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Learning from public and patient involvement in research

A briefing note for organisations

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In collaboration with



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Executive summary

Our aim was to support the expansion of public engagement training within the School of Life and Medical Sciences (SLMS) at UCL. We were commissioned to run a consultation on existing training and to consider strategies to engage hard to reach academics and senior leaders.

Many researchers and academics are at different stages of their public engagement and involvement journeys and are unsure of how to successfully carry out the activities involved. Through consultation with researchers and senior academics, we have compiled some facilitators and action points that will assist in these public engagement and involvement activities. We also researched methods for behaviour change and have included the findings here.

Public engagement is the sharing of information from research with the public, **public involvement** is "seeking input and advice from people who have relevant expertise in living with the conditions or situations authors are writing about",² while "**Co-producing**" a research project is an approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge".⁴



Key themes

1. Engaging and working collaboratively with people
2. Culture shift
3. Ethical considerations
4. Communication and cross-working
5. Support and practical solutions.

Key points to gain buy-in

- Consider behavior change concepts
- Use techniques to "sell" the issue
- Recognise that senior management's focus is often on external visibility
- Mid-career colleagues may be in the most influential position
- Behaviour is driven by a combination of capability, motivation and opportunity.

Recommendations

- Provide clarity over the distinctions between public engagement, patient and public involvement, and co-production
- Have in-house support and guidance aimed at all stages of public and patient engagement and involvement
- Increase visibility of and/or the communication around the services provided, in particular training, support provided and toolkits
- Influence senior academics via the 'middle management' (mid-career academics)
- Consider if there is scope for facilitation of idea sharing and support across departments
- Use behaviour change concepts to address barriers and opportunities in the development of any future training and support e.g. in terms of the COM-B model.

Introduction

Public engagement describes "...the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit".⁹

There are many terms that are used to describe public engagement in research, including: "outreach, patient-involvement, collaborative research, citizen science, participatory arts, lifelong learning, community engagement, and engagement with partners".⁸ However, there are differences between the activities involved in public engagement, public involvement and co-production.

Briefly, **public engagement** is as described above, the sharing of information from research with the public, **public involvement** is "seeking input and advice from people who have relevant expertise in living with the conditions or situations authors are writing about." (BMJ), while "**Co-producing** a research project is an approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge".⁴

Public engagement facilitators and action points

There has been a recent increase in the emphasis placed on public and patient engagement and involvement by funders, which has gone some way to help buy-in. However, not all funders require this to be a central part of research and it is not mentioned on many grant applications, so there is some way to go on a local level to get researchers to feel encouraged to do this.

We ran workshops and held interviews where those involved had the opportunity to share experiences, challenges and suggest solutions related to public engagement and enabling senior academics to support innovative public engagement practice.



Five key themes and actions

For each theme, we have noted the issues raised, along with suggested actions to address these.

Issues Raised

- How to get people interested
- Keeping people involved
- Same groups of people being involved all the time
- No links to reach intended audience
- Need to be aware of conflicts of interest
- Need to manage people with differing views
- Lack skills to navigate complex issues arising
- Assumptions e.g. depressed people won't take part
- Lay descriptions needed
- Building relationships takes time and skill

Engaging and working collaboratively with people

Action Points

- Training to include building skills related to how to communicate with public groups and facilitate discussions
- Work with a third-party agency who can provide access to hard to reach groups (e.g. charities and patient representative groups)
- Make sure you do not replicate work by ensuring you seek out and use existing relevant population groups
- Go out to consult people in their own environment rather than ask them to come to you
- Allow time to develop relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Action Points

- There is scope for some work to be done to educate ethics committees about public engagement
- Working with a third-party organisation to contact the desired groups, would be beneficial.

Issues Raised

- Getting ethics committees to understand the need for PPI
- Ethical approval needed to make contact to ask people to be involved?
- Difference between ethics and ethical practice/safeguarding



Methodologies for gaining buy-in

"Strategic issues are events, developments or trends that are viewed as having implications for organisational performance (Ansoff, 1980)".³

The key salient ideas that emerged from the literature searches were:

- Consider behaviour change concepts
- Use techniques to 'sell' the issue
- Recognise that senior management's focus is often on external visibility
- Mid-career colleagues may be in the most influential position
- Behaviour is driven by a combination of capability, motivation and opportunity.



Behaviour change concepts

Show people how it benefits them

NICE guidance (2007) suggests that while the evidence for psychological models of behaviour change is limited, there are a number of concepts that may be helpful. These include: managing people's expectations; self-efficacy (enhancing people's belief in their ability to change); emphasising personal relevance; and having a positive attitude towards the end outcomes.⁷

These concepts emerged in the discussions held at the workshops and in interviews, as discussed later. Utilising these key concepts in communication about the training would help academics understand how public and patient engagement and involvement fits with their research.

A practical example of this might be to have a positively-framed, clear university-wide communication strategy around what exactly public engagement and involvement entails.

A way to increase the impact would be by demonstrating how it is relevant to all areas of research as well as personally applicable to the self-development of all academics. The offer of individual support to academics who are less clear about how it is applicable to them is something that could be considered.

Think about specific barriers

From a more logistical standpoint, literature from the Business sector highlights the importance of asking senior management about the following issues that may prevent them from engaging in the desired behaviours: time restraints; logistics; is it a case of lack of understanding or that they can't see the benefits; and ask for advice and feedback on the issue itself.⁵ Requesting this sort of feedback is exactly what the workshops and interviews set out to do.

A practical example is that once some of the communication challenges, as discussed later in this report, have been bottomed-out, the next more logistical aspects are focused on, for example, are people logically set up to involve the public, do people know what the benefits are and ensure that key academics are given the opportunity to give their views on public engagement and involvement.



'Selling' issues

In order to increase buy-in, the Process-Change Management Perspective recommends the following key criteria for 'selling' an issue:¹

1. Show the benefits
 - This may include successful case studies and discussing the organisational-wide benefits
2. Explain the concept and how to ensure success
 - Clear communication about what is meant and the different levels of engagement. Being clear about what a successful project looks like and being realistic about what is involved
3. Understand where it can help
 - This is linked to the first bullet point. This may also involve seeking out specific challenges being faced and how public engagement can help solve issues
4. Understand what motivates senior researchers
 - This is discussed in more detail below. Understanding what is important to senior academics will enable public engagement to be 'pitched' in the right way.

External visibility

The senior level management's focus is often on the external visibility of the organisation and top-level management and organisational success are often intertwined.³

This means that an organisation which has a lot of public engagement and involvement in its research will be well regarded, which will thus contribute to the success of the organisation.

When discussing the benefits of public engagement and involvement, it is important to highlight the benefits to the success of the organisation to senior-level management.

COM-B system

The COM-B system framework has been proposed as a way to understand behaviour with a view to thinking through how to affect change (Michie et al., 2011).

- Capability: the psychological or physical skills or knowledge required to enact the behaviour;
- Motivation: the reflective and automatic mechanisms that enact or inhibit behaviour;
- Opportunity: the physical and social environment;
- All these factors combined will enable the desired behaviour.

We suggest that this model is used to help frame the challenges and facilitators to public engagement and involvement within departments and organisations, to develop a comprehensive implementation plan to mobilise the public engagement strategy across all levels of researchers and staff.



Figure 1. COM-B system - a framework for understanding behaviour.⁶

Recommendations

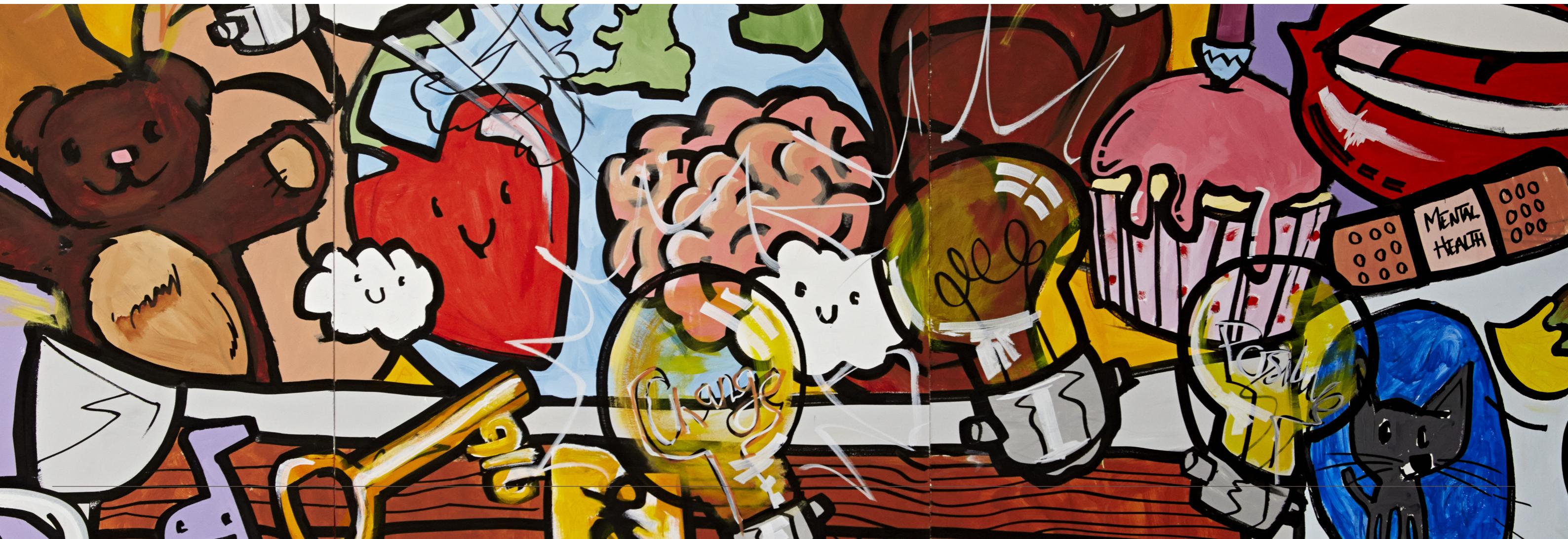
1. Use the COM-B system framework to develop a comprehensive implementation plan to encourage the required behaviour change at all career levels
2. Utilise the expertise of mid-career academics to add weight to influencing senior-academics of the benefits of public engagement
3. Develop messages for and with senior leaders on how public engagement and involvement will improve the external visibility, reputation and profile of the organisation
4. Use behaviour change techniques, including:
 - Show the benefits
 - Explain the concept
 - Understand where it can help
 - Understand what motivates senior academics
 - Manage expectations
 - Enhance self-efficacy
 - Emphasize personal benefits
 - Keep a positive attitude about the outcomes.
5. Consider specific challenges, including:
 - Time restraints, logistics
 - Cannot see benefits.

Summary

We have provided facilitators and action points in this briefing note, which emerged from the discussions at workshops and interviews. There may need to be some groundwork which precludes the substantive work of people being engaged in their public involvement and engagement work. Two of the main challenges that were discussed related to 1) people not really understanding the difference between public engagement, involvement and co-production and 2) not knowing where to start or turn to for advice.

There are widely available resources in the internet, but organisations would also benefit from having in-house support and guidance aimed at all stages of public and patient engagement and involvement, which is supported by clear training schedules and communication to all levels of staff.

In terms of helping people gain clarity over public engagement and involvement itself, we encourage the use of the COM-B model to interrogate where there are gaps in the forces (compatibility, opportunity, motivation) that drive behaviour (engaging and involving the public), as well as consideration of aspects of behaviour change concepts to "sell" issues arising.



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The Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) is the UK's leading membership organisation that collects and uses evidence to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

EBPU

Evidence Based Practice Unit

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Founded in 2006 as a collaboration between UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, the Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) bridges cutting-edge research and innovative practice in children's mental health. We conduct research, develop tools, provide training, evaluate interventions and disseminate evidence across four themes: risk, resilience, change and choice. Our vision is for all children and young people's wellbeing support to be informed by real-world evidence so that every child thrives.

COMMON ROOM

Common Room is a consultancy led by lived experience. We connect the expertise of children, young people, researchers, practitioners and policymakers across disability, health and mental health to:

- Enable professionals and services to find the best ways of involving young people in decisions about their lives, services and support.
- Develop and deliver training to support professionals to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to have difficult conversations with young people about a range of issues including safeguarding and mental health.
- Involve children and young people as partners in research, policy and service improvement projects.
- Learn from lived experience through consultation and research with children, young people and families.

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