



Inclusive. Entrepreneurial. Transformational.

2030 Strategy

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FOREWORD BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

OUR STRATEGY FOR A CHANGING WORLD

For over a century, Aston University's enduring purpose has been to make our world a better place through education, research and innovation, by enabling our students to succeed in work and life, and by supporting our communities to thrive economically, socially and culturally.

Born out of the First Industrial Revolution, Aston University has a proud and distinct heritage dating back to our formation as the School of Metallurgy in 1875, the first UK College of Advanced Technology in 1951, gaining university status by Royal Charter in 1966, and becoming The Guardian University of the Year in 2020.

Building on our remarkable past, we now ask ourselves, what is our place and role in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (and beyond) within a rapidly changing world?

Over the past year we have explored possible scenarios for our future within our city, our region, and more broadly within the national and international context. How we might navigate the challenges of economic uncertainty, the changing nature of work, business and trade due to digital transformation, digital inclusion, health inequity, climate crisis and global unrest, just to name a few. How to prepare our students for work and life, within an increasingly complex and uncertain world, and how to help our communities thrive in the face of all these challenges. Our 2030 strategy emerged from many workshops, reviews and conversations about our purpose and aspirations, changed operating environment, and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Here, I want to highlight three things that will define our future at Aston.

First, I will explore our commitment to being an **Inclusive** university.

From the beginning, our founder's dream was that Aston University would be defined not by whom we exclude but by whom we include and how they succeed. Inclusion and diversity: these two essential values go right to the heart of who we are as a university. Each and every one of us here at Aston University is unique, and we are proud of that. We come from different backgrounds and cultures, have different experiences, skills and ideas. We all belong here at Aston University, and in Birmingham, one of the most welcoming, diverse and inclusive cities on Earth.

But being inclusive requires strategy and hard work. This year we have become only the second university in the UK to achieve an Athena Swan Gold Award in diversity in engineering, we have renewed our Civic Agreement, actioned the Race Equality Charter and secured University of Sanctuary status. And we are embedding intercultural awareness in all our courses across all disciplines. This forms a powerful platform for our inclusive future.

Being inclusive also means many things to us, including how we engage with our city and our diverse communities to help drive city regeneration, inclusive growth and better health

outcomes for all. So that is why our 2030 strategy aims to extend our reach and grow our influence, beyond the Aston Triangle, within our city and region, and internationally via our offshore hubs that we will create with our partners in places such as India, Vietnam and Singapore. Our understanding of and impact on diverse cultures, economies and societies will expand as we embrace our city and the world like never before.

Second, we will embrace our innovative past and become a truly **Entrepreneurial** university.

The past two decades have been witness to the most intense period of innovation and creativity in the history of the world. We've made significant strides in almost every field, driven in particular by science, technology and digital transformation. Connectivity has exponentially multiplied human progress.

But innovation does not just happen – it requires a favourable innovation ecosystem in order to thrive. This is why we are creating the Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ) here at Aston University with our partners Bruntwood SciTech, Birmingham City Council and others, and in the process redefining Aston University as an enterprising university. We are co-creating an innovation ecosystem of global significance with all the essential ingredients, to enable innovation at scale and pace, to attract enterprising talent, and create enterprising graduates – our future leaders of innovation and change.

"Aston University's history is intertwined with the history of Birmingham, a remarkable city that was once the heartland of the industrial revolution and the manufacturing powerhouse of the world."

We are building a digital innovation powerhouse in the heart of Birmingham – a place where digital tech and health tech, the brightest talent, most exciting businesses and cultural institutions come together to foster an environment which continually reinvents itself by harnessing fresh ideas and by pursuing game-changing innovations that make a positive impact.

We believe that successful universities of the future will foster confident and enterprising learners who are able to adapt to the changing world of work and drive innovation. Because successful graduates of the future will not necessarily emerge with all the answers, they will be prepared to ask the question, find and solve problems, be ready to take risks and pursue new frontiers and contribute to both local and global communities. Our 2030 strategy will ensure that our students are ready to tackle future challenges in work and life – because our university will be innovative, engaged and global in orientation.

And this brings me to my third and final point, our vision of Aston University as a **Transformational** university measured by the positive impact that we achieve for our people, students, businesses and the communities we serve.

Being transformational means embedding professional practice in all our courses to drive employability and social mobility; encouraging interdisciplinary teaching and challenge-based research; developing entrepreneurs internally and externally to drive innovation and inclusive growth; facilitating a collaborative co-creation approach with industry and business focused on value realisation, embedding industry teams and professionals within the university environment; fostering lifelong connectivity with our students and expanding our international collaborations.

But most of all, this means that we will need to think and act differently, beyond the conventional boundaries of today, as we create a more agile and adaptive university, a learning organisation for the future, powered by digital innovation.

"This means that we will need to think and act differently, beyond the conventional boundaries of today."

Perhaps the best example of the transformational model we have in mind is the new Aston Health Services Hub that we will establish on campus within the B-IQ, to provide integrated care for all our students and the community and drive health tech innovations. A Hub that brings together cutting-edge research in precision healthcare and digital health, clinical training and clinical trials, with embedded NHS services, tech companies and expert teams from partner organisations.

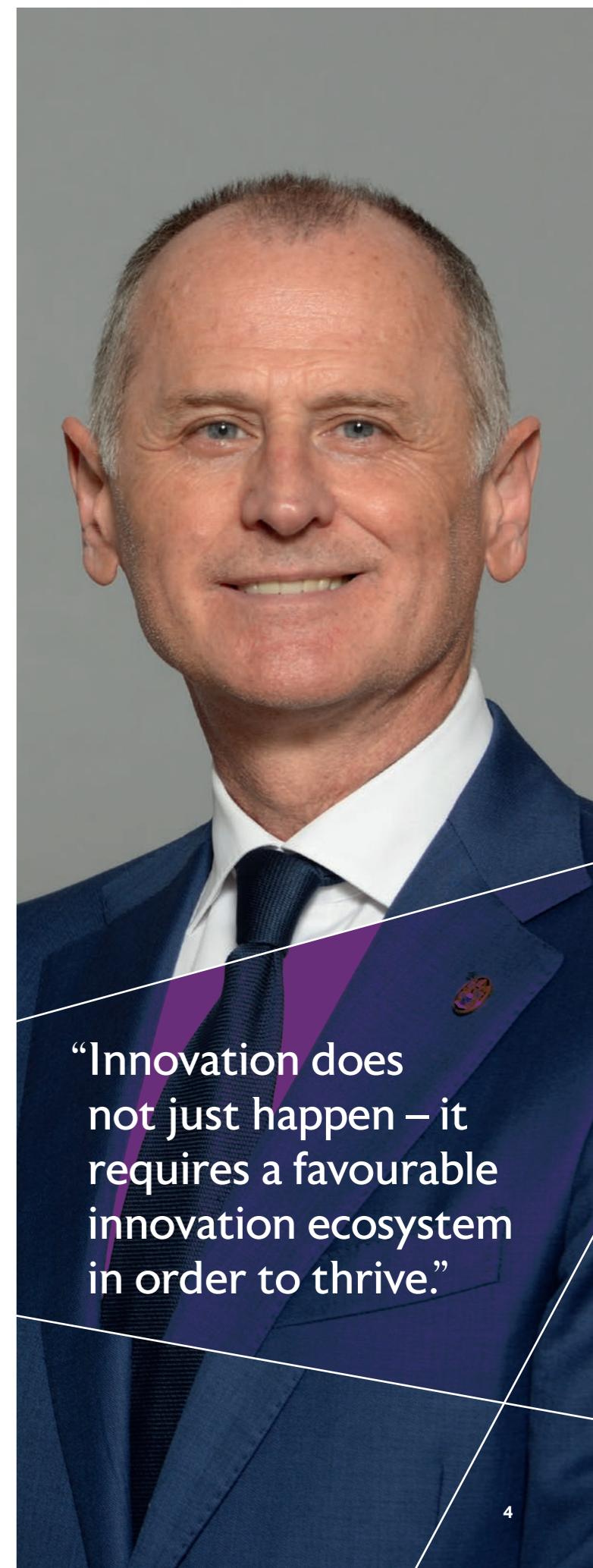
A 'living lab', in fact, that will bring together our diverse disciplines and teams to advance both education and research by prototyping and proofing new healthcare solutions and technologies to address the unprecedented challenges to health inequity and access to care.

A new model of university for a changing world. This is our grand challenge at Aston University.

Bring it on.



Professor Aleksandar Subic
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive
September 2023



"Innovation does not just happen – it requires a favourable innovation ecosystem in order to thrive."

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

We operate within a rapidly changing world facing major challenges, within both a local and global context, including exponential technological advances, climate change, shifting geopolitics, and widening inequalities and inequities. In the UK, we are experiencing poor economic performance and a pervasive productivity problem, alongside post-Brexit and post-Covid-19 economic uncertainties, and widening social and health inequities. Locally, our young, super diverse and entrepreneurial city is at a crossroads, building on its impressive past legacy, whilst seeking to reinvent itself and take its rightful place in the next industrial revolution.



The context for our 2030 strategy is set by the key trends and challenges outlined.



Technological advances

We are immersed in a digital era: the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Post-Covid-19, our society moved to more flexible working and learning, and we are in the midst of developing digital health solutions, digital manufacturing and digitally-enabled service models, with intelligent data analytics and artificial intelligence underpinning much of these developments. Cycles of technological advances and innovation are now measured in months rather than years or decades, bringing both opportunities and risks. Exponential technological change is redefining the nature of work, with many jobs changing or set to become obsolete. Communities must be equipped with the emerging and advanced skills needed for the future of work so that they can operate in high value-add jobs, within a global knowledge-based economy. Higher education, as a pathway towards high value-add jobs, must prepare for projected rises in demand.



Climate change

A whole system transformation is needed if the world is to avoid an accelerating climate disaster. This must involve both reducing carbon emissions and preparing for the inevitable impacts of climate change. Transformation must take place at micro and macro levels, within individual organisations, locally, regionally, nationally and globally, and it must be underpinned by research, innovation and advanced skills.



Shifting geopolitics

Decades of technological advancement have ushered in new levels of global connectivity and accessibility, but this closeness is threatened by geopolitical uncertainty. Pushback against longstanding institutions and norms, war in Europe, and the use of false news as a political tool are amongst some of the complex challenges that universities themselves must navigate, whilst supporting others to do so. This will require a concerted, collaborative effort with partners across the globe.

Inequality and inequity

Weak growth, income inequality and structural issues such as skills shortages and an ageing population dominate the UK's economy. Exiting the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic had a particularly damaging impact on the West Midlands' economy, as previously impressive economic growth has been replaced by the slowest recovery to pre-pandemic levels of gross domestic product (GDP). In Birmingham, the economic reality is one of inequity: 37% of the city's children and young people live in relative poverty and health inequities are stark.

Universities have a critical role to play in this; to act as catalysts and assume their responsibility to seek to understand the challenges of our time, and work with people, communities and industries to find the most appropriate responses and solutions. Our 2030 strategy actively embraces these challenges and seeks better solutions for our beneficiaries.

OUR VISION, PURPOSE AND VALUES

OUR VISION

Our Vision is to be a leading university of science, technology and enterprise, measured by the positive transformational impact we achieve for our people, students, businesses and the communities we serve.

OUR PURPOSE

Our Purpose is to make our world a better place through education, research and innovation, by enabling our students to succeed in work and life, and by supporting our communities to thrive economically, socially and culturally.

OUR VALUES

Ambition: our ambition drives us to advance and accomplish our goals, strive for excellence and impact, and create value for our beneficiaries and communities.

Collaboration: we believe in the value of working together for a shared purpose, by engaging and collaborating across our teams and disciplines, as well as with our beneficiaries.

Inclusion: we provide an inclusive, caring and empowering environment for all and respect and support the values that diversity and inclusion bring to our whole community.

Innovation: we nurture an innovative environment that values new ideas, seeks diverse perspectives and pursues game-changing innovations that make a positive impact.

Integrity: by valuing honesty, trust, fairness and ethical behaviour, we always act with integrity and hold ourselves and others accountable.



2030 PRIORITIES AND AMBITION

Our 2030 strategy has identified a number of priorities for us to focus on to achieve our ambitions.

PRIORITIES

Prepare our students for work and life through contemporary learning experiences enriched with professional practice across all disciplines and courses.

Create a place-based innovation ecosystem through strategic partnerships to serve as a catalyst for impactful research, high value business creation and inclusive growth.

Realise our role and place as an inclusive urban university deeply integrated within the city centre, enriching the lives of our staff, students and the community.

Increase our reach and impact through partnered international and regional hubs embedded within vibrant economies and emerging growth areas.

Adopt a digital first approach across the entire organisation to meet the changing needs of our beneficiaries and enable a more agile operating environment.

Develop a sustainable operating model for the future through innovation, diversified growth and strategic commercial partnerships.

AMBITION

In 2030 Aston University will be recognised nationally as a leader in graduate employability and social mobility.

In 2030 Aston University will be recognised as a leader in science and technology innovation, driving socio-economic transformation in our city and region.

In 2030 Aston University will be recognised as the best place to work and collaborate, bound together by our shared values and commitment to the greater good.

In 2030 Aston University will have a strong presence in London and select global locations, with a thriving portfolio of partnered programmes and projects.

In 2030 Aston University will be recognised as a leading digital enterprise in the region.

In 2030 Aston University will be future-proof, more resilient and responsive to external changes and disruptions, and able to drive new high impact developments.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following five strategic objectives provide a guiding framework for our 2030 strategy in line with our priorities and ambitions. They represent our bold statements of intent which convey our focus, what we must do and what we will achieve as we work towards realising our Vision and Purpose.



Objective 1: Elevate ambition

We will extend the reach, scale and reputation of Aston University.

We will do this by:

- **Increasing our capacity** – for sustained excellence and impact in Science, Technology and Enterprise.
- **Diversifying our academic portfolio** – growing our student communities on campus, at Aston London and offshore hubs, and via Aston Online.
- **Diversifying and scaling-up our commercial activities** – including joint ventures with strategic partners, Conference Aston, research, knowledge exchange and commercialisation, philanthropic initiatives, and training for industry and businesses through modularised and digitally-enabled learning.
- **Improving our standing in international and national rankings** – strengthening our reputation among businesses and the community based on how we engage and the impacts we create through education and research.

Objective 2: Create value

We will differentiate ourselves by providing our people and beneficiaries a unique value proposition.

We will do this:

- **For our students** by articulating Our Promise to Students, based on unique experiential learning experiences with guaranteed professional practice for all students in all courses, attainment of intercultural, digital, entrepreneurial and environmental literacies through Aston Power Skills, a novel student-centred learning approach via the Block Learning Mode, and sector-leading care and support via the Aston Health Services Hub and Student Support Hub.
- **For our people** by nurturing an inclusive, collaborative and collegial community that provides all staff with the best lived experience, and an empowering environment where the potential and ambition of each individual is recognised and supported.
- **For our partners** by facilitating a collaborative co-creation approach focused on value realisation, embedding industry teams and professionals within the university environment, and establishing a Business Hub and Alumni Club as the 'front door' to engaging with the whole of the university.

Objective 3: Leverage our place

We will embrace our city and enrich its cultural, physical and socio-economic environment.

We will do this by:

- **Evolving as an urban university** – integrated within Birmingham city centre and driving city regeneration, prosperity and better health outcomes.
- **Shaping the campus as a catalyst** – for the development of the Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ) through strategic partnerships and joint ventures with the city and private sector, using the triple-helix model of innovation.

- **Extending the Aston Triangle** – both physically and virtually via the 'hub and spoke' model that involves interconnected Hubs across the city centre, regionally and internationally, all contributing to and augmenting Aston University's core activities, engagement and impact.

Objective 4: Build digital enterprise

We will create an agile learning organisation through digital transformation.

We will do this by:

- **Adopting a digital first approach** – across the organisation to improve flexibility, responsiveness and productivity, and enhance staff and student experience.
- **Developing and implementing a data-enabled enterprise model** – across the organisation to provide intelligent data analytics and insights in a timely manner for planning, decision making and continuous improvement.
- **Enabling ubiquitous learning** – that leverages effectively current and emerging digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR), digital twins and the metaverse, for education, training and research.

Objective 5: Transform businesses and communities

We will drive socio-economic impact through transformative innovation and inclusive growth.

We will be:

- **Inclusive** by playing a key role in the development of a vibrant innovation ecosystem to drive sustainability and inclusive growth across our diverse communities, building on our active civic engagement and commitment to the Race Equality Charter and University of Sanctuary platform.
- **Entrepreneurial** by nurturing and facilitating innovation in all quarters of the university and establishing an Enterprise Hub to create new businesses, develop entrepreneurs, and commercialise research through Aston University Ventures and Midlands Mindforge.
- **Transformational** by creating high value-add jobs and helping scale-up businesses, drive city regeneration, and lead in employability and social mobility, and by driving digital transformation and digital inclusion across businesses and communities through the creation of the Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ), incorporating the Digital Futures Institute, Digital Skills Academy, and Digital Health Hub with Health Tech Accelerator.

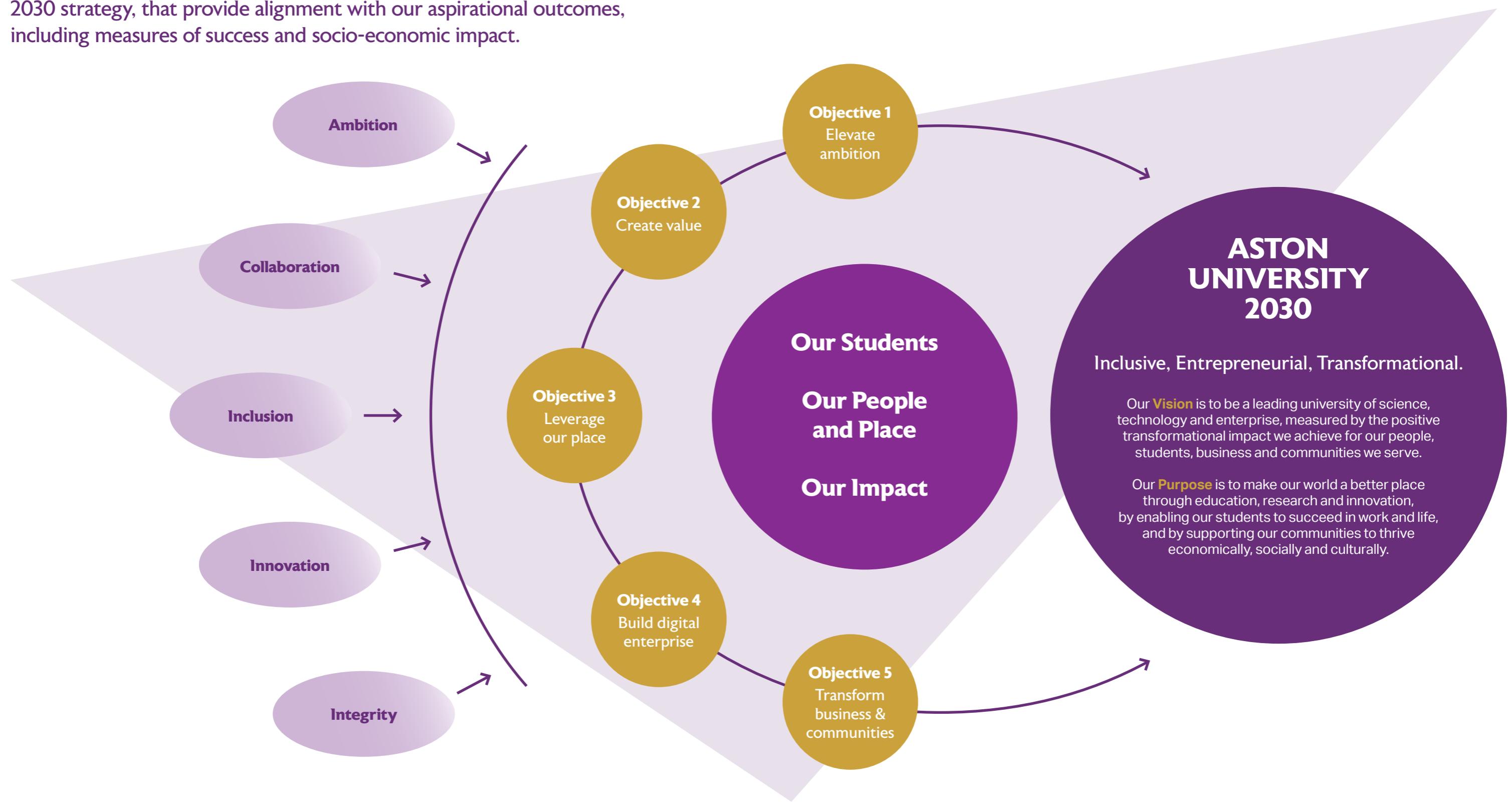


INCLUSIVE

Our home is right in the heart of Birmingham – one of the most vibrant, diverse and inclusive cities on earth. We attract people from all over the world and are immensely proud of the impact they have both on Birmingham and their communities.

STRATEGIC THEMES

Our strategic themes provide an integrating framework for the objectives and initiatives, with a laser sharp focus on our students, our people and place, and the impact we will achieve together. These integrating themes are in fact the key pillars of our 2030 strategy, that provide alignment with our aspirational outcomes, including measures of success and socio-economic impact.



OUR STUDENTS

Ready for work and life

Our value proposition for our students involves an integrated portfolio of contemporary learning and development opportunities supported by unique experiences and professional practice, all designed to elevate their learning and prepare them well for both work and life within a changing world.

The Aston University experience sets learners apart from those who have studied elsewhere. Our commitment to building and enhancing each individual's career potential is achieved through a skills-based approach by focusing on the skills sought by employers (for now and the future), engaging students with relevant and diverse experiential learning opportunities, and exposing them to contemporary industrial experiences and the latest and emerging research and practice in a chosen field of study.

Our strategy builds on our strengths in employability and graduate outcomes, which are part of Aston University DNA, as we have a longstanding reputation for excellence and impact in this field. We aim to maintain the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold status as an independent indicator of our excellence in teaching, learning and student outcomes. Of equal importance is ensuring a sense of belonging and providing the tools and support needed to thrive, by building intercultural and social awareness, and a positive lifelong approach to health and wellbeing.

Through our commitment to building graduate outcomes for work and life, learners are encouraged and supported to network and build collaborations within the university and externally, in support of lifelong learning development and greater adaptability to the future of work in a changing world.



Our strategy will ensure that beyond discipline-based and professional knowledge and skills, all Aston University students will graduate with advanced levels of intercultural, digital, entrepreneurial, and environmental literacy, as well as with a positive and informed approach to maintaining their health and wellbeing.

OUR STUDENTS

Ready for work and life

We have established five key value propositions which we will provide to all our students:

1. Skills and support needed to enhance lifelong career potential.

- Engagement with industry and research will form a core element of all taught and postgraduate research provisions, with professional practice embedded in all taught provision (undergraduate and postgraduate courses).
- At undergraduate level, all students will undertake an Aston Power Skills stackable module which develops the digital skills for the digital economy (contextualised to discipline and profession); build leadership, management and entrepreneurship skills; and develop an awareness and understanding of environmental sustainability and its implications for professional practice. We are one of a select group of universities with the Responsible Futures accreditation for our whole of institution approach to environmental sustainability and social responsibility, which form an integral part of the new Aston Power Skills module.
- For postgraduate taught courses, we will adopt the Aston Global Advantage offer and postgraduate researchers will have the opportunity to be part of our active research community, engaging with research leaders at Aston University, nationally and internationally.
- Given the significance of effective collaboration and networking skills for all careers, we will develop in all students these important employability skills via experiential learning experiences.
- All courses will engage industry professionals to enhance industry relevance and practice.

2. An environment and tools for a positive approach to health and wellbeing as a life skill.

- Develop a positive, data-informed approach to health and wellbeing as an important life skill.
- Provide integrated healthcare support through the interconnectedness of the new Aston Health Services Hub, Sports Centre and the range of available mental health and wellbeing resources.

3. Unique opportunities to personalise individual learning journeys.

- We recognise the diversity of our learners and their unique interests and needs for preferred approaches to study and development.
- All taught provisions will enable our learners to make choices about what, and how, they study and the nature of their assessment (involving authentic assessment approaches as our core model).
- Our new Block Learning Mode will provide our students with a better paced learning mode leading to higher rates of success, satisfaction and retention.

4. Access to contemporary physical and digital resources for all courses of study.

- Our Digital Enterprise strategy and next generation information systems will evolve to support technology-rich learning approaches anywhere at any time.
- Our flexible and blended learning approaches will embrace the changing nature of knowledge acquisition at a time when information is expanding at an exponential rate in almost every field.
- We will provide contemporary digital tech to all learners, encompassing relevant e-texts and e-links to online learning resources, including the hardware and software required for their programme of study.
- Our laboratories, enhanced by state-of-the-art digital infrastructure, will support learning across disciplines and professions, and evolve in select areas as super-labs for active learning, bootcamps and inter-disciplinary projects at scale.

5. Lifelong learning opportunities and personalised end-to-end student support.

- Recognising the value-add that higher education provides in terms of employability and social mobility, we will offer our students career support for life.
- On joining Aston University, students will become part of Aston for Life, which is a thriving community that offers a unique portfolio of personal and professional development and networking opportunities, insights and support that are essential for work and life, both during study and beyond.
- We will develop a new Student Services in the Cloud platform (a virtual Student Services Hub) that provides end-to-end engagement and support for our students anywhere and anytime with direct links to digital resources, applications, and advice (augmented by our integrated data platform in the Cloud with new generation AI).

Enabling strategies

- Education strategy
- College strategies
- Digital Enterprise strategy
- Estates strategy
- Access and Participation plan

Measures

- Student Positivity (NSS – National Student Survey)
- Student Voice (NSS – National Student Survey)
- Postgraduate Taught Experience (PTES)
- Postgraduate Research Experience (PRES) (Biennial)
- Access (OfS – Office for Students); Polar4 (Q1)
- Continuation (B3 / OfS)
- Completion (B3 / OfS)
- Progression (B3 / OfS)
- Ethnicity Awarding Gap
- Graduate Employability (Career after 15 months)
- Percentage of programmes with professional accreditation / certification / endorsement
- Percentage of programmes with professional practice embedded
- Number of students completing Aston Power Skills



Impact



Life Skills:

Beyond discipline-based and professional knowledge and skills, all Aston University students will graduate with advanced levels of intercultural, digital, entrepreneurial, and environmental literacy, as well as with a positive and informed approach to maintaining their health and wellbeing. This will position them for success in their approach to work and life and enable them to make a positive impact in their careers from day one.

Employability:

Their industry-relevant skills and qualifications, the networks they have curated, and the professional experience they have gained during studies means that Aston University graduates have a competitive edge in the job market. They will progress quickly to high value jobs and often well-remunerated roles – as an employee in an organisation or by setting up and running their own enterprises.

The ability to benefit from personal and professional development opportunities through the Aston for Life platform means throughout their careers they will be supported to progress into leadership roles, to re-skill and up-skill in line with the changing economies. This adaptability will ensure that throughout their careers they will be able to navigate between sectors as the world of work changes.

Social Mobility:

Aston University has shown that it is possible to be both an inclusive university and one which delivers impressive graduate outcomes, irrespective of their starting point or social capital; an Aston University education will help to improve the access to opportunity for our students. Through preparing our students from all backgrounds for high value careers in a changing world of work we will deliver transformational social mobility and continue to be renowned as a national leader.



OUR PEOPLE AND PLACE

Inclusive and innovative

This strategic theme is about placemaking, by focusing on creating new innovative places for our people and beneficiaries and transforming our city and campus beyond the current Aston Triangle. Our primary aim is to improve the lived experience within our university and strengthen the connections between people and our places. This is an approach centred on people and their needs, aspirations, desires, and visions, which relies strongly on community engagement.

Our 2030 strategy is therefore blurring the boundaries between campus and city, between our university community and diverse city communities, business and academia, work and life, by creating places that drive and enable innovation, co-creation and collaboration as never before.



Urban university

By embedding our core activities and infrastructure within the heart of the city to drive the regeneration of the city and engagement with the community. This includes establishing in the city centre the 'front door' to Aston University, our Business Hub and Enterprise Hub, Alumni Club (as a 'home away from home' for Aston University alumni) and embedding Aston Business School within the city business and financial district at the intersection of main transport links (including HS2 and New Street Station). We will be an urban university integrated within the city centre, supporting our communities to thrive economically, socially and culturally.



Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ)

Located here at Aston University, and co-created with our partners Bruntwood SciTech, Birmingham City Council and others, as an innovation ecosystem of global significance to drive innovation at scale and pace, to attract enterprising talent, and create enterprising graduates. This will be a place where digital tech and health tech, the brightest talent, most exciting businesses and cultural institutions come together to foster a game-changing innovation environment. A place where our staff and students work alongside leading innovators and businesses to develop new skills and realise new value.

Aston Health Services Hub

Embedded within the new consolidated health innovation campus within the B-IQ. As part of our commitment to enable our students to be ready for work and life and to our staff and wider community, the Aston Health Services Hub will offer comprehensive integrated health and wellbeing services. We know our community, including our student population, face disproportionate health inequality. We are also addressing known national challenges around student mental health and wellbeing. The Aston Health Services Hub will provide unique personalised preventative health and wellbeing support, personalised information to enable informed life choices for healthy living and ageing, and our students and community will benefit from the latest thinking and technology in digital healthcare, driven by world-leading research into global health challenges within this unique ecosystem.

These strategic developments, innovations and co-investments will establish a new university model that is inclusive, entrepreneurial and transformational, demonstrating in action how universities can act as a catalyst for their people and place, and the communities they serve.

Our people

Our people are an integral and essential part of the 2030 strategy.

We aim to be the best place to work by:

- Strengthening our employer value proposition and employer branding to champion the university as an agile and innovative learning organisation.
- Attracting and retaining the best talent who are aligned with our purpose, values and strategy.
- Being receptive and proactively using staff and beneficiaries' feedback to inform and improve what we do.
- Further increasing the focus on staff wellbeing and provide modern and purpose-built working environments and equipment.
- Instilling competitive and innovative staff benefits and rewards, and providing career progression opportunities.
- Removing any systemic gaps which might be a barrier to equity and embracing the global racial and ethnic equity framework.

We will nurture an inclusive, collaborative, and supportive environment by:

- Embedding a principle-based approach to equity, diversity and inclusion across all we do.
- Reinforcing our values and behaviours and promoting an environment where everyone can flourish and achieve their potential.
- Embedding leadership and management principles that nurture an inclusive environment based on trust, respect and empowerment.
- Setting out transparent principles to guide what we expect of all our staff.
- Embedding our inclusion principles in all we do.
- Providing support for mental health and wellbeing.

We will develop and empower our people to realise their ambition and full potential by:

- Providing enhanced academic and professional services career progression and pathways, supported by structured personal development including in leadership and management (projects, people, change and technology).
- Enabling all staff to advance their core skills, especially digital skills and data literacy, innovation and entrepreneurship skills.
- Establishing a Talent Academy to facilitate staff development and mentoring, and provide access to new work experiences and opportunities across the university.

We will create a culture of continuous improvement that rewards innovation and excellence by:

- Adopting a new contemporary approach to performance management that includes a digital platform and personalised support.
- Providing industry or business experience opportunities, and support for innovation capacity development within our new Enterprise Hub.



Our people at all levels and from all backgrounds will be supported to reach their potential and progress in their careers at Aston University.

Our place

Our prominence in the heart of Birmingham has facilitated our integration into the economic fabric of the city.

Aston University is synonymous with the enterprise, energy and engagement activities which drive this modern city and wider region of more than two million people.

With a student body that reflects the demographic of the city, our presence symbolises the best of Birmingham.



We will create an urban university, enabling people to integrate seamlessly with the city centre and where the university is seen as an essential resource for alumni, businesses and the community by:

- Establishing a physical presence in the city centre by extending the Aston Triangle into the centre and locating staff, students and partners in One Aston on Corporation Street.
- The relocation of more than 5,000 students, over 100 partners and 300 staff within Aston Business School into the city centre business district.

We will embrace the diverse culture, infrastructure, and opportunities that Birmingham has to offer by:

- Engaging in partnerships with local organisations that share our aspiration for the continued growth and success of the UK's second city. Acting as a cultural and intellectual resource, we will support the long-term ambition of both the city and the wider region.
- Collaborating with Birmingham City Council to develop public realm that integrates our new hubs and connects the city to the extended Aston Triangle.
- Building partnerships with private and public sector organisations, centred on the campus, to create a compelling innovation district proposition, to draw investment and private sector collaboration with our research to create new value and impact.
- Modelling the campus to become the heart of an innovation district that is welcoming, inclusive and gives people a reason to visit, work, play and stay in the area.

We will provide the best place to engage with partners by:

- Activating the B-IQ, leveraging our physical and academic assets and talents to draw in partners and collaborators to build an ecosystem of science, technology and enterprise innovation.
- Using our Alumni Hub as a physical space for alumni at the heart of the city, a facility which adds value to alumni in work and life and enables business with the university.
- Using the Aston for Life platform to create a digital space, available on demand to all alumni 24/7; establishing a powerful global online community with user-led networks and tailored personal and professional development.



We will provide the best place to innovate and create by:

- Enabling businesses and entrepreneurs with access to our human and physical resources on demand.
- Creating new business and enterprise hubs to provide a focal point for business, and to make regular engagement with students, staff and alumni an everyday experience.



Enabling strategies

- People strategy
- Estates strategy
- College strategies
- Digital Enterprise strategy

Measures

- Staff engagement
- Best Companies to Work For certification
- International academic staff ratio (QS World University Ranking)
- Industry staff ratio (Innovation Fellows, Industry Fellows, Professors of Practice)
- Diversity in leadership and governance roles
- Number of staff completing entrepreneurial bootcamps
- Number of staff undertaking leadership and management development
- Community engaged on campus on university business
- Companies incubated / embedded on campus / in Hubs
- Greenhouse Gas emissions (Aston University estate)

Impact



Inclusive:

Our people at all levels and from all backgrounds will be supported to reach their potential and progress in their careers at Aston University.

Our leadership teams will better reflect the diversity of our place, and our campus and nodes will serve as catalysts for collaboration and inclusive growth involving our beneficiaries and the communities we serve.

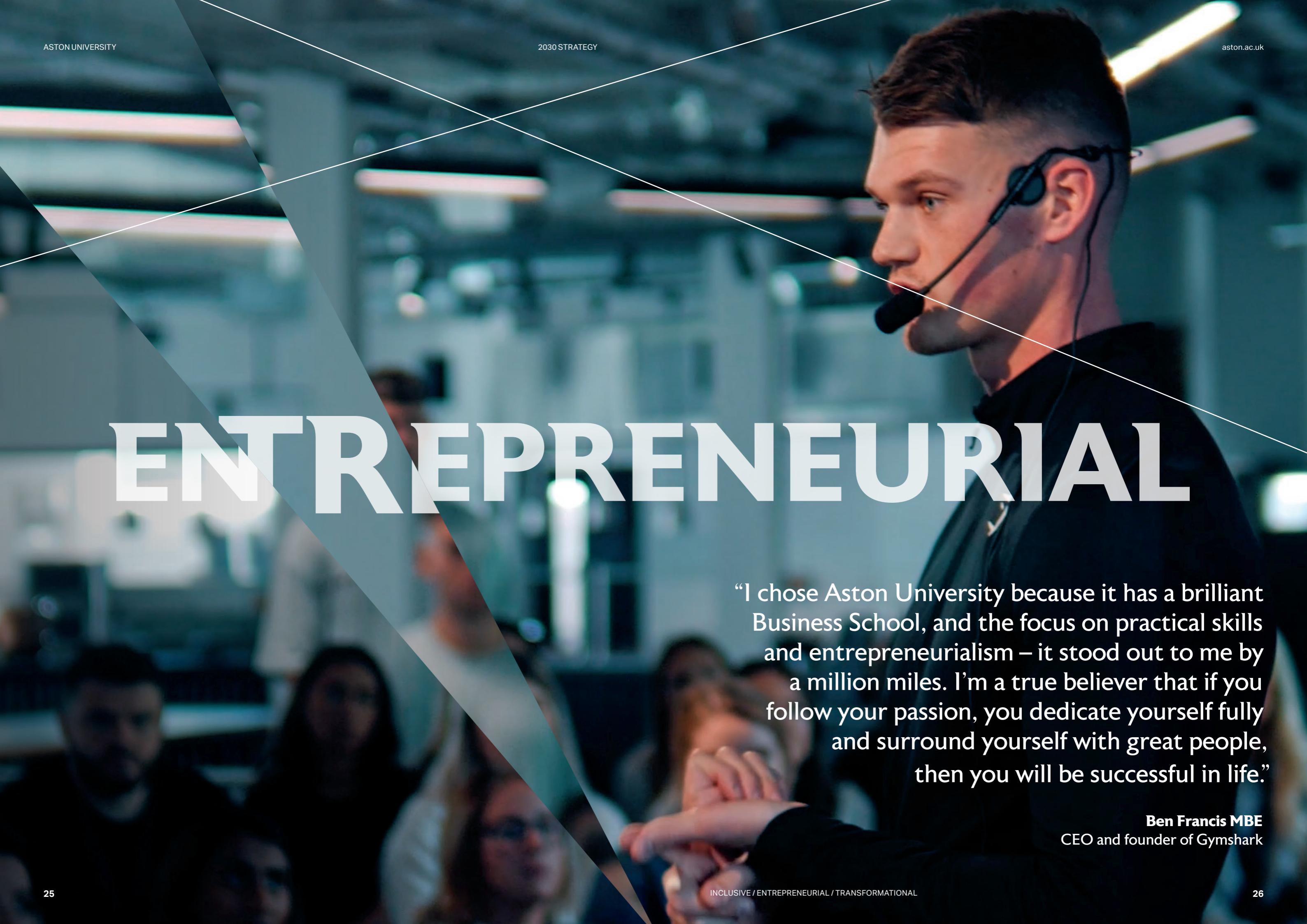
Innovative:

Just as we prepare our students for the changing world of work, our people will be enabled to embrace and lead innovation for our own organisation for their own benefit. Through our creation of the Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ) and our Enterprise Hub, orienting our services and expertise outwardly, we will attract innovators and entrepreneurs to the city and support more partners from diverse backgrounds to maximise their potential.

Engaged:

Aston University will be the most engaged university in the region, an influential catalyst, building a transformational ecosystem within our place, providing physical and digital resources for alumni, businesses and the community.

ENTREPRENEURIAL



“I chose Aston University because it has a brilliant Business School, and the focus on practical skills and entrepreneurship – it stood out to me by a million miles. I’m a true believer that if you follow your passion, you dedicate yourself fully and surround yourself with great people, then you will be successful in life.”

Ben Francis MBE
CEO and founder of Gymshark

OUR IMPACT

Enriching our communities

We are deeply embedded within our city and region, and we serve the people who live, work and study here – with over 100 years of equity invested in the financial, economic and social progress of Birmingham and its citizens.



We currently generate over £1bn to the national economy and within the 2030 strategy we aim to increase our contribution to over £2bn annually. Our graduates and placement students bring valuable skills to our businesses, and we are opening exclusive professions to students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our student body is diverse and is representative of our city and region. A third of our students come from Birmingham and we are actively driving social mobility by providing students with the skills that employers value. We understand local businesses and their needs and are expert at helping them to grow. We work collaboratively with firms and entrepreneurs across the region, and through this drive productivity and growth in the economy. We are proud of our contribution to local communities, but we want to do more.

To drive impact we must be forward-thinking and future-oriented, equipping our students to make a positive contribution to society and the economy, and enhancing our institutional contribution to inclusive growth. We will equip our students with the skills necessary for success in an evolving world and labour market, while at the same time be committed to promoting accessibility to higher education and ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have equal opportunities to thrive.

In expanding our impact and influence, we must remain strong in our commitment to maintaining our university's distinct identity and preserving our unique value-add proposition. Our academic expertise in emerging sectors will ensure we can make a direct contribution to local growth, but we must also stay true to our values as a civic institution which proactively drives social mobility, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential. We will continue to be strongly embedded within places and local communities by cultivating strong relationships with local businesses and communities, contributing to their growth and development, and attracting the inward investment which will provide new opportunities for our graduates and researchers. We are dedicated to being an integral part of our region's economic and physical transformation, collaborating with local stakeholders to drive positive change.



Credit: Howells

Our challenge-led research is a key vehicle for creating transformative impact, both for our partners in business and the professions, and in our communities. Our research will have three core interdisciplinary themes: Health, Digital and Technology. We see excellence in research as a prerequisite for high impact, and our distinctive interdisciplinary University Research Institutes will be the primary drivers of this.

We will create impact by building on our proven track record in Knowledge Exchange, through applied research with industry and business, high-quality Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, and successful commercialisation of our intellectual property. In line with our values, we will collaborate to create scale and impact, including with our business partners through Aston University Ventures and Aston Business Hub, with our university partners through Midlands Innovation and Midlands Mindforge, and through international partnerships including our offshore hubs. A particular focus for us will be our role and partnerships in the B-IQ with its focus on science and technology innovation: this will underpin how we use our research to leverage our place for the benefit of the city and the region. In addition to the economic impact measured within the 2030 strategy, our research impact will also be validated externally through the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF).

Our focus

We are dedicated to achieving success across various impact areas that directly tackle both local and national critical challenges.

These challenges encompass critical issues such as technological advancements, shifting geopolitics, inequality and inequity, and climate change. We aim to make a unique and transformative contribution to tackle these critical issues which have informed our outward-facing activities:



Technological advances

- We will make a direct and significant contribution to innovation-led growth and ensuring we have the skills and knowledge to drive growth in emerging sectors. We acknowledge the rapid advancements in technology and their transformative effects on industries, economies and future ways of working.
- Our university strives to stay at the forefront of technological innovation; we want to ensure that our students are equipped with advanced skills and knowledge to meet the evolving needs of society and we want to actively engage in the transformation of sectors and industries.
- To foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurialism within our university, we incentivise engagement and collaboration with local businesses, recognising the importance of working with industry partners to be responsive to industry needs and drive innovation forward.
- Furthermore, we embed enterprise skills in our core curriculum and provide support to student start-ups and university spin-outs, enabling them to thrive and contribute to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- Accelerating the impact of our research is another important focus. We provide comprehensive support to researchers and academics, guiding them from ideation to commercialisation. We actively connect them to the regional innovation ecosystem, facilitating the translation and commercialisation of their research findings. This ensures that our expertise reaches beyond academic circles and generates tangible benefits for society.

Shifting geopolitics

- We will put ourselves at the heart of decision-making, using our knowledge and expertise to ensure a good deal for our institution and community. As a key anchor institution, we have an important role to play in attracting investment and using our expertise and soft power to raise the profile of our region.
- We understand the challenges that come with the current political environment and the government funding landscape. We recognise the importance of influencing policies in ensuring that higher education receives adequate government funding. By actively engaging with policymakers, we work towards creating an environment where higher education is valued and supported.
- We advocate for making the sector more resilient to changes in government priorities and funding decisions. To ensure the financial sustainability of our university, we pursue strategies that balance affordability and revenue generation.
- Simultaneously, we explore avenues to diversify our income streams, by actively building our reputation profile, attracting foreign investment in research and development, and seeking innovation funding opportunities. Collaboration and partnership work is also vital to address shifting geopolitics. We actively engage in partnerships with other universities to tackle complex challenges, drive innovation, and enhance our research capabilities.

Inequality and inequity

- We will proactively support the UK's Levelling Up agenda, driving positive outcomes for all. We recognise the importance of creating a diverse and inclusive environment within our institution.
- We recognise our civic role and that our expertise can play a crucial role in addressing societal issues that, if left unchecked, will have far-reaching consequences. To tackle these challenges effectively, we embrace an interdisciplinary approach, ensuring that diverse perspectives and knowledge are leveraged to develop comprehensive solutions.
- We collaborate with local schools and colleges, foster partnerships with local charities such as the Aston Villa Foundation, and anchor institutions, such as the NHS, and engage with local SMEs. Through these partnerships and by participating in the foundation economy, we aim to create more pathways for individuals to enter the healthcare workforce and vital services which are essential to people's wellbeing.
- We want our campus to be accessible to all and support our students, including those from deprived areas and minority groups, by providing access to good job opportunities and fostering their personal and professional development, making a positive impact on their lives.
- We also want to ensure lifelong learning opportunities, and a flexible educational offer that is responsive to evolving skills needs, including short courses that cater to specific skillsets and high-level skills development. However, we remain mindful of affordability concerns and are committed to providing accessible education, ensuring that cost is not a barrier for individuals seeking to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Climate change

- We will apply our expertise and influence to tackle the major societal issues which will support sustainable growth. We recognise the crucial role we play in the local and national business ecosystem in supporting businesses in adopting sustainable practices and business models to achieve net-zero emissions.
- One notable initiative is the Green Advantage Project, where we provide guidance and resources to businesses, helping them gain a competitive edge through sustainability. We undertake world-leading research throughout Aston Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute and have secured significant funding for research in sustainable energy systems.
- We want to ensure that our students are well-equipped to address climate change and embed carbon literacy within our courses, integrating sustainability principles and climate-related topics into the curricula.
- Collaboration with other universities is also important to harness the collective expertise and resources of multiple institutions to drive forward energy research and innovation. We run initiatives like the Energy Research Accelerator in partnership with Midlands universities, which aims at facilitating the development and implementation of sustainable energy solutions at a regional level.

A woman with long dark hair is running on a sandy beach. A purple triangular overlay on the left side of the image contains a grayscale image of a human brain. The word 'TRANSFORMATIONAL' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Transforming health and wellbeing through access, partnership and our Aston Health Services Hub is a key focus of our strategy. Investment in our neuroimaging facility, research and discoveries allows us to drive major advances in healthcare and educational policy, both regionally and nationally.

Our contribution

By tackling these important challenges, we will make a significant contribution to the local and national agendas which impact our local community:

- Reducing the productivity gap by generating innovation-led growth and addressing the demand for skilled professionals, which will support emerging growth sectors and create the high value-add jobs which will retain our students in the city and attract businesses.
- Levelling up and inclusive growth agenda by fostering inclusive growth within our community and local economy, making future-oriented education accessible to all, applying innovation and using the university's expertise to tackle the societal challenges and inequalities which limit people's potential.
- Local regeneration and place-making agenda – by being a key player in Birmingham's regeneration programme, making a direct contribution to the East Birmingham Levelling Up Zone, fostering positive change to the local community and economy.
- Net-zero agenda and the overall transition towards a greener economy – by actively supporting businesses in adopting sustainable practices and business models to achieve net-zero emissions; undertaking world-leading research projects to drive innovation and develop cutting-edge solutions for a sustainable future and equipping students with the carbon skills and literacy needed.

In 2022-23, the principal impact channels outlined above show that Aston University's total economic output was £1.42bn [Metro Dynamics]. This represents its impact on the national economy, measured as a combination of the university's core operations (expenditure and salary payments), research, teaching, student expenditure, and student placements.



Credit: Howells

“We are building a digital innovation powerhouse in the heart of Birmingham – a place where digital tech and health tech, the brightest talent, most exciting businesses and cultural institutions come together.”

Projected 2030 contribution

Although the university already makes a significant contribution to the local and national economy, the 2030 strategy is an opportunity to do more. As the university continues to grow its operations, research outputs, and reputation – attracting more local and international students, creating the opportunity for more research and business partnerships, and continuing to grow its role as an anchor institution – there is an opportunity to increase economic contribution as well as drive the wider social benefits which are important to local communities.

Based on aspirational but achievable targets that the university has set for itself, an estimate of the potential impact by 2030 has also been calculated. The infographics illustrate the overall economic impact of Aston University and also the total economic impact that will be realised from the B-IQ, through our work in strategic partnerships and joint ventures with the city and private sector.

By 2030, if the university's targets can be achieved through the activity set out in this strategy, then Aston University's economic impact could grow to £2.37bn by 2030, a growth of just under £1bn from the 2023 level described. A breakdown of the potential 2030 impact is shown.

The total economic output of Aston University has been estimated based on its effect on skills, jobs, investment, and gross value added (GVA); grouped under the following principal areas of impact:

Core operations:

- Direct output of the university based on net income.
- Indirect impact on the wider economy and supply chain as a result of procurement spend and staff wages spent in the economy.

Research and innovation:

- Value of funded research (with an impact multiplier applied).
- Turnover of businesses supported by the university including graduate start-ups, formal spin-outs, and social enterprises.

Teaching:

- Wage premia experienced by graduates (compared to non-graduate baseline).
- Student expenditure in the economy (50% of spending attributed to the university).

Placements:

- Output contributed by students to the businesses in which they are working (assumed to be 1/3 that of standard output per worker based on the sector in which the placement is occurring).

Aston University's economic impact by area 2023 - 2030

Investment

	↑ £948.8m £556.6m		↑ £182m £93.1m
	↑ £642.7m £377.1m		Student expenditure in the economy
	↑ £64.5m £37.8m		↑ £538.7m £359.8m
Total: £1.42bn → £2.37bn			

Benefit

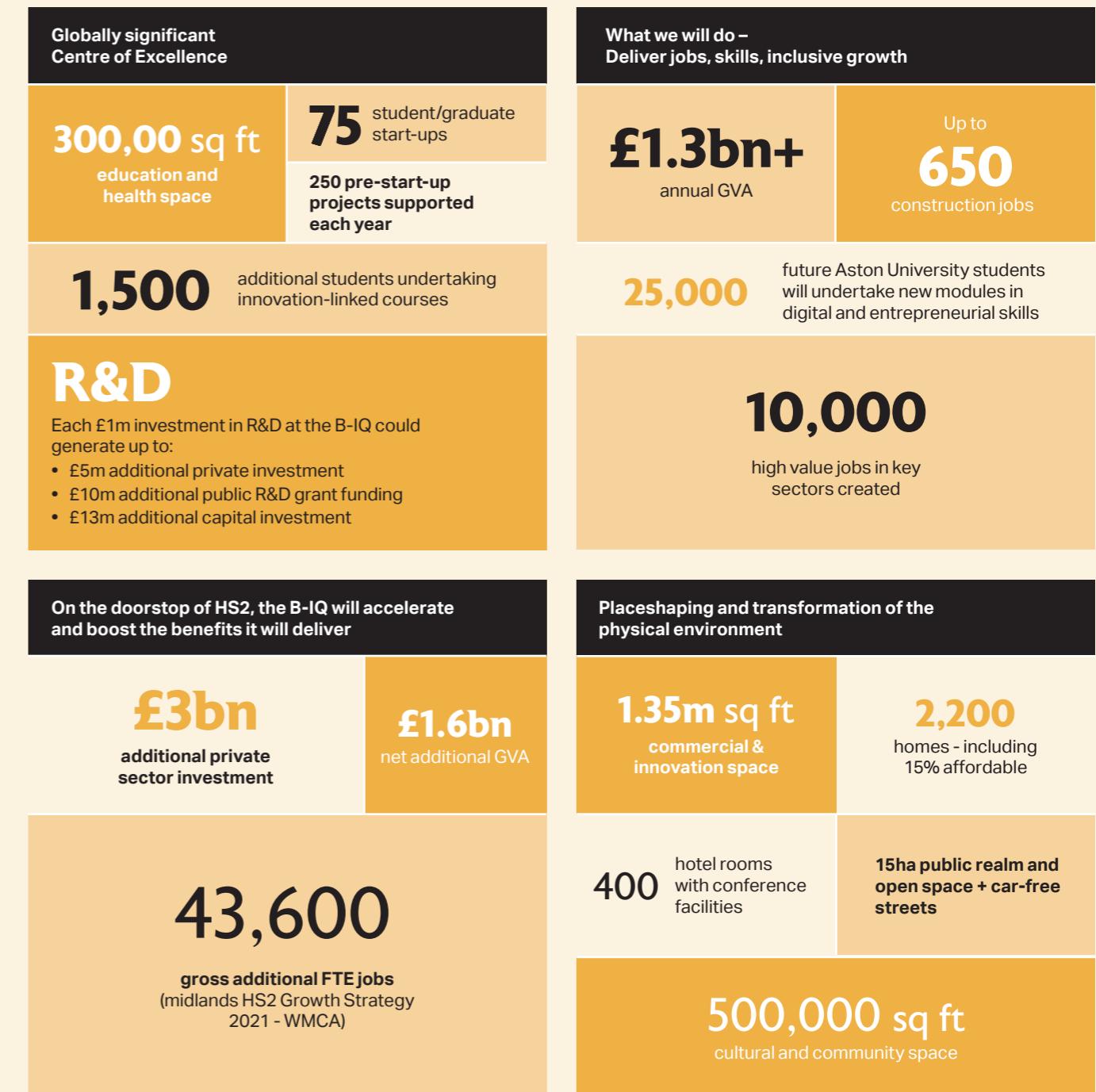
	↑ £864.3m £532.1m		↑ £317.1m £185m
	↑ £181.9m £107.2m		↑ £1,013m £594.5m
Total: £1.42bn → £2.37bn			



Birmingham Innovation Quarter

Projected impact

The B-IQ is a strategic partnership between Aston University, Bruntwood SciTech and Birmingham City Council, which aims to realise a bold vision within a new digital era, by creating a leading innovation cluster of international significance centred on science, technology and enterprise. It represents an innovation ecosystem that will co-locate industry, business, entrepreneurs and start-up founders together with staff and students from academia, bringing digital cutting-edge research into a range of sectors – most critically the health tech sector. It will become the catalyst for foreign investment, for business transformation, and for skills, and in turn will create socio-economic impact across the region.



SECURING OUR FUTURE

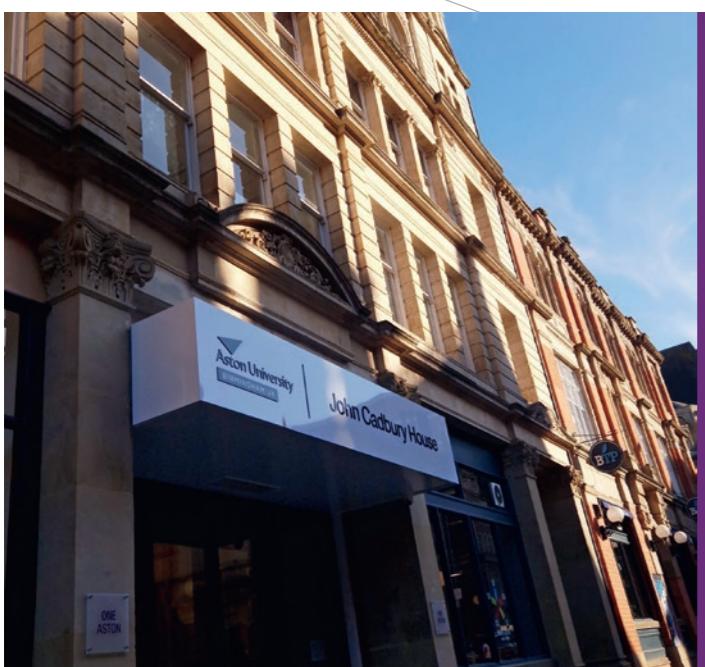
Aston University operates in a highly competitive market for students, research funding, private and public sector investments, and for new income sources, while being challenged by increasing operating costs and regulatory pressures. The ongoing cap on UK undergraduate tuition fees means that around half of the university's income does not increase for inflation, and with the volatility of the environment for international student income, it is a challenging set of pressures to balance.

The UK higher education sector faces significant challenges going forward in relation to achieving a sustainable funding model while attempting to meet all the internal and external operating requirements and expectations.



We will become an organisation with excellent financial literacy embedded across all functional units and colleges, ensuring that we:

- Deliver a sustainable financial foundation with a transformational platform that provides for targeted investment in organisational capability, infrastructure and digital improvements.
- Maintain high levels of financial compliance with full transparency over how resources are allocated and where the true cost and value of activities is understood.
- Operate a diverse workforce portfolio that provides for agile scalability and sustainable cost management.



It is clear that to secure our future, the university will need to:

- Commit to diversifying and growing its revenue well beyond current levels.
- Transform the core operating model for better efficiency and effectiveness.
- Achieve much higher levels of internationalisation and commercialisation than in the past.

Delivering the 2030 strategy requires a step change in our core operating and delivery models, underpinned by a commitment to higher levels of organisational agility and cross-unit collaboration.

This will involve developing a new operating model, underpinned by a sustainable financial framework, that enables and supports this strategy, consistently utilising intelligent data analytics and insights to ensure the growth across our diversified portfolio.

The key steps we will take to secure our future include:

- **Developing an agile organisation through digitalisation** – by adopting a digital first approach across the organisation to improve flexibility, responsiveness and productivity, and enhance staff and student experience, and developing a data-enabled enterprise model, providing intelligent data analytics and insights across all areas of the organisation for planning, decision-making, and data-informed interventions focused on continuous improvement.
- **Diversifying our academic portfolio and presence** – growing our student communities on campus, at Aston London and offshore hubs, and via Aston Online.
- **Scaling-up our commercial activities** – including joint ventures with strategic partners, Conference Aston, philanthropic initiatives, and commercial training for industry and business.

- **Focusing on value creation with partners** – by embedding industry teams and professionals within the university environment, establishing a Business Hub and Enterprise Hub to create new businesses and commercialise research through Aston University Ventures and Midlands Mindforge.
- **Shaping the campus as a catalyst** – for the realisation of the B-IQ through strategic partnerships and joint ventures with the city and private sector using the triple-helix model of innovation and attracting private sector investment including Foreign Direct Investment.

Securing our future means taking greater control, being cognisant of the competitive and commercial context we operate in, but also being brave and committed to a new direction involving new models of operation – to give us a transformational platform and sustainable foundations for our future.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

We have established measures of success and introduced a comprehensive and rigorous strategy management system through which we will plan, monitor and communicate our progress. This will enable us to accurately monitor and manage the progress we are making towards achieving our vision, strategic objectives and outcomes.

The table below shows our measures of success with aspirational targets for 2030.

OUR STUDENTS		
Measure	2021-22 Performance	2030 Target
1. Student Positivity (NSS – National Student Survey)	76%	Top quartile (85% and above)
2. Student Voice (NSS – National Student Survey)	72%	Top quartile (85% and above)
3. Postgraduate Taught Experience (PTES)	82%	Top quartile (85% and above)
4. Postgraduate Research Experience (PRES) (Biennial)	81%	Top quartile (85% and above)
5. Access (OfS – Office for Students); Polar4 (Q1)*	9.3%	Top decile
6. Continuation (B3 / OfS)	Above benchmark	Above benchmark
7. Completion (B3 / OfS)	Above benchmark	Above benchmark
8. Progression (B3 / OfS)	Above benchmark	Above benchmark
9. Ethnicity Awarding Gap	White - Black 11.1 pp White - Asian 8.2pp White - other 10.6pp White - mixed 9.8 pp	No gap (0)
10. Graduate Employability (Career after 15 months)	Top 27%	Top quartile (with less than 1% gap across all students)
11. Percentage of programmes with professional accreditation / certification / endorsement	62%	100%
12. Percentage of programmes with professional practice embedded	60%	100%
13. Number of students completing Aston Power Skills	-	100%

OUR PEOPLE AND PLACE		
Measure	2021-22 Performance	2030 Target
14. Staff engagement	77%	80% and above
15. Best Companies to Work For certification	-	Achieve Best Companies to Work For certification and Best Place to Work award by 2030
16. International academic staff ratio (QS World University Ranking)	131	100
17. Industry staff ratio (Innovation Fellows, Industry Fellows, Professors of Practice)	<20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 1 Professor of Practice per Department • At least 1 Industry Fellow and / or Innovation Fellow and / or Clinical Fellow per programme
18. Diversity in leadership and governance roles	1. Minoritised Ethnic Groups in senior roles 13.55% 2. Female senior roles 34.58%	1. Minoritised Ethnic Groups in senior roles to at least 30% 2. Female senior roles to at least 50%
19. Number of staff completing entrepreneurial bootcamps	-	100 staff p.a., 700 by 2030
20. Number of staff undertaking leadership and management development	-	100 staff p.a., 700 by 2030
21. Community engaged on campus on university business	5,000	25,000
22. Companies incubated / embedded on campus / in Hubs	8 (live spin-outs) 41 (graduate starts incubated)	50 (live spin-outs) 100 (graduate starts incubated)
23. Greenhouse Gas emissions (Aston University estate)	Gas consumption per year (3,900 MWh.y ⁻¹) Emissions per floor area per year (45.3kgCO ₂ e.sqm.y ⁻¹)	Net zero emissions by end of 2030 25% reduction of per floor area emissions by end of 2030

*This measure and target will be subject to change as the university finalises its Access and Participation plan in 2023-24.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

OUR IMPACT		
Measure	2021-22 Performance	2030 Target
24. Research Excellence Framework (REF) / Times Higher Education GPA Ranking	58th	Top 35 for research quality
25. Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)	Placed in second quintile nationally (e.g. very high or high engagement) in three out of four key areas aligned with the strategy	Top quintile in all 7 categories
26. International reputation – QS World University Ranking	QS 561-570	Top 300
27. International reputation – Times Higher Education Ranking	THE 401-500	Top 300
28. International reputation – Times Higher Education Impact Ranking	-	Top 100
29. National reputation – The Guardian	22	Top 20
30. National reputation – The Times / The Sunday Times	44	Top 30
31. Number of revenue-generating business partnership agreements	380	500 (focus on larger scale contracts)
32. Number of community partnership agreements	5	50
33. Number of revenue-generating international partnership agreements (JVs)	5	25
34. Number of commercial / corporate Joint Ventures	1	15
35. Number of active Knowledge Transfer Partnerships	30 (£7m total portfolio value)	50 (£15m total portfolio value)
36. Digital inclusion – Digital Skills Academy provision	-	1000 p.a.
37. Health equity – Health Services Hub community access to clinical services on campus (external, staff, students)	1,500 p.a.	22,000 p.a.

INCLUSIVE.
ENTREPRENEURIAL.
TRANSFORMATIONAL.

BRING IT ON