



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement

How to support Public Engagement

Enhancing learning from your public engagement

This resource pack forms part of a suite of resources to support universities to embed leadership for public engagement. The full set of resources is accessible here:

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/edge-tool>

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Enhancing learning from Public Engagement: an introduction

*“I was re-looking at some internal reviewing we did of capacity of willingness and interest of staff to work with small social organisations, community organisations and small businesses and this is in quite a mature cohort of people ...and I was surprised to remind myself that about forty percent of that cohort of people had said explicitly they could value some training and assistance and help, they weren’t comfortable in talking to a non university audience.” **Management, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh***

Why does learning matter?

Public engagement can bring great rewards – both for the university and for the public its staff and students engage with. But this mutual benefit can’t be taken for granted: it relies on real skill and expertise. Many staff and students recognise that they need help to develop these skills and aptitudes, and an institution that wants to support them effectively needs to take account of this. The experiences of the beacons and others suggest that the following four areas are vital to supporting high quality, effective public engagement, providing support both for informal learning and for more formal professional development:

1. SUPPORTING INFORMAL DEVELOPMENT

Learning informally from colleagues and sharing public engagement experience is very valuable. Actively bringing together people from across your institution with an interest in public engagement, and helping them to access and share relevant information can build a sense of community and lead to new partnerships and collaborations that significantly improve the quality of public engagement activities. The goal is to support all staff and students to embrace PE in their work – investing in a small amount of specialist expertise and allocating formal responsibility to the delivery of some key functions can deliver efficiencies and increase the impact of your public engagement.

2. BUILDING FORMAL SUPPORT INTO CPD PROGRAMMES

Participating in public engagement develops skills relevant to a career in research. The transferable skills and aptitudes required for effective public engagement makes it likely that there are already many relevant courses in your institution, although there may be some gaps. Integrating high quality public engagement training as part of your institution’s professional development programmes will benefit individual researchers and the institution as a whole.

3. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Training courses can be useful but people also need to engage with the public and reflect on their experience to truly gain expertise. Participating in local festivals and museum events, established public engagement projects or Fellowship schemes provide some routes to learning about public engagement in practice.

4. INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Underpinning the opportunities with infrastructure is also important: for instance, individuals with expertise and defined responsibilities for the strategy; central web-pages listing opportunities; systems for staff to set and track their own goals and link these to the institution's appraisal process etc. – all these can make a big difference.

What next?

Use our self-assessment tool to explore what you've already achieved and what more you could do to develop effective 'learning' from public engagement in your own institution.

Self-assess your support for learning

We've created this simple tool to help you assess how your institution is currently performing in this area, and to begin to identify areas where you would like to see progress.

We have described four 'states' to describe an institution's progress towards embedding support for engagement:

- **Embryonic:** Institutional support for engagement is patchy or non-existent
- **Developing:** Some support has been put in place, but in a relatively unsystematic and non-strategic fashion
- **Gripping:** The institution is taking steps to develop more systematic and strategic support
- **Embedding:** The institution has put in place strategic and operational support for engagement

Instructions for use

You can use the tool in numerous ways, for example:

- You could fill it in individually, relying on your own knowledge of your institution;
- You could use it as part of a workshop with colleagues and other stakeholders;
- Or you could invite a number of people to fill it in individually and then bring them together to compare their perspectives. Comparing different departments across an institution can be a powerful exercise.

While the levels presented here assume that embedding engagement brings benefits to an institution, some may choose not to seek to embed it in all of the areas identified in the tool. In some instances, informal and emergent approaches may be preferred to formalised and embedded ones.

LEARNING				
FOCUS	EMBRYONIC	DEVELOPING	GRIPPING	EMBEDDING
Support for informal development	Few, if any, informal mechanisms exist to share information about PE. There is resistance to sharing best practice and groups feel in competition with each other. There is little or no attempt to involve individuals from outside organisations.	Informal mechanisms exist sporadically to share information about PE. People are keen to share experience and learn from each other. There are some opportunities to involve individuals from outside organisations.	Informal mechanisms exist to share information about PE. Regular events are organised. People are keen to share experience and learn from each other. Individuals from outside organisations are involved. More experienced colleagues act as informal PE Mentors.	Informal mechanisms exist to share information about PE. Regular events aimed at different levels are organised by dedicated staff. People are keen to share experience and honest about failures. Individuals from outside organisations are actively involved and there is a PE Mentor scheme (or similar) in place.
Building formal support into CPD programmes	The institution has no clear definition of PE or the skills required to do it. There is little or no opportunity for professional development in PE. There is little or no support for PE training providers.	The institution has defined public engagement, but not the skills or attributes to do it. There are some informal opportunities for professional development. There is some support for PE training providers.	The institution has clear definitions of both PE and the skills or attributes required to do it. The institution provides some strategic support for professional development to individuals with a PE element to their role. There is some support for research groups to develop a public engagement strategy. PE training providers are encouraged to share course evaluations.	The institution has clear definitions of both PE and the skills or attributes required to do it. Individuals are supported to take a strategic and reflective approach to their professional development in PE. This could link to the appraisal system. Research groups are supported to develop a public engagement strategy which draws on different people's strengths, skills and interests. Training is evaluated and is of high quality. The institution supports a network of PE training providers.
Opportunities for learning	There are limited opportunities to try public engagement.	There are some opportunities to get involved in public engagement.	Training courses also provide opportunities to get involved in public engagement.	Training and development is linked to skills and opportunities to apply those skills. A reflective approach is encouraged and supported.
Infrastructure to support learning	The co-ordination of public engagement training and development activities in the institution is not included in any job descriptions. There is limited opportunity to create online resources or strategic support for professional development in PE.	Several staff roles include a remit to co-ordinate public engagement activities in the institution. There are some opportunities to create online resources and mailing lists. There is some infrastructure in place to support professional development in PE.	Posts which include a remit to co-ordinate public engagement activities are dispersed throughout the institution. There is significant investment in infrastructure to support professional development in PE. Information about professional development opportunities is linked to skills.	Posts which include a remit to co-ordinate public engagement activities are dispersed throughout the institution. Regular meetings support a 'joined-up' rather than 'top-down' approach to co-ordination. There is significant investment in infrastructure to support professional development in PE which is evaluated for effectiveness. Information about professional development opportunities is linked to skills.

Edinburgh's approach to supporting professional development and informal learning in Public Engagement

Introduction

This section tells the story about how one institution – the University of Edinburgh – went about supporting professional development and informal learning in public engagement. It also draws on the experiences of other beacons and universities who have tackled this area. It starts with an overview of successful approaches to supporting informal development.

We will explore in turn how the university tackled each of the following key challenges:

- Introduction and supporting informal development
- Formal support and CPD
- Providing opportunities
- Investing in infrastructure

Edinburgh's approach to informal development

Providing opportunities to both share learning about public engagement, and to practice skills, is an effective way to support informal development.

A varied internal events programme can work well, with introductory sessions for people new to public engagement, focused events on a particular aspect of PE for people with more experience, and networking events involving external organisations. Find out more about the event formats that have worked well for The University of Edinburgh, and the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon in their [case study about informal development](#).

A mentor scheme, or similar, which allows people to receive individual guidance, support and advice can also be helpful.

Other Approaches

The University of East Anglia ran a Postgraduate Research Showcase in Norwich to encourage early career researchers to explore the potential of public engagement.

UEA's Centre for Staff & Educational Development trained the researchers on presentation and communications skills and poster design for a public audience, leading to a poster exhibition showcasing the research in the Forum centre in Norwich. The general public talked to the researchers about their research and its real-world applications, and voted for their favourite poster.

Edinburgh's approach to building support for public engagement into CPD programmes

Institutions take different approaches to developing a professional development programme in public engagement but there are some common principles:

DEFINE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE SKILLS REQUIRED TO DO IT

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) has developed an attributes framework for public engagement. The framework helps staff and students in UK Universities to identify the personal attributes and skills required for different public engagement (PE) activities. It is also a tool for research institutions and networks to reflect on the current training and development opportunities that develop these skills.

COMPLETE A TRAINING AUDIT TO ASSESS THE OPPORTUNITIES ALREADY AVAILABLE IN YOUR INSTITUTION

The University of Edinburgh presented an attributes framework to different training providers. The providers identified which courses in the university developed those skills. The Manchester Beacon interviewed staff to find out which areas of public engagement they would be keen to receive training in, and used this insight to develop a formal programme with their human resources department.

CHECK FOR OVERLAPS, GAPS AND ASSESS DEMAND FOR NEW COURSES

Developing new courses is expensive. If there are gaps, it is useful to find out how much demand there is for training in that area. It might be more cost effective to buy places on established courses run elsewhere. The NCCPE provide a list of such training and can recommend potential training providers and offer advice on how to commission courses.

PROVIDE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES IN A WAY WHICH ALLOWS PEOPLE TO CREATE PERSONALISED PROGRAMMES LINKED TO THEIR NEEDS AND INTERESTS

The Manchester Beacon, CUE East, The Edinburgh Beltane and The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute all took different approaches to developing professional development programmes in public engagement. However, each group found that a personalised approach to public engagement that was not tied to a sequence or progression was very important.

ENCOURAGE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT: SET GOALS, TRACK PROGRESS AND REFLECT ON EXPERIENCE

Established professional development programmes in other sectors recommend a reflective approach to development. Applying skills and reflecting on experience encourages people to consider how they can improve.

CONSIDER INTEGRATING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INTO THE APPRAISAL SYSTEM AT YOUR INSTITUTION

A reflective approach to professional development could include a diary or portfolio which could be used as evidence of development during an appraisal. You can find out more information about public engagement and appraisal processes in the Recognition section.

SUPPORT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TRAINING PROVIDERS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICE

This could result in more strategic and sustainable development, courses of better quality and create a support network amongst the staff in this group.

Find out more about [how the University of Edinburgh followed these principles](#).

Other approaches

The Manchester Beacon commissioned FLOW Associates to run two half day practical introductory workshops on aspects of delivering public engagement. The workshops also provided an opportunity to assess practitioner skill needs in public engagement to inform the development of a more extensive professional development package in the future.

The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute commissioned a comprehensive review of professional development in public engagement, and revised their own training provision as a result: **'Towards a professional development framework for scientists involved in public engagement work'**, (2010).

Edinburgh's approach to providing opportunities for learning

Providing opportunities for staff to apply their skills and learning is also important. The University of Edinburgh has worked in partnership with local organisations including the various Edinburgh festivals, Our Dynamic Earth and National Museums Scotland and Edinburgh Castle to deliver public engagement activities. Where possible, training is tailored to a specific public engagement activity. Read about some of the [various initiatives](#) that have been successful at the University of Edinburgh.

Other approaches

The UCL Beacon has an innovative approach to linking training with opportunity. Bright Club, described as the thinking person's variety night, blends comedy, music, art, new writing, science, performance, and anything else that can happen on a stage. UCL Researchers receive training in performance skills by experts in stand-up comedy and then perform at in a London venue. The aim is to bring UCL researchers together with a new audience, primarily 20-40 year olds who have no existing relationship with academia. Read our [Bright Club case study](#).

Involvement with a local Café Scientifique or festival (local or national) could also lead to opportunities for staff and students in a university to reach other audiences.

On a national level, schemes like **Researchers in Residence** and **FameLab**, and the **ESRC Festival of Social Science** and **National Science and Engineering Week** can also be excellent ways to involve people. You can find out more in our [guide to participation in schemes](#).

Edinburgh's approach to investing in infrastructure to support learning

Networks, internal events programmes, training opportunities and formal professional development in public engagement all support learning about public engagement but delivering these initiatives requires some investment in infrastructure, particularly in staff to take responsibility for co-ordination, and in some mechanism to share 'intelligence' about relevant training and development opportunities.

The Edinburgh Beltane Beacon's key investments have been creating 'Training & Development Coordinator' and 'Communications and Events Officer' roles, a coordinating group, and a central website and online database of training opportunities, linked to the attributes framework. The database brings together training providers in human resources, postgraduate skills development, press office, lifelong learning and other departments. This may be a useful system to adopt in larger institutions. Find out more about the [investment in infrastructure](#) at Edinburgh.

Other approaches

Cue East developed an online Public Engagement Tracker to support a strategic approach to personal development. You can find out more in the [Recognition section](#).

Issues and Considerations

The following issues are worth keeping in mind when seeking to develop this area:

- People have increasing pressures on their time. There may be reluctance to join networks, or contribute information to a central website if it's not clear why the network or website exists, and how it will benefit them personally.
- People who do public engagement, particularly those who do it in their spare time, are often protective of their projects. They can view other groups as competition for limited funding and may not be willing to share resources and/or experience.
- People may feel defensive about their experience in public engagement. 'Best practice' events need to be handled sensitively.
- Networks need a core of active members, but it is also important to advertise the existence of established networks and encourage new people to join to ensure it covers a whole institution and not limited to those 'in the loop'.
- Professional Development, rather than training, is perhaps a more useful way of describing what's needed. Training implies participants can attend a day, or course, and leave knowing 'how to do' public engagement. Realistically, to create successful layers and types of public engagement staff, students and researchers need to understand more about the ethos and principles of public engagement as well as the pragmatics.
- Bad or inappropriate technology often derails good intentions. Involving a focus group of potential users during the development stage can provide useful insights and result in a system that is more intuitive to use and much easier to keep up to date.

Links and Resources

The 'How to support public engagement' area of our site focuses on nine specific areas to embed public engagement within an institution. These areas are closely integrated, and although the resources below have a learning focus, they also provide insights into other sections of the tool kit.

Example Jobs

At the Edinburgh Beltane, people in the following non-researcher roles have played a major role in sharing public engagement expertise:

<p>Science communicator</p>	<p>People in this role often develop new public activities and present or run them with target audiences e.g. school children or local audiences. In a university context, these roles are usually funded from successful public engagement grants.</p> <p>These people have provided case studies and participated in informal learning events.</p>
<p>Communications Officer</p>	<p>This role is often found in research centres where there is a specific requirement to communicate research findings effectively. This can involve running events, working with the media, and writing articles and policy briefs.</p> <p>These people have also participated in informal learning events and their close links to research centres and university departments helps ideas to become more widespread.</p>
<p>Public engagement coordinator</p>	<p>This role is often based within a particular discipline, often science or engineering based. It can involve developing new public engagement activities in collaboration with colleagues; providing training, support and advice to colleagues interested in public engagement and setting up new partnerships.</p> <p>People in this role often act as a broker and often have links with local festivals and relevant community groups as well as other university departments. They often participate in wider networks.</p>
<p>Knowledge exchange manager</p>	<p>This role has similarities to the public engagement coordinator, but there is often a much stronger focus on influencing policy. These types of roles often have a humanities/social science perspective.</p> <p>Again, people in this role often act as a broker and have links to relevant external audiences and other university departments.</p>

Public Engagement Training & development coordinator	<p>This role involves identifying the PE training and development opportunities already available, coordinating information and developing new courses if required.</p> <p>At the Edinburgh Beltane, work in this area was heavily directed by the Training & Development working group.</p>
Staff Development Officer	<p>This role has a broader perspective on staff development and is often focussed on researcher development, either at postgraduate level or academic staff.</p> <p>It is important to involve staff development contacts in any plans to incorporate more public engagement training in established programmes.</p>
Edinburgh Beltane Training & Development Working Group	<p>The Training & Development working Group was established to bring together staff from these groups, and research staff with experience in public engagement, at an early stage to assess how best to deploy their expertise for the benefit of the partnership, identify needs and prioritise development. The areas of training & development in public engagement identified by the sub-group will be delivered through transferable skills programmes (for students), staff development programmes (for academics and researchers) and through informal seminars and one-to-one meetings.</p>

Example courses and opportunities to try Public Engagement

CUE East Transitions postgrad research showcase	<p>Involving postgraduates A case study about a public poster exhibition showcasing the research being undertaken by postgraduate researchers at UEA and the Norwich Bioscience Institutes.</p>
<u>Rising Stars: Cambridge University</u>	<p>Involving early career stage researchers An initiative to support early stage researchers become tomorrow's high-profile communicators.</p>
CUE East: Making History Workshop	<p>Commissioning training from external partners to involve people from diverse backgrounds CUE East commissioned the BBC Making History Workshop on 'The Value of Research?' to bring together researchers and members of the public.</p>
<u>Bright Club</u>	<p>Stand up comedy and communication skills UCL researchers learn communication skills from stand up comedians and take part in a variety night in a London club.</p>
FameLab	<p>Competition and Masterclass for experienced communicators Famelab is a science communication competition held across the UK. Finalists receive in-depth training in science communication and public engagement.</p>

Other Opportunities

- **National Science and Engineering Week**
- [ESRC Festival of Social Science](#)
- **Researchers in Residence**
- [Engage – The National Association for Gallery Education](#)
- [UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres](#)

Professional development programmes and resources

NCCPE Attributes for public engagement framework	Public Engagement attributes framework with a focus on communication, empathy and reflection.
CUE East Case study: Public Engagement Continuing Professional Development Programme	Community University Engagement East (CUE East) developed a CPD programme for staff and students at the University of East Anglia in Norwich.
The Edinburgh Beltane: Professional Development in Public Engagement	Link to the Edinburgh Beltane’s work on learning and professional development.
Beacon North East Case Study: Systems for staff	A short case study about the approach the Beacon North East have taken to develop systems to support staff.
Manchester Beacon: Skills Analysis Report	The Manchester Beacon commissioned FLOW Associates to assess the training and development requirements in the Manchester Beacon partner institutions.
The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute Report on Professional Development in Public Engagement	The Wellcome Trust developed a comprehensive review of the continuing professional development opportunities available to science communicators and compared this to similar schemes in place for teachers, doctors and football referees.
Vitae Researcher development framework	Vitae developed a Researcher Development Framework which covers researchers doing postgraduate degrees right up to leading professors. Vitae and the NCCPE are in the process of developing a Public engagement lens for this framework to highlight the areas where public engagement expertise links to professional development in research more generally.
Vitae Engaged Researcher	This is a booklet which highlights some of the many ways researchers can engage the public, offers practical tips for getting started and explores how public engagement can benefit researchers personally, their research and the public with whom they engage.

Example Event Agendas

WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT?

This is an example PowerPoint from Edinburgh Beltane for initial discussions about what public engagement is, and how it can benefit an academic career. You can access this at the bottom of the page.

Example timetable for a learning lunch event

12.30	Sandwich lunch
13.00	Presentation
13.30	Discussion
14.00	Finish

Topics might include the benefits of public engagement, working with policymakers, planning your festival event.

Example timetable for a breakfast seminar event

8.15	Coffee and pastries
8.45	Panel discussion with questions
9.30	Coffee, pastries and networking
10.00	Finish

These events have tended to be more discussion based than lunchtime ones and focus more on new techniques such as using social media, or on planning festival events.

Example format for a 1.5 hour networking event

30 minutes	Refreshments and networking
20 minutes	'2 minute wonder' short presentations focussed on current projects linked to a particular theme, request for collaborators
10 minutes	Short talk by external organisation, linked to theme
30 minutes	Refreshments and networking (sometimes structured networking)

Useful Online Resources

- Events: [Eventbrite](#), [Google calendar](#), [Doodle](#)
- Social network: [Linked In](#), [Facebook](#),
- Email: [JISC Mail](#), [Vertical Response](#), [MailChimp](#),
- Post information: [Twitter](#), [blogger](#), [WordPress](#),
- Post videos: [YouTube](#), [Vimeo](#), [Vidiowiki](#)
- Share content: [del.ici.ous](#), [StumbleUpon](#)

Some UK wide email based networks related to public engagement

- [PSCI-COM](#) – public engagement with science
- [The British Interactive Group](#) - public engagement with science, building exhibits and displays
- [Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine Public Relations Association](#) (STEMPRA) – science & media focus, mainly press officers.
- [NCCPE mailing list and network](#)

Contacts

Edinburgh Beltane core team contact details:

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Find out more, see resources or join in the conversation at www.edinburghbeltane.net.

Beltane's public-facing partner website, **Engaging Scotland**, features public engagement events across Scotland.