

Our Knowledge Exchange (KE) Strategy: Building an Engaged University

Professor Simon Green / Mark Smith

December 2020



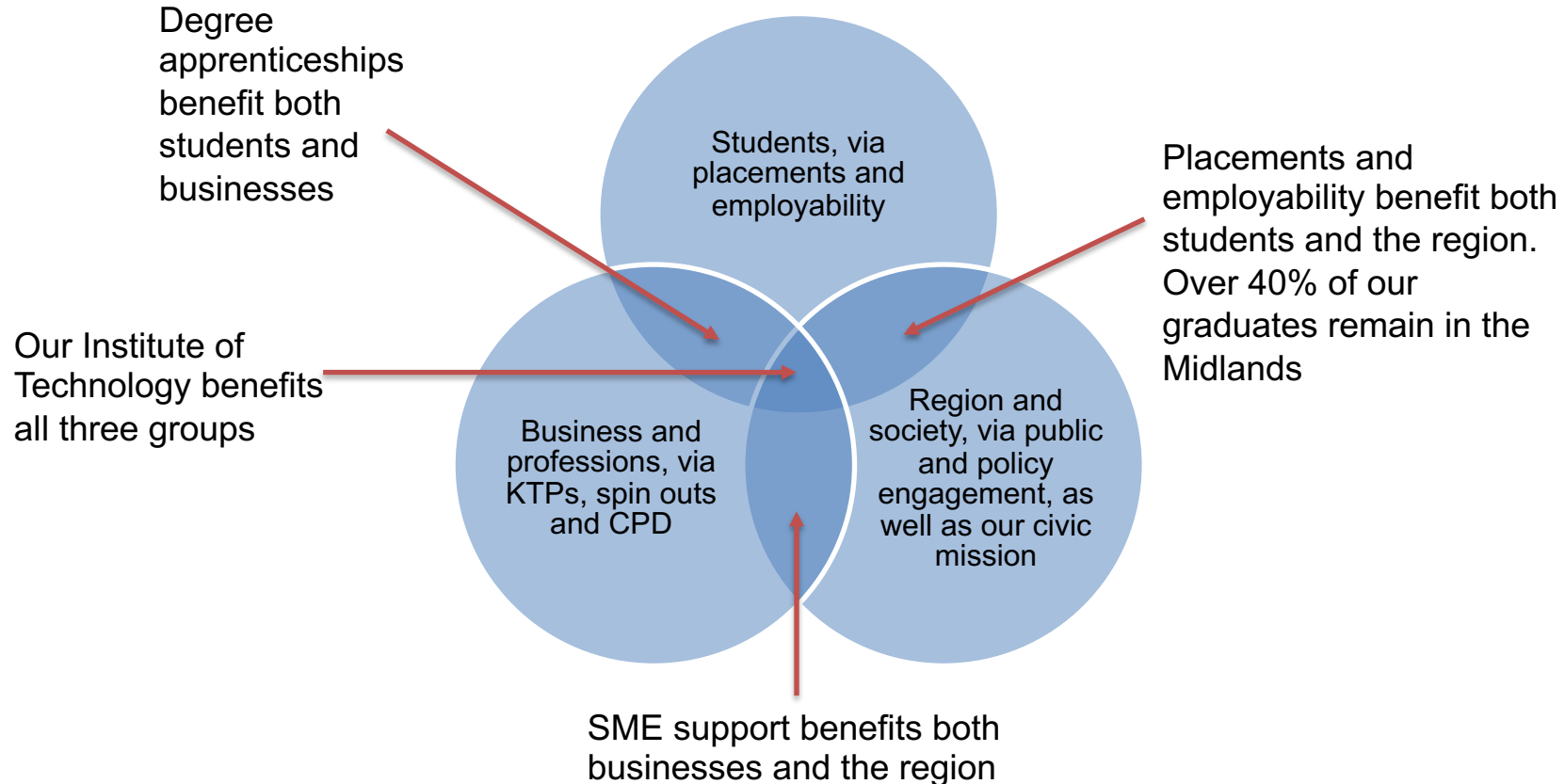
What is Knowledge Exchange?

- Knowledge Exchange (KE) captures how we use our expertise and research to engage with non-academic audiences; it is also a government priority
- It is a **two-way** exchange between academics, professional and technical staff and students on the one hand, and external collaborators on the other
- Examples of KE include:
 - Research collaborations with businesses, including KTP / ERDF projects
 - Spin-outs, commercialisation of research and student start-ups
 - Degree Apprenticeships, placements, employability and entrepreneurship training
 - CPD, short courses for third parties and consultancy
 - Our engagement with the public, the city, the region and the country
- KE is therefore derived from both our research and learning and teaching

KE covers a wide range of activities

Facilitating the research exploitation process (non-tech transfer) Access points for external organisations Business development Consultancy support Corporate relations Press Communications/marketing External fundraising for research	Skills and human capital development CPD/ short courses Lifelong learning Careers services Work placements/ project experience Joint curriculum development	Knowledge Networks/diffusion Provision of public space KE Professional networks Alumni networks KE Professional networks Staff exchanges Academic – external organisation networks	Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Education Social Enterprise Entrepreneurship education
Commercialisation (tech transfer) Technology Transfer Patenting/IP advice Investment Funds Contracts/ legal support	Exploiting the Physical Assets of the HEI Science Parks incubators Facilities/equipment	Supporting the Community / Outreach Volunteering Social cohesion/ community regeneration	Public Engagement Widening Participation Awareness raising/ knowledge diffusion Involving public in research

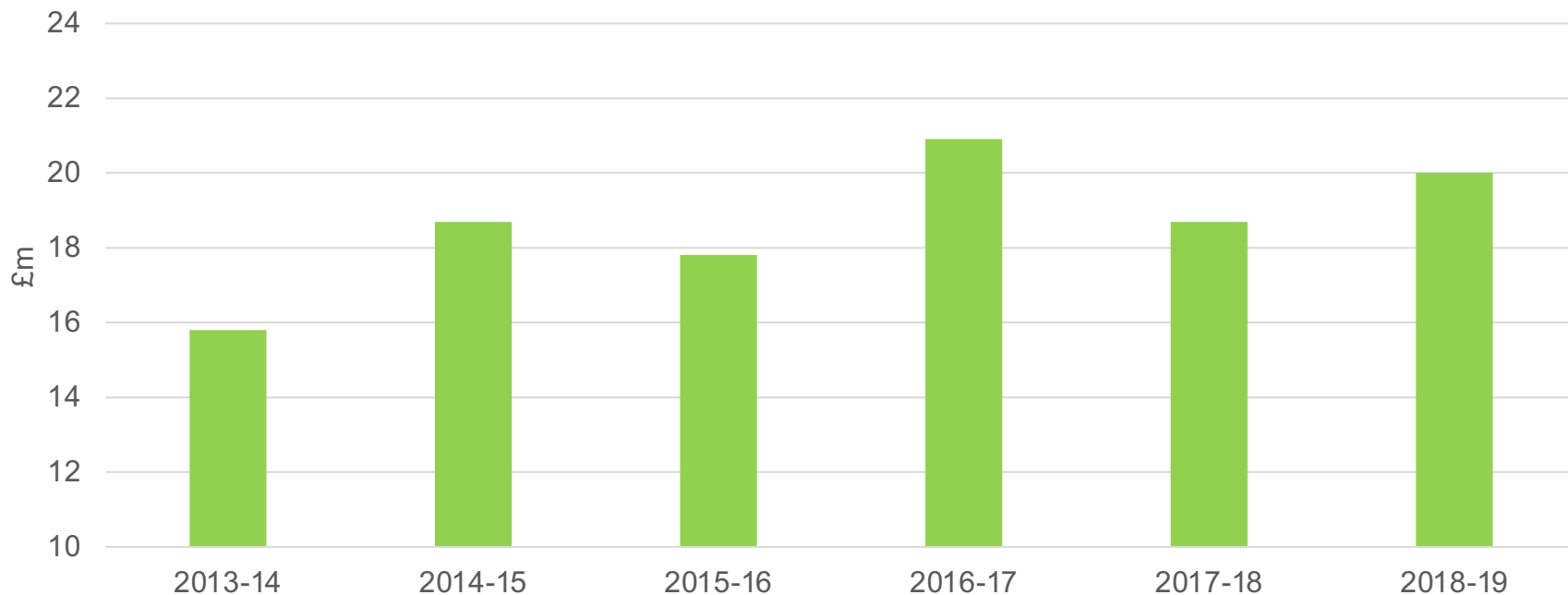
KE helps us to deliver for all our beneficiaries



Why does it matter to Aston?

- KE is very much part of Aston's DNA. Our Charter entreats us to:
 - *advance, disseminate and apply learning and knowledge ... for the benefit of industry and commerce and of the community generally*
- Its breadth also aligns very closely with our position as a 'dual intensive' University, committed equally to excellence in teaching and research
- This strategy thus joins up with other elements of Aston's strategic landscape, notably our Research Strategy and our Learning and Teaching Strategy
- We have a proud history of achievement, including:
 - Pioneering placements and Degree Apprenticeships
 - We are one of UK's leading providers of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)
 - Spin-outs: from the blockbuster cancer drug Temozolomide to more recent successes such as Grid Edge and Aston Particle Technologies Ltd
 - Our reputation for working with SMEs

The total financial value of our KE is growing steadily



Data taken from Aston return to annual Higher Education Business and Community Interaction (HE-BCI) Survey

Industrial and collaborative research awards are growing

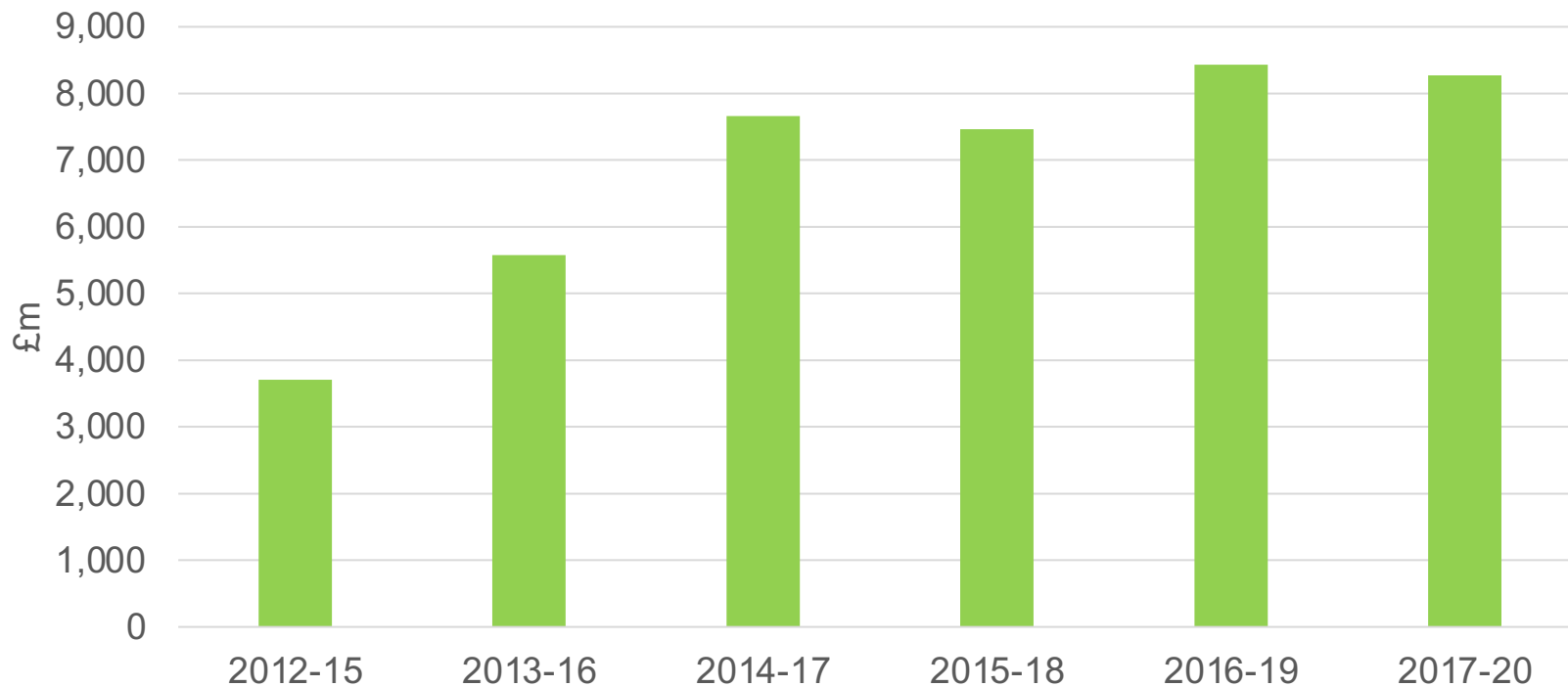
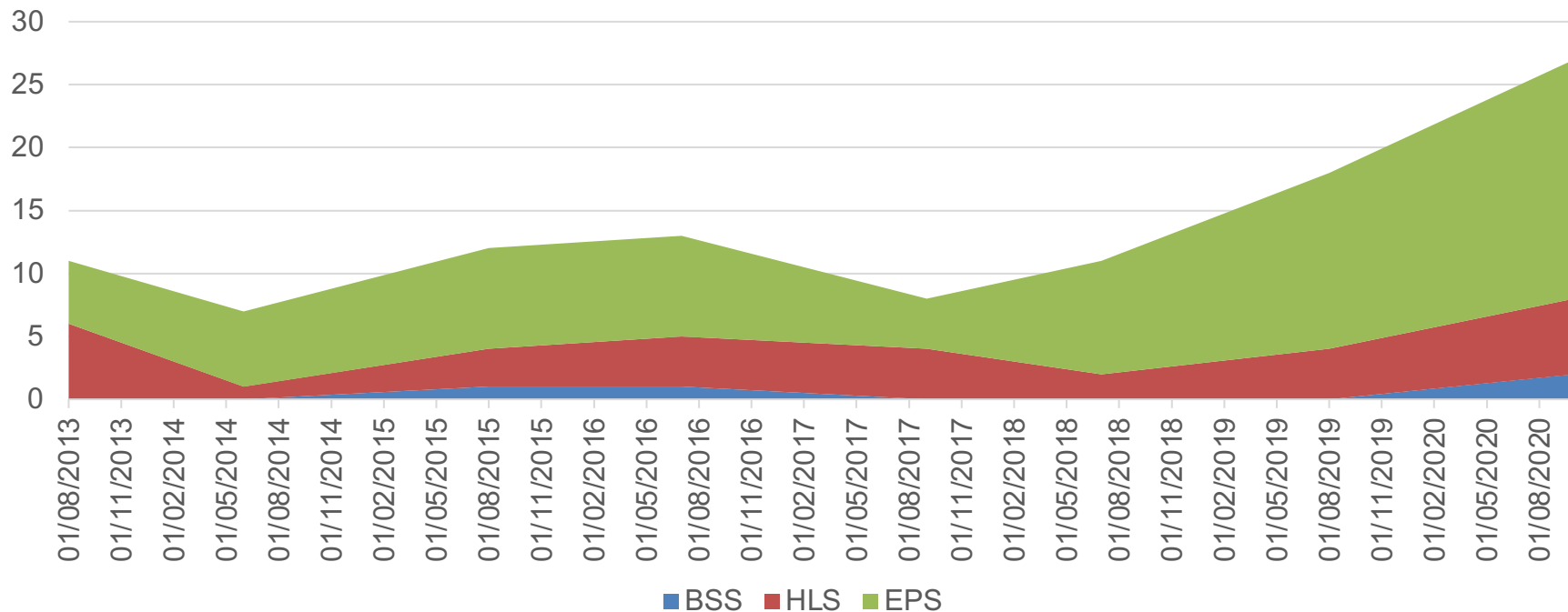
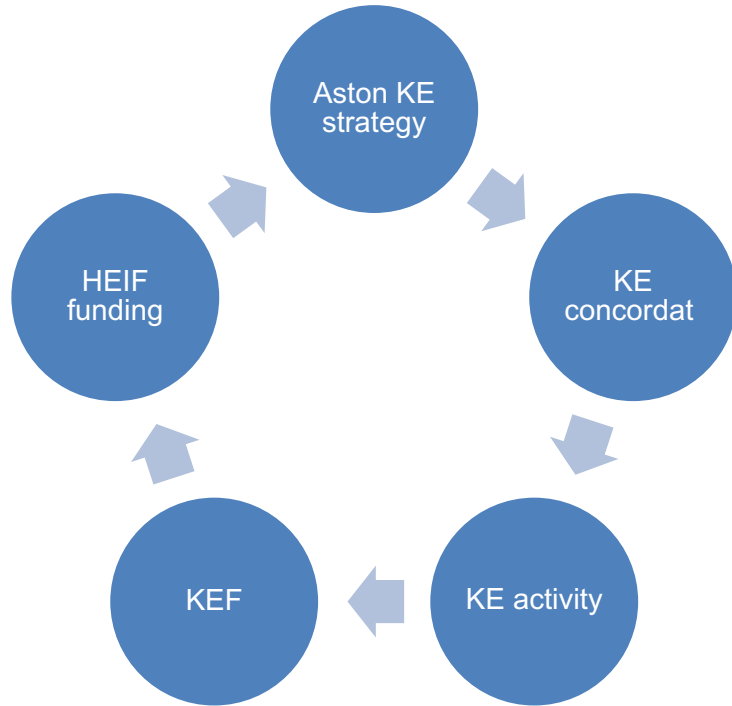


Chart shows three-year rolling average (including ERDF). Between 2012 and 2020, their share of total research awards increased from 18% to 30%

Our KTP portfolio has increased substantially



The KE landscape is changing

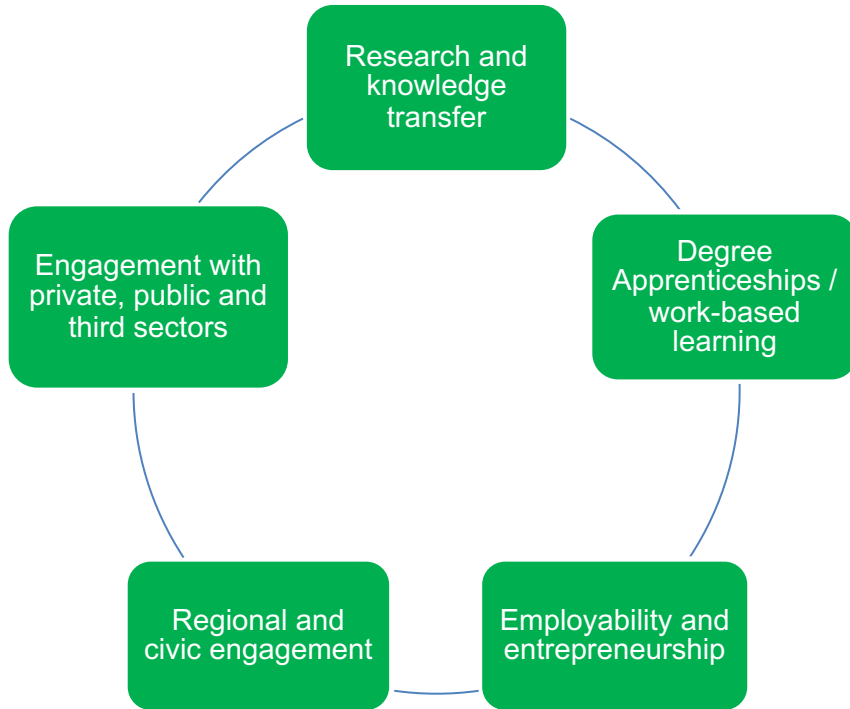


- The new Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) will track our performance against benchmark institutions, while the Knowledge Exchange Concordat (KEC) supports continuous improvement
- Future funding allocations via the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF, worth £200m in 19-20) are likely to be linked to performance in KEF
- KEF and KEC will not only give us a platform to shout about the things we are good at, but also help us deliver a step change in how KE performs at Aston

Our strategic vision for KE at Aston

- **Our vision is to become an engaged University** (see NCCPE framework):
 - KE is understood as deriving from all our academic activities in all Colleges and Schools, not just some
 - All colleagues, whether academic, professional or technical, and students have a role to play in engaging with KE
- We will achieve this by being:
 - **Defined:** As a relatively small and focused institution, we need to make choices, and cannot do everything, including in KE. In the past, we have sometimes deployed our resources indiscriminately
 - **Aligned:** To maximise the effectiveness of our resources, we need to ensure that our activities are joined-up and reinforce each other
 - **Engaged:** As a University, our aim is to deliver change for our beneficiaries through impact. In KE, we do so through the two-way process of engagement

We are focusing on five areas of activity



We have identified these five areas of KE activity because:

- They are areas where we can have most impact on our beneficiaries
- We have a strong track record in each
- They are distinctive, and core to our mission and brand
- They can be connected to maximise overall impact

Activity 1: research and knowledge transfer

- KTPs will be a priority for us, in all three Colleges, both as a product and a platform
- We will grow our awards in collaboration with industry, with a focus on Innovate UK
- We will engage with policy-makers to ensure that our research has policy impact
- Our impact case studies for REF 2021 provide evidence of our achievement. We will adopt a strategic approach to supporting impact for REF 2028
- We will simplify and integrate our approach to IP commercialisation, working with our partners in Midlands Innovation (via MICRA)
- We will adopt a portfolio approach to our IP and patents, aligning these more closely with research impact and spin-out opportunities
- We will support collaborative outputs with business partners: these correlate with higher citations which in turn helps us in international rankings and hence student recruitment

Activity 2: Degree Apprenticeships / work-based learning

- As one of the pioneers of DAs, we have a head-start in this area, with over 1,000 apprentices in the Aston system
- DAs are vital to diversifying income from the traditional 18-21 year-old campus-based students, and bring mature learners back to the University
- We will work in partnership with FE Colleges to deliver skills-based provision through our new Institute of Technology (IoT)
- We will support this through the development of agile University systems to provide and accredit of micro-credentials and stackable qualifications
- We will refocus our corporate education provision on 'open' cohorts built on existing Aston expertise

Activity 3: employability and entrepreneurship

- Aston seeks to transform the lives of all its students by preparing and enabling learners to become highly employable, global graduates
- All students are given the opportunity to build their employability skills within employer-informed curricula and work-based learning, and through extra-curricular opportunities such as volunteering and work experience
- The University's Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement processes are used to ensure that all programmes embed employability within the curriculum and are continually reviewed and enhanced to reflect the changing needs of employers and the respective disciplines
- The University will further strengthen its engagement with employers to maximise opportunities for student projects, placements and other initiatives through effective internal Engagement coordination and the use of CRM and account management practices

Activity 4: regional and civic engagement

- We are proud of our position as an anchor institution within Birmingham and the West Midlands:
 - Our Regional Impact Assessment shows that, directly and indirectly, we contribute over £1bn to the economy (Metro Dynamics Regional Impact Assessment)
 - Our market research demonstrates our high visibility in north Birmingham
 - Through BSEEN, ERDF projects, CREME and the Aston Centre for Growth, we support SMEs across the region
- We will focus our activities around a defined number of beacon activities and work together with local and regional partners to maximise our impact:
 - Membership of Citizens UK and support of Core Cities UK initiative
 - Our partnership with Aston Villa Foundation (Villa Vision)
 - WM-REDI together with regional partners and led by University of Birmingham

Activity 5: engagement with private, public and third sectors

- We will continue to work with both large and small businesses and public sector bodies (>400 SMEs in 2018-19), while understanding that SME support is resource intensive
- We will continue to develop our strategic approach to business partnerships and build better, deeper and more resilient relationships, around four cumulative dimensions:
 - Where we have a record of delivering outcomes
 - Where the relationship is not dependent on individuals
 - Where our partnership spans several of the five elements of our KE strategy
 - Where our engagement spans more than one College
- We will prioritise our resources according to this framework. To support this new, more strategic approach, we will need to invest in a CRM
- We will also need to review our processes for engaging with businesses to promote greater agility, including B2B marketing
- Our engagement with new funding streams (e.g. UK Shared Prosperity Fund) will be aligned with our other strategic priorities

What success looks like: our KPIs by 2025

➤ Council KPIs

- Value of our KE (via HE-BCI) to grow to £25m
- Employer reputation: top quartile for UK institutions in QS ranking
- Graduate outcomes: top quartile in the sector (subject to confirmation)

➤ Other indicators of success include

- A portfolio of 40 KTPs (£8m); within top 3 providers in the UK
- UK and overseas industry awards by HESA to grow to 30% of total portfolio (£12m)
- Share of outputs co-authored with industry to grow from 5.8% to 10% (Scival)
- 20% of our fee income from DAs and professional education (£20m)
- Top 3 in our KEF reference group
- 10 active spin-out companies
- Positive view of University in Community to increase from 50% to 66%
- We will develop lead indicators to help track these measures

Our enablers include

- First and foremost, our staff and students
- College ADs for Engagement and Impact
 - For academics, recruitment and promotions processes, plus workload models
- Our teams within Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE), Careers and Placements and DARO (and hence our alumni networks)
- Our research projects, impact case studies and URIs
- Regional partners, including Midlands Innovation, GBSLEP, GBCC, WMCA
- IoT, Industry Clubs, BSEEN, Aston Centre for Growth
- Citizens UK for information on community/citizens views and needs
- In addition, we will need culture change towards sharing intelligence, account management and better understanding of business needs
- Marketing and communications, to help communicate our successes more effectively

As everything else, KE involves trade-offs

- As in other areas of our activities, we will need to understand and manage a set of ambiguities to be successful in our strategy
 - **Size:** Our KE footprint will remain modest due to our size, but we are ambitious as an institution. We have a clear choice to make between breadth and depth
 - **Distinctiveness:** we want our KE to be distinctive, but are operating in a crowded market place, both locally and nationally
 - **Purpose:** we should accept that although primarily derived from our teaching and research, KE may sometimes be an end in itself
 - **Cost:** we want to use our time to benefit our stakeholders, but also need to generate the income (and contribution) to pay for this
 - **Time:** We recognise the importance of KE to achieving our University strategy, but also that it competes with many other priorities for our attention, notably teaching and research

In summary

- KE has grown significantly in importance in recent years, and is now a central part of the policy agenda
- This agenda plays to Aston's strengths and helps us to deliver our own mission to serve our beneficiaries: **KE is a natural enabler of this mission**
- Our opportunity is to recast KE as a cross-institutional activity, to join up our activities and thereby to create a KE profile greater than the sum of its parts
- Our challenge will be selectivity: there are many things in this space which are intrinsically valuable, but for which we do not have the resources
- But by being defined, aligned and engaged, we can ensure that KE both echoes and amplifies our education, engagement and research strategies, and thus **contributes to our success as a dual intensive University**