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**Author**

LEBEAU, Yann (COCHRANE, Allan)

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Yann Lebeau and Allan Cochrane

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**Abstract**

Drawing on the experiences and statements of two universities, this article sets out to relate current trends and discourses of engagement of UK higher education (HE) institutions with their regional environment in the context of major policy shifts in HE and in regional governance. The 'third mission' is considered as an aspect of what universities do in place and in relation to other place-based agencies. In this process of exploration, we attempt to identify adjustment behaviours and discourses in contrasting regional contexts and to relate them to the unequal power of universities and to their structural embeddedness in a local socio-economic and policy fabric.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)