Community-University Research Partnerships: United Kingdom

Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement

This case study provides an overview of the policies in place to support community-university engagement and community-based research in the United Kingdom, and provides some vignettes of how these policies are being implemented in university and community settings.

The National Policy Context

The last 15 years have seen an increasing interest from UK policy makers in how to effectively incentivise deeper engagement between universities and wider society. Much of this activity has been focused on research partnerships with business, but increasingly interest is spanning across the broad range of disciplines and considers social and cultural, as well as, economic benefits.

Whilst there are a range of factors, for simplicity we will consider two different motivations for these developments. The first is centred on challenges around trust and responsibility, leading to a series of interventions to address the cultural factors that inhibit researchers from embedding engagement in their practice. The second concerns the need for research activity to be better tuned to social need: to be more relevant and responsive, and to demonstrably contribute and account for its value to society.

The Science in Society Agenda: Addressing Declining Trust in Science

From the 1980s onwards there has been a growing concern as to the extent to which the public understand, trust and feel engaged in scientific research. Initially, the response to this focused on ‘public understanding’ of science which sought to communicate and explain science better so that the public would be more likely to support investment in it. Over time this deficit view was challenged. Public resistance and protests about emerging areas of research—such as Genetically Modified crops—made policy makers aware of the jeopardy in not taking better account of public opinion. New thinking about how best to address such fractures in trust and understanding brought fresh insights into how to effectively build engagement into the science and research system. It was recognised that the public didn’t want science ‘explained’ to them, but wanted genuine engagement in debating the ethics and direction of research. More generally, it was recognised that it was vital
to take account of the social and ethical context within which new research was being commissioned and to feed this social intelligence into the system to anticipate and address public concern and interest. This led to an array of funding and policy instruments, including:

- the creation of the Science Media Centre (www.sciencemediacentre.org) to address the often dysfunctional relationship between scientists and the media
- the creation of the Public Attitudes to Science Survey (Ipsos-MORI, 2014) set up to track the levels of trust and engagement between publics and science
- the Sciencewise expert resource centre (www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk), established to build capacity in effective dialogue with the public to ensure social intelligence was being captured and used to evolve new research priorities

The problem came to be seen as more complex than narratives about public ‘misunderstanding’ could capture. A big part of the challenge was the lack of commitment and capability within the science and research community to listen effectively to the public and to engage them in their work. A critical intervention was a survey commissioned by the Wellcome Trust and the Royal Society to explore the factors affecting this (Royal Society, 2006). The survey of nearly 1500 scientists revealed deep cultural and structural challenges that needed to be addressed if a more healthy culture of public engagement was to be realised:

- 64% said the need to spend more time on research was stopping them getting more engaged
- 29% said that time taken away from research was the main drawback for engaging with the public
- 20% agreed that scientists who engage are less well regarded by other scientists

The research assessment exercise was cited as a key driver influencing the academic community in the UK and as having a negative influence on science communication. Science communication was viewed as ‘altruistic’ and not a central part of academic life. All in all, a toxic climate for engagement to flourish:

…in the qualitative interviews, several researchers highlighted that public engagement activity was seen by peers as bad for their career. A further message that emerged was that public engagement was done by those who were ‘not good enough’ for an academic career; and that public engagement was seen as ‘light’ or ‘fluffy’, and risked reinforcing negative stereotypes for women involved in such activity. (Royal Society, 2006, p. 11)

The report contributed to the establishment in 2008 of a major culture change initiative in UK Higher Education, the ‘Beacons for Public Engagement’
This £9.2m four-year initiative led to the establishment of 6 Beacon projects around the UK and the founding of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, hosted by the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England. The Beacons project built directly on the ‘Factors Affecting’ survey and report, and was set five aims:

1) create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students;

2) build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved;

3) ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level;

4) create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise; and

5) enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning.

As far as we are aware, this initiative was a unique attempt by national research funders to address these cultural and professional issues, across all research areas—not just the sciences. It was supported by all the key funders of research, namely the UK HE funding councils, the Research Councils and the Wellcome Trust. The project did useful work to identify the key factors affecting culture change and developed a range of ‘self-improvement tools’ for HEIs which have been shared widely and taken up by many institutions.

While the Beacons focussed on 6 university partnerships, a key role of the NCCPE was to work across the UK. A significant part of this work to bring other HEIs into the network was the Manifesto for Public Engagement (NCCPE, n.d.(d)) which set out a high level commitment to 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 NCCPE also consulted widely to develop a definition of public engagement, to help clarify the scope of their work and provide common purpose across the sector:

Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit (NCCPE(e), n.d.).

In parallel, the funders sought to make their expectations about public engagement more explicit. A consortium of research funders came together to develop a Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research (Research Councils UK, (a), n.d.)). Importantly, this included the core funders of the Beacons, but also invited other funders to join the consortium to develop “a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders in the UK” (Research Councils UK (a), n.d.)).

Building directly on the work of the Beacons project, the Concordat identified four principles to encourage those they fund to develop strategic support for engagement:

• UK research organizations have a strategic commitment to public engagement
• Researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities
• Researchers are enabled to participate in public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities
• The signatories and supporters of this Concordat will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector’s progress in fostering public engagement across the UK (Research Councils UK (a), n.d.))

Along with the Concordat, expectations about public engagement were also woven into the development of other frameworks for research, the most notable of which was the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) (Vitae, 2012) which sought to define a core set of professional skills and capabilities for all researchers to underpin training and development across the academic sector. Amongst four domains, ‘Engagement, Influence and Impact’, was included alongside the more traditional domains of Research Governance and Organisation; Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities; and Personal Effectiveness. The NCCPE supported the development of the RDF and created a public engagement ‘lens’ which provided a more in depth account of the skills and capabilities required for public engagement, as well as developing training, and resources including the booklet ‘The Engaging Researcher’ (www.vitae.ac.uk/images/vitae-publications/the-engaging-researcher-booklet.jpg/view).
The Research Councils chose to fund a second wave of culture change projects in 2011: the Catalysts for Public Engagement (NCCPE (b), n.d.) in which eight universities were funded for three years to embed strategic support for public engagement. The original consortium of funders who founded the NCCPE has continued to invest in the centre to provide support for HEIs across the UK to develop a culture that is conducive to the development of high quality practice. The centre inspires and equips leaders to embed engagement in their institution; supports the development of high quality, impactful engagement; connects people together to enhance their work; and works with policy makers and funders to help align policy and funding interventions to enhance engaged practice.

The Research Impact Agenda: Relevance and Accountability

In parallel with these strategic investments to embed a more socially engaged research culture, there have been significant developments in the funding mechanisms for research and the extent to which these incentivize public engagement.

As in many other countries, there has been a long tradition in the UK of supporting ‘Knowledge Transfer’ and more recently ‘Knowledge Exchange’ activities within universities. In the UK a specific fund—the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)—was established in 2001 to provide funding to universities to invest in infrastructure and activity to facilitate the exploitation of research.

Although the bulk of this funding is directed at industrial and commercial activity, community and public engagement is also encouraged, and many universities have used their HEIF to invest in infrastructure to support such engagement. The impact of this funding is tracked by the ‘HE Business and Community Interaction Survey’ (Higher Education Funding Council, n.d.) which asks HEIs to account for how they have invested their innovation funding and to detail the returns from this. Useful summary reports are accessible on the HEFCE website (www.hefce.ac.uk/whatsnew/kees/heif). PACEC’s report Strengthening the contribution of English HEIs to the Innovation system: Knowledge Exchange and HEIF funding offers a conceptual framework to describe the different ways in which university knowledge and research contributes to communities (Public and Corporate Economic Consultants, 2012, pp. 73-4):

- **Facilitating the research exploitation process** through, for example, supporting the contract research process, consultancy activities and licensing/spin-outs through technology transfer.

- **Skills and human capital development** of academics, students and those external to the HEI through, for example, CPD, training for academics and students, providing entrepreneurship and employability training etc.

- **Entrepreneurship and enterprise education**, including social enterprise activities.


- **Knowledge networks / diffusion**, including the stimulation of interactions between those in the HEI and those in the economy and society through, for example, the development of networks, and holding events that bring academics and external organizations together to share ideas and knowledge.

- **Exploiting the physical assets of the HEI** through, for example, the development of science parks, incubators, design studios, hiring of specialist equipment, as well as museums, exhibition space and so forth.

- **Supporting the community/public engagement** through, for example, outreach and volunteering, widening participation programmes and so on

What these surveys and other research have helped to reveal is a relatively vigorous and diverse culture of engagement across UK universities. This was evidenced in research done by the UK-Innovation Research Centre whose 2009 report, ‘Knowledge Exchange between Academics and the Business, Public and Third Sectors’ (Abreu, Grinevich, Hughes & Kitchen, 2009) describes the findings of a large scale survey of academics in the UK, with over 22,000 responses:

This report shows that academics from all disciplines are engaged in the knowledge exchange process – it does not simply involve those from science and technology based disciplines but also includes academics from the arts and humanities and the social sciences. And the knowledge exchange mechanisms are wide and varied – it is not simply about the codified transfer of science (patents, licences, etc) but includes many people based, problem solving and community driven activities. (p. 7)

The research revealed that—despite much of the policy discourse focussing on incentivizing greater interaction with business, and the generation of patents and IP—here was a much broader tapestry of engaged practice that covered a diverse range of partners, communities and publics:

Academics are engaged with a range of partners – and in the private business sector the range is not confined to the high-technology manufacturing industries but includes services and many so-called low technology sectors. Furthermore, many academics are interacting with the public and third sectors – and on many metrics the level of interaction is higher with these sectors than with the private sector. (p. 7)

This was further evidenced in 2014, when the NCCPE launched a competition for public engagement with research projects (NCCPE, n.d.(c)). With over 230 entries spanning all subject areas, ranging from inspiring young people to ask research questions to citizen science projects, the applications represented the diversity of high quality projects happening across the UK.

HEIF ‘innovation’ funding is currently capped at £160m—a relatively small amount compared with over £3 billion invested annually in research by the
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Research Councils and Higher Education funding councils. There have recently been significant changes in how this much larger pot of funding has been re-aligned to incentivize external engagement.

UK research funding is invested using a ‘dual support’ system: this involves regular retrospective assessment exercises conducted by the HE funding councils, who then provide institutions with a block grant on the basis of the performance in the last assessment period. In parallel, the Research Councils run competitive funding rounds to which universities can bid.

A major shift in UK research policy was triggered in 2007 with the publication of the Warry Report (www.rcuk.ac.uk/Publications/archive/TheWarryReport). This shifted attention from how relatively small scale investments in innovation funding might trigger greater knowledge exchange, to question the extent to which the total research budget and infrastructure was delivering social and economic value—as well as academic excellence. Until that point, mainstream research funding was allocated purely on the basis of academic excellence, assessed by peer review. The report recommended a major shift in all research funding, seeking to ensure that considerations of social and economic impact became embedded in funding and assessment decisions.

Driving this policy was a desire for both relevance (how useful the research was, and the return on investment) and accountability (to better account for the value of the investments in research in times of austerity and increasing pressure on all public spending).

Since the Warry Report significant changes have been implemented to both sides of the dual support system to incentivise non-academic impact. This has been a fiercely contested process—with over 18,000 academics signing a petition in 2009 to demand the withdrawal of the policy (Lewcock, 2009), which has been seen as an attempt by government to impose an instrumental agenda on the HE sector and constrain academic freedom. For others, it was seen as attempting the impossible—how can such impact either be predicted or reliably assessed? However, two major changes have been implemented. First, all Research Council grants now expect applicants to complete a ‘pathways to impact statement’:

At the application stage we do not expect applicants or peer reviewers to be able to predict the economic or societal impacts that research will achieve. However, we want to encourage applicants to consider and explore, in ways that are appropriate given the nature of the research they are proposing to conduct, potential pathways to impact, for example through engagement or collaboration with partners. (Research Councils UK (b), n.d.)

In parallel, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) has been replaced by a new Research Excellence Framework (REF), which retrospectively assesses the quality of a research units’ work, and includes an assessment of the impact of the
research ‘beyond academia’. Research units now submit both research outputs and impact case studies—which describe how particular research outputs have contributed to social and economic impact, and for each submitting unit, an impact template is required—which outlines their strategic approach to building impact. This is a radical departure from the RAE which focussed only on the quality of the research outputs as judged by academic peers.

Underpinning both schemes are similar typologies which provide prompts to explain the types of impact which might be expected. For instance, in the Arts and Humanities, the REF guidance (HEFCE, 2012, p. 91) invites researchers to evidence how their research has enriched ‘Culture and Society’ in the following domains:

- **Civil society**: Influencing the form and content of associations between people or groups to illuminate and challenge cultural values and social assumptions.
- **Public discourse**: Extending the range and improving the quality of evidence, argument and expression to enhance public understanding of the major issues and challenges faced by individuals and society.
- **Cultural life**: Creating and interpreting cultural capital in all of its forms to enrich and expand the lives, imaginations and sensibilities of individuals and groups.

Possible indicators that might be used to evidence ‘impact’ in such domains are also offered, including specific guidance about accounting for the impact of public engagement. The NCCPE has contributed a range of resources, such as training booklets (for example, see NCCPE & JISC, 2013) and training events to help the wider sector and research funders develop effective approaches. Again it appears that the UK is almost unique in this area of policy development. While other countries—e.g., Australia—have experimented with impact assessment, none has gone so far as the UK.

The developments have brought public and community engagement much more into the mainstream of university research cultures: requiring researchers to think more actively and to plan more carefully their engagement strategies. There is still much to reflect on and to learn. A number of networks have formed to attempt to share insight and expertise in this emerging area. The NCCPE has taken an active role in consulting with the sector to identify lessons learned—and the extent to which impact is actually a positive development for those working inside and outside HEIs who want to see deeper and more effective engagement. A consultation we ran in 2014 revealed a mixed picture (NCCPE, 2014). The impact assessment process was widely acknowledged to be a very time consuming and challenging activity, but with a number of positive outcomes for public and community engagement:
• It has formalised the need for good planning, evaluation and evidence gathering

• It has encouraged a view of Public Engagement (PE) as core business not just ‘good intentions’

• It has given PE a ‘harder edge’ in terms of its financial and strategic value to the institution

• It has created more demand and interest from academics for help and support to develop good PE—many of whom were previously unaware or uninterested

• It has helped make the case for PE to be effectively resourced and supported

• It has opened up opportunities for greater dialogue with outside partners

• PE is now regarded as an essential part of research, although for some PE is restricted to that which leads to REF–relevant impact—rather than more broadly defined outcomes

• It has encouraged staff actively to seek opportunities to share research findings with the wider public

It has also had some negative consequences:

• Some partners/collaborators have been overwhelmed by the sector’s demands for evidence of impact and have felt ‘used’

• It has encouraged an instrumental attitude from some—doing PE for ‘selfish’ reasons rather than to achieve genuine mutual benefit

• There is a risk that all PE becomes focused on the REF/impact, meaning that other valuable forms of engagement won’t be supported or valued

• The friction and negativity associated with the REF has tarnished engagement in some people’s eyes

• Some feel that valuable time which should be spent on innovation is now being spent on auditing

On balance, the feedback suggested the positives significantly outweighed the negatives, but it was acknowledged that there is much still to learn and develop, in particular:

• How to evaluate and evidence impacts arising from Public Engagement. PE was generally viewed by researchers and their managers as ‘softer’ and less easy to evidence than other forms of impact

• How to frame and implement strategies to encourage effective ‘impact generation’

The results of the first REF were published in December 2014. It is likely that research impact assessment will remain key part of research culture in the UK—and
if so, the NCCPE will continue to work hard to help the sector interpret the relationship between engagement and impact.

**Community-University Engagement in Practice**

Having provided an historical overview of the policy and funding context for community-university engagement we want to complete this case study by providing some vignettes of the kinds of activity which have been triggered. We have clustered these under four headings. We hope that these provide a vivid account of how these broader policy shifts are being implemented in practice:

- Disciplinary innovation in research funding
- ‘Grass roots’ academic responses to policy developments
- Institutional responses
- Supporting community organizations to work with universities

**Disciplinary Innovation in Research Funding**

There is increasingly dynamic and differentiated activity happening within discipline and practice areas. It is clear that there are distinctive opportunities and challenges in different areas of practice—for instance in health, the arts, the social sciences and the hard sciences like engineering.

**The connected communities programme**

The Connected Communities funding programme was launched by the Research Councils in 2010, and is led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The vision for the programme is “to mobilize the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health and well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders, and communities” (Connected Communities, n.d.). The programme supports research across a number of core themes, including: community health and wellbeing; creative and digital communities; civic engagement and social innovation; sustainable community environments: community heritage, disconnection, division and exclusion.

The Programme brings communities in all their rich and diverse forms to the centre of research agendas. It looks to improve our understanding of the changing connections, networks, values and practices that underpin notions of community across a wide range of historical and cultural contexts. This enhanced understanding is informing the development of more effective ways to contribute towards flourishing communities and address key economic and societal challenges.

The programme aims to build powerful research collaborations between researchers and communities that reflect the challenges and interests of diverse communities and to stimulate cross-disciplinary research innovation. By con-
necting research expertise, knowledge, understanding, and approaches from across the research base with the knowledge, experience and assets of communities, the Programme generates new research insights and meaningful legacies for communities. We provide an example of one of the project funded by Connected Communities below, the ‘Research for Community Heritage’ project.

**Responsible research and innovation**

The concerns about moving to a more responsive science and technology research system noted above have continued to evolve. Recently, one of the research councils, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), launched a framework for Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI). This seeks to embed engagement at all phases of the research cycle:

RRI is a process that seeks to promote creativity and opportunities for science and innovation that are socially desirable and undertaken in the public interest. Responsible Innovation acknowledges that innovation can raise questions and dilemmas, is often ambiguous in terms of purposes and motivations and unpredictable in terms of impacts, beneficial or otherwise. Responsible Innovation creates spaces and processes to explore these aspects of innovation in an open, inclusive and timely way. This is a collective responsibility, where funders, researchers, stakeholders and the public all have an important role to play. It includes, but goes beyond, considerations of risk and regulation, important though these are.

EPSRC has created a framework to help researchers to embed RRI practices. It suggests that “a responsible innovation approach” should continuously seek to:

- **Anticipate:** describing and analysing the impacts, intended or otherwise, that might arise. This does not seek to predict but rather to support an exploration of possible impacts and implications that may otherwise remain uncovered and little discussed.

- **Reflect:** reflecting on the purposes of, motivations for and potential implications of the research, and the associated uncertainties, areas of ignorance, assumptions, framings, questions, dilemmas and social transformations these may bring.

- **Engage:** opening up such visions, impacts and questioning to broader deliberation, dialogue, engagement and debate in an inclusive way.

- **Act:** using these processes to influence the direction and trajectory of the research and innovation process itself (EPSRC, n.d.)

**Grass-roots Academic Responses to Policy Developments**

Inevitably, the shifts in policy and funding outlined above have triggered considerable debate and argument across the sector. The Council for the Defence of
British Universities (CDBU) and the London School of Economics (LSE) blog on the impact of social science research—representing two contrasting examples of the kinds of conversations that have been generated.

The CDBU, established in 2012, is not associated with any particular discipline community but represents a broad constituency from across the academic community. They have provided vocal opposition to a variety of recent policy changes and are deeply sceptical about the long term consequences of the impact agenda for research:

Universities add enormous value to our society and economy, enriching the lives of all of us through the education and research they provide. But in a post-industrial age, where knowledge is money and growth is elusive, powerful forces are bending the university to serve short-term, primarily pragmatic, and narrowly commercial ends. And no equal and opposite forces are organized to resist them. The CDBU is dedicated to the purpose of defending academic values and the institutional arrangements best suited to fostering them. (CDBU (a), n.d.)

CDBU actively campaigns for the abolition of the impact agenda as a means of ensuing accountability. They argue that “radical reform is required in order to ensure that the HE sector can continue to produce research whose intrinsic quality is measured by intellectual interest and ambition” (CDBU (b), n.d.).

In contrast, (LSE) launched a blog site (the Impact of Social Sciences) to act as “a hub for researchers, administrative staff, librarians, students, think-tanks, government, and anyone else interested in maximising the impact of academic work in the social sciences and other disciplines. We hope to encourage debate, share best practice and keep the impact community up to date with news, events and the latest research” (LSE, n.d.).

The site provides a rich and very popular space for debates about impact and engagement to be explored, and for effective practice to be shared.

Institutional Responses

One of the fascinating things to observe over the last seven years has been the varied ways in which different universities—and indeed discipline communities—have chosen to respond to the challenges of embracing deeper engagement with communities. The NCCPE’s role has been to act as a hub to connect and network expertise across the sector. While enjoying and celebrating the diversity of activity, we have also sought to distil some generic lessons and to provide a set of resources which can be adapted by any institution to scaffold their work. An example of this is the EDGE tool, designed to help HEIs assess their strategic support for public engagement.
The EDGE tool

Working closely with the Beacons for Public Engagement and drawing on expertise in other countries the NCCPE piloted and then launched a self-assessment framework to provide institutions and departments with a framework to help them plan how to develop a supportive culture for public engagement. This identified three key focal points for addressing culture change:

- **Purpose:** clarify your purposes and values
- **Process:** build flexible support structures and processes
- **People:** put people first

These focal points provided the basis for the self-assessment tools and institutional case studies which can be accessed from our website (www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support-it/self-assess-with-edge-tool).

The NCCPE has also sought to share examples of practice. We do this through hosting a variety of events, including training and staff development sessions; strategy workshops within individual universities or research teams; national workshops and conferences; and through developing a host of web-based resources and case studies (www.publicengagement.ac.uk/case-studies).

Supporting Community Organizations to Work with Universities

A key part of the public engagement agenda is community engagement. How are community partners getting involved in research partnerships—what works well and what does not? What are we learning with and from them about these shifts?

We have chosen to highlight two activities that the NCCPE has been actively involved: The Community Partner Network and the Research for Community Heritage.

The Community Partner Network

Launched in 2013, following a consultation with community-based organizations working with universities, the UK Community Partner Network seeks to support community-university partnerships. Inspired by community partner Kim Aumann, from the ‘Boing Boing’ social enterprise and academic Angie Hart, from the University of Brighton, the network provides an opportunity for community partners to meet, connect and learn from each other.
Members of the network are passionate about the value of community-university partnerships because they:

- harness different expertise
- generate new understandings
- provide valuable access to information and resources
- help us know more about how communities could better tackle important problems

However there are some real challenges to working together, such as:

- power differentials—and whose voices are heard
- communication, language and jargon
- inequity in funding and resourcing the partnership
- different time frames
- different expectations as to desirable outputs from the process, and
- navigating universities with multiple points of contact.

Funded initially through the AHRC Connected Communities Funding, and now by the NCCPE, the network runs regional capacity building events; training for academics wanting to work with community partners; develops resources to support effective partnership working; an online network; and an opportunity to lobby for more effective support for community-university partnerships for social change. (For more information see: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/uk-community-partner-network.)
Research for Community Heritage

The Research for Community Heritage’s/All Our Stories project was a unique partnership between the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) that sought to support community-university partnerships around heritage. The HLF ran a small grants scheme to support community groups to run community heritage projects. As part of the ‘Connected Communities’ programme, the AHRC funded 18 research organizations to help their researchers work more closely with these community groups—from inspiring community organizations to apply for the lottery funding; providing an opportunity for community groups to meet university researchers and learn about the resources that the research organization had that they could access; providing training to support community groups developing their research skills; and linking them to people with specific expertise relevant to their project.

What the project recognised was the wealth of expertise, enthusiasm and knowledge of all project partners. But it also resourced them adequately to work together on relevant projects. The NCCPE was funded to help coordinate the project. In a wrap up summit in October 2013, participants came together to reflect on successes and challenges from the project, leading to a summary report which can be found at: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/research_for_community_heritage_full_report.pdf).

Research for Community Heritage demonstrated that the projects were enhanced by the opportunity to work with researchers; the researchers developed new skills in working with others and were inspired by the knowledge and expertise of local groups; some new partnerships developed that have received additional research funding; and overall the project was considered very successful—enabling two funders to align their funding to develop really effective outcomes. For more information see: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/completed-projects/research-community-heritage.
Taking Stock of Progress and Looking Forward

So where have we got to in this long journey to embed a more engaged research culture in the UK? The NCCPE regularly hosts meetings to bring together staff working across the sector. An event in 2014 was convened to take stock of progress and was attended by over 60 people working across the UK. Delegates identified the following challenges and learning points:

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<th>Learning points</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>• The impact agenda and the Research Excellence Framework has driven uptake and awareness of PE</td>
<td>• Alignment and coordination: PE often happens in fragmented pockets</td>
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<td>• Increasingly ‘joined up’ thinking across public, civic, cultural, business engagement activities (helped by impact agenda)</td>
<td>• Pull towards ‘broadcast styles’ of engagement still very prevalent</td>
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<td>• A range of other funding sources and incentives are helping—though requires entrepreneurial, pick-and-mix approach</td>
<td>• Lack of evaluation and monitoring—though this is improving</td>
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<td>• When it is there, senior manager support is very important</td>
<td>• Getting PE properly reflected in promotions criteria</td>
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<td>• Investment in central infrastructure and support—eg., festivals—provides multiple opportunities</td>
<td>• Muddled/divergent views of PE and its relationship to other forms of external engagement</td>
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<td>• Role of enthusiasts/champions cannot be over-estimated</td>
<td>• Constantly shifting context and priorities—requires very agile and flexible approach</td>
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<td>• Bringing together networks of committed people to mobilize and motivate practice and culture change</td>
<td>• Securing sufficient central resource for coordination</td>
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<td>• Forming high level ‘coordination’/strategy groups to align activity</td>
<td>• Making a compelling business case to secure strategic, long term investment</td>
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<td>• Increasing sharing of expertise and approaches between disciplines</td>
<td>• Very different disciplinary cultures</td>
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<td>• Great resources already exist (e.g., NCCPE website)</td>
<td>• Pressure on academics time leaves little room for PE</td>
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<td>• Value of partnerships working with external agencies—e.g., museums—with complementary expertise.</td>
<td>• Moving beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to work with more diverse communities</td>
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<td>• Sustaining momentum and networks.</td>
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Where Next?

The NCCPE launched a consultation to explore the future of Community University partnership working in 2013. The 18 month consultation has provided us with rich insight into the views of people working inside and outside universities about the possible futures for this area of work.

What Might an Engaged University of the Future be like?

• What are the key changes/forces of change that may affect its engagement models?

• How can we build upon existing practices within and outside the Higher Education (HE) sector to strengthen our partnerships with other organizations and affect change?

• What can we do to ensure that universities remain relevant and engaged with society?

• How has discussion about engagement changed over the last few years, and how might this change in the light of challenges we currently face within the HE sector and society as a whole?

In a summary report published in December 2014, (Duncan, 2014) we identified six overarching factors that support the ongoing expansion of Public Engagement in UK universities:

• Market-based incentives for universities to distinguish themselves as ‘engaged universities’ in a crowded and competitive market for students and research income

• Bureaucratic controls: academics are increasingly expected to demonstrate the social and economic impact of their research for the research excellence framework, for instance, through the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

• A steadily consolidating policy focus from all major parties on greater societal interaction by universities and researchers, for instance, through public engagement with science and knowledge exchange

• Greater scrutiny of universities and other publically funded institutions and pressure to increase transparency and accountability

• A shift away from single authoritative experts towards more pluralistic forms of evidence and growing recognition of the significance of situated knowledge

• The re-emergence of civic universities, as engines of regional growth and development that contribute to the local community, business and civil society.
The research revealed optimism and enthusiasm for the future of engagement, and that considerable progress has been made over the last ten years to embed high quality engagement within higher education institutions. Despite the unfavourable economic climate and budgetary cuts, which profoundly affect community partners’ capacity to engage with universities, people thought a culture of engagement is beginning to take hold and is strengthening.

**Conclusion**

This case study demonstrates that there have been some really promising developments in the UK to support effective high quality engagement with research. However, there are still many uncertainties and questions that need to be addressed. These include the need to better understand and assess the social impact of research; the need to conduct more research into engagement processes—and if and how they lead to better research and social outcomes; the need for more capacity building to develop the skills of the next generation of researchers; the need for funders to better align their funding to support engagement; and the continued need for culture change. Addressing these changes will provide a more fertile ground where engagement can flourish and become genuinely mainstreamed in university cultures.

**References**


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