

CIVIC & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2025-2026



Introduction

Civic and stakeholder engagement remains central to the mission and identity of University of Staffordshire. As a modern civic university, our role extends beyond teaching and research; we are a strategic partner in supporting the economic growth, wellbeing and future prosperity of the communities we serve. In turn, this approach is hugely valuable to the University – as this report aims to highlight.

Strong engagement with employers, local authorities, schools, colleges, charities, cultural organisations and regional partners enables the University to respond effectively to skills needs, support social mobility, drive innovation and contribute to inclusive economic development across Staffordshire and the wider region. These relationships also enhance the student experience through applied learning opportunities, employability support, placements, research collaboration and real-world engagement.

Sustained civic engagement strengthens the University's reputation, reinforces public trust and ensures that our strategic priorities remain aligned with the needs of stakeholders and place. In an increasingly competitive higher education environment, meaningful partnership working is essential to demonstrating relevance, impact and civic leadership.

This report provides Governors with an overview of some of the key civic and stakeholder engagement activity undertaken during 2025/26, highlights major partnerships and initiatives, and outlines how this work supports the University's strategic objectives and long-term regional contribution.

Many of the University's flagship external-facing initiatives are conceived, coordinated or supported through the Development and Alumni Relations (DAR) function within the Commercial area.

Staff in this team manage a significant number of the University's key relationships with businesses, sponsors, funders, civic leaders, Honorary Doctors, alumni, politicians, charities and cultural influencers. These relationships are often highly personal and require sustained stewardship, visibility and engagement.

Maintaining a strong presence within the civic and stakeholder landscape enhances the profile and influence of the University while signalling to current and prospective students, staff and partners that University of Staffordshire is a well-connected institution at the centre of important regional conversations and opportunities.



A Your Heroes trophy made by KMF apprentices.

University of Staffordshire

Business Awards

The fourth annual University of Staffordshire Business Awards campaign was launched in January 2026 with a high-profile event attended by approximately 150 invited business leaders and VIP guests. The launch included a panel discussion showcasing the University's Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) activity alongside successful alumni businesses.

Our nominations process runs for six months and includes daily, news-style content published via our dedicated Business Awards platform and promoted extensively across social media channels.

The initiative currently attracts support from more than 20 sponsors and generates more than £100,000 in revenue and a profit in excess of £40,000. Sponsors include RBC Brewin Dolphin, Capula, Stoke-on-Trent College, Stoke City FC and Port Vale FC, Staffordshire Chambers, World of Wedgwood, KMF Group, Beswicks Legal, and Staffordshire County Council.

More important than the revenue, by the conclusion of the 2026 campaign, culminating in the awards ceremony in September, the University will have engaged with more than 200 businesses – many of which had no prior connection with the institution.

The programme therefore delivers significant profile-raising opportunities alongside valuable introductions into academic and professional service teams across the University.

Our Business Awards dinner is a sell-out and the 30+ bespoke films of our finalists shown on the night then give us a month's work of positive social media collateral to share.

Alongside the positive publicity, the event itself offers senior University staff with an unrivalled opportunity for networking.

Close collaboration with colleagues from the Business School, Business Engagement, Apprenticeships and Unitemps ensures that the awards also support employer engagement, placement opportunities and graduate employability.

The Business Awards continues to strengthen the University's relationship with the regional business community while positioning the institution as a champion of enterprise, innovation and economic growth across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

As a direct result of the Business Awards new sponsorships have been secured and new relationships with companies such as JCB and Drayton Beaumont Group have been forged.



The stage is set in The Catalyst for the 2025 University of Staffordshire Business Awards.

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

The University remains a Patron of Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, which represents more than 1,200 businesses across the county.

The University also sponsors the Chambers' Business Awards as part of a reciprocal arrangement linked to the University's own Business Awards programme.

In addition, the Director of Commercial Strategy sits on the Chambers' Council.

The partnership provides strong visibility for the University at major business networking events including the annual Let's Do Business Expo and seminars featuring leading business figures and Government Ministers.

Staff from Business Engagement, Apprenticeships, Unitemps and the Business School are encouraged to utilise Chambers events as strategic networking and relationship-building opportunities.



The announcement of the finalists for the Entrepreneur of the Year category at the 2026 Staffordshire Chambers Business Awards, sponsored by University of Staffordshire

Stoke-on-Trent City Centre BID

The University has developed a strong, ongoing relationship with Stoke-on-Trent City Centre BID (which represents businesses based in the city centre) – with our High Value Relationships Manager Jenny Amphlett invited to speak at levy payer events and jointly hosting sessions for start-up businesses.

The partnership brought in the offer of a free space for UoS to have a presence in the city centre funded by the BID and other partners. The partnership comes at no cost to the University and the BID also pays to be a category sponsor of our Business Awards.



Stoke-on-Trent City Centre Bid once again sponsors the High Street Impact category, an award it curated with the university back in 2024. City centre businesses have been shortlisted in not just the High Street Impact category, but across the board.

Staffordshire Tourism Awards

The University has been headline sponsor of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Tourism Awards as part of a wider strategy to align the University brand with major county-wide initiatives and support tourism and visitor economy education within the Business School.

The awards dinner provides a valuable networking opportunity for Business School and Commercial colleagues while enabling University representatives to publicly reinforce the institution's commitment to the city, county and regional business community.



Winners of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Tourism Awards 2026, headline sponsorship by UoS.

Your Heroes Awards

The 2026 Your Heroes Awards campaign marks the 20th anniversary of this flagship community initiative celebrating inspirational individuals and organisations across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The awards recognise individuals and groups including children of courage, community organisations, NHS staff, carers, teachers, charity fundraisers, police and fire officers, armed forces and emergency services personnel.

Supported by a wide range of local businesses including Alton Towers, Stoke City FC, Woolcool, City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College, and Lucideon the campaign places the University firmly at the heart of local communities.

Daily features and human-interest stories are published on our dedicated Your Heroes platform and shared on social media in the lead-up to the awards ceremony.

The campaign culminates in a major black-tie awards dinner attended by more than 250 guests alongside business and education leaders, Honorary Doctors, local celebrities, sporting personalities and civic dignitaries – generating significant positive regional publicity for the University.

The 30+ bespoke films of our finalists shown on the night then give us a month's work of positive social media collateral to share.

No other event on the civic calendar has the resonance of the Your Heroes Awards and, as a direct result of last year's event, the University forged valuable new commercial relationships with companies including Lucideon.



Actor and UoS Honorary Doctor Amit Shah presents Kayleigh Simm with a Future Star Award.

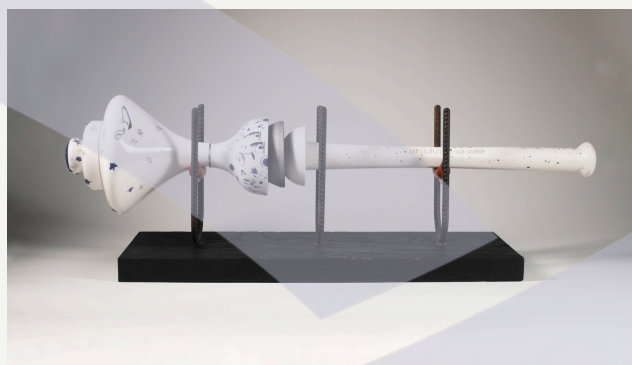
Stoke-on-Trent Centenary Celebrations

During 2025 the University played a significant role in supporting celebrations marking 100 years since Stoke-on-Trent was bestowed city status.

Academic colleagues and students designed and created a new civic mace for Fenton, with the judging process involving the Vice-Chancellor and Honorary Doctors.

The Development and Alumni Relations and Communications teams also collaborated with Cross Rhythms City Radio on a podcast series celebrating local voices and stories connected to the Potteries.

The University was well represented on the giant public mural in Stoke-on-Trent city centre which includes the faces of 100 influential figures from the city's first 100 years.



The Fenton Centenary Mace designed by UoS students.

University alumni and Honorary Doctors ranging from actress Rachel Shenton, fighter pilot Commander Nathan Gray, author and historian Fred Hughes, boxing champion Nathan Heaney, theatre star Jonathan Wilkes, Port Vale FC Chair and owner Carol Shanahan, former Vice-Chancellor Professor Liz Barnes CBE and playwright Deb McAndrew to our Director of Commercial Strategy Martin Tideswell are featured.

Both the Business Awards and Your Heroes Awards incorporated centenary themes, while colleagues across Communications, Marketing and DAR supported Stoke-on-Trent Day through coordinated social media activity celebrating the city and region.



Centenary mural in Stoke-on-Trent City Centre featuring numerous UoS Honorary Doctors.

Knot A Sports Day

Earlier this month teams from 30 businesses from across Staffordshire took part in the second annual Knot A Sports Day event (an It's A Knockout-style competition) – utilising the sports centre and pitches on our main Stoke-on-Trent campus.

The event raises money for 10 local charities and affords University colleagues the opportunity to network with businesses. It also showcases our facilities to people who would otherwise never have visited campus and delivers positive reputational impact during the period when there are no students on campus.



Images from Knot A Sports Day 2025.

Covid memorial

The Director of Commercial Strategy has been liaising with the office of Stoke-on-Trent Central Gareth Snell MP to support an initiative by the bereaved locally to create a memorial to those who lost their lives as a result of the pandemic. The proposal includes a physical memorial in the city centre but the University has specifically been asked for expertise in helping to create a digital memorial record.

Professor Chris Headleand has been brought into the discussions. He and his team are now scoping out options and work on this civic project will begin during the summer.

Civic presence

The University is represented at a wide range of civic events – from the inauguration of the Lord Mayor to carol concerts and the laying of a wreath at the Cenotaph in Stoke on Remembrance Sunday.



The inauguration of Stoke-on-Trent's new Lord Mayor, Cllr Joan Bell, last month.

Douglas MacMillan Hospice

The Dougie Mac (Douglas MacMillan Hospice) is the best-known and largest local charity in Stoke-on-Trent (a £23 million business employing 600 people, with almost 1,000 volunteers and the largest retail store network in North Staffordshire).

The University has been actively strengthening links with Dougie Mac through Director of Commercial Strategy who is a Trustee. He hosts the Dougie Mac Ball (£110k raised) and the MCD the Strictly Knot Dancing fundraising event alongside University Governor Josie Morris MBE which raised £140,000 for the hospice.

These have resulted in a number of dividends including the hospice using The Catalyst for its public events.

Conversations are also taking place between academic colleagues and the Hospice Exec team about placement and career opportunities for UoS students and Graduates.



The dancers and their professional partners during the intro sequence for the Strictly Knot Dancing event at the Kings Hall in aid of the Dougie Mac Hospice.

Stoke City FC and Port Vale FC Partnerships

The University maintains strong links with both Stoke City F.C. and Port Vale F.C. through sponsorship and partnership activity.

Partnerships with the clubs' community foundations enable the University to engage with thousands of young people annually through grassroots and school-based programmes.

The University remains Stoke City's Lifelong Learning Partner and delivers the successful Coaching in the Community Foundation Degree in collaboration with the club.

As a principal sponsor, University branding is prevalent at the bet365 Stadium and we retain sponsorship of the iconic Boothend End stand.

The University also enjoys multiple hospitality opportunities on match days.

In addition, UoS has membership of the club's Business Club which provides valuable networking opportunities.

At Port Vale, sponsorship of the FanZone has raised the University's profile with families and younger audiences on matchdays and a number of stakeholders.

These partnerships have also supported wider societal initiatives including literacy improvement and homelessness awareness, while creating placement and employability opportunities for students.

The University is headline sponsor of Port Vale FC's first Hall of Fame Dinner on June 19 as part of the club's 150th anniversary celebrations.



The University partnership includes sponsorship of the iconic Boothend End stand.

Staffordshire FA Partnership

The University developed a strong partnership with Staffordshire Football Association focused on supporting grassroots football and student enrichment opportunities.

With a network of more than 40,000 people involved in local grassroots football across Staffordshire – comprising players, coaches, match officials, and volunteers – and a desire from the Association and the Staffordshire football community to continually grow and develop all areas of the game, the partnership with University of Staffordshire was really exciting.

Staffs FA has a direct link to the Football Association and England national teams.

As well as branding and advertising opportunities, as the key sponsor of Staffordshire Football Association, the relationship also gives students the opportunity to visit places such as St George's Park and have opportunities in the media space.

It also enables the University to receive tickets to England men's and women's games and FA Cup Finals.

The University has been the headline sponsor of the boy's youth County Cup finals (under 16s-18s). Our branding has been prominent at these events and via social media, helping to increase the University's visibility across the county to the under-18 target demographic.



Dr Alex Blackett with the winning team at the boys' youth County Cup finals (under 16s-18s) sponsored by University of Staffordshire.

Army Cadet Force Partnership

The University partnered with the Staffordshire and West Midlands Army Cadet Force Trust to raise aspirations among young people and promote access to higher education.

The Army Cadet Force is one of the country's largest voluntary youth organisations, with more than 900 cadets aged 12 to 18 years old and 220 adult volunteers in Staffordshire and the West Midlands.

The partnership focused on improving life chances in the region by breaking down barriers to higher education for both cadets and volunteers.

The joint venture saw cadets and volunteers invited to taster days on campus, plus bursaries to support university study, funded by The Friends of the Staffordshire and West Midlands (North Sector) Army Cadet Force Trust.

The initiative included campus taster days, bursary support and volunteering opportunities designed to improve progression pathways for cadets and adult volunteers.

Our High Value Relationships Manager is a Trustee.

We Are Staffordshire

The University was a founding patron of the county's powerful placemaking vehicle We Are Staffordshire – supporting initiatives designed to promote the county nationally and internationally.

The University hosted the organisation's annual conference and benefitted from wider strategic networking opportunities linked to inward investment and regional promotion.

Our Head of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs Mary-ann Astle has been on the board of We Are Staffordshire since its inception.

Our High Value Relationships Manager was recently shortlisted by We Are Staffordshire as Staffordshire Ambassador of the Year. The winner will be announced at the Staffordshire Chambers dinner on July 9.



Lisa Davies, Head of Business Engagement, joined 'The Value of Skills and Learning to Business' roundtable discussion at the House of Commons.

Stoke-on-Trent College Awards

The University remains headline sponsor of Stoke-on-Trent College's annual student awards ceremony.

The Vice-Chancellor will present the Apprentice of the Year award, while collaborative promotional activity across college channels highlights the strength of the relationship between both institutions.

In March 2025, the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Raheel Nawaz became a Governor of the college.



Students celebrating at the Stoke-on-Trent College Awards.

Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College and the Potteries Educational Trust

The University maintained a strong presence at the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College ASPIRE Awards and sponsored an award category.

Our Director of Commercial Strategy, who also serves as a Governor of the College, compered the awards evening and attends all key college events.

The University also hosted the annual away day for Potteries Educational Trust staff, compered by High Value Relationships Manager Jenny Amphlett, and has supported the Trust's ongoing brand development work.



The ASPIRE Awards Evening at Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College.

Staffordshire University Academies Trust (SUAT)

The University continues to host the annual SUAT leadership conference and support wider community engagement initiatives involving SUAT schools. The multi-academy trust rents offices in UoS's Ashley 2 building on the Stoke-on-Trent campus.

Our High Value Relationships Manager, who is a SUAT Trustee, has supported community engagement strategy development across several schools.



The SUAT conference held at The Catalyst.

TEDx University of Staffordshire

The University hosted its third TEDx event in 2025 featuring a diverse range of speakers from across business, education, sport, the arts and public life.

Speakers included University Chancellor Major Levison Wood, Port Vale FC owner and Chair Carol Shanahan OBE (Honorary Doctor), Royal Navy top gun and test pilot Commander Nathan Gray (Honorary Doctor), 1882 founder Emily Johnson, deductionist Ben Cardall, University of Staffordshire games art lecturer Dr Emma Fallows, entrepreneur and former Stoke City footballer Mark Jones and University technical specialist Daniel Haynes.

The event provided a platform for staff, students, alumni and stakeholders to share ideas with both local audiences and global viewers through the TED platform.

All our speakers had their talks uploaded to the platform – endorsing the quality of our event.



Images from TEDx 2025.

City of Stoke-on-Trent Symphony Orchestra

The University hosted externally funded symphony orchestra performances within the Catalyst building during 2025.

The relaxed-format concerts attracted students, staff and members of the public, including many individuals visiting campus for the first time.

The events demonstrated the University's commitment to accessibility, arts engagement and opening campus spaces to the wider community.

Discussions are ongoing regarding future performances.



The City of Stoke-on-Trent Symphony Orchestra.

Andy Edwards partnership

The University continues to strengthen its relationship with renowned Stoke-on-Trent artist and alumnus Andy Edwards.

The University supported the unveiling of his Lemmy Kilmister statue in Burslem and facilitated work experience opportunities for Business students linked to the event.

Andy, who has created iconic sculptures including The Beatles statues on the waterfront in Liverpool, also delivered a TEDx talk hosted at the Catalyst and will, later this year, receive an Honorary Doctorate from University of Staffordshire for his contribution to the arts in a global context.



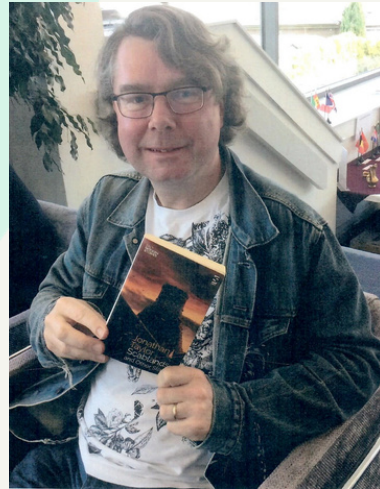
UoS alumnus and world-renowned sculptor Andy Edwards with the maquette of his statue of rock icon Lemmy. The statue was unveiled in Burslem in summer of 2025.

Arnold Bennett Book Prize

The University supports the Arnold Bennett Book Prize in partnership with the Arnold Bennett Society.

The international literary prize attracts entries from around the world and reinforces the University's support for regional culture, literature and creative engagement.

Our High Value Relationships Manager is a judge for the award.



Jonathan Taylor, winner of the Arnold Bennett Book Prize 2025.

Honorary Doctors' Society

The Honorary Doctors' Society was established in 2023 to strengthen relationships between the University and recipients of honorary awards.

The network was designed to encourage collaboration, advocacy, mentoring and support for University initiatives.

The next meeting of the Society is being planned for the Autumn to showcase the new Student Village and Hub.



A meeting of the Honorary Doctors' Society.

Made in Stoke-on-Trent Network

The University has played an active role in supporting the growing Made in Stoke-on-Trent diaspora network, which now includes more than 500 influential members nationally and internationally.

The University has played a key role in growing the network and stewarding its members – and is involved in shaping key networking events including at the flagship London branch of Belstaff and again at the London offices of Jones & Day. Plans are in progress for an event at the V&A in London this November.

The University's involvement has led to several high net worth and influential diaspora network members visiting campus and engaging with the University on a number of projects.

Examples include the renowned music photographer Tom Oxley who has offered to deliver free masterclasses for photography students. Tom launched a fashion label, with UoS fashion students offering career-enhancing opportunities.

Our High Value Relationships Manager represents the University at all Made in Stoke-on-Trent events.



Adding value for students

Stakeholder relationships continue to create substantial added value for students.

These opportunities include:

- Guest speakers and mentors drawn from alumni and Honorary Doctor networks
- Work placements and employability opportunities
- Scholarships and bursaries
- Exclusive enrichment experiences
- Networking opportunities with employers and civic leaders

Examples during the reporting period include:

- Securing student access to the national touring production of War Horse alongside an exclusive puppetry masterclass
- Facilitating international placement scholarships in Vienna for Business students
- Supporting graduate recruitment opportunities through alumni and stakeholder networks.

YMCA partnership

UoS, YMCA North Staffordshire and the Bertarelli Foundation joined together to support and inspire the young people of North Staffordshire on their journey into education.

The University transformed an area at the YMCA Harding Street premises into an Education Zone, so that staff from UoS can directly engage young people at the YMCA about the education pathways open to them such as Step Up to HE.

Groups of YMCA students regularly visit the University for taster experiences, events and tours.

S-o-T Youth Collective

The University is a partner and supporter of the Stoke-on-Trent Youth Collective – a network of 71 community partners, youth practitioners and key influencers delivering on early intervention, prevention and innovative engagement with young people living in Stoke-on-Trent.

The collective provides a platform for third sector providers of young people's support services and other organisations with a youth focus to share good practice, resources, and knowledge and to coordinate their delivery to maximise the offer for young people/delivery for young people.

Staffordshire Police Forensics Partnership

The High Value Relationships Manager comperes Staffordshire Forensics Partnership's annual event, including chairing the Q&A panel for high profile external guests in the fields of policing and forensics.



The Q&A panel at the Forensics Partnership's annual event in The Catalyst Gallery.

Conclusion

The breadth of civic and stakeholder engagement activity undertaken during 2025/26 demonstrates the University's continuing commitment to civic leadership, regional collaboration and public impact.

Through strategic partnerships, sponsorships, cultural engagement, employer collaboration and community-focused initiatives, the University continues to strengthen its role as a connected and influential civic institution.

While several sponsorships and initiatives have concluded or been paused following strategic review and resource pressures, the University continues to maintain a strong and visible presence across Staffordshire and the wider region, delivering reputational, educational and economic benefits for students, staff and stakeholders alike.



University Chancellor Major Levison Wood on stage during his TEDx talk in The Catalyst in 2025.

