WEISS Public Engagement Strategy
2018 - 2022

Research at the Wellcome / EPSRC Centre for Interventional and Surgical Sciences (WEISS) will improve healthcare outcomes for current and future patients around the world, enabling cutting edge engineering solutions to reach patients faster.

Effective public engagement enhances research by broadening, exchanging, and testing knowledge, ideas and expertise. It also improves the rate and speed of translation into practice as ethics and practical application are contextualised and applied, and the public discourse engaged with.

This is why public engagement forms an integral part of the WEISS identity, is embedded into the centre’s strategy and membership, and forms one of the WEISS key deliverables and translational aims.

Public Engagement Vision

Using UCL’s core values of openness, inclusiveness and fostering innovation and creativity, our vision is:

“To engage with publics to improve the design and translation of WEISS research, building public awareness by opening up conversations about the wider implications of this for people’s lives.”

Public Engagement Strategic Aims

- Public and patient stakeholders have opportunities to inform research throughout the research cycle, through constructive dialogue and mutual learning.
- Our public engagement is designed collaboratively, involving relevant people outside of higher education to create and design opportunities. Such as cultural partners, patient support groups and medical professionals.
- Public engagement is supported by an embedded culture of engagement at WEISS, ensuring the capacity and internal support for public engagement is part of our identity.
- WEISS staff and students have access to training, advice and support that provide skills and opportunities to conduct effective public engagement.

Programme Attributes

The WEISS programme will prioritise activity that can demonstrate a fit to one or more of the four associated attributes or outcomes below.
These activities link to the four strategic aims and will be our focus throughout the programme.

- **Enhance** – Activity demonstrating a clear link to WEISS research, with potential to enhance elements of design, practice and/or translation.
- **Collaborate** – Collaboration with relevant external partners & stakeholders to develop creative and relevant methods of effectively engaging with our target publics.
- **Develop** – Activity that demonstrably contributes to the development of a skilled staff and student base for public engagement, developing new skills or understanding in participants and sharing learning wider across the centre.
- **Embed** – We seek to embed public engagement within core business, ensuring capacity and encouragement to undertake engagement as part of research.

**Our Key Publics**

There are various definitions of ‘publics’ in relation to higher education, however these typically align with our major funders, UKRI, as “individuals, groups, young people and their families who do not currently have a formal relationship with a HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer...”¹

However, the public are not homogenous, identifying segments through demographics or communities of interest that will most benefit from or contribute to the purpose of research and engagement can substantially improve activities.

Based on the WEISS aims and public engagement vision our three major publics are:

**Patients who are directly affected by Interventional and Surgical Sciences**

*Who?* This includes people currently or potentially undergoing treatment for conditions likely to result in interventional and surgical interventions that are underpinned or developed by the centre.

*Why?* Involving end users throughout research allows research and outputs to be more reflective of patient needs, and relevant to the practical setting that treatment is applied in.

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¹ RCUK Catalyst Seed Fund Guidance, section 16, accessible here, also see NIHR definition here.
² UCL Public Engagement Strategy, page 5, accessible here
Patients are also more likely to embrace new procedures that they feel they have helped to shape, or where they are able to receive more and better-quality information, developed with current and past patients.

The public indirectly affected by Interventional and Surgical Sciences

**Who?** This definition includes those working with and for those directly affected, such as carers, family and friends, and networks of charities and advocate services that represent people directly affected³.

**Why?** Patients are supported by networks that provide support and represent their interests, who provide the pre and post care that can decide the success of treatment. The long-term experience of carers and advocates also make them a valuable source of patient insight, as well as a link to important networks.

Local community in the Borough of Camden

**Who?** UCL’s local borough of Camden intersects our Fitzrovia location and represents a major catchment area of the UCLH Foundation Trust. We will target a number of primary partner organisations, particularly those with a health focus, to work through.

**Why?** The UCL Strategy 2034 recognises “our responsibility to contribute effectively to society and our local community and encourage a dialogue that will inform our activities”⁴.

Focussing on local community aligns WEISS with UCL 2034 and through selecting specific partner organisations allows us to develop sustainable relationships with groups and institutions comprising diverse and hard to reach memberships that are often underrepresented in research consultation and engagement.

Monitoring and Governance

The Public Engagement Advisory Group (PEAB), will meet twice per year to monitor the implementation of this strategy and discuss new ideas and any issues regarding its development as they arise.

The group may set targets following the first year and will participate in a centre-wide strategic review of this programme in 2020 where aims and targets will be reviewed and reassessed.

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³ Informed by the definition of the public by INVOLVE, NIHR, [accessible here](#).
⁴ UCL 2034 Principal Themes, Accessible and publicly engaged, [accessible here](#).
Appendix I – Strategic Fit and Definitions

Strategic Context

The strategy builds on the WEISS aim, to deliver ‘a suite of initiatives to facilitate interaction, communication and dialogue with the broader community, patients and the general public… to promote constructive dialogue and mutual learning.’

This feeds into the UCL 2034 and Public Engagement strategies, delivering the principal theme of ‘accessible and publicly engaged’ to ‘contribute effectively to society and our local community and encourage a dialogue that will inform our activities’.

It also builds on national commissions on preparing for a digital future in healthcare, including the Royal College of Surgeons’ ‘Future of Surgery Report” and NHS Commissioned Topol Review which recommends for digital medicine, AI and Robotics:

“patients are involved from the beginning in the design and implementation of AI software for healthcare, with their needs and preferences reflected in the co-design process.”

Definition of Public Engagement

Public engagement can take place at any or several stages of research, depending on the purpose. This may be to shape research questions; design or carry out research; or spread awareness amongst those affected or interested by research.

Public engagement provides opportunities for open and equal communication between researchers and members of the public, allowing both to benefit from new insights and perspectives.

As in the UCL Public Engagement Strategy our definition is informed by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE).

The NCCPE is part funded by Wellcome and UK Research and Innovation, reflecting the priorities of our two major funders.

“research being carried out ‘with’ or ‘by’ members of the public rather than ‘to’, ‘about’ or ‘for’ them… where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations.”

- Involve, NIHR

Patient and Public involvement (PPI) is recognised within our framing of public engagement, sharing a focus on dialogue and collaboration with the public for mutual benefit. As part of our approach we hope to better unify these two related definitions.

5 Wellcome/EPSRC application [203145Z/16/Z], p.8
6 UCL 2034 Principal Themes, Accessible and publicly engaged, accessible here
7 UCL Public Engagement Strategy, page 5, accessible here
Appendix II - Public Engagement Outcomes

Public and patient stakeholders have opportunities to inform research throughout the research cycle through constructive dialogue and mutual learning.

- Public engagement approaches are embedded throughout the research cycle and the development of grant applications, with activities and/or planning prepared beforehand.

- Research projects feel they have benefitted from using their planned public engagement approaches and can identify where these activities have contributed to their work.

- Public contributors feel they have been provided the requisite information / training to inform participation and that their involvement has been valued and factored into research decision making.

**Effective and relevant opportunities are created for target publics by involving non-academics in collaborative approaches to their development, such as cultural partners, patient support groups and medical professionals**

- Public engagement activities are informed by external collaborators (non-WEISS), involved in the development and/or delivery of public activities to generate creative and relevant projects that reach key publics.

- Our publics feel more informed about WEISS research through opportunities that clearly communicate research and stimulate thinking around WEISS key themes.

- WEISS staff and students have the opportunity to take part in centre-led initiatives linking them with collaborators, feeling that they’ve come out of these with a better understanding of collaborative approaches.

- The centre is part of a network of relevant and engaged collaborators with an interest in reaching patients and our publics with research.

**Public engagement is supported by an embedded culture of engagement at WEISS, ensuring the capacity and internal support for public engagement is part of our identity.**

- Public engagement is considered as part of core centre business, included in recruitment, ongoing appraisals and probation, core processes and strategy, with representation at advisory board level.

- WEISS staff and students feel supported and encouraged to take part in public engagement opportunities by centre management, with support and time to do so.

- WEISS staff and students have a shared understanding of the centre’s definition of public engagement and how it is relevant as part of their role and the aims of the centre.
WEISS staff and students have access to training, advice and support that provide skills and opportunities to conduct effective public engagement

- Training is provided and linked to by the centre, providing the opportunity to develop an understanding of the basic steps of public engagement and develop specific practice based on the centre strategy and member needs.

- Funding calls and opportunities led by the centre provide the chance for WEISS staff and students to develop skills in public engagement and they feel supported to continue developing these.

- WEISS staff and students’ own public engagement is evaluated and shared across the centre as part of wider practice sharing, including internal events and online resources.

- WEISS staff and students feel there are adequate reward mechanisms in place that celebrate good practice and demonstrate the value of activity to the centre, including internal mechanisms and external award nominations.