

# THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

*A manifesto for public engagement*





*Participant at 'Maximising Impact' event at Beacon North East, where delegates explored the role of public engagement.*

Beacon North East

*We are inviting universities and research institutes to sign up to this manifesto to celebrate and share their public engagement activity, and to express their strategic commitment to engaging with the public.*

## Manifesto for public engagement

**We believe that universities and research institutes have a major responsibility to contribute to society through their public engagement, and that they have much to gain in return.**

**We are committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and skills with the public, and to listening to and learning from the expertise and insight of the different communities with which we engage.**

**We are committed to developing our approach to managing, supporting and delivering public engagement for the benefit of staff, students and the public, and to sharing what we learn about effective practice.**

## The engaged university

Twenty-first century universities make a huge contribution to the life and success of the nation – through their teaching, their research, their students and their relationships with other organisations.

In recent years, with government encouragement, universities have worked hard to strengthen their mutually beneficial links with the local and regional economy and business community.

Now there is increasing recognition that higher education institutions can play an equally vital role in the UK's community, intellectual and cultural life through their engagement with the public. It is a role that enables institutions not only to rediscover their roots as active contributors to positive social change but also to gain practical benefits of lasting value.



*The benefits of public engagement to a university, its staff and students and wider communities are numerous, and need to be recognised, rewarded and valued by those in leadership positions.*

**Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell,  
President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester**



*Universities are very different places than they were even ten years ago, and their focus is much more outward-looking. The focus on dialogue, on exchange rather than simple knowledge transfer, which is the heart of true public engagement, is one of the greatest challenges for the modern university. It is also a significant opportunity for universities to reinvent themselves as a public good for the 21st century.*

**Professor Michael Worton, Vice-Provost, UCL**

# Universities make a difference

## The impact of public engagement



*The Butterfly Effect, CUE East & Partners, at the Norwich & Norfolk Sustainable Living Festival 2009: organised to bring university staff and students together with NGOs and community organisations to inspire discussion and debate about the future.*

Keiron Tovell

## Impact on your university

Higher education policy is increasingly explicit about the need for universities and research institutes to make a real commitment to public engagement<sup>1</sup>. Most are already engaging with the public in a rich variety of ways, but there is an opportunity to co-ordinate and support such activity better and to increase the benefits that flow from it. The rewards are long term and strategic.

### **It enriches the institution's research, teaching and learning**

Interaction with the public can demonstrably improve the quality of work undertaken in universities. Not only do members of the public challenge, enrich and broaden academic thinking, but projects that have been defined and researched in partnership with the public invariably result in greater impact and relevance<sup>2</sup>. Engagement can also enrich the curriculum in numerous ways<sup>3</sup>.

### **It helps the university to demonstrate accountability in a climate of increasing scrutiny**

Universities and research institutes receive billions of pounds of public money. Society and politicians are increasingly prepared to challenge investment in public services. Through public engagement, the sector can demonstrate its openness, transparency and accountability and ensure that there is well-informed debate and dialogue about future investment<sup>4</sup>.

### **It strengthens and enriches the university's brand and identity, and can increase public appreciation of and support for higher education and research**

People are cynical about old-fashioned marketing and branding. They increasingly base their judgements on personal experience and on the views of their trusted peers. Public engagement demonstrates a university's willingness to listen and to change, and can provide a safe space for dialogue and debate, meeting a demand for authentic and stimulating experiences<sup>5</sup>. In the process it helps to build genuine understanding and appreciation of the sector<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research (2010) which describes research funders' commitment to public engagement, and Pathways to Impact, RCUK (2010) which describes public engagement as a pathway to maximise the social and economic impact of research.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Nanodialogues. Experiments in Public Engagement with Science, Demos, London (2007)

<sup>3</sup> Student Community Engagement and the Development of Graduates Attributes, Mason O'Connor, K. et al (2011); from Journal of Education and Training, Special Edition on Student Learning from Community Engagement.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Evaluation of the Research Councils UK Public Dialogue on UK Energy Research, RCUK/Shared Practice (2008)

<sup>5</sup> See Public Attitudes to Science 2008, RCUK/DIUS (2008) for evidence of this demand from the public.

<sup>6</sup> See Universities Week survey, UUK (2010) which revealed that, currently, less than one in five people 'recognise the wider impacts universities have on society'.

# Impact on your students and staff

Embracing public engagement can transform the educational experience of students, and stimulate and develop your staff.

## Public engagement motivates and develops staff and students

The vast majority of staff and students believe they have a duty to explain their work and its social and ethical implications to the public<sup>7</sup>. Through engaging with the wider public, they develop a range of transferable skills, for instance in leadership, communication, listening, partnership working and project management<sup>8</sup>.

## It helps to sensitise universities and their staff and students to social and ethical issues, and to stay in tune with wider social concerns.

Three quarters of the public believe that academics should listen more to what ordinary people think and over half believe that scientists pay insufficient attention to potential risks<sup>9</sup>. Seeking to discuss issues with the public, and to listen to their aspirations and concerns is a requirement in the new Universal Ethical Code<sup>10</sup>. Engaging with the public helps staff and students to understand better these kinds of social and ethical concerns and the implications for their own work<sup>11</sup>.

## It enriches the student experience

Students are looking for a higher education experience that is relevant to the needs of today's society and that will equip them for their future lives and careers: 49% of students surveyed in 2010 had volunteered in the previous year – with 95% motivated by a desire to improve things or help people. Ensuring they can access a range of formal and less formal opportunities to engage with the public, for instance through volunteering, provides students with the kind of socially committed higher education they demand; it also develops their employability and life skills<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The Role of Scientists in Public Debate, Wellcome Trust/MORI (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Evidence Counts. Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue, Sciencewise-ERC/BIS (2010)

<sup>9</sup> Towards a Better Map: Science, the Public and the Media, ESRC (2009)

<sup>10</sup> Rigour, Respect, Responsibility. A Universal Ethical Code for Scientists, GOS/DIUS (2007)

<sup>11</sup> Evidence Counts. Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue, Sciencewise-ERC/BIS (2010)

<sup>12</sup> Bursting the Bubble: Students, Volunteering and the Community, NCCPE/Institute of Volunteering Research (2010)

## Impact on civil society

Public engagement helps universities maximise the benefits of their work to society – helping them to keep abreast of public concerns and expectations and to support real-world problem solving.

### **Public engagement helps to maximise the flow of knowledge and learning between universities and society**

Through their staff, students and facilities, universities possess huge potential to catalyse learning and innovation in wider society – with, for example, nearly 6 million people enjoying university collections and public lectures every year<sup>13</sup>. Strategic investment in public engagement helps to maximise this potential by focusing attention and support on the multiple, often informal, ways in which universities enrich the lives of the wider public.

### **It contributes to social justice and corporate responsibility and can lead to a range of positive social outcomes**

By embedding public engagement in their work, universities are better able to respond to social need locally, nationally and globally. They can make a positive contribution to social justice<sup>14</sup>, develop more effective ways of helping people to make a difference and significantly raise aspiration<sup>15</sup>. Through their contact with student volunteers, external organisations see universities as valuable repositories of talent, creativity and enthusiasm<sup>16</sup>.

### **It can help to build trust and mutual understanding**

Trust is critical to a healthy higher education system and to its licence to practice, but it is difficult for trust to take root unless there are opportunities for the public to engage with universities' work. Over three quarters of the public agree that 'we ought to hear about potential new areas of science and technology before they happen, not afterwards'<sup>17</sup>. Engagement creates space for trust and understanding to grow, at a time when deference to authority and to professional expertise is decreasing<sup>18</sup>.

### **It generates unforeseen outcomes, and stimulates creativity and innovation**

One of the most profound joys of public engagement is its unpredictability: fresh perspectives, challenging questions, lateral insights - all can help to sharpen thinking, release precious energy and creativity and unlock new collaborations and resources<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>13</sup>Universities: Engaging with Local Communities, UUK (2010)

<sup>14</sup>Universities: Engaging with Local Communities, UUK (2010)

<sup>15</sup>Evidence Counts. Understanding the Value of Public Dialogue, Sciencewise-ERC/BIS (2010)

<sup>16</sup>Bursting the Bubble: Students, Volunteering and the Community, NCCPE/Institute of Volunteering Research (2010)

<sup>17</sup>Public Attitudes to Science 2008, RCUK/DIUS (2008)

<sup>18</sup>Science in Society Research Programme, ESRC

<sup>19</sup>The NCCPE's website ([www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)) contains a host of case studies from the Beacons and vInspired students project that illustrate this.

## What your university can do



*The Discover Science event run by the University of Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland during the Edinburgh International Science Festival: an exciting range of hands-on science activities for families, provided mainly by University staff and students.*

Douglas Robertson

# Developing a strategic approach to public engagement

Public engagement happens spontaneously and naturally in universities and research institutes. However, it also needs support and leadership to fulfil its potential. The Beacons for Public Engagement<sup>20</sup> and the **v**inspired students project<sup>21</sup> have revealed how a strategic and co-ordinated approach can make a huge difference to the overall impact of this work. Such an approach means taking action in the areas outlined below.

## Sense of purpose

Creating a shared understanding of the purpose, value, meaning and role of public engagement among staff and students, embedding this in your strategy and mission, and evidencing its importance publicly

## Leadership at all levels

Supporting champions across the organisation – including at the very highest levels – to embrace public engagement

## Reward and recognition

Recognising and rewarding staff and student involvement within recruitment, promotion, workload planning and performance review systems, and celebrating success with awards or prizes

## Listening and learning

Offering opportunities for learning and reflection to improve engagement practice, and providing support for continuing professional development and training

Learning as an institution as well as at an individual level

## Involving the public

Investing in people, processes and infrastructure to support and nurture the involvement of individuals and organisations external to the university, for instance through help desks or brokerage

## Involving students

Proactively involving students in shaping the public engagement strategy, and maximising opportunities for them to engage with the public, through the curriculum and through volunteering, building on the approaches piloted in the **v**inspired students project

## Joining it all up

Co-ordinating the delivery of public engagement to provide opportunities for everyone to get involved, maximise efficiency, target support, improve quality, foster innovation, join-up thinking and monitor involvement and impact

<sup>20</sup>Funded by the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust, the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative was launched in 2008 to inspire a culture change in how universities and research institutes engage with the public.

<sup>21</sup>The NCCPE also secured funding from **v**, the National Young Volunteers service, to run the **v**inspired students project. The project aims to inspire a cultural shift in the sector, encouraging universities to recognise the value of student volunteering as part of their core work, and to galvanise a step-change in the quality, quantity and diversity of student volunteering.

# Picturing Public Engagement

Public engagement describes the many ways in which higher education institutions and their staff and students can connect and share their work with the public. Done well, it generates mutual benefit, with all parties learning from each other through sharing knowledge, expertise and skills. In the process, it can build trust, understanding and collaboration, and increase the sector's relevance to, and impact on, civil society. The photographs in this brochure give a flavour of the wide range of public engagement activity currently taking place in the UK. You can find more examples at [www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)



Young people participating in a summer school for Gifted and Talented Youth organised by Bristol University.

**Dave Pratt**



PhD student Sheila Kanani speaks at Bright Club, UCL's variety night, where researchers perform stand-up comedy about their work.

**Hilary Jackson**



The Butterfly Effect Project at the Norwich and Norfolk Sustainable Living Festival, organised by the CUE East Beacon. A giant map is used to elicit public input to UEA research into the future of the Norfolk Broads.

**Keiron Tovell**



Students and school children involved in the On Our Doorsteps Volunteering Project. Initiated by the University of Brighton, this pilot project for vintpired students offered a new approach to student volunteering, working in collaboration with the community.

**Stephen Lawrence, from Snap it Now**



As part of the Future Animals project, supported by the Beacon for Wales, young people worked alongside archaeologists, scientists and an artist to explore past and present fauna. Pupils designed 'future animals', with the artwork exhibited in the National Museum of Wales.

**Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales**



Participant at 'Maximising Impact' event at Beacon North East, where delegates explored the role of public engagement.

**Beacon North East**



The Butterfly Effect, CUE East & Partners, at the Norwich & Norfolk Sustainable Living Festival 2009: organised to bring university staff and students together with NGOs and community organisations to inspire discussion and debate about the future.

**Keiron Tovell**



Nutritionist Dr Amelia Lake is setting up an 'expert' panel of young people who will influence public health research. Amelia is a fellow at Beacon North East

**Picture courtesy of North News and Pictures**



The Discover Science event run by the University of Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland during the Edinburgh International Science Festival: an exciting range of hands-on science activities for families, provided mainly by University staff and students.

**Douglas Robertson**



In collaboration with the Vitae North West Hub, the Manchester Beacon for Public Engagement offered small seed awards to create opportunities for early career researchers to communicate their research in an inspirational, accessible and relevant way to local communities. For example – this intergenerational open day in Ramsbottom was based on academic research into the experiences of Channel Island evacuees who came to Bury and Tootington during World War Two.

**Jan Chlebik**



Launch of the DrugsFutures project, bringing together specialists and non-specialists to shape the future of drugs policy through consultation. The project was funded by Sciencewise-ERC and co-ordinated by the Academy of Medical Sciences.

**BA/Laura Mtungwazi**



## Beacons for Public Engagement

Funded by the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust, the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative aims to inspire a culture change in how universities and research institutes engage with the public.

It consists of:

- the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), which co-ordinates, captures and shares learning between the Beacons and across UK higher education institutions and research institutes;
- six Beacons, university-based collaborative centres that help support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement work. The six Beacons are based in Newcastle and Durham; Manchester; CUE East UEA; UCL; Wales; and Edinburgh.

## vinspiredstudents

The NCCPE is also funded by **v**, the National Young Volunteers Service, to run the vinspired students project.

## Find out more

There is a host of resources on our website to support staff and students in universities who want to find out how to conduct and support effective public engagement.

[www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)

