



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to support Public Engagement

Supporting leadership for public engagement

This resource pack forms part of a suite of resources to support universities to embed leadership for public engagement. The full set of resources is accessible here:

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/edge-tool>

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Supporting leadership for public engagement: an introduction

“We wouldn’t have come far if we didn’t have people at the top supporting it and championing engagement. However, it’s much more complicated than just expecting the VC to make it happen. We’ve thought about community representation at the highest level – with 3 community leaders on our governing body, for instance, and a community leadership programme. We support champions at every level across the partnership. None of that would have been enough if we hadn’t also tackled things like workload management and recognition. Embedding means that engagement becomes woven into the fabric of the institution – and as leaders, that’s what we want to use our influence to bring about.” **Discussion at the Manchester Beacon Leadership Group**

Why does leadership matter?

Articulating your institution’s official commitment to public engagement in strategic and operational plans is important, as we have explored in the [mission section](#). Yet, it is equally important to foster a network of leaders who can act as formal and informal advocates for engagement, to help encourage and bring that strategic commitment to life.

These champions need to be at every level, from inside and outside of the institution, and across the different functions, not just academic staff but support staff too.

To build a critical mass of such leaders and champions we need to encourage the values, attitudes and behaviours which create a supportive culture for public engagement; ensuring that it becomes a natural and visible part of everyday work, conversations and decision- making across the institution.

The experiences of the beacons and others suggest that the following four areas deserve careful attention:

1. SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Commitment ‘from the top’ sends a powerful message to the whole institution that engagement matters. Having the VC/ principal leading as a champion brings obvious benefits, and having a senior manager with formal responsibility for monitoring progress against your strategy helps too. Equally important is encouraging all senior managers to have a clear view of how engagement contributes to their wider responsibilities and aspirations, so that they build consideration of engagement into their day-to-day work and decision-making and can justify supporting it.

2. ENGAGEMENT CHAMPIONS

Staff and students are as influenced by their colleagues as they are by the institution's senior leaders, so it is important to support engagement champions at every level of the institution. For example, offering secondments or small bursaries and awards can help individuals develop their confidence and expertise. Actively supporting and encouraging networking across and beyond the institution is also important, to build 'grass roots' support and distributed leadership. Simple resources e.g. social media can be used to support networking in addition to face to face meetings.

3. DEPARTMENTAL / FACULTY LEADERSHIP

A key learning from the Beacon initiative is that heads of departments and faculties face a particularly difficult set of challenges when it comes to supporting engagement. There will often be both 'high level' and 'grass roots' support for engagement in an institution – but department heads can feel 'caught in the middle', left with the very difficult job of balancing a host of competing demands relating to staff workloads, performance and income. As a consequence, support for engagement can begin to breakdown at a departmental level. Supporting departmental leaders by appointing associate heads or associate deans for engagement can turn a challenge into an opportunity to provide support at School or Faculty level.

4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

It is possible to become so focused on internal leadership challenges that you risk neglecting the critical role of the public and wider community, and the value of external expertise. There are a number of practical ways in which you can actively involve people from outside the institution to help catalyse innovation, to shape, guide and evaluate your public engagement, and to act as critical friends, leaders and champions for your work. At the Manchester Beacon, public stakeholders were involved in setting objectives for the programme, commissioning, co-designing and co-delivering pilot projects.

What next?

Download a self-assessment tool and use it to explore what you've already achieved and what more you could do to develop leadership for public engagement in your institution.

Self-assess your support for public engagement

We've created this simple tool to help you assess how your institution is currently performing in this area, and to begin to identify areas where you would like to see progress.

We have described four 'states' to describe an institution's progress towards embedding support for engagement:

- **Embryonic:** Institutional support for engagement is sporadic or non-existent
- **Developing:** Some support has been put in place, but in a relatively unsystematic and non-strategic fashion
- **Gripping:** The institution is taking steps to develop more systematic and strategic support
- **Embedding:** The institution has put in place strategic and operational support for engagement

Instructions for use

You can use the tool in numerous ways, for example:

- You could fill it in individually, relying on your own knowledge of your institution;
- You could use it as part of a workshop with colleagues and other stakeholders;
- Or you could invite a number of people to fill it in individually and then bring them together to compare their perspectives. Comparing different departments across an institution can be a powerful exercise.

While the levels presented here assume that embedding engagement brings benefits to an institution, some may choose not to seek to embed it in all of the areas identified in the tool. In some instances, informal and emergent approaches may be preferred to formalised ones, particularly if engagement is just one part of a wider strategic goal.

LEADERSHIP				
FOCUS	EMBRYONIC	DEVELOPING	GRIPPING	EMBEDDING
Senior leadership	Few (if any) of the most influential leaders in the institution serve as champions for public engagement.	Some of the institution's senior team act as informal champions for public engagement.	Some of the institutions senior team act as formal champions for public engagement.	The VC / Principal acts as a champion for public engagement; a senior leader takes formal responsibility; other senior leaders informally champion PE. All senior leaders have an understanding of the importance and value of public engagement to the institution's agenda.
Engagement Champions	Although some individuals chose to act informally as champions or ambassadors for public engagement, they receive no institutional support.	An informal public engagement champions network is beginning to emerge, enabling them to share approaches and offer some support to each other's work.	A critical mass of champions has emerged. The institution recognises the value of this network and the need to provide some formal support for it. Engagement champions are recognised from within, across and outside the institution.	Formal support for PE champions is provided by the institution, with regular opportunities to network with others across the institution and nationally.
Departmental / Faculty leadership	There is very limited or no informal support from departmental leaders for PE activity by their staff.	Informal support for PE activity is offered by a small but significant number of departmental or faculty leaders. Some department leaders struggle to support staff in this area.	A number of departments / faculties formally support PE activity by their staff, e.g. through recognising it in appraisal processes, and workload planning.	The majority of departments / faculties are committed at the highest level to actively supporting PE activity by their staff. All heads of department recognise the importance and value of public engagement, and are seeking ways to support it effectively.
Public involvement	There are very limited or no opportunities for the public or community partners to assume leadership roles within the institution (e.g. serving on advisory groups, providing feedback, collaborating on research).	There are some opportunities for the public or community partners to assume leadership roles within the institution, but there is no co-ordinated or planned approach to involving people from outside the institution.	There are a significant number of opportunities for the public or community partners to assume leadership roles within the institution, and attempts are being made to co-ordinate external involvement and to provide structured support.	Appropriate public / community representatives are formally welcomed and encouraged to serve in leadership and ambassadorial roles. External expertise is evidently valued. There is support for community capacity building, and a widespread commitment to seeking mutually beneficial outcomes through engagement.

Embedding support for public engagement leadership

Introduction

This section tells the story about how the **Manchester Beacon** went about supporting leadership in public engagement. It also draws on the experiences of other beacons and universities who have tackled this area.

Manchester Beacon is a partnership between The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, The University of Salford, Museum of Science and Industry and Manchester: Knowledge Capital.

The stakeholders in the Beacon articulated and adopted the following cross-cutting shared objectives, which come under three priorities:

PRIORITY 1: CHANGE BEHAVIOUR

- Encourage, value and support Public Engagement
- Change perceptions and improve accessibility

PRIORITY 2: INCREASE PE LEVELS

- Increase the relevance of institution activity and connectivity with communities

PRIORITY 3: PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND COLLABORATION

- Improve opportunities for sustainable two-way learning
- Develop deeper partnership working across the beacon partners, the beacons and with the community.

Manchester's approach to senior leadership

*“Commitment from the top: One of the identified successes of the Manchester Beacon is the level of senior commitment, with strong champions across all partners. This ensures that an emphasis is being put on changing behaviours both from a top down and a bottom up approach.” **Manchester Beacon for Public Engagement – interim evaluation, August 2010***

The Beacon's work is accountable to a Steering Board and several working groups who encourage change, solve problems and share knowledge of how to support culture change. On the steering

board, each of the key partners are represented by a Vice Chancellor, Deputy VC or PVC, alongside other external senior representatives. The Board is chaired by Professor Nancy Rothwell, President and Vice Chancellor of The University of Manchester:

“You have to have this coming from the top. We are incredibly fortunate with our president. Social responsibility and public engagement is in her DNA.” **Sally Sagar, Assistant Director of Regional and Economic Affairs, University of Manchester**

Formal and informal roles

The Manchester Beacon senior leadership is not just demonstrated through these individual’s formal leadership roles: there is a firm belief in the importance of their informal influence as well. Senior leaders champion public engagement, through being encouraging and supportive of PE activities, listening to and sharing knowledge with people inside the institution and outside:

“There’s a formal leadership role, and an informal role – and for me, that’s all about talking to people. One of the things I do is I go on about public engagement; you have to show interest and enthusiasm. One of the things I do is I go on about public engagement. We’re all representatives of what the university thinks it’s here for. Public engagement is part of what we do, it’s not an afterthought.” **Gerry Kelleher, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Strategic Planning, MMU**

Culture Change Labs

Building on this commitment to fostering dialogue between senior staff and the wider university community, the Beacon director introduced a particular event format: the culture change lab. These strategic engagement events are convened by the senior leaders acting as project sponsors and facilitated by external deliverers. Find out more about the format and how it worked in our [case study](#).

Attitude and action

The attitudes and behaviours of staff can have a very positive influence, and the Manchester team are keen that they need to be reinforced and incentivised by changes to university policies, systems and processes:

“Besides displaying the right behaviours, you need to make sure the strategic things are in place to support and recognise those who are actually delivering the

*activities". Keith Barnes, PVC Strategic Partnerships and Development,
University of Salford*

This view was supported by the Beacon evaluation:

*"The importance of senior commitment cannot be underestimated but needs to be reinforced with systems and processes that reward and recognise PE."
Manchester Beacon for Public Engagement – interim evaluation, August 2010*

Other approaches

UCL have developed a provost's award for public engagement, signposting clearly how the senior team value engagement. Find out more in our [case study](#).

CUE east also have an annual award to achieve a similar outcome.

Manchester's Approach to Engagement Champions

"What would an institution that had 'embedded' engagement actually look like? When you took a random diagonal slice across the institution, you could have a sensible conversation about public engagement at all the different levels. They might express it in different terms, but they would understand it." Discussion at the Manchester Beacon Leadership Group

The Manchester Beacon – like all the beacons – has recognised that to truly embed public engagement, you need *champions* to drive change at all levels. Movers and shakers - the 'do-ers' on the ground - are just as important as senior leadership. Champions need to lead and be visible as points of contact so they can support one another and support others including those in the community: for the Manchester Beacon, there is no rigid distinction between the inside and the outside. They recognise that the University is part of wider society.

Institutional support

A key way that the beacon has facilitated this support is through the project managers that are based in each of the partner institutions. These staff are not involved in doing public engagement themselves; they facilitate and broker knowledge, catalyse networks, culture change working groups and partnerships to support change and public engagement across the university and with the local community.

For example, Suzanne Spicer is the project manager based at the University of Manchester. She emphasises the need for flexibility: to work contextually within the university, and to tailor approaches to the different needs of different departments – with a view to building a distributed

network of advocates across the institution that share learning and knowledge across the institution.

This has translated into seed grants for Early Career Researchers and Community Science Awards, for example. These projects have encouraged the development of engagement champions, through ongoing support and mentoring from the Beacon to develop their activities, successfully boosting confidence in public engagement.

“There are ways to make science more accessible... it’s changed my opinion”
University of Manchester Academic

Networking

Another example of this kind of support is the **Crescent network**. This network was set up at the University of Salford for researchers and external venue managers to connect and bring cutting edge research and the public together, and to give those new to research and academia an opportunity to dip their toe into the pool of public engagement. From viewpoints on politics and history to quantum entanglement, speakers post their talk titles and their research interests on their Crescent pages, where venue managers can find something a little different to offer their own audiences. Learn more in our [case study](#).

Celebrating and showcasing public engagement

A particular way that the Beacon staff recognise public engagement champions is through an annual summit: a cross-university and community celebration of public and community engagement. Find out more in our [celebrating and showcasing PE case study](#).

Other Approaches

The Beacons, and other universities, have developed a host of mechanisms to encourage and support champions and leaders, including bursary schemes, supporting informal networking, and developing CPD programmes.

Manchester’s approach to Departmental/ Faculty leadership

“We’ve found that it’s easy to get to people at the top and the bottom. It’s the ones in the middle that are the real challenge!” **Suzanne Spicer, Beacon Project Manager, University of Manchester**

All of the beacon projects have found that attempts to embed engagement can be

enthusiastically supported by senior staff and staff working at the 'grassroots', but that efforts to materially change university cultures, systems and processes can lose momentum at department level.

It is recognised that heads of department are often balancing a large number of sometimes incompatible demands, for instance to maximise the quantity of quality of research publications from their department at the same time as supporting staff to take 'time out' to engage. They also need to deal with the practical consequences – for instance, perhaps having to 'backfill' for staff who are undertaking public engagement activities, and in the process possibly creating an impression of unfairness or lack of equity in workloads in their department. These issues have been clearly articulated through the NCCPE action research project's Heads of Department Group. Learn more about this group [here](#).

At Manchester, additional support is now targeted at these challenges. The project managers offer time and space to supporting managers through working groups, which identify particular barriers they are encountering and come together to overcome them:

“Talking and listening to the middle management, finding out what their barriers are and tuning in to their language helps to create a relationship and to work out what support would be most valuable.” **Suzanne Spicer, Beacon Project Manager, University of Manchester**

As a result, The University of Manchester has a cross-faculty *Public Engagement Advisory Group* (that includes Associate Deans for Social Responsibility) to support managers, and ensure that learning is being networked across the institution.

Other approaches

Newcastle University is seeking to clarify the expectations being made of Heads of Department by building public engagement formally into their planning processes. As a matter of policy, every Faculty, Academic Unit and Professional Support Service Unit is expected to develop and implement its own engagement strategy as part of its strategic plan. Each department is also expected to nominate an Individual to be responsible for collating and transmitting information on engagement activities.

You can find out more about Newcastle's approach in the [mission section](#).

Manchester's approach to public involvement

For the Manchester Beacon, with £240k secured from the North West Regional Development agency, another opportunity was to deliver projects to support local communities in their third sector work whilst building networks and connections outside the university.

After an initial survey and consultation event hosted by a third sector organisation and an outreach worker, community groups based near the universities in Hulme, Moss Side, Longsight,

Gorton and Ardwick identified a need for leadership skills to build capacity across the third sector and specifically in culturally diverse communities.

For this reason, Manchester Beacon invested in a *Community Leadership programme* with two complementary projects – ‘*Step Up*’ and ‘*Inspiring Leaders*’.

Step Up

Step Up seeks to network, support and mentor Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) leaders working or volunteering in Manchester communities

"I think it's called Step Up (because) it gives you an opportunity to realise your potential, to know your direction, your focus and then think about where to go next. Prior to coming to this Step Up project, I think I felt I had barriers. I felt that I didn't have that confidence. When I went into the Step Up programme, looked at the training programme, the opportunity, the level of mentoring and support that was provided, I then realised that I had the potential." **Step Up Participant**

Feedback has been extremely positive, and several course participants have now taken up the opportunity for further mentoring from senior university staff including mentoring on the University of Manchester Ethics Committee. You can find out more about the course [here](#).

Inspiring Leaders

Inspiring Leaders was an existing MMU programme run by MISPA that was opened up to third sector organisations in neighbourhoods adjacent to Manchester based universities: Ardwick, Moss Side, Rusholme, Longsight and Hulme. It was expected that half the learners would come from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. It consisted of a seven-day training programme to support the development of leadership in the third sector.

The training sought to equip individuals with the appropriate leadership skills to sustain and develop their organisations for the benefit of their communities; and identify, train and support programme graduates with cascading their leadership knowledge and skills to their peers and communities. The sessions were on a number of topics including leadership and learning, managing your organisation, sustaining your organisation, managing relationships and reflection and action planning:

"The course has been inspiring and I have found more confidence to speak up and put my ideas and myself forward in a way I never did before."
"The course has been enlightening, inspiring, challenged my thinking and most important, helped me question my set goals."
Inspiring Leaders participants

The community leadership programmes were both driven by local need, and shaped by the participants. They have helped to build capacity locally and created a number of community champions who now have more capacity to make a difference to the communities they serve. They have also increased recognition within the universities of the expertise in the community, and have fostered mutually beneficial interaction that has generated opportunities for innovation:

“When working with communities you have to have the mantra ‘do with’ and not ‘do to’. In the past universities thought of community engagement as ‘we go out and tell them things’, but that has changed hugely. Communities have always been made up of very aware people, and it’s taken universities a while to realise that there is benefit in working with communities in partnership. Instead of it being one way – the university going out and benefiting the community - we now realise that if we work with our communities then we can benefit from them. It isn’t just influencing-the- community type work, it’s also influencing us and enhancing our research, and the community leadership programmes are an important dimension to this.” **Sally Sagar, Assistant Director of Regional and Economic Affairs, University of Manchester**

Other approaches

Both Manchester and Beacon North East have a particular focus on public engagement that involves communities and academics in co-production of knowledge. A significant step in ensuring sustainable support to staff and community members for this kind of public engagement is the development of Durham University’s Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA). Find out more in our [case study](#).

Issues and Considerations

There are various issues or challenges which cut across the Leadership area that it’s worth being aware of. These include:

1. INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP IS NOT EXEMPLIFIED BY A VICE-CHANCELLOR DICTATING TO STAFF

A top down directive is not on its own going to deliver embedded public engagement. There needs to be a groundswell from the bottom, support at middle management level and commitment from all senior managers:

“If you’re a vice chancellor you are the leader of a university: everyone looks at you for direction and sometimes they want to abdicate their own responsibility for leadership. It’s crucial to engage with senior and middle-managers so that

they feel empowered and enabled to lead as well.” Nancy Rothwell, President, Vice Chancellor and Beacon PI, University of Manchester

2. SIGNIFICANT TENSIONS AROUND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CAN EMERGE

The NCCPE’s Action Research programme revealed that significant tensions around public engagement can emerge between senior managers and the rest of their institution, particularly in the area of reputational risk:

*“While senior managers recognised the importance of creativity to individual staff members involved in public engagement, there was also reflection that the pressures of senior management may encourage increased ‘corporate’ control. At the heart of the matter is a concern that individuals may go off and do things which reflect badly on the university.” **Embedding Public Engagement in HE: The Key Issues. Download the full report on our [publications page](#)***

3. BUREAUCRACY CAN SUPPRESS INNOVATION IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Bureaucracy and an overly managerial approach can suppress development of ideas and innovation in public engagement:

*“You can’t overly manage this kind of activity, because a lot of public engagement activity has to be from the ground up. You’ve got to be responsive to that.” **Sally Sagar, Assistant Director of Regional and Economic Affairs, University of Manchester***

4. LEADERSHIP ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

It needs to be backed up by systems that actually demonstrate to staff that public engagement activity is valued and recognised by the institution. You can find out more in the [reward and recognition section](#).

5. A KEY ISSUE IS EQUITY MANAGEMENT

The NCCPE's Action Research programme also found that a key issue for heads of department was managing equity. You can find out more in the report we have published:

“Staff with heavy teaching loads, for example, can resent those who are spending time outside the university working with groups or others (especially if this external engagement provides opportunity for additional income). In many departments, this outside involvement can mean extra workload for those not participating. This can create tensions within a department which can be very hard to manage.” **Embedding Public Engagement in HE: The Key Issues.**
[Download the full report on our publications page](#)

6. LEADERS NEED SUPPORT

Leaders themselves can need support to drive the agenda forward: the senior team in Manchester have created an informal leadership group that meets regularly, and provides a very different kind of space to the formal steering board:

“So often if you're trapped in an organisation and you're one of the few driving an agenda forward now and then it can be useful to go out and talk to other colleagues and be refreshed by that.” **Gerry Kelleher, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Strategic Planning, MMU**

Resources

Interpreting public engagement: An Audit of Senior Academics' Attitudes towards Public Engagement	This report is based on a series of qualitative interviews with senior managers, including Heads of Disciplines, Vice Chancellors and Pro-Vice Chancellors across multiple HEIs in Wales. It provides helpful insights into the attitudes of senior university academics towards public engagement.
Embedding Public Engagement in HE: The Key Issues	This report of the NCCPE's action research programme identifies a series of key issues in the management and leadership of public engagement, and explores possible responses.

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