THE UCL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Overview

Effective public engagement informs research, enhances teaching and learning, and increases our impact on society. This strategy provides a formal vision for public engagement (PE) at UCL and lays out the practical steps that UCL will take to make engagement a core part of our work and of the student experience.

UCL’s founding ethos gives us a unique motivation to engage with people outside academia; we have a radical tradition of being open to all, and of responding to new ideas, challenges and perspectives. We continue to see ourselves as a Beacon for Public Engagement.

Definition of Public Engagement

Working Groups developing this strategy have agreed on a definition of PE that includes talking, listening, and being prepared to change, offering benefit to all participants. PE at UCL currently falls into six broad areas and we hope to develop others. Case studies from these areas are available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/public-engagement/strategy.

- Telling public groups about our work.
- Supporting communities (especially those listed below under ‘Public participants’) with our expertise.
- Nurturing a society in which the next generation want to take part in research, teaching and learning
- Encouraging people outside the university to contribute their research and knowledge to our activities.
- Taking part in dialogue about the direction of our research and teaching.
- Creating knowledge in collaboration with communities and interest groups outside the university.

PE should not be a new and separate activity for UCL, but rather part of research, teaching, learning and knowledge transfer. PE projects can be organized at an individual, group, department, faculty or institutional level.

Vision

- PE will be part of good research, teaching and learning for many staff and students
- Different forms of PE are appropriate for different academic disciplines, different individuals and different public groups
- Opportunities to engage will be open to all staff and students.
- UCL will work in partnership with other organizations, including funders, government agencies, local businesses, NGOs, community groups and others.
- UCL will share its own engagement expertise while learning from experience elsewhere.

Public participants

UCL acts globally and locally. Part of this strategy involves a new focus on local engagement. We will aim to concentrate on London, while paying special attention to our immediate local communities in the boroughs of Camden and Islington. Our aim is to engage with a larger and more diverse public, and to develop engagement programmes aimed at our publics’ needs and interests. This will include reaching groups currently under-served by university engagement.
Reward and Recognition of Engagement

UCL will ensure that public engagement is properly rewarded formally through promotions, appraisal, progression, grading and hiring processes. We will also recognize excellent engagement through an expanded programme of annual awards for staff (academic, research and support) and students, and through other less formal methods.

We will:
- Strengthen the PE criteria in our promotions process, including benchmarking PE
- Include PE in the documents that define UCL’s vision, for example Excellence and the UCL Community
- Continue to recognize training and experience of PE as part of student development and Global Citizenship
- Consider PE experience when hiring staff (including support staff), including it in job descriptions where appropriate
- Provide guidance to Heads of Department on the setting of PE objectives

Support

UCL will provide a central hub to support sustainable public engagement work by staff and students. This team will form part of a department with UCL Museums & Collections and will work closely with Outreach, Volunteering Services, Corporate Communications and other public-facing parts of UCL, sharing skills whilst at the same time recognizing the difference between PE and student recruitment or public relations. The team will:

- Stimulate, support and facilitate engagement
- Create opportunities for engagement
- Co-ordinate engagement across UCL
- Develop staff and student engagement skills
- Support ‘champions’ for engagement in other departments
- Broker relationships with external PE organizations and communities
- Run a small number of engagement programmes, including online projects
- Evaluate UCL’s engagement portfolio, and monitor a selection of projects in a strategic manner to support this evaluation

Resources

UCL will aim to make more of its resources available for use by groups outside academia, including providing space for interactions led by public groups. We will also reflect UCL’s activity better in our public offer, by ensuring that there is always something worth visiting at UCL that links to our public engagement. We will continue to improve UCL’s public realm, and provide spaces for interaction between publics and UCL activity, including spaces for exhibitions and events that reflect this strategy.

Monitoring

In order to make public engagement a part of research, teaching and learning activities, academic departments will be asked in each year to provide details, in an appropriate way, of their engagement work. Evaluation of the effectiveness of engagement will become part of UCL’s culture, supported by the central PE team.

This strategy will be reviewed in three years.