Engaging members of the public in research and teaching: purpose, examples and practice at UCL

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Executive Summary

This document explores and documents the practical manifestations of what a model of public engagement linked to research and teaching consists of in practice: dissecting and describing a number of projects and activities supported by the UCL Public Engagement Unit (PEU).

The UCL Public Engagement Strategy states that public engagement includes both speaking and listening, offering benefit to all parties involved (e.g. staff, students, “public” groups). This document maps the landscape of engagement processes within research and teaching activities against the broad categories of engagement proposed in the UCL Public Engagement Strategy (1. telling public groups about our work; 2. supporting communities with our expertise; 3. nurturing a society in which the next generation want to take part in research, teaching and learning; 4. letting people outside the university contribute their research and knowledge to our programmes; 5. taking part in dialogue about the direction of our research and teaching; 6. creating knowledge in collaboration with communities and interest groups outside the university).

Evidently the concept of engagement is a complex issue, the examples included in this document covers a range of approaches (e.g. informing, consulting, involving, devolving decisions) and a diversity of mechanisms to encourage involvement of a range of public groups (e.g. exhibitions, strategic partnerships, focus groups, open days, photography, conferences, film). Drawing together the examples and collective experiences of those running projects funded under the UCL-led Beacon for Public Engagement (BPE) programme, there are some key considerations for public engagement in practice: how to engage, why engagement happens from the perspective of members of the public (i.e. the role of the public) and the dynamic nature of the processes that occur.

The examples in this document represent a wider movement within UCL where engagement has become part of research and teaching.
Introduction

Effective public engagement has the potential to inform research, enhance teaching and learning, and increase higher education institutions’ impacts on society. There is a persuasive body of literature describing why and how public engagement may improve the processes and outcomes of university research and teaching programmes. For example, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) has documented a range of benefits of higher education-public engagement, including the development of skills in staff and students, the enrichment of the student experience, the building of trust between different groups, increasing the flow of knowledge and learning between universities and external organisations, and the stimulation of creativity and innovation. Despite the glowing recommendations for the engagement of public groups in university activities there is a need for evidence to support such claims. Therefore it is important to consider what is really meant and understood by public engagement within higher education institutions, and what public engagement actually consists of in practice.

The UCL Public Engagement Strategy states that public engagement includes both speaking and listening, offering benefit to all parties involved (e.g. staff, students, “public” groups). Public engagement at UCL currently falls into six broad areas:

- Telling public groups about our work;
- Supporting communities with our expertise;
- Nurturing a society in which the next generation want to take part in research, teaching and learning;
- Letting people outside the university contribute their research and knowledge to our programmes;
- Taking part in dialogue about the direction of our research and teaching;
- Creating knowledge in collaboration with communities and interest groups outside the university.

In outlining these six broad areas the UCL Public Engagement Strategy highlights that it is essential to recognise that there are different approaches and interpretations of the term public engagement.
The purpose of this document is to encourage those involved in various aspects and types of research and teaching to consider approaches to engage public groups in their work. The document provides a number of examples of individuals, groups and organisations playing a role in research and teaching in a variety of contexts and a diversity of disciplines. The recommendations for practice are drawn from the experiences of those running public engagement projects funded under the UCL-led Beacon for Public Engagement (BPE) programme.

Public engagement linked to research and teaching: examples

This section provides a range of examples of public engagement projects and activities linked to research and teaching processes. The section maps the landscape of engagement processes within research and teaching activities against the six broad categories of engagement proposed in the UCL Public Engagement Strategy. This interpretation is useful to categorise the different types of engagement supported under the UCL-led BPE programme. The evaluation of the UCL-led BPE programme provides a range of examples of public engagement projects and activities (throughout the life of the programme) linked to research and teaching processes.

This document outlines the practical manifestations of what a model of public engagement linked to research and teaching consists of in practice, dissecting and describing a number of projects and activities supported by the UCL Public Engagement Unit (PEU). These examples represent a wider movement within UCL where engagement has become part of research and teaching.

1. Telling public groups about our work

The first category relates to public engagement projects and activities which seek to inform or educate individuals, groups and/or organisations about aspects of research and teaching. Three examples are outlined to illustrate how this has been undertaken in practice; these projects were funded under the PEU’s Beacon Bursary small grant scheme.

Example 1
DCAL Deaf Open Day, March 2010, UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research

1 See: http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk
A DCAL Deaf Open Day was held at UCL in March 2010 with presentations in British Sign Language (BSL) from Deaf and hearing researchers, and hands-on interactive sessions. Researchers reported back to members of the Deaf Community on research undertaken at the UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre (DCAL).

Over 100 members of the Deaf community, associated professionals (teachers, interpreters, and speech and language therapists) and researchers from other universities attended the day. Researchers from range of disciplines, including neuroscience, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and sign language interpreting contributed to the day. The event ended with a cultural activity where two Deaf poets performed and three short films made by Deaf directors were screened.

The Open Day was a means to disseminate research findings to the Deaf community in their first and preferred language, BSL. The day helped to raise awareness of what the UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre do and to increase the public profile of their work.

By holding an Open Day, the UCL DCAL Research Centre has formalised engagement with the research population, i.e. the Deaf Community. The UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre are running a similar type of event on a regular basis as part of a project funded by the UCL Public Engagement Unit called the DCAL Roadshow.

Example 1, DCAL Deaf Open Day, provides an example of the organisation of a specific activity (an open day) to inform a targeted interest group (the Deaf community) about the research activities undertaken by a specific part of UCL the DCAL Research Centre. The audience for this event were both those who were uninformed about the research undertaken by the UCL Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre and for those who were aware of the research but not all of its technicalities or implications. The engagement method, i.e. the organisation of an open day for a large number of people, is a prevalent mechanism to inform people about university research and teaching activities, used across a range of disciplines, as illustrated by Example 2.

Example 2 follows the traditional model of allowing members of the public access to the university (e.g. people, subjects and facilities). However, the organisation of MSSL 2009 Community Open Day is worthy of special consideration. Ten representatives from the surrounding geographical area spent an evening at Mullard Space Science Laboratory before the open day to give their ideas on the event. The discussion was focused on three aspects: the format of the day; the content of the day (i.e. which science themes they could include) and; how to develop longer term relationships between the local community and UCL-MSSL. The discussion was organised around two short talks from staff at MSSL and the output of this discussion was used to set the agenda for the open day.
Example 2
Mullard Space Science Laboratory Community Open Day, September 2009, Mullard Space Science Laboratory

This was the 4th annual open day for Mullard Space Science Laboratory (MSSL). The one day event included talks, opportunities to talk one-to-one with MSSL staff and students, equipment and poster displays, children’s’ activities and a demo-competition organised by students.

The event aimed to develop community links and encourage the local community, i.e. those geographically surrounding MSSL, to view the laboratory as an outward facing institution.

The Community Open Day was attended by 220 members of the local community, mainly attracting a family audience.

The annual Community Open Day is considered a high profile public event for MSSL. The day is supported by the Head of Department who encourages all staff and students to be involved. Twenty-five members of staff and students volunteered in the planning, organisation and delivery of the Community Open Day from the Head of Department to students, research scientists, engineers and administration staff.

Example 3
Destination London, October-December 2009, School of Slavonic and East European Studies

Destination London was a series of public events and activities structured around the experiences and perceptions of East Europeans who have written about London. The project marked the completion of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded East Looks West travel writing research project. The public events and activities included: a book launch, panel discussions, writing workshops, podcasts, the production of a booklet, the creation of a project website.

These events and activities had a number of specific aims including, to:

- open up the results of UCL research to a wider audience;
- publicize UCL’s resources on travel writing, and on London, to interested audiences (both academic and non-academic);
- target London communities that may not previously have engaged with the university;
- explore how new forms of distribution and publishing can be used to extend the impact of UCL research and contemporary writing from outside the mainstream.

The events brought together a mix of Londoners, some with an East European heritage, interested in the changing character of the city and interested in writers and writing about London.

The range of activities allowed the School of Slavonic and East European Studies to test a variety of different methods of exchanging knowledge and research e.g. web-based, print-based and public talks.
Destination London, Example 3, was a series of activities linked to the completion of the AHRC-funded East Looks West travel writing research project. These activities were organised with the prime purpose of disseminating the findings or results of a research project. However, the member of staff who led the project noted an unexpected outcome of organising the activities:

“For my own part, one result was unexpected. Hearing so much from the audiences about their personal experiences, and about contemporary travels of the sort that don’t usually get written up as ‘literary’ travel writing has shifted my own current research plans to include these – and has given me some of the contacts that will make this possible. For me, the greatest personal benefit of the whole programme has been the new and unexpected perspectives I’ve received on my own research”.

2. Supporting communities with our expertise

The main purpose of public engagement activities which fall under this second category are those activities which seek to provide support to particular communities (e.g. geographical communities, communities with a shared interest, those who share a similar economic or social background, or practitioner communities). This interpretation of public engagement builds upon the previous category of informing public groups of university research and teaching, to consider how that information and knowledge is then used. The two examples below (Example 4 and 5) are of public engagement projects which were developed in response to particular community needs.

The projects that are briefly introduced in Examples 4 and 5 address clear needs from the communities that they are intended to serve, be that on the future of digital resources or planning strategies. The public groups involved have a role as ‘users’ of the knowledge, support and expertise that is provided by the UCL staff and students participating in these projects.

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**Example 4**

Our History in Our Hands: Towards Digital Sustainability for Minority Cultural Archives, June 2009, Department of Information Studies

‘Our History in Our Hands’ was a half-day event, which took place on 5 June 2009 at the
Museum of London, Docklands. Thirty-eight people attended the workshop event, which brought together speakers from major national institutions (e.g. the British Library) and independent community heritage activists, primarily from culturally diverse communities.

The idea for the event emerged following informal discussions between staff at UCL and Untold London, which identified the sustainability of digital resources as a key issue for independent minority cultural heritage groups. There was an agreement that such organisations would benefit from an opportunity to share experiences and knowledge in this area. The project aims were as follows:

- Create a broader public debate about the role of heritage in a diverse society, shaped by a practitioner and/or activist perspective;
- Provide an opportunity for organisations to learn from the experiences of other groups who have faced similar challenges around sustainability in the past;
- Organisations to go away with new ideas about addressing certain problems, such as how to ensure the future of digital resources, or how to develop new income streams.

The event brought together individuals from other higher education organisations (e.g. UEL) with heritage professionals and community activists, around an agenda of sharing skills and experience. This event was useful to reinforce loose and informal relationships between UCL and community heritage practitioners invited to the event. The event also contributes to UCL’s Department of Information Studies being seen as somewhere that is responsive to independent community-based voices.

Example 5
Building community engagement in the London plan, September 2009-ongoing, Bartlett School of Planning

This project started with a small group of staff and students (15) from the Bartlett School of Planning working together with representatives of community sector organisations (24) in the preparation of comments to the Mayor’s Draft Replacement London Plan. This initiative builds on the Just Space Network which was formed by London non governmental organisations (NGOs) and local groups to coordinate actions for the previous version of the Plan in 2007.

The result of the collaboration was the submission of comments on the London Plan by the various community and voluntary groups, which have drawn on the UCL work and on discussions designed to improve the integration of the submissions. The submissions themselves, which represent the views of the groups, were submitted to the Mayor in January 2010. These submissions are collected at http://justspace.wordpress.com

This engagement project supported groups (some deprived or disadvantaged, other scattered) to represent their needs at the level where crucial decisions are increasingly being taken (on housing, transport, economic development, environment, open space and so on).

These groups range from local residents’ and tenants’ action groups in various parts of London through to established non governmental organisations like the Council for Voluntary Service and Friends of the Earth and some London-wide organisations representative of diverse ethnic groups and of other ‘equalities’ categories which tend to be marginalised in planning decisions.

3. Nurturing a society in which the next generation want to take part in research, teaching and learning
The public engagement activities which fall under this category are those motivated by encouraging groups outside the university to be interested in taking part in research, teaching and learning. These types of activities may take a variety of forms and may involve a range of people, not all necessarily school children, as illustrated by Example 6.

Example 6  
Science Soirees, November 2009 – February 2010, Department of Chemistry

Funding from the UCL Public Engagement Unit Beacon Bursary small grant scheme supported six ‘cabaret-style’ evening events on five different cutting-edge chemistry topics at six different London schools. Topics included: CO2-The world’s deadliest Molecule, Pattern formation in nature, and Fuelling the vehicles of the future. The audience of the events were parents and guardians of primary and secondary school students. Each event involved 10-25 parents/guardians.

Alongside providing talks and demonstrations for parents at primary and secondary schools the project aimed to communicate to parents that science, specifically chemistry, are interesting fields which offer stimulating opportunities for their children.

This is a rather different approach to public engagement to types of methods the UCL Department of Chemistry generally undertake (e.g. talks to school children, science festivals, media appearances). The project provided a means to undertake stimulating and entertaining presentations in a relaxed and interactive environment.

Example 6, Science Soirees, aimed to provide stimulating talks and demonstrations for parents and/or guardians at primary and secondary schools. The evaluation strategy adopted by the project team (which included a personal response system at the events, observations of the events and interim and final team reflection meetings) demonstrated that the events were effective in providing stimulating presentations on a range of chemistry related subject matters, in a relaxed and interactive setting. The discussion generated by the presentations and demonstrations was wide-ranging.

Example 7 is a project funded by the UCL Public Engagement Unit’s Innovation Seed Funding stream, detailed in Section 4.1.2, called On the Move. The project aimed to stimulate young people’s interest in the subject of history through the organisation of arts and education workshops with youth groups and a one day showcase event held at UCL.

Example 7  
On the Move, August 2009 - May 2010, Department of History

On the Move paired UCL graduate historians with local artists to deliver 3 history workshops with 4 youth groups across London. These workshops were followed by an all-day event held at UCL in February 2010.
The activities varied according to the youth group and historian/artist team but were based upon the history of their local area or of the youth group itself. The 4 youth groups involved were: Westminster House Youth Club, Nunhead; Smalley Road Youth, Stoke Newington; New Horizons, Somers Town; and Mosaic Youth, Brent.

The original aim of the project was to engage the ‘next generation’ in history but this required a knowledge of what ‘the next generation’ found interesting in history, through what mediums could they engage with history. The project was as much, if not more, about learning how and in what ways different people engage with the past, as it was reaching out to young people to engage them in the subject. Thus, an extremely important aim of the project became about understanding what it was that young people wanted to know about history and how they wanted to acquire that knowledge. The openness of the project and the workshops meant that the themes that were explored were those relevant to the youth groups.

Unlike Example 6, Example 7: On the Move, directly engaged the next generation with the subject of history. This project introduced the UCL History Department to a new audience - young people from diverse backgrounds. The project lead noted that the project was learning experience for the historians involved; specifically they were introduced to how different audiences viewed the subject of history. It was necessary for the team to spend time working with the young people to explore what questions were relevant to the young people and how these questions could be formulated and examined historically.

4. Letting people outside the university contribute their research and knowledge to our programmes

Within this fourth category of types of public engagement, the intention of the public engagement activities is to share knowledge, expertise and experiences rather than the disseminate information or deliver a particular service to a particular audience, partner or community. The contribution to specific research projects and or teaching programmes can take many different forms, for instance groups outside the university may be involved in different stages of the research process e.g. prioritising and commissioning research, identifying research topics, planning and designing a research project, undertaking the research, disseminating, or evaluating research. The three examples below, Examples 8, 9 and 10, have been selected to illustrate the various ways that this contribution can take place.

Example 8
Reel Health Stories, September 2009- October 2010, Division of Medical Education

The UCL Division of Medical Education ran a short film competition on the subject of health and sickness. The competition was promoted online line, locally in Archway and within local
The team received 42 entries; a shortlist of 8 was created. The team developed relationships with local arts organisation Rowan Arts who introduced them to Reel Islington Screenings who run a local film festival in the summer. The films were screened at a local arts festival in Archway in July 2010 and onsite at UCL in Bloomsbury in October 2010. Using the entries, the team created a bank of health-related films for use in teaching medical students within the department.

A panel of 4 judges for the films included: Professor Jane Dacre, Head of Medical Education at UCL and consultant at the Whittington hospital in Archway; Director Ken Loach; Actor/Director David Morrissey and locally-based film Producer Camille Gati). Cash prizes were awarded to the winning entrants.

The above example used a creative method to engage a wide audience on the issues of health and sickness, as the project lead noted:

“We would not have done a project with film without the public engagement funding. It was certainly a method of engaging the public that no-one in our department had done before”.

Through engagement in a film competition, those who are patients but not academics are, offered a route whereby their knowledge can be used to create teaching materials. Another public engagement project which aimed to involve user groups in teaching is briefly outlined in Example 9.

Example 9
Involving Service Users in Clinical Psychology Training, February 2009-ongoing, Clinical Educational & Health Psychology

The aims and objectives of this project were to: formalise and develop service user input in the teaching, development and evaluation of the DClinPsy at UCL; and to complete a formal evaluation of service user involvement in teaching.

Ten service users were involved in teaching activities, including: the participation in DClinPsy Service User and Carer Committee, teaching to BSc psychology and DClinPsy students, and the involvement in the design and completion of a large scale research project to evaluate the impact of involving service users in clinical psychology teaching at UCL.

The DClinPsy Service User & Carer Committee now has a formal constitution. The committee’s work and other aspects of service user involvement have been highlighted as real strength of the course, by the department, in evidence prepared for the course accreditation in March 2010.

The formal evaluation of user involvement in teaching has almost reached the finishing stages with the help of 3 undergraduate UCL students and 1 post-graduate UCL student. Services users were involved in this project from the outset and will be involved in reviewing the findings and making recommendations accordingly.
In the above example, the purpose of engagement was embedded in the tools used (committees, training, evaluation) and was not just about gathering information about the users of the service, but about building the capacity of the users to be involved in aspects of teaching. With such practices, there is also a desire to create a feeling amongst those involved that there is something that can be influenced: a sense of ownership and commitment to the activity.

Similarly, in the example below (Example 10) the key parties involved (UCL staff, student, local residents and artists) were bound together by a mutual endeavour – hoping to capture and discuss regeneration and change in the urban environment.

Example 10
Drawing DiverCITIES: Walk-Talk-and-Draw, October–November 2010, Bartlett School of Planning

On the 29th October 2010 a group of 15 MSc students, 11 members of the local public, 2 professional artists, and 2 members of Bartlett School of Planning staff participated in a one-day event that encouraged a sharing of perspectives on the transformation of the King’s Cross area through the communicative act of drawing.

A guided walk through key points of interest in the King’s Cross regeneration area was interspersed with three drawing exercises led by the collaborative, mobile and performative drawing collective Ortelius Drew. A week-long public exhibition of the drawings followed in UCL.

The main aim of the event was to encourage students and members of the local public to come together in dialogue about their experiences of urban regeneration and change but from two rather different perspectives: the community affected by planning and those learning how to manage it.

The combination of artist run drawing exercises in situ surrounded by ‘planning in action’ allowed for a real experiential learning process.

This project challenged traditional norms of what constitutes ‘planning’ education and also what counts as constructive ‘community engagement’ in planning. It also established new networks between community members, students and the arts community and demonstrated the capacity-building propensity of activities like this which in a relaxed, informal and non-threatening manner encourage a lively exchange of ideas, opinions and perspectives on urban change and its management.

The project outlined in Example 10 serves two objectives: an opportunity to experiment with community engagement approaches and the creation of a new learning and teaching tool. The project lead noted how drawing as a communicative tool combination with reflective discussion could become embedded into the induction week proceedings for all MSc. students within the Bartlett School of Planning.
5. Taking part in dialogue about the direction of our research and teaching

Public engagement activities range from those which seek passive engagement, such as informing public groups about specific research, through to those where the agenda is driven by both members of the public and staff and/or students. The two examples below illustrate projects supported by the UCL Public Engagement Unit which aim for collaboration between patient groups and UCL staff, on a range of different aspects of the research process.

<table>
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<th>Example 11</th>
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<td>Public engagement in oral healthcare research, August–September 2009, Eastman Dental Institute</td>
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The Beacon Bursary supported the organisation of focus group, with dentists, hygienists and patients on 20th August 2009. This followed two previous focus groups held in May and June (of these groups separately). The project aimed to improve the public engagement on research in oral healthcare, by seeking feedback on a funding application to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

The focus group aimed to inform the development of a large grant application to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) through seeking feedback on the application in specific domains:

1. Research questions: Are we asking the right research questions?
2. Methods: Are we using appropriate research methods (including, types of participants, and ways of assessing outcomes, plans for analysis or bringing the data together)?
3. Reporting and dissemination: Do we have a good plan for communicating the findings?

The UCL Eastman Dental Institute has been developing a programme of studies which aims to develop a care pathway for periodontal (gum) diseases in the NHS by investigating patient experience and outcomes.

Involvement in the focus group studies has helped the project teams’ understanding of the value and importance of the public engagement and this approach to developing research ideas. The use of focus groups and public engagement to develop research has been shared. The team have discussed the focus groups with other researchers at the Eastman Dental Institute.

According to the project lead of Example 11:

"The focus groups achieved constructive comments from participants regarding the planned research. The feedback helped the team to improve the quality of the research and therefore strengthen the application".

Furthermore the project lead stated:
“Patients were impressed that their view were respected and sought. Dental professionals also reported that their understanding of patient issues and perspectives was improved”.

Example 11 illustrate public engagement projects which were organised where specific interests groups (e.g. patients, fellow practitioners) have some degree of power in influencing decisions about the direction of research being undertaken. The activities provide an opportunity for a two-way communication process between the public groups and the academic decision making bodies.

Within this project there is a clear application (i.e. funding applications, research projects) from the process of engagement. Influence is therefore a key aspect of this category: this project wanted engagement process to have a genuine impact and be seen to do so; otherwise, the process could be seen as ineffectual. If there is no detectible influence on the outcomes, be that a funding application, a conference, or a research project, the engagement exercise could be considered false or superficial.

6. Creating knowledge in collaboration with communities and interest groups outside the university

Collaboration is the key term within this category of types of public engagement. The examples below bring together the local community, local agencies, individuals and academics in the research and teaching process.

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**Example 12**
**REVEAL Food Junctions, February 2011- ongoing, UCL Bartlett Development Planning Unit**

The PEU funded a consortium of UCL staff and students to provide UCL’s contribution to the REVEAL festival - Food Junctions. Food Junctions specifically aimed to:

- raise awareness of the significance of food and empower people to take actions;
- reinforce artistic practice as a public forum;
- develop researchers’ skills, enhance knowledge and increase understanding of public engagement;
- exchange information and share learning between UCL departments;
- develop recommendations for the policy agenda and implementation towards sustainable food practice.

Food Junctions was a series of 60 events and activities (including art workshops, discussions, wine tasting, films, tours, readings, performances, art installations) targeting a range of audiences (e.g. local residents, community groups, festival attendees, local organisations). These activities were organised within the Camley Street Natural Reserve, the Calthorpe Project and surrounding areas in Kings Cross over five days across the two weeks of the
REVEAL festival.

The outputs from Food Junctions were impressive: 20 partner organisations linked to the project; 150 UCL students and staff at all academic levels were involved in the project, plus a further 100 contributors external to UCL; 27 UCL departments participated; over 1500 people attended Food Junctions events over the course of the two week programme.

Food Junctions was lead by a dedicated group of unpaid students (8 members in the core team) who initiated, organised, promoted and delivered the Food Junctions festival. The structure and organisation of the Food Junctions programme provided opportunities for a range of levels of involvement for organisers, presenters and audience members.

Furthermore, Food Junctions was linked to a range of student research projects. For example, the project was used as an evaluation case study to build critical theory on community-university engagement and part of a PhD thesis (by Marina Chang, the project lead) on food systems in London. The project provides an excellent example of how public engagement projects can enrich research and theory through the production of relevant, critically engaged knowledge.

REVEAL was a ten-day festival taking place in Kings Cross from 22nd April to 2nd May 2010. Organised by Create KX, a creative and cultural development agency, the REVEAL festival aimed to bring together a range of groups and organisations to celebrate Kings Cross’ unique cultural identity and reveal its rich creative history.

The PEU collaborated with Create KX to organise a competition, providing up to £20,000 to UCL students and/or staff to deliver a project during the REVEAL festival (detailed in the UCL-led BPE review report, September 2010). Sixteen applications were received from staff and students across the university; these were reviewed by a panel, on 16th November 2009, including UCL staff (the Dean of Students and a Professor from the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience) and a representative from Create KX. The panel was chaired by a member of the PEU, the Head of Public Engagement.

The public engagement project supported as part of the REVEAL festival 'Food Junctions', Example 12, has emerged both as tool for, and outcome of, research. The project lead (Marina Chang) is currently involved in another public engagement project called Foodpaths, which is also linked to her PhD studies which explore local food systems in London.

Example 13
Thames Discovery Programme: Training Events, May 2009-ongoing, UCL Environment Institute

The Thames Discovery Programme is a major initiative that aims to involve the wider public directly in a field of archaeological research in London that was pioneered by UCL.
The Thames Discovery Programme has established a Foreshore Record Observation Group (FROG), the membership of which is drawn from right across the London community. The group will be trained to survey key sites on a regular systematic basis, reporting their findings back to the Great London Sites & Monuments Record.

The Beacon Bursary funding, in tandem with Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) support, will provide the resources required to prepare the membership packs that all FROG members will receive, retain and re-use throughout their service. The project also involved running public engagement training programmes, for the members of FROG.

Once the training programme has been completed, it is hoped that the FROG members will be empowered to take over the long-term survey and re-survey of the Thames sites.

The Thames Discovery Programme also hope that the local foreshore will be used as a teaching resource and that research projects can easily use the website and resources to follow leads on topics and where to find research material.

The above example highlights a project where members of the public are involved as research practitioners, collaborating with academics and collecting data. The type of public engagement undertaken in this project part of the research process directly affects the research undertaken. The aims of the project outlined above have intentions towards both the research - improve the recording of the Thames foreshore - and the people involved in the project - building skills and increase awareness.

Example 14 illustrates an inventive way of how the local community, local agencies and academics can work together in the research process.

Example 14
MaiMwana women’s groups photography exhibition, January 2009-December 2010, Centre for International Health and Development

The aim of the project was to visually present the progress and impact of the MaiMwana women’s groups to dynamically raise awareness and contextualise the findings of the work amongst the general public, policy makers and donors in Malawi and in the UK. In addition, the project aimed to generate a dialogue between the women’s groups and these audiences.

To achieve this the project objectives were to:

- To distribute disposable cameras to 100 MaiMwana women’s groups to enable them to visually document the impact they feel the groups are having on their lives.
- To distribute prints back to the communities and support an elected committee of women’s group members to select the 30 prints they felt best illustrated the impact of the groups.
- To exhibit the 30 selected photographs, with accompanying narratives, in Malawi (at the Mchinji Community Hall) and in the UK (at Institute of Child Health, ICH and the main campus at UCL).

One hundred MaiMwana women’s groups were trained in basic photography and asked to take photographs of aspects relating to the impact of their groups. 30 images were selected from over 2000 to be part of Chimvano cha Mabvu exhibition in Malawi. In total over 500
people attended. The photographs were also exhibited at UCL.

This project was the first time that the UCL Centre for International Health and Development (CIHD) was involved in using photography as a method of public engagement. Moreover it was the first time that CIHD has involved research participants in the development of public engagement materials. The project has resulted in the development of a public engagement session at an international workshop in Kathmandu (on Public Engagement) held in March 2011. The session will use the project as an example of public engagement.

Engagement in practice

The examples outlined in this review demonstrate the range of ways in which engagement may happen within higher education (e.g. from telling groups about the research work being undertaken, to creating knowledge in collaboration with a range of stakeholders). Engagement can range from exchanging opinions to making decisions. Evidently the concept of engagement is a complex issue, the examples included in this document covers a range of approaches. There are different types or models of engagement within the cases examined (e.g. informing, consulting, involving, devolving decisions).

This section draws together the collective experiences of those running projects funded under the UCL-led BPE programme to highlight some key considerations for public engagement in practice. There are three key considerations: how to engage, why engagement happens from the perspective of members of the public (the role of the public) and the dynamic nature of the processes that occur. The following paragraphs interprets in these considerations into recommendations for those interested in undertaking public engagement linked to research and teaching.

As illustrated in this document a range of mechanisms have been applied in funded projects to encourage involvement of a range of public groups, these include: exhibitions, strategic partnerships, focus groups, open days, photography, conferences, film. Engagement is inherently a social activity, which relies heavily on connections with others; thus interactive, face to face methods such as workshops and events were considered essential. In practice, particular methods are more appropriate for achieving certain kinds of engagement to access different kinds of knowledge or generate specific interactions. For example, the process of informing may involve a community open day or exhibition, whilst consulting might involve undertaking a focus group or workshop.
The role of members of the public: individuals, groups and/or organisations can be involved in research and teaching in many different ways. There are four distinct ways that can be pulled out of the projects funded; these are:

- Members of the public as **active participants** in research and/or teaching, contributing their knowledge into the research and/or teaching process
- Members of the public as **practitioners** in research and/or teaching through undertaking specific aspects research and/or teaching
- Members of the public as **advisors** giving advice on the direction, priorities or design of research projects and/or teaching.
- Members of the public as **users** of information generated from research and/or teaching.

However, it is important to stress the dynamic nature of engagement. It should not be assumed these roles are static or discrete. The role of public groups and will ebb and flow depending on the stage of the research and teaching, the subject matter and the particular aspect of decision making. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that there is an ideal type of engagement or role of members of the public, people will have different interests in what they are participating in, and will therefore be satisfied to be involved at differing levels.

Different types of engagement (the exchange of information between individuals and groups; promoting and raising awareness of certain issues or activities; the improvement of the delivery of services, encouraging collective decision-making and action) might be appropriate at different stages of research and teaching for different stakeholders.

**Summary**

Public engagement in or with research and teaching has the potential to produce outcomes at a range of levels, with mutual benefits to research, teaching, staff and students and members of the public themselves.

The processes of public engagement to research and teaching are of particular interest to this document. The examples in this document show that interest groups, patients, residents, local authorities, young people and students are all stakeholders with a role to play in research and teaching processes.
This document explored and documented the practical manifestations of what a model of public engagement linked to research and teaching consists of in practice: dissecting and describing a number of projects and activities supported by the UCL Public Engagement Unit. These examples represent a wider movement within UCL where engagement has become part of research and teaching.