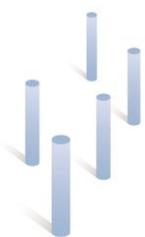




The authors and the NCCPE would like to thank all those who contributed to the workshops.



**national
co-ordinating centre
for public engagement**

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Catalyst – supporting engaged research

BACKGROUND

Universities, and the staff within them, are increasingly being asked to “engage”, to look outside the university walls. There are many reasons for this, including:

- **Accountability to the public purse.** Many university activities (eg some research) are funded through the taxpayer meaning taxpaying citizens have a right to influence and know about how their contributions are being spent.
- **Improving research.** The involvement of the public, patients and service users can enhance the quality and relevance of research.
- **The knowledge economy.** We live in a knowledge economy and that means a continuous supply of people are needed to generate that knowledge. As a result, universities raise awareness of, and facilitate, careers in research.
- **Civic duty.** Universities are often significant in their communities: creating jobs and supporting the local economy. This position motivates many universities to engage with their local communities.

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) helps universities engage with the public. The NCCPE is currently running a consultation about the future of engaged universities¹. There are workshops, meetings and online questionnaires all being used to create a national conversation about how universities could interact with their communities in the years to come. This report summarises the discussions held during three Peninsula workshops in Plymouth, Exeter and Penryn. A full report has been sent to the NCCPE to contribute to the consultation².

The workshops took place on:

Tuesday 8 October 2013, Plymouth University

Wednesday 9 October 2013, University of Exeter (Exeter and Penryn campuses)

19 people took part in the three workshops

The facilitation tools were provided by the NCCPE through the Engaged Futures programme

¹ <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/engagedfutures>

² This longer report is available on request from Mary Schwarz or Helen Featherstone.

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THE DISCUSSIONS IN THE WORKSHOPS



“We want opportunities for lifelong learning, on our terms”

There was a strong sense that universities should have a civic duty within their communities and that universities should support a culture of lifelong learning for everyone. The participants in the workshops also recognised that universities are businesses, have targets to meet (eg research income, intellectual property and student numbers) and have international agendas. This tension between the local, long-term and the national, international, short-term was recognised as a challenge.



“We’d like to trade with universities”

Participants felt that universities can dominate a community, yet not be seen to be part of the community. It was not that participants wanted only to take from the university, they felt they had an offer to make. This could be in the form of time, knowledge, skills etc, yet they did not feel there was a currency they could trade in when the university appears to only trade financially.

“We didn’t know so much was going on already”

For many participants, there was a welcome surprise that engagement activities were happening already, there were successful collaborations in place and there were people within universities to facilitate relationship building. The surprise arose because they’d never heard of these initiatives. There was wonder at why these success stories weren’t being told, there was comfort in realising that contributing to university business was part of a wider institutional commitment, there was agreement that engagement is diverse and messy which makes for difficult storytelling and there was affirmation that this was the ‘right thing’ to do.

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“Don’t contradict yourselves”

The overwhelming message from the workshops was that engagement and collaboration must be at the heart of the university: it must be in its culture and in its values. People were very sensitive to the possibility that engagement could be a passing fad or being undertaken to meet solely financial goals. Universities need to be aware of inadvertently sending out contradictory messages that raise distrust: the example given was pricing for using sports facilities where staff and students were given discounts, but local community members had to pay full price. This sends out the message that while non-university people *can* use on-site facilities, they are not really welcome.

“Where do we find you?”

Other indicators for a university being of and for its community included easy access points such as pop-up shops within the community, clear entry points with intermediaries to broker relationships, funding schemes to facilitate collaboration and celebration of shared, mutual relationships. While individual stories were welcomed, there was also a recognition that if a university is truly of and for its community, then the community also needs to hold a similar engagement culture with appropriate skills. Is it possible to have an engaged city?



If you would like to follow the rest of the Engaged Futures conversation or encourage others to take part, then join in here:

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/engagedfutures>