

TOWARDS 2030 AND BEYOND

The University of Cumbria's
strategy refresh

January 2026

THE REFRESH OF 'TOWARDS 2030' AND BEYOND

As we approach the mid-point in our strategy it is the right time to consider how to refine our focus and ensure that we drive forward our ambitions for our students, our communities and for Cumbria. We aim to be an exemplar for higher education, realising economic transformation through an inclusive place-based mission and delivery via vibrant partnership.



Vice Chancellor Professor
Julie Mennell DL

Our refresh of Towards 2030 has been undertaken in an exciting period for Cumbria. The launch of Going for Growth, the Cumbria Economic Strategy, as well as the Borderlands Growth Partnership, Barrow Town Deal, Lancashire Growth Strategy and the development of a mayoral authority for Cumbria, present opportunities to accelerate and amplify positive progress. Strong alignment with the national policy agendas, including the defence industry strategy, provide further impetus.

The introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement offers a platform to further support flexible provision for individuals changing or progressing in their careers.


We have also seen significant achievements since the launch of Towards 2030. Growth in apprenticeships, supporting critical public services, has been unprecedented and both our new Barrow campus and the Pears Cumbria School of Medicine in Carlisle have welcomed their first students in 2025.

It is, however, also an exceptionally challenging time for the higher education sector as many universities face significant financial deficits following the collapse in international student recruitment two years ago, evolving student support needs and a period of sustained high inflation compounding the real-term decline in Higher Education funding. Through careful management we have maintained a positive financial position. However, we believe that we can't and shouldn't standstill as an organisation. We must continue to transform, our systems, processes, structures, and ways of working, to provide capacity for investment and enable thriving co-creative relationships, to fulfil our ambitions for Cumbria and for every student. We embrace the diversity of our student community and their education journeys and are committed to enhancing and delivering excellent student experience and graduate outcomes.

We acknowledge that 2030 is a milestone and not the end of our journey. In refreshing our strategy, we are actively looking beyond 2030 and acknowledge the need to be an increasingly agile organisation. We remain rooted in the needs of Cumbria and its communities and will anticipate, respond and adapt to the evolving nature of the region, its businesses and communities.

We also recognise that being for and of Cumbria brings the expertise and imperative to impact beyond the boundaries of our region.





We were established in Cumbria for a reason. Inspiring and equipping our graduates, communities, economy and environment to thrive remains our mission.

We are a young university, but we are deeply rooted in the region through our predecessor institutions and the support and engagement of our extended Alumni family.

OUR MISSION

Headquartered in the historic city of Carlisle and surrounded by the incredible landscape of Cumbria and the Lake District, we draw on the unique natural, cultural and industrial assets of the county and our experience of delivery across dispersed communities. We are here to enable our local communities, to attract students nationally and internationally to benefit from a unique combination of place and practice, and to enable employers to build their productivity faster through collaborative research, knowledge exchange, and workforce development.

In refreshing Towards 2030, we know that we need to strengthen and broaden our impact. Our strategic partners, students and localities require us to respond effectively to the challenges ahead, identifying and creating opportunities, if we are to achieve our shared ambitions.

Funding commitments for the new Citadels buildings and the Carlisle Business Exchange and the opening of both the Pears Cumbria School of Medicine and our new campus in Barrow demonstrate the confidence and expectations which regional stakeholders and Government place with us.



Looking forward, the mayoral authority will enable a focus on the skills needs of Cumbria providing further impetus to build with partners the visible, effective skill pathways that will support a step change in economic confidence, individual attainment, higher education participation, wellbeing and productivity.

The unique nature of Cumbria and the university provide the foundation for delivering impact beyond the timeline of Towards 2030 and beyond the boundaries of the county. Our expertise in dispersed delivery of teaching and learning enables reach beyond our campuses, supporting students in the workplace and wherever they are in world. In doing so, we will drive ongoing innovation in our own delivery to ensure that our communities and businesses have access to the skills they need.

In our refresh of Towards 2030, we acknowledge that to fulfil our mission as Cumbria's University we also need to be the university for each of our localities. Our early work in Barrow has provided insights into what it means to a university town, while providing a conduit to contribute directly to the National Endeavour. We commit to refining and articulating the strategic focus of our campuses; ensuring that we support local need and aspiration and demonstrate to the world the unique opportunities of our places.



This will include championing, through both our research and teaching, the interconnectivity of sustainability, population health and technology innovation, including robotics and advanced manufacturing, across our sectors from the land-based and visitor economies to health, energy and defence.

OUR VALUES

In refreshing Towards 2030, our values remain at the forefront of our thinking and approach:

WE ARE PERSONAL

Individuals are the heart of what we do. Our culture of belonging recognises and supports every person.

WE ARE PROGRESSIVE

A determination to deliver our mission keeps us open to opportunities in front of us.

AND WE ARE ENGAGED

As stewards of knowledge and place, it is our privilege to champion the region and advocate for the value of education.

DEFINING SUCCESS FOR 2030

The quantifiable factors identified in Towards 2030 remain the test of our success. By 2030:

- We will have gained national standing and reputation for the relevance and quality of our student experience, student outcomes and applied research and knowledge exchange.
- We will have raised higher education participation in our region from the young through to our working age population and increased the numbers of new entrants into Cumbria.
- We will have increased national and international market share in areas of strength.
- We will be making a strategic and demonstrable societal and economic impact to Cumbria and our wider region, increasing the high-level skills capability and productivity of our key sectors.
- We will be financially prosperous, allowing sustainably investment in our people and places.
- We will have reduced our carbon emissions and delivered against targets which challenge us.



- A diverse student base of c. 20,000 students – spanning students who are young, mature, on campus, off campus, living at home, studying away, learning through working, learning whilst working, full or part-time, online or flexible, from our county or the other side of the world.

However, we also know that within Cumbria, higher education participation rates vary significantly.

We will have established, with growing reputation and impact:

- The Carlisle Business Exchange Centre.
- The Citadels site as part of our Carlisle campus.
- A joint Medical School with Imperial (now opened as The Pears Cumbria School of Medicine).
- Ambleside as an internationally recognised place of scholarly excellence for sustainable practices and the natural environment, bringing Scale How and Hill Top back into use.
- The Barrow Learning Quarter (New campus built and opened for 2025/26 academic year).
- Institute of Engineering, Computing and Advanced Manufacturing.

Quantifiable success will also mean:

- **Reducing the participation gap for our communities, particularly those in West Cumbria.**



REFRESHING OUR FOCUS

In Towards 2030, we outlined three areas of strategic focus:

- Our Students and Graduates
- People, Practices and Places
- Academic and Applied Research Focus.

Supported by four cross-cutting themes:

- Digital
- Sustainability & Carbon Reduction
- Health & Wellbeing
- Strategic Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement.

The cross-cutting themes, and particularly that of **Strategic Partnerships and engagement** with our communities and localities, critically contribute to the refinement of our focus. The **health and wellbeing** of our people, staff and students, supporting effective personal learning and growth and organisational development is central to our values.

We will harness **digital** to transform and enable our portfolio, programme access and delivery, curriculum, operations, working practices, environments, and campuses - supporting innovation, new business models, and the evolving academic and cyber landscape. The importance of a holistic organisation wide commitment to **sustainability** remains clear and a new strategic framework is currently in development.



For our Students and Graduates, we look to increase accessibility and the regional, national and international relevance of our provision.

In the period since launching Towards 2030 our degree apprenticeship models have been hugely successful, increasing higher skill levels for individuals from paramedics to project managers within and beyond Cumbria. However, participation in higher education in Cumbria for 18-year-olds^[1] remains below the average for the Northwest and the UK as a whole and varies significantly across the county. Our young people deserve to be able to access the life opportunities that would be available to their peers in urban areas.

As we look forward, we will continue to innovate and extend the range of ways individuals engage in higher education and ensure that students have an exceptional student experience, and graduates benefit from our curricula, work experience, learning technologies and gain graduate skills through our approach to Teaching, Learning & Assessment.

In doing so, we recognise that we must listen and respond to the voices of students, employers and localities. Our dispersed communities are strong. However, the challenges of geography and limited transport options can make alternative pathways through education and employment difficult for individuals to identify.



We commit to working with our partners in schools and further education colleges, to make those pathways visible and accessible for every school-leaver.

A significant proportion of our on-campus students are already local returners to education. We recognise the importance of providing supportive routes to get ready for study and will develop this further as part of our portfolio. We also anticipate the accelerating pace of change in skills requirements and will extend our apprenticeship portfolio and our off-campus delivery of Continuous Professional Development at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

In recruiting students to Cumbria from across the UK, we will offer programmes tailored to the region. Our groundbreaking partnership with Imperial College and the Pears Foundation delivers exactly this approach to the medical programme. This approach will both provide a distinction experience for those students but also encourage them to remain, supporting our economy and communities to fulfil its potential. Our international students are increasingly drawn by the unique environment and historic legacy of our region as well as our academic expertise. We will continue to build on these foundations, through our International College now open in Lancaster and developing our portfolio of postgraduate and particularly postgraduate research programmes.

[1] UCAS 2024 end of cycle resources – Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies.



The Towards 2030 strategy recognised the need to respond to even more local- and demand-led opportunities and in doing so to enable the acceleration of expertise that we can export nationally and internationally.

We have made significant progress against many of the aspirations outlined in Towards 2030. This includes the construction of a new campus in Barrow directly aligned to the National Defence Endeavour and establishing, with Imperial College and the Pears Foundation, the Pears Cumbria School of Medicine with an associated research centre, as well as the rapid expansion of our apprenticeship provision supporting major employers and public sector need.


In refreshing Towards 2030, we recognise explicitly the need to ensure that:

- We directly support business innovation and workforce development ensuring that Cumbria, as well as the university, gains national recognition for the creativity, entrepreneurship and the excellence of our research, learning & teaching.





- We understand and engage effectively with the unique demands of operating successful businesses within Cumbria, ensuring our curricula reflect and support those needs. The Carlisle Business Exchange will provide business development and incubation capability in and from Carlisle. We effectively respond and contribute to the development of public services; ensuring that our research expertise and our graduating teachers, nurses and allied health professionals are ready to address the population health and education needs of our communities.
 - We collaboratively develop study across the arts and creative sectors with our partners, ensuring that our graduates can thrive drawing on digital, technological, creative and entrepreneurial expertise.
 - We increase our efforts to amplify Ambleside, globally unique as a university campus located inside of a national park, as a world-renowned place of scholarly and research excellence for sustainable land management and the natural environment, attracting new colleagues and partners.
 - As we grow and intensify our impacts, our structures will need to evolve to support that growth and breadth. We intend to transition from a structure of five-six institutes to three faculties. This will provide the agility and efficiency, as well as the research and interdisciplinary expertise, to drive forward Towards 2030. Each faculty will be the academic home for staff and students, whether based on campus, in work or learning online.
- Our approach recognises, seeks, and embraces the benefits of co-creation with partnerships as we seek to accelerate our impacts.



**For our People and Places,
we look to increase our
Impact and Voice through
Partnership.**

Towards 2030 recognised that the why, how, where and for whom we do things is as important as “what” we do. It outlined a purpose driven approach which underpins our approach to valuing and equipping our staff, ensuring that our organisational practices are agile and efficient, embracing our responsibilities for carbon reduction and sustainability and that our places, multiple campuses, provide us with the ability and reach to deliver our strategic aims.

We are investing and being invested in.

The Pears Cumbria School of Medicine, our new campus in Barrow and the commitment of the Borderlands Growth Deal and Carlisle Town Deal to the Citadels and Carlisle Business Exchange developments in the heart of Carlisle are evidence of that.

In refreshing Towards 2030, we recognise explicitly that we need to amplify our impact.

As Cumbria’s University we must be the university for each of our localities and for our students off campus, studying in their workplaces or online. We will clearly articulate the identity, contribution and focus of each of our campuses, providing a diverse and vibrant environment, open to our wider community.

We will deliberately work in partnership with business, third sector and other civic bodies to tackle the wicked issues and the transformational opportunities available to our region. That means making sure that our portfolio anticipates the needs of individuals, businesses and sectors, supporting entrepreneurship amongst our staff and students and finding mechanisms to support connection with SMEs, particularly in the creative sector, that don’t have the scale to commit to standard apprenticeship engagement.



We will embrace the responsibilities of the university as a civic leader. We recognise that this is, most evident in the recent commitments to Barrow Rising, a real and significant role requiring commitment to provide insight, drive and challenge but also to reflect and amend our own activities to support shared civic priorities.

We will formalise our strategic approach to sustainability and carbon reduction as an organisation and through the development and demonstration of world-leading expertise at our Ambleside campus.

OUR VISION

In delivering our Refresh of Towards 2030, our vision remains one of:

Transforming lives and livelihoods through learning, research, place and partnership – for now and for our future generations

