

People and Places

How to put R&D on the map

November 2024

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About this report

This report explores the use of place as a framing to strengthen connections between the R&D system and the public across the UK. It draws on insights from CaSE's Discovery Decade programme, including extensive public opinion research and a set of pilot studies carried out across the UK in 2023-24, and from experts across the sector.

CaSE would like to thank the partner organisations in the three pilot locations across the UK (listed in each section), along with individuals and organisations who offered their insights to the wider project through workshops and interviews.

We would also like to thank the team at creative agency [Luna 9](#) for the development of the campaign assets throughout this project and their strategic input into the pilot process, and [Public First](#) for the public opinion research that has contributed to this project.

Foreword

If the R&D sector wants more public and political support, it needs to get much better at describing what it does for people. And indeed, there is a great opportunity for the R&D sector to do just this.

One effective way to better describe what the sector delivers, is place. We know that people feel positive about sectors that operate, and deliver benefits, closer to home – for them, their families or for their communities. This report captures the work that CaSE's Discovery Decade programme has recently completed on the valuable opportunity to strengthen public perceptions of R&D in **place**.

Our research shows that people feel more positive about R&D that visibly happens close to them. They feel it delivers benefits for their communities, and this in turn increases public support for R&D as a national political issue. Many areas of the UK have strengths in R&D, located in universities, the NHS and businesses; on campuses, science parks and – increasingly – on high streets.

Yet generally, awareness of R&D 'in my area' is very low. Only 9% of people have visited their local university (and most of these are 18-24 year olds) and two-thirds said they knew hardly anything about research in their area. Despite this, 65% would like to hear more, and a majority think it's important that their region carries out a lot of R&D. There is a real opportunity for the sector to make more of its hidden strength in place. One way to do this will be by raising the visibility of R&D and building powerful connections to the public by creating more compelling place-based identities and brands.

Some strong place-based identities do, of course, already exist in the R&D sector, and have delivered benefits both locally and nationally. Perhaps the best-known example is the **Golden Triangle**, linking Oxford, Cambridge and London, but there are many other examples across different sectors and at different scales.

To cite a few: the established **Silicon Roundabout** brand, which helped draw start-ups into the area around Old Street in London, and **Media City**, which built on the BBC's original investment at Salford Quays to encourage the growth of a thriving production company sector. The more recently created **London Knowledge Quarter** cluster that is helping power the re-development of Kings Cross and the **Titanic Quarter** in Belfast, which has drawn together cultural, creative and science organisations. Emerging local identities can be seen in the **Atom Valley** project being established between Rochdale, Bury and Oldham in Greater Manchester, and the **Western Gateway** partnership running from South Wales into Western England.

In all of these areas, an identity or brand has been used to significantly amplify awareness among public and political audiences. These identities signal purpose and intent, make activity visible, and help cut through the information overload. They create tangible benefits for the region and its leaders – by attracting talent, inward investment, positive planning decisions and national political support – and for the public, new opportunities for skills development, more diverse career choices and local pride.

Very often, these initiatives have been driven by local authorities, with the involvement of anchor commercial or public sector organisations. CaSE sees a significant opportunity for the R&D sector, both public and private, to go further and engage with local authorities to drive forward a new wave of positive, locally-tailored identities and messaging. By doing so, they will together reap the benefits of a much higher profile for R&D activity in place.

I urge everyone interested in accelerating Britain's drive to be an R&D positive nation that has strong support, interest and buy-in from its citizens, to read this important report from CaSE.

Focusing on place as a connection point will not just bring local benefits – although it will undoubtedly help to boost community pride and local economies – but also national benefits as people see that UK-wide investment in R&D is delivering for them closer to home. This is an opportunity that the R&D sector cannot afford to miss.



Kim Shillinglaw

Chair, Discovery Decade programme
and former Controller of BBC2

Introduction

CaSE works to champion R&D as a political and societal priority that can transform lives and livelihoods. Our Discovery Decade programme is supporting a behaviour change in how our sector advocates for R&D with the aim of making R&D matter to more people. We believe this can radically transform our advocacy by creating a research system that feels more human and more local.

CaSE's extensive public attitudes research has shown that 70% of people think it's important to invest in R&D, and around half think funding research should be a high or top priority for UK political parties. However, R&D isn't seen as urgent. Many people view R&D as an abstract activity; they don't feel a strong connection to it and can't identify how it benefits them or their loved ones, with some describing R&D as a "luxury".

This clearly demonstrates the need for R&D advocates – including CaSE – to make a clear and compelling case for R&D being a national priority, especially at a time when public finances are tight. The R&D sector needs to connect with public audiences in a more meaningful way, to demonstrate that R&D is an essential tool for tackling the challenges facing our communities and countries.

Building these connections will also show decision makers that the R&D sector is relevant to the UK's changing political and societal priorities, and that it has broad and sustained public appeal.

Place and Purpose

The evidence collected by our Discovery Decade programme indicates that two vital elements of effective R&D messaging are **purpose** and **place**. There is public appetite for honest conversations about the rationales, risks and rewards of R&D. Meanwhile, people trust local messengers, want to see local benefits and often express local pride in R&D.

Although there are ongoing debates about the geographical balance of R&D across the UK, it is still the case that R&D has a footprint across many communities – yet our evidence shows that it is largely invisible to the public at present. This does not stem from a lack of stories to tell – the [Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's innovation clusters map](#) alone demonstrates how many potential connections there are to build on.¹

As a sector, we have an immediate opportunity to tell better stories about nearby R&D to help strengthen the connection between the public and the research system.

This report explores how we can use the framing of place to support this connection. We first outline the evidence on place as a powerful connection point with R&D, including case studies of existing successes in creating identities around a place and how this can link to R&D.

We then assess pilot studies delivered by CaSE in Stevenage, Greater Manchester and Northern Ireland, which sought to put our research findings into practice. These pilots saw CaSE, working with creative agency Luna 9, convene a small group of local organisations to collaboratively develop messaging strategies and example campaign and engagement assets. These pilots were designed as a conceptual exercise to spur new ideas and collaborative working, but one has already led to the deployment of new public-facing messaging.

How to seize the opportunity

Drawing these elements together, we make a series of recommendations for action and next steps aimed at R&D organisations, local and central government, businesses and education institutions.

For the R&D sector, we hope this work stimulates new ideas and collaborations, and reinforces the opportunity for, and value of, using emotion-led arguments to talk to the public about our work, complementing the logic-led narratives that are very familiar to the sector.

We also hope it will provoke discussion among local actors – including regional, mayoral and local authorities – by demonstrating the advantages of boosting the local profile of R&D, from attracting inward investment and local industries, to increased training and education opportunities and greater local pride.

Our pilot studies have emphasised the shared interests and common challenges of local groups and the R&D sector – and the benefits of working together to tackle them.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing discussions around devolution and R&D funding. Exploration of this important topic sits outside the remit of this report, but we note that any decisions should consider and weigh the potential impact of greater local ownership of R&D funding in strengthening the place-based connection between the public and R&D.

Summary of recommendations and actions

Recommendations to strengthen connections

CaSE has identified place as an effective – and underused – connection point between the public and R&D and has trialled one approach for strengthening this connection.

Our recommendations seek to support both the R&D sector and local actors and governments to embed R&D as part of an area's identity. Taking such actions will help drive public awareness of, and support for, R&D; raise the area's profile, attracting talent and investment; and inspire local communities through greater opportunities for skills, education and pride.

CaSE intends to build on this work with further trials of place-based messaging strategies and consideration of policy recommendations that will support the R&D sector to put the public at the heart of their work.

This report draws together evidence from CaSE's public opinion research, stakeholder engagement and our three pilot studies exploring place-based messaging strategies. Using this, we offer a set of broad recommendations that could strengthen the connection between the public and local R&D, and a set of specific actions for those that want to create a brand or identity for R&D in their area.

- 1 **Build a distinct brand for R&D in your area**
- 2 **Open up R&D's doors to local communities**
- 3 **Demonstrate R&D's benefits and champion diversity among researchers and research**
- 4 **Encourage collaborations across disciplines, sectors and geographic areas**
- 5 **Prioritise building public connections with R&D when harnessing powers of devolution**

Actions to support coalitions that want to build R&D identities

CaSE has identified a set of lessons from our pilot exercises, which we will apply to our own future place-based work and that could be applied to messaging campaigns led by others:

There is appetite for raising R&D's local profile through coalition building: Similar schemes should seek to secure the time and resource to transform shared enthusiasm into shared action.

Local data collection and analysis can bring deeper insights: Similar schemes should consider including a stage that carries out specific local-level quantitative or qualitative research early on in the process.

Co-developing a messaging strategy requires clarity and should include communities: Similar schemes should ensure the development of a targeted brief and bring in public perspectives throughout the process.

Driving adoption requires consistent support, time and resource: Similar schemes should consider offering follow-on funding to help drive adoption and identifying a lead partner from the outset.

Taken together, our recommendations and actions offer a clear challenge to R&D organisations, local and central governments, businesses, and education institutions to collaborate to convey the tangible value of their work to local public audiences.

We urge everyone with a stake in R&D's future to consider how these recommendations could support your own work, and how you could build on the pilots set out in this report. CaSE would welcome hearing from organisations interested in progressing these ideas together.

Place matters when talking about R&D

CaSE's Discovery Decade programme has gathered extensive evidence on public attitudes to R&D through eight nationally representative polls between May 2022 and June 2024, and 14 focus groups with people across the UK. All our quantitative and qualitative research was carried out in partnership with research agency [Public First](#).

This section summarises evidence on attitudes to R&D and place from our public opinion research and engagement with organisations across the R&D sector. It shows not just the potential to use place as a connection point, but also the appetite for more information and local R&D champions.

CaSE's research shows that while a majority of the public think R&D investment is important, many do not feel it is urgent. Many struggle to see how R&D benefits them, their loved ones or their communities, while the people, processes and places involved in R&D are opaque. In particular, we found that younger groups (from 18-44) were less likely to see R&D's benefits or support R&D investment.

Strengthening these connections is vital if we are to make R&D matter to more people. [CaSE's Guide for Engaging the Public](#)² recommends that R&D messaging emphasises the purpose of R&D and the place it's happening.

Talking about location can help R&D feel more tangible, and the public welcome the benefits that more local R&D would bring, trust local messengers and often express pride in local research. Meanwhile, CaSE's has previously identified that long-term relationships and connections between organisations in a place can build a reputation and 'brand', as described in our reports [The Power of Place](#) and [Backing Business R&D](#).



Place matters when talking about R&D

Advocates must open up R&D institutions to build on existing local connections

Our polling shows that many people associate their region with R&D; a connection often driven by universities, the NHS and businesses. In focus groups, some participants mentioned local firms and talked about these businesses – or the local innovations – with a strong sense of pride.

“I’d never heard of [graphene being discovered in Manchester]. Is that because we’re supposed to take the time to find out? That’s the type of thing I’d like to see on social media or something, let’s be proud!”

Buyer for a hotel chain,
Female, 34, Greater Manchester

However, many struggled to think of examples of R&D that was specifically linked to their area. Two-thirds didn’t feel well informed about local R&D, but a similar proportion (65%) would like to hear more. The situation for local R&D – with high interest but low awareness – was perhaps best expressed by a focus group participant in Greater Manchester.

We know from our [consultation with R&D organisations](#) that the physical spaces in which R&D takes place can be intimidating or feel like they “aren’t for” local people.³ The Francis Crick Institute in London, which was built on the edge of a low-income residential area in London, told us that they prioritised building strong relationships with local communities from the start.

Meanwhile, universities have emphasised their desire to dispel the idea that campuses are places where local people can’t go, and there are numerous examples of their efforts to reach out to local communities to engage. [CaSE’s briefing on the benefits of university R&D](#) outlines an example focused on inspiring younger people.⁴ This briefing emphasises the importance of universities as anchor institutions, supporting greater collaboration within the R&D sector and between places. Our public opinion research has shown that the public naturally think of R&D as a collaborative endeavour.

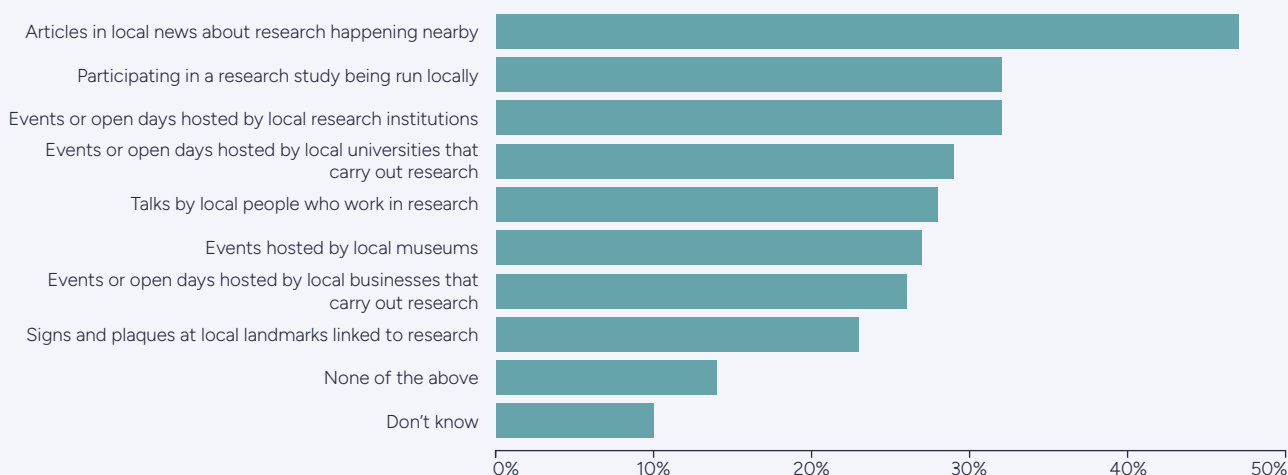
Our data supports this: When given a list of ways they could hear more about local R&D, around a third were interested in open days at a local research institution (32%) or university (29%). Just 9% said they had visited a university in the last six months, largely driven by those aged 18–24.

“Medicine and stuff does come to mind first, but I think, being from Derby, Rolls Royce is pretty massive, so also things linked to aerospace and travel.”

Teacher, Male, 37, Derby

We also know that those who work in R&D are well trusted. In our July 2022 poll, more than half (56%) agreed that they would trust people who work in R&D in their area to talk about its benefits. In our June 2024 poll, a majority said they would mostly or completely trust scientists to be honest about how helpful R&D is to the public (69%) and to be honest about how much money the Government should be invested in R&D (59%).

The public would like to learn more about local R&D through local news and open days



Which of the following, if any, would you personally be interested in seeing, attending or taking part in to learn more about the research being carried out in your area? n=8,474. Select any which apply. Public First polling for CaSE • July 2022.

Place matters when talking about R&D

Advocates can build on the fact R&D is seen as an asset to communities

A majority (66%) in our February 2023 poll would support a new research lab being built in their local area. This is comparable to support for a new school or wind farm, and stronger than support for a new train station or shopping centre. When asked why, 62% of those who supported the proposal said it would benefit the local economy and 60% said it would bring more well-paid jobs to their area.

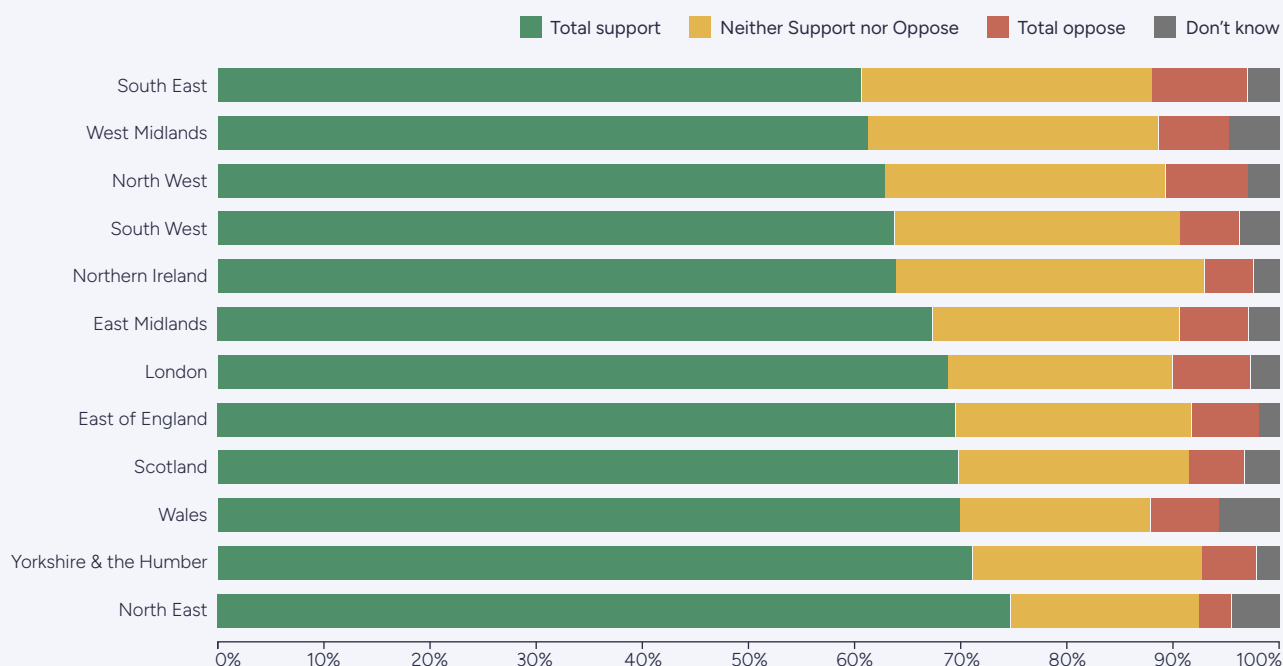
In our October 2023 polling, some 76% wanted to see more R&D carried out in their local area. When asked what the benefits might be, 57% said more jobs, followed by improvements to the local economy (50%) and local people being involved as participants (44%).

We see a similar effect at a regional level: in our July 2022 poll, more than 60% of people in all UK regions said it was important that their region carries out a lot of R&D. Of these, 71% were motivated by the local jobs that R&D could generate, followed by inwards investment in the area and benefits to the UK as a whole. Notably, 18-24 year olds were less likely than those aged over 65 to say that R&D would generate new local jobs (60% vs 79%) or that it would bring investment to their area (47% vs 76%), but were equally likely to say it would open up local educational opportunities (56%).

Our 2024 polling also demonstrated the appetite for political action on R&D at a local level, with a majority saying they would support their MP campaigning for their nearest NHS hospital to host more clinical trials; for more R&D jobs to be created in the area; and to create a new scheme for local children to visit research centres.

This demonstrates the importance of talking to people on a local level about not just the purpose of the R&D, but also the spillover benefits of R&D. Although these are not always front of mind for the public, they generate a great deal of support when they feel local and tangible.

There is majority support in all UK regions for a new research lab being built locally



Would you support or oppose the building of the following in your local area? A new research laboratory n=4,053
Public First polling for CaSE • February 2023.

Case studies

Although the majority of R&D funding is not devolved, harnessing innovation is a crucial part of many UK regions' strategic priorities. Places across the UK are increasingly interested in exploring the potential R&D can bring for regional economies, jobs and skills.

Insights: Atom Valley, Greater Manchester

Created as an innovation cluster across the North-eastern Greater Manchester boroughs of Bury, Oldham and Rochdale, Atom Valley was created in 2022 as a Greater Manchester Mayoral Development Zone. These areas are outside the R&D-intensive city centre borough of Manchester and are among the most deprived parts of the UK.

The programme has stated it is taking a long-term approach to deliver large-scale regeneration and build a nationally significant industry cluster. The cluster will focus on advanced manufacturing, materials and machinery, and is seeking to attract UK and international firms, SMEs and start-ups to the region, with a goal of creating 20,000 new jobs. It builds on the area's rich history of industry and innovation – including the spinning Jenny and splitting the atom – with the group noting that “today, that same spirit lives on”.

Although in its early stages, Atom Valley offers lessons for others in the R&D sector. Branding is clearly front-of-mind, with the name invoking the region's historic links to innovation and the power of Silicon Valley in the US. Meanwhile, the project is seeking to learn from successes in other sectors that have worked to create a strong identity around an area, such as Salford Quay's link to the creative industries.

“Atom Valley connects advanced manufacturing with real community impacts.



“Atom Valley is Greater Manchester's bold step towards making R&D matter beyond established boundaries, creating a thriving manufacturing cluster with deep roots in local strengths,” said Mark Robinson, Director of Economy & Place at Rochdale Council.

“It is where world-class research translates into practical opportunities, driving skills, jobs, and prosperity across Bury, Oldham, and Rochdale. As a landmark example of regional economic transformation, Atom Valley connects advanced manufacturing with real community impacts, creating pathways from research to reality.”

Insights: Liverpool City Region

Liverpool City Region, which comprises six local authorities in North West England, has been proactively developing highly collaborative approaches to place-based innovation over the last 11 years, focused on maximising its distinctive world-leading capabilities.

John Whaling, Lead Officer for Innovation and Commercialisation at the Combined Authority, reflects that, although innovation wasn't a stated priority for the Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham when he was first elected in 2017, his signature projects – Mersey Tidal (potentially the world's largest tidal power scheme) and LCR Connect (a gigabit-capable cross-regional fibre backhaul network) – were inherently very innovative.

Moving from implicit to explicit support meant demonstrating that R&D is a vital tool for solving the region's challenges as well as unlocking big opportunities. Whaling's team tackled this in a few ways, working with anchor institutions and via the LCR Innovation Board, the first such sub-national body of its kind. First, creating a headline ambition that is easy to grasp – to invest 5% of GVA (gross value added) in R&D a year by 2030 – and second was to translate that into practical terms, notably a net additional 44,000 new jobs, £20 billion GVA, and 10% productivity increases. On top of this, the team helped facilitate site visits to key R&D projects for the Mayor and other leaders: "Seeing is believing," Whaling says. "This has led to a point where not only is innovation a mayoral priority, it's now also built into our organisational mission; the Liverpool Combined Authority's new corporate strategy is titled 'Innovating for Growth'."

The city region is home to a wealth of R&D, both historic and current. For Whaling, this connection can help projects succeed: "We're obviously seeking to accelerate and scale up, and that has a much greater chance of sustainability if it's not artificially created, but rather founded on longstanding world class expertise."



When asked about engaging the public, Whaling emphasises the need to make R&D feel relevant, personal and on the doorstep. For instance, 2030 is the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Liverpool to Manchester railway. "Of course we want to tell this story in a new engaging way," he says. "But even more importantly, we're focusing on the people and businesses that are right here, right now; those who are changing the world."

A related focus has been engaging primary school children. In particular, Whaling highlights *The Animates: Learning in Liverpool* a children's book by local author Natalie Reeves Billing and illustrated by Hannah Jesse, supported by the Connected Places Catapult in tandem with Knowledge Quarter Liverpool. ***Natalie is pictured above with pupils from Pleasant Street Primary School in Liverpool.*** The book follows a group of characters whose spaceship crash lands in Liverpool, leading them to explore different R&D facilities to gather the means to repair it, giving a fun, inside view of institutions that might otherwise seem out of reach. "We can inspire the innovators of tomorrow by doing it today," Whaling says, with plans to send the book to every primary school in the region.

When asked about the factors that can help foster a place-based identity for R&D, Whaling emphasises the importance of strong, long-term relationships that allow partners to create and act on trust, plus the dedicated money and capacity to deliver projects to their best.

"But the most fundamental thing of all is the uniqueness of place," he says. "It's about distinctiveness. It's not just that different places have different individual assets – it's also the combination of them. There are other parts of the world well known for culture, infectious disease, AI solutions and materials chemistry – but where else has our particular blend?"

“There's a rich history here, and this is the place's identity – it's kind of back to the future.”

One example is Glass Futures, an organisation established in 2012 to deliver unprecedented collaborative worldwide solutions to decarbonise and therefore sustain glass-making and other energy intensive industries. It recently opened a unique global centre of excellence and training facility, bringing investment, profile, high value jobs and training opportunities back to the area. That the scheme is centred on St Helens is no accident; the town is famous as the birthplace of float glass thanks to the Pilkington brothers, and employed tens of thousands of people in the 1960s and 70s. "There's a rich history here, and this is the place's new identity – it's kind of back to the future," Whaling says.

Insights: Innovate Cambridge

Cambridge is firmly established as a global hub for scientific and technological research. In 2024 it was named as the world's most intensive science and technology cluster by the Global Innovation Index for the third year running. In addition to research intensity, with over 120 Nobel prizes, it has a thriving startup and investor community. It is also one of the fastest growing cities in the UK.

Recently, Cambridge has unveiled a roadmap to achieve the same level of innovation in the next 10 years as the last 25 years. This 10-year vision and strategy is designed to accelerate the region's world-class science and innovation and unlock the region's full potential while maximising social returns.

The vision was developed by a coalition of organisations across the region, drawing on Cambridge's strengths, to launch Innovate Cambridge in 2022 by Cambridge Enterprise, Cambridge Innovation Capital and the University of Cambridge. Its funding partners also include Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Anglia Ruskin University and the Judge Business School.

Established as a locally driven initiative, more than 200 organisations and 500 individuals were engaged early on. The result is a strategy shaped by local organisations with a shared ambition for Cambridge to be "the best place in the world to make ground-breaking discoveries and translate them into world-changing businesses".

The strategy aims to create an innovative ecosystem that delivers value and impact for the local community. Local deployment of innovation ensures that more local talent can access jobs in the innovation sector, while a social impact fund will tackle inequality in the region with the aim that "everyone around Cambridge should feel empowered by the science on their doorstep and have a sense of ownership over its direction and how it can support their lives".

“The aim was to create a compelling story that will attract the eyes of the world to Cambridge

The social impact fund, The Cambridge Pledge, enables start-ups, companies and anchor institutions to help address the region's most pressing social challenges and secure public support for innovation driven economic growth.

"The ambition of Innovate Cambridge and our partners is to build the most equal innovation ecosystem in the world. To achieve that, support from the founders and innovators is critical," says executive director Kathryn Chapman.

"As entrepreneurs, we are used to putting our minds to solving the world's greatest challenges - the Cambridge Pledge enables us to tackle our most pressing regional ones, for example radically reshaping children's homes, or helping to end homelessness."

Speed and scale will be essential to deliver the initiative's ambitions, and the quickest way to achieve this is through partnerships, emphasising the value of UK regions and R&D clusters collaborating, rather than competing.

A notable connection has already been established between Greater Cambridge and Greater Manchester, built on the two ecosystems' similar challenges and similar solutions. For example, setting up and deploying investment funds, delivering innovation districts, supporting companies to scale-up in the UK and activating social and cultural infrastructure.

"By working together and learning from each other, we have two cities as test beds for interventions which means we can gather evidence, learn and implement much more quickly," says Chapman "We can also focus on people, programming and joint investment propositions that can unlock existing infrastructure and put our current assets to work to deliver more. This is a step-change and deliberate strategy to collaborate to build a pan-UK innovation partnership, pioneering a new model of place-to-place collaboration rather than competition."

Reflecting on the initiative, Chapman says that one of its strengths was a focus on storytelling, which she believes this will help bolster public support.

"One of our challenges as an ecosystem was that historically, we did not have a future-looking, integrated innovation story. This is important for public support for innovation as well as for global investors," she says. "We took on a year-long consultation process with all our partners, across academia, business and government. The aim was to create a compelling story that will attract the eyes of the world to Cambridge to showcase our ideas, our companies and our track record for building successful innovation businesses. The story is uniquely Cambridge and will amplify all pillars of our innovation strategy."

Discovery Decade's place-based messaging strategies

Gathering data on public attitudes to R&D can only take us so far. To broaden our public supporter base, these insights must be translated into practice. Having identified place as powerful connection point, CaSE chose to develop and pilot one approach to creating place-based R&D messaging strategies, to help the R&D sector move beyond a one-size-fits-all narrative about R&D.

The pilot studies explored how localities of different sizes could raise the profile of R&D in their area and how coalitions of local organisations could work towards an evidence-based brand or public-facing identity as a tool to support this work.

Each pilot convened a group of local organisations from the R&D community, education sector and local or regional governments. Together they explored relevant findings from the Discovery Decade public opinion research, discussed target audiences and shared goals, and combined these into new ideas, messaging and collaborations that could help engage local audiences with R&D. From this, example campaign ideas were developed that sought to tell effective and relevant stories of R&D and its value in each location.

The approach

The aim was to work with local R&D-relevant organisations to collaboratively develop a clear, compelling public-facing identity for R&D in the area. CaSE convened small groups of stakeholders rooted firmly in their localities – ideally including some that did not normally work together – and used CaSE's public opinion research to stimulate a discussion about local attitudes to R&D.

Drawing on the stakeholders' on-the-ground experience engaging in that area, the groups collaboratively identified audiences and messages of particular interest and used this to inform a creative brief. [Luna 9](#) used this brief to develop a set of illustrative campaign assets that brought the group's campaign choices to life, which were then presented to the group.

As the pilots were a conceptual exercise, implementation of the campaigns was out of scope for this work, although each group was invited to take forward the campaign proposals that worked best for them and their area. One group, in Stevenage, did reach the stage of a set of out-of-home billboards for one concept.

The next stage of this approach would be to measure the impact of any campaigns that are put into practice. This could include monitoring local awareness of, and attitudes towards, R&D. This would be from a baseline collected at the outset of the project or qualitative research conducted just after any specific campaign to gauge how many people had seen it and what impact it had had. This would be followed by refinements to future campaigns and further continued evaluation.

The locations

As a proof-of-concept exercise, the Discovery Decade programme was able to run three place-based messaging strategy pilots across the UK. All were conducted in 2023, with follow on work running throughout 2024. We considered a range of areas as candidates, considering the size of the locality, established organisations and partners, existing links to R&D, and political salience.

Our chosen areas were the town of **Stevenage**, the city region of **Greater Manchester** and the nation of **Northern Ireland**, with this latter workshop hosted in Belfast. As part of the programme, CaSE and Luna 9 have worked with all three groups to evaluate the ideas and reflect on how to take the approaches forward. This section first discusses each area and then offers overall recommendations for actions that could expand on this particular pilot approach.

Discovery Decade's place-based messaging strategies

Showcasing the power of research and development: Research Develop Thrive



Alongside our place-based messaging work, CaSE has sought to build a broader suite of tools that can aid the work of those championing R&D to public audiences.

Our Discovery Decade data indicates that the R&D sector is hindered by a low public profile and a fragmented public-facing identity, where people are not connecting the different parts of the sector's work – and the people delivering that work – into a greater whole.

To help address this challenge, CaSE worked with R&D partners and a creative agency, Luna 9, to develop a clear campaign badge that could help convey a clearer sense of place and purpose around R&D.

This Research Develop Thrive campaign connects organisations across the sector to tell a compelling story of how R&D addresses the challenges of today and tomorrow. The campaign aims to nurture stronger public and political support for R&D by highlighting our sector's local impact and making it relatable.



The campaign focuses on what R&D aims to achieve, using active language and themes we know connect with the public. To reflect the unique qualities of organisations across the R&D sector, the third word is customisable around four evidence-led messages known to connect with public audiences:

- Creating a better world for future generations
- Bringing people, places and ideas together
- Solving problems and expanding our knowledge
- Educating and inspiring the next generation

An early version of the campaign badge can be seen across the illustrative campaign assets that were developed as part of this place-based work. The finalised campaign is used in the out-of-home adverts that were placed as part of the Stevenage pilot study.

Pilot location: Stevenage

Date: December 2023

Attendees:

Airbus Defence and Space, Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult, GSK, Hertfordshire Futures, North Hertfordshire College, Reef, Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, Stevenage Borough Council, UBS

Regional results:

Discovery Decade research found that 51% of people in the East of England either haven't heard the acronym R&D or have but don't know what it means. Some 39% in the region could think of very few or no ways in which R&D investment benefits their lives, which is slightly more than the national average. More than half (59%) said they would like to hear more about R&D in their local area, which is the lowest of all UK regions.

Setting the scene

Stevenage was designated as the first 'new town' in 1946, to relieve pressure from bomb-damaged London, and now has a population of almost 90,000. An industrial area on the outskirts of the town centre is home to some of the biggest local employers, including Airbus Defence and Space, pharmaceutical company GSK and aerospace company MBDA.

Three decades ago, about a quarter of all UK pharma R&D employment was in Stevenage, and the area has continued to play host to a concentration of life sciences and biotech research. Many are centred around a science park that opened in 2011, including Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst and GSK. These sites continue to expand, with a £900m investment having been recently announced to further develop this site.⁵

Meanwhile, in 2023, the council approved a development project by the Reef Group, which will see the transformation of the existing Forum car park and retail units to deliver GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) advanced manufacturing, office, labs, co-working and community spaces.⁶ This site is also home to biopharmaceutical company Autolus.

Stevenage is ranked 6th overall in the British Science Association's science engagement index – which uses data on STEM education, industry, cultural centres and more to rank opportunities for people to be engaged with science – and 5th in its industry ranking, which focuses just on industry measures including the proportion of working population in STEM jobs.⁷

Local partner discussion: Demonstrating the local and national benefits of Stevenage's R&D

Discussion in Stevenage focused on local, national and international perceptions and recognition, and how R&D could fit into that. Participants referenced Stevenage's history as a new town and emphasised the need to foster a sense of local identity in a new age of research, building on its pioneering status and place in the industrial and information ages.

There was a strong sense that, as well as reaching local audiences, R&D messaging would benefit the town by reaching a broader audience, including national decision-makers, companies and other individuals, to help support further investment and growth in the area.

The fact Stevenage is home to many R&D organisations, with multiple large-scale development projects, meant that there was strong focus on planning and construction. The group noted a 'vocal minority' of people who spoke out against development projects compared with a larger number of potential advocates in the community who could be better served.

Participants wanted to engage local people who weren't aware of Stevenage's role in R&D or what goes on 'behind closed doors' at the town's larger R&D sites, and to inspire local school children to support the local R&D talent pipeline. They felt it was important to foster a two-way relationship between Stevenage's R&D sector and the community to encourage a greater sense of ownership among local residents, rather than simply telling the public about local achievements.

Pilot location: Stevenage

Date: December 2023

Creative brief

- Increase advocacy and excitement around the R&D developments in the town by creating vocal supporters
- Invite people into the R&D bubble to encourage ownership and strengthen local pride, avoiding the feeling of a one-way 'show and tell' with little public dialogue
- Showcase Stevenage's influence and importance beyond the local community, celebrating its status as a case study for success in combining purpose and place

Visual campaign concepts

After the workshop, Luna 9 created four concepts for the Stevenage group to consider.

1

Building anticipation while building R&D space: This sought to make better use of hoardings around local R&D developments, including in the town centre

2

Showcasing the community's young curious minds: A programme for young people to come up with prototype ideas that local companies could then 'develop' and be shown side by side in local public spaces

3

A destination for R&D: Using spaces at the major entry points to Stevenage – the railway station and major A road – to show how local R&D activity benefits the community and the country

4

A shop window for science and technology: Using empty retail units in the town centre to give people a space for learning, discussion and debate, including between local people and the major companies in the area



Pilot location: Stevenage

Date: December 2023

Evaluation

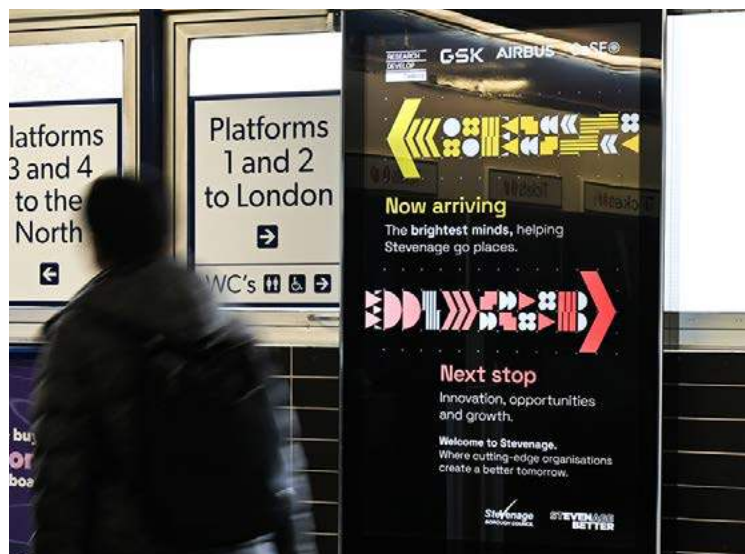
All the concepts were well received by the group, and the variety of formats and scales of investment or effort required was welcomed.

In particular, the hoardings and railway station ideas were immediately recognised as having the potential to be effective in achieving the group's aims, while also being fairly straightforward to implement. Concept 1 was seen to fit in with wider efforts to celebrate Stevenage's heritage, and concept 3 was seen as a powerful way to connect to people outside Stevenage that could also be used in other locations.

Participants noted the intention in concept 2 to try and break down the 'us and them' perceptions about the types of people who work in R&D, which was seen as a message the group could promote. However, the group acknowledged that both concepts 2 and 4 would require long-term funding and resource from the organisations involved, alongside the use of physical spaces. As such, these concepts were not followed up.

As the developers of major sites across Stevenage, Reef and UBS formed a sub-group to discuss how they could implement R&D related messaging on the hoardings. These are due to be ready in late 2024 or 2025, and CaSE and Stevenage Borough Council are engaged in this process as an opportunity to bring the R&D 'behind the hoardings' to life for Stevenage residents and visitors.

The third concept was the most popular among the group and proceeded the furthest. A sub-group of Stevenage Borough Council, GSK and Airbus continued discussions around a collaborative campaign focused on the train station as a gateway to Stevenage, which led to a small-scale out-of-home advertising campaign. This saw advertisements placed simultaneously at Stevenage and – at the other end of the train line – King's Cross stations and ran in November and December 2024. Images of the billboards can be seen below



Pilot location: Northern Ireland

Date: July 2023

Attendees:

Catalyst; Northern Ireland Science Festival; Odyssey Trust; Royal Academy of Engineering; Ulster University

Regional results:

Discovery Decade research found that 54% of people in Northern Ireland either haven't heard of R&D or have but don't know what it means. Some 34% agreed with the statement "R&D should not be funded by taxpayers" and 43% said they could think of very few or no ways in which investment in R&D benefits their lives. Both figures are higher than the national average, of 24% and 37%, respectively. Some 68% said they knew hardly anything about research in their area but 67% said they would like to hear more.

Setting the scene

Much of Northern Ireland's R&D activity centres in Belfast, although there are universities and R&D parks or centres across the nation. The capital has strong historic ties with engineering, in particular shipbuilding. According to a [June 2023 report from the Royal Academy of Engineering](#), Belfast is ranked joint 8th across all 374 local authorities in the UK in terms of the proportion of R&D employment within the local engineering economy.⁸

There is also an increasing focus in the capital on innovation and commercialisation of science and technology, with the development of the Titanic Quarter innovation district and the science park Catalyst. It is important to note the wider political context in Northern Ireland at the time the workshop took place in July 2023, as there had not been a First Minister or Deputy First Minister in the nation since February 2022, and other ministers' roles had ceased to exist later that year.

Local partner discussion: Demystifying Northern Ireland's R&D

Discussions in our Northern Ireland workshop centred on making R&D accessible and relevant, and how to convey it as a source of opportunity. Participants felt that the public were unaware and therefore disengaged with R&D happening in the nation and the capital city, and that knowledge of Northern Ireland's thriving R&D sector was limited to a small 'bubble'.

Participants wanted to demystify R&D for public audiences and share the opportunities and achievements related to Northern Ireland's research system. They discussed how to engage more people with the research happening on their doorsteps – including through opening up large institutions like universities – and how to humanise the R&D process by making better use of the world-leading researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs across the city.

There was a strong emphasis on education and employment opportunities in the discussions. Participants wanted to tackle the idea that the only way into research is through traditional academic career routes and discussed how to engage younger groups and build broader science and media literacy among all audiences. In light of this, an audience of particular interest was aspirational parents as well as young people themselves.

There was a recognition that there may currently be no reason for public audiences to care about R&D, and that it was important for those working in the sector to demonstrate R&D's relevance to those audiences. The political situation in Northern Ireland at the time of the workshop was also recognised as a challenging environment to work in, but participants reflected that greater public engagement could create stronger advocates for R&D.

Pilot location: Northern Ireland

Date: July 2023

Creative brief

- Support teachers to get young people excited about R&D subjects and demystify who does R&D in Belfast, with mechanisms to help this excitement be heard at home
- Use non-school based channels to make R&D feel less abstract to young people, and ensure they are talking more about it to family members
- Offer parents, guardians and family members access to further information about R&D careers and opportunities, to reinforce their desire to see greater political action and investment

Visual campaign concepts

Luna 9 created four concepts based on the creative brief, all of which sought to engage children and their parents with innovation and R&D.

1

Digital classroom speakers: Working with schools to get primary school children engaged and thinking about innovation through resources including video interviews that feature people working in R&D and innovation from across Northern Ireland

2

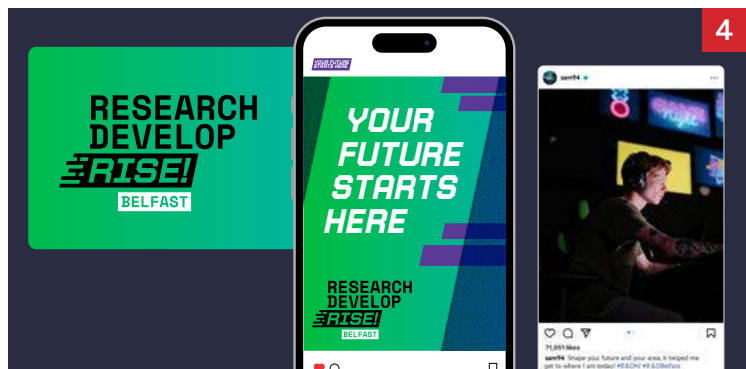
Innovation treasure hunt: A Belfast-based innovation trail for all ages to enjoy together that explores historic and current places with links to R&D, which could be a lead up to an event such as the Northern Ireland Science Festival or a permanent feature

3

Innovation catalogue: This online resource is designed to promote awareness and excitement about the innovations happening across Northern Ireland using straightforward language that highlights the range of organisations involved in R&D

4

Influencer campaign: A social media campaign aimed at secondary school children involving social media influencers to highlight the breadth of opportunities for careers related to R&D



Pilot location: Northern Ireland

Date: July 2023

Evaluation

The participants were enthusiastic about the concepts and could see how they would fit together to broaden engagement opportunities in the nation. There was particular interest in the idea of using influencers to engage young people and thinking of new ways to demonstrate the range of innovation happening in Northern Ireland.

The digital classroom speaker was seen as something that could – and would need to – fit into existing work to engage children in R&D, including some of the participants' organisational work and initiatives like STEM Ambassadors. There was also a discussion about the time needed to engage teachers in how to use resources like this.

Similarly, the online innovation catalogue was seen as something that could be developed collaboratively by a range of actors across the nation, and participants noted that it would link in well with the digital classroom speaker idea. This was one of the most popular ideas.

The innovation treasure hunt around Belfast was well-received, but it was noted that real-world concepts could be harder to implement as they need physical resources. Participants also wanted to understand what could be learnt from other Belfast-based trails – for instance those that focus on culture or the city's history – before launching a new trail.

Fundamental to implementation was the question of funding and resource, along with a need to identify a group of partners keen to collaborate while also recognising that there needed to be ownership and a central force driving the work forward.

However, there was broad enthusiasm for the idea behind the Research Develop Thrive logo (see page 13) to raise the profile of R&D across Northern Ireland. Participants felt that it was something that would be quick and easy to implement and would help to bring together different types of voices. CaSE has discussed opportunities to deploy the campaign with these organisations.



Pilot location: Greater Manchester

Date: December 2023

Attendees:

Bruntwood; Greater Manchester Colleges Group; Greater Manchester Combined Authority; KPMG Innovation Centre; Marketing Manchester; iMidas; Rochdale Development Agency; Science and Industry Museum Manchester; The Blair Project; Turing Innovation Catalyst; University of Manchester; University of Salford

Regional results:

Discovery Decade research found that 52% of people in the North West either haven't heard of R&D or have but don't know what it means. Some 22% agreed with the statement "R&D should not be funded by taxpayers", which is lower than the national average. However, 40% said they could think of very few or no ways R&D investment benefits their lives, which is higher than nationally. In Greater Manchester, 61% said they know hardly anything about research in their area and 65% would like to hear more, while 54% said they would trust people who work in R&D in their area to talk about its benefits.

Setting the scene

Greater Manchester has a strong historic connection with R&D. Manchester was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution, and the region is home to famous scientists, such as Alan Turing and Ernest Rutherford, and numerous innovations, from canals and railways to computers and graphene. Greater Manchester was formed in 1974, made up of 10 boroughs, which all have their own identities, successes and challenges, and devolution has allowed the

region to adopt longer-term strategic thinking and forge trusting relationships between local partners.⁹ The region is host to much industrial and academic research, but one notable recent development is the Atom Valley project (see page 9). This innovation cluster aims to bring 20,000 jobs to the boroughs of Bury, Oldham and Rochdale, focused on advanced materials and manufacturing.¹⁰

Local partner discussion: Demonstrating diversity in Greater Manchester's R&D

Participants in Greater Manchester were concerned about diversity and accessibility in R&D and the lack of pathways for those from ethnic minorities and underprivileged backgrounds into research. There was also a strong emphasis on the need to tackle the perception that R&D "isn't for us", which participants felt deepened apathy and disillusionment within communities.

The differences in access and opportunities to engage with R&D for those living in each of the city region's 10 metropolitan boroughs was also noted, and participants reflected on what was already being done to try and reach out into under-represented communities.

Rather than focusing on qualifications and traditional paths into R&D, participants wanted to consider how to demonstrate what it means to have an R&D mindset that celebrates and champions attitudes, such as perseverance or problem-solving, over academia.

There was also consideration of the opportunities like summer schools or those offered by new developments, such as Atom Valley. Participants were keen to inspire young people and celebrate the diversity of R&D within Greater Manchester, focused on audiences of young people and their parents, guardians or wider community and support networks.

Pilot location: Greater Manchester

Date: December 2023

Creative brief

- Create a campaign that engages and inspires young minds in the possibilities of a career in R&D-focused industries
- Celebrate the diversity of creative thinkers, tinkerers, and curious explorers, championing the belief that R&D is built on a mindset, not a qualification
- Shape a movement that reaches beyond just the young audience at its heart, but influences the families and communities who will play a key role in guiding their children's choices and aspirations

Visual campaign concepts

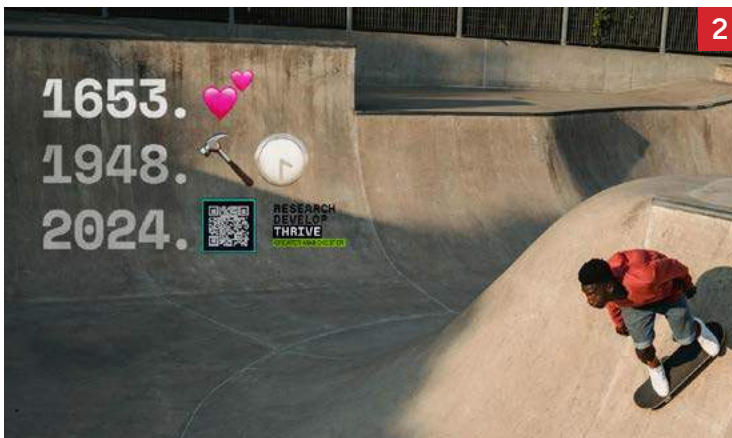
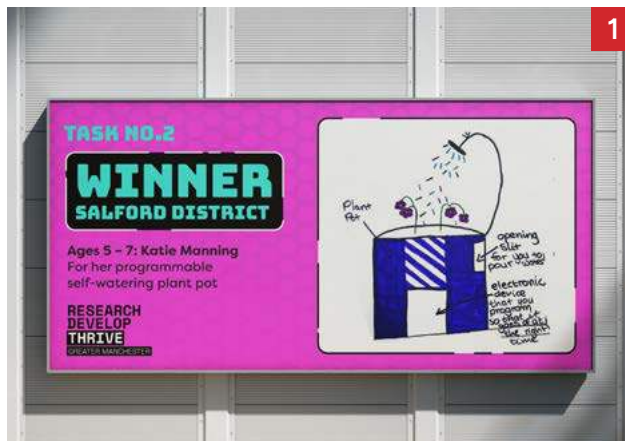
After the workshop, Luna 9 created two large-scale concepts:

1

The Summer Sandbox Showdown – Engaging Greater Manchester's curious young minds: This concept is a summer camp style multi-channel campaign centred on weekly challenges to foster and celebrate the mindset required to thrive in R&D industries, including celebration of individual boroughs' identities

2

The Greater Manchester Mentality – Showing that R&D is a mindset to be harnessed: This concept uses stealth engagement, rather than more obvious messaging, to engage Gen Z groups (14-17 year olds) through quizzes and challenges that aren't overtly focused on R&D but instead celebrate the lateral thinking required to succeed, and then explaining how these could be developed into careers



Pilot location: Greater Manchester

Date: December 2023

Evaluation

Both concepts were well received by participants. The Summer Sandbox Showdown was seen as being the most straightforward to implement and had clear links to existing work, such as the science museum's summer reading challenge or Manchester's science festival. There was a discussion about how to ensure that this was accessible to people across all boroughs, for instance by engaging libraries as places to support the work and ensuring that any activities weren't restricted to central Manchester.

The stealth engagement campaign was seen as an interesting concept that could be developed further. Participants noted that by engaging children outside a school setting it could help open up options for children who can't access careers advice, and that there was the potential for industry to be engaged in the concept. The biggest concern for the group was ensuring that it would be inclusive and accessible to a range of people across Greater Manchester.

For both concepts, the biggest question was around financing and who would drive the work forwards. There was an emphasis on trying to use existing networks and groups rather than creating a new working group to develop the ideas, and to ensure that any new concepts would be integrated with existing work rather than created alongside.

Since the evaluation meeting, discussions continued between CaSE and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, along with some discussions on further work with individual participants. However, the challenges of financing larger-scale projects, especially at times when budgets are tight across the public and charitable sectors, seemed to be a major barrier to further adoption.



Conclusions on CaSE's place-based messaging strategy pilots

Almost 30 organisations were engaged through CaSE's place-based messaging strategy pilots, and the process has provided insights into the challenges and motivations faced by those working across locations, disciplines and sectors. CaSE hopes to build on this work, and this section reflects on what we have learned and how this could be used to inform similar schemes for greater impact and scale.

One of the strongest motivations for organisations agreeing to be involved was enthusiasm. The workshops demonstrated a real appetite for collaboratively engaging different local public audiences. However, there were challenges, including in moving from theory to practice. We have offered potential actions to address these.

These actions will be applied by CaSE in any future place-based work we carry out, but we urge other organisations working in local or regional authorities and in the R&D sector to consider how they could be applied in their own messaging campaigns.

These reflections are framed around the four broad stages of the pilot process:

Coalition building

Local data collection and analysis

Co-developing a messaging strategy

Driving adoption

There is appetite and enthusiasm for raising R&D's local profile through coalition building

Throughout the development of the pilot projects, CaSE was heartened by the enthusiasm from the organisations we approached to join as partners, which was apparent among those from both inside and outside the traditional R&D community. Places seeking to establish local R&D identities or campaigns can take confidence that they will likely find willing partners.

However, such coalitions need sufficient resourcing, as well as time to identify common goals and establish and nurture trust if the partners are less familiar with each other. As such there may be a trade-off between building a new coalition or using established relationships. For some, the workshops were a valuable opportunity to connect with new organisations – but these partners might have benefitted from more time to strengthen connections and align their priorities. On the other hand, some partners already had joint projects, which may have lessened their appetite to collaborate on additional work.

Lessons from CaSE's work:

Build on local appetite and enthusiasm to support the setup of coalitions, which should include organisations from within the R&D community and the local area as well as members of the public.

Allocate time and resource for coalition building to help establish common goals and support the identification of anchor partners who could lead the work from a local perspective.

Provide funding for self-forming groups, drawing on local partners' existing connections and appetite to generate their own groups, or propose using pre-existing networks and partnerships.

Conclusions on CaSE's place-based messaging strategy pilots

Local data collection and analysis can bring deeper insights

To support these pilots, CaSE used data collected through our existing public opinion research, which can be analysed at a regional level, and – for our largest 8,000-person poll – at a city region level. This means that Greater Manchester and Northern Ireland were provided with the most relevant local data possible, with the former also benefitting from insights from focus groups held with people from the area. In contrast, our data lacked the statistical power to separate out public attitudes for smaller geographic areas, such as Stevenage. Although we know from our wider research that attitudes do not vary significantly at a regional level, we recognise that local data collection could help partners feel greater confidence in the process.

Lessons from CaSE's work:

Include time and resource for local-level quantitative or qualitative research early in the process, following initial consultation with partners to understand their priority questions for the public.

Co-developing a messaging strategy requires clarity and should include communities

The discussions in each pilot location were detailed and engaging, with partners enthusiastic about collaborating on local messaging about R&D. Ensuring sufficient time to move from ideas to a refined brief for the creative design process helps to ensure that the outputs are well targeted and address the group's priorities. As outlined earlier, more time to establish partnerships, trust and common goals will support the development of a more targeted brief. Additional perspectives – including those from local communities, groups or individuals – are also vital, to ensure that the brief would better serve local audiences.

Lessons from CaSE's work:

Ensure each coalition has clarity on the end point and the role of each partner to support the development of a more targeted brief.

Provide funding to open up engagement opportunities to local communities, to bring in wider perspectives to the discussions, development and delivery process.

Driving adoption requires consistent support, time and resource

CaSE's aim through these pilots was to provide the partners with a set of illustrative campaign assets that brought each group's ideas to life. Partners were invited – not required – to take forward the campaign proposals. The concepts were welcomed by the groups, but there were practical constraints to adoption, including resourcing (both time and money) and brand and sign off requirements. Additionally, the approach used in our pilots aimed to see leadership move from CaSE in the early stages to one or more local partners for follow on actions and delivery. We believe this convening role was essential for driving forward the projects, but it is equally important that any shift in leadership occurs at a defined point in the project.

Lessons from CaSE's work:

Identify, and ideally ringfence, organisations' resources in advance to ensure clarity on what is achievable and better support the design process. The potential to offer follow-on funding should be explored early and directly.

Ensure clarity on sign off processes among partners and build in the time needed to prevent this from becoming a blocker to action.

Identify and nurture a local lead partner from the outset to carry the work from theory to practice and help act as a local champion to other potential partners on the project's goal and the resulting benefits. If a funding scheme were established for this work, this champion could be the lead applicant.

Recommendations

CaSE has identified place as an effective – and underused – connection point between the public and R&D and has trialled one approach for strengthening this connection.

Drawing on evidence from CaSE's public opinion research, stakeholder engagement and our three pilot studies exploring place-based messaging strategies, we have developed recommendations that can support both the R&D sector and local actors to embed R&D as part of an area's identity.

Taking action will help drive public awareness of, and support for, R&D; raise the area's profile, attracting talent and investment; and inspire local communities through greater opportunities for skills, education and pride.

Our recommendations are aimed at R&D organisations, local and central governments, businesses, and education institutions. We first set out five ways that R&D champions can strengthen the connection between the public and R&D in their area and then offer recommendations within each:

- 1 Build a distinct brand for R&D in your area**
- 2 Open up R&D's doors to local communities**
- 3 Demonstrate R&D's benefits and champion diverse backgrounds among researchers and research**
- 4 Encourage collaborations across disciplines, sectors and geographic areas**
- 5 Prioritise building public connections with R&D when harnessing powers of devolution**



Recommendations

1. Build a distinct brand for R&D in your area

As demonstrated by efforts including the [Government's map of innovation clusters](#) and the [British Science Association's analysis of science engagement opportunities across the UK](#), many areas have existing strengths in R&D. There is an opportunity to build or strengthen a brand around those R&D clusters to satisfy the public's appetite for more information about local R&D.

CaSE has previously identified that long-term relationships and connections between organisations in a place can build a reputation and 'brand'. While some places may see a reputation emerge organically, all areas should think about how to tap into local identity when talking about their unique combination of R&D assets and strengths. Developing a brand can deliver broader benefits beyond public support, for instance creating awareness among potential R&D investors.

Existing cultural brands can also be harnessed alongside R&D. For instance, Greater Manchester has a well-established identity and benefits from existing elements of a city region-wide brand; notably the worker bee symbol, which was used by Luna 9 in the illustrative campaign assets developed through CaSE's pilot.

CaSE recommends:

Local authorities should take a lead role in catalysing the creation of a local brand. Local authorities, mayoral and regional governments are well positioned to convene a diverse mix of local stakeholders to articulate a distinct R&D narrative for their area. This should involve the perspectives of local residents, draw on data available about the local area and consider existing local identities.

R&D organisations should establish or engage with local networks to foster a trusting community of stakeholders. R&D organisations working in an area should seek opportunities to collaborate with non-R&D organisations and learn from best practice in other areas.

R&D funders should provide resources and encouragement for organisations working in local clusters to work towards a local R&D identity. This will ensure that local public awareness and support is a valued measure of impact. Funders should support local groups in different ways, including offering additional resources to support existing geographically linked clusters and establishing new funding schemes to support grassroots clusters.

2. Open up R&D's doors to local communities

R&D institutions can be intimidating, but there is public appetite to learn more about R&D, and organisations should consider how to make people feel welcome on their premises where possible, while also actively reaching out into local communities or making use of public spaces, such as town or shopping centres.

Shifting demand for office and retail space across the UK is resulting in a growing stream of repurposed R&D sites in the heart of communities – as reflected by the development in Stevenage, along with developments in London's Canary Wharf and Oxford town centre. This changing footprint of R&D represents a unique opportunity for the R&D sector to introduce itself as part of a community.

Organisations taking on these new or existing buildings must invest in creating a strong relationship with the new local communities from the outset and consider how to become good neighbours that integrate into the area respectfully. Accommodating a new or expanded institute in an area requires patience and willingness on both sides – especially when a space has played an important or visible role in a local area – but can yield mutual benefits for R&D organisations and local residents.

CaSE recommends:

R&D organisations should develop long-term plans for local or community engagement and review these plans. This should include clarity on how they will actively address inclusion, for instance by going to communities rather than expecting the public to come to the institution.

R&D funders should provide funding to scale-up novel approaches to involving the public or applying existing approaches in new settings. This should include funding for those that have been successfully piloted through existing schemes.

R&D organisations should use public physical spaces in engaging and innovative ways. This could include local R&D trails, the use of building hoardings, plaques celebrating local researchers, QR codes that link to videos showing the public what is happening "behind closed doors" of R&D institutes.

Recommendations

3. Demonstrate R&D's benefits and champion diversity among researchers and research

Local organisations should demonstrate the direct and indirect benefits of R&D on local, regional, and global scales, and promote R&D champions from diverse backgrounds. Messages that resonate with the public include those focused on benefits for the next generation and those that clearly link R&D to the issue it is trying to solve.

At the same time, there is widespread support for more local and regional R&D, which is driven by hopes of boosting the local economy, jobs and education opportunities. CaSE's research demonstrates that stereotypes persist about what R&D is, and the roles and people involved in it, with the public generally starting with a narrow view of what our sector does.

In our pilot studies we heard concerns about the lack of pathways into R&D for those from ethnic minorities and underprivileged backgrounds. Organisations must do more to engage local audiences with messages that highlight the range of valued skillsets and non-traditional paths into R&D.

CaSE recommends:

R&D funders should explore the value of providing centralised training programmes for individuals in a range of organisations. This will support individuals in developing skills and confidence in public engagement in R&D, to build and support a diverse network of R&D messengers and advocates across the UK.

R&D institutions, universities, funders and local organisations should collaborate to establish mechanisms that champion excellence. This will ensure that those who act as local R&D messengers or advocates are recognised and incentivised for their work and demonstrate its value more widely.

4. Encourage collaborations across disciplines, sectors and geographic areas

Local organisations can generate a strong sense of pride among their own communities but may not have the time or money to do widespread or long-term engagement. Working in partnership with other organisations in the area will help to champion, support and embed public engagement as a vital part of their work.

As Innovate Cambridge's work to build connections with other areas across the UK shows, creating strong links will open up new opportunities for the R&D sector and local communities in the areas.

Partnerships will also benefit from perspectives from across disciplines and sectors; breaking down such silos will allow the R&D sector to frame messaging around societal challenges that the public are concerned about, rather than specific subject areas.

CaSE recommends:

National and local funding agencies should seek to create opportunities that foster a sense of collaboration rather than competition. This could include funding for national networks. National and local R&D organisations should take opportunities to create cross-sector networks to support collaborative opportunities for place-based R&D engagement as well as research itself.

Local coalitions of R&D and non-R&D organisations should identify and embrace new ways to work together. Groups should lean into natural commonalities and connection points, looking for links that may reach outside of traditional regional areas. They should collaborate on place-based messaging that goes beyond individual organisations' usual asks and identify opportunities to frame messaging around challenges rather than disciplines.

Recommendations

5. Prioritise building public connections with R&D when harnessing powers of devolution

It is impossible to ignore the potential of devolution as a lever for strengthening place-based identity for R&D. There are numerous discussions about the impact that handing more control of R&D budgets to regional or mayoral authorities, including whether this would benefit the spread and shape of R&D across the UK along with the impact on the economies of the areas involved. Alongside these are complex discussions about the practicalities and methods of various approaches.

This report does not discuss the balance or scale of R&D funding across different parts of the UK, but it is important to acknowledge these discussions.

From the perspective of the issues considered in this report, it is vital that these conversations include an assessment of how to include the public's views and voices, early and often. If R&D is to play a role in addressing economic imbalances across the UK, it is vital that we also take this opportunity to strengthen the connections between the public and R&D community, including by involving local organisations that do not traditionally sit in the R&D space.

CaSE recommends:

A coalition of local R&D champions should explore the implications and opportunities of devolution for the relationship with the public. Coalitions should involve local R&D organisations and local authorities. This work should happen alongside – not after – discussions around devolution of R&D funding, so it can be used to inform political decisions.

The UK Government should give regions the freedom to make decisions about local innovation programmes. The UK Government should support local authorities and businesses to build an innovation offer on behalf of a region with the funding and freedom to enact effective policies at a local level. This should include using funds to strengthen local public connections with R&D.

National and regional governments should ensure that long-term plans for public engagement are built into any proposals for devolution of R&D funding. This should include sufficient provisions for the time and resources required for these activities to be planned, carried out and evaluated.

CaSE next steps

CaSE intends to build on this initial activity as part of our wider work to centre the public in our policy and advocacy work. Subject to further development work in 2025, our core focal points will be:

1 Expanding and adapting the place-based messaging strategy pilots described in this report, to explore different approaches and areas, and their impact

2 Developing and championing policy recommendations that can support place-making in R&D

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³ <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/what-we-do/public-opinion/collating-best-practice/>

⁴ <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/analysis-and-publications/detail/universities-a-crucial-component-of-uk-rd/>

⁵ <https://www.stevenagecatalyst.com/stevenage-bioscience-catalyst-developer-named-campus-expansion/>

⁶ <https://reefgroup.co.uk/project/the-forge>

⁷ <https://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/science-engagement-mapping>

⁸ <https://raeng.org.uk/policy-and-resources/policy-publications/engineering-economy-and-place/belfast>

⁹ We discuss the impact of devolution on R&D and public engagement in this report:
<https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/analysis-and-publications/detail/rd-in-greater-manchester/>

¹⁰ <https://www.atom-valley.co.uk/>



The Campaign for Science and Engineering is a non-partisan charity with a membership that cuts across R&D sectors. It takes a high-level, cross-sector view of the research and innovation environment, and gives impartial expert insight on the whole R&D system to decision-makers.

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