

# SEE-PER Final Report: Birkbeck, University of London

## The SEE-PER programme

The UKRI Strategic Support to Expedite Embedding Public Engagement with Research (SEE-PER) call sought to help enrich and embed cultures within HEIs where excellent public engagement with research (PER) is supported, valued, rewarded and integrated within institutional policies and practices. The first year of this programme ran from October 2017 to October 2018. Two types of approach were funded:

**‘Embedding change’** proposals that sought to enhance and embed an institution’s approach to supporting PER, building on the learning from the Beacons for Public Engagement, RCUK PER Catalyst and Catalyst Seed Fund programmes:

- Birkbeck College, University of London, led by Professor Miriam Zukas
- Heriot-Watt University, led by Professor Gareth Pender
- Keele University, led by Professor David Amigoni
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, led by Professor Dame Anne Mills
- NERC Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, led by Dr Nick Wells
- University of Lincoln, led by Professor Carezza Lewis
- University of St Andrews, led by Professor John Woollins

**‘Challenge’** proposals which addressed a specific challenge in supporting PER effectively, and which expanded the existing knowledge base about ‘what works’ in effectively supporting PER:

- University of Brighton: developing an incubator model for finding and fostering community-university knowledge partnerships, led by Professor Tara Dean
- University College London: exploring how to make PER fundamental to the university's efforts to address global societal issues through cross-disciplinary research, led by Professor David Price
- University of Bath: examining the challenges associated with training and professional development for public engagement, led by Professor Jonathan Knight
- University of Southampton: tackling barriers to professional development in PER and developing a robust educational framework for such activity, led by Professor Simon Spearing
- STFC – Laboratories: investigating the take up and provision of PER training, led by Dr Neil Geddes

In May 2018, the SEE-PER projects were given the opportunity to apply for a second year of funding to embed and expand upon work done in the first phase. Ten of the twelve projects received funding to extend for a further 12 months, and the programme concluded at the end of 2019.

UKRI appointed the NCCPE to co-ordinate this work, ensuring learning was shared across the projects, and that evaluation was used strategically to inform and assess the value of the SEE-PER initiative.

Further learning from the SEE-PER initiative can be found in the ‘Support Engagement’ section of the NCCPE website.

## Contents

Context: Public Engagement with Research at Birkbeck.....	3
Summary of the project.....	4
Synopsis of Year 1:.....	5
Summary of the approach:.....	5
Key achievements from year 1:.....	5
1. Birkbeck's PER Awards.....	5
2. Birkbeck Engaged Practice Symposium.....	6
3. Training development.....	6
4. seed funding for projects.....	7
Did year 1 achieve its aims?.....	7
Introduction to year 2:.....	9
Project inputs.....	11
Assumptions and context.....	11
Activities / outputs.....	12
1. Training delivery.....	13
2. PE awards.....	13
3. research office.....	14
4. seed funding for projects.....	14
Outcomes and impact.....	14
Did Year 2 achieve its aims?.....	15
Sustainability.....	17
Final thoughts.....	18
Talking points.....	19
APPENDIX: YEAR 2 TRAINING PROGRAMME and PER AWARD WINNERS.....	20

## Context: Public Engagement with Research at Birkbeck

There is a plethora of public engagement with research (PER) at Birkbeck, ultimately intended to influence, inform and shape social change in one way or another. So, where PER enablers often cite the challenge of persuading researchers to participate, this is rarely the case here. Although there might be some uncertainty amongst colleagues about identifying these activities as PER, there is no doubt that the call for universities to enhance PER falls on highly receptive researcher ears at Birkbeck. However, in common with other universities, while we have historically been engaged in some aspects of public engagement, we have done so on a voluntary basis, relying on individual commitment and enthusiasm, rather than a strategic approach and systematic support. In order to realise the full potential of our vision for public engagement, the College required a step change to address its key challenge: to build sustained infrastructure for supporting PER, with a secondary focus on reward and recognition.

In October 2014 Birkbeck, University of London received an ISSF award from the Wellcome Trust which included support for a fractional Public Engagement Coordinator (0.4 FTE from January 2015) role which was focussed on addressing cultural barriers to public engagement in the College.

Over the next two to three years, the College gained a much fuller understanding of what public engagement is (as opposed to, for example dissemination and media work) but worked to identify the main barriers for public engagement with research within the College.

In recognition of the challenges faced, the fractional Public Engagement Coordinator was turned into a full time Public Engagement Manager role by 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016, and the College agreed that the focus of the role should be restricted to public engagement with research. A revised public engagement strategy was developed which was focused on building capacity with our researchers to develop and deliver PER.

Once this strategy had been launched, the Research Councils UK Strategic Support to Expedite Embedding Public Engagement with Research (SEE PER) funding initiative was identified as an opportunity for the College to ramp up activity in this area significantly, to fully capitalise on the work done to date and thus to more effectively embed PER into the College's DNA.

In October 2017 Birkbeck, University of London received a £60,000 award from Research Councils UK through their Strategic Support to Expedite Embedding Public Engagement with Research (SEE PER) funding initiative. The College received this award for its Birkbeck Researchers' Engagement Development project (BRED) which aimed to build on the work done previously and enrich and embed an institutional culture of public engagement with research. In October 2018 a second SEE PER award of the same size allowed us to continue with these activities into a second year (the BRED 2 project).

## Summary of the project

SEE PER funding was made available at the perfect time for the delivery of the College's PER strategy, which is focussed on recognising and embedding PER across the College.

The College used SEE PER funds to appoint additional expertise in the form of a PER Coordinator (full-time) and a PER Evaluation Officer (part-time) and thus to ramp up activity, allowing us to directly support many more researchers and promote the concept of PER much more widely.

Our approach was to support researchers to understand PER and to empower them to build PER into their research activities as a conscious activity, and to celebrate their successes.

The additional expertise also enabled the College to establish a number of identified 'quick wins', including bespoke training; better support for activities by the provision of seed funding; rewarding and recognising PER through new PER Awards as well as increasing the support available to individual academics.

## Synopsis of Year 1:

### Summary of the approach:

With our SEE PER funding we successfully recruited a full-time Public Engagement Coordinator and a part-time (0.6 FTE) Public Engagement Evaluation Officer. The additional expertise enabled the College to establish a number of identified 'quick wins': training; Seed Funding; PER Awards and raising the visibility of PER.

The College also envisaged that by strengthening the PER team and increasing the number of researchers who could be supported, our overall vision for our researchers to understand what PER is and to take a more strategic approach to their PER activities would also be supported. It was thus envisaged that this additional capacity would have a significant impact on activity across the College.

Having the new staff in place enabled the PER team to be more visible, and improved communications to academic staff about the work of the team. It led to a significant step-change in the level and recognition of PER activities in the College.

In year 1 we significantly increased the number of individual researchers able to benefit from advice on their public engagement activities, launched the first Birkbeck Public Engagement Awards, and established and awarded PER Seed Funds, as well as doing the development work on new webpages and a suite of training activities. In addition, conversations began about how best to recognise engagement activities through our reward and recognition processes (such as in our promotion criteria), although this work took longer than one year to complete.

### Key achievements from year 1:

Successful academics were very generous with their time: supporting the pilot training programme as speakers; becoming active participants at the Engaged Practice Symposium; feeding into plans for the following years' Awards and more generally demonstrating an eagerness to support the work of the PER team. The PER team would not have been able to capitalise on this increased support from academics without the expansion of the team provided by SEE PER support.

#### 1. Birkbeck's PER Awards

The College ran its inaugural PER awards in March 2018 with support from SEE PER and Wellcome ISSF. Our awards aimed to: raise awareness of PER in the College; recognise and reward PER best practice; raise awareness and recognition of the PER team and support available; enable the PER team to collect examples of best practice PER.

*"The PER awards have been one of the highlights of the academic year, we don't often get the opportunity to see what everyone else is doing, especially not from other Schools and Departments. It was a really enjoyable and inspiring evening."* **Professor Julian Swann, PVM Research.**

Immediately after the awards the PER team noticed an increase in referrals by word of mouth as well as academics who took part in the awards inviting the team to speak at department meetings.

An excellent summary of the event was written up by our Public Engagement Manager for the London PEN website (see <https://londonpen.wordpress.com/2018/06/07/categorising-public->

[engagement/](#) accessed 25/11/19). This report succinctly summarises both the successes of these inaugural awards and areas we needed to address in year 2.

## 2. Birkbeck Engaged Practice Symposium

Our initial plans for training support assumed that our researchers who are already doing PER successfully may not need support from the PER team. However, feedback after the PER Awards showed that this was not necessarily the case. We therefore developed the College's first Engaged Practice Symposium to address the gap in support.

Focus group discussions with our most engaged researchers revealed that these researchers felt that they did not currently have a space to discuss their engagement practice as a part of their research. They felt there were particular challenges and issues around engaged practice that were not always easily answerable within disciplines and that very little support was available to tackle these challenges. They therefore placed high value on having the opportunity to share experiences peer-to-peer and across disciplines. As such the Public Engagement Team decided to develop the Engaged Practice Symposium to enable practice sharing and learning, and worked with this group of researchers to define what a training programme for PER should look like. The format and content of the Symposium was devised through a consultation process with researchers to identify key challenges for discussion.

Both internal and external speakers were invited to tackle specific questions and challenges. The day ended in researcher led workshop discussions, with facilitation support provided by the PER team. The day was very well received with researchers in attendance from all Schools across the College. One of our researchers, Dr Sophie Hope also shared her experience of the day in a blog post entitled [Finding my People: Engaged Practice Symposium at Birkbeck](#).

*"This workshop felt like an important step in finding out who is doing engaged research already at Birkbeck, bringing those of us together who have been practising and critically reflecting on this for years from their different inter-disciplinary perspectives. It was an important occasion for us to listen to each other and exchange experiences and quandaries. It was also important for the College management to hear more about how we can be supported and find out what barriers we face and issues we are encountering."* **Dr Sophie Hope**

Due to the success of the day, we set up a formal PER network to share practice throughout the year and reflected the views of these key stakeholders in other areas (for example, when deciding which content to include in our website).

## 3. Training development

As noted above, the focus of year 1 was to establish what the College's training requirements were with respect to PER and to design and develop a programme which was ultimately delivered as a full suite of activities in year 2, tailored to a specific audience and delivered in workshop style to an intentionally small number of delegates.

This work grew out of the original engaged practice symposium and the contribution of this group of researchers to the development phase needs to be acknowledged.

However, whilst developing the full suite of training activities the team recognised the value of the global 3MT (three minute thesis) competition and worked closely with our graduate research school (BGRS) to ensure that the College was able to take part in this important competition in year 1. In year 1, the training for the competition took place in March and April, with the competition itself in May. The 3MT competition gives PhD students the opportunity to present a compelling oration of their thesis and its significance in three minutes (3MT) – not to ‘dumb-down’ their research, but to challenge students to collate their ideas and research discoveries before presenting it succinctly to a non-specialist audience.

#### 4. seed funding for projects

Year 1 of the project saw £4940 allocated to 5 seed projects to support public engagement:

- Starting a dialogue with early-years stakeholders on the role of technology in child development: Focus groups and evaluation, Dr Tim Smith, Psychological Sciences
- Seed funding to develop and test the concept and technical aspects of a theatre production called *The Blackout*, Dr Charlie Williams, History Classics and Archaeology
- Poetic Occupation, Dr Keith Jarrett, English and Humanities
- Translation of the film 'CRAFTING RESISTANCE: THE ART OF CHILEAN POLITICAL PRISONERS' into Swedish and Spanish to extend its impact and engagement with broader publics, Dr Jasmine Gideon, Geography
- Imagined Futures Short Film, Dr Caroline Edwards, English and Humanities

How the project would be evaluated was a component of the application and one of the assessment criteria. Each of the projects which secured funding successfully achieved its evaluation targets as defined in the application.

#### Did year 1 achieve its aims?

SEE PER funding supported the following of the College's aims for PER in year 1:

- **Strategy:** to enhance the planning, governance and management of PER support for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers.
- **Infrastructure development:** To build the necessary infrastructure to support and promote excellent public engagement.
- **Reward and recognition:** To enable our researchers and professional staff not just to participate in public engagement but to regard PER as an integral, distinctive and valued aspect of research at Birkbeck, University of London which is incentivised celebrated and rewarded.

The outcome of each of these aims is:

- **Strategy:** ongoing work around strategy led to changes in the makeup of the PERI committee in year 2 to try and enhance its effectiveness. Year 1 also saw the College decide to launch an independent Research Office and to include the PER function in this remit to further enhance the functional role of the team to support PER for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers.

- **Infrastructure development:** the increase in the size of the team allowed a larger number of researchers to be supported and enabled us to design a bespoke suite of training activities to address the specific needs of Birkbeck researchers. The seed funds allowed researchers to develop PER ideas into delivered projects.
- **Reward and recognition:** the first awards ceremony was a huge success and will be continued, and conversations began about recognising engagement activities in the College's formal reward and recognition processes (e.g. our promotion criteria).

*“The BRED project has played a crucial role in enabling us to meet the objectives set out in our PER strategy. Public engagement is part of a broader research support function within the College and is closely integrated with research impact. I see public engagement as an important part of my responsibilities and through the PERI committee, which I chair, I am in a position to help to promote PER throughout the College.”*

**Professor Julian Swann, Pro-Vice Master for Research**



## Introduction to year 2:

In year 2 of the SEE PER funding, the College's PER strategy continued to be focussed on recognising and embedding PER across the College in the context of our unique mission.

As described in the section above, the SEE PER-funded year 1 BRED project was extremely successful and the provision of additional funds for year 2 allowed us to fully capitalise on the outcomes of year 1 and to continue to develop our PER focus.

The College's primary objective for the SEE PER funding in year 2 was to build on and consolidate the successes in achieving the aims from year 1:

- **Strategy:** to enhance the planning, governance and management of PER support for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers.
- **Infrastructure development:** To build the necessary infrastructure to support and promote excellent public engagement.
- **Reward and recognition:** To enable our researchers and professional staff not just to participate in public engagement but to regard PER as an integral, distinctive and valued aspect of research at Birkbeck, University of London which is incentivised celebrated and rewarded.

These aims were designed to all intersect with the aims of the original SEE PER call as follows:

- help enrich and embed cultures within HEIs where excellent PER is supported, valued, rewarded – our strategy ensures that the College has an effective environment to develop and grow PER; our infrastructure development will ensure PER is able to thrive which is a prerequisite for PER to be supported, valued and rewarded as well as embodying practical measures to do this such as the delivery of the PE awards; reward and recognition is essential to show that PER is supported, valued and rewarded.
- ensure PER is integrated within institutional policies, practices and procedures – our strategic aim explicitly addresses questions relating to policies, practices and procedures; infrastructure development has sustainability at its heart, in order for PER to be effectively integrated it needs to be sustainable; reward and recognition is essential for PER to remain visible which is necessary to get the traction necessary to drive change where it is necessary to do so.

A number of new specific aims for the project were also identified based on reflection on the outcomes from year 1 and other strategic initiatives across the College:

- **Strategy:** To provide stability and continuity of purpose for PER at a time of structural change by incorporating the PER team effectively into the newly-established Research Office
- **Infrastructure development:** To actively target researchers who have not engaged with the PER team previously, to begin to work with Schools and Departments to better understand local needs with respect to PER and to deliver the bespoke suite of training activities developed in year 1.

- **Reward and recognition:** To evaluate (and where necessary adapting) the first year's PER awards; to continue conversation about formal recognition of engagement activities

These new aims were identified at the point that the application for additional funds for year 2 was made and continued to guide our thinking across year 2 and were also designed to ensure we were delivering against the original SEE PER aims effectively as follows:

- help enrich and embed cultures within HEIs where excellent PER is supported, valued, rewarded – our strategy demonstrates the growing maturity of the Colleges PER ecosystem, and represents a practical mechanism to continue to develop and enhance this; our infrastructure development will ensure PER is able to thrive which is a prerequisite for PER to be supported, valued and rewarded; for reward and recognition this change is essential to show that PER is supported, valued and rewarded.
- ensure PER is integrated within institutional policies, practices and procedures – our strategy explicitly addresses this aim as described in the bullet point above; infrastructure development has sustainability at its heart, in order for PER to be effectively integrated it needs to be sustainable; reward and recognition for PER needs to remain current and relevant and that is what this aim is intended to do.

Our fundamental approach (that for developments in PER to be sustainable across the College we need to empower our researchers to undertake PER themselves and to celebrate their successes) has not changed across year 1 or year 2, and these changes reflect our natural evolution as we work towards that point.

Towards the end of the SEE PER funding period, the College began a process to ensure that all the learning from the project was effectively captured and to ensure that the College's next steps with PER build on these foundations. Again, this is in line with the original aims as defined in the original SEE PER call – it will help enrich and embed cultures within HEIs where excellent PER is supported, valued, rewarded and will ensure PER (including learning from SEE PER) is integrated within institutional policies, practices and procedures. This review is taking a strategic and holistic approach and is being run by the College's Head of Research Strategy Support to ensure high-level buy in.

## Project inputs

The SEE PER project was delivered effectively within the resourcing envelope envisaged in the original applications in years 1 and 2.

The biggest surprise was the relatively modest ambitions our researchers have in terms of the need for financial support for PER funds and we struggled to spend the amount originally envisaged in the seed funding pot. In practice this underspend was proactively re-cycled to support the PE team to access additional training and training resources.

The provision of SEE PER funding has accelerated the ability of the College to engage meaningfully with PER and provided a significant short cut on our journey. The College is in a much better position than it was at the start of the SEE PER funding to capitalise on the outcomes from the project and we have been able to address effectively the question of how to continue to support our PER strategy and aims with a smaller team delivering a more focussed activity, and to re-work our internal funding mechanisms to ensure PER activities are able to apply to these calls as well as classical research activities.

## Assumptions and context

For Birkbeck, the SEE PER project started at the perfect point on our PER journey. We had used ISSF support from the Wellcome Trust from October 2014 to begin to build up our PER strategy and to improve our processes and support. After two years we had effectively identified the main issues and barriers and were perfectly poised to begin to do the work to address them. Without SEE PER funding it would have been a much slower and less interesting process to get to the point we are at now.

Our assumptions at the start of the SER PER project were as follows:

1. the College faces some specific and unique challenges in addressing the question of PER but engagement is such a strong element in the College's overall mission that the institution doesn't impose the same barriers that some other institutions do.
2. all our researchers have an innate understanding of the value of PER – what they lack is a good understanding that what they do is PER and how to deliver/evaluate effective PER.
3. as a small institution the amount of resource we can dedicate to supporting PER will always be limited so we need to empower our researchers to do good PER themselves and provide the necessary infrastructure to allow them to thrive.

The aims from our year 1 and year 2 projects are listed below with the high-level mapping to how these aims are underpinned by our assumptions:

- **Strategy:** to enhance the planning, governance and management of PER support for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers; to provide stability and continuity of purpose for PER at a time of structural change by incorporating the PER team into the newly-established Research Office.

**Assumption:** high level buy-in to overcome barriers to PER are not an issue, see for example the recommendation from the strategic Research Support Review that PER be incorporated into the new Research Office

- **Infrastructure development:** To build the necessary infrastructure to support and promote excellent public engagement; to actively target researchers who have not engaged with the PER team previously, to begin to work with Schools and Departments to better understand local needs with respect to PER and to deliver the bespoke suite of training activities developed in year 1.

**Assumption:** the best and most sustainable strategy for the College is to empower our researchers to understand how PER applies to them and how to do and evaluate PER well and to recognise that the College's small size means the scale of support will always be limited.

- **Reward and recognition:** To enable our researchers and professional staff not just to participate in public engagement but to regard PER as an integral, distinctive and valued aspect of research at Birkbeck, University of London which is incentivised celebrated and rewarded; to evaluate (and where necessary adapting) the first year's PER awards; to continue conversations about formal recognition of engagement activities.

**Assumption** (based on two years-worth of work prior to the application for SEE PER funding): that many of our researchers are already undertaking PER and what is needed is a framework that enables them to understand how to do it better.

This project was very consciously designed to fit our specific institutional context and built on two years' worth of work which had been done with ISSF support from the Wellcome Trust to fully understand what that context was. As such, the assumptions which underpinned the project were not reviewed until towards the end of the project when the strategic review of PER was established. Confirming that these assumptions were still valid was the starting point for the review and as such these assumptions continue to underpin our approaches to PER. The key driver for this review was to ensure that we utilise the SEE PER learning effectively.

## Activities / outputs

The main activities supported by the year 1 and year 2 projects were:

- Direct one-to-one support for researchers to develop their ideas about PER. In some instances this was targeted at a specific funding opportunity, but in line with Birkbeck's unique mission and ethos in many cases this was not driven by a desire to secure funding but by maximising the potential outcomes from projects which had already secured funding elsewhere that had not considered questions of public engagement at the point of application
- Designing and delivering a bespoke suite of training activities which were intended to address specific questions raised by our research base. The decision to deliver this training in small focussed groups was the first time that the College had tried such an approach for

training and the learning from this will feed into decision making about our future training provision.

Both of these activities are self-evidently orientated towards our strategy of embedding PER through empowering our academics with the skills necessary to do PER well themselves.

## **Key activities and outputs from year 2:**

### **1. Training delivery**

Year 2 saw the delivery of the full suite of training activities designed in year 1. Each of these training activities was tailored to a specific audience and delivered in workshop style to an intentionally small number of delegates. This ensured that the learning outcomes planned into the training session were delivered effectively and allowed the sessions sufficient “flex” to deliver the level of training required for each participant. A full list of training activity is included in the report annex.

Being able to design a bespoke training programme only came about because of the highly effective engaged practice symposium which was run in the year 1 project. For the first time we brought Birkbeck researchers with a track record together and asked them what support they needed, and our future activities were tailored to the insights which came out of that symposium.

### **2. PE awards**

Setting up and establishing the PE Awards was a critical step towards embedding recognition of PER within the College, and the awards continue to go from strength to strength. In the first year, the quality of activities highlighted in the awards applications provided a key source of evidence to demonstrate to our HR Department what was required in their work to re-write the College’s promotion criteria.

The second Public Engagement Awards recognised and celebrated the myriad ways that Birkbeck scholars work with the public and communities to make their research accessible and to include non-academic expertise.

Dozens of guests joined the ceremony and reception at the historic Mary Ward House, where the winners were announced for each of the six categories.

*“In the last year alone, we’ve been able to support 150 researchers with their public engagement activities, providing support and advice from everything from idea generation, to funding applications, to delivery and evaluation.*

*“All this work, and the people and projects that we celebrate here, showcases the really brilliant research that we have here at Birkbeck, and which contributes to our impact outside the university, and our civic place as London’s evening university.”*

**Mary-Clare Hallsworth, Public Engagement Manager**

A list of award winning projects is included in the appendix.

### 3. research office

The creation of a Research Office was not envisaged at the start of the year 1 SEE PER project but was in train at the point that the application was made for SEE PER year 2 funding. Moving the PER team to the Research Office was a natural evolution from a clear direction of travel at that point. Unfortunately, the launch of the Research Office coincided with the launch of a new finance system meaning that the full benefits of this co-location could not be seen by the end of the project.

### 4. seed funding for projects

Year 2 of the project saw £9510 allocated to 4 seed projects to support public engagement:

- Making my own impression, Dr Leslie Topp, History of Art;
- Improving governance in the non-profit sport sector: Engaging an important, but hard-to-reach, audience, Dr Richard Tacon, Management;
- Money: Changing Fortunes, Professor Anthony Bale and Professor David Feldman, Pears Institute;
- Slave-ownership and the Rise of the British Art Museum: Museum Workshop, Dr Sarah Thomas, History of Art.

As in year 1, how the project would be evaluated was a component of the application and one of the assessment criteria. Each of the projects which secured funding successfully achieved its evaluation targets as defined in the application.

## Outcomes and impact

The response from College researchers to the year 1 and year 2 projects shows the work was highly valued by our core constituency, our researchers. Real change has been seen in behaviour and practice.

The College ran its inaugural PER awards in March 2018 with support from SEE PER and Wellcome ISSF, and the second awards ceremony was held in 2018. Our awards aimed to:

- raise awareness of PER in the College;
- recognise and reward PER best practice;
- raise awareness and recognition of the PER team and support available;
- enable the PER team to collect examples of best practice PER.

Success measures against these aims include:

- raised awareness of PER in the College is demonstrable through the publicity associated with the awards and the fact that recipients felt empowered to talk about their engaged practice in their local Departments and Schools.

- the awards themselves represented a tangible form of recognition and reward for good practice.
- after each award ceremony the PER team saw an increased number of queries, demonstrating that the awards had succeeded in raising awareness of the PER team and the types of support available
- each of the award applications demonstrate examples of best practice

On the occasion of the inaugural awards: *“I believe this is a very important occasion, where we celebrate Birkbeck’s contribution to public engagement with our research and I’m delighted that we’ve had such a range of excellent applicants from across the College – the judges have had a very difficult task in deciding who should win.”*

**Professor David Latchman CBE, Master of Birkbeck**

Our initial plans for training support assumed that our researchers who are already doing PER successfully may not need support from the PER team. However, feedback after the PER Awards showed that this was not necessarily the case. We therefore developed the College’s first Engaged Practice Symposium to address the gap in provision.

Successful academics have also been very generous with their time: supporting the pilot training programme as speakers; becoming active participants at the Engaged Practice Symposium; feeding into plans for next years’ Awards and more generally demonstrating an eagerness to support the work of the PER team. The PER team would not have been able to capitalise on this increased support from academics without the expansion of the team provided by SEE PER support.

Year 2 saw the delivery of the full suite of training activities designed in year 1. Each of these training activities was tailored to a specific audience and delivered in workshop style to an intentionally small number of delegates. This ensured that the learning outcomes planned into the training session were delivered effectively and allowed the sessions sufficient “flex” to deliver the level of training required for each participant.

Designing and delivering a bespoke suite of training activities which were intended to address specific questions raised by our research base. The decision to deliver this training in small focussed groups was the first time that the College had tried such an approach for training and the learning from this will feed into decision making about our future training provision. Each session was evaluated to ensure it had delivered its learning aims effectively.

Year 2 also saw the successful delivery of our second suite of PER seed funded projects, each of these projects had a measurable and tangible benefit to the partners who our academics worked with to deliver the projects, as shown through the bespoke evaluation frameworks for each of the projects.

### Did Year 2 achieve its aims?

The key aims for year 2 were:

- **Strategy:** to enhance the planning, governance and management of PER support for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers; to provide stability and continuity of purpose for PER at a time of structural change by incorporating the PER team into the newly-established Research Office.
- **Infrastructure development:** To build the necessary infrastructure to support and promote excellent public engagement; to actively target researchers who have not engaged with the PER team previously, to begin to work with Schools and Departments to better understand local needs with respect to PER and to deliver the bespoke suite of training activities developed in year 1.
- **Reward and recognition:** To enable our researchers and professional staff not just to participate in public engagement but to regard PER as an integral, distinctive and valued aspect of research at Birkbeck, University of London which is incentivised celebrated and rewarded; to evaluate (and where necessary adapting) the first year's PER awards; to continue conversation about formal recognition of engagement activities

Key success in achieving these aims are as follows:

- **Strategy:** year 2 of the SEE PER project enhanced the planning, governance and management of PER support for the benefit of the College, its research and its researchers through the expanded team. The PER team were successfully incorporated into the newly formed research office, and the best ways to build on this are questions being considered in the strategic review of PER support.
- **Infrastructure development:** The website and mailing lists provide significantly improved infrastructure to support and promote excellent public engagement; the team worked with 50 academics who had not previously engaged with the team over year 2 of the project, the team attended Departmental meetings to scope out where Schools and Departments needed bespoke support (for example, our School of Science is much more actively involved in STEM outreach programmes than other areas), and the bespoke suite of training activities developed in year 1 was delivered. The second set of PE Seed fund projects were more ambitious than those seen in year one but all still effectively delivered their objectives and were able to record success against the evaluation framework defined for the project.
- **Reward and recognition:** The largest single impact from the SEE PER project is the work undertaken in year 1 and year 2 to have PER recognised in our formal recognition and reward processes – our revised promotions criteria with completely re-drafted requirements for engagement are due to be used in the 19/20 academic year for the first time (i.e. after the formal end of the project but still a tangible outcome from this work).

The College has begun a strategic review to ensure that its continuing support for PER continues to be fit for purpose and delivers a service which is valued by our researchers and this has re-ignited the conversation ready for a second wave of change. Each of the specific initiatives in the SEE PER year 1 and year 2 projects worked – they created discourse and changes in mind-set. Training, seed funding and awards were each shown to meet their objectives with positive results.



## Sustainability

The largest single impact from the SEE PER project is the work undertaken in year 1 and year 2 to have PER recognised in our formal recognition and reward processes – our revised promotions criteria with completely re-drafted requirements for engagement are due to be used in the 19/20 academic year for the first time (ie after the formal end of the project but still a tangible outcome from this work).

In order to capitalise on the value-added from the year 1 and year 2 SEE PER projects, and following the resignation of our Public Engagement Manager (which coincided with the end of year 2 of the SEE PER project) the College is in the process of a strategic and holistic review of its support for PER – this review is not only considering the operational question of how best to support PER but also the more strategic question of how PER needs to work with other aspects of the College's overarching mission. At the heart of this review how best the College can support for PER in a sustainable way. It is unlikely that the core part of our PER strategy (to empower our researchers to undertake good PER themselves) will be changed.

In the interim, the College has brought in a fixed term part time PE coordinator to ensure that we are still able to deliver the PE awards and three minute thesis competition and to ensure that all queries from our research base about support for PER activities are addressed effectively, bringing in support from our network of engaged researchers as necessary. This is an interim arrangement to allow the review to take place but the willingness of our researchers to help in this period is a further testament to the success of the SEE PER year 1 and year 2 projects.

The College monitors the implementation of strategic reviews by nominating an oversight committee who receive reports on progress against the review until all the recommendations have either been implemented or shown to be not practical. This process is likely to be adopted with the strategic review of PER and will allow us to monitor the long term impacts of the SEE PER year 1 and year 2 projects.

## Final thoughts

Birkbeck's journey to understanding PER is by no means complete but through the provision of SEE PER funding we were able to make much more progress in a shorter time than we had envisioned. This means we can move forward from a position of strength and continue to understand what PER means to us in the context of an institutional mission with engagement at its heart. One area where we struggled initially was to fully incorporate PER into the strategic research environment effectively (as opposed to having PER touching on but not fully embedded in a whole raft of institutional strategies), and it was this understanding which drove our decision to move the PER team into the Research Office when it formed.

We had the following final observations from the SEE PER projects at Birkbeck:

- i) Birkbeck had a specific issue in that our researchers are fully committed to our mission and routinely undertake PER, but do not necessarily understand that what they are doing is PER. This may not be such a common problem for institutions with a different mission and ethos but is something other HEIs might want to consider.
- ii) One of the main challenges with PER is the lack of a concise definition which is used by all funders. If funders could agree a standard and concise definition it would be very helpful for HEIs and would make it much easier for us to profile PER. The new strategy from UKRI defines a sensible framework and is a step in the right direction but it is a framework which is different to that used by Wellcome who are the largest funder of PER activities. The short definitions of research, impact and scholarship used by Research England in REF are extremely useful when working with academic researchers, and the definition of knowledge exchange in HERB follows this model. It would be helpful if a similar definition could be developed for PER.
- iii) NCCPE provide an extremely valuable set of resources to the sector but are relatively hidden to researchers on the ground because whilst the resources are well known to PEPs (public engagement professionals) they are less visible to researcher development functions. We discovered through our year 1 and year 2 SEE PER projects that targeted training is extremely effective in this space. We are lucky at Birkbeck that we are small enough to coordinate our researcher development over several departments and it is effective for the PER team to pick up PER training. This will not be the case in larger institutions where researcher development functions operate remotely. It would be worth NCCPE working more closely with Vitae to ensure that NCCPEs resources have the maximum possible exposure – researcher development professionals use Vitae.

## Talking points

WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR JULIAN SWANN, PRO VICE MASTER (RESEARCH) AND STRATEGIC LEAD FOR PER AT BIRKBECK:

As a result of the UKRI funding the Birkbeck Researchers' Engagement Development project was able to make a number of tangible improvements to the College's understanding of Public Engagement and its promotion across the academic community. Thanks to the funding received, Birkbeck expanded its Public Engagement Team and was able to take a far more coordinated approach to PER support. The existing Public Engagement manager was joined by a full-time PE coordinator and a part-time evaluator all of whom were successfully integrated into the new Research Office launched in August 2018. In that respect, the award was particularly timely as it helped to reinforce the work of the Public Engagement and Research Impact [PERI] Committee that had been meeting since 2016 in bringing together academic and professional services staff to, amongst other things, embed public engagement throughout the College's activities, facilitate cross-College communication of these activities and co-ordinate advice, training and opportunities related to public engagement for staff and students. The additional resources were used to provide training, much of it involving one-to-one meetings with academics to help develop new grant applications or to maximise the opportunities provided by existing awards.

Even with the extra support, it was clear that it would be a challenge to win over academic staff in particular, primarily because of the widespread confusion about the precise boundaries between public engagement and research impact. That problem was compounded by a perception that public engagement was another hoop for hard-pressed staff to jump through. To overcome that obstacle, we were able to use the PERI committee (which had representatives from each of our five schools) to disseminate information about PER activities. Crucial to this was using the PER team to show that far from being something new, PER is fundamental to Birkbeck's mission and research strategy to promote "excellence in research" and to "make available the results of research and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate". To illustrate that, the BRED project placed deliberate emphasis on promoting the PER awards which were undoubtedly one of our main successes as they attracted applications from every School. It is also noteworthy that PER will be formally recognised by the College through its promotion criteria from the 19/20 promotion round onwards. Many of the award winners subsequently acted as ambassadors for PER in their departments and certainly helped to encourage others to apply for seed funding for future projects. That said, there were fewer applications to that fund than we had hoped hence the decision to redirect funds to additional training, something that I would expect to bear fruit in due course. As might be expected, the end of the BRED project has seen staff changes and regretfully the departure of the PER manager. She and her team have left a strong legacy which is being built upon via the review of PER support which will build upon the firm foundations it has put down.

## APPENDIX: YEAR 2 TRAINING PROGRAMME and PER AWARD WINNERS

### YEAR 2 TRAINING PROGRAMME

#### Influencing Policy workshop – November 2018

- Talks by 3x Researchers
- This workshop explored how researchers can involve policy makers and influencers in their research as well as identify opportunities to connect with relevant groups or individuals e.g. think tanks, select committees etc.
- **11 delegates** including academic researchers and impact officers attended the symposium. The most useful part of the symposium highlighted by delegates include:
  - “Understanding different sources of policy influence”
  - “Understanding the role of think tanks and how to engage with non-academic organisations and politicians”
  - “The diversity within the subject covered including the speaker’s Knowledge and first-hand experience”
  - “Awareness of the structure of parliamentary committee and how to work with think tanks”
  - “Hearing about Researcher’s policy experience/journey and how the passion of a researcher’s work is making improvement for disadvantaged people”

#### Presenting to Public Audiences – January 2019

- Talk by 1x Researcher
- This workshop supported researchers to develop skills in translating/communicating their research for non-academic audiences
- **6 delegates** had the opportunity to talk about their research – as they would to a non-academic audience and to consider the relevance of their work for different publics

#### Developing interactive activities – February 2019

- Talk by 2x Researchers and 2x Speakers from external partners from Bloomsbury Festival and Being Human Festival
- This workshop provided insight and advice to researchers on how to develop interactive activities and engage the public with their research
- **8 delegates** had the opportunity to receive feedback and advice on how to develop their future PE activities as well as access to upcoming opportunities with external partners e.g. Museum Executives and Festival Directors. The most useful part of the symposium highlighted by delegates include:
  - “Understanding my audience”
  - “Focus on why people need to learn about PE”
  - “Hearing from the Speakers in terms of how they succeeded”
  - “Finding out about funding and training opportunities”

#### Network event: What does a good Funding application look like? – February 2019

- Talks by 3x Researchers (internal and external partners); with **14 delegates** in attendance

- This workshop featured short talks from Researchers currently undertaking high quality Public Engagement with Research projects (as well as Professional Services staff).
- Following this event, the PE Team mailing list increased to 88 Researchers in April 2019 from 20 (December 2018)
- Following this event, one delegate was successful in applying for SEE-PER seed funding and two Researchers are currently being supported to develop research grant funding applications

#### **Engaging with schools – May 2019**

- Talks by 3x Researchers: 1x PhD , 1x Research fellow, 1x Professor
- **5 delegates** had opportunity to plan an activity that would engage young people and teachers with their research; and how to develop/deliver an engaging activity with school students; and consider working with different aged students and their teachers

#### **3MT – 3 Minute Thesis presentation skills x3 – (March, April & May 2019)**

- **25 delegates** attended this training; 13 of which took part in the event after training
- PhD students were given the opportunity to present a compelling oration of their thesis and its significance in three minutes (3MT) – not to ‘dumb-down’ their research, but to challenge students to collate their ideas and research discoveries before presenting it succinctly to a non-specialist audience

#### **Online Engagement – June 2019**

- Talks by 2x Researchers
- delegates had the opportunity to explore online engagement activities and discuss which audiences their research would work well with. This session included examples of social media projects, blogs and other online activities that engage audiences with Birkbeck research including the merits and challenges of engaging online and how to evaluate their outcomes. The most useful part of the symposium highlighted by delegates include:
  - *“broadening my thinking about how to use social media”*
  - *“Thinking about my own network building”*

## PER AWARD WINNERS

In year 1 and year 2 the following projects were selected to receive an award:

### Year 1:

**Communicating Research - *This award recognises excellence in communicating research projects and ideas through stimulating or innovative activities.***

Dr Preston explores the question, 'Is there life on Mars?', in talks and demonstrations at public festivals, in her own show on BBC Radio 4 and through working with schools to inspire the next generation of STEM students. Dr Louisa Preston (Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences)

**Collaboration - *This award recognises outstanding engagement work based on an active collaboration and a two-way working relationship with an external partner or partners.***

The project group collaborated with award-winning children's author Francesca Sanna to explore how best to encourage children to think critically about current international problems such as the refugee crisis, the outbreak of global epidemics and the limitations of international organisations. Dr Jessica Reinisch (Department of History, Classics and Archaeology)

**Engaged Practice - *This award recognises high-quality research that uses participation and involvement of the public as a core approach to the creation of research. These projects were built on a foundation of dialogue and deliberation with public participants, which consequently empowered or improved the lives of those involved.***

Dr Martins' project reconnects indigenous communities with a 19<sup>th</sup> century collection of artefacts and botanical specimens from the Amazon and the Andes, using workshops and film to enable participants to recover their histories. Dr Luciana Martins (Department of Culture and Languages)

**Transforming Culture or Public Life - *This award recognises exemplary research engagement activities which have aimed to stimulate change within our culture or society. Projects in this category tackled a range of societal challenges, often working with organisations and policy makers to highlight the voices of those their research affects.***

Dr Brooks-Gordon has worked extensively with the sex-work community, stakeholders and co-researchers to understand the changing nature of prostitution in the UK, to empower marginalised groups and to drive policy development. Dr Belinda Brooks-Gordon (Department of Psychological Sciences)

**PhD/Early Career - *This award recognises the inspiring public engagement work undertaken by researchers in the early stages of their research career. The commitment this group of early-career scholars has shown to undertaking engagement work alongside their research is particularly of note.***

Dr Panton recently received his PhD for his thesis, 'How do Stakeholders Influence Stadium-led Regeneration? The Story from East Manchester and Tottenham'. The report focused on

understanding local communities' and stakeholders' perspectives on stadium-led regeneration. Dr Mark Panton (Sport Business Centre, Department of Management)

An evaluation of the year 1 awards which demonstrated that members of the College had applied with excellent projects for each of the categories and that the evaluation of the awards event itself was overwhelmingly positive, and a fuller description of this evaluation is given in the next section.

## **Year 2**

The following awards were made in year 2:

### **COMMUNICATING RESEARCH:**

*Tb Or Not Tb? A Dynamic Approach in Tackling Antibiotic Resistance in Superbug.* Professor Bhakta and his team engaged with local school students to investigate how to tackle the global health emergency of tuberculosis. The school acquired over-the-counter medicines which the students then investigated for their antibiotic action. Professor Sanjib Bhakta and team (Department of Biological Sciences).

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

Responding to the longer-term aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Dr Laite and her team are seeking to engage and empower the local community to preserve their history and develop their own narrative. They are working with the Bishopsgate Institute to create an archive of the community's response to the fire that also reflects their vibrancy and resilience. Dr Julia Laite and team (Department of History, Classics and Archaeology), *North Kensington Archive and Heritage Project*

### **COLLABORATION:**

The project team ran a series of assemblies and workshops enabling 16-17 year old students to learn about the team's research into Cold-War-era ideas about 'brainwashing' and mind control. The teenagers were supported to produce their own films on social media, peer pressure, gangs, advertising and body image. Professor Daniel Pick, Dr Sarah Marks, (Department of History, Classics and Archaeology) and team, *Open Minds: Exploring Hidden Persuasion in Modern Society*

### **ENGAGED PRACTICE:**

The Waiting Times project is a multi-stranded research project into the temporarilites of healthcare. The project itself has four core strands, one of which, 'Speaking of Waiting,' is a piece of publicly engaged research creating and sharing stories of waiting and time in relation to healthcare. Professor Lisa Baraitser (Department of Psychosocial Studies), Dr Michel Flexer (University of Exeter) and team, *Waiting Times: Messages in Bottles*

### **TRANSFORMING CULTURE OR PUBLIC LIFE:**

Siblings are routinely separated in the public care system, resulting in an absence or lack of contact between them. Professor Monk and Dr Macvarish, with members of the Family Justice Young People's Board, sought to learn more about this emerging area of concern and to enhance engagement with key stakeholders working in family justice. Professor Daniel Monk and Dr Jan Macvarish (Department of Law), *Siblings, Contact and the Law: An Overlooked Relationship?*

**PHD/EARLY CAREER:**

Teachers in elementary schools often complain about noise levels. However, very little is known about children's perception of classroom noise: how annoyed are they? Working in close collaboration with artists and elementary school teachers, Jessica designed child-friendly interventions with the potential to improve children's well-being while also aiding data gathering on noise in the classroom. Jessica Massonnié (Department of Psychological Sciences), *Noise Annoyance in Schools: is it a Fatality?*