

**east midlands**  
**universities association**

**Strategic Plan**

**2009-2011**

**[www.emua.ac.uk](http://www.emua.ac.uk)**

## 1. Introduction

The East Midlands Universities Association (EMUA) was formally established on 7 December 1998, with an inaugural meeting of the Vice Chancellors and Principals of the region's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Since its inception, EMUA has become an effective organisation, providing a collective voice for the HEIs in the East Midlands, and a forum from which collaborative activity can be developed.

It is widely recognised that the HE sector, impacted by the recession and cuts to public funding, is now facing a difficult period. Future challenges to the sector, as highlighted by John Denham at the HEFCE Annual Conference in April 2009, include graduate employability; expectations of vocational subjects and professionally accredited degrees; more non-traditional degree delivery; greater competitive strength in postgraduate provision; more science, technology, engineering and mathematics students; and better prioritisation of research budgets. Although the political future is uncertain, it is nevertheless a time of change for the sector. It is within this national context that EMUA must carefully consider where it can add value on a regional basis, to members' activities.

The contribution of the HE sector to the development of the regional economy, which has received increasing recognition in the East Midlands, is exemplified by a range of projects delivered by individual HEIs and collaboratively with support from EMUA. Due to changes in regional and sub-regional infrastructure (arising from the Sub-national Review), and pressures on public sector budgets, we recognise that it will become increasingly important to work with regional partners to ensure that the importance of the HE sector is fully recognised, and its activities supported. EMUA's Strategic Plan for 2009-2011 therefore seeks to strengthen the role for Higher Education as a key influencer and delivery partner in the region.

We anticipate that the future environment will present further opportunities for collaboration, not only across research, skills provision, and knowledge transfer activity, but also through identifying where shared services between institutions could result in cost efficiencies. This Strategic Plan therefore continues to emphasise what has previously been EMUA's priority area; to provide a mechanism to identify opportunities for collaboration and to facilitate discussions between members to develop collaborative activity.

In today's rapidly changing political and economic environment, this document is intended to be kept under regular review and in step with national and regional strategic drivers for Higher Education as they change and develop over time.

## 2. Mission & Aims

EMUA is a membership organisation, working on behalf of the HEIs in the East Midlands. Our mission is to promote the impact our HEIs have on a regional, national and global economy, and to add value to members' activities by facilitating co-operation and collaboration.

The strategic aims of the Association for the period of this strategy are:

1. To ensure effective engagement with all stakeholders to promote the impact that HEIs in the East Midlands have on a regional, national and global economy.
2. To promote the HE sector in the East Midlands as a generator and provider of world-class knowledge and high quality graduates.
3. To maximise the collective contribution of the East Midlands' HEIs in the development and delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy and other relevant regional strategies including the ESP, and the East Midlands Innovation Strategy.
4. To identify opportunities where strategic collaboration will add value to the East Midlands' HEIs, and to facilitate discussions between members to maximise these opportunities.
5. To support member HEIs to engage with regional strategic partners to implement a co-ordinated response to the economic downturn, and to ensure preparedness for economic recovery.

### 3. Context

This section describes the general strands of activity that EMUA will undertake in order to achieve its strategic aims.

#### Aim 1

**To ensure effective engagement with all stakeholders to promote the impact that HEIs in the East Midlands have on a regional, national and global economy.**

Over the past three years EMUA has been successful in strengthening existing relationships, particularly with *emda*, and developing a range of new relationships with bodies such as the Sector Skills Councils. To maximise the HE sector's contribution to regional strategy formation and delivery, it is important that EMUA **strengthens the range and depth of relationships** with relevant bodies and groups. The most important of these are:

#### *emda*

EMUA commits to working closely with *emda* to help shape and deliver relevant strategies including the revised Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS2), and the forthcoming Single Integrated Regional Strategy (SIRS). EMUA will also work more closely with *emda* to ensure that there is synergy between the relationships that *emda* has formed with our members as individual institutions, and the relationship with EMUA as an organisation. A mapping of formal relationships between EMUA and *emda* can be found in appendix 1.

#### HEFCE

EMUA commits to working closely with HEFCE. The aim of this relationship will be to:

- Support HEFCE in understanding any regional issues
- Promote the collective strengths of the region's HEIs.
- Identify and discuss any opportunities for HEFCE funding for regional projects
- Facilitate EMUA members where a regional response to HEFCE is appropriate.

#### Key Politicians and Government representatives

EMUA will continue to communicate with Government Office East Midlands and the Regional Minister, to promote the strengths of the region's HEIs, and particularly the role of the sector during the economic downturn. EMUA will continue to lobby for representation on the Regional Economic Cabinet.

EMUA will also develop its relationships with senior civil servants and key political figures at Whitehall, including the Shadow Cabinet Minister for Higher Education. This will enable EMUA to represent the interests of its members at the highest level, and support future policy development.

EMUA will commit to communicating with East Midlands MPs on a regular basis to increase their understanding of the HE sector.

Local Authorities: One outcome of the recent Subnational Review (SNR) has been to give Local Authorities (LAs) greater power in the allocation of funds for regional economic development (channelled through RDAs). We are concerned that that devolution of funds to Local Authorities may shift the focus and type of investments to very local priorities confined to small administrative areas, which may limit the role of universities as delivery partners, and the significant funds they can raise against

regional investment. It will therefore be important to work with the LAs to help them understand the impact of their local HEIs, and role in economic development. EMUA will build a strategic relationship with the LA Leader's Forum, adding value to relationships that individual members will build with their own Local Authorities.

### **NHS**

EMUA will strengthen its relationship with the NHS, through the Strategic Health Authorities, to facilitate a strategic relationship between the NHS and East Midlands HEIs.

### **Employment Skills Productivity (ESP) Partnership**

The *esp* Partnership is a key forum where EMUA has demonstrated it can influence regional policy and strategy. EMUA will be represented on the Partnership Executive by the Chair of the EMUA Employer Engagement and Higher Level Skills Strategy Group, who will ensure EMUA participates in all relevant *esp* Partnership task groups.

### **Business Link**

As part of the Governments Business Support Simplification Strategy, Business Link has been identified as the primary channel for access to all forms of publicly-funded business support for SMEs. In the past, referrals via Business Link to HE for knowledge transfer and skills have been rare. EMUA will work to develop good relationships with the deliverers of Business Link brokerage services so that they better understand the diversity of the regional HE offer. In particular, we will encourage the use the East Midlands Knowledge Network and Beyond Brokerage Higher Level Skills Service in supporting brokerage to their clients, in an effort to increase the referral and successful conversion of SME enquiries to our HEIs.

### **Job Centre+**

The current recession is impacting more on individuals with higher level skills than in previous recessions and graduate vacancies are declining steeply. EMUA recognises the need to develop a strategic relationship with Jobcentre Plus, to ensure that unemployed graduates receive appropriate assistance to achieve graduate level jobs and that Jobcentre Plus' employer outreach service is leveraged to promote graduate employment. In the next 12 months, EMUA will work with Jobcentre Plus as lead agency for the *esp* Partnership Integrated Adult Skills Service task group to ensure the service is extended to include higher skilled individuals, and will try to establish a dialogue with Jobcentre Plus around a common approach to graduate unemployment/HEI interaction across the region.

### **Sector Skills Councils**

EMUA recognises the synergies between the work of its Employer Engagement & Higher Level Skills Group and that of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in identifying gaps in provision. Those SSCs with a significant higher level skills needs in their Sector Skills Agreements welcome EMUA's overtures regarding strategic engagement around provision since strategic engagement is critical to the SSC re-licensing process. Similarly, EMUA institutions will be well placed to access SSC commissioning funding as a result of such strategic engagement. The Employer Engagement & Higher Level Skills Group will build on last year's successful meeting with interested SSCs, by identifying a small number of projects, where we can work collaboratively to our mutual benefit.

## Aim 2

**To promote HE in the East Midlands as a generator and provider of world-class knowledge and high quality graduates.**

By increasing the range and depth of relationships with relevant bodies and groups (as described on the previous page) EMUA will be able to promote the impact and value of its member HEIs to a wider audience, on a regional and national basis.

Although EMUA has a limited budget for promotional activities, we will continue to produce and distribute press releases and publicity materials. We will also work closely with *emda* to maximise any opportunities and coverage.

The East Midlands Knowledge Network will be EMUA's main tool for promoting EM HEI services to Business. This will be updated and further developed over the coming year.

## Aim 3

**To maximise the collective contribution of the East Midlands' HEIs in the development and delivery of the Regional Economic Strategy and other relevant regional strategies including the esp, and the East Midlands Innovation Strategy.**

EMUA seeks to articulate the role of Higher Education as a key influencer and delivery partner in regional strategies. EMUA will continue to work with *emda*, and other relevant bodies, to promote the economic impact of the HE sector, and to ensure that this is recognised in the development of new regional strategies.

Through EMUA's 3 Strategic Groups, we will consider how a collective approach to the delivery of regional strategies, can add value to the activities of individual HEIs.

## Aim 4

**To identify opportunities where strategic collaboration will add value to the EM HEIs, and to facilitate discussions between members to maximise these opportunities.**

### Types of activity

EMUA will continue to facilitate collaboration through its three strategic groups; Innovation & Knowledge Transfer, Research, and Employer Engagement & Higher Level Skills. In addition, where EMUA or its members identify that there is value in sharing best practice, groups may be set up to address this. Two current examples of this are the EMUA Environmental Managers Group, and the EMUA Student Health & Well-being Group. Both of these groups are focussing on sharing best practice across a number of agreed themes.

Future funding cuts to the sector will encourage HEIs to make efficiency savings. EMUA will therefore facilitate discussions on the potential for shared services and administration, as identified by members.

### Funding sources

Over the period of the previous strategic plan, EMUA has been successful in developing collaborative projects funded from a range of sources, for example:

- Enterprise Inc; *emda* single pot and ERDF funded

- East Midlands Knowledge Network; HEFCE funded
- Projects arising from EMUA's research groups, iNet HE collaboration Funds
- Beyond Brokerage; *emda* funded single pot.

It is difficult to predict whether cuts in public funding will result in funding competitions which act to encourage greater collaboration on a regional basis, or whether cuts will result in greater competition between individual members. EMUA will therefore continue to monitor funding opportunities, and facilitate discussion between members should an opportunity arise.

In recent years, EMUA and individual HEIs have worked successfully with *emda* to align funds. Cuts to RDA budgets now mean that *emda* must be increasingly aware of where their funding results in maximum impact. EMUA will work with *emda* to support strategic alignment of funds. It is anticipated that ERDF and iNet funds will continue to be available over the period of this strategy; EMUA will continue to facilitate joint submissions to these funds.

The EMUA Research Groups will increasingly look to national sources of funding, including from Research Councils. EMUA has identified the forthcoming call from the ESRC for Doctoral Training Centres and Units to be of interest to EMUA members.

It is noted that HEFCE's SDF fund will have strict criteria applied in future, and is more likely to be used to support critical developments or strategic change within institutions. This fund is therefore less likely to be appropriate to funding the types of projects that EMUA has previously put forward. EMUA will continue to work closely with HEFCE to other opportunities for funding.

### Engagement of EMUA members

This plan acknowledges that delivery of the strategy is reliant on the participation of our Higher Education Institutions at all levels. This relationship is based on collaboration across a range of activities, providing opportunity for all Higher Education Institutions engage. However the members also recognise that not all Higher Education Institutions need to be involved or realise equal benefit for an activity or project to be undertaken or co-ordinated by EMUA.

## Aim 5

**To support member HEIs to engage with regional strategic partners to implement a co-ordinated response to the economic downturn and to ensure preparedness for economic recovery.**

In March 2009, EMUA was awarded £138,000 HEFCE SDF funds for a period of 18 months, to undertake a project which helps East Midlands HEIs to support individuals and businesses during the economic downturn. This project will involve closer engagement with intermediaries (including Business Link) who sign-post individuals and businesses to skills or business support solutions, and will also involve EMUA developing a strategic relationship with Job Centre Plus. The project will provide a backdrop to the work of individual HEIs, which is being extensively documented through the 'HERA Barometer'.

The HERA barometer is a national report, compiled by HEFCE for BIS, on the changes to HE activities in response to the economic downturn. EMUA will continue to provide information from the East Midlands as requested by HEFCE (currently every two months), and will produce an East Midlands Barometer to promote the response of the East Midlands HEIs within the region.

The EMUA project will also include a research report on the impact of the downturn on the HE sector in the region.

## 4. Implementation

EMUA is structured in such a way to achieve the above aims, primarily through the activity of three Strategic Groups; Innovation & Knowledge Transfer, Research, and Employer Engagement & Higher Level Skills, and associated subgroups (Appendix 2). Each Group will set its own strategic objectives for the period of this Strategic Plan, and develop operational work plan of how these objectives will be achieved. The Operational Plans will also contain appropriate Key Performance Indicators and targets.

The strategic objectives and operational plans for each group will be approved by the EMUA Steering Group. In accordance with EMUA's previous strategy (2006-2009), each of the three strategic groups will be overseen by a member of the EMUA Steering Group, who will champion and provide strategic direction to the Association's agenda for each area.

Special interest groups exist in other areas of HE activity which support the overall work of the Association as well as present opportunities for sharing of best practice. These groups will report back to the EMUA Steering Group on an annual basis.

To ensure that EMUA is sufficiently responsive to the rapidly changing environment, the Steering Group agenda will have a standing item to consider 'new agendas'. Any issues or opportunities identified will be directed to the appropriate EMUA Group, or if necessary, a Task & Finish Group will be formed to address the issues.

EMUA has a small Executive Team based at Loughborough. The team is responsible for providing support to the Steering Group, Strategic Groups, and on occasion the Special Interest Groups. The work programme of the Executive Team will prioritise, across all functions, those activities that make the greatest contribution to the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

## 5. Role of the Association

EMUA provides a forum for the ten HEIs in the East Midlands to work together, and acts as their collective voice in the region. Our activity is focused on the provision of a central service for our members.

EMUA acts as a facilitator and enabler on behalf of the Higher Education Institutions to engage at a regional level with key partners representing a collective policy perspective and facilitating the development of a range of collaborative projects. We seek to complement and add value to the work of individual Higher Education Institutions.

EMUA will act where:

- Regional and sub-regional activity can bring added value to existing activities and can deliver benefit
- It would be difficult or inefficient for Higher Education Institutions to act independently
- New initiatives appear to demand a regional response
- Good practice may be shared by the Higher Education Institutions to mutual advantage.

In general EMUA will not undertake activity on behalf of partners or stakeholders which causes EMUA to make evaluative judgement on the individual performance of members.

EMUA recognises that not all Higher Education Institutions need to be involved or realise equal benefit for an activity or project to be undertaken or co-ordinated by EMUA.

In order to maintain the focus of the EMUA Executive Team on those high value added activities that make the greatest contribution to the delivery of the Strategic Plan, EMUA will not seek to project manage large collaborative projects. A lead HEI or existing HE partnership will be sought to manage collaborative projects on behalf of the participating members.

## 6. Monitoring and Review of the Strategic Plan

The EMUA Strategic Plan is for a two year period from August 2009 to July 2011. Activities of the Strategic Groups (and other groups) will be reported at each meeting of the EMUA Steering Group. An annual report of progress against objectives and targets will be reviewed by the Steering Group in June 2010, and 2011.

## Appendix 1

### Proposed meeting schedule: *emda*, EMUA, HEIs

*emda* proposes moving from 4 to 3 meetings with each university per year, and adjusting the schedule so that it aligns with the EMUA/VCS' dinner schedule (currently held twice per year). The meetings would have the opportunity to feed into and provide focus for the VC dinner agenda, and would also enable discussion of any follow-up actions from the dinner.

Recognising that each university has its own priorities and ways of working, *emda* recognises that there should be a flexible approach to the agenda and attendance. In general, *emda* suggest that meetings might alternate between strategic and operational issues, with attendance pitched accordingly:

The table below shows the proposed schedule (to roll out on a recurring basis in 2010):

	'09								'09	'10				'10
	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Proposed <i>emda</i> University Meetings	X					X				X				X
EMUA VC Dinner							X					X		
EMUA Employer Engagement sub-group				1		15			10					
EMUA IKT sub-group			24				1 tbc		8 tbc					
EMUA Chair & Executive Director		X				X					X			

### EMUA Structure 2009

