



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to support Public Engagement

Embedding public engagement in your mission

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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Embedding public engagement in your mission: an introduction

“In developing our engagement strategy, we have chosen to eschew the language of the third stream. The best examples of engagement we came across were umbilically linked to the core teaching and research activities. So our thinking led us to the conviction that engagement needs to be embedded, and seen as a critical approach to doing the day job better, not an additional activity.” Professor Paul Younger, PVC Engagement, Newcastle University

Why does ‘mission’ matter?

Without a sense of mission – a shared understanding of the purpose and value of public engagement - it is very difficult to build momentum. By expressing this commitment in your institution’s strategic planning, you can then begin to mobilise the resources and enthusiasm to effect significant cultural and operational change.

There are four key areas that have proved to be critical in tackling this area:

EMBEDDING A COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR MISSION

For many institutions, engagement provides a powerful way of framing their civic and intellectual purpose, and their desire to contribute to ‘public good’. Because their commitment to engagement says something so profound about their values and purpose, they choose to describe this formally in their mission statement or corporate plan. This provides real momentum.

BUILDING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND ITS VALUE

Public engagement is something of a hidden treasure in most institutions: there is far more of it going on than is often realised, and some people will be doing it without even realising it. Opening up the conversation about what engagement means to your institution, what it currently looks like, and how it might be enhanced provides a crucial foundation for further development.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

To capitalise on this potential and to maximise impact and value for money, it helps to develop a strategic plan for engagement. This should articulate why engagement matters, how different parts of the institution can contribute, and how best to ensure it is effectively coordinated and supported across the institution.

Clear objectives and performance measures can be set.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER PRIORITIES

It is important that you don't end up creating an engagement 'silo'. Engagement is best understood not as an 'add on' to existing activity, but as a way of enhancing the quality and impact of the institution's core activities: research, teaching and learning, student experience and civic responsibility. Ensuring that you articulate this alignment, and the opportunities for all staff and students to contribute, will unlock huge value.

What next?

Use our self assessment tool to explore what you've already achieved and what more you could do to develop a 'mission' for public engagement in your institution.

Self-assess your engagement mission

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. It identifies four key challenges, and maps each against a scale:

E	Embryonic: Institutional support for engagement is patchy or non-existent, although some engagement activity is underway
D	Developing: Some support has been put in place, but in a relatively unsystematic and non-strategic fashion
G	Gripping: The institution is taking steps to develop more systematic and strategic support
E	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 and embedded ones.

EMBEDDING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR MISSION: SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

FOCUS	EMBRYONIC	DEVELOPING	GRIPPING	EMBEDDING
Embedding in mission	Public engagement is not addressed explicitly in the institutional mission or in departmental / institution-wide strategies.	PE is referenced sporadically within the institutional mission documents and strategies, but is not considered a priority area.	Work is underway to review the institution's commitment to PE, in order to articulate a set of strategic priorities and embed these in the institutional mission and other relevant strategies.	Public engagement is prioritised in the institution's official mission and in other key departmental / institution-wide strategies, with success indicators identified.
Shared understanding of public engagement and its value	The term is used inconsistently and infrequently and very few staff have an understanding or appreciation of what it means or its relevance to their work.	References to public engagement appear in some institutional strategies and plans, but there is no institution-wide definition for public engagement.	Consultation is underway with internal and external stakeholders to share understandings of public engagement and its purpose, and to develop a shared definition.	The institution has consulted widely with internal and external stakeholders to develop a definition for PE and its purpose and value which is used consistently.
Strategic planning	There is no official strategic plan for advancing PE.	Although some short- and long-term goals for PE have been defined, these have not been formalized into an official strategic plan that will guide their implementation.	Work is underway to develop an official strategic plan for PE	The institution has developed an official strategic plan for advancing PE, which includes viable short-term and long-term goals. A senior individual / team has formal responsibility for monitoring progress.
Alignment with other priorities	Public engagement rarely features as a component within wider institutional initiatives	Public engagement occasionally features within wider institutional initiatives, but in a relatively piecemeal way	Processes are being developed to ensure that PE is routinely considered during strategic planning	Public engagement is routinely considered during strategic planning and institution-wide developments.

How Newcastle University developed and engagement strategy

Introduction

This section tells the story about how one institution – the University of Newcastle – went about developing its mission for public engagement. It also draws on the experiences of other beacons and universities who have tackled this area.

Developing commitment in mission takes a significant amount of time. Newcastle published its first engagement strategy in 2010, but ground work began significantly earlier than this. Key events included:

- The arrival of a new Vice Chancellor, Professor Chris Brink, in July 2007, who enthusiastically endorsed the University's role as a major player in the civic engagement agenda
- A Strategic Review, led by the Vice Chancellor, leading to the development of Vision 2021, which identified Engagement as a core function of the University and set out the University's strategic objectives, supported by strategic development funds
- The appointment of one of the first Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Engagement, Professor Paul Younger, in 2008
- The University's successful bid in 2008 to lead the Beacon North East project, in collaboration with Durham University and the Centre for Life

We will explore in turn how the university tackled each of the following key challenges:

- Embedding a commitment to public engagement in their mission
- Developing a shared understanding of public engagement and its value
- Strategic planning
- Aligning their commitment to public engagement with other priorities

Embedding a commitment to public engagement in Newcastle University's mission

The arrival of Chris Brink as Newcastle's new Vice Chancellor in 2007 led to the creation of a new **vision and mission** for the university. The vice chancellor's personal commitment was a key factor in ensuring a commitment to engagement was embedded there, but there were other factors too:

- Recognition of the University's long history of successful engagement with civil society on multiple levels, over many years. There was also a belief by the university's leadership that these 'civic roots' had been lost sight of.
- Anticipation of the need to identify, classify and quantify impact of research activity as part of the new Research Excellence Framework (REF) process.
- The Charities Act 2006, which led to a renewed emphasis on charitable bodies such as universities demonstrating the public benefits achieved in pursuit of their stated charitable purposes.

- The University's status as leader of Beacon North East, which put their engagement activities under a national spotlight.

The resulting Vision and Mission reflected these internal and external drivers:

"Our Vision is of Newcastle as a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence."

"Our Mission: to be a world-class research-intensive university, to deliver teaching and facilitate learning of the highest quality, and to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England."

Newcastle University Vision 2021: A world-class civic university

This broad commitment set the strategic context for the development of Newcastle's engagement strategy. A new role was created – PVC Engagement – to drive this forward, and Professor Paul Younger was appointed to this role in 2008. His own background included a long-standing commitment to community-based research. His task was to translate the ambition of the mission into a strategic plan with broad support from staff across the university.

*"Seeing it embedded in the mission is an important liberation for those members of staff who are passionate about engagement. And it can be achieved quite quickly if you have the right people at the top. Converting it into buy in from across the university is a much longer game." **Professor Paul Younger***

Building a shared understanding of public engagement and its value

*"Personally I think you're better laying your cards on table and saying this is what we mean by engagement and this is why it matters to the university. If you don't there is scope for managers to try to ignore or avoid it. I think having an agreed institution-wide definition is very valuable because it doesn't give anyone room to hide – and it helps staff to make the case in their own departments." **Professor Paul Younger***

As PVC for engagement, Paul Younger was charged to begin work on the engagement strategy in 2008. The work proceeded on two fronts: research and evidence gathering, and consultation and staff involvement, under the guidance of a development group that was set up in early 2009.

Research and evidence gathering

Preparatory work to support the development of the Engagement Strategy included:

- A University-wide engagement survey to capture, analyse and celebrate the rich and varied diversity of activities already undertaken by staff and students across the University. More than 1200 individual submissions were made, from people involved in volunteering or work with communities, disadvantaged minorities, small businesses and other 'hard-to-reach' groups, those undertaking public service or civic duties, or people

participating in research of global significance to address society's problems, or using their expertise to influence and change public policy.

- A **literature review of engagement practice** in the international higher education (HE) sector: *“we wanted to explore what state of the art university public engagement looked like. We discovered a huge range – from what was frankly window dressing to activity that was so ‘far out’ that it had no connection to the core business of the university. A key insight for us was that the best engagement strategies were plugged into the university’s teaching and research. That gave us real confidence in how to take things forward in Newcastle.”*
- An analysis of the societal and socio-economic factors affecting the North East to help focus the strategy on global challenges manifest in the region.
- A report and analysis of typologies of engagement to help clarify a definition for public engagement at Newcastle.
- An initial round of bidding for funding to support new engagement projects.

The University also took the opportunity to join the international **Talloires Network** and to draw on experience from other countries, such as Latin America, where engagement is a much more embedded part of HE work.

Consultation and staff involvement

The Development Group met monthly from March to September 2009. It comprised engagement enthusiasts and practitioners from across the University (staff and students), whose experience and breadth of knowledge of engagement, both within and beyond the UK context, were invaluable in ensuring that the Strategy was based on an ambitious yet attainable vision. Members of the Group also had an important role in communicating and consulting within their respective Faculty or service.

Internal communication and consultation were important: early drafts of the Strategy were discussed in faculty or service meetings, and the views of external lay members of University Court and Council were also sought. All staff had an opportunity to comment on the draft Strategy, which was also sent to a number of external stakeholders for comment and input.

The formal approval process included detailed discussion at meetings of Executive Board, and presentation and consideration of the final draft at Senate and Council. The Strategy was approved in February 2010.

“At the end of the day the most important question you need to tackle isn’t the ‘what’ but the ‘why’. You need to be able to articulate a compelling rationale for engagement that convinces your colleagues. What helped convince people here was that most engaged departments were also the best performers in the Research Assessment Exercise and the National Student Survey. So we could make the argument partly based on enlightened self interest.” **Paul Younger**

Other approaches

Several other beacons also conducted surveys early on, to inform their strategy development: read a **case study** about how CUE East conducted a baseline survey of engagement activity and attitudes at UEA, and how this informed their strategy

Other beacons have focused attention on developing definitions for public engagement to underpin their work. See for instance:

- Edinburgh Beltane’s **‘spectrum of public engagement’**
- CUE East’s **definition**
- Elsewhere on this site you can access more resources tackling **‘what is public engagement?’** and **‘why does public engagement matter?’**

The Manchester Beacon has developed **‘culture change labs’** as a way of involving a range of staff in strategic staff engagement events. The labs are attended by the executive directors and senior leadership teams. After the events, project sponsors are assigned to cross-partnership task group to pilot projects to embed PE into policies and procedures. These groups also included representatives from non-University partners.

Why and how should universities engage with the public? A video of Professor Younger’s presentation at the NCCPE’s Open House event in 2009, where he outlines the case for public engagement

Strategic Planning

The next stage in Newcastle’s strategy development process was to set up a ‘task and finish’ group to define priorities for the allocation of resources, and identify an appropriate long-term approach to coordinating engagement.

*“My advice to others setting out on this journey is to set some headline objectives. Keep them as few as possible – half a dozen, or less, if you can get away with it. Unpack them into the key actions needed to deliver them, and think about any cross-cutting enabling structures or support that you need to put in place. Try to set KPIs corresponding to each objective – and try to distribute responsibility for these amongst research, teaching and administrative staff so that they adjust their own strategies and activity to help.” **Paul Younger***

The resulting strategy is still a work in progress. The initial mapping needed to be turned into a strategy that was feasible and added to the University’s other core missions of excellence and a high student experience.

Definition

The draft starts with a definition – a pithy summary of what engagement means at Newcastle: ‘the interaction of the University with the civil society to which it belongs’

Vision, mission and values

It was felt to be important to spell out an inspirational vision and sense of purpose, and to describe the values that should animate the strategy, before setting specific objectives. Newcastle crystallised their mission as *“playing a leading role in the development of North East England and regions worldwide that face challenges addressed by our research base.”*

Strategic objectives

Five objectives were set, which aligned with the broader thrust of Vision 2021:

- Attract top talent to settle in the North East
- Develop and implement the concept of Newcastle Science City
- Contribute our facilities, knowledge and skills to support healthy growth of civic and regional culture
- Use our global standing and intellectual capital to influence and inform national and international debate
- Implement strategic partnership initiatives to address major global challenges relating especially to health, wellbeing and sustainable development

Action themes

The action themes spelt out how each objective would be delivered, by listing the headline activities relevant to each one. In some cases, this involved aligning existing activity, while for others new initiatives were outlined.

One innovation was the decision to develop engagement campaigns around societal challenge themes, such as ageing, health and sustainability.

Engagement practices

The strategy then spelt out five cross-cutting activities that would also be necessary to deliver the objectives. The headings were:

- Engaged staff (supporting recruitment, development and promotion of staff)
- Students citizenship programmes (for instance service learning and volunteering)
- Educating for Life (for instance developing cross cutting 'engaged' research themes and supporting lifelong learning)
- Engaging spaces (eg developing the university campus to be more accessible)
- Serving social need (eg support for community networks)

Key performance indicators

The group worked hard to find measures for each of the five strategic objectives. Wherever possible, these were designed to be quantitative, and to draw upon data which was already gathered or could be collected without great additional effort. However, it was acknowledged that the nature of engagement activities meant that some of the most important evidence for success would be predominantly qualitative, requiring consideration of narratives alongside statistical evidence. As an example, for supporting the growth of regional culture, they settled on the following measures:

- Attendance figures to public lectures and events
- Annual statistics and narratives linked to engagement campaigns
- Annual statistics and narratives on participation of schools and community groups in aspiration- raising activities
- Statistics and narratives from student engagement activities, eg volunteering and service learning
- Numbers of staff holding statutory positions in public, private and voluntary organisations (e.g. school governors, charity trustees)

It is anticipated that these KPIs will change as the Engagement Strategy matures.

Enabling factors

Finally, the Task and Finish group spelt out 6 key 'enabling factors' which would need to be addressed in order for the aspirations of the strategy to be realised. These covered:

- Staff and students
- Culture
- Communication
- Financial
- Procedures, processes and structures

Other approaches

You can find out more about approaches to measuring the impact of engagement activities in our literature review 'Auditing, benchmarking and evaluating public engagement'.

Elsewhere in this section, you can find out much more about different enabling factors for embedding public engagement, including support, communication, learning and reward and recognition.

The University of Bristol published its '[Engaged University](#)' strategy in 2009. It built a commitment to public engagement into a refreshed [vision](#), published in the same year.

Alignment with other priorities

"Our engagement activities, while carried out in the sense of good citizenship, are firmly and specifically based on our academic expertise and experience. In consequence, all our academic units are expected to build up an engagement portfolio based on their research and teaching activities. Likewise, student and alumni activities form an important part of our institutional engagement profile."

Newcastle University, 'Vision 2021'

As Newcastle researched and developed their strategy it became increasingly apparent that public engagement needed to be framed not as an end in itself, but as a way of enhancing the quality and impact of the institution's core activities: research, teaching and learning, student experience and civic responsibility. The final articulation of the strategy in their refreshed Vision 2021 reflected this holistic approach:

- It integrated public, community and business engagement in one strategy
- Although strongly regional in focus, the engagement activity was seen to extend to national and global influence
- The involvement of all disciplines was invoked under the two pillars of 'cultural' and 'scientific' engagement
- Engagement was firmly positioned as an academic activity integrated into teaching and learning, rather than as a 'third strand'

As a result of this integrated view of engagement, the strategy presupposed that its implementation would be achieved through its alignment with the normal, ongoing work of all parts of the University, rather than via a separately identified delivery mechanism. For example, the rich range of student engagement activity that was already delivered academic units, by relevant professional services and the Union Society, would not be duplicated in any way. The 'gap' to be filled was to ensure there was some means of knowing what was actually being done, promoting best practices, and effectively communicating this to the wider world. Some coordination across the corporate levels from Schools to the University as a whole was therefore deemed necessary, with the following recommendations being made:

As a matter of policy, **every Faculty, Academic Unit and Professional Support Service Unit must develop and implement its own engagement strategy as part of its strategic plan.** Many units have already done so. While it is not expected that all individual members of staff will have engagement duties, all Units must allow for inclusion of engagement activities in the workload models of staff for whom engagement work is appropriate, and support this commitment through PDR processes.

In several Units, the responsibility of 'engagement coordinator' (or similar) has already been assigned to an individual member of staff, typically someone with a strong track record in some aspect of engagement. Some Units with particularly large engagement commitments have appointed full-time managers to such a position. The level of provision appropriate for each particular Unit is clearly a matter for the Head of Unit to resolve; however, **the principle that a named individual be responsible for collating and transmitting information on engagement activities is recommended for all Units.**

The goal of aligning engagement with the existing priorities and practices of the university has already borne fruit. Examples include:

- Ongoing innovation in the embedding of engagement into the curriculum and student experience, for instance in the [ncl+ graduate skills programme](#)
- The development of a 'coherent campus' strategy to make the campus and buildings, such as the library, more welcoming and accessible to the public
- Finalising a major re-development of their museum in partnership with Newcastle City Council, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne
- Implementing strategic partnership initiatives to address global challenges, for instance through working with regional fora like the ['Northern Rural Network'](#)

*"Your priority has to be to get buy in to the process. That's why it took us a year from start to finish. If you don't, people won't be interested. Because we gave it time, we've now got lots of ownership, and references to the engagement strategy are popping up all over the place." **Paul Younger***

Other approaches

You can find out more about how other universities and beacon partnerships have gone about developing their engagement strategies in the **Stories of Change** section of the NCCPE site

Issues and considerations

The following issues are worth bearing in mind when seeking to develop your own strategic plan for engagement

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TAKES TIME

This was Newcastle University's first ever Engagement Strategy, so the process, and the scope, were quite difficult to define. A further challenge arose from the extraordinarily wide spectrum of actual and potential engagement activity which was difficult to capture and quantify, as it was constantly changing.

THE PROCESS CAN CREATE STRONG RESISTANCE FROM SOME MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

Although seeking to develop a shared understanding of engagement is agreed to be a worthwhile goal, it is unlikely to ever achieve consensus, and can even provoke hostile reactions from some academic staff who view engagement as a dangerous distraction. 'It's worth provoking the debate, but don't get too hung up on arriving at a set of universally agreed values tripping off everyone's tongue!' (Paul Younger)

BE AWARE THAT RUNNING SURVEYS AND AUDITS CAN BE VERY TIME CONSUMING

'We were overwhelmed by the response to our audit. We expected a couple of hundred responses, but got nearly twelve hundred. It was a struggle trying to distil it all, and in retrospect probably wasn't worth doing in the way we did it as we didn't have the resource to properly analyse the results.' (Paul Younger)

CAN ENGAGEMENT BE 'MANAGED'?

It is important to consider the extent to which it is desirable or possible to 'manage' public engagement – and to what extent 'managerial' approaches squeeze out the creativity and spontaneity which many regard as fundamental to good engagement. Is there a 'best fit' level of management, which protects an institution from risk while also supporting individuals to be creative in their engagement activities?

JUST HOW MUCH SUPPORT DOES ENGAGEMENT NEED TO THRIVE?

While most people agree that engagement is more likely to thrive if aligned with research and teaching, it is also acknowledged that it still requires time and resources to underpin it. For example, much public engagement is built on long term relationship and network development. This is difficult to fund within teaching programmes or research projects.

Further reading

The NCCPE set up an action research project in 2009 to examine some of the strategic challenges involved in embedding public engagement in the university sector. You can find out more about some of the other issues identified through this process by accessing the **final report**.

Links and further reading

Vision 2021: A world-class civic university	Newcastle University's mission statement, published in 2009, which clearly outlines its commitment to engagement
Characterising modes of university engagement with wider society A literature review and survey of best practice	A literature review, examining university engagement and drawing out lessons to inform how universities can become better engaged. Commissioned to inform the development of Newcastle's Engagement Strategy
Why and how should universities engage with the public?	A video of Paul Younger's presentation at the NCCPE Open House event in November 2009
University / community engagement at Newcastle University	A powerpoint presentation by Professor Paul Younger, outlining Newcastle University's approach to public and community engagement
University of Bristol engagement strategy	The University of Bristol's vision makes clear its commitment to public engagement. Their engagement strategy outlines how this commitment will be delivered.
<u>Embedding Public Engagement in High Education: The key issues</u>	A report summarising the key findings from the NCCPE's action research programme to support the embedding of Public Engagement in Higher Education.
<u>Auditing, benchmarking and evaluating public engagement</u>	This NCCPE paper explores the roles of auditing, benchmarking and evaluating university public engagement. It brings a multitude of different

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