Industry-Policy engagement with our range of collaboration case studies, corporate interviews, research reviews and special reports.

Brunel Hive Review aims to make a key contribution to bridging this communication gap. Across our social media platform - LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube - we aim to create and engage targeted communities of companies and entrepreneurs across the UK, and internationally. As our case study content develops, we will contribute to the toolkit of growing companies, helping them to link cutting-edge research to their entrepreneurial value propositions. Drawing on specific collaboration cases across the business school and other departments, we will provide real-life evidence on how well academic research and sustainable value creation define and influence each other.



As universities choose their individual paths, revamp and re-pitch their corporate brands, and implement their long-term value strategies, the more entrepreneurial institutions may be the ones to attract today's increasingly hard-nosed student and business buyer. Brunel Hive Review will document how Brunel contributes to creating a space-age university model - one where ideas are critically tested, incubated and facilitated to generate high-growth self-employment and sustainable business growth. The conversation is generally beginning to shift from: what is the point of universities? The focus of the discussion seems now to be on universities re-positioning the offerings to not only students, but to local businesses, communities, and other societal stakeholders.

Be the jury. We invite you to join us in this conversation.

The Brunel Hive Team