



GFCC

Global Federation of
Competitiveness Councils

University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF)

Leadership Dialogue

Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socio-Economic Transformation

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This report was created by Roberto Alvarez and Elaine Rodríguez.

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The GFCC is a global multi-stakeholder membership organization founded in 2010 with a footprint spanning more than 35 nations. The GFCC is committed to disseminating best practices to accelerate productivity, growth, and prosperity for countries, regions, and cities. We do that through high-level networking and events, in-depth conversations, analytical tools, advice, and education.


GFCC members include private sector councils on competitiveness and industry organizations, government agencies, global corporations, and leading research universities. All members pay membership dues yearly to secure their placement in the network. Currently, the GFCC hosts 50 members from 23 countries.


Besides its members, the GFCC network also includes experts invited to participate as fellows. Members and fellows have different roles. Fellows contribute by sharing their specialized knowledge and expertise with the community and participating in project development and strategies. Currently, the GFCC hosts 67 fellows from 24 countries.

Learn more about the GFCC at: www.thegfcc.org.

Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC)

900 17th Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20006
United States

 /thegfcc

 @thegfcc


 /the-global-federation-of-competitiveness-councils/

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Letter from the GFCC Leadership

Hosting the latest meeting of the GFCC University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF) community at Aston University on November 8, 2024, alongside its President and Vice-Chancellor Aleks Subic, was an honor and privilege. Professor Subic leads this current phase of the URLF, which focuses on place-making innovation — a concept he has coined and we embrace in the GFCC. As a visionary leader, he is guiding Aston University toward a technology-enabled, community-centered model and fostering a thriving innovation ecosystem in Birmingham.

Guided by a shared win-win mindset, a stellar group of industry, government, and academic leaders from the West Midlands and the United Kingdom joined the GFCC community for a series of lively discussions on “Universities 4.0 and their role in driving place-based innovation and socio-economic transformation.” During the events, we honored Professor Aleks Subic with a Global Competitiveness Award in Recognition of Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation. Similarly, we honored Professor Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor at Queen's University Belfast, with this award at the 2024 Global Innovation Summit hosted on his campus. These two outstanding university leaders have worked to advance their university's mission beyond teaching, have reinforced the transformational role universities can play in local economies and communities, and have come together in innovative ways to partner.

Aston University's location — Birmingham, a city synonymous with innovation and progress — provided the perfect setting for the activities. The city's legacy as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution served as an inspiring backdrop for our discussions on the evolving role of universities in addressing local and global challenges. We witnessed firsthand an unbelievably impressive level of engagement from key organizations and leaders in the West Midlands to building the future. This commitment remains an inspiration GFCC colleagues have carried back home.

Across the world, universities are anchors in our communities, especially in times of transformation and turbulence. They play well-known roles in education and training, but they also bring communities together. This is crucial now more than ever, as recent technological advancements, such as those we are all watching unfold in the AI domain, are happening at an unprecedented pace, with universities at the heart of these transformations. As we all recognize, universities can and should capitalize on these new opportunities for impact.

The GFCC launched the URLF in 2016 at Imperial College to be a platform for leaders to collaborate on rethinking and reshaping the future of higher education for impact. Now, the URLF is entering an exciting new phase. Professor Aleks Subic is helping us to focus this phase on creatively and innovatively leveraging universities as catalysts of change and transformation within their communities and regional economies, particularly in the context of a rapidly evolving global digital innovation economy. In 2025 and 2026, we will embark on a journey to explore university-anchored innovation ecosystems within the GFCC network, with the goal to catalyze learning and to foster new projects between GFCC members. The event with Aston was the first in this series.

Birmingham's journey offers valuable lessons, from a glorious manufacturing past, through economic downturn, to its re-emergence as a socially diverse city on the global stage. Today, it serves as a living example of how universities can play a role in pioneering urban revitalization and socioeconomic

transformation. In the backdrop, the city's rich history, including its vibrant arts and cultural scene across history — punctuated by the advancements of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Pre-Raphaelites — provides a unique foundation for today's transformational cross-sector initiatives.

The Birmingham Innovation Precinct (B-IP) exemplifies this new model. A partnership between government, academia, industry, and the community, this "quadruple helix" collaboration is working to attract investment and improve the city's infrastructure. B-IP is the result of strong leadership, powerful vision, and willful collaboration seeking to turn the city into one that generates globally recognized innovation, attracts bright talent, and houses exciting businesses, a rich culture, and a vibrant community.

Aston University plays a fundamental role in B-IP. Hosting the GFCC, Aston provided us with firsthand insights into this project. Furthermore, the presence of GFCC leaders in Birmingham helped strategically position the city and the region as a global innovation hub.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Vice-Chancellor Subic, our members, and local partners for their leadership, dedication, and commitment to the GFCC mission. These events have reaffirmed our belief that universities, working alongside industry, government, and the local community, are fundamental growth engines in the knowledge economy. They can help drive transformative change and create a more productive, prosperous, innovative, and competitive future.

Over the years, the GFCC has consistently supported cross-sector partnerships to drive innovation and prosperity. We remain committed to fostering collaboration, recognizing today's challenges demand collective solutions. Being at Aston University provided a platform for leaders to exchange ideas, share best practices, develop insights into strategies to harness the transformative potential of universities, and build new partnerships.

In times of global turbulence and rapid change, focusing on win-win solutions and partnerships is more important than ever. In the GFCC, we are doubling down on our approach to bringing all sectors together on a global scale to advance inclusive and sustainable value creation and prosperity. We are optimistic about the progress we can achieve together and hope other leaders interested in advancing an innovation economy that is sustainable and inclusive can join us.



Charles "Chad" O. Holliday Jr.

Charles "Chad" O. Holliday Jr.
Chairman, GFCC



Deborah L. Wince-Smith

The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith
President, GFCC

Letter from Aston University's Leadership

It was my honor to welcome our friends from the US, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe — truly from all around the world — to Aston University. The events in Birmingham gathered a select group of leaders from universities, industry, government, and business to discuss the role of universities in a rapidly changing world driven by digital transformation, hyperconnectivity, and powerful technologies like artificial intelligence. Universities are uniquely positioned to act as champions of digital inclusion and catalysts of socioeconomic transformation, creating thriving place-based innovation ecosystems that drive inclusive growth, sustainability, and genuine placemaking.

The GFCC University Research and Leadership Forum (URLF) meeting was quite inspirational. GFCC university leaders from across the world gathered with a shared purpose: to reimagine the role of universities in a world transforming at an unprecedented rate. Universities must step up, transforming how they work and collaborate to meet complex challenges and vast opportunities. This is the promise and purpose of the new generation of universities. We call it University 4.0.

Let's take a moment to appreciate the journey that has brought us to this pivotal point. The first generation of universities, also called classical universities, focused primarily on the transmission of knowledge through oral communication and manuscripts. Their main purpose was education. Examples of such classical universities include the medieval universities, like the University of Bologna, which commenced this journey of higher education.

The second generation, the research university, emphasized the creation of new knowledge through scientific research as a central purpose. Universities became places where new ideas and innovations were born. Think of early research universities like Humboldt University in Berlin, or perhaps Oxford University in the UK.

The third generation, the entrepreneurial university, went beyond knowledge transfer and research. They became economic players, commercializing research results, promoting startups, and fostering innovation by forming closer ties with industry and business. This was the beginning of the triple helix model of innovation and entrepreneurship. Cambridge University and MIT in the US are good examples.

But today's world demands even more. The pace of societal change and technological advancement has outpaced traditional linear academic processes. We now need a fourth-generation university — University 4.0—that is inclusive, entrepreneurial, transformational, and embedded within its regional and global ecosystems. University 4.0 represents a bold transformation. It is a model that sees universities as open, collaborative innovation ecosystems interconnected with industry, government, and society to create real, measurable socioeconomic impact for all. This is the emergence of a quadruple helix model, where place and society play a vital role in knowledge creation and innovation. Innovation here is not a solitary pursuit. It is the product of collaborative networks that draw on diverse perspectives and respond to real-world challenges.

Around the world, place-based innovation facilitated by universities has become a global phenomenon, embedded within regional and national ecosystems. Universities today partner with the public and private sectors like never before, shifting to new business models that leverage physical, digital, and human assets to drive growth. Innovation precincts and districts — geographically concentrated hubs of high-tech companies, research institutions, civic infrastructure, and community organizations — are emerging as engines of economic growth, revitalizing post-industrial cities, fostering new businesses, and creating opportunities for a skilled workforce.

Aston University is proud to be a driving force in Birmingham's innovation ecosystem, the Birmingham Innovation Precinct, and our Birmingham node of the new West Midlands Investment Zone, serving as a catalyst for the region's growth and innovation. In stepping up to this transformative civic role, universities must embrace change in how

they work, collaborate, and engage with society. University 4.0 requires open channels with industry, government, and community partners, creating a fluid exchange of ideas and resources that fuels innovation in both education and research, and delivers inclusive growth.

The Leadership Dialogue explored key themes that illustrate how universities are rising to meet this challenge. The session on place-based innovation for inclusive growth explored how universities act as engines of local economies by fostering research and innovation that supports startups, scale-ups, growth enterprises, and transforms knowledge into practical solutions. Second, we examined how universities work with local stakeholders to attract investment, bridge skill gaps, enhance productivity, and promote sustainable, inclusive growth. These partnerships are fundamental to University 4.0 as universities shift from isolated knowledge hubs to active participants in regional and national ecosystems. Finally, we discussed digital knowledge and enterprises for a changing world with AI. We looked at the role universities play in equipping students and professionals with the skills necessary to thrive in an AI-driven economy. By fostering digital inclusion and creating a pipeline of talent for high-tech industries, universities are ensuring that regions have the skilled workforce they need to adapt to the rapid advancement of technology.

This unique dialogue brought together insights and strategies from global leaders, sharing profound examples of place-based innovation and crafting a shared agenda for the future of University 4.0. As the GFCC University Research and Leadership Forum takes this agenda further to other regions of the world beyond Birmingham and Aston University, we will explore how universities can rise to the challenge, transforming not only their mission but also their ways of working and partnering to meet the needs of their communities in a rapidly changing world. To change the world, you must first change yourself.

Thank you to all who joined us for this important discussion on the future of University 4.0. We appreciate your dedication to creating a future where universities drive inclusive, transformative growth. We were delighted to welcome you to Aston University, the heart of place-based innovation in Birmingham.



Professor Aleks Subic
President and Vice-Chancellor,
Aston University

What Are Universities Good For?

As industrial engineers by training and former academics, we have always been captivated by the interplay between technology, industry and socioeconomic transformation. Standing in Birmingham, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, brought a profound sense of history and possibility to both of us. Birmingham is not only where modern industry and manufacturing took shape but also where bold thinking and collaboration once reshaped society — a legacy that resonates today as we live in a fast-changing world in which universities are simultaneously called to both transform themselves and serve as engines of societal and economic transformation.

In Birmingham, the GFCC University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF) had its first in-person meeting since the pandemic. It marked a return to the spirit of global collaboration that began with the Forum's launch in London (2016) and continued in Kuala Lumpur (2017), Buenos Aires (2018), and later with workshops in São Paulo in 2022 and 2023. University leaders from around the world — including the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Malaysia, Romania and Australia — demonstrated an extraordinary commitment by traveling far to engage with peers and a diverse set of stakeholders.

As reported throughout this document, the Forum featured both a closed-door roundtable discussion and a public event — the “Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based

Innovation and Socio-Economic Transformation” Leadership Dialogue. These conversations revealed a shared understanding: universities can no longer be detached institutions but must reshape and embed themselves within the economies and societies they serve. This concept of the “embedded university” was particularly stressed during the Forum’s roundtable, with examples from across the GFCC membership being scrutinized.

Still in its early days, Birmingham’s Innovation Precinct (B-IP) is a transformative initiative that drew the attention of all participants. Anchored by Aston University, in partnership with Bruntwood SciTech and the Birmingham City Council, it exemplifies the concept of the “embedded university.” The Innovation Precinct aims to revitalize Birmingham by attracting entrepreneurs, researchers and investments to an area once neglected. It is a bold vision, not just of urban renewal but of embedding universities into the very fabric of the city’s economy and future.

The model of transformation that leverages university assets as key resources, or is even driven by universities, is not unique to Birmingham. Around the world, cities and regions like San Diego, Belfast, Auckland, Sydney and the Greater Phoenix area are leveraging their universities to reshape their economies. San Diego, for example, has evolved from a military town into a global innovation hub for biotech, semiconductors, health sciences and advanced industries. Belfast, once an industrial powerhouse that went through a long period of decay, is now a leader in digital arts, cybersecurity and health technologies.

What unites these regions is their approach to actively forge their path and shape the future. Universities have unique capabilities that can inform and enable regional efforts. They train the workforce of tomorrow, attract talent to the region, generate new knowledge, attract investments in frontier technologies, and have convening power. They can serve as neutral and trusted conveners of local and regional leaders and organizations. When embedded in society and the economy, they are instrumental in transforming local realities.

The first step of any initiative aimed at transforming local or regional economies is to understand the reality on the ground. As stated in GFCC's 2022 Call to Action "Place-based Innovation – An Imperative for Future Growth," "...strategies to advance local and regional innovation must be based on a solid understanding of the assets on hand." From there, stakeholders and leaders in the region can work to build the desired future innovation ecosystem.

Innovation ecosystems thrive when different types of organizations and individuals interact. As GFCC senior fellow Greg Horowitz wrote in "The Innovation Rainforest," innovation ecosystems are complex and resemble tropical forests, with their diversity and richness, not plantations. But just as ingredients alone don't make a meal, having a diversity of stakeholders is not enough for innovation to happen. It is necessary to actively and purposefully connect them or, in other words, to weave the innovation fabric.

Among other things, what sets Birmingham apart is Aston's proactive role as a connector, an active hub weaving the local innovation ecosystem, deeply engaging with a roster of other organizations and leaders. Under the leadership of Alex Subic, Aston University has embraced its role as a driver of change. The relocation of the university's administration to a central hub in downtown Birmingham – a space that combines administrative offices, event venues and alumni engagement facilities symbolizes its commitment to integrating with and contributing to the local economy.

A key principle in competitiveness is that a competitive advantage is not given – it is built, and building a competitive advantage begins with leadership. Transformation requires leaders, companies, universities and innovators to come together within a city or region to craft a new reality. External forces cannot cause this transformation; it must come from within.

Transformation also requires investment, enabled by strong leadership and a clear vision. Investment begins with time and effort from key leaders but ultimately hinges on financial capital but investment ultimately hinges on financial capital. Projects that align with diverse stakeholders behind a shared vision are more likely to succeed in the scrutiny of multiple parties, secure solid support and buy-in from key players, and attract funding. Additionally, a cohesive local or regional leadership group is instrumental in crafting an environment that provides assurance to investors.

Institutional agility is equally critical. Technology advances rapidly, outpacing business and government. To leapfrog into the future, regions must challenge outdated norms and remove barriers to innovation. This requires rethinking how cities and institutions operate but also, in many cases, how universities are regulated, making them more responsive to emerging opportunities. During the Forum, agility was a theme accompanying embeddedness in every discussion.

As the GFCC embarks on a global journey to explore university-anchored innovation ecosystems, the lessons from Birmingham and beyond will inspire us. Transformation is not about accepting the world as it is but about designing and building the future we want. It requires bold leadership, deep engagement and a relentless commitment to challenging the status quo.

A better future is not given – it has to be actively built. Universities, as catalysts for innovation and transformation, can lead the way. To truly fulfill this role, as university presidents and vice-presidents in Birmingham stated, the question we should all have in mind is not what universities are good at but what universities are good for. This is more than just rhetoric; it's a fundamental shift in the thinking about higher education in a rapidly transforming world.



Dr. Roberto Alvarez
Executive Director, GFCC



Dr. Elaine Rodriguez
Director of Operations, GFCC

Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation Award

The GFCC recognizes every year outstanding leaders whose prominent work have helped to bring higher levels of competitiveness and greater opportunity for their countries and local communities. These thought leaders, energetic doers, and agents of change have demonstrated a strong commitment and tireless dedication to advance competitiveness and innovation by leveraging new models, championing new investments, legislation, and government policies, or catalyzing other activities that promote economic growth, industrial and business development, and prosperity for their citizens.

In 2024, the GFCC bestowed a total of six awards to exceptional leaders from Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom for their remarkable work in improving local and national competitiveness, forging key partnerships, and shaping a brighter future. During the events in Birmingham, the GFCC recognized Professor Aleksandar Subic for their leadership in driving innovation and socio-economic transformation through higher education. Five additional awards were presented at the 2024 Global Innovation Summit in Belfast: Dr. Martin Naughton and Dr. Stephen Kingon for their visionary leadership in promoting Ireland's competitiveness across the island; Professor Sir Ian Greer for his leadership in driving innovation and socio-economic transformation through higher education; and Dr. Bob Barbour and Dr. Paul Madden for their strategic contributions to Northern Ireland's economic development.

Universities are uniquely positioned to collaborate with all sectors of society – government, community, and business – and are increasingly sought after as sources of innovation, new business formation, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving. The Global Competitiveness Award in Recognition of Transformational Leadership in Higher Education, Research, and Innovation acknowledges university leaders who champion the university's role in driving innovation and socio-economic transformation within local economies and communities. In 2024, this award recognized Professor Sir Ian Greer (at the GFCC Gala Dinner in Belfast) and Professor Aleksandar Subic (in Birmingham).

Professor Subic is a visionary university leader guiding Aston University into a transformational journey to a technology-enabled, community-centered university with a wide impact on local businesses and communities. He advocates and champions a new model of university engagement with communities and citizens to help drive the city's regeneration. Under his leadership, Aston and its partners have established the Birmingham Innovation Precinct, developing an innovation ecosystem of global significance that will attract enterprising talent, and nurture future leaders of innovation and change.

Professor Subic also chairs the new phase of the GFCC University and Research Leadership Forum, focused on understanding high-performing university-anchored innovation ecosystems. His mandate will include working with university members to organize a series of global study trips and leadership dialogues focusing on identifying best and "next" practices emerging in university-anchored innovation ecosystems.

The GFCC is honored to celebrate these exceptional leaders for their dedication to advancing knowledge, innovation, and competitiveness globally.

The Global Centre for Innovation Leadership

A defining moment during the Leadership Dialogue was the launch of the Global Centre for Innovation Leadership (GCIL). This partnership, spearheaded by the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils (GFCC), brings together Aston University (UK), the University of California San Diego (USA), Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (Malaysia), and Queen's University Belfast (UK) in a shared mission to drive global innovation and address critical challenges. The partners took advantage of the Leadership Dialogue to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) towards the Center's establishment.

The GCIL is committed to advancing the place-based agenda and providing thought leadership on innovation and place-making through the collaboration of its university partners. To achieve this, the GCIL will deliver specialized education programs in innovation leadership, organize study tours and workshops, and produce high-impact research and case studies that blend academic insights with practical applications.

A board comprising representatives from the GFCC and signing universities will govern the Centre and shape its agenda. This setup will ensure the Center's alignment with the pursuit of the vision expressed in the GFCC's 2024 *Call to Action: Achieving a Sustainable Future*, allow for the mobilization of resources across the GFCC membership, particularly from participating universities, and connect its work with concrete priorities faced by GFCC members.



Prof. Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University of Belfast, NI; The Hon. Deborah Wince-Smith, President, GFCC; President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA; Professor Aleks Subic, President and Vice-Chancellor, Aston University; Dr. Paul Roben, Associate Vice Chancellor, Innovation and Commercialization, University of California San Diego, USA; and Zaimizi Hamdani, Chief Strategy Officer, Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS, Malaysia.

The launch of this groundbreaking initiative represents more than a partnership; it is a declaration of shared purpose and ambition. It also reflects a bold commitment to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting inclusive, sustainable growth and prosperity. By pooling their expertise, the GFCC and its partners are creating a powerful platform to drive innovation, transform economies, and cultivate a new generation of leaders.

2024 University and Research Leadership Forum Meeting

The URLF meeting, a closed-door gathering of GFCC university leaders and fellows, convened to discuss the evolving role of universities in today's world and served as a platform for university presidents and vice-presidents in the GFCC to exchange information about their 'real-world experiences' and generates new insights. The meeting emphasized the critical role universities play in driving socio-economic transformation into a complex global landscape marked by rapid technological advancements and massive geopolitical shifts.

Here are some of the key themes, concepts and strategies that emerged in this GFCC member only dynamic conversation:

- **Community Impact:** Universities are redefining their role and becoming impact-oriented, actively engaging with industry, governments and society to address local challenges. Examples from various countries highlighted their evolving strategies for real-world impact.
- **What Are Universities Good For?:** The strategic focus of impact-oriented universities requires a shift from what they are good at to what they are good for. Strategic thinking must prioritize transformative impact and relevance to society's needs.
- **Metrics to Measure Success:** Performance metrics must evolve beyond publications and graduation rates. Universities should measure inclusivity, community impact, and the long-term success of their graduates in improving lives and boosting economic outcomes.
- **The Embedded University:** Innovative universities are blurring the lines between them and society. Universities must immerse themselves in local communities, embedding into the social and economic fabric they serve – this includes physical infrastructure, curricula, etc.
- **Enabling the Use of Human Talent:** Universities remain vital gateways for lifting individuals into the innovation economy. They unlock human potential and help regions fully harness their available talent – without training, individuals cannot fully contribute to the economy.
- **Skills for a Rapidly Changing World:** With accelerating technological change, universities must adopt dynamic, lifelong learning models. Education should evolve dynamically to meet the diverse needs of individuals throughout their lives and leverage digital technology.
- **Transforming Local Economies:** Universities are powerful conveners and connectors, capable of coalescing partnerships to transform regional economies. They can leverage existing assets, identify new ones, and unite stakeholders to drive transformation.
- **Trusted Partners:** In a world of complexity and division, universities can help rebuild trust by empowering communities and stakeholders. However, they must shed perceptions of elitism in practice, via engagement and inclusive programs, to strengthen these roles.
- **The Need for Entrepreneurialism:** To achieve impact, transform economies, and remain relevant, universities must embrace entrepreneurial mindsets. Change must be constant and woven into every aspect of their strategies and operations.



Participants at the 2024 University and Research Leadership Forum Meeting.

Leadership Dialogue on Universities 4.0

Universities, industry, and research organizations in innovation ecosystems are navigating a fast-changing world shaped by technological advancements and uncertainty. To help them thrive in this dynamic environment, the University and Research Leadership Forum (URLF) has launched an ambitious initiative to uncover what makes university-anchored innovation ecosystems successful. This new phase highlights the critical role universities play as catalysts for socioeconomic transformation, working with partners across sectors and helping build the assets needed for future economies.

The URLF's mission is to empower universities to drive socio-economic transformation. Over the next several years, the Forum will host study tours to leading innovation hubs worldwide and facilitate leadership dialogues with GFCC university members and stakeholders from government, industry, and local communities. These activities aim to generate practical insights, identify key drivers of innovation, and identify key elements in much-needed toolkits for place-based and place-making innovation.

The 2024 Leadership Dialogue at Aston University in Birmingham was a major milestone in this effort. From Birmingham's innovation precinct to the successful cases of Phoenix, Belfast, San Diego, Sidney and Auckland, among others, the event showcased best practices and strategies for aligning university efforts with regional needs while building global connections and scientific relevance.



Professor Aleks Subic, President and Vice-Chancellor, Aston University.

In the following pages, you'll find a compilation of the main topics discussed in each panel and fireside chat, along with insights shared by leaders, challenges addressed, recommendations proposed, and the key takeaways from the event.

Looking ahead, the URLF will build on these efforts with more dialogues and visits to university-led innovation hubs worldwide. These activities will deepen our understanding of how universities can create meaningful change. We invite you to join us on this journey.

Watch the Leadership Dialogue on the [GFCC YouTube Channel](#). 



Top: The University and Research Leadership Forum

Left: The Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith.



Place-based Innovation for Inclusive Growth – The Case of Birmingham

MODERATOR

Prof. Aleks Subic

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Aston University, UK

Rob Valentine

Regional Director-Birmingham, Bruntwood SciTech, UK

Katie Trout

Director of Policy & Partnerships, West Midlands Growth Company, UK

Lisa Smith

CEO, Midlands Mindforge, UK

Sir John Peace

Chairman, Midlands Engine, UK

Douglas Wright MBE DL

High Sheriff, West Midlands, UK

Henrietta Brealey

CEO, Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, UK

Birmingham's transformation into a model for place-based innovation is a powerful story of turning challenges into opportunities. The city is tackling issues like low productivity rates and social inequality by leveraging its unique strengths – a young and diverse population, a strong SME base, and a legacy of academic excellence and collaboration between universities, businesses, and the community – to chart a new course for growth.

Central to this transformation is the Birmingham Innovation Precinct (B-IP), a visionary project aiming to establish a world-leading innovation district. This initiative, along with major infrastructure developments like the HS2 high-speed rail,



enhances Birmingham's connectivity and solidifies its position as a burgeoning economic and innovation hub. These developments are not just about physical infrastructure; they represent a broader vision of Birmingham as a central node in a globally connected network, attracting talent and investment from around the world.

Collaboration lies at the heart of Birmingham's strategy. The "quadruple helix" model, involving universities, industry, government, and the community, underpins this collaborative approach. Initiatives such as the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships showcase how businesses and universities can join forces to bridge the gap between research and real-world application. Midlands Mindforge is another example of how pooling resources and expertise can drive advancements in science and technology, making the region a hotbed for world-class



Prof. Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Aston University, UK; Sir John Peace, Chairman, Midlands Engine, UK; Douglas Wright MBE DL, High Sheriff, West Midlands, UK; Rob Valentine, Regional Director-Birmingham, Bruntwood SciTech, UK; Lisa Smith, CEO, Midlands Mindforge, UK; Katie Trout, Director of Policy & Partnerships, West Midlands Growth Company, UK; and Henrietta Brealey, CEO, Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, UK.

innovation. A collaboration among eight research-intensive universities, it provides capital and company-building skills to university spinouts and early-stage businesses, accelerating the commercialization of groundbreaking science and technology innovations and making the region a hotbed for world-class innovation.

Universities extend their influence beyond education to act as engines of regional innovation and social mobility. By being entrepreneurial themselves, nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets and breaking barriers for first-generation students, institutions like Aston University pave the way for new segments of society to contribute to and benefit from the innovation economy. Their efforts ensure that the workforce is prepared for the demands of a knowledge-driven economy. Such efforts should and must be coupled with initiatives to attract talent—universities are uniquely positioned to attract talent from other regions and even other countries, helping to oxygenate, to connect globally and to bring dynamism to local/regional economies. For instance, the Global Growth Programme, in partnership with Bruntwood SciTech and regional universities, showcases a commitment to attracting international talent and supporting the growth of innovative SMEs, highlighting Birmingham's appeal on the global stage.

Leadership remains a cornerstone of this journey. Initiatives like Western Business School's CEO Academy develop leaders who prioritize sustainability and inclusivity, while infrastructure investments and targeted programs, such as SME support and digital skills training, address disparities and enhance local economic vitality. Together, these efforts position Birmingham's innovation precinct as a beacon of integrated growth, demonstrating how economic, social, and infrastructural elements can come together to create a sustainable impact.

The vision for Birmingham extends beyond economic metrics; it's about creating a vibrant, inclusive community where the benefits of innovation are widely shared. The city's commitment to social mobility is evident in its efforts to engage and uplift its most deprived wards, ensuring that the Innovation Precinct serves as a catalyst for broader social change. This is only possible because key players have forged strong links and developed protocols to work together at various levels.

PANEL SESSION

Place-Based Innovation Initiatives by Other GFCC Leaders

Worldwide Examples for "Next Practices" Case Studies

MODERATOR

The Hon. Deborah Wince-Smith

President, GFCC; President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA

Prof. Sir Ian Greer

President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University of Belfast, NI

Prof. Damon Salesa

Vice-Chancellor, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand

Prof. Ken Sloan

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, Harper Adams University, UK

Dr. Matthew Hulver

VP of Knowledge Enterprise Initiatives, ASU Knowledge Enterprise, USA

Dr. Michinari Hamaguchi

Director General of SCARDA, AMED; GFCC Distinguished Fellow, Japan

Place-based innovation adapts strategies to local contexts, leveraging unique regional assets to foster sustainable economic and social progress. Unlike one-size-fits-all approaches, this model addresses specific challenges and opportunities inherent in each region, making it essential for an increasingly interconnected and globally diverse world.

Insights from the panel highlight the interplay of government policy, universities, industry, and community in building thriving, inclusive, and innovative ecosystems. The experiences of cities like Belfast, Newport, Nagoya, Auckland, and Phoenix offer examples of how place-based innovation thrives through collaboration, trust, and understanding of local needs.

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, Queen's University has been instrumental in shifting the city from heavy industry to a knowledge-based economy. Through initiatives like the Belfast Region City Deal, the university has strategically aligned its strengths in advanced manufacturing, health research, and digital innovation with the specific needs of the

local economy. In addition, Queen's has leveraged its unique position as a trusted institution to convene diverse stakeholders and foster cross-sector collaboration, enhance its capability to offer new skills for the workforce, and provide SMEs with access to shared facilities and expertise to develop new products and services. This transformation reflects the power of sustained, cross-sector collaboration and the importance of universities as anchors for regional development.

Nagoya, Japan, offers an example of how to bridge the gap between academia and industry to drive innovation. The "Under One Roof" model physically co-located Nagoya University researchers and industry partners, such as Toyota to foster trust and collaboration in mission-driven projects. This approach, coupled with strategic funding initiatives from Japan's Science and Technology Agency, has not only advanced technological innovation but also addressed pressing societal challenges, such as those related to Japan's aging population.

Harper Adams University in the UK is tackling the unique challenge of driving innovation in rural and town communities, often overlooked in favor of city-centric approaches. With food technology, production, and sustainability as key drivers, the university recognizes that a significant portion of the UK population resides in these areas, many with a history tied to the Industrial Revolution but now facing challenges of low skills and aspirations. To address this, Harper Adams has established the School of Sustainable Food and Farming, creating a network across rural communities to promote innovation in food production. They've also launched a digital hub offering advanced skills training in fields like robotics and data science, adopting a proactive "go to them" approach to engage local residents and encourage them to pursue higher education. This demonstrates that place-based innovation initiatives can also fulfill those regions' needs and potential beyond major urban centers.

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in New Zealand prioritizes inclusivity by engaging with indigenous Māori and Pacific communities under a unique innovation ecosystem that blends advanced technology with traditional knowledge. Projects like the Living Laboratories, which involves the restoration of an urban forest in partnership with a local Māori tribe, exemplify how universities can address sustainability challenges while promoting equity and social cohesion. The commitment to serving its diverse community highlights the importance of trust and cultural understanding in driving meaningful innovation.



Prof. Damon Salesa, Vice-Chancellor, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand; Dr. Matthew Hulver, VP of Knowledge Enterprise Initiatives, ASU Knowledge Enterprise, USA; The Hon. Deborah Wince-Smith, President, GFCC; President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness, USA; Prof. Ken Sloan, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer, Harper Adams, University, UK; Prof. Sir Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University of Belfast, NI; and Dr. Michinari Hamaguchi, Director General of SCARDA, AMED, and GFCC Distinguished Fellow, Japan.

Arizona State University (ASU) exemplifies how a university can serve as a catalyst for transformative place-based innovation. With initiatives like the development of semiconductor hubs in Phoenix, USA and research on water sustainability solutions with southwest universities, industry and utilities companies, ASU has aligned its research and educational missions with local needs and opportunities for growth for the Southwest region. ASU's commitment to use-inspired research and community-based initiatives, coupled with a willingness to take calculated risks, has positioned the university as a driving force behind Phoenix's emergence as a center for innovation in technology and sustainability—for 10 years in a row, ASU has been being recognizes as the most innovative university in the country by U.S. News & World Report.

The experiences of these diverse cities and institutions highlight the multifaceted nature of place-based innovation. Collaboration, inclusivity, and tailoring strategies to local contexts can unlock the potential to build thriving innovation ecosystems. The common thread linking them is embeddedness – in all cases presented, universities focus on issues and problems that are key to their communities and position themselves as a fundamental part of the socioeconomic fabric of the regions and cities where they operate. This model offers a pathway where innovation is not only a driver of economic growth but also a force for sustainable development and economic inclusion.

FIRESIDE CHAT

Digital Knowledge and Enterprises for a Changing World with AI

Prof. Aleks Subic

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Aston University, UK

Dr. Martin Betts

CEO, HEDx, Australia

In conversation with:

Ann Kirschner

Former President, Hunter College, USA

Higher education institutions are navigating a landscape reshaped by rapid technological advancements, evolving student needs, and shifting societal expectations. Declining enrollments, skepticism about the value of a traditional degree, and resource limitations make adaptability essential. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) adds another layer of complexity, compelling universities to rethink their roles and operations to remain relevant, impactful, and trusted by the public.

AI's potential to transform higher education is immense. It promises to streamline administrative processes like financial aid, registration, and academic advising, enabling institutions to operate more efficiently while providing personalized support at scale. Far from replacing human interaction, AI complements it, enhancing the quality of engagement between universities, faculty, and students. Early successes in using AI for advising, for example, demonstrate its ability to improve student outcomes and tailor the educational experience.

The omnichannel learning model further illustrates how universities can adapt to meet the needs of modern learners. By integrating in-person, online, and hybrid formats, this approach prioritizes flexibility, accessibility, and student agency. Stackable credentials and seamless transitions between modalities empower students to tailor their education to their individual goals, schedules, and life circumstances. This adaptability aligns education delivery with the varied demands of today's learners.

Leadership and strategic partnerships are crucial for driving these transformations. Visionary leaders must foster a culture of collaboration and innovation among academia, industry, and government to align educational goals with workforce needs. Partnerships with companies like Adobe and AWS, not only provide crucial resources but also bridge



Prof. Aleks Subic, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Aston University, UK; Dr. Martin Betts, CEO, HEDx, Australia; and Ann Kirschner, Former President, Hunter College, USA, via video.

the gap between academic preparation and industry requirements, ensuring that education remains practical and forward-looking. Ann Kirschner captured the deliberate growth required to succeed in this dynamic environment through the analogy of bonsai cultivation — balancing a clear vision with careful pruning of outdated areas to support new growth while fostering permanence by building a culture of constant innovation.

By embracing new technologies, omnichannel learning, and cross-sector collaboration, universities can meet contemporary challenges while reaffirming their role as drivers of societal advancement. To pursue this agenda, they need to embrace digital technology as a key enabler of their own operations.

PANEL SESSION

Digital Knowledge and Enterprises for a Changing World and Artificial Intelligence (AI) – From Threat to Opportunity

MODERATOR

Dr. Martin Betts

CEO, HEDx, Australia

Ms. Arlene Stewart

Director of Academic and Operations, Online Education Services (OES), UK

Ms. Suzanne Steele

Vice President & Managing Director, UK/I, Middle East, SSA, Adobe, UK

Mr. Andrew Proctor

Executive Lead UK Education, Amazon Web Services, UK

Prof. Osama Khan

DVC Academic, Aston University, UK

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation are changing the way we live, learn, and work. These shifts bring challenges and opportunities, requiring universities, businesses, and communities to rethink how they embrace technology. While AI is often seen as a potential threat to jobs and traditional practices, it also presents immense potential to drive innovation and growth when approached thoughtfully and collaboratively.

Universities are at the forefront of preparing students for a digitally driven economy. By forging strategic partnerships with technology leaders like Adobe, AWS, and OES, they provide learners with the tools, skills, and mindset needed to thrive in today's workforce. For example, Aston University's collaboration with Adobe as a "Creative Campus" – where students have access to Adobe Creative Cloud to foster digital literacy and drive student success in the classroom and beyond – is an example of how digital literacy and innovation are becoming central to higher education. These partnerships empower students and educators to make the most of a rapidly evolving technology-focused world. They also call for universities to learn from their partners and break free of the "ivory tower" mentality.

The move toward omnichannel learning – a blend of online, hybrid, and in-person approaches – represents another significant shift. These flexible models allow students to upskill or reskill while balancing work,



Dr. Martin Betts, CEO, HEDx, Australia; Ms. Suzanne Steele, Vice President & Managing Director, UK/I, Middle East, SSA, Adobe, UK; Ms. Arlene Stewart, Director of Academic and Operations, Online Education Services (OES), UK; Prof. Osama Khan, DVC Academic, Aston University, UK; Mr. Andrew Proctor, Executive Lead UK Education, Amazon Web Services, UK.

personal commitments, and their individual learning styles. As Aston University's partnership with OES demonstrates, online learning can be tailored to meet specific regional needs while also fostering global connections through accessible digital platforms. This approach supports lifelong learning, helping individuals stay competitive in a fast-changing job market and contributing to both personal and regional economic development.

However, technology alone is not enough. True transformation requires a human-centric approach to innovation, ensuring that technological advancements are inclusive and focused on solving real-world problems. Universities must prioritize understanding and addressing the challenges faced by students, communities, and society, focusing on the core issues rather than pre-defined solutions—as reputedly stressed in this report and throughout the event in Birmingham, this requires purposeful engagement with society. By using AI to boost creativity, productivity, and societal impact, institutions can address concerns about displacement and inequality while creating meaningful opportunities for everyone.

PANEL SESSION

Bridging Gaps: Universities, Industry and Community Partnerships for Impact

MODERATOR

Dr. Paul Roben

Associate Vice Chancellor, Innovation and Commercialization, University of California San Diego, USA

Prof. Sam Turner

CEO, City Deal, Queens University of Belfast, UK

Prof. Padma Raghavan

Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, Vanderbilt University, USA

Dr. Peter Dorhout

Vice President for Research, Iowa State University, USA

Universities are increasingly recognized as key players in driving innovation ecosystems, bringing together industry, government, and communities to tackle challenges and create opportunities. Their role has evolved far beyond traditional education, as they actively bridge gaps between sectors, fostering regional economic growth, and positive social change.

Universities are adapting to meet the needs of their regions while addressing global challenges. Examples from institutions like Queen's University Belfast, Vanderbilt University, Iowa State University, and Westminster University showcase how universities are leveraging their strengths to deliver long-term benefits for their communities.

- Queen's University Belfast, through its Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, is driving economic and social value in Northern Ireland by focusing on advanced manufacturing, health, digital technologies and cybersecurity. The research center is working to attract government funding and drive these sectors forward while creating opportunities for everyone in the community, including those who may feel disconnected, and bridge the skills gap to ensure the broader population benefits from its success.

- Vanderbilt University has become a key player in Nashville's innovation ecosystem, focusing on health, defense, and computing, and serving as a magnet for investments in the region in areas such as health technologies. The university's expertise in infectious diseases, demonstrated through its rapid development of monoclonal antibodies during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a successful partnership with AstraZeneca. This exemplifies the importance of agile, mission-driven innovation in responding to global challenges.
- Iowa State University demonstrates the importance of understanding the local context in building its research park. Their focus on agricultural and animal health companies co-located near the university, highlights the need to align innovation efforts with regional strengths.
- The University of Westminster is focused on being a strong community partner in London fostering a strong sense of social responsibility via a diverse range of initiatives that are not part of academic curricula. They promote student well-being and engagement through extensive extracurricular activities and community partnerships providing educational opportunities for local youth and addressing the social needs of the elderly.

Universities have the unique ability to act as neutral conveners, bringing diverse perspectives and resources to the table. By collaborating with industries and governments, universities create spaces for co-designing solutions to pressing issues. These partnerships not only accelerate innovation but also ensure that the results are inclusive and meaningful for communities. This collaborative approach was exemplified by Vanderbilt's experience, where breaking traditional academic norms and fostering a culture of rapid iteration proved crucial in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, as it also happened in other universities.



Dr. Paul Roben, Associate Vice Chancellor, Innovation and Commercialization, University of California San Diego, USA; Prof. Sam Turner, CEO, City Deal, Queens University of Belfast, UK; Prof. Padma Raghavan, Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, Vanderbilt University, USA; Dr. Peter Dorhout, Vice President for Research, Iowa State University, USA.

Societal impact and inclusivity were other key points discussed. Innovative universities are increasingly investing in place-based innovation that promotes equitable growth and ensures underserved communities benefit from collaborative efforts. Initiatives like Westminster University's community-centered programs and Queen's University Belfast's research centers in Northern Ireland illustrate how universities are addressing social and economic disparities.

Universities should focus not only on what they are "good at" but also on what they are "good for" — a shift that requires a deep understanding of societal needs and a commitment to delivering tangible benefits. By reimagining their roles and fostering partnerships across sectors, universities are proving themselves as catalysts for change, helping to build a more sustainable and inclusive future.

INSIGHT SESSION

Universities, Industry and Community Partnerships for Impact

Dr. Roberto Alvarez

Executive Director, GFCC, Brazil

In conversation with:

Mr. Charles "Chad" O. Holliday Jr.

Chairman, GFCC, USA

The world is facing a confluence of disruptive forces that demand urgent attention and innovative solutions, marked by the unprecedented convergence of escalating global disorder, the transformative rise of artificial intelligence (AI), and the increasingly severe impacts of climate change. Amidst this turbulence, universities, particularly research universities, play a central role, not only in generating new knowledge but also in fostering dialogue, collaboration, and action needed to navigate this complex landscape. The continued leadership of nations depends on strong research universities that embrace this call to action.

Central to this role is the recognition that, much like the printing press before it, AI is not just a tool for productivity but a transformative force that will fundamentally reshape how we live, work, and interact with the world. Considering this, universities must lead the charge in understanding and shaping AI's trajectory, ensuring it aligns with the best interests of humanity. Holliday stressed the importance of actively seeking solutions and refusing to settle for the current situation.

In an era of mounting societal challenges, universities are uniquely positioned to connect diverse stakeholders and collaborate on innovative and practical solutions, driving scalable impacts across sectors. Industry and community partners increasingly seek actionable support, such as customized training or interdisciplinary programs designed to meet pressing needs. Universities that demonstrate agility and a willingness to break traditional molds in response to this demand enhance their relevance and credibility, building stronger partnerships and fostering trust.



Dr. Roberto Alvarez, Executive Director, GFCC, Brazil; and Mr. Charles "Chad" O. Holliday Jr.; Chairman, GFCC, USA.

Effective collaboration also depends on empathy and shared language. By actively listening and prioritizing clear communication, universities can help diverse stakeholders find common ground, moving beyond compromise to forge "reconciling solutions," as advocated by Mr. Holliday. This emphasis on understanding and mutual respect facilitates partnerships that yield meaningful, measurable outcomes, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical applications.

By embracing responsiveness, empathy, unparalleled convening capabilities, and the transformative potential of technologies like AI, universities can reaffirm their critical role in shaping innovation and fostering societal progress. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative initiatives, they can exemplify the transformative power of education in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world, ensuring a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

FIRESIDE CHAT

The Future of Universities: Insights Gained Through the Leadership Dialogue and from HEPI's Experience

Chad Evans

Executive Vice-President, Council on Competitiveness, USA

In conversation with:

Nick Hillman

Director, HEPI, UK

In today's fast-changing world, universities are at a crossroads. They are being called upon to extend their role far beyond the confines of traditional classrooms and lecture halls, becoming key players in addressing global challenges, supporting workforce development, driving technological innovation, and building stronger, more resilient communities. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call, showing a need for higher education to be agile, adaptable, and deeply connected to the needs of society.

One of the biggest challenges universities faces is the shrinking population of traditional college-age students in many countries, driven by demographic changes and declining birth rates. To stay relevant, universities need to think outside the box — opening doors to non-traditional learners and offering flexible programs that cater to individuals at every stage of life. At the same time, educational access remains uneven, with significant gaps across income levels, geographic locations, and gender. Bridging these divides is key to making higher education a transformative force for good.

On the research front, universities are navigating complex terrain. While international collaborations are essential for breakthrough innovation and addressing global challenges, they also raise concerns about research security and the protection of intellectual property. Striking the right balance between working openly and safeguarding national interests demands careful solutions and strategic foresight.

Despite these challenges, the potential for universities to lead and catalyze change is immense. Lifelong learning, for instance, is more than a buzzword — it is a critical imperative in a world of constant technological advancement and evolving workforce demands. By offering flexible, modular education options, such as the UK's Lifelong Learning Entitlement, universities can empower individuals to continue learning, adapting, and growing throughout their careers. Technology further amplifies this potential by making education more accessible and personalized through online platforms and digital tools. By partnering with industry and government, universities can ensure their programs are aligned with real-world needs, keeping education both relevant and impactful.



Chad Evans, Executive Vice-President, Council on Competitiveness, USA; and Nick Hillman, Director, HEPI, UK.

Building a brighter future also requires universities to confront inequities in education. Tackling gaps in access and representation is both a moral and practical necessity for building a more prosperous society. By closing these divides, higher education can create a more inclusive system that benefits everyone, ensuring that no learner is left behind.

Global collaboration adds another layer of opportunity. Universities thrive when they engage across borders, driving innovation through international partnerships. At the same time, they must remain grounded in their local communities. Balancing global partnerships with local engagement helps universities stay relevant while amplifying their impact on both regional and global scales.

The road ahead is undoubtedly filled with challenges, but it also offers tremendous opportunities. Universities that embrace adaptability, lifelong learning, and inclusivity will not only thrive but will also lead the way in shaping a better, more sustainable, and inclusive world for all. The importance of communicating the value and impact of higher education to the broader public has never been greater, as universities work to regain trust and demonstrate their commitment to serving the common good.

Key Insights from the Leadership Dialogue

The 2025 Leadership Dialogue on “Universities 4.0 and Their Role in Driving Place-Based Innovation and Socio-Economic Transformation” provided an invaluable platform for examining the evolving role of universities in addressing today’s most pressing challenges. Through in-depth discussions and global examples, the event showcased how higher education institutions are driving change, fostering innovation, and shaping inclusive growth in their communities and beyond.

Collaboration is the Cornerstone of Innovation

Collaboration emerged as a foundational element for success. Trust-based partnerships among universities, industries, governments, and communities were shown to be essential in tackling complex issues and unlocking meaningful innovation. Examples such as Queen’s University Belfast’s advancements in manufacturing and Vanderbilt University’s rapid COVID-19 response highlighted the transformative potential of coordinated efforts. Similarly, initiatives like Midlands Mindforge and Adobe’s Creative Campus underscored the importance of resource-sharing and interdisciplinary teamwork in achieving impactful outcomes.

Inclusivity Drives Sustainable Impact

The Dialogue also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the benefits of technological and collaborative progress are accessible to all. Inclusive practices, such as Auckland University of Technology’s engagement with indigenous and Pacific communities and Birmingham’s digital skills programs, showcased how equity strengthens innovation ecosystems. These initiatives reflect the “University 4.0” vision of reducing disparities and fostering opportunities for underserved populations, thereby creating a more equitable and sustainable future.

Connecting Local and Global

Place-based innovation was another recurring theme, demonstrating how universities excel when they align their efforts with regional strengths and opportunities while maintaining a global perspective. From Phoenix’s semiconductor initiatives to Belfast’s manufacturing hub and Iowa State University’s agricultural research, localized approaches have proven to be highly effective in driving regional economic growth and addressing societal challenges. These efforts also illustrate how global partnerships can enhance local impact and sustainability.

Technology as an Empowering Tool

Artificial intelligence and digital transformation were presented as powerful tools to enhance, not replace, human creativity and judgment. By automating routine tasks, technologies like AI enable educators, researchers, and students to focus on high-value, creative work. Human-centric approaches to technology, championed by organizations like AWS and OES, demonstrated how advancements can be designed to address real-world needs and promote accessibility for diverse communities.

Leadership as a Catalyst for Change

Visionary leadership was highlighted as a driving force behind equitable and sustainable transformation. Programs like Birmingham's CEO Academy illustrated how cultivating leaders with the skills to navigate complexity and prioritize inclusivity can create long-lasting, positive change. Effective leadership ensures that progress reaches all corners of society and benefits future generations.

Impact-Oriented Universities

Universities are embracing entrepreneurial mindsets and evolving into impact-oriented institutions deeply engaged with their communities. They are shifting their focus from traditional metrics to prioritize transformative impact and relevance to societal needs. This includes fostering inclusivity, measuring community impact, and embedding themselves in the social and economic fabric of their regions. Universities are embracing lifelong learning models to equip individuals with the skills needed for a rapidly changing world and acting as conveners and connectors to drive regional economic transformation.

The Leadership Dialogue reaffirmed the pivotal role of universities as anchors within global and regional ecosystems. By fostering collaboration, embracing inclusivity, tailoring efforts to local contexts, leveraging technology responsibly, and prioritizing forward-thinking leadership, universities are uniquely positioned to lead the way toward a more innovative, equitable, and sustainable world.

To learn more or get involved, please contact Roberto Alvarez (execdir@thegfcc.org), Executive Director of the GFCC, and stay tuned for updates on the exciting initiatives ahead.

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GFCC

Global Federation of
Competitiveness Councils

Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils

900 17th Street, NW, Suite 700

Washington, D.C. 20006

USA

T +1 202 969 3382

www.thegfcc.org

info@thegfcc.org