

The Beacons for Public Engagement



Introduction

In 2008 the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative was launched. It had one simple aim – to inspire a culture change in how universities engage with the public. Six Beacon partnerships and a National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement were funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust.

Public engagement describes the many ways that the activity and benefits of higher education and research is shared with, and informed by, the public. There is already a large amount of inspiring public engagement activity involving universities and research institutes. Much of this work is under the radar and vulnerable to shifts in funding. The funders were keen to see how public engagement activity could be embedded into the culture of higher education institutes.

Each of the Beacon partnerships is tackling this issue in different ways. There have been successes and challenges along the way – but what is emerging is a significant amount of learning about how to create lasting change, alongside a deeper understanding of how appropriate public engagement can have huge benefits for everyone involved.

This booklet details some of the work of the NCCPE and the Beacons, including viewpoints from some of the twenty three universities involved. We invite you to get involved in this exciting project.

“ Professor Alan Thorpe, Chair of RCUK

Public engagement matters profoundly to Research Councils UK. Much of the work carried out by researchers has a direct impact on society, so it is important that the public can both access the knowledge being generated and have their say. This engagement helps empower people, enriches research, broadens attitudes and ensures that the work of universities is relevant to wider social concerns. We set up the Beacons project because we believe that interaction with the public should form a core part of the role of any member of staff or student in any discipline. We are delighted with the progress of the project – and are really keen that the lessons being learned are shared widely across the sector – inspiring researchers to engage the public with their work.



“ Sir Alan Langlands, Chief Executive, HEFCE

It has never been more important for universities to demonstrate the important wider role they play in society, to be outward-facing and to engage with the public across a range of issues. The Beacons, partnering with a range of community, cultural, public and media organisations, are making a major contribution to our understanding of how universities can become more engaged and open. This isn't straightforward: it involves challenging some entrenched attitudes and ways of working, and learning new skills and approaches. But the rewards are significant, as this summary demonstrates, and the project is helping to redefine what it means to be a university in the 21st century. HEFCE is committed to helping support universities in developing their work in this area.



What is Public Engagement?

Public engagement describes the many ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research is shared with, and informed by, the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening between all parties, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.

Public engagement connects the public with staff and students to share together their passions and expertise and to problem solve on societal issues. It can bring benefits to all involved. It covers all subjects, from arts and humanities to science, and a host of activities, many of which are detailed in this brochure and at www.publicengagement.ac.uk.

Activities can include

- Presenting to the public (eg public lectures or talks)
- Participating in festivals
- Working with museums / galleries / science centres and other cultural venues
- Creating opportunities for the public to inform the research questions being tackled
- Involving the public as researchers
- Researchers and publics working together to inform policy
- Engaging with young people (eg workshops with schools)



The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and the Beacons

The Beacons for Public Engagement initiative consists of a network of

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



The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, NCCPE

Based at the Watershed Centre in Bristol, the NCCPE is a partnership between the University of Bristol and University of the West of England. Our vision is of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity. We are working to help support universities to improve, value and increase the quantity and quality of their public engagement and embed it into their core practice.

We work with the Beacons to synthesise learning from their work, and disseminate it. In addition we work with higher education Institutions across the sector to learn from them, and develop resources, research and events that capture the huge value of public engagement, and equip people to get involved.

We are keen to ensure that we support university staff and students across all roles and subjects to get involved in appropriate public engagement activity. Our website www.publicengagement.ac.uk is a rapidly growing resource for the sector – with information about funding, examples of good practice, upcoming events, news and other resources.

We are developing a manifesto for universities to sign to declare their support and intentions around public engagement and will encourage senior managers to sign up to develop their institution's work in this area.

Paul Manners, Director, NCCPE

Public engagement has a vital role to play in ensuring that the work that goes on in universities is informed by wider social concerns. It is also hugely energising, both intellectually and personally, relying as it does on curiosity, discussion and debate. We want to share our passion for engagement – and to learn from and support everyone who wants to get involved.

Bang Goes the Theory

The BBC One Science series, Bang Goes the Theory, has provided an excellent opportunity for the NCCPE to develop a collaborative project with the BBC and the Beacons. Academics from the Beacon universities have come together with colleagues from the Open University and BBC editorial staff to answer questions asked by the public, inspired by the programme.

To date, over a hundred and sixty academics have taken part – developing new skills, raising the profile of the work of the Beacons, and providing answers to the public's science questions. The partnership is supported through an online forum and academics can also access training to improve their communication skills, or develop filmed answers for use on the BBC website.

The BBC is delighted to have the expert support from a group of university academics and is keen to develop work in this area.

In addition the project enabled academics to do useful engagement activity from the comfort of their own office, developing skills and experience that deepened interest in public engagement.



vinspired students

The NCCPE was successful in securing funding from **v**, the national young volunteers service, to run the **vinspired students** project, which is providing compelling evidence of the impact of volunteering on students, communities and institutions. The project aims to inspire a cultural shift in the sector, encouraging universities to recognise the value of student volunteering as part of their core work, and to galvanise a step change in the quality, quantity and diversity of student volunteering.

We are doing this through:

- Research and evidence gathering: we have undertaken a mapping exercise to describe current volunteering activities and impacts, and have commissioned new research into the motivations for and outcomes of student volunteering
- Pilot projects: we have funded ten pilot projects to create new opportunities for student volunteering, whilst also testing new ideas and advancing our strategic knowledge
- National campaigns: we are running national campaigns to explore the benefits and challenges of universities working with external partners on large scale student volunteering projects
- Manifesto: we are developing a framework and manifesto that clarifies the scope of student volunteering and will help Vice-Chancellors to determine how they can embed student volunteering as part of their strategy

Claire Sedgwick, 3rd Year student, University of Northumbria

Volunteering provides a great way of helping students engage with the local community. Through volunteering I have made friends with people from a variety of different cultures and backgrounds and I have been able to get to know the city I live in, and not just the student bars and my students' union. Volunteering has enriched my student experience and provided me with a better insight into the world.

vinspiredstudents

Student Advisory Board

Our Student Advisory Board is made up of fourteen student volunteers from around the country who are helping us to develop our strategy and influence the shape and delivery of the project. This includes:

- Leading on an extensive consultation process with other students and stakeholders involved in volunteering in different higher education institutions
- Gathering case studies to illustrate the strength and variety of student volunteering projects
- Contributing to, and acting as champions for, our student volunteering 'manifesto'

Together with the **vinspired students**' project team, the Student Advisory Board will serve as powerful advocates for student volunteering. They will act as an important check and balance to ensure that the results of our project are relevant, support our work to achieve a positive influence, and help secure a healthy future for student volunteering.



Beacon for Wales

The Beacon for Wales is a partnership between Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, Techniquet, and BBC Wales. It aims to develop the skills and confidence of university staff and students in listening to and learning from publics across Wales.

Since the start of the project the Beacon for Wales has been focussing on raising the profile of engagement as a valid activity for university academics. To help achieve this we have initiated three funding rounds to encourage staff to develop engagement projects, and have so far awarded over £200k to sixteen projects across four different Welsh universities. More importantly, one hundred and fifty four applications were received from ten universities across Wales requesting a total of £1.3M; this level of interest has helped to improve the networks between higher education institutions and their communities by linking academics and non-academics together. You can read more about this in the case study below.

The Beacon for Wales also supports the successful Science Alliance Cymru Network, which now has over a hundred and fifty members, and brings together people involved in engagement projects in universities, museums, science centres, educational charities, the media, private industry, and public bodies. Building on the success of this network the Beacon for Wales has launched the Wales Culture Exchange, a network for the arts, humanities and social sciences. We have also undertaken a significant amount of evaluation of engagement activities, both in the higher education sector and others. This work is disseminated via our website and through academic papers.

Academic, Beacon for Wales

The Beacon project call involved me and my researcher actively finding out key issues for the community by meeting with them and tossing around ideas. Usually we work the other way around by simply responding to funding calls. Doing it the Beacon way is much more rewarding.

Using Funding to Support Change

Aimed at encouraging new partnerships between universities and community organisations and developing better understanding of public engagement, the Beacon for Wales launched a funding programme. Sixteen projects have so far received funding of £208k, with projects ranging from £6,100 to £19,800. Academic subjects covered by the projects include archaeology, maths, journalism, foster care, and Jewish history.

Everyone who expressed interest in the second round of funding was invited to complete a short e-survey exploring what they had learnt about public engagement as a result of their funding application. This survey had fifty respondents, thirty six of which were university staff involved in projects. Key findings were:

- 60% of people learnt something new about public engagement which inspired them to get more involved
- 75% made new partnerships
- 60% identified areas where they needed further training for engagement

Participants

"In addition to the new contacts made... the very act of assembling and thinking through our project has made me think of new approaches to research and projects."

"If academics want to do something innovative and useful, it is very important to partner with external bodies, especially if the academics are not experienced with the group they want to work with."



Michael Worton

Michael Worton is Vice Provost (Academic and International) of UCL (University College London). He was chair of the HEFCE/AHRC Expert Group on Research Metrics and is a member of the HERA/European Science Foundation Steering Committee, 'Building a European Index for the Humanities'. He is committed to universities engaging the public in their research.

As we face the prospect of deeper Government funding cuts it is important that we reflect on the successes of the past decade. We have seen unparalleled investment in research by the UK Government, enabling UK Higher Education to reinforce its global position. More and more UK students are choosing to go to university to study for a degree, including those from non-traditional backgrounds.

Universities are focusing on interdisciplinary work, in their research and teaching, and have been putting in place international strategies increasing the mobility between the UK and other countries. This outreach to the world (which still has some considerable way to go) has been accompanied by an increasing focus on working with local communities, driven to a large extent by the work of student volunteers.

Universities are thus very different places than they were even ten years ago, and their focus is much more outward-looking. As the value of knowledge transfer has been increasingly recognised, there has been a shift from the notion of research dissemination as a one-way communication to a growing sense of the importance of dialogue and the collective creation and development of knowledge. The focus on dialogue, which is the heart of true public engagement, is one of the greatest challenges for the modern university but is also an opportunity for universities to reinvent themselves as a public good for the 21st century.

One of the major lessons we at UCL have learnt as a Beacon for Public Engagement is that the public is not only "elsewhere", but is within our own walls. We are a community of nearly 22,000 students and 8,500 staff who have great loyalty to UCL as a community, but many are unaware of what exactly is going on in terms of research and teaching. We need also to define which external audiences we particularly want to address, and engage them in specific and differently appropriate ways. The biggest lesson we have had to learn is how to listen and allow non-specialists to challenge our ideas and question the significance of our discoveries, and contribute to the knowledge with which we are working.

A striking example is Object Retrieval, a mass participation art project when a single museum object was exhibited in a converted Routemaster. This inclusive interdisciplinary project sought to include everyone who visited the bus in the process of creating knowledge about the object through their responses, knowledge and questions. (www.objectretrieval.com)

This project reminded us that we can never predict exactly why and when people are interested in certain things. We now recognise explicitly that through our various processes of communicating, we gain new perspectives and are offered new pathways forward in thinking about our discoveries. Crucially, we are learning gradually to undo decades of assumptions about how and where knowledge is created and by whom.

Public engagement encounters therefore contribute to the way we think about our research and how we are teaching our subjects. In this way, it serves to bind universities more closely (and in creatively complex ways) with the communities with which they work and helps us to bring our research and teaching together in closer and more productive ways.

You can read the full piece, as well as the views of others at www.publicengagement.ac.uk.



Community University Engagement East (CUE East)

CUE East is led by the University of East Anglia (UEA) and is designed to foster an informed climate to improve quality of life, support social and economic regeneration regionally and inculcate civic values.

CUE East is making a positive difference at UEA by providing an infrastructure dedicated to building skills, confidence and capacity at all levels in the organisation. CUE East creates and supports opportunities for people to get involved in a wide range of engagement activities. This includes:

- Funded projects such as East Meets East
- Events such as the CUE East & Partners first Norwich & Norfolk Sustainable Living Festival 2009
- 'Experiments' such as the Making History Workshop where postgraduate researchers and members of the public explored together the value of research

These activities are providing that all essential opportunity for experiential learning.

CUE East is also building on good practice across the Norwich Research Park and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and is piloting ways to recognise and reward excellent engagement through internal processes, such as staff promotions criteria and individual awards. A new and innovative Enterprise and Engagement Tracker developed by CUE East helps individuals to record and present their 'engagement portfolio'.

A key external feature of CUE East is its off-campus presence at The Forum in the centre of Norwich, which provides a city contact point for the public as well as a space and digital facilities for UEA staff and students to use in their engagement activities.

Postgraduate Researcher

...it did just kind of ignite this idea behind the fact that anything you are doing is relevant to society.

CUE East Individual Awards 2008/09: A 'Culture Change' Intervention

Aimed at providing an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution that staff and students at UEA and at the Norwich Research Park have made to university community engagement, and thereby raise the profile of public and community engagement, the initial scheme saw seven awards of £1k being made. Nominators were asked to provide a supporting statement and evidence of the specific contribution that their nominee had made to public and community engagement. The first awards were made during Summer Congregation, and represent a significant development in embedding public engagement at UEA, as the awards shared in the prestige of other awards given out at Congregation.

Stephen Ashworth (shown here) has been actively involved with public engagement for the past ten years and is the Schools Liaison Officer for the local section of the Royal Society of Chemistry. He has organised the annual Salters' Festival of Chemistry, the Norwich Science Olympiad working with hundreds of local pupils of all ages, regular workshops for Women's Institute Groups and developed a workshop for blind and partially sighted participants called 'Looking Glass Laboratory'.



Edinburgh Beltane

Edinburgh Beltane aspires to empower people to engage in public policy issues (such as health and energy) by ensuring research expertise in these areas is made accessible and relevant.

This Beacon is a large partnership led by the University of Edinburgh and includes all the higher education institutions in Edinburgh, plus the UHI Millennium Institute and thirteen other public, policy, engagement and research organisations.

Bringing our researchers together with our policy and engagement partners means we can help researchers, policy makers and the public to consider how research advances will impact and benefit Scottish and wider communities.

We are proactively working towards culture change on several levels:

- Our working groups tackle key areas within the partners, such as staff development and rewards and recognition
- Our Public Engagement Fellows scheme enables academics to devote 20% of their time to develop their public engagement skills and act as ambassadors, sharing best practice across their disciplines and institutions. Current fellows represent five partners, spanning wide-ranging subjects such as astrophysics, bilingualism and financial risk
- Our community networking website provides topical discussion forums to facilitate innovative cross-partner collaborations, shared resources and case studies to showcase good practice
- We have recently awarded funding to six successful applicants to our Public Engagement Challenge. This will enable pioneering projects to take place, with reflective learning to be shared

Dr Kathy Velander, Senior Lecturer, Edinburgh Napier University

It is important researchers feel competent and confident to meet the challenge of successfully engaging the public in their work. The Training and Staff Development Working Group allows us to share expertise, identify good practice and encourage the embedding of public engagement skills within their own institutions.

Working Together to Effect Change

The Training and Staff Development Working Group has members from diverse disciplines spread across the partnership. We bring this team together regularly to transform the way researchers approach public engagement. By providing new training opportunities, embedding public engagement into current personal development programs and sharing expertise, this group works towards ensuring consistently high-quality public engagement activities throughout the Beltane partners.

Key accomplishments to date:

- Piloted a Learning Lunch series illustrating the value of public engagement (part of the University of Edinburgh staff development programme)
- Developed the 'Beltane Certificate' concept to standardise public engagement training across the partners
- Ran a successful Trainers Event to assess this concept with key stakeholders. The positive outcome indicates that the certificate will raise awareness and ensure effective evaluation of the training on offer
- Compiled a shared database which will allow partners to coordinate and identify overlaps/shortfalls in public engagement training provision



The Manchester Beacon

The Manchester Beacon combines the complementary strengths of The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and The University of Salford with the Museum of Science and Industry and Manchester: Knowledge Capital.

The Manchester Beacon engages staff, students, community groups and local businesses in the design and delivery of activities that use engagement to break down the barriers between universities and local people. Five objectives were established and agreed by relevant stakeholders:

- Encourage, value and support public engagement
- Change perceptions and improve accessibility to universities and local communities
- Increase the relevance of institutional activity (i.e. research, teaching and engagement) and connectivity with local communities
- Improve opportunities for sustainable two-way learning
- Develop deeper partnership working across the Beacon partners and with local communities

Manchester Beacon's programme includes:

- Building capacity through networking, mentoring and professional development
- Funding new and relevant partnerships with local communities to foster knowledge exchange
- Funding innovative approaches to public engagement
- Celebrating and showcasing public engagement through an annual summit

Professor Gerry Kelleher, Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Manchester Metropolitan University

The Beacon Lab has helped change the direction of thought of our senior management... the Beacon is an engine for cultural change and is enabling us to make connections and embed public engagement across the university.

Creating a Culture in Which Public Engagement is Valued

Manchester's strategic focus is to work with senior university managers to create a culture where public engagement is encouraged, valued and supported. Effective culture change needs to be relevant to strategic contexts and gain ownership and buy-in from staff at different levels. This inspired a creative approach to culture change, called the "Manchester Beacon Labs".

The Labs have provided time and space for senior leadership teams and relevant practitioners to share and explore the vision and priorities for embedding public engagement into each institution.

This approach has informed pilot project criteria to address the challenges and to update and inform university policies and procedures including defining public engagement within strategic goals; reward and recognition structure; professional development training and evaluating the impact of public engagement activity.

Strategic cross-partnership task groups for Reward and Recognition, Communications, Operations and Evaluation have been set up to share learning and pilot joint activity.

Key learning to date:

- The value of strong leadership to endorse policy changes
- Shared visioning fosters ownership and understanding amongst staff and local communities
- Celebrating and communicating success is important as a form of reward and recognition
- Change is facilitated by staff networks who engage peers to collaborate and share knowledge
- Small amounts of money can stimulate big changes



Beacon North East

Beacon North East is a partnership between Newcastle University, Durham University and the Centre for Life. We support and promote good quality public engagement and help to influence the culture of our universities to further value communication with wider society. We believe that academic experts can improve the quality of research by working with 'experts by experience' outside the academic world.

Providing funding and support to ten innovative projects through our Small Grants Programme has helped us to pilot different models of public engagement and to broker relationships both within and outside the universities. One of our valued community members commented, 'Beacon North East has funded our project to help us make our plans a reality and has paired us up with a researcher... whose knowledge and experience in this area will ensure that the work we do helps to influence key decision-makers in Gateshead to make changes for the better...'

Working with the Centre for Life and Pro-Vice-Chancellors at Newcastle and Durham University, we have set up a jointly funded sabbatical programme for staff at both institutions which has already become embedded within Newcastle University's emerging Engagement Strategy. The Beacon North East Fellowship Scheme now boasts thirteen diverse Fellows undertaking a range of innovative public engagement projects. This element of our programme is helping us to identify and remove barriers to public engagement, as well as providing Fellows with an opportunity to develop new skills in this area.

Professor Paul Younger, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement, Newcastle University

Beacon North East has really got into gear in its second year, and is now acting as a veritable motor of positive cultural change in our two universities. Drawing on the experiences of many colleagues, and the creativity and expertise of the Centre for Life, we are encountering great enthusiasm from colleagues at all stages of their careers.

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action

Durham University's Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (CSJCA) was established in May 2009 to promote research of practical interest and relevance that involves community groups and organisations at every stage of the process.

Beacon North East has been central to the formation of the CSJCA. One of the two CSJCA directors, Professor Sarah Banks, is Durham Theme Leader for Social Justice and Social Inclusion; one of the three themes of Beacon North East. Additionally, Beacon North East has fully supported the Centre in terms of administrative support and the opportunities offered through the Beacon Fellowship Scheme and Small Grants Programme. The CSJCA offers a number of unique and innovative training and development opportunities open to members of the public free of charge.

In addition, the second CSJCA director, Dr Rachel Pain has established a module on participatory research that will be taken by approximately thirty Geography undergraduates at Durham University in 2009-10, and will involve a number of community organisations. This is integrated into the Geography BA degree as a third year option, and is a good example of mainstreaming public engagement into teaching and developing skills and interest of undergraduate students.



Nancy Rothwell

Nancy Rothwell is Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at The University of Manchester where she also holds a Medical Research Council Professorship. A long-standing advocate of public engagement in the higher education sector she is principal investigator of the Manchester Beacon for Public Engagement.

Universities are changing. They are increasingly diversifying the types of teaching and learning they provide and the students they enrol. The change has been driven largely by external pressures, from funders, from government and from the many “customers” of universities which include the students, their families and future employers, the users and benefactors of research and scholarship in universities and not least the tax payer.

Now is hardly a time of economic plenty for universities, so investment of time and money in activities such as public engagement needs clear justification and some measurable outputs. The carrots and sticks wielded by the core funders of universities are powerful incentives. The forthcoming Research Excellence Framework is likely to place considerable weight on the wider “impact” of research. This has caused much concern in academe and fears that the UK will no longer maintain its position amongst the very best places in the world to undertake fundamental “blue skies” research. This would be a disaster, but it isn’t necessarily the outcome. If, as many of us would argue, “blue skies” research has had great impact and benefit, then dissemination of its findings and clarity over that impact should be valued. Arguments over the details of measuring impact and the time scale that is needed (many decades in some cases) will run on, but there is little disagreement that universities need to get better at explaining what they do, how and why, and why it should matter to the UK.

These arguments assume that public engagement is a rather defensive tactic to ensure that universities are valued and supported.

But those with long experience of public engagement activities would argue that there are much wider benefits. There is nothing like trying to discuss a complicated piece of research with non-experts to make you really grapple with its true meaning or see it in a different light as I, myself, have discovered engaging with patient groups. Sometimes the most relevant questions and answers come from the “lay” audience.

There are also personal rewards and enjoyment in public engagement activity. This year’s winner of the Society of Biology Young Science Communicator Award, Ceri Harrup, said that she was considering giving up plans for a career in research until she became involved in public engagement. The excitement and challenge of explaining her work (on mucous, so not the most engaging topic) to non-scientists made her realise the fascination of her research.

The benefits of public engagement to a university, its staff and students and wider communities are numerous, and need to be recognised, rewarded and valued by those in leadership positions. We are discovering a huge appetite for engagement inside and outside our universities as part of the Beacons initiative and, whilst public engagement activities may be a modest part of the time of a busy academic or university student, it shouldn’t have to be restricted to weekends and evenings and can be celebrated by those in the most senior positions throughout universities.

You can read the full piece, as well as the views of others at www.publicengagement.ac.uk.



University College London (UCL)

UCL's Beacon activity is based in the new dedicated Public Engagement Unit. Our team work to embed public engagement across all of university life, and to nurture a continuous two-way exchange of thought, knowledge and expertise between staff, students and people outside academia.

We remove barriers to engagement wherever we find them: strategically funding projects proposed by academic, research and support staff, arranging training, finding new opportunities to engage alongside external organisations, advising other university support departments on how to best facilitate engagement, spreading best practice across UCL and helping staff and students take the first step into an engaged way of working. We also operate responsively, using arising opportunities to connect people at UCL with others outside the university. We work to give UCL staff and students the chance to work together and with external organisations to achieve their engagement goals.

The Unit works with a range of external partners, including London's museums (especially the British Museum), festivals (for example the Kings Cross, Bloomsbury and Cheltenham Festivals), and educators (including Birkbeck and City and Islington College).

We have put a lot of new projects and structures in place to support public engagement, including an annual symposium for staff to share their public work, awards for high achievement in engagement and meetings for staff involved in public activities. In evaluating these activities, we draw on UCL staff's expertise in social science, with the intention of developing, understanding and promoting best practice.

“Bright Club Audience Member

Well, you come to a comedy night and you expect to be entertained and amused, but you don't expect to learn anything! I really liked the mix of science and comedy ...It is a fantastic concept

Bright Club

“Bright Club” is a project facilitated by UCL and One Green Firework, a comedy promotions company. It brings together and trains researchers and academics and gives them a space to share their research with the public. Bright Club provides an enjoyable first step into engagement, aiming to reach out to members of the public aged 20-50 who currently are not linked to a university, but who take part in cultural events. Bright Club tests a new method for public engagement focused around entertainment.

Bright Club happens every month in a comedy club in Clerkenwell, London. A professional comedian comperes, and UCL staff and students perform short sets about aspects of their work, with a single unifying theme. We always include a musical act. So far we've tackled Lust, London, Time, Space, Light (the last three supported by the Science and Technology Funding Council) Metal and Film, and at the time of writing we are planning The Sea, Crime and Happiness.

Monitoring shows that more than 60% of the audience have no relationship with a university. Many of the first-time presenters have gone on to other engagement projects, and audience members tend to come back.



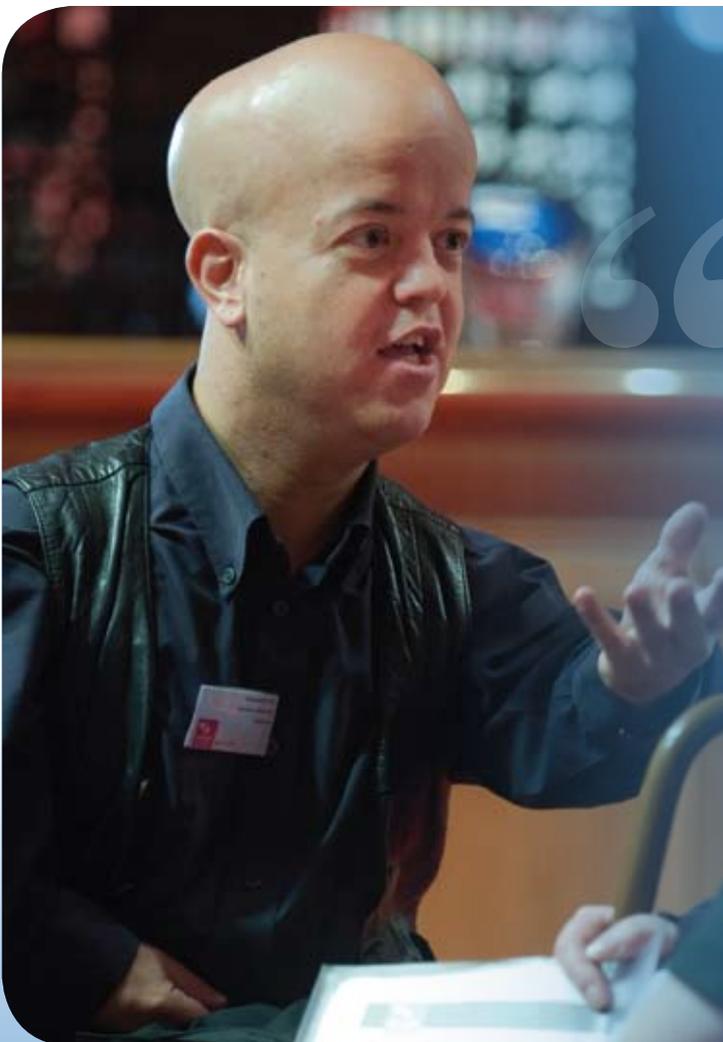


Mary Bownes

Mary is Vice Principal (Pro-VC) at the University of Edinburgh with responsibility in postgraduate affairs, widening participation, recruitment, admission, scholarships, community relations and social responsibility and sustainability.

“ Researchers who share their knowledge and enthusiasm for their discipline with the public often find that this rejuvenates and reminds them exactly why they do research when faced with the day to day struggle of getting funding, getting papers published and getting acknowledgement for discoveries or new ideas. Further, an interested audience, particularly when they are not experts in the area, can often ask questions that make researchers rethink their approach or consider new multidisciplinary collaborations which significantly take forward their research design and progress. There can be publicity in the media as events are covered, which can engender acceptance and credibility amongst peers. Also seeing their own findings, based on evidence, influencing policy and the behaviour of the public can be really exciting. For some researchers public engagement is fully embedded into their research project, especially those involved in policy development or the professions, but for others this involves interacting with new groups of people, which is always stimulating. There is even evidence from a survey in France that scientific researchers who engage with the public perform better in their research.

You can read Mary's full article at www.publicengagement.ac.uk.



Tom Shakespeare

Tom Shakespeare is part of the team at Beacon North East. He is a member of Arts Council, England, and has been involved in the disability movement for more than twenty years.

“ The current emphasis on engagement is perhaps an overdue recognition that universities cannot, like the ivy on their buildings, take a parasitic role, sucking resources and people from their surroundings without facing up to the responsibilities which both public funding and intellectual independence bring with them. Of course, many academics have always known this and have, honorably and usually with scant recognition, spent time in serving the needs of wider communities.

You can read Tom's full article at www.publicengagement.ac.uk



Get involved

The NCCPE are committed to engaging people in this work. You could:

- Check out the website: www.publicengagement.ac.uk which includes information about funding, how to guides, news about public engagement and higher education institutions and also provides lots of opportunities for you to shape our work
- Sign up to our monthly newsletter – and find out more about the work of the initiative
- Get in touch – and let us know about events, resources or web content you would like to see us develop. We are particularly keen to host joint events across the UK
- Help us to develop our manifesto and associated toolkits online or at events. Do tell us if you would like to get involved in this exciting work
- Join our Public Engagement Network (PEN). Open to anyone passionate about public engagement with research, universities and research institutes, the PEN encourages people to share news, and discuss relevant topics. The NCCPE also provides a regular news digest for this network
- Apply to become a Public Engagement Ambassador. Aimed at supporting people who are passionate about Public Engagement to develop their own skills and experience, and act as change agents within their own institution, this scheme provides funding to attend conferences and events, as well as having networking events and training sessions
- Come to an event. All our events are listed on our website – including our national conference on 7/8 December 2010. We are also happy to come and run workshops/presentations at your events
- Share your own work with us. Please get in touch if you have a great example of student volunteering or public engagement

Get in touch

We are keen to hear from you – so do get in touch at:

nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk

0117 915 0165

The NCCPE, Watershed Media Centre, 1 Canon's Road, Bristol BS1 5TX

Enquiries will be forwarded to the appropriate person at the NCCPE or the Beacons

Websites

NCCPE www.publicengagement.ac.uk

The NCCPE website includes links to the Beacon websites, the case studies featured in this brochure, and the viewpoints summarised here as well as lots of relevant information about public engagement.

Beacon for Wales www.engagingwales.org

CUE East www.uea.ac.uk/ssf/cue-east

Edinburgh Beacon www.edinburghbeltane.net

Manchester Beacon www.manchesterbeacon.org

Beacon North East www.beaconnortheast.co.uk

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