

# UNIVERSITY TIMES

*Serving Faculty & Staff Since 1968*

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VOLUME 53  
ISSUE 11: JANUARY 29, 2021

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## Pitt, Newcastle share ideas on 'place-based' education

Friday, January 29, 2021

By **SUSAN JONES**

Pitt isn't just reaching out to its neighbors during the Year of Engagement. In a two-day event last week, the University reached across the Atlantic Ocean to share ideas for a "place-based" approach to education with officials from Newcastle University and its surrounding community in England.

"We think the old days of universities sitting behind the walls — the so-called ivory tower approach — simply chucking stuff over the wall, whether that be research or graduates, and hoping that those research findings or that those graduates might be useful to somebody out there, really that those days should be long vanished," said Chris Day, vice-chancellor and president of Newcastle University, in the opening session of "The Role of Universities in Sustainable, Just & Inclusive Cities" on Jan. 21. "Working closely with our city and regional partners is the way to produce graduates that are truly needed by the local economy and other professions."

Pitt's partnership with Newcastle goes back to 2016 and includes student and scholar exchanges. Day has visited the Oakland campus and Chancellor Patrick Gallagher was a guest at Newcastle in 2018. Both schools are in similarly sized, post-industrial cities. Last week's event was organized by the University Center for International Studies.

Kathy Humphrey, Pitt's senior vice chancellor for Engagement, kicked off the conference by saying this is the first in a series of annual conferences with Newcastle "that will set the stage for defining a place-based approach to university education, in which we consider the community setting as central to the mission of the university. We also hope to produce an expanding global network of institutions committed to these ideas, committed to being more than a good neighbor, but a good partner with individuals, communities, businesses and local governments."

At Newcastle University, Day said they have elevated engagement in place to the same level of attention as research, teaching and global strategies. To do this, they have established several pillars of engagement:

- Influence the local economy, not just from direct spending by the university, but by using research and development to attract investors and encouraging faculty and students to create start-up companies.
- Health and well-being, through bringing hospitals, universities and local government together to drive economic growth in the health sciences.
- Play a huge role in cultural vibrancy of the city, including having a museum and galleries on campus that are open to the public.
- Widen opportunities through education, by trying to increase access of students in the surrounding area to the university. In his five years there, Day said the percentage of students at Newcastle who come from disadvantaged backgrounds has risen from 6 percent to 20 percent.
- Encourage researchers and the work that they do to play a role in local and national policy development.

Mark Thomas of the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance said that areas without anchor universities, like Pitt and Newcastle, "are trying to replicate the magic, without really the tools to do so." In talking with companies looking to expand, "Universities are always the first thing that they ask about."

He said the alliance wants to make sure that "the universities have the tools, programs, public support that they need to really produce the talent and create the pipelines that will power our economy in the future."

Pitt's Provost Ann Cudd said the "breadth and the depth of the outreach that Pitt does in a place-based approach has expanded exponentially" since her days here as a student in the 1980s. She cited the Community Engagement Centers in Homewood and Hill District, along with Pitt's Office of Child Development, as key examples of this outreach.

She said one of the areas she's working on is changing the promotion and tenure rules within the university so that they reflect this increased emphasis on engagement and social impact.

Also participating in the session was Pat Ritchie, chief executive of Newcastle City Council.

The conference also included a discussion between Newcastle's Chris Day and Pitt Chancellor Patrick Gallagher, along with a plenary discussion on "Post Industrial Cities and the Sustainable Development Goals — A Framework for the Future?" and several breakout sessions.

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