

# CIVIC ✦ UEA

The Ipswich Book

## OPEN SPACE EVENT

October 2022 | University of Suffolk | Ipswich

**The Ipswich Book is a summary of the conversations that took place at the Open Event at the University of Suffolk, where participants explored how universities could collaborate with local businesses to better meet regional needs.**



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# PREFACE

**If you are reading this document, you have some investment in the idea of universities as institutions that help to nourish and nurture life in their local area. You may have a strong sense of what civic activity should look like and be an active member of the community in which you live. You could also have an Ipswich, Suffolk, or East Anglian focus: a keen attachment to the geographical area in question. Most likely, it will be all the above.**

On 21st October 2022, CivicUEA hosted an Open Space event in collaboration with the University of Suffolk, with the aim of provoking discussion around how universities can contribute to a thriving local business community. A range of participants attended the session at the Waterfront

building in Ipswich, ranging from local business leaders to community group facilitators, and were asked to set the agenda using the Open Space method, a democratic and collaborative meeting format that enables the participants to decide what should be discussed. After an introductory speech, the participants were

asked to take a moment to consider ‘How can universities collaborate with businesses to better meet regional needs?’, leading to a full agenda of topics provoked by this question. The participants were asked to take notes during these discussions, either handwritten or submitted via a digital form, and at the end of the session, everyone





reconvened in a plenary circle to reflect on the morning's proceedings.

This book is the result of the notes; edited and summarised, but distilling the essential points made in each of these dynamic conversations. It is the work of many hands, but any errors are that of the CivicUEA team,

so please direct any queries to us, at [civic.university@uea.ac.uk](mailto:civic.university@uea.ac.uk). This book will be joining similar documents, resulting from other Open Space events we have co-ordinated, to be published on our website so that anyone with an interest in the UEA's civic efforts can see the ideas and suggestions raised at events throughout the region.

Finally, we will condense the core values that have emerged through the creation of these books, to produce a statement that will form a Civic University Charter for East Anglia. All event participants will be invited to comment upon, and later sign, this statement.



# **SUPPORTING STUDENTS, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EARLY-CAREER PROFESSIONALS**

**Retaining students in East Anglia**

**Empowering young people**

**Nurturing skills, confidence, dreams  
and entrepreneurship**





## How can businesses and universities retain students in East Anglia?

**How do local organisations cultivate that talent and make East Anglia a place for people to grow, develop and thrive? East Anglia attracts many students from outside of the region, but to ensure they stay after university, there needs to be attractive opportunities available to graduates.**

How can universities ensure graduates are equipped with the skills that local industry need? It was suggested that there are gaps in the practicality of courses at UEA and UoS and more efforts could be made by the universities to cater to local industry to provide better vocational skills/knowledge.

These could be in the form of apprenticeship degrees, that are both more relevant to local industry and more accessible to potential learners. Courses need to constantly evolve to reflect the long-term strategic direction of the region and business needs – such as around engineering and manufacturing.

It was noted that while universities have lots of services and projects that benefit the communities, they are not always well communicated outside of the organisation – so how can universities better advertise their offerings?

Improved communication is needed between the universities and businesses regarding job opportunities, along with ensuring information about these opportunities makes it to graduates, and advice on how to navigate the jobs market. UoS has great access to businesses – can more work experience opportunities be arranged to better inform career choices?

More broadly, it was discussed how to encourage people into Ipswich and Suffolk – and whether it is actually beneficial for them to stay. The visibility of universities in schools in less affluent communities from a younger age, and the diversification of teaching, could encourage greater and more diverse enrolment. The conclusion of the discussion was that a better channel of communication between the universities and external organisation could fill the skills gaps within the region, and that courses in East Anglian universities should better reflect East Anglian industry vocationally.

**To ensure graduates stay after university, there needs to be attractive opportunities available to graduates.**







## How can we empower young people to meet and cope with challenges in the system, and connect this generation to create an equal playing field?

**This group discussed issues faced by young people in BAME communities and how to improve diversity and inclusivity within the region.**

We need to redefine narratives in African and Caribbean communities, especially with young people, teaching them to be proud of their heritage. People don't know what to say in uncomfortable conversations about diversity as they are worried about saying the 'right' thing. How can we help young people express themselves? Diversity begins in school education, but it has to be broader than that. What's the use if they leave school and face discrimination? We all need Black history learning as so many adults (including Black adults) have no knowledge around it,

and this needs to be widespread throughout all sectors – i.e. universities need to know the role of Black people in higher education. There should be a cultural richness in education – not just history but food, music, arts in school should be diverse. Work also needs to be done around diversity in rural areas – how do children in all-white schools learn about inclusivity? We need to tell diverse narratives even in non-diverse contexts. The answer has to be long term programmes, not one-off tick box exercises. Solutions also need to be systemic, regional and council supported. The council needs to

ask, 'why are we not attracting diversity in this area?' Air Force base in Suffolk is highly diverse but never integrates into the local community. Universities are often the same. We need to find diverse spaces and break them open. Town centres should have multicultural offerings. However, improving these issues all comes down to funding and money.

## How can we help learners to transition into employment/self-employment? What skills do they need to support not only their confidence but dreams?

**Nurturing students' and graduates' skills, confidence and projects can not only foster individuals' development but also help cultivate a thriving local business and entrepreneurial community through encouraging fresh new ideas and an innovative and enthusiastic workforce. What is the best way for universities and businesses to facilitate this?**

We need to help learners with the skills they need for employment – including self-employment – so that we make the most of their potential. This will allow our business and academic communities to thrive, but most importantly the learners themselves will thrive too. How do we listen to (and understand) the needs and expectations of learners, educators and employers? The timing of the opportunity is important so that it does not detract from learner's

education. Learning opportunities should be transcendent – connected to something – and encourage/develop a more rounded approach to making a personal contribution. Lecturer/learner relationships are key, as are students' relationships with each other, as these relationships can nurture skills and offer peer support opportunities. This could help students value each other as a resource instead of defining the lecturer as the sole source of information, as well as instilling comfort in not having all the

answers – being comfortable with being uncomfortable. Opening up dialogue between students and businesses could be mutually beneficial, giving the student the opportunity to show businesses how what their learning could impact their business, empowering them with the skills to communicate their learning and the idea that they are also educators.

# **CULTIVATING ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT AND THRIVING LOCAL BUSINESSES**

**Supporting early-stage businesses**

**Improving communication  
between universities and communities**

**Post-pandemic priorities**

**Financial sustainability and a collaborative  
approach for the future**





## How can we better support early-stage businesses?

**Educational institutions have a wealth of knowledge and spaces that could be useful to start-ups – this group discussed ideas of how universities could support early-stage businesses by sharing these resources.**

Universities can help entrepreneurs by sharing spaces and resources. Facilities such as the Norwich Research Park could be better utilised for the support of those with business ideas. Entrepreneurial start-up courses should be embedded within the curriculum – long

term support is needed, from school age and beyond. Funding is also key – how can universities help gain access to funding?

Norfolk and Suffolk aren't well known outside of the region – we need to get the word out and bring talent here by improving

the reputation of the area as an innovative region. Universities could help by branding East Anglia as a hub for innovation, as well as doing more to encourage entrepreneurship amongst students and alumni.





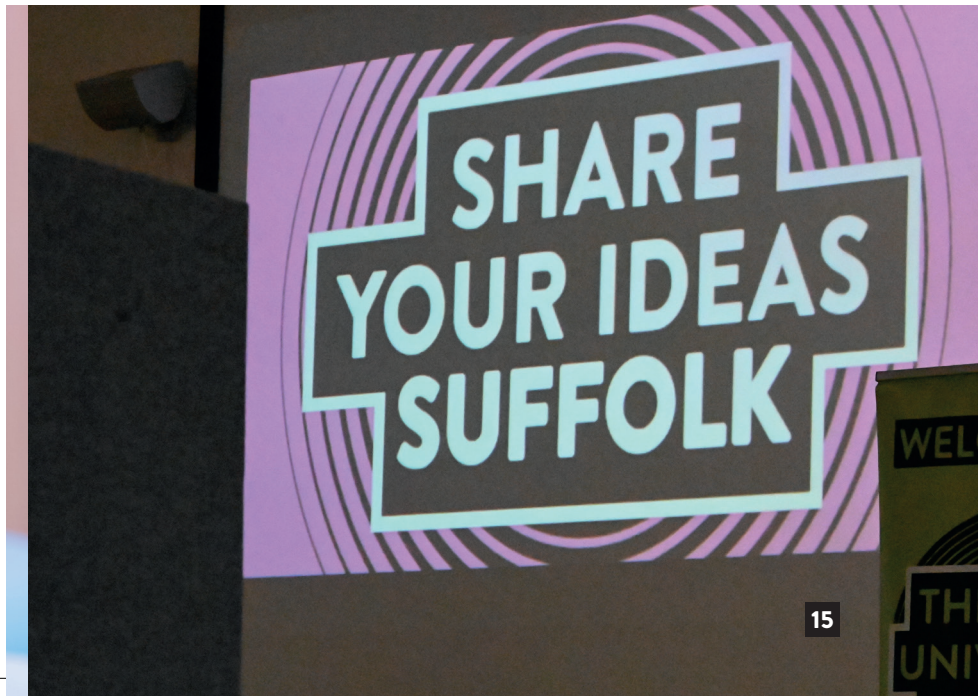
## Connection, innovation, communication and uniqueness – improving communication between universities and communities

**Many participants felt that it's not always easy to find out what events and opportunities universities are offering – what can be done to improve communication and ensure information reaches the right groups?**

Some participants felt that communication between UoS and Ipswich needs to be improved, as it can be difficult to know what events are happening and when. Businesses

and community leaders need a better point of contact for the university to learn of opportunities and events, and how best to spread the word so that everyone can utilise these

offerings. In a place like Ipswich there isn't one community, there are many communities, so how can a stream of communication be built to enable them all to talk to each other? Some cross pollinations exists but usually between small groups, not whole institutions like the university. An open-access diary would really help – a centralised calendar between universities and the local communities so that everyone can see what's on offer in the region. It is also important to deconstruct hierarchies and for communication to be more accessible. Universities could communicate and co-ordinate regular, sector specific, networking events so that students, organisations and communities can create better connections.



## Be bold, brave and ambitious! How can society and individuals' ideas shift and evolve, post-pandemic?

**The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we live and work, with many people's priorities shifting over the last few years – and businesses need to evolve to accommodate this.**

People's values have realigned post pandemic, with a greater importance placed on work/ life balance, so organisations need to work with an altered value structure and new ways of living. This means creating a people-first agenda, in which

successes are celebrated but failures destigmatised and used as opportunities for innovation – even if an idea is not quite right, it may be useful in the future. Requirements/qualifiers also need to be re-evaluated, and offers made more attractive, to expand

the talent pool. Resisting comfort makes space for experimentation – we need spaces be made for people to share ideas – such as innovation platforms available to businesses, researchers and community to drive new projects and collate resources.

**Post pandemic, people are placing place greater importance on work/ life balance.**



## How do we know what problems businesses have?

**If universities are to provide opportunities to local businesses, a better understanding of their needs is required.**

Further events could be held for networking opportunities between students and businesses. Grants aren't readily available for all sectors (i.e. retail), leaving whole groups of businesses excluded by grant structures. Who leads these grants? Business grants should be available from the bottom up, and shouldn't be run solely by public sector – is the language used by public sector a barrier? Sector leads could collaborate with businesses to get an honest representative view of issues facing the same kinds of businesses and work together to find solutions. Applying for grants is a cost in itself, due to the admin involved. Funded consultancy could be one solution. Universities could collaborate and co-create the support that businesses need.



## Financial sustainability and a collaborative approach for the future

**This group discussed the need for collaboration, instead of competition, to ensure financial sustainability for small businesses and community groups in the region.**

Organisations need to join forces because there's a competitive fundraising environment with limited pots, whether grants, private funding or national schemes i.e. NPO/ NHLF/arts councils. Rather than creating individual projects to generate crowdfunding/ sponsorship, a collective approach could have greater impact. We need to collaborate and have critical friends/ mentors – such as friendly, informal audits and information sharing. Having events like

this one more regularly (every quarter?) would help with long term planning. We should take advantage of new local talent and connections – spurred on by pandemic migration to rural areas. Local communities can benefit from knowledge, skill sets and resources. We should be sharing resources in general – speakers, furniture, venues, audiences etc. We need to re-evaluate and create sustainable business models and investment in communities/local economy.

## How do we identify issues 10 years in the future?

**A short but sweet discussion around creating a long-term vision for the region.**

Can we/should be we plan that far in advance? Is there any benefit? We need more open collaboration between policy makers, researchers and

businesses. Communication could be improved by the creation of university 'hubs', allowing the curation of a shared vision.

## How do businesses and universities effectively communicate a willingness to collaborate?

**Issues around communication were raised again – here with a more specific focus, around what UoS could do to communicate the services and opportunities they have available to local businesses.**

Expectations need to be managed – businesses often try to reach out to specific academics and don't hear back which can affect reputation, but individuals cannot always have the capacity to take on additional obligations. Universities could be asking businesses what information they want from newsletters – there are lots of facilities, but the awareness isn't widespread, so better communication of the facilities and opportunities available needs to take place both internally and externally. Word of mouth is so powerful, so tools are needed for staff and

academics to confidently discuss our services. How do we make time to get services out there? Often, organisations wouldn't automatically think to look in education – would Google for services in the first instance. We need a holistic approach to what success looks like and this needs to be measurable.

The University and Suffolk County Council should be doing more press releases and PR as a service together. The university collaborates with history students/English students – why aren't we joining up on this? We could utilise creatives to extract

the interesting stuff press will use (which might not be what the institutions thinks it should be, so getting an outsider opinion may be more in public interest). External audits could also be useful. There's a need to think about being more commercial and where these easy wins are – we cannot expect things to sell themselves. Meetings need to have goals in order to be constructive – non-conference events with tangible long-term objectives. For example if we hold an event, this should lead to something in a defined time period.

# IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**Future plan for Ipswich**

**Raising awareness of  
innovation in the region**

**Transport links for rural communities**



## The direction/future plan for Ipswich – effects on community, student/staff experience, employability and investment in the area

How to change perception of Ipswich to bring more people to the town? Some participants felt that there is a negative perception of Ipswich, or that it is lacking in a recognisable identity, so they discussed how to raise the town's profile as a hub for quality local businesses and improve reputation.

It was agreed that Ipswich does not feel like a county town to the wider region, and that an 'Ipswich strategy' is needed. One suggestion was a map/guide to the town, either paper or digital (or both), that links all of the independent businesses in the area. This could be shared with the student union and SU building could serve as focal

point for information about the town and facilities. Weekly markets in the town could be improved using the 'Treacle Market Macclesfield' model, driving a local, high-quality approach with a focus on food and artisan goods, building upon the Saints markets, to incentivise shoppers into the town.



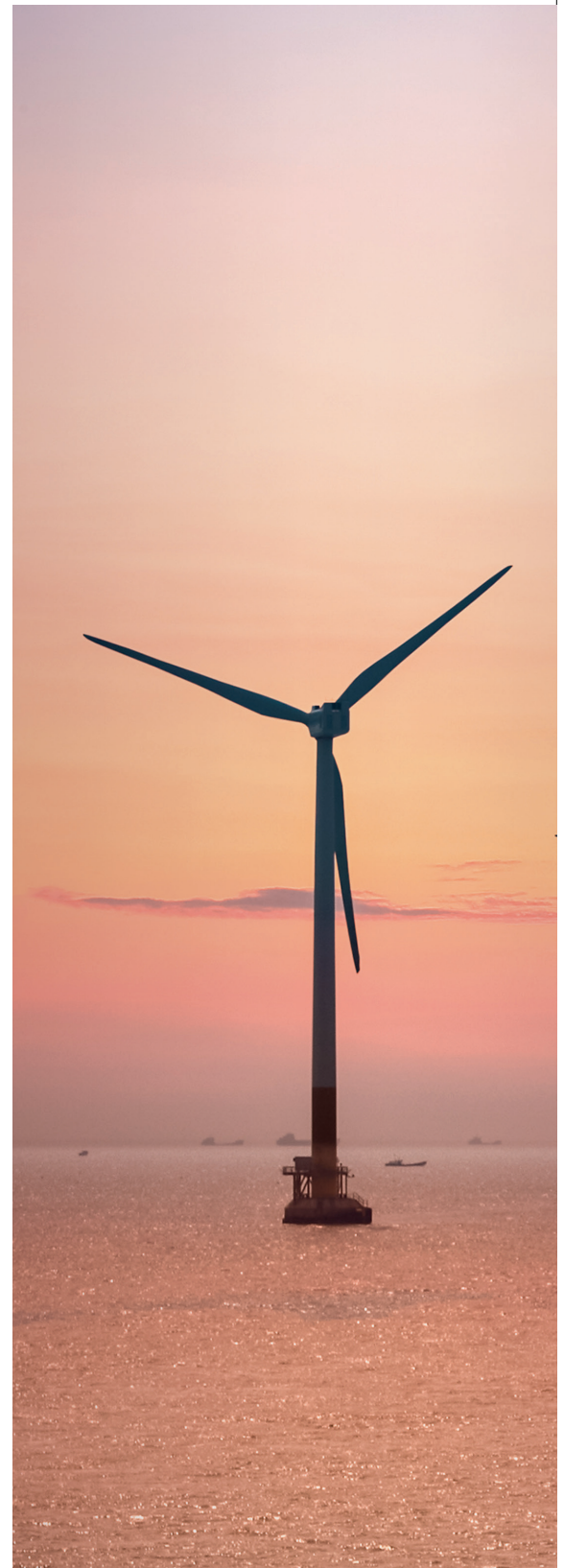
## Raising awareness of amazing things in the region to attract business, investment and students

**East Anglia is not widely known for its innovation outside of the region, but there are many businesses and organisations involved with exciting projects – they are just not always well advertised. What can be done to platform brands and opportunities to boost the region’s reputation as a hub for innovation?**

Branding is important, and East Anglia has some very successful brands – Colmans, Ed Sheeran. We need to elevate other brands e.g. GENERATE, degree courses, people. The influence of tourism is important in making people aware what a brilliant place the region is – we need to attract events, from big gigs to national/ international business events.

Industry/job opportunities need to be highlighted to (potential) students, for example through sponsored degree courses. Students are attracted by business engagement and job opportunities, so how can

universities make potential students aware of the size and diversity of the industry offering in the region (e.g. energy industry), prior to university choice? There are hundreds of SMEs innovating in the region, but we need to promote them. There is a problem with platforming – websites just aren’t enough. The recommendations were put forward that universities could support ‘Brandland’ to elevate regional brands and seek out businesses to work with on opportunities such as degree sponsorship, to highlight the opportunities within the region and attract more students.



## Transport links for rural communities – what impact does poor public transport options have on communities and what can be done to improve?

**The duality between urban and rural areas of the region can lead to an imbalance of opportunities, with young people in more isolated communities missing opportunities. One of the biggest barriers to education in these areas is a lack of reliable and/or affordable public transport – what can universities do to improve rural outreach?**

There are similar issues in both Norfolk and Suffolk – the chasm between the hub of diversity found in universities which is not reflected in the rural communities. A key obstacle to accessing education for those in rural areas is a lack of affordable, regular transport, as well as a cultural mindset that can impact educational aspirations. Solutions to bring more opportunities to rural areas could include a roadshow to go around villages showcasing universities and greater outreach to rural state schools – and teachers at these schools need to encourage children to be

aspirational. A permanent hub or library area providing a university presence in sixth forms (or secondary schools) could increase visibility and raise aspiration. State schools should utilise alumni the way that is common within independent schools – bringing them in to give talks on their careers can raise ambitions (as well as possible financial implications such as philanthropy.) The aging population in rural communities could also be included within the university system, providing opportunities for connection for those at risk of social isolation.

The Norfolk Science Festival has the potential for a great Suffolk presence and could help increase STEM education in rural areas. Further solutions could involve creating ‘roadshows’ to take the university out to rural areas, to provide better support with affordable travel/travel grants, creating university ‘hubs’ within rural communities, and alumni could visit local schools for inspiring talks.



# **COMMUNITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTISES**

**The role of universities can have in  
improving ethical business practises**

**Supporting charities and community groups**

**Harnessing mature workers**

**Utilising university facilities to  
benefit the community?**



## How can universities work with businesses to improve jobs and contribute to a better future and more ethical businesses?

**Ethical business practises are increasingly important to consumers, workers and employers, but it can be difficult for businesses to know the best way to make changes – what could universities do to help?**

We need more co-produced research, and the mechanisms to enable this. ‘Business Ambassadors’ could be appointed within universities to encourage businesses to collaborate with the institution. Businesses want to respond to the demand to be more responsible, and there is a changing expectation/ demand from workers and consumers, but how can universities support businesses in making these adaptations, as well as incentivising these collaborative relationships with (especially small) businesses?

Solutions put forward include organising ‘sustainability clinics’ for organisations to access expertise, reverse internships that bring organisations

into the universities, and opportunities for students and other stakeholders such as local authorities to facilitate collaborative conversation.



## How can universities better support charities?

**University involvement with charities and social enterprises needs to go beyond volunteering or fundraising opportunities to make the most impact – can a system or network be developed to support those with social impact ideas?**

A ‘Make a Difference’ social enterprise creation program at UoS could provide an opportunity for students and alumni to develop their passions into a business idea that benefits social good. The Anglia Capital Group (a network

of East of England start-up and innovation investors) only deal with private investment – it’s not clear if there is a localised social investment network. Could universities support the establishment of a regional social/charity investment

network – and could students and alumni with social impact ideas get seed funding from this? Research could be carried out within universities into social investments made in the region over the last five years in order to build a business case.



## How can universities support community groups?

**Volunteering opportunities can be an important way for students to get practise work experience that is both constructive and rewarding.**

Universities also have facilities and knowledge that could be valuable to the users of charities or community groups to help people gain professional skills and knowledge. Forming stronger relationships and sharing opportunities would be mutually beneficial.

Collaboration between universities and community groups to provide volunteering opportunities to students would be mutually beneficial, giving valuable, practical work experience while creating stronger bonds between students and the community. Appointing sector co-ordinators to link with universities could create better opportunities for these collaborations.

One challenging issue experienced by local community support group, BME Suffolk, is getting service users into

employment that matches their qualification. Universities could help by highlighting opportunities to transition into new roles – could this be developed into a program to support adults struggling to enter professional roles? This could involve workshops on skills such as CV writing and applications, how to job hunt, interview techniques etc.

What does it mean to be a ‘professional’? Body language, self-confidence and self-awareness play a part – this should be nurtured as well as more tangible knowledge and skills. Could universities open up their career resources to the public? There are different ways to transition into different roles and career pathways need highlighting.

Universities could also provide the space for businesses to

talk to each other, as well as other stakeholders such as local government and third sector groups, as well as students, to find out how we can support each other and the users of local services. Events could be held in which local businesses and community groups are invited to hold talks for students. A problem sharing/solving forum could allow different disciplines to help each other find innovative solutions. Universities should also work with local authorities to support disadvantaged groups – such as qualified migrant workers that are struggling to continue their professions in the UK. Talent should be harnessed – there is a shortage of talent in every sector. More events like today’s could be held on a bigger scale for wider collaboration between universities and community groups.



## Harnessing mature workers and not losing their wealth to unemployment or ‘stuckology’

Mature workers hold a wealth of experience that could be valuable to businesses and learners – how can we foster opportunities for mature workers to share knowledge with others, whilst ensuring they are equipped to thrive in their careers for as long as they choose?

Mentoring programs – this can encompass both mentoring the workers themselves and empowering them with a greater sense of purpose with

the opportunity to mentor the younger generation. By encouraging knowledge transfer via skills sharing and training programs can help ensure the mentors’ intellectual wealth is not lost. But how do you pass on the ‘knowledge baton’, and how do workers equip others to do their jobs? Suggestions included online courses, a mature jobs fair, face-to-face conversations to explore options and opportunities, and events that can help open up opportunities and inspire hope.

Could the universities’ career services be opened up to this cohort, in order to help with upskilling, filling gaps in workers’ portfolio of skills needed to transition within the jobs market, and advice on CVs, interviews, body language, digital skills etc? Work is also needed in driving businesses to value mature talent more highly instead of prioritising younger (cheaper) talent, and validating existing skills and experience.





## How can university facilities be utilised to benefit the community?

### A further discussion on how university spaces could be shared with businesses and the community

Campus cafes could be utilised as community spaces. A regular roadshow bus (not a one off!) could take services tackling sustainability issues, wellbeing and young person centric topics to rural areas. Could library services be opened up for public use? Open lectures – what do businesses and the public actually want to learn about?

The Innovation Labs at UoS could be grown and publicised beyond ILUOS members. Creating child-friendly areas at universities would create visibility from a young age and raise aspiration.

## Social justice and blurred learning spaces

A brief thought on taking learning outside of traditional educational establishments. We need to bring learning into different community settings instead of taking it for granted

that people already know – taking learning ‘on the road’ – a spiritual and literal journey. Fostering a community improves social skills.

**Could library services be opened up for public use?**





## A concluding thought to the day

The business community in East Anglia is vibrant, dynamic and thoughtful. They are eager to engage with universities not just in helping us to address their needs, but in coming together to address social problems. The exceptional body of ideas that emerged from this Open Space is testament to two sectors enthusiastic about engaging with one another, but also cognisant of the barriers that collaboration faces. It was an important step to better dialogue and partnership work and we look forward to how we can take these ideas forwards as a region.

### **Julie Schofield**

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**Find out more  
about CivicUEA:**

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