

UNAI MEMBER ACTIVITY REPORT 2017/2018

Newcastle University

United Kingdom

During the 2017/2018 reporting period, Newcastle University undertook a number of activities that underscore its commitment to UNAI and its principles. The following examples stand out as particularly noteworthy:

Development related research activity is integral to the Newcastle University vision to be a world-leading university, advancing knowledge, providing creative solutions and solving global problems. Our new University Vision and Strategy and our draft new University research strategy emphasise the vital importance we place on addressing Global Challenges (GC), meeting UN Sustainable Development Goals and working together in mutually beneficial partnerships, especially with partners based in low and middle income settings. A cornerstone of our new Vision and Strategy is engagement for economic and societal benefit, of which making a difference internationally is a key part. Newcastle University has a particular emphasis, developed over many years, of working in equal partnership across disciplines and sectors with a variety of stakeholders to find innovative and achievable solutions to the most pressing problems felt regionally, nationally and globally.



Newcastle
University

Below we have highlighted 3 of the UNAI principles for special attention in this report.

1. Addressing Poverty - A commitment to addressing issues of poverty through education;

This principle is embedded in Newcastle University's vision as a world-leading university, advancing knowledge, providing creative solutions and solving global problems. Our core values include social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion and we have a track record of working to support young people in North East England to raise their aspirations and attainment. We aim in everything we do to shape brighter futures, grow the economy and champion social justice. Our students come from all over the world and we support them to develop the resilience, attributes

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and skills to transform their own lives and the communities in which they live, whether that it is the North East of England or internationally. We have a long history of excellence in learning and teaching. We are consistently rated among the UK's best for the education and the support we provide to students from all backgrounds. This support has helped them become some of the most sought after for employment or further study in the UK across a wide range of disciplines. Our more than 190,000 alumni are making a significant impact across the globe.

Further our School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences hosts SOLE Central, a global hub for research into self-organised learning environments (SOLEs) (more information is available [here](#)). Work in this area, including that of Prof. Sugata Mitra's School in the Cloud (more information available [here](#)), has transformed lives in the most disadvantaged communities in the world through accessible and innovative educational practice.

2. Capacity Building - A commitment to building capacity in higher education systems across the world;

We strive to be a global inclusive institution providing new knowledge and creative solutions that make a positive impact on the economy and society of our region, the UK and beyond. Embedded in our University strategy is a commitment to provide leadership in identifying and responding to societal needs including those addressed by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We do this partly through our very many global research partnerships with international higher education institutions, especially those in lower income settings, and with relevant NGOs working to embed research into development (for example INASP).

To achieve this aim we have established the Newcastle University Global Challenges Academy (NU GCA). The NU GCA has been developed to encourage and support problem-and-solution focused, transformative research and to maximise the likelihood of improving social welfare and economic development in our DAC list partner countries. The NU GCA explicitly aims to build capacity of Newcastle academics and their LMIC based partners to address global challenges, as we believe that working together in partnership is the key to achieving the UN SDGs across the world. NU GCA activity includes our Global Challenges Networks: Water Security; Agrifood Security; Urban Futures; Global Ageing; Sustainable Sugar Reduction and Sustainable Livelihoods. The Networks bring together key academics, partners and communities so choices and synergies might be better understood and new intellectual partnerships and project ideas can be formed. Further, the GCA Knowledge Exchange Webinar Series and Website aim to build capacity for addressing GC in University staff and their LMIC partners. This outreach and KE activity is intended as a collaborative catalyst as well as a training platform. It is intended that this activity will be built upon, particularly in engaging our LMIC partners, over the next 3 years in line with our ODA Strategy.

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3. Human Rights - A commitment to human rights, among them freedom of inquiry, opinion, and speech;

IN 2017 Newcastle University led the Freedom City 207 initiative; a city-wide programme across Newcastle marking the 50th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. receiving an honorary degree from Newcastle University. See [here](#) for more information.

On 13th November 1967, Newcastle University awarded Dr Martin Luther King an honorary degree, the only UK university to do so in his lifetime. On accepting this award, Dr King made what was to be his final public speech outside of the US before his assassination in April 1968. In a moving address, he called for us to join him in the ongoing struggle against war, poverty and racism.

Newcastle University has a strong history of civic engagement and support for civil rights and social justice. The award of Dr King's honorary degree in recognition of his significant contribution towards equality and fairness for all is just one example of this. Freedom City 2017 was a programme which brought together international artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics and community groups to inspire a new generation to contribute towards tackling the issues that Dr King spoke of in his acceptance speech. Details of the all exciting projects inspired by this programme can be found [here](#).

As part of the legacy of the Freedom City 2017 initiative, Newcastle University has used the opportunity to reflect on institutional practices and are actively taking forward a programme of work to embed equality and diversity across the whole university. Among legacy initiatives the University will be working towards accreditation under the Disability Charter and Race Equality Charter and is to appoint a Dean of Social Justice to ensure these values carry forward into all that the University does in the future.

4. Newcastle University's academic research related to the Sustainable Development Goals implementation

Working towards the UN SDGs is an aim enshrined in our institutional strategy. We understand our role in this task broadly to include academic research both into the UNSDGs themselves, their targets, indicators and policy practices as well as academic research that can address aspects of the targets in multiple countries. Further we understand this commitment as applying to our work with partners in lower income settings, those in 'developed countries' and at home in the UK and particularly the North East.

Examples of all the work undertaken at the university with relevance to the UNSDGs are too numerous to include comprehensively here. For more information please see both www.newcastle.ac.uk/globalchallenges, which lists research projects by relevant UNSDGs, and also see <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/sustainability/> for projects associated with our Institute for Sustainability. Below are some examples of our UNSDG focused work:

1. Measuring up to the SDGs in the UK: a data availability and performance gap analysis

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The Sustainable Development Goals are universally applicable – commitments not just for developing, but developed countries. Nevertheless, they need translation to differentiated country contexts. In “Transforming Our World: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development” (the SDG summit outcome document - A/RES/70/1), countries’ commitments to implementation of the goals should be followed by “ambitious national responses” (para 78) to the SDGs. Countries also commit to implementing the goals in a way (1) that “leaves no one behind” (para 4; 74e) – focusing on the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised groups within society – and (2) respects the “integrated and indivisible” nature of the SDGs – placing a premium on policy coherence in response.

This research project addresses two key questions prompted by attempts at SDG measurement and implementation in a UK domestic context.

(a) How many of the applicable SDG indicators are currently measured in the UK?

(b) What do these measurements tell us about where the UK sits in respect of the ambitions expressed in the global targets?

This ongoing project takes the current agreed SDG indicators for targets applicable to the UK domestic context (excluding goal 17 because of its focus on global partnership), and then searches for, and garners expert evaluation of, commensurable indicators. The linked document constitutes a full current table of results for over 170 indicators – over 100 pages of data. The project is not currently complete: as it moves towards completeness – not least through interviews with more area experts and further collaboration with ONS, DEFRA, and other data sources and users, it will become more robust and comprehensive.

In phase one, the project employed experienced researchers to sweep for global, regional and national metrics and data that mapped on to the SDG indicators, from government and non-government sources. Phase two, currently underway, consults academic experts, data users and sources to maximise the comprehensiveness and robustness of this evaluation.

As such, the data presented possesses some limitations. The timeliness of the data, and issues of comprehensive coverage of data gathered across the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are not, currently, systematically examined. As detailed at points in the table, almost every indicator is accompanied by ambiguities and issues of interpretation. The comparative element, against other OECD or EU countries, say, is deliberately not widely and systematically addressed. Lastly, while an attempt has been made to identify the extent of data disaggregation as a precursor of “leaving no one behind”, this exercise is currently incomplete in both breadth of coverage and depth.

2. Unintentional Overdosing of Vitamin A

One-third of children in low-income countries are deficient in vitamin A, and an estimated 157,000 children worldwide die each year because of vitamin A deficiency. However, the current intake of vitamin A may be excessive because it is being added to many foods and is provided

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routinely in the form of high potency supplements. Overdosing can lead to nausea, dizziness, bone and joint pain and in severe cases liver failure and haemorrhage.

Using state of the art isotope dilution techniques, we're monitoring dietary and biochemical assessments to assess liver and bone function as well as vitamin A status. The project focuses on young people who live in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Guatemala that are at risk of Vitamin A overdosing.

As part of this project we're informing guidance and recommendation for future nutrition programmes, by determining safe levels of vitamin A intake and helping to avoid the risk of unintentional overdosing. This work will prevent children from excess Vitamin A intake due to overlapping intervention programmes.

This project works towards Goal 2: Zero Hunger and Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing and is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

3. Clean Air for Delhi

The world is greatly in need of effective interventions for mitigating air pollution in cities. According to the World Health Organization, 98% of cities in low to middle income countries with more than 100,000 inhabitants do not meet WHO air quality guidelines.

The project will develop an integrated action plan that details strategies and potential interventions for mitigating air pollution in the city of Delhi, and the surrounding region. It will seek to understand current contributing factors to air pollution across the domestic, transport, industrial and agricultural sectors. And it will develop modelling tools for collating emissions inventories and how air pollution is dispersed, and collect policies and best practice for mitigation within the city and region.

This project works towards Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing and Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, partners with IIT Madras and IIT Bombay and is funded by NERC.

Link: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/>