
Preface

➤ Our interviews and desk research defined a clear ‘call to action’ for the university sector: get a grip on your engagement or risk being overtaken by events.

The purpose of this report, commissioned in summer of 2019, is to examine the state of play in strategic support for public engagement, not just in the UK, but within an international context too.

For the NCCPE, the time felt right to take stock in this way. In the past 10 years there has been steady, incremental change in the embedding of public engagement in the UK HE sector. Stepping back to make sense of these changes with colleagues working at the ‘front line’ felt timely.

For UCL, the process to develop a new strategy for Public and Community Engagement was kicking off, and we felt it was really important to approach this with a robust understanding of wider trends.

We commissioned NCCPE Associate David Owen to lead the research process. We secured the involvement of engagement leads in a sample of different HEIs and conducted a series of in depth interviews. These revealed a shared conviction that a tipping point was approaching for public engagement, and an urgent call for universities to get a grip on their engagement or risk being overtaken by events.

We were about to publish both the report and the resource pack when COVID19 struck – and events did indeed overtake us, leading us to delay publication. Six months on much has changed, with COVID 19, Black Lives Matter and Brexit, running in parallel with the climate emergency, creating an unprecedented level of disruption and challenge. How universities will navigate this crisis is, we believe, very much dependent on the quality of their engagement activity: their sensitivity to the context in which they work, and their ability to contribute value to society.

This makes publishing the report now very timely. What this report offers is a snapshot in time: this was the state of the art in university public engagement ‘pre-Covid’. It provides a set of really important pointers to what matters in supporting public engagement well; it highlights the challenges and limitations in the current system; it points to practices outside HE which we should learn from. As such, we hope it provides a useful platform to inform the step change in public engagement which is now required.

Laura Cream, UCL

Paul Manners, NCCPE

Introduction

➤ Most of the people interviewed have been involved in university engagement strategy for the last decade. They pointed to a variety of ways in which significant change has occurred to make the sector more ‘engaged’. But there was also a strong feeling that in anticipation of the challenges ahead, a gear change is needed in university public engagement.

What we have done and why

The decade ahead offers significant opportunities and challenges for universities’ engagement with society. The current policy environment is demanding a greater focus on societal impact, on addressing inequality and accountability, to both funders and wider society. Universities cannot take for granted that their value is either understood or appreciated by large sections of society.

We commissioned this report and accompanying Resource Pack to provide practical tools to help us all navigate this rapidly unfolding context. The spirit of this project is self-help: by speaking frankly and sharing openly, we can accelerate our collective progress.

We invited a sample of universities working in the UK and beyond to share how they are tackling three challenges:

1. How are universities making and stating the case for public engagement and articulating its value?
2. How are universities turning strategy into practice - galvanising excellence in the design and delivery of public engagement and embedding it into their institutional infrastructure?
3. How are universities resourcing public engagement – both people and programmes?

Reflecting on these challenges through semi-structured interviews, senior leaders have provided rich intelligence about the ‘state of play’ in strategic leadership of public engagement. We detail key lessons in this report, not least the sticking points and barriers people are confronting.

We also asked them to share resources, strategies and other practical instruments which are helping them make progress, a sample of which we have compiled in the accompanying Resource Pack.

Most of the people interviewed have been involved in university engagement strategy for the last decade. They pointed to a variety of ways in which significant change has occurred to make the sector more ‘engaged’. But there was also a strong feeling that in anticipation of the challenges ahead, a gear change is needed in university public engagement.

We would like to thank all of the contributors for sharing their time and expertise so generously.

A note on language

Some HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) do not use the phrase ‘public engagement’ to describe their work with society. They have opted for other framings (such as ‘service’ or ‘societal engagement’). But all are aligned around a drive to increase the purposefulness and impact of their external engagement and to involve citizens and civil society in this work. We have elected for the phrase ‘the engaged university’ to capture this overarching ambition.

Executive summary

➤ Universities' role within civil society is being scrutinised both from within the sector and by civil society; place-based strategy, inequality and impact are all rising up the agenda.

➤ The imperative is to create engagement strategies and structures which anticipate rather than simply keep pace with societal change.

1. The evolving context for the engaged university

Headlines

- Higher Education policy imperatives in **research culture and EDI** (equalities, diversity and inclusion) are concentrating minds afresh on universities' internal and external engagement.
- Universities' role within civil society is being scrutinised both from within the sector and by civil society; **place-based strategy, inequality and impact** are all rising up on the agenda.

2. Making and stating the case for engagement

Headlines

- Engagement is increasingly being positioned as a **top-level strategic priority** by HEIs, partly in response to increased pressure from both government and funders for impact and accountability.
- The 'drivers' for societal engagement are volatile and shifting rapidly, meaning that HEIs need to rethink their practice to **stay ahead of the curve**. The imperative is to create engagement strategies and structures which **anticipate rather than simply keep pace** with societal change.
- Our interviewees consistently echoed the view that the sector is failing to **invest in the evaluation** vital to their engagement success.
- They helped us to identify a particular **set of conditions** in which the engaged university appears to thrive:
 - When engagement is a separate pillar within the institutional strategy, with clear links to research and teaching strategies.
 - Governance structures are aligned with the strategy (e.g. senior boards for each of the different pillars of the institutional strategy).
 - Senior staff are appointed to oversee and guide the implementation – academic and professional.
 - The strategic narrative draws on the institutional history and culture.
 - It draws on what matters to its staff, students and communities.
 - There is an integrated and systems-wide approach to evaluation.

Executive summary

continued

➤ There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach and HEIs will continue to cut their engagement cloth according to institutional scale, location and their unique culture and history.

➤ We encountered a sector in which engagement is still relatively rarely resourced as an integrated and essential element. Rather it is often ‘added on’ to existing ways of working in ways which make it hard to sustain or indeed evaluate effectively.

3. Turning strategy into practice: ‘Weaving’ engagement across the university

Headlines

- Developing an engagement strategy fit for the next decade requires an intelligent ‘weaving’ of engagement threads **across research, teaching and student experience, and the civic realm.**
- Drawing these strands together is a painstaking but necessary process. It demands **high level collaboration between academic and professional leadership and involvement of external stakeholders / partners.**
- **HEIs consistently grapple with these challenges:**
 - Experiences and perceptions of the university do not live up to the strategy.
 - Building trust and addressing equality, equity and inclusion.
 - Nurturing leadership & developing capability and talent.
- Implementing and realising a vision takes time and commitment. There are **a range of models and approaches** across the sector - each with advantages and disadvantages. There is **no ‘one size fits all’ approach** and HEIs will continue to cut their engagement cloth according to institutional scale, location and their unique culture and history.

4. Resourcing the engaged university – both people and programmes

Headlines

- HEIs who are serious about turning words into action inevitably face some difficult decisions about how to **balance and focus engagement investment.**
- We encountered a sector in which engagement is still relatively rarely resourced as an integrated and essential element. Rather it is often ‘**added on**’ to existing ways of working in ways which make it hard to sustain or indeed evaluate effectively.
- We also found a sector **ill equipped to benchmark its engagement resourcing.**
- We anticipate that the coming decade will see a shift from hesitancy to confidence in HEI investment in engagement: the re-engineering of work-flows, systems and roles so that engagement is **resourced as a ‘core’ function** and integrated into how HEIs go about their work.
- **Funders will have a key role to play in making this shift from ‘add on’ to ‘core’** ensuring that high quality engagement is hard-wired into delivery.

Executive summary

continued

➤ To move engagement from an ‘add on’ to a fundamental strategic orientation requires a genuine paradigm shift in how organisations understand their purpose and organise themselves to deliver against it.

➤ Five fundamental strategic challenges burned through the data we collected – and we invite you to use these as prompts for further discussion with colleagues and partners.

5. Staying ahead of the curve

Headlines

- Our interviewees aspired to engagement strategy being **proactive**, not reactive to the latest policy incentive.
- They also identified the need to shift the **balance of power in our external relationships** and invest in long term partnership building.
- We need to **learn from other sectors** who have successfully responded to the engagement imperative. What HEIs are currently contending with is something other sectors have had longer to adapt to.
- This teaches us that to move engagement from an ‘add on’ to a fundamental strategic orientation requires **a genuine paradigm shift** in how organisations understand their purpose and organise themselves to deliver against it.
- This begs the question – is the incremental progress we have identified in this report an adequate response? Do we need **bolder and more rapid progress**, and if so, how will that be achieved?

Where next?

Our review reveals a sector in rapid transition. Five fundamental strategic challenges burned through the data we collected – and we invite you to use these as prompts for further discussion with colleagues and partners.

- Are universities prepared to look critically at how we use our power? And do we recognise the power held in communities and understand how to mobilise it?
- Are we ready to examine how good and trustworthy a “partner” we really are? If and when we find shortcomings, what are we willing to do about it?
- What will it take to shift, or at least counterbalance, our primary accountability from government and regulators to our communities and partners? How open are we willing to be about the challenges this may involve?
- Do we have the talent, creativity and diversity of experience and expertise to navigate this new landscape? If not, what do we need to do about it?
- Do our leaders grasp the significance of the changes we need to implement, and are they committed to that change?

1. The evolving context for the engaged university



Common Cause Research, Sept 2018



Wellcome, January 2020

Headlines

- Higher Education policy imperatives in **research culture and EDI** (equalities, diversity and inclusion) are concentrating minds afresh on universities' internal and external engagement.
- Universities' role within civil society is being scrutinised both from within the sector and by civil society; **place-based strategy, inequality and impact** are all rising up the agenda.

New HE policy imperatives

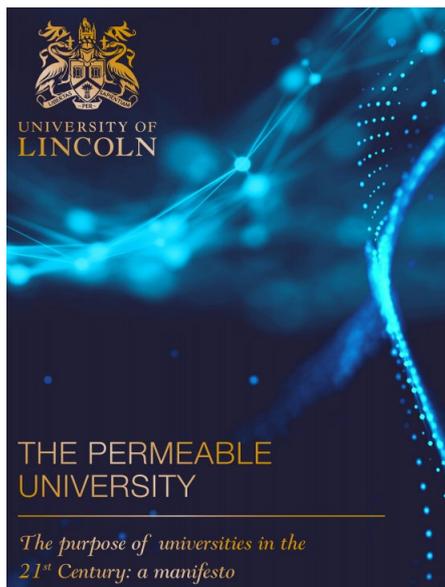
Research funders and government are calling on universities to:

- Address the complex challenges facing the world thereby **delivering maximum benefit for all**.
- **Create social and cultural impact**.
- Work in new ways to **raise investment in R&D** to 2.4% of GDP.

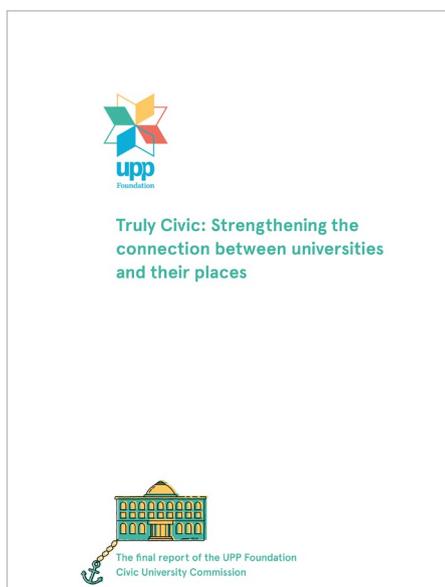
There are growing calls for a change in research culture:

- Tackling **unconscious bias**.
- Making research **people-centred**.
- Addressing **toxicity of research culture**.
- Addressing **structural inequalities** and barriers to **inclusion, diversity and equity**.

1. The evolving context for the engaged university continued



The Permeable University, November 2019



Final report of the Civic University Commission, 2019

Scrutiny of universities' role within civil society

There is an increasing focus on how research and innovation funding is addressing **social need and inequality** across all areas of the UK.

- The **local and regional role** of HEIs was foregrounded in the UPP Civic University Commission.
- UKRI has commissioned a programme of work to explore **place-based engagement** and subsequent funding may follow¹.
- Funders in the three other UK Nations are developing **bespoke 'place' policies**.

These external pressures 'up the ante' significantly. They demand rapid and profound change and a chance for universities to demonstrate their openness, transparency and social responsibility.

This is well expressed in Lincoln University's 'Permeable University' manifesto, which foregrounds the uncertainty surrounding the university sector, which it characterises as '**Complex, interrelated and unpredictable**'.

'Permeability should be the new lens which reframes the historic, core activities of universities; across organisational and national boundaries, between different groups and communities, technologies, and disciplines.

This will require a rethinking at every level from the system and policy framework within which universities operate through to the governance of institutions and what they deliver.'

¹ Enhancing place-based partnerships in public engagement www.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/enhancing-place-based-partnerships-in-public-engagement

1. The evolving context for the engaged university continued



The Story of Our Times: shifting power, bridging divides, transforming society:

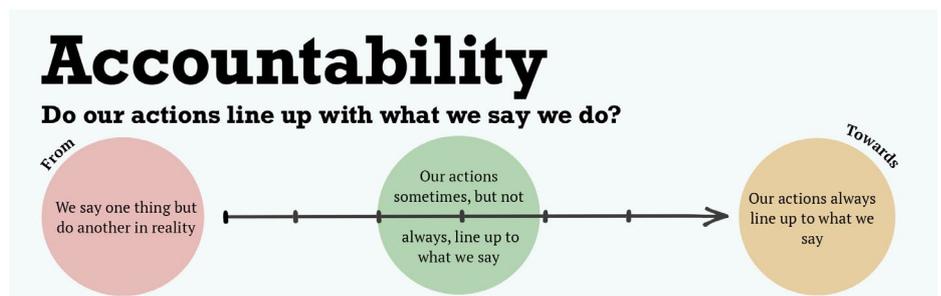
[Final report of the Civil Society Futures Inquiry, November 2018](#)

Civil Society Futures, November 2018

Civil society has a vital role to play in helping to address the challenges that lie ahead. To change for the future, all of us within civil society and those who interact with civil society need to respond with care, courage and commitment.

Civil Society Organizations are calling on Universities to heed the call for change:

- Consciously **shifting power and decision-making**.
- Holding ourselves **accountable** towards communities present and future.
- Broadening and deepening **connections**.
- Devoting the time and resources to **building trust**.



Extracts from the PACT for civil society framework – based on what Civil Society Futures heard from thousands of people across England².

² How can we shape the future together? https://civilsocietyfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/11/Civil-Society-Futures_PACT_Putting-it-into-practice.pdf

2. Making and stating the case for engagement

➤ Engagement is increasingly being positioned as a top-level strategic priority by HEIs, partly in response to increased pressure from both government and funders for impact and accountability.

Headlines

- Engagement is increasingly being positioned as a **top-level strategic priority** by HEIs, partly in response to increased pressure from both government and funders for impact and accountability.
- The ‘drivers’ for societal engagement are volatile and shifting rapidly, meaning that HEIs need to rethink their practice to **stay ahead of the curve**. The imperative is to create engagement strategies and structures which **anticipate rather than simply keep pace** with societal change.
- Our interviews helped us to identify a particular **set of conditions** in which the engaged university appears to thrive.

We highlight below a sample of seven HEIs. Their decision to elevate the importance of their engagement seeks to:

- draw out the respective strengths and traditions of the university around place, partnerships and impact.
- contribute directly to the social and economic wellbeing of their communities.
- provide a framework for their institutional governance and inform strategic decision making.

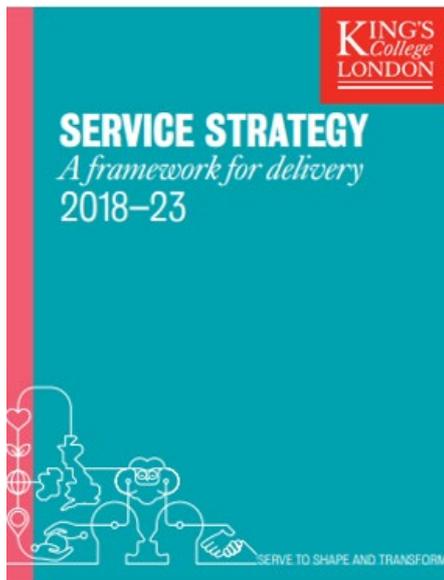
The Resource Pack provides greater detail on how these and other HEIs are working in practice.

HEIs are making engagement a top-level priority:

- The **University of Manchester** have adopted **Social Responsibility** as one of three core goals in their 2020 strategy and plan to build on this into 2030.
- **Sheffield Hallam University** focus on **transforming lives** through their teaching, research and civic leadership.
- **King’s College London** have embedded **service to society** throughout their Strategic Vision 2029.
- **Queen’s University Belfast** have launched a **social charter** which reaffirms their commitment to engaging with society and celebrates the contribution of students and staff contribute to the community.
- **University of Brighton** have foregrounded **practical wisdom** within their strategic plan, drawing on their strong heritage of community-university partnerships to enrich and embolden their teaching and research.
- **University of Chicago** has adopted **Civic Engagement** as the key framing for urban research, education and their local business, policy and community engagement.
- **Rutgers University – Newark (New Jersey, USA)** construes itself as an anchor institution focused on the intersection of social mobility and racial equity.

2. Making and stating the case for engagement

continued



King's College London Service strategy

Many of the people we spoke with reflected that societal engagement (however framed) comes to life in certain conditions. In particular when:

- It is a separate pillar within the institutional strategy, with clear links to research and teaching strategies.
- Governance structures are aligned with the strategy (e.g. senior boards for each of the different pillars of the institutional strategy).
- Senior staff are appointed to oversee and guide the implementation – academic and professional.
- The strategic narrative draws on the institutional history and culture.
- It draws on what matters to its staff, students and communities.
- There is an integrated and systems-wide approach to evaluation.

Increasingly. Universities are equipping themselves to respond more effectively to external drivers such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) and UN Sustainable Development Goals; and in the process are developing more robust measures for social accountability and evaluation.

Demonstrating social accountability – and the need for better evaluation

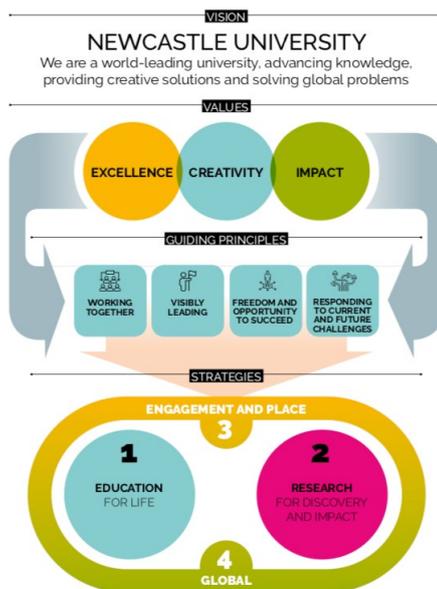
“If we don’t know the quality of the PE that we are doing, the numbers are meaningless”.

Our interviewees consistently echoed the view that the sector is failing to invest in the evaluation vital to their engagement success. The sector is currently self-sabotaging its ability to evidence success - to funders via REF, KEF and TEF¹ and more and to external stakeholders and communities in terms of broader social outcomes. The evaluation metrics (whether qualitative or quantitative) are still often framed with an internal rather than external community audience in mind.

¹ [Research Excellence Framework](#), [Knowledge Exchange Framework](#) and [Teaching Excellence Framework](#)

2. Making and stating the case for engagement

continued



Newcastle University Strategic Plan

What are institutions doing to tackle this?

- Measuring success against a much broader set of 'social' metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (e.g. prosperity of the region, staff diversity).
- Co-development of KPIs and performance measures with communities and external partners.
- Actively researching and theorising public engagement.
- Using creative evaluation methods (e.g. participatory film).
- Involving external voices in governance to increase transparency and accountability.

Who is leading the way on this:

- Newcastle University are working on the co-design of KPIs for place, looking at access and inclusive growth.
- Sheffield Hallam University have developed an evaluation framework for their outreach activity that benchmarks against educational attainment in the region.
- Simon Fraser University's Surrey Campus have established an advisory committee comprised of local business, government and community leaders who advise, guide and support the university's growth, development and campus-community engagements in the city of Surrey.

3. Turning strategy into practice: 'Weaving' engagement across the university

➤ Developing an engagement strategy fit for the next decade requires an intelligent 'weaving' of engagement threads across research, teaching and student experience and the civic realm.

Headlines

- Developing an engagement strategy fit for the next decade requires an intelligent 'weaving' of engagement threads **across research, teaching and student, experience and the civic realm.**
- Drawing these strands together is a painstaking but necessary process. It demands **high level collaboration between academic and professional leadership, and involvement of external stakeholders / partners.**
- Implementing and realising a vision takes time and commitment. There are a **range of models and approaches** across the sector - each with advantages and disadvantages. There is **no 'one size fits all' approach** and HEIs will continue to cut their engagement cloth according to institutional scale, location and their unique culture and history.

Common challenges

We identified three common challenges which HEIs are grappling with in developing their engagement strategies.



Experiences and perceptions of the university do not live up to the strategy



Building trust and addressing equality, equity and inclusion



Nurturing leadership & developing capability and talent

3. Turning strategy into practice: 'Weaving' engagement across the university

continued

“When you come out with these big strategic themes you have to really walk the walk – and be genuine.

The Challenges in Focus

We asked people both why these challenges matter – and how they can be tackled.



Experiences and perceptions of the university do not live up to the strategy

Failing to “walk the walk” risks fostering cynicism and disaffection amongst staff and students and damaging relationships with external communities. An engagement narrative which fails to translate into integrated and consistent practice or is simply overlaid onto outdated systems and silos can cause more damage than good.

What are institutions doing to tackle this:

- Embedding engagement principles across research and teaching and all core business (e.g. estates, procurement etc.).
- Building partnerships with other institutions around place.
- Updating systems and processes to ensure they are ‘fit for purpose’.

3. Turning strategy into practice: 'Weaving' engagement across the university

continued

“The value of engagement is that it changes the trust dynamic. We model this in how we work and behave.



Building trust and addressing equality, equity and inclusion

Our UK interviewees were keenly aware of universities' responsibility to 'left behind' communities in one of the most regionally unbalanced countries in the industrialised world. Many viewed building trust as a crucial counterbalance to the growing distrust of experts. They were taking steps to address the fundamental inequalities underpinning university/community relationships and the unintended consequences of traditional approaches to research and education.

What are institutions doing to tackle this:

- Prioritising co-production with communities, particularly those under-served.
- Looking for equity and reciprocity in research processes e.g. ensuring partners are paid for their contributions.
- Exploring the concept and practice of the 'engaged curriculum', offering innovative learning opportunities for students through collaboration with community partners.
- Setting KPIs for equality and diversity in the workforce and ensuring that staff profiles reflect the diversity in the community.
- Investing in long term place and partnership development.

3. Turning strategy into practice: 'Weaving' engagement across the university

continued

“When you're leading and cutting edge and pushing new boundaries there are very few people working in this field – sometimes you need to look at other sectors and work out how to transfer the skills into the sector.



Nurturing leadership & developing capability and talent

We heard a consensus view that engagement, essentially still in many ways a culture change initiative, is highly vulnerable to fluctuations in HEI leadership. Consequently, thought needs to be given to developing present and future leaders, both academic and engagement-specific.

What are institutions doing to tackle this:

- The appointment of senior leaders with responsibility for societal engagement.
- Development of leadership programmes for staff and students.
- Community leadership programmes for civil society organisations.
- Putting in place professional support for researchers to help them develop capacity and skills.
- Developing mentoring schemes .
- Public engagement masterclasses for University staff co-created with community partners.

4. Resourcing the engaged university – both people and programmes

➤ Common across all institutions is a commitment to the purposeful deployment of people and resources.

Headlines

- HEIs who are serious about turning words into action inevitably face some difficult decisions about how to **balance and focus engagement investment**.
- We encountered a sector in which engagement is still relatively seldom resourced as an integrated and essential element. Instead, it is often **'added on'** to existing ways of working in ways which make it hard to sustain or indeed evaluate effectively.
- We also found a sector **ill equipped to benchmark its engagement resourcing**.
- We anticipate that the coming decade will see a shift from hesitancy to confidence in HEI investment in engagement: the re-engineering of work-flows, systems and roles so that engagement is **resourced as a 'core' function and equipped to respond to the societal demands of the coming decade**.
- **Funders will have a key role to play in making this shift from 'add on' to 'core'** ensuring that high quality engagement is hard-wired into delivery.

Common across all institutions is a commitment to the purposeful deployment of people and resources. Those that had made the most progress over the past ten years had moved from ad-hoc, uncoordinated resource deployment towards strategic and integrated decision making that is aligned with the culture and vision of the institution.

4. Resourcing the engaged university – both people and programmes

continued

➤ Despite challenges in collecting information, some common themes emerged.

How HEIs are resourcing the work

Despite challenges in collecting information, some common themes emerged.



Central engagement teams were generally small. Often <10 staff working horizontally across the institution.



Teams are currently sustained on relatively small budgets. Often designed to broker resources and support and mobilise activity across the institution.



Roles focus on institutional culture change. There is a growing cadre of ‘Public Engagement Professionals’ with significant expertise in both the design of excellent engagement AND skills in organisational development.

Some key resourcing lessons learned included:



Senior backing for the team is vital. Having a direct line to the top circumvents bureaucracy and helps the institution take a coordinated, strategic approach.



Successful teams will create more work for themselves and risk burnout. Engagement professionals have a ‘can do’ attitude – this is a key factor in their success but can lead to burn out if not carefully managed.



Invest in talent. Engagement requires specialist skills – finding and developing the right people is crucial and valuing their expertise.

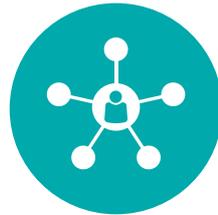
4. Resourcing the engaged university – both people and programmes

continued

➤ Our interviews revealed significant diversity in approaches to resourcing engagement.

Getting the balance right...

Our interviews revealed significant diversity in approaches to resourcing engagement. We identified five areas where decisions about resourcing need to be made. In many cases these are not either/or choices but are about emphasis, or trade-offs.



FOCUS: CULTURE CHANGE - DELIVERY

How do you balance delivery of engagement activity with investment in long term culture change?

Culture change

Delivery



POSITION: CENTRAL - DELIVERY

What balance do you strike between centralised and departmental support?

Central

Devolved



STAFFING: PAY BUDGET - NON-BUDGET

What balance do you need between staff resource and other resource (e.g. a seed fund, funding to bring in external expertise etc.)

Pay budget

Non-pay budget



SOURCES: CORE - EXTERNAL

What balance do you need between core and external funding?

Core funding

External project funding



REMIT: PEOPLE BASED - PROGRAMME BASED

Do you focus on supporting everyone, or concentrate on developing high-profile programmes?

People-based

Programme based

5. Staying ahead of the curve

➤ Our interviews and desk research defined a clear ‘call to action’ for the university sector: get a grip on your engagement or risk being overtaken by events.

Headlines

- Our interviewees aspired to engagement strategy being **proactive**, not reactive to the latest policy incentive.
- They identified the need to shift the **balance of power in our external relationships** and invest in long term partnership building.
- We need to **learn from other sectors** who have successfully responded to the engagement imperative. What HEIs are currently contending with is something other sectors have had longer to adapt to.
- This teaches us that to move engagement from an ‘add on’ to a fundamental strategic orientation requires **a genuine paradigm shift** in how organisations understand their purpose and organise themselves to deliver against it.
- This begs the question – is the incremental progress we have identified in this report an adequate response? Do we need **bolder and more rapid progress**, and if so, how will that be achieved?

Our interviews and desk research defined a clear ‘call to action’ for the university sector: get a grip on your engagement or risk being overtaken by events.

We can help ourselves by looking outside the university sector to how others have responded to the same pressures we are facing. In this section we identify six areas which can really enable positive change. These snapshots are fleshed out in the accompanying Resource Pack.



Developing leadership capability



Collaborative platforms



Data, evaluation and insight



Open and reflective environments



Incubating new ways of working



People-centred value-based approaches

5. Staying ahead of the curve

continued

“I’ve had to adjust my leadership style to learn from social movements stuff. I’m used to leading from the front, but in this role, it’s more about being in the background, supporting others.

“We’re moving from broad engagement activities to place-based relationships and initiatives. Convening Forums with different actors in specific locations to understand ambitions and priorities for those places. This is a very different way of working for us now.



Developing leadership capability

In practice...

“I’ve had to adjust my leadership style to learn from social movements stuff. I’m used to leading from the front, but in this role, it’s more about being in the background, supporting others”.

Experimenting with...

- Developing capacity and skills.
- Encouraging systems leadership.
- Working across disciplinary silos, teams and organisations.
- Leadership academies.



Collaborative platforms

In practice...

“We’re moving from broad engagement activities to place-based relationships and initiatives. Convening Forums with different actors in specific locations to understand ambitions and priorities for those places. This is a very different way of working for us now. For example, we are working with Indigenous organisations and communities through a process of collaboration and co-creation – listening and acting on priorities identified by the community”.

Experimenting with...

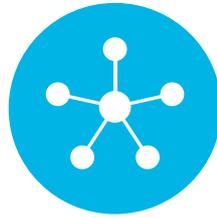
- Social mobility partnerships.
- Convening regional cross organisational strategy groups.
- Working inter-professionally.
- Place-based strategies and plans.
- Network building and social connectedness.

5. Staying ahead of the curve

continued

“We are developing new metrics and making a serious effort to define the outcomes we are working towards.”

“We’re asking researchers to think in a fundamentally different way about how they do research...”



Data, evaluation and insight

In practice...

“We are developing new metrics and making a serious effort to define the outcomes we are working towards. There are questions whether we will have the resource to deliver against our ambitions though”.

Experimenting with...

- Understanding need for investment in data capability, e.g. expertise or CRM platforms etc, feasibility and the business case for investment.
- Building evaluation and monitoring into projects.
- Influencing global rankings.
- Improving data capability (e.g. financial value of PE, measuring research culture).
- Activity mapping.



Incubating new ways of working

In practice...

“We’re asking researchers to think in a fundamentally different way about how they do research...”.

“To get to these hard-hitting landmark outputs, people often forget the early phases of projects, years of building trust and relationships, there is so much work that goes in beforehand to get here”.

Experimenting with...

- Place-based approaches.
- Investing in seed funds / experimentation.
- Combining research and social enterprise.
- Drawing on diverse funding sources.
- Developing business cases.

5. Staying ahead of the curve

continued

“It’s all about learning, support and reflection with staff and community partners. Making sure we build process for learning and doing together.”

“Our civic engagement strategy is based on values. It is not about metrics.”



Open and reflective environments

In practice...

“It’s all about learning, support and reflection with staff and community partners. Making sure we build process for learning and doing together”.

“All members of the research team are involved in public engagement in some way, but every project builds on the knowledge of the team. It’s evolutionary and a really nice example, where a really high performing lab has developed a culture of engagement within their research”.

Experimenting with...

- Opportunities to practice engagement.
- Reflective team-based learning.
- Spaces in which researchers can try engagement and learn from it.
- Involving partners in feedback and development.
- Improving data capability (e.g. financial value of PE, measuring research culture).
- Activity mapping.



People-centred value-based approaches

In practice...

“Our civic engagement strategy is based on values. It is not about metrics. The whole point of this work is not only are you allowed to feel, but you need to feel in order to do it well”.

Experimenting with...

- Putting people and values at the heart of the work.
- Addressing intersectionality and power.
- Proactively reaching new partners and audiences.

6. Concluding comments

We hope that the snapshot of approaches outlined above is helpful to any HEI reflecting on its engagement mission and wanting to move from ‘words to action’.

This project has confirmed that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, nor a checklist to tick off. There are some hard decisions to work through and judgements to be made about priorities and emphasis. We can however learn a lot from each other and from what has already been tried – inside and outside HE. The accompanying Resource Pack provides resources and tools to help with this, as does the NCCPE website.

The strongest overall message we have taken from this exercise is one of urgency and the need for change: we need to move quickly and decisively, and with common purpose.

Five fundamental strategic challenges burned through the data we collected – and we invite you to use these as prompts for further discussion with colleagues and partners.

- Are universities prepared to look critically at how we use our power? And do we recognise the power held in communities and understand how to mobilise it?
- Are we ready to examine how good and trustworthy a “partner” we really are? If and when we find shortcomings, what are we willing to do about it?
- What will it take to shift, or at least counterbalance, our primary accountability from government and regulators to our communities and partners? How open are we willing to be about the challenges this may involve?
- Do we have the talent, creativity and diversity of experience and expertise to navigate this new landscape? If not, what do we need to do about it?
- Do our leaders grasp the significance of the changes we need to implement, and are they committed to that change?

We welcome your feedback on this report.
Please email nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk

Annex: Participating HEIs and staff

Key contacts	Role	Institution
Vicky Brightman	Head of Public Engagement	Imperial College London
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