

## **Panel 3: Innovation Constellation - Connecting Clusters to Accelerate R&D Across the UK**

Moderator: Dr. Andy Williams

Panelists:

- Pam Smith, CEO, Newcastle City Council
- Jessica Bowles, Bruntwood SciTech
- Josh Hawkins, Midlands Engine
- Richard (surname not provided), Oxford-Cambridge Partnership

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** When we formed the supercluster board two or three years ago, it was on the premise that if we connect Oxford and Cambridge better, connect them better together, then that would improve collaboration between Oxford and Cambridge, but also build that connectivity across the wider region. We heard this morning that even Oxford and Cambridge don't do that well. So actually, getting that all together is quite a tough ask, but it's something that we think we can do.

But from my perspective, Oxford to Cambridge, which is enabled by east-west, is just the starting point. We need to make sure we don't just fill in the gaps between Oxford and Cambridge and enable those to be successful. But it spreads out to Norwich, then out to Bristol, up to Manchester, to Newcastle and all parts of the UK, because if we genuinely believe we want to be a UK science superpower, we need to enable all our regions, not just some of them.

Pam, from your perspective. How does Newcastle figure in terms of science and technology? How important is it to you? Where does it all fit into the wider UK economy?

**PAM SMITH:** Science and technology is hugely important to Newcastle because we're the home of green and blue energy, and that's important because we've got the biggest offshore wind farm off our coastline. And in the future, for me the context is you've got to have energy security and water security. That is, for me, the context that you've got to have a research capability. So we've got the highest concentration of researchers in the UK, outside of London. So you've got to have that research capability and then you've got to be able to commercialise it, exploit it and make sure that you're working together to do that.

An example for me would be our space centre. We've heard quite a bit about space on the other panels and that came about by fantastic collaboration from universities, local authorities, the private sector. We're working with Lockheed Martin. And for me that's an example of coming together, having high ambition, because as a region we've got high ambition, being excited about it, being excited about innovation and technology.

I think what we are in Newcastle is we're ambitious and we recognise innovations that have come from a few things. Innovation's everywhere but for us, there's a focus on space, national security, renewables, life sciences. And then the big wrapper for me is AI. So I think lots of different regions will say what they're focusing on, but for us in Newcastle, those are our key areas and we're excited to be involved with a number of public and private sector partners to kind of make sure that it's a reality, but it's also meaningful to our residents. I think that's the

thing for me, it's not just literally pie in the sky, it's actually making sure that it remains relevant to all our residents.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Moving slightly further south, Jessica, tell us about Manchester's perspective on science and technology.

**JESSICA BOWLES:** Thanks very much. Let me just tell you who Bruntwood SciTech is briefly and why I'm here representing Manchester. So, Bruntwood SciTech is a commercial property company. We develop, own, manage and operate facilities for science and tech businesses across the UK. We often do this as partnerships with universities, hospital trusts and local authorities, and sometimes develop on our own account. It's a joint venture between Legal & General Capital and Greater Manchester Pension Fund. And I mentioned that because it's come up quite a few times today - how do you unlock pension fund investment and deploy it into economic growth across the UK?

We're headquartered in Manchester, which is why I'm here representing Manchester. And we've got a 45 year history of operating there, supporting the growth and the rebirth of the city following the post-industrial decline that we saw in last century. We're a founding partner of Innovation Greater Manchester, which is a private sector-led organisation in Manchester to really try and bring further investment into the innovation ecosystem, both at the R&D end of things and into institutes and into the universities, but then really seeing how that can be driven into business and commercialised and kept importantly within the UK. It's there with a focus, really, on driving up the productivity of the city region.

Greater Manchester, 3 million people, £70 billion economy. So it's a sizable bit of the country. And if that's not firing on all cylinders, the UK is not going to be doing as well as it needs to. So that's been a kind of driving force for us.

I'd just like to pick up three quick points about how we're doing this in Greater Manchester and why it's important:

First, growth happens somewhere. Economic growth isn't just an abstract idea, it happens in places. And I think Greater Manchester has been really good at harnessing that idea of how you can kind of get your arms around the activity you want to happen, bring people together, shape and drive that activity.

Second, it's had a long-term strategy. It created a strategy that's been developing over time and being delivered over time to lead the way out of post-industrial decline that the city had suffered.

Third, we've kept a local industrial strategy in Greater Manchester which, when government sort of moved away from industrial strategies, we kept ours. And we kept it focused on those local strengths that Greater Manchester actually had. Not kind of, we're great at everything, but what are the things we're really good at. And those were really focused around advanced materials and in particular 2D materials, the sort of poster child of which is graphene, but it's not the only one. And the other was diagnostics and genomics, where we've got real strength in terms of academic research, but also ability to translate that into innovation.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Josh, moving to the huge Midlands engine, which has a huge, diverse geography. How do you manage all that geography, and what's the situation with science and technology in your region?

**JOSH HAWKINS:** We certainly don't manage it. We just connect to do things. But I guess hearing everything today, I guess if you imagine the Oxford-Cambridge area, and it's interesting, I call you out slightly because earlier you said Bristol, Manchester and so on, this always happens. You didn't mention anywhere in the middle. And we're in an area of nearly 12 million people, right? An economy the size of Denmark, has more people than Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland combined. So, big old area, 20 universities, tens of thousands of researchers, 350,000 students.

We're doing an exercise, basically working with authorities across the Midlands to understand what their priority development sites are, their clusters. Within that there are some 33 sites which are R&D associated. So it could be a science park or a business park, a university campus. There's five new ones being built in the Midlands, or planned to be built, about £200,000 in gross event value. Massive size. And if you think of us, we are the closest neighbours to the Oxford-Cambridge supercluster in this context.

The region itself, I mean, I've just touched on a lot of it. I work for the pan-regional partnership, so we were set up a number of years ago. The whole point is to close that productivity gap in the Midlands. How can we drive economic growth in an inclusive and sustainable way? So I'm just part of a small secretariat. It's a brand that exists across government and some of the things like the British Business Bank. So our role is to do three things effectively: to convene relevant stakeholders, to provide evidence, and to advocate to government, but also domestically around those things.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Richard, the still recently established Oxford-Cambridge partnership and abundance of riches, how do you see that coming together in an effective way?

**RICHARD:** I want to talk about the hyphen, because most people in this room know an awful lot about Oxford and Cambridge. I want to talk about the bit in the middle, and we've got some incredible places. So, Milton Keynes leads on competitiveness of UK cities. Northampton has near double-digit economic growth, Luton and Luton Rising, and the airport around that one. Regeneration and skills with their university. Peterborough has a new university.

Yes, Oxford and Cambridge have produced 200 Nobel prize winners. It's just phenomenal. You know, we're not starting from a low base, are we? They have two of the three most intensive science and tech clusters in the world, but it's about the opportunity of connecting these places up and how are these places going to grow and connect with Manchester and Newcastle?

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** How do you try and drive collaboration across a region and between regions?

**RICHARD:** Well, as Pam said, having your team in the front rows glaring at me isn't going to stop me from saying what I really think. So the first thing is, don't let the politics get in the way of doing the right thing. But obviously, you've got to. It's a coalition of the willing, so you can't ignore it, but you've got to do the right thing.

Secondly, when the RDAs used to come down to London and meet with people like Peter Mandelson, who was Secretary of State, he would say, what are the two or three most important things that we could do to unblock growth? It was always the same answer. Transport and skills. Transport and skills. Transport and skills.

We are very fortunate. We have got a railway being built and it's being built at pace. East West Rail linking Oxford to Cambridge and places in between. That is the catalyst for growth in our region. Not going from Oxford into London and out to Cambridge, but connecting these places between.

You've got to bring the communities with you, because it's about the people who live in this patch and attracting the talent into our patch. And I'm sure it's the same in every other patch, but I think you can do it differently. You can do it in a sustainable way, so you can do it and use it as an opportunity to enhance the environment in your patch.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Pam, Newcastle is quite away from Oxford, Cambridge and from Manchester. How does Newcastle maintain its connectivity to the country?

**PAM SMITH:** I'm just going to challenge you a little bit on that. It depends on your perspective. If you were in Vancouver or in the states, you won't be saying that Newcastle is a long way from. Because actually people drive 2 hours to dinner. I think we have to get over this notion that we're all far away from each other because globally we know. And I think that you've got the East Coast Main Line, which is absolutely fantastic. And I think that Newcastle's in a fantastic position because it's between two of the most productive cities on the same line, which is Edinburgh and London.

We're interested in the north-south connectivity because that's where the money is and that's where the productivity is. But also we're interested in the port structure. So we've got in our devolution deal, we've got a green superport because we know trade has changed and there's this deep water port when those trades will change.

It's important that we play to our strengths and we recognise what we're good at. And globally, you have to understand that. And there's no point going into a market that you're not best placed for. Recognise who's best placed to get that piece of global business and then absolutely back it and put everybody behind it.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Jess, you've got an example of a collaboration between Cambridge and Manchester. Can you tell us about that?

**JESSICA BOWLES:** Clearly we've been thinking about work with our neighbouring authorities and neighbouring partners and that's been really important across the north for a long period of time. But we also recognise that this isn't just about - it's a small country and this is about how can you use the complementary skills, expertise, assets and use those in a way that creates more.

Manchester and Cambridge have been looking at how they can work together, recognising where their research, what their business base looks like, where they've got opportunities to work in a way that relieves some of the pressure on Cambridge by creating spaces where there's land and opportunity in and around Manchester, particularly around manufacturing, but also the tie-up between the universities and the academics and the universities collaborating.

And so we've got a big piece of work looking at how we do that, how we leverage investment across the two, how we build up our respective strengths and how we see the overlap between it. The sort of big message from it is that decisions need to be made at the right level. So national infrastructure, that is a question for government to support and row in behind how you join things up in places and between places. A lot of that's in our hands and we want to be doing that between the business community, the academic community, and public sector.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** We are running out of time. In any order, one minute of what could make a difference for your region from a new government. Josh?

**JOSH HAWKINS:** One of the challenges we have is a very complex landscape around support for businesses, but also traction with investment and all these other things. So we can't freeports and investment zones through to investment promotion agencies left, we've got two left and growing up and whatever else. So that's how to articulate domestically, let alone internationally, let alone sort of business plans, whatever else. So through the existing relationships we have that we can build upon optimising that with support and government. So implementing how to review recommendations but building on that, really optimise that landscape to the single front door. And it's all the piping and wiring is hidden behind a lovely, connected ecosystem.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Richard, one dream for the Oxford-Cambridge partnership?

**RICHARD:** We came up this morning in the first panel with the two Gregs and Vicky, which is some long-term thinking and planning strategy. You don't build nuclear power overnight. We need a long-term joined-up strategy.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Pam?

**PAM SMITH:** I think we need, I'm going to call it productivity and growth plan that looks at UK plc strengths and assets from a strategic perspective. And it builds into that plan the opportunity to leap ahead on some key sectors globally and it allows people to take risks in a way that is going to mean we're going to be shaping UK plc's economy. We're not going to be subjected by other global players to how our economy is going to be.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Thanks, Jess?

**JESSICA BOWLES:** I would like government to really take the next step in devolution and push much more to places, devolve more of the innovation funding that exists, providing greater certainty to local places and removing a lot of the sort of silos and complexity that you talked about. Greater Manchester Combined Authority has 134 different funding streams and pots that it's trying to manage. That's like a nonsense. And so I would love to see that, so that places could get on with doing the right things for their area and being able to have a more mature, rebalanced relationship with the centre of this country.

**DR. ANDY WILLIAMS:** Thank you all for your insights. I hope we have another session like this next year where we get even more different, diverse regions and we get even more reflections. But thank you, and thank you to you for listening. And we thank our panel.