

Evaluation Report Darlington Economic Campus (DEC)

September 2024

Acknowledgements: Thanks to all the stakeholders, across central and local government, local businesses, education institutions and community organisations who provided considerable information and help during the course of the evaluation.

About this Evaluation: HM Treasury (HMT) commissioned Drees & Sommer UK to evaluate the process and impact of Darlington Economic Campus (DEC), to date. DEC is a multi-department government hub located in the Northeast of England. The evaluation involved collection and analysis of information regarding how the campus was established and assessing its successes in achieving its intended outcomes.

CONTENTS

1.0 Executive Summary 2

1.1 Introduction..... 2

1.2 Evaluation Purpose..... 2

1.3 Methodology 2

1.4 Findings 3

1.5 Effective Practices 3

1.6 Recommendations 4

2.0 Introduction 5

2.1 What is the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC)? 5

2.2 Purpose of the evaluation and scope..... 6

3.0 Darlington Economic Campus 7

3.1 Policy background 7

3.2 Outcomes of the DEC 7

3.3 Delivery of the DEC..... 9

4.0 Methodology 13

4.1 Methodology overview 13

4.2 Bias and validity..... 16

4.3 Limitations and constraints 16

5.0 Findings – Process 17

5.1 Was the DEC delivered as intended? 17

5.2 Was there adequate resourcing allocated to the programme?..... 18

5.3 Were there any unexpected or unintended issues? 20

5.4 How could the campus have been delivered at less cost and sooner?..... 21

5.5 External factors that Influenced Delivery..... 22

5.6 Lessons to be Learned (Process) 23

6.0 Findings – Impact 26

6.1 Achieving its outcomes..... 26

6.2 Direct Attribution of the Outcomes to DEC..... 34

6.3 The Impact of the DEC on stakeholder groups..... 35

6.4 Additional outcomes 36

6.5 Lessons to be Learned (Impact) 39

7.0 Conclusions..... 40

7.1 Process..... 40

7.2 Impact..... 41

8.0 Effective Practices 42

9.0 Recommendations 43

APPENDICES

- A - Glossary
- B – Bibliography

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) is an innovative government hub located in the Northeast of England. It forms part of a significant government initiative aimed at decentralising policy-making and bringing it closer to the communities it impacts, whilst also driving regional economic growth. The initiative intends to relocate 22,000 civil service positions from London and the Southeast of England to other areas of the UK including Darlington. In Darlington, these roles would mainly be filled through recruitment from the local and wider area with a small proportion through voluntary relocations.

In addition to being a hub for governmental operations, the DEC serves as a cultural hub. It brings together a diverse workforce from various governmental departments, fostering a unique culture. This culture is further improved through regular team events such as weekly coffee clubs and team lunches. The DEC also engages with the local community through outreach sessions and volunteering opportunities.

The DEC initially operated from Bishopsgate House between August 2021 and June 2022. In July 2022, the departments who committed to occupying Feethams House moved in there, with DfE remaining in Bishopsgate House. The DEC, established with the intention of transforming how government operates, is due for further expansion with work being set to commence on a new hub on Brunswick Street. By 2030, it is projected that the DEC will accommodate up to 1,400 civil service staff, marking a significant milestone in its growth.

1.2 Evaluation Purpose

The intention of this evaluation is to examine the process and impact of the new campus, collecting and analysing information regarding its establishment and assessing its success in achieving its intended outcomes. The evaluation considers each element of the delivery of the DEC from March 2021, when Darlington was announced as the location, to the end of September 2023, marking one year since the completion of the refurbishment of Feethams House. The evaluation will inform the development and delivery of similar projects across the Civil Service, capturing the learning to improve the public and social value of relocating roles outside of London.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology involved a combination of semi-structured interviews and surveys from a broad spectrum of organisations which included local businesses, schools and community organisations. Surveys were used to gather quantitative data on the impact of the DEC, while semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into both the delivery and impact of the programme. A total of 18 individuals responded to the survey, and 29 interviews were conducted virtually.

The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis, supported by AI tools, where appropriate. To ensure the integrity of the data and reduce bias, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and both

quantitative and qualitative data were incorporated into the analysis. The evaluation team worked independently, considering diverse perspectives and using a variety of sources to gather a representative sample of stakeholder opinions. This comprehensive approach ensured a fair and reliable evaluation process.

1.4 Findings

1.4.1 Process

The evaluation findings emphasise the complexity of the DEC project yet highlight its ultimate success in meeting the intended objectives. Despite an accelerated timeline that led to some challenges such as delays in some essential services; the project was completed ahead of the initial public commitment to have a fully operational campus by the end of the parliament. These challenges, which impacted the campus's usability and incurred additional costs, emphasised the need for comprehensive early planning, efficient resource management, and streamlined governance.

1.4.2 Impact

The impact of the DEC has been extensive, benefitting its departments, the local community, and businesses by driving economic growth, job creation, and fostering community engagement and cultural shifts. While the campus has realised many of its projected outcomes, it has also led to some unanticipated benefits, including contributing to the wider regional economy and talent retention.

1.5 Effective Practices

Some of the effective practices which should inform further similar projects are summarised below. Further detail is provided in Section 8.0.

Design:

- Use successful change management strategies from previous projects like Feethams House.
- Continue to learn from initial and subsequent workspace designs to develop a civil service design standard.
- Allocate sufficient resources to align operational buildings with workplace services.
- Remove physical barriers (e.g. home zones) which can prevent departments from collaborating.

Leadership:

- Ensure leaders of new change programmes have the necessary influence and determination.
- Leaders of campus development programmes should be enthusiastic and committed.
- Assign specific 'campus' roles focused on campus development and collaboration.

Outreach:

- Maintain engagement at both local and regional levels.

People:

- Maintain change management and talent development to ensure campus voices impact policy making.

Programme:

- Allow future campus development programmes to adapt the main brief for cross-government collaboration and local circumstances.
- Clearly define task ownership and departmental resources for timely delivery and accountability.
- Harmonise monitoring of impacts at the start of the programme.
- Include workplace services costs in costs for departments at the outset.

1.6 Recommendations

Some of the key recommendations are summarised below. Further detail is provided in Section 8.0.

Design:

- Eliminate cross-departmental digital communication barriers that detract from the campus experience.
- Preserve the barrierless nature of the DEC to encourage cross-departmental collaboration.

Leadership:

- Departments should refine their impact on policy and the economic focus of the campus.

Outreach:

- Implement an approach to renew focus on social mobility.
- Collaborate with local government partners to address senior-level recruitment challenges.

People:

- Increase the use of secondments and interchange with regional government partners.

Carbon:

- Commission an expert review of the DEC's impact on carbon emissions to understand the effects of building acquisition, disposal and staff travel behaviour on government carbon emissions.

2.0 Introduction



“We use our three words: ‘Darlington Economic Campus’ as our themes.

Darlington - is the place to be.

Economic - policy is what we do.

Campus - it's about the people and the culture”

2.1 What is the Darlington Economic Campus (DEC)?

The Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) is a multi-department government hub located in the Northeast of England. It was established with the vision of reimagining how government departments work, enabling people from across the region to play an active role in shaping the future of the country.¹ The campus brings together several government departments, including:²

- HM Treasury (HMT)
- Department for Business and Trade (DBT)
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC)³
- Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Department for Energy and Security & Net Zero (DESNZ)
- Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)
- Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) (currently based in Conniscliffe House)
- Department for Education (DfE) (currently based in Bishopsgate House)

In locating to Darlington, these departments join over 700 staff in the Department for Education (DfE) who are already based in the town centre in Bishopsgate House, and who, while not sharing accommodation, are members of the campus community. This co-location allows decision makers and policy advisors to work closer to the communities they serve, working towards the DEC vision of making government, national policy making and delivery stronger through a diverse workforce which is more representative of the public.⁴

The government-wide initiative intends to relocate 22,000 civil service positions from London and the Southeast of England to other areas of the UK including Darlington. In Darlington, these roles would mainly be filled through recruitment from the local and wider area with a small proportion through voluntary relocations. In the March 2020 budget announcement, then-Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, pledged to establish "a new economic campus in the North, staffed by over 750 employees from the Treasury, and the departments for business, local government, and trade".

¹ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 1 - Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

² Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 1 - Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

³ Since the evaluation was undertaken, this department has been renamed to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following the 2024 general election

⁴ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 1- Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Between August 2021 and June 2022, HMT, DBT, DLUHC and ONS occupied interim accommodation in Bishopsgate House and moved into Feethams House in July 2022 with BEIS (now DSIT and DESNZ), followed by DCMS with CMA taking up occupation in a nearby office. The construction of a new government hub on Brunswick Street is expected to house up to 1,200 civil service staff by 2025 bringing the final total by 2030 to c.1,400. This is in addition to the c750 DfE staff who have been based in Bishopsgate since 2015.

In summary, the DEC is a significant government initiative aimed at decentralising policy-making and bringing it closer to the communities it impacts, while also driving regional economic growth. The DEC houses civil servants from teams across each of the departments, many of whom are responsible for dealing with national policy, and who by working together, support the DEC's vision to make government, policy making and delivery stronger through a diverse workforce which is representative of the public the campus serves. The DEC aims to achieve this vision by recruiting exceptional people to work in a dynamic environment and being a force for good in the community by engaging with local schools and businesses.

2.2 Purpose of the evaluation and scope

2.2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the process and impact of the new campus, to date. This involves collecting and analysing information regarding how the campus was established and assessing its successes in achieving its intended outcomes. The evaluation will help HMT and the other campus departments to determine whether changes need to be made to the activities undertaken by the DEC (or its organisational design) to successfully deliver on its planned benefits and will influence the delivery of the permanent Brunswick Street site by learning from the campus delivery to date. It will also inform the development and delivery of similar projects across the Civil Service, capturing learning to help improve the public and social value they bring when relocating roles outside of London.

2.2.2 Scope of the Evaluation

The scope of this evaluation considers each element of the delivery of the DEC from March 2021, when Darlington was announced as the location, to the end of September 2023, marking one year since the completion of the refurbishment of Feethams House. This includes assessing the provision and occupation of accommodation, staffing, ways of working, outreach, and culture. The evaluation identifies what worked well, what didn't, for whom, and why, as well as potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, the evaluation determines whether the programme has achieved any of its expected outcomes and to what extent, using the agreed intermediate and end benefits set by HM Treasury as a baseline. To support this evaluation, a variety of stakeholders, including some of the Heads of Campus, were engaged with, including:

- HMT Programme Team
- HMT Delivery Teams

- HMT Darlington Leadership Team
- DBT
- DLUHC
- ONS
- DESNZ
- CMA
- DCMS
- DfE
- GPA
- Delivery partners
- Darlington Borough Council
- Tees Valley Combined Authority
- Local Businesses
- Educational Institutions
- Local Community Groups

A second phase evaluation, which will also include a review of value for money, will be carried out one year after occupation of the permanent building (Brunswick Street). This second phase does not form part of this evaluation.

3.0 Darlington Economic Campus

3.1 Policy background

The policy was officially announced during the budget presentation in March 2020 and forms part of the government initiative to move 22,000 civil service roles out of London and the Southeast of England; a significant initiative which aims to make the Civil Service more representative of the communities it serves. In the announcement, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, committed to “opening a new economic campus in the North, with over 750 staff from the Treasury, and the departments for business, local government and trade”.⁵ The Chancellor announced Darlington as the chosen location for the new campus in March 2021.⁶

3.2 Outcomes of the DEC

3.2.1 Intended outcomes

The HMT Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) seeks the funding required to provide for any facilities that are not included in the Government Property Agency’s design standard. The key investment objectives for the Multisite and Darlington Economic Campus Programme identified in HMT’s SOBC and agreed with other campus departments, are as follows:

⁵ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 3 - Budget Speech 2020

⁶ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 1- Darlington Economic Campus (DEC) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

- 1) Operational Economic Campus in Darlington: Establish a new campus in Darlington which is operational by the end of the Parliament, secures value for money, is environmentally sustainable, and has best-in-class accessible office facilities.
- 2) Attract and Retain Diverse Talent and Foster an Inclusive Culture: Ensure the Darlington campus attracts and continues to attract the skills required to sustain a policy location and allows people from a range of backgrounds to contribute meaningfully to policy making. To retain staff, the new office will provide attractive career paths and a wide range of progression options within the civil service. The campus will be underpinned by a diverse and inclusive culture, and recruitment will be consistent with ambitions to increase diversity.
- 3) Effective Policy Making: Ensure the economic campus is a site of effective policy making. Maximising opportunities to work collaboratively with the Departments co-located in the campus, and with local stakeholders in the region.
- 4) Positive Impact on the Region: Work closely with the local stakeholders to ensure the economic campus has an overall positive impact on Darlington and the wider region. Including through outreach with local schools, further and higher education facilities.

The Government Property Agency is responsible for developing the business cases to secure funding to meet the costs for identifying and procuring land and / or accommodation, due diligence, procurement, construction and fit-out. This evaluation is not reviewing the costs and value for money therefore is not looking at either business case in detail.

3.2.2 Benefits

Departments are measuring benefits associated with their growing presences at the DEC. The following summarises specific intermediate and end benefits identified and measured internally by HMT. Comparable work is ongoing across departments, and in parallel, to better collate the measurement of benefits across the campus.

- 1) The DEC is a key additional location across campus departments, helping to employ staff outside of London and the Southeast. HMT met the recruitment target of 200 FTE in post by the end of March 2023, while DBT reached 250 FTE in January 2024. Departments continue to recruit to meet their cross-government delivery targets.
- 2) Multi-site hybrid working supported across campus departments. The intermediate benefit is that hybrid multi-site working is embedded as the norm and workplace capacity meets departments business needs.
- 3) Departments are attracting more applicants/candidates from outside of London and the Southeast region with over 80% of staff from DBT and HMT recruited locally rather than relocating from London.
- 4) Departments have more staff with experience from outside the Civil Service. With over two thirds of HMT and DBT staff recruited to DEC from outside the Civil Service, the campus is bringing in people with a variety of backgrounds and experience.

- 5) DEC is making a positive contribution to departments overall diversity ambitions. DEC recruitment is improving overall diversity metrics in regard to gender and the social and economic backgrounds of its staff.
- 6) DEC is improving its value proposition to employees. Staff from some departments are able to choose to base themselves in, or relocate to, Darlington.
- 7) DEC provides greater Civil Service career opportunities in Northeast England. DEC is helping to provide people in Northeast England with Civil Service career options.
- 8) DEC is having a positive impact on the local community. Creating vacancies in the Northeast through roles made available in Darlington (direct employment).
- 9) Long term salary costs are lower compared to London. DEC is helping to reduce departments salary costs over the longer-term.
- 10) More policy professionals are based in communities outside London and the Southeast. DEC is helping to make departments policy workforce more regionally diverse.

3.3 Delivery of the DEC

3.3.1 Programme and timeline

The DEC has been and continues to be delivered to a comprehensive programme which follows the standard programme/project lifecycle and methodologies, starting with project initiation, progressing into delivery and then concluding with a 'close-down' phase. The timing of the programme is as follows.

From September 2020 to February 2021, the focus was on identifying potential locations for the campus, establishing a cross-campus leadership team and governance structure, and agreeing a vision for the campus. The next phase, from March 2021 to March 2022, was dedicated to establishing a presence in Darlington through recruitment campaigns, setting up and occupying interim accommodation, engaging with other campus departments and establishing the community and culture through the early relocators. During this period, HMT occupied interim accommodation in Bishopsgate House, alongside DBT, DLUHC and ONS. During this period, a recruitment and retention plan was developed and implemented to ensure the most effective staff were hired into the campus and retained at a high rate.

From March 2022 to March 2023, the focus shifted to the completion and ongoing operation of Feethams House, building momentum with the recruitment and developing and implementing the outreach programme. In July 2022, far ahead of the programme set by the government, HMT, DBT, DLUHC and ONS moved across to Feethams House alongside BEIS and followed by DCMS. While the CMA took some space initially in Feethams House, it could not provide them with the specific set-up required and they decided to take up separate space in Conniscliffe House. Although in another building, like the DfE they remain a full member of the campus. During this same period, Brunswick Street was announced as the site for the permanent office.

This was followed by a period from March 2023 to March 2024 dedicated to the management of

Feethams House, including changes to the building which increased the number of workstations. Feedback has been collected throughout the Feethams House project on the use of the building, with individuals being asked to complete a formal review of the spaces they used and why. This feedback enabled the project team to collate any snagging or improvements for the building.

3.3.2 Roles and Responsibilities/Programme Resource

The programme, as outlined in section 3.3.1, has been supported by a variety of entities. Their roles and responsibilities are highlighted in Table 1.

Entity	Roles and Responsibilities
Government Property Agency (GPA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivers property and workplace solutions across government - delivery partner for the DEC. Responsible for procuring, developing, and managing any property acquisition, construction/refurbishment elements of the DEC programme. Works closely with the programme team on site options and delivery.
HMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports the programme for HMT with dedicated resource, responsible for the development of policy. Acts as lead department, coordinating and managing cross-campus governance. Responsible for identifying and securing any relevant funding to support delivery.
Darlington Economic Campus Steering Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for monitoring delivery of projects under the campus programme to completion, holding the delivery partner to account to ensure the agreed costs, timescales, and scope are met, continuing to deliver the campus vision through agreement on campus wide transformational elements such as recruitment, ways of working, and outreach etc.
Darlington Heads of Campus Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brings together the most senior officials from each Department based in Darlington to discuss progress on areas of mutual interest and agree and coordinate areas for joint action on key issues relating to the campus including future ways of working, policy collaboration, recruitment, staff engagement, stakeholder engagement, wider opportunities, and diversity. The group takes a leadership role in the delivery of the campus.
Other Government Departments and Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that the programme delivers to meet their own departmental needs and requirements. Work together to agree design parameters and align milestones and goals, ensuring that their departmental approvals are in place to support delivery. <p>Departments have also added location-specific roles to streamline and amplify local delivery and improve cross-DEC coordination, e.g. DBT's</p>

Entity	Roles and Responsibilities
Cabinet Office / Civil Service HR	Regional Support Manager and Campus Lead roles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to manage synergy with the wider government relocation agenda.

Table 1 - Roles and Responsibilities

3.3.3 Provision of accommodation

The initial phase of the DEC involved utilising existing space in Bishopsgate House, which was already occupied by the DfE. This allowed for immediate occupation and operation while future plans were being developed. Significant value was added through the use of the Bishopsgate House site which enabled departments to initiate any relocation programmes early and establish vanguard teams before the occupation of Feethams House which helped to build a sense of community between campus members. It also allowed departments to start and build momentum in recruiting and ensured that initial internal recruitment targets could be met.

The second phase was to find a temporary home for the DEC. Feethams House was identified via the GPA’s formal procurement exercise as the only readily available Grade A office space in Darlington that would meet the delivery target of an operational campus by end of Parliament (assumed at that time to be during 2024). However, it was clear from the outset that Feethams House was not large enough to accommodate the predicted workforce numbers and so could not meet the long-term needs of the campus. The removal of traditional department-based zones in Feethams House encourages collaboration and adaptability. Any employee regardless of which department they work for can sit at any desk on any floor. With no desk reservation system, employees are encouraged to move around the building, promoting flexibility and efficient space utilisation. All available spaces are utilised, breaking away from fixed zones and promoting interaction. In summary, this ‘soft home zone’ design fosters a collaborative culture which will continue with the move to Brunswick Street.

3.3.4 Occupation

The establishment of the DEC will bring up to 1,200 civil service new roles by 2025, increasing to 1,400 by 2030. These 1,400 new roles build on the c.750 DfE staff already based in the town. While not sharing accommodation, DfE are one of the nine departments who make up the campus.

Currently, Feethams House contains the following departments:

- HMT
- DBT
- DLUHC
- ONS
- DSIT
- DESNZ
- DCMS

As at June 2024 there are almost 900 people working in the new roles created and based in Darlington, with over 880 based out of Feethams House (excluding CMA who are based in a separate building). Growth in recruitment is expected to continue and as Feethams House has limited capacity, a move to a larger, permanent site is planned (Brunswick Street).

3.3.5 Outreach and stakeholder engagement

A comprehensive programme of engagement has been implemented to ensure the participation of internal stakeholders in the design, delivery and success of the DEC. The programme is managed via a dedicated communication and engagement strategy and plan, supported by regular review and analysis. Internal stakeholders, which include the Darlington Economic Campus Steering Group, The Brunswick Delivery Group, Heads of Campus, campus estate, project, HR, ICT and security teams, and campus staff are managed via the different governance groups, digital platforms and on a 1-1 basis, aligning with key engagement, communication, and project milestone activities.

The Darlington Vision Delivery Team is responsible for managing external stakeholders some of whom are based in the region (External stakeholders include Darlington Borough Council, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Cabinet Office, the Government Internal Audit Agency, local businesses, local community groups, and local schools).

Across departments, significant resource has also been invested in improving policymaking and delivering wider outreach. Initiatives have included arranging internal lectures and deep-dive sessions with academics at local universities, embedding academics within the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), and HMT/CMA run conferences and seminars.

3.3.6 Recruitment and Culture

The transition to a new location required significant organisational efforts, with departments initiating the move and establishing processes for staff relocation. Significant support was provided for these transitions, including reimbursement of expenses and temporary relocation options. A Vanguard team was also formed to aid in setting up the new office, contributing to the sense of community.

The recruitment process has been comprehensive, employing strategies such as centralised bulk recruitment, use of a recruitment delivery partner, and advertising roles in both London and Darlington. The process also included assessment methods for different job grades, onboarding and induction processes, capability building and future talent development. The cross-campus leadership and governance also enabled sharing best practice across departments and in some cases changing recruitment processes to better support applicants. The roles recruited so far span different seniority levels across departments. Ensuring a sufficient number of senior roles with broad scope is crucial to providing career paths for those based at the new campus. Departments have also actively innovated in the People space, e.g. sharing candidate reserve lists between departments, introducing cross-DEC

spot mentoring, and launching a cross-DEC Grade 6 development programme.

Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of the DEC's culture. There is a commitment to creating a diverse workforce that is representative of the public it serves. This is achieved by recruiting exceptional individuals from various backgrounds and providing them with the support they need to thrive. There is also a strong emphasis on continuous learning and development, with regular 'lunch and learn' sessions being held across the nine campus departments which cover a variety of topics, providing staff with opportunities for professional growth.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Methodology overview

This evaluation assesses each element of the DEC's delivery from March 2021, when Darlington was announced as the location, to the end of September 2023, marking one year since the completion of the refurbishment of Feethams House. To conduct this evaluation, fieldwork was carried out using a mixture of semi-structured interviews and surveys.

4.1.1 Surveys

Surveys were utilised to gather quantitative data from a broad spectrum of organisations external to government which included local businesses, schools and community organisations. This approach was utilised because it is typically resource-efficient while still yielding rich data, especially when dealing with a large number of individuals. The survey questions were concerned with the impact of the DEC, as follows.

Questions 2 to 17 were required to be answered on a 5-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', with 'I don't know' as an additional option. Questions 18 to 20 provided an opportunity for a qualitative response.

1. *Please tell us the name of your organisation.*
2. *I am aware of the DEC.*
3. *I am aware of the purpose of the DEC.*
4. *Overall, I (or my organisation) have been positively impacted by the creation of the DEC.*
5. *Overall, I (or my organisation) have been negatively impacted by the DEC.*
6. *The DEC has improved community engagement.*
7. *The DEC has boosted the economy through the recruitment of local civil servants.*
8. *The DEC has boosted the economy through attracting international business into the area.*
9. *The DEC has boosted the economy through the increased use of office space.*
10. *The DEC has created more job opportunities including work experience and internships.*
11. *The DEC has reduced government carbon emissions as a result of the creation of the new build environment.*
12. *The DEC has made the civil service more representative of the local area.*

13. *The DEC has improved collaborative working between government departments.*
14. *The DEC has boosted feelings of local pride amongst the local community.*
15. *Overall, the DEC has achieved its expected outcomes.*
16. *The outcomes achieved can be attributed directly to the establishment of the campus.*
17. *The outcomes achieved have been influenced by other external factors.*
18. *How and why have you (or your organisation) been impacted by the DEC?*
19. *Has the establishment of the campus resulted in any unintended outcomes that you are aware of?*
20. *Are there any other comments you wish to add about the impact that the DEC has made?*

A total of 18 individuals external to government responded to the survey, from the following organisations:

- Bevan VAT Consultancy Limited
- Darlington Business Club
- Dolphin Centre
- Edward Robertson Limited
- Euro Superabrasives Ltd
- HCS Ltd
- Darlington Workspace – Business Central and Innovation Central
- North East Chamber of Commerce
- Northumbria University
- OutsourcedHR Ltd

The survey data was exported into Excel to allow for analysis. Thematic analysis of the qualitative responses was carried out and supported by use of Copilot which is an AI (artificial intelligence) tool that helps to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data.

4.1.2 Interviews

Between 16 April and 15 May 2024, 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they can elicit qualitative data on the delivery and impact of the programme, providing insights beyond what could be gleaned from the quantitative data alone.

The interview questions were concerned with both the process and impact of the DEC but were adapted to suit the individual participant, as required. The following organisations were interviewed:

- HMT
- DBT
- DLUHC
- ONS
- DESNZ

- CMA
- DCMS
- DfE
- GPA
- AECOM
- Darlington Borough Council
- Tees Valley Combined Authority

The following questions were asked in the interviews:

Process Questions	Impact Questions
Was the campus delivered as intended?	Has the DEC achieved the expected outcomes?
What do you believe worked well when delivering the campus? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved community engagement • Boosted the local economy
Were there any unexpected or unintended issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More job opportunities including work experience and internships
Has adequate accommodation been provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced government carbon emissions
What do you believe worked less well when delivering the campus? Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil service is more representative of the local area
How could the campus have been delivered at less cost?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved collaborative working • Boosting feelings of pride
To what extent was there appropriate outreach with the required stakeholders as part of the planning phase?	How and why have you (or your organisation) been impacted by the DEC?
What do you think could be improved if you were to deliver the project again?	Do you think that any of the outcomes can be attributed directly to the establishment of the campus? If so, which ones?
How could the campus have been delivered earlier?	Has the establishment of the campus resulted in any unintended outcomes?
What can be learned from the delivery methods used?	To what extent have different groups been impacted and why?
Was adequate resourcing allocated to the programme?	Have any of the outcomes been influenced by other external factors? If so, which ones?
Have any external factors influence delivery? If so, how?	What lessons have been learnt about setting up a new campus?

Table 2: Interview Questions

These interviews were recorded and transcribed to prepare for analysis. Thematic analysis of the answers to the questions was undertaken by the evaluation team via a synthesis session. Thematic analysis was also supported by use of Copilot.

4.2 Bias and validity

To address bias and validity in the evaluation, reference was made to the UK Evaluation Society's Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation.⁷ Several strategies were implemented that aligned with the principles of clarity, integrity, independence, accessibility, diversity, trust, equity and transparency as highlighted in these guidelines.⁸

Working as an independent evaluation team ensured that diverse perspectives were considered, reducing the impact of individual biases. A variety of sources, including existing documents, interviews, and surveys, were used to gather a representative sample of stakeholder opinions. This approach helped avoid over-reliance on any single source, which can introduce bias.

To ensure the integrity of the data, interviews were recorded and then transcribed directly from these recordings. This allowed for revisiting discussions in detail and ensured all points could be transferred accurately. This method also supported transparency by providing a clear record of interviews.

AI functionality, in the form of Copilot, was utilised for data analysis, and a synthesis session was held, which ensured that the data was reliable. This approach allowed for the verification of insights and findings, improving the reliability of the results.

Lastly, both quantitative and qualitative data were incorporated into the analysis. This balanced use of data types helped maintain equity, as equal consideration was given to numerical evidence and descriptive accounts, ensuring a fair evaluation process.

4.3 Limitations and constraints

During the course of this evaluation, a combination of interviews and surveys were employed to gather data. However, several challenges were encountered that may have impacted the comprehensiveness of the findings:

- **Time Constraints:** The project was subject to a short programme which limited the ability to engage with all individuals identified by HMT.
- **Group Interviews:** In some instances, stakeholders were interviewed together. This approach, while efficient, may have influenced the responses given.
- **Self-Selected Sample:** There could be potential bias due to the sample of people participating in the evaluation not being selected by an impartial party, but instead chosen by HMT, who commissioned this evaluation. This could lead to a sample that is not representative of the entire population of interest. Additionally, some external stakeholders who participated in the survey, were found by Drees and Sommer UK.
- **Individual Bias:** Individual bias references the personal prejudices or predispositions that each

⁷ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 2 - UK-Evaluation-Society-Guidelines-for-Good-Practice-in-Evaluation.pdf

⁸ Appendix B – Bibliography Ref 2 - UK-Evaluation-Society-Guidelines-for-Good-Practice-in-Evaluation.pdf

individual brings to their responses in the interviews and surveys. These biases could affect the accuracy of the data collected.

- Response Rate to Surveys: in the engagement period, only 18 survey responses were received. The views expressed by this sample may not accurately represent the views of the entire population of interest.

These constraints and limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the evaluation.

5.0 Findings – Process

5.1 Was the DEC delivered as intended?

Most of the interview participants believed that the campus was delivered as intended as illustrated in figure 1, below.

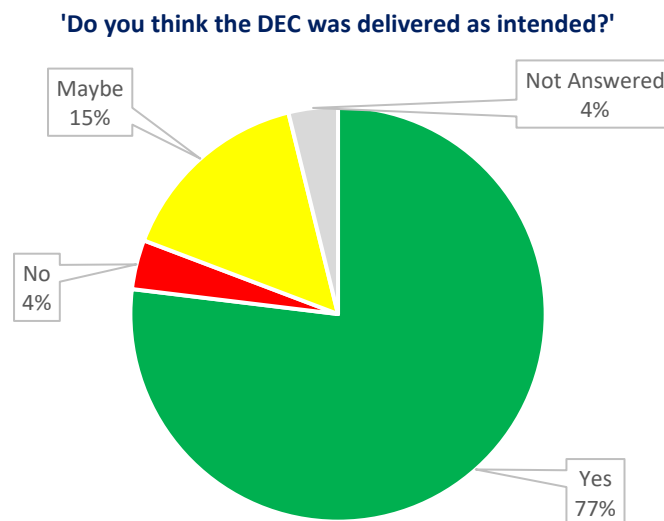


Figure 1 - Interview responses to "Do you think the DEC was delivered as intended?"

Participants also noted the following:

- The campus has over delivered in some ways, shown by the volume of recruitment that has been achieved, the frequent use of the site and the positive scores in employee surveys when compared to other civil service hubs in other areas of the country.
- The model has worked as it has succeeded in bringing new people into the civil service.
- The original intention of DEC was somewhat unclear at the project's outset and has evolved significantly since the initial announcement.
- The campus hasn't been fully delivered yet and therefore the answer to the question will only be known in 2 or 3 years' time.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, it has been determined that the campus has met its key investment objectives, which are summarised as follows (see section 2.3 for more detail):

- Establish an operational Economic Campus in Darlington by the end of the Parliament (i.e. December 2024), is environmentally sustainable, and has best-in-class accessible facilities.
- Attract and retain diverse talent and foster an inclusive culture.
- Effective policy making.
- Positive impact on the region.

A review of the documents provided by HMT reveals that the DEC has been successful in bringing nearly 900 new people into the civil service to date and has been popular in terms of recruitment and employee satisfaction. It has also fostered a sense of community, scoring high in employee surveys when compared to other sites. The DEC has brought policy advisors and decision-makers closer to the communities they serve, which is expected to inform policy with diverse voices and collective economic expertise. The impact of the DEC on policy-making is still developing and will become clearer over time.



"I've always felt as though we've got a voice... I think it's been a real a genuine collaboration."

5.2 Was there adequate resourcing allocated to the programme?

Due to the broad nature of this programme, resource should be thought about in the terms of what makes a programme successful: Sponsorship, Project Management and Change Management.

- **Sponsorship** – There was significant symbolism in the Second Permanent Secretary to the Treasury relocating to Darlington and this provided a very strong intention to the programme and provided significant leadership. DBT has also moved senior staff to DEC, on a comparable basis, with two Director Generals now based at the Campus. The programme also benefitted from senior sponsorship such as from ministers, who had a regular presence on the campus. There were 7 ministerial visits to the campus in between May and November 2023, 5 ministers were from HMT and 1 was from DBT and 1 from the Cabinet Office. There have also been 6 ministerial visits between January and June 2024, 4 of which were from HMT, 1 from DLUHC, and 1 from the Cabinet Office. Ministerial support played a significant role in campus delivery by championing the initiative of the DEC and enhancing its reputation. Without ministerial support, such as that from the then Prime Minister, the delivery of the campus may have been less successful.
- **Project Management** - The results of the interviews and document review show that while programme resource was overall broadly adequate, particularly in the HMT programme team and the GPA, as delivery partner; it was not sufficient at the very start of the project in terms of

managing outreach and culture. However, this changed as the project developed with the formation of a Darlington based leadership team. HMT’s lessons learnt document also highlights a lack of resourcing provided by the GPA at the level required to deliver workplace services for ‘day one’ of Feethams House which meant that some service issues (e.g., GovPass) took significantly longer to resolve than expected. It also impacted campus department delivery teams, in that it created an overhead for campus departments to put interim services in place.

There were some resource challenges noted in the interviews by stakeholders. For instance, participants advised that at the start of the project there was a high staff turnover at the GPA. There is a perception that the HMT programme team could have benefitted from more resource being in place earlier, although it should be noted the policy team was in place from 2020 and led on the identification and confirmation of the location and identification of those individuals to act as an initial advance party to work from Darlington. It was also noted that the outreach roles could have been recruited to earlier. In addition, departments sometimes had to use BAU resource to support the programme.

Table 3 highlights the HMT programme resource that was available over the course of the project and specifically details the leadership resource that was available (which includes resource for roles deputy director (SCS) and above). The resource in place, including leadership resource, played a crucial role in the delivery of the project.

	FY 20/21	FY 21/22	FY 22/23	FY 23/24	FY 24/25
Leadership Resource (Grade deputy director and above) (No.)	1.40	2.20	2.80	2.80	2.80
Other FTE Resource (No.)	12	16	13	11	8
Total Resource (No.)	13.40	18.20	15.80	13.80	10.80

Table 3: HMT FTEs for DEC delivery

- **Change Management** - The programme benefited from the individuals delivering the programme, such as the Heads of Campus, and felt that their enthusiasm, drive, commitment and overall work ethic had a positive influence on the overall success of the programme.



"A very clear political commitment, was given ... therefore as a direct consequence everyone performed and pulled as hard as they could."

There are some challenges to note:

- The delivery model is resource intensive and requires more resource than the delivery of a regular government hub.

- There was a need for surge resource during peaks of workload.
- The capital delivery team for the GPA was well resourced but the workplace services team didn't seem to have sufficient resource as this element was delivered later than expected by stakeholders.
- Smaller departments effectively donated headcount to support the programme delivery teams, which required being selective about task engagement. Some departments are now 'fully onboarded' with the GPA, meaning the GPA handles their estates and facilities management. This transition has led to a reduction in department-based estates staff and has limited their ability to engage in the development of DEC.
- At times there were issues with information being cascaded from the HMT programme team to the departments.
- The GPA had significant staff turnover at the start of the project, which affected continuity, but it should be noted that the objectives were ultimately delivered despite this.



"There's probably not enough recognition that if you're going to set up a new campus or office, and you want it to be a really thriving community, that that needs resource to support it."

5.3 Were there any unexpected or unintended issues?

The lessons learned exercise that was undertaken by HMT and completed in March 2023 focused on the delivery of the building, occupation and ongoing use and references that many of the day one services, such as building passes, were not ready when departments were being moved into Feethams House. This was a theme that was prevalent throughout the process interviews. In terms of these issues, there were no major problems and the problems that did arise were predominantly surrounding the provision of accommodation and less to do with other areas such as recruitment. The unexpected and unintended delivery issues from the process interviews are noted below:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Some stakeholder engagement did not work well during delivery as cascading information from the programme team to the departments sometimes lagged, impacting coordination.
- **Furniture and space management:** The DEC operates a fully open system in which staff from any department can sit anywhere, however, some departments perceived the "home zones" in place as being reserved seats due to department branding initially being displayed in these areas. This led to some expressing frustration at an adjacent department encroaching into what they perceived as being "their" area. Differing attendance levels between departments is a source of friction between some departments.
- **Governance and processes:** Some departments have a longer chain of command and therefore governance processes, put pressure on the project when seeking sign off or agreement. Some smaller departments were not as involved as they should have been and therefore this impacted decision making. This also led to some of these departments feeling like they were unable to effectively contribute to the establishment of the DEC.

- **Occupant relations and workplace services:** The GPA is experienced at managing multiple occupants in a hub scenario or a traditional building with space boundaries. Participants noted that they felt they were not as experienced in delivering a hub with open access where full interoperability is required. There were some key elements that were not in place when departments were moved into Feethams House. This included the café that was not in place until a year after initial occupation and when delivered, brought unexpected additional costs to the individual departments. The impact of this was potentially lessened by the town centre location, but there seems to be a gap between departmental expectations and delivery. The secure working space was also delivered later on in the project and therefore meant certain senior staff members could not work from Feethams House, until this time.
- **Building issues:** There were some maintenance issues that required remedial works at additional cost to the GPA.

5.4 How could the campus have been delivered at less cost and sooner?

Delivery Costs

Some considerations regarding potential cost savings are as follows:

- **Space and design:** Initially, the design did not supply the volume of desks required, which necessitated a later expansion to provide additional work points. It was felt that this expansion was more costly than if the additional spaces had been included from the start. Feethams House was delivered in line with the GPA's standard hub design rather than maximising use of what was known to be temporary space that was available within the building limits. Staff were given opportunities to feed in thoughts on the building design during landing parties, though as these took place before the building was in use it would have been too early to determine the need for extra desks. Both the building design and space allocation were areas where costs could have been optimised.
- **Building Maintenance and Upgrades:** Remedial works were required soon after Feethams House was operational, such as fixing windows, which incurred more costs for the GPA, suggesting that more thorough due diligence could have reduced cost.
- **Resource Management:** More resources could have been allocated at the outset, to the GPA and in establishing the Darlington-based HMT leadership team (who are responsible for working with the Heads of Campus from all departments and supporting Darlington-based staff and for leading on outreach and culture).
- **Facility Delays:** The late provision of key facilities such as secure working spaces, which affected access to higher security information, was highlighted as an area that incurred additional costs and could have been handled more efficiently. The delay in providing secure working spaces effectively prevented departments from recruiting and relocating more senior staff in some policy areas to Feethams House. The delayed setup of amenities such as the coffee shop and the need for additional furniture, added to the costs.

Delivery Programme



“A colleague said it was the best office building she’s ever worked in.”

The HMT lessons learnt review exercise stated that the pace of delivery was a particular concern in the process of establishing the DEC. To meet ministerial expectations, Feethams House was completed on an aggressive timeline. However, this haste led to decisions being rushed, particularly regarding design and layout. Some options were not fully explored due to time constraints, exacerbated by a lack of understanding across campus departments regarding GPA milestones. Additionally, ministerial approvals further limited the time available for considering alternatives. While commendable that the building opened within 12 months, some workplace elements (such as secure space) were not in place when it was occupied.

The interviews show that the campus was delivered as quickly as possible and bringing the delivery deadline forward would have negatively impacted upon the quality. For the DfE to offer space in Bishopsgate House and for the Council to have Feethams House available meant the project was accelerated. Feethams House opened floor by floor as each completed and did not wait for all workplace services to be available in order to move people in quickly. Some further considerations regarding the programme:

- **Project Initiation:** The time taken to decide the campus location delayed the start. Better initial coordination could have accelerated the delivery of the campus.
- **Facility Delays:** There were some delays in the provision of key facilities that impacted the usability of the DEC and a perceived delay in the provision of appropriately secure rooms that were required for particular staff members. Without the correct secure working facility in place, more senior roles in some policy areas could not effectively undertake their duties and often spent time in between Darlington and London.
- **Access Issues:** There was a 6-month delay for the provision of access passes for several departments which hindered their easy access to the building.

5.5 External factors that Influenced Delivery

- **Construction Inflation:** Construction inflation contributed to increased costs and possibly slowed the speed of delivery.
- **Market Conditions:** The lack of competition for office space in Darlington, and the landlord’s response to the opportunity, could have influenced the lease costs and the financial aspects of the project.
- **Regulatory Requirements:** Compliance with fire safety and other regulatory standards, such as the need for bomb-proof glass in particular areas, may have introduced unexpected requirements and costs.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The need for full stakeholder engagement and departmental approval

of aspects of the work, including designs, requirements and occupation, which was not always possible due to the pace of the programme, could have influenced the delivery, particularly in terms of meeting the specific needs of the departments.

- **Supply Chain Issues:** Delays in computer equipment due to a single supplier and the need for secure workspace accreditation could have affected the delivery schedule and the availability of fully operational office space.
- **Unforeseen Building Issues:** Maintenance issues at Feethams House required remedial work, adding to the costs and potentially affecting the delivery schedule
- **Ministerial Support:** The DEC programme had the visible backing of senior figures and ministers who had a presence on site which played a vital role in championing the goals and objects of the DEC.

5.6 Lessons to be Learned (Process)

Some key lessons learned from delivering the project are summarised below:

Reference	Category	Lesson
Culture		
1	Community Building	The creation of a campus fostered a sense of community, with Darlington scoring high in community feelings compared to other government hubs. This was seen as a success in integrating new starters into the civil service and eliminating silos.
2	Collaboration and Open Culture	Significant collaboration across the public sector. The leadership focused on practical delivery and promoting the campus’s purpose and vision, contributing to an open culture between departments.
Communication, Engagement, and Recruitment		
3	Effective Communication	The need for clear and consistent communication between all stakeholders throughout the project to ensure alignment and understanding of objectives and changes. A shared cross department vision was agreed early on that was adhered to for the duration of the project which was pivotal in the delivery of the DEC.
4	Stakeholder Engagement	The importance of engaging with all stakeholders, including end-users, throughout the project to gather feedback and ensure the final outcome meets their needs. Some stakeholder engagement did not work well during delivery as cascading information from the programme team to the departments sometimes lagged, impacting coordination.
5	Recruitment	The need for a comprehensive recruitment process, employing strategies such as centralised bulk recruitment, use of a recruitment delivery partner, and advertising roles in both London and Darlington. The recruitment processes in place ensured a range of seniority levels are represented at the DEC. Recruitment

Reference	Category	Lesson
		processes also placed emphasis on diversity and inclusion creating a diverse workforce that is representative of the public it serves.
6	Engagement and Communication	The 'Landing parties' and leaders using the space and engaging with others were well-received. Departments collaborated to create an area guide for new staff, indicating good communication and stakeholder engagement.
Design		
7	Space Planning	The restack of the building provided enough desk spaces with IT equipment, but there is a concern about space adequacy if everyone adheres to the 60% attendance requirement. Future DEC accommodation could utilise improved spatial planning.
8	Future-Proofing	The necessity to future-proof designs and plans to accommodate growth and changes in organisational structure or work practices, ensuring long-term viability of the accommodation.
9	Sustainability Focus	There was a focus on sustainability, with efforts made to reduce the environmental impact of the campus through energy-efficient designs and materials.
10	Innovative Solutions	Innovative solutions were implemented to overcome challenges, such as the use of modular furniture and technology to create flexible and adaptable workspaces.
Occupation		
11	Essential Services	The provision, or lack thereof, of day one systems and services were frequently cited when participants were asked, "What do you believe worked less well when delivering the campus, and why?" Security provision delays were often mentioned, highlighting that these delays hindered staff access to essential information and undermined the broader goal of decentralising the civil service. This aligns with the HMT Lessons Learnt document from March 2023, which notes that many day-one services, such as building passes, were not ready when departments began to move into Feethams House.
12	Phased Occupation	The phased occupation of Feethams House was also referenced as something that did not work well. The building was opened to departments floor by floor while construction continued in other areas, this added complexity to the accreditation process for secure spaces. This challenge is noted in the HMT Lessons Learnt document that states this approach was necessary to meet deadlines, but recognises that occupying the building during construction meant that some floors and meeting rooms weren't available, as well as some services, which could only be brought

Reference	Category	Lesson
		online once the building was complete. Rolling out floor by floor also created inefficiencies in delivery, with processes and resources needing to be booked in multiple times.
Project Management		
13	Cost Management	Some maintenance issues emerged shortly after Feethams House was operational, incurring additional costs for the GPA to conduct remedial works. The lease was considered by many as expensive due to lack of competition for that standard of office space.
14	Adaptability to Change	The impact of COVID-19 on work patterns compared to when the project started highlights the importance of adaptability in planning and design to accommodate unforeseen change.
15	Adaptability and Resourcefulness	The support from GPA and their positive attitude enabled quick delivery and appropriate responses to challenges. Having a single point of contact with HMT as the lead department facilitated swift actions and decisions.
16	Effective Project Management	The project was managed effectively, with clear objectives and milestones that were communicated to all stakeholders, ensuring everyone was aligned and contributing to the project's success.
17	Project Management	Lessons in project management, particularly in terms of scheduling and resource allocation, to ensure timely delivery and optimal use of resources. More resources could have been allocated for outreach work, as the task fell on just a few individuals.

Table 4: Lessons learnt from the delivery methods

6.0 Findings – Impact

Most of the survey participants have been positively impacted by the DEC as illustrated in figure 2, below.

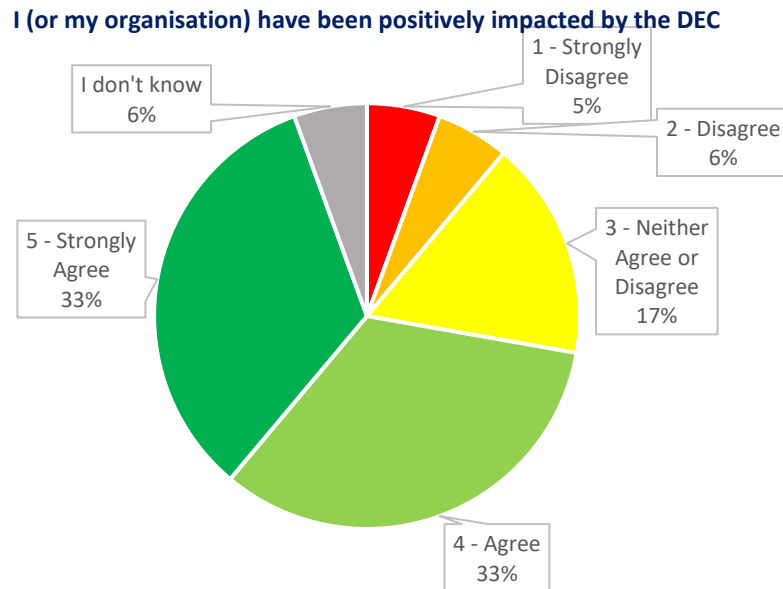


Figure 2: I / my organisation has been positively impacted by the DEC

6.1 Achieving its outcomes



“For [our department] specifically ... Darlington is our success story ... our engagement scores are ... a country mile above the rest of the organisation.”



“It impacts the rest of the organisation as the rest of the organisation looks to learn from some of the really new and exciting and innovative and dynamic things we've done.”

The DEC has achieved many of its anticipated outcomes, as evidenced by this evaluation. The DEC has undertaken significant community engagement, boosted the economy through the recruitment of local civil servants, and increased the use of office space in Darlington. There is less information available currently about DEC attracting international business or reducing carbon emissions. These were additional potential benefits identified during the evaluation interviews and therefore could be monitored in the future.

Operational Economic Campus in Darlington:

The new campus has been established in Darlington and is now into its third year of additional roles based in the town and continues to grow its presence. Eight government departments are now

represented within Feethams House, with over 880 FTE's. The workspace is well regarded by people that work there; they feel it is of good quality, well designed and supports them in their roles. Initially there were insufficient individual desk spaces, but following some adjustments, the workspace mix is now perceived as balanced and supportive of the work taking place. The use of central branding for the campus has supported the view that DEC is unique and different for the civil service and those involved in delivering it feel proud to have done so.

Attract and Retain Diverse Talent and Foster an Inclusive Culture:



"I was in London ... and I came home, as my wife's from Newcastle. So it was wonderful."

The creation of the campus has delivered its intended outcomes in attracting and retaining talent as well as creating an inclusive culture. DEC has contributed to the overall aim of the government to relocate 22,000 civil service roles outside of London and the south east, as shown through the data, with there being nearly 900 new roles currently based at the Campus, building on the 700 roles already existing at the DfE. The barrierless nature of the campus; how easily different departments can sit next to each other and work closely together is something that was lauded and should be held up as an example to the wider Civil Service.

The aspiration was for the vast majority of roles to be recruited from the region, with a small proportion of relocators, and this has been realised. The results of the evaluation show that the civil service is now representative of the local area as a result of the DEC. The campus has opened up significant career opportunities through the creation of these roles and departments have supported this with their own recruitment policies, such as HMT determining that all roles can be delivered from Darlington and 9.7% of applicants submitting Darlington as their preferred location for HMT roles which are advertised with multiple locations (as shown in the documents submitted by HMT as part of the document review). Participants commented that it was clear from the mixture of accents heard around the campus that recruitment had successfully diversified. Several specific examples of their colleagues' previous job roles before joining the civil service in Darlington, were provided, which included positions in the private sector and education. However, it is noted that while the DEC has a good proportion of SCS grade staff, the filling of senior roles has been a challenge for some departments and it has been acknowledged that this is an area that requires additional development.

Significant effort has been expended in developing a pipeline of talent from the local area and there is clear evidence of a forward plan and a clear mission that DEC is driving forward:

- Over 200 young people have come to the campus for a range of work experience and internship events between October 2023 and March 2024
- There has been focussed collaboration with the 5 regional universities, Teesside, Northumbria, Durham, Newcastle and York. There is a focus on building relationships, providing policy projects for both undergraduates and post graduates and creating partnerships in research. So far, representatives from DEC have attended 7 graduate recruitment events across the region (adding

Sheffield and Sunderland to those named above) and this has resulted in more than double the number of applications for the HMT graduate programme from the region in 2024

- There is engagement with schools and colleges across the North East region, with a broad range of activities covering multiple age groups. The plans for 2024 include a local policy competition and focussing visits in on the geographical areas with lower social mobility
- There is engagement with ex-forces via Catterick Garrison and through the local authority, engagement with older workers and those being made redundant in the local area. This helps to engage skilled professionals that are well into their working lives
- There have been a total of 77 apprentices based at Darlington, 66 are entry level and a further 11 are professional development apprenticeships (e.g. leadership apprenticeships)

Relocation of staff from London, the South East and Leeds were an important feature in the initiation of the programme, so that knowledge transfer was supported and existing staff were given an opportunity to relocate. Participants reported several stories of individuals choosing to take up the opportunity of relocating 'home' from London to be closer to their families.

In terms of diversification of the workforce across protected characteristics, HMT data tells us that recruitment within HMT is falling short of some targets as referenced in the benefits section (3.2.2). Therefore, although it is noted that diversity metrics for gender and socio-economic backgrounds are positive, more work is needed to diversify the workforce across all characteristics.



“We've got people who used to work in Primark, people who worked in the police, people who are from the army ... teachers ... even got an actor! There are people from massively diverse backgrounds ... being civil servants at the heart of government in the campus, and that's incredibly important ... when we're making policy and finding the answers to problems.”



“What's really important is building the pipeline for the future in terms of working with schools, colleges, universities and we're doing a lot here. There's something really important about our relationship with young people in the Northeast that we're part of a story that you don't have to leave the area as there are different types of jobs you can do.”

The DEC has created a unique and positive work culture for most. Participants, particularly those living locally, consistently expressed a positive outlook on the campus as both a workplace and a community. In civil service staff surveys, the Darlington campus has scored highly in community feelings, when compared to other government hubs. This is attributed to many social and development activities that promote contact with staff across all departments and promote individual wellbeing.



“Collective campus culture is very strong and ... the boundaries totally ... disappeared.”

The working experience and collaboration across departmental boundaries at Darlington is unique across the civil service and those with 10 – 20 years’ experience have never seen it before. This is supported by the programme of activities, which includes ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, shared directories, virtual channels and the creation of professional networks for various disciplines (e.g. analysts, change management). In addition, there are informal events, such as sports teams and annual events such as the winter ball.

Some issues were reported detailing the minor day-to-day frustrations that work against a true barrierless campus, for example, not all departments can access shared areas on MS Teams, issues remain in being able to seamlessly access the different buildings, the continued use of individual departmental consumables (i.e. stationary) rather than a shared store and the lack of consistency across departments in use of Govprint.

It should be noted that there were a number of challenges experienced when attracting talent, particularly in the recruitment of senior roles, which has not met some departments expectations and internal targets. Although relocators form a small proportion of staff and not all departments had a relocation offer, this shortfall was partly attributed to the usual age and stage of life of the individuals typically occupying these roles, which makes them less inclined to relocate from London. Moreover, the longstanding view that you need to be living in London to progress your career, means London remains a significant draw. This long held view is something the DEC challenges directly. This was highlighted by respondents who raised the need to expand ongoing efforts of the DEC in developing a regional talent pipeline through secondments and interchange with key focus areas in the region.

Effective Policy Making:



“We're not quite at the point of making real community driven place- based policy. I think we're making good strides to ... bring the community into DEC ... but I don't quite think we're there yet. I think we're a much better place than we would be if we were still ... in London.”

There was a mixed response on how effective the campus has been at effecting changes to the way policy is made in government, however, it must be noted it is an area difficult to assess at a high level and will become clearer over time, not least as the Campus grows and Darlington based staff make up a larger proportion of the overall numbers in their departments.

In the interviews some examples were given as to how this is starting to move in the right direction. An example provided was that outreach activity had identified that some businesses in the region are finding it challenging to secure financial investment; holding back economic growth. This has since been developed into a workstream in the DEC, brought to the attention of senior civil servants and

policy development is being pursued. Interviewees demonstrated there is significant buy-in to the idea of needing diverse inputs in order to make good policy. The overall view is that the ingredients for more diverse policy making are now present, but that there is further cultural change required within the Civil Service. Inter-departmental collaboration across multiple sites needs to continue to be driven forward to truly take advantage of the diversity now provided. Maintaining the use of hybrid meetings to bring teams across the country together, without having to travel to London, supports the development of this outcome. This is supported by the survey, with 55% of respondents agreeing that the DEC has improved collaborative working between government departments.

Positive Impact on the Region:



“Apprenticeships and Internships is a big thing. [...] It would have been offered in London, but I think it's been pushed even more because[we're] trying to grow a pipeline because the pipeline wasn't necessarily there.”

The DEC has had a significant positive impact on the region, with 67% of survey respondents agreeing that the DEC had a positive impact on themselves or their organisation. Some examples are summarised as follows:

- **Increased Revenue:** The DEC has contributed to increased revenue for local businesses through higher footfall and events, indicating a positive economic impact⁹
- **Engagement with Education:** There have been successful engagement sessions with Northumbria and Teesside University students, and other local universities, raising awareness of opportunities in the Civil Service through the DEC. 77 individuals have enrolled in the apprenticeships offered by the civil service at the DEC.
- **Business Community Support:** The business community has responded positively to the DEC being in Darlington, with benefits cited such as investor interest, improved physical environment, job creation, and higher career aspirations for local people.
- **Area Enquiries and Visibility:** Enquiries for the area have increased as businesses seek proximity to the DEC, enhancing the region’s visibility nationally.
- **Career Opportunities:** The DEC has provided great career opportunities, allowing individuals to support the work of government without relocating to London.
- **Social Diversity:** HMT has been able to recruit a more socially diverse workforce since the creation of the DEC, meaning that more people from lower socio-economic groups are now afforded the opportunity to work in the civil service.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Regularly convened business representative groups, provide an opportunity for business to share their views and challenges directly with policy makers, increasing the influence of business in the region.
- **Local Pride and Investment:** The investment in Darlington has instilled local pride and is seen as a step towards the town’s prosperity, with the introduction of well-paid, high-profile roles.

⁹ NB. The value for money and economic evaluation of DEC is to be completed as a later phase of evaluation.



“We're part of the story about the town and how it's developing.”

78% of the survey respondents agreed that DEC has provided more job opportunities (as identified in figure 3), including work experience and internships. The positive impact of DEC in creating well-paying jobs in the area is frequently cited. This is somewhat supported by ONS data showing an increase in the upwards trend of regional and local wage growth (as identified in figure 4). Darlington Borough Council and Tees Valley Combined Authority reported positive economic and social outcomes through their interviews.

The DEC has created more job opportunities include work experience and internships

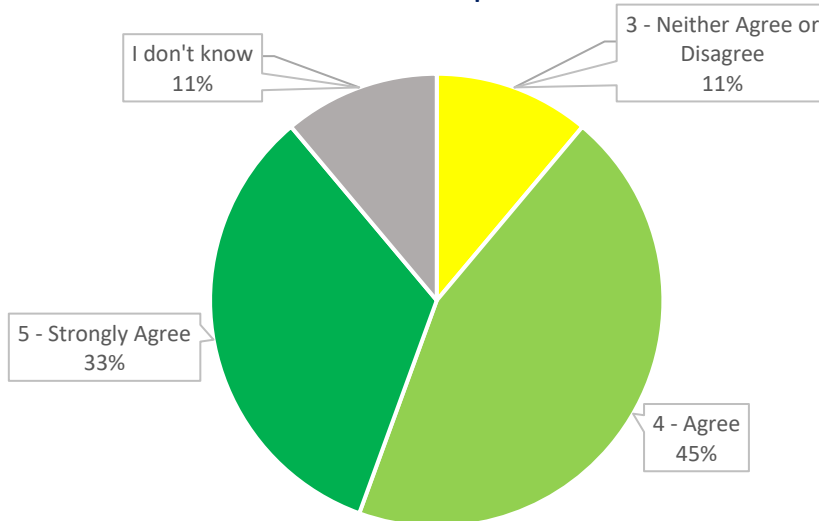


Figure 3 - The DEC has created more opportunities

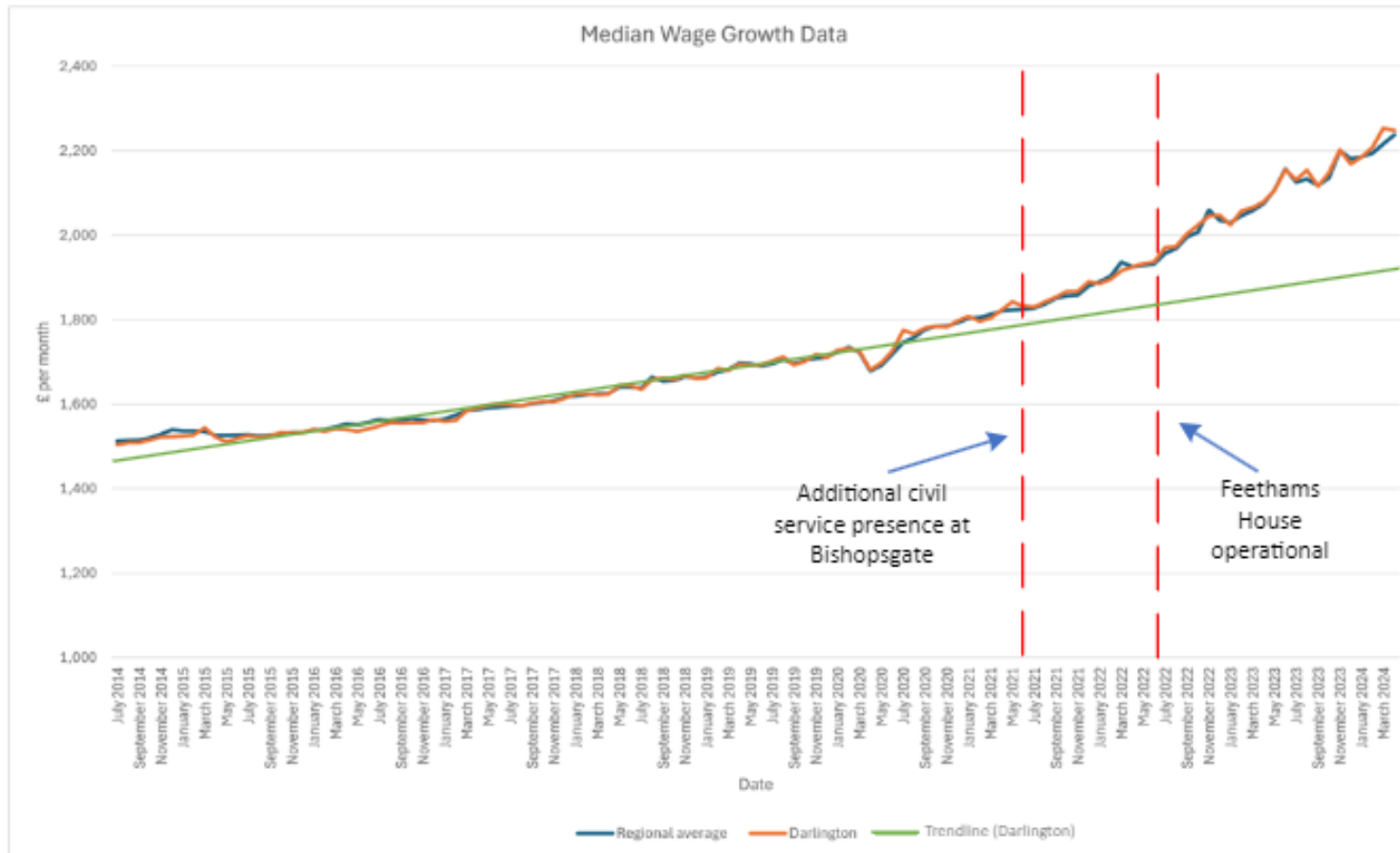


Figure 4 - Median Wage Growth Data March 2024 Darlington compared to regional average. (ref Earnings & Employment from PAYE Real Time Information, UK, ONS dataset)

Whilst there is general consensus that the creation of jobs by the DEC has boosted the local economy, opinions vary widely on the other ways in which the DEC has stimulated economic growth.

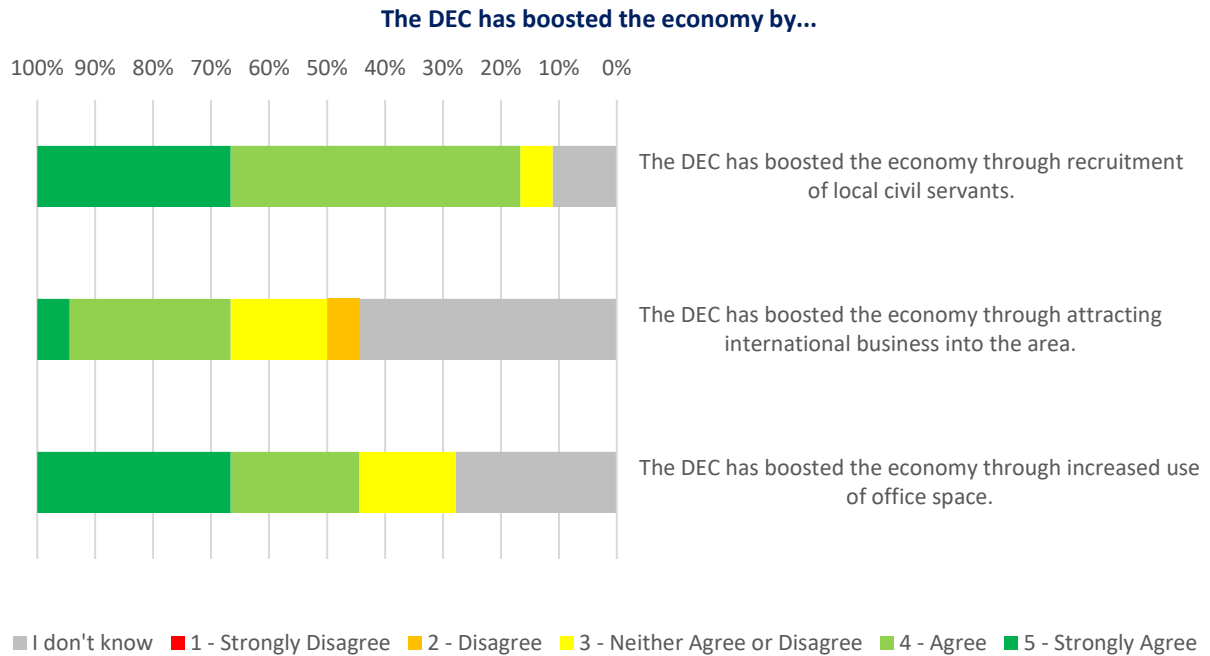


Figure 5 - The DEC has boosted the economy by ...

These views included:

Office space:

- The local authority reported a 'huge amount' of business enquiries showing interest in the area and an increase in legal firms moving to the area.
- There have been claims that international businesses, such as large consultancy companies, are planning to locate themselves in the immediate area. Although some firms have expressed an intention to do so, this has not yet materialised.

Town Centre impacts:

- There are diverging views on the economic impact of this on Darlington Town Centre.
- The local authority reports a change in shopping habits influencing town centre businesses.
- Feethams House building access data tells us there is an average of 900 people per week regularly attending the office and potentially making use of the local facilities such as shops and cafes.
- Some noted a lack of obvious growth, stating that many staff appear to bring their own lunch and noted there is less of an 'after work' socialising culture than found in London.
- Others contended that the DEC had spurred economic growth in Darlington, citing anecdotal evidence such as recognising familiar faces in queues at popular coffee shops, as an indication of such growth.

There has been significant and successful engagement with the skills and learning agenda in the region. In addition, there has been relationship building and engagement with the local authority, the combined authority and businesses.

Overall, participants believe that the DEC has had a positive impact locally. The survey found that 44% of respondents agreed that DEC had boosted feelings of pride amongst the local community, with only 6% disagreeing with this statement. Some stakeholders, based in the region before DEC, believe it has positively influenced local ambitions and a feeling of pride in their area.

Reduction in Carbon Emissions

While the campus currently centres around Feethams House, a BREEAM excellent building, which undoubtedly contributes to reducing carbon emissions, there is an overall lack of awareness as to whether the campus has reduced carbon emissions. Moreover, the travel-to-work area for Darlington is extensive, covering regions as far north as Northumberland and as far south as West Yorkshire (e.g. Leeds) and although Darlington is well-connected by rail, travel from rural areas often relies on car travel, which has its own carbon impact.

6.2 Direct Attribution of the Outcomes to DEC



“I feel very proud to be here.”

Whilst 45% of survey respondents agreed that the outcomes achieved can be directly attributed to the development of the DEC, it should be noted that it operated within a broader context where external factors and unforeseen challenges also played a role in shaping its impact to date:

Direct Influence of DEC:

- The DEC can be directly credited with creating well-paying jobs and attracting a larger workforce to Darlington, which has boosted the local economy.
- It has boosted community involvement and created a pathway for talent, leading to a civil service that better reflects the community and encourages local aspirations to pursue a career in the civil service.
- The DEC has been recognised for nurturing improved collaboration within and between government departments.

Other External Factors:

- External factors such as the Levelling Up agenda, local mayoral initiatives, and broader economic trends are considered to have contributed to the outcomes.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped how people work. The widespread adoption of hybrid working has resulted in teams collaborating much more via systems such as Microsoft Teams

rather than in person, which reduces ‘water cooler’ conversations and makes for a level playing field for intra-team communications when people are split over multiple sites. In turn, hybrid working has resulted in people dividing their time in between working from home and from the DEC which ultimately provides for a greater number of people to be employed at the campus.

Unforeseen Challenges:

- Some outcomes, such as the impact on policy making are less measurable and may not have been directly attributable to the DEC alone.
- Issues such as the lack of awareness of the environmental impact indicate that not all outcomes were as expected or desired.

6.3 The Impact of the DEC on stakeholder groups

The impact of the DEC has been multifaceted, affecting departments, the community, and local businesses in various ways, from economic growth and job creation to community engagement and cultural shifts.



“it was 5 o'clock on a Friday once, and I needed to find someone in the department for levelling up. ...And by 5:30 on a Friday night, I was talking to the right person and it was all sorted.”

Central Government Departments:

- The DEC has created a campus that fosters community, with Darlington scoring high in community feelings compared to other government hubs. This has allowed new starters to integrate well into the civil service and boosted cross-departmental collaboration.
- Recruitment has improved as the civil service has been able to draw on a different pool of talent with a different and wide ranging socio-economic background.
- Those based in Darlington feel they’ve been involved in something unique and it was not a simple relocation of government departments.
- The campus has created a more positive working culture with an appreciation for collaboration within and across departments and improved well-being of staff.
- The civil service has been able to draw on a wider range of views that would not have been possible otherwise.

Local Government:

- The DEC has been a catalyst for economic and social outcomes in the region, aiming to improve the local economy and community engagement. It has brought policy advisors and decision-makers closer to the communities they serve, which is expected to inform policy with diverse voices and collective economic expertise.
- Tees Valley Combined Authority has seen an increase in economic activity and interest from businesses due to the DEC’s presence, which has raised the profile of the region and may have influenced policy making and community engagement.

- The DEC has provided Darlington Borough Council with a long term tenant which contributes to local finances, but also played a significant role in fostering local economic growth and diversity.

Community:

- The DEC has been impactful in terms of community engagement, with efforts to build a talent pipeline for the civil service and initiatives to meet Diversity & Inclusion targets.
- It has also sparked a sense of pride among individuals, contributing to a more positive view of the North East and Darlington.
- Almost 900 new job opportunities and career choices are now present in the region; which didn't exist prior to DEC.

Local Business:

- Local businesses have seen economic growth through the creation of well-paying jobs and increased apprenticeships, with large consulting firms considering taking space in Darlington.
- The DEC has also raised the profile of the region, although there is a perceived negative impact on local house prices but this is considered unmeasurable due to the large area over which any effects are spread.

Education and Collaboration:

- The DEC has become a model for the government initiative to relocate civil servants out of London, and has influenced local education systems to tailor curricula for economic graduates and fostering stronger ties with regional universities.
- There's a drive for more collaboration, reflecting the DEC's role in enhancing the regional skillset and educational focus.

6.4 Additional outcomes

None of the survey participants felt they had been negatively impacted by the DEC as illustrated in figure 6, below.

I (or my organisation) have been negatively impacted by the creation of the DEC

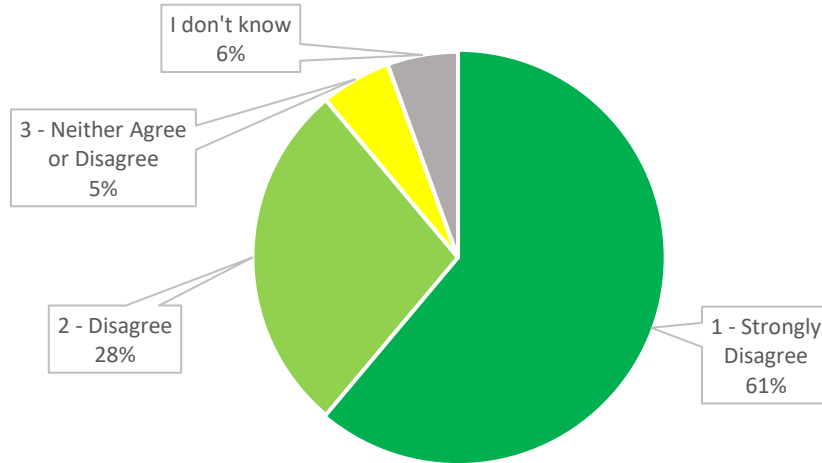


Figure 6 – I, or my organisation has been negatively impacted by the DEC

The interview participants highlighted some additional outcomes of the DEC not formally recorded as benefits, as follows.

Development and Economic Impact:

The DEC has spurred the development of significant logistical and office space, reportedly attracting developers from London and Switzerland. This development is part of a broader economic impact narrative, where the DEC is seen as a catalyst for positive change, drawing in international distribution companies, amongst others.

Recruitment and Talent Development:

There were anecdotal reports, showing concern, that the DEC is being favoured over other local employers. Although there is no direct evidence this is the case, it has led to improvements in recruitment strategies through both the public and private sectors and highlights the importance of focused talent development and training across the region as a whole.

Housing and Local Economy:

The local leisure facility, the Dolphin Centre, reports experiencing a boost in patronage and may actually face some scheduling complexities as a result of the DEC’s impact on the area. Additionally, there is the view that the presence of the DEC has helped maintain a buoyant housing market and will support increased residential development in the area. This may be linked to the increase in local incomes (see Figure 5), which could be partly attributed to DEC, but also the wider economic development across the region. The rise in incomes positively influences the development of residential sites by closing the ‘viability gap’—a scenario where there is little profit to developers as the cost of development is high and incomes and subsequent sales value is low. Construction costs

have risen beyond inflation and therefore this gap was leading to suppressed levels of house building in the Tees Valley region. The increase in local incomes across the region encourages house building.

Transport and Accessibility:

The location of the DEC presents some transport challenges for nearby towns. Although the north-south connectivity between major towns and cities is good, the east-west links are less well developed. There is a need for better public transport links to ensure the benefits of the DEC are accessible to a wider community.

Perception and Integration:

The DEC's initial success raised questions about its impact on local businesses and housing prices, but there is a sense of integration with the local and regional ecosystem. The DEC's comparison with London highlights a shift in opportunities, with a need to ensure Darlington is not seen as lesser and to maintain the barrierless working culture. Conversely, for departments with a presence at Darlington, but also in other government hubs around the country, there is concern that the focus on the growth of DEC may lead to other locations being dismissed.

6.5 Lessons to be Learned (Impact)

Key lessons from an impact perspective are summarised as follows:

Reference	Category	Lesson
1	Communication & Collaboration	The collaboration between government departments (both formal and informal) should be replicated in other hubs.
2		Cross-departmental working and collaboration is possible across the Civil Service.
3	Office Space and Infrastructure	There has been a significant demand for individual desks, and less collaborative space and breakout areas.
4		The final barriers to creating a true campus with no boundaries needs to be addressed by the wider civil service. For example, enabling easy access to cross departmental systems, the ability to print at any print location, immediate IT support, pass access, and stationary supply.
5		IT support can be slow, due to no immediate support being available on campus.
6		The office space is of good quality and inclusively designed.
7	Leadership & Community	The porosity and the way that different departments can sit next to each other and work closely together is something that should be held onto with other campuses.
8		The importance of confidence and creating a brand to attract people and create a sense of values and community.
9		The ability to dial in and participate in meetings and discussions without having to go to London is important.
10	Measurement & Planning	There is a need for clear measures of success to be agreed and measurement of them to be set up from the beginning to improve the ability to measure impact.

Table 5: Lessons to be learned

in future projects. The recruitment processes in place at the DEC ensured a range of seniority levels are represented. Recruitment processes also placed emphasis on diversity and inclusion which should be considered in future projects creating a diverse workforce that is representative of the public it serves.

In conclusion, while the DEC project has had its challenges, the overall success and the valuable lessons learned from its delivery provide a robust framework for future government hub projects. The experiences and insights gained from the DEC can contribute to more effective and efficient project management and delivery in the future.

7.2 Impact



Figure 8 - Key word summary of the impact evaluation depicting the frequency of words used by evaluation participants

It is clear that what has been created at the DEC is something unique within the civil service and has had multifaceted positive impacts on its departments, the community, and local businesses. The impact ranges from economic growth and job creation to community engagement and cultural shifts.

The programme, specifically including the provision of dedicated and invested staff, has ensured that community engagement and the recruitment of local civil servants has been well resourced, wide ranging and targeted.

The DEC has achieved many of its expected outcomes but it has also resulted in some additional unrecorded outcomes. For example, it is seen as a contributor to the broader economy of the region alongside the airport and freeport; together making the region a more attractive proposition for business and also retaining talent, rather than losing it to other regions of the UK. It is noted that there are also geographical limitations to the potential reach of the DEC as Darlington currently presents

transport challenges for nearby towns, especially on the east-west axis, suggesting a need for better public transport links to ensure the benefits of the DEC are accessible to an even wider community.

Several lessons have been learned about setting up a new campus, such as the importance of communication, enthusiastic leadership and strategic resource management in creating successful, adaptive, and inclusive work environments.

Something unique has been created, with the potential for impact being far greater than a regular government hub. The expectations for the campus to deliver on these outcomes should remain high, not least because more resource has been put into the delivery of the campus, but because of the wide reaching impacts through the local and regional economy that are possible.

7.3 The Future

The evaluation team is confident that the lessons from the DEC's initial development will guide its future evolution, including the new Brunswick Street building. The anticipated increase in employment at the DEC is expected to foster further cross-government collaboration.

8.0 Effective Practices

The following table summarises the effective practices; which should inform other similar projects within the civil service.

No.	Theme	Strategic / Operational	Effective Practice
1	Design	Strategic	Build on the learning from the change management that was successfully received during Feethams House delivery – e.g. landing parties.
2	Design	Operational	Take learning from the change between initial and subsequent working space design to build upon the existing GPA design standard.
3	Design	Operational	Ensure sufficient resource to develop workplace services to align buildings becoming operational.
4	Leadership	Strategic	Leaders of new programmes of change, whether based regionally or in London, must possess the influence and determination necessary to support effective collaboration across multiple locations.
5	Leadership	Strategic	Leaders of campus development programmes need to be both enthusiastic about and committed to the transformation, as they will drive initial decision-making processes and engage key stakeholders.
6	Leadership	Operational	Designate specific roles as ‘campus’ roles, with responsibilities centred on the campus’s development and collaboration efforts. Investing in leadership and

No.	Theme	Strategic / Operational	Effective Practice
			engagement capacities is crucial to ensure dedicated time and visibility on campus, which are essential for ongoing success.
7	Outreach	Strategic	Maintain engagement on a local level as well as a regional level.
8	People	Strategic	Change management and in-house and external talent development needs to be maintained across the civil service to ensure that the voices from the campus impact on policy making.
9	People	Strategic	Ensure sufficient resource is provided to the project should any handover of key personnel occur.
10	Programme	Strategic	Enable future campus development programmes to flex the main brief to take advantage of cross government collaboration and local circumstances, following a model of asset based development.
11	Programme	Operational	Be clear on the owners of tasks and the resource available from each department, to ensure timely delivery and accountability. Assess where resource may be lacking and plan to ensure that each stakeholder can play its part.
12	Programme	Operational	Harmonise monitoring of impacts at the start of a programme. It has been a challenge to obtain data from departments to evidence participants' reports.
13	Finance	Operational	Provide clarity on complete expected costs of the campus to all departments from the outset, which includes workplace services.

Table 6 - Effective Practices

9.0 Recommendations

The following are recommendations specifically for DEC, drawn out by the evaluation.

No.	Theme	Strategic / Operational	Recommendation
1	Design	Operational	Break down the final cross-departmental barriers that take away from the campus experience, such as differing MS Teams accounts, printing systems, stationary allocation and immediate IT support.
2	Design	Operational	Maintain the barrierless nature of the DEC to promote cross-departmental relationships and collaboration.
3	Leadership	Strategic	Departments to consider how they can refine their impact on policy and the economic focus of the campus. The location of

No.	Theme	Strategic / Operational	Recommendation
			the significant volume of staff has provided an excellent start and proved viability of the campus. To refine the focus on the 'economic' will strengthen the credibility of the campus and the positive impact it can have on policy making.
4	Outreach	Strategic	Discuss and implement an approach which ensures a renewed focus on social mobility.
5	Outreach	Strategic	Work with local governmental partners to tackle the challenge in recruiting at senior levels through secondments and nurturing talent. Look to create a pipeline at the more senior level.
6	People	Strategic	Increase the use of secondments and interchange with regional governmental partners such as the Combined Authority and Local Authorities, to improve the pipeline of senior talent.
7	People	Operational	Change management and in-house and external talent development needs to be maintained across the civil service to ensure that the voices from the campus impact on policy making.
8	Carbon	Strategic	Commission an expert review into the impact of the DEC on carbon emissions. Greater understanding is needed on the acquisition and disposal of buildings and the impact staff and travel behaviour has in the drive to reduce government carbon emissions, in line with government net zero targets.

Table 7 - Recommendations

10.0 Appendices

A. Glossary

Word/Acronym	Definition
CMA	Competition & Markets Authority
CoPilot	Copilot is an AI analytics tool that can assist with various tasks such as answering questions, writing, coding and creating content.
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Replaced by DESNZ, DSIT and DBT in 2023.
DBT	Department for Business and Trade
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media & Sport
DESNZ	Department for Energy, Security & Net Zero
DfE	Department for Education
DIT	Department for International Trade
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, now known as MHCLG, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
DSIT	Department for Science, Innovation & Technology
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GPA	Government Property Agency
HMT	HM Treasury
MHCLG	The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, which replaced DLUHC after the 2024 general election.
ONS	Office for National Statistics
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BAU	Business as usual
BREEAM	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methodology (an environmental assessment method for buildings)
DEC	Darlington Economic Campus
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MS	Microsoft

SCS

Senior Civil Servant

HR

Human Resources

B. Bibliography – external links

1. [Information on the DEC from the .gov website](#)
2. [Guidelines for good practice in evaluation \(UK evaluation society\)](#)
3. [Government budget speech from 2020 via the .gov website](#)
4. [Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK: May 2024 \(ONS\)](#)