NCCPE Updates

- The NCCPE has recently launched a series of online training courses, with 6 topics available, facilitated with Blackboard collaborate. These courses will be delivered by members of the NCCPE team and training associates; and are currently open for institutions seeking training in PE. We are also offering 4 training courses throughout August for individual researchers and PEPs: ‘High Quality Public Engagement’, ‘Online Engagement’, ‘Introduction to Community Engagement’, and ‘Evaluation’. The link to these sessions will be available through our mailing list and website.

- The NCCPE is hosting Engage Conference this year, using a hybrid model of online and offline activity. Taking place between the 30th November and the 4th of December, the festival will be partially curated via suggestions and ideas from those in the PEP network, with a range of sessions, plenaries, workshops and performances that reflect the diverse array of knowledge, needs and experience available in the sector. A prominent theme to this year’s Engage will be around the role of public engagement in reimagining a post COVID-19 world. The NCCPE will be offering a small number of bursaries for those bringing ideas for online and offline engagement to the table, with a call for contributions now open. More information can be found here.

- Registration for the NCCPE’s PEP Network is now free of charge until March 2021, with the status of current members extended at no cost for the next membership year. To find out more, click here.

- A new blog post is now available to read on the NCCPE website; ‘Dancing in the Dark: engagement and risk’. The post examines the benefits of taking risks in supporting Public Engagement, and the different types and levels of risk that might be involved in one’s work.

- The NCCPE is initiating a piece of research which explores the experiences of PEPs and institutions through the current context of the pandemic, and their plans for the future. The project has a long-term focus, examining how organisations and funders can support the PE ecosystem in building a new future. This will inform
The NCCPE, ensuring we offer appropriate support to the sector, including PEPs, university leaders, partner organisations, etc.

PEPs, to inform their own leadership and advocacy within their own contexts.

Funders, to consider how they can best support the engagement ecosystem in a time of great change.

The key aims of this project are as follows:

To develop a deeper understanding of how PE Professionals and their institutions are adapting to the current context

To identify critical challenges and opportunities that would benefit from collective action

To highlight examples of innovation to inspire change in how PE is supported

This will be a peer-developed piece of research, and as such, the NCCPE is looking to work with PEPs to develop and conduct the research, including design, analysis, reporting and dissemination. As a collaborative research programme, it will involve a range of participatory options, including surveys, interviews and focus groups.

The overall process will involve several steps:

This will be a nuanced assessment of the development of the PE ecosystem during and after COVID-19, and we hope that PEPs will be eager to get involved. Resources are available for those whose institutions cannot cover their time.
We have launched the call for contributors through the PEP Network, membership of which is currently free.

- For PEPs who wish to share any news, updates or stories during future sessions, please contact Maddy Foard (Maddy.Foard@uwe.ac.uk)

The Role of Public Engagement in University Responses to COVID-19

This week’s PEPtogether built upon the ‘Scenario planning’ methods outlined in our last session, wherein professionals could consider possible futures and the impact they might have on their role, as well as the developing environment in which they are working. Both the notes from the session and the slides from the presentation are available to view on the NCCPE website.

This session explored how PEP’s could take the thinking and use it to mobilise change in their institutions:

- How might PEPs draw on scenario thinking to influence how HEIs are planning their long term response to COVID19?
- How do scenarios create a platform to articulate the value of public engagement?

The NCCPE has used the Scenario thinking to develop a framework to inform conversations about ‘what does the future hold for universities? And ‘how might public engagement help us respond?’ Most of the scenarios identify polarised versions of the future:

- Unequal – Inclusive
- Siloed - Collaborative
- Polarized – Collective

With this in mind, how might the role of universities help in moving ‘right’ toward a more collective, collaborative and inclusive future? The NCCPE presented a framework that they have developed to flesh this out, with five focal points for action. They presented examples of interesting engagement practice to illustrate what is possible:
1: Being trusted and ethical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus for action</th>
<th>Worst case: Unequal, Siloed, Polarized</th>
<th>Best Case: Inclusive, Collaborative, Collective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being trusted and ethical</td>
<td>Collapse of trust in science and research</td>
<td>HEIs and their staff are perceived the be trustworthy and to act with integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Leaving Lockdown Public Debate

Taking place over two months, The Leaving Lockdown Public Debate was an instance of rapid, online research which involved exploring public perceptions and concerns about COVID-19 research, alongside issues of privacy, trust and human rights. It was conducted by four organisations: The Ada Lovelace Institute, Bang the Table, Involve, and Traverse.

There were three core aims of the project:

1. Influencing research content through defining the questions that need to be explored to help inform the design of policy around contact tracing.
2. Generating timely research data and contributing to the evidence base on public perceptions and values in relation to contact tracing in time to inform policy making and design.
3. Influencing research strategy through demonstrating to research commissioners that inclusive, deliberative research can be done online and alongside the development of policy.

The research involved 28 members of the public, and five specialists presenting on issues pertaining to data and the use of technology in lockdown. Each week was structured, beginning with a 60 minute Monday Zoom meeting in groups of 8 people, after which delegates were asked to complete two activities in their own time. Following this, another 90-minute Zoom meeting would take place on Thursday, in which a specialist would answer delegate’s questions.

2. Acting on inequality and exclusion

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<th>Best Case: Inclusive, Collaborative, Collective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acting on inequality and exclusion</td>
<td>HEIs reinforce inequality, exclusion and division in society</td>
<td>HE demonstrably contributing to ‘levelling up’ and addressing root causes of inequality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example: UKRI Black Lives Matter statement

Recently, UKRI released a statement demonstrating their support of the Black Lives Matter campaign, and raising their commitment to addressing the ‘structures, work environments and the ways in which we might be perpetuating problems – in terms of who we represent, who we invite to the table, and who we fund’, in order to ‘achieve justice in practice’.

As one of the largest HE funding groups in the UK, UKRI are well positioned to influence the response of Universities, and to push for positive change.

3. Working responsively

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<th>Best Case: Inclusive, Collaborative, Collective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working responsively</td>
<td>HEIs perceived as self-interested, inflexible and slow to respond</td>
<td>HEIs perceived as responsive, compassionate &amp; skilful partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a time of economic uncertainty (and the likelihood of an approaching recession), universities are invariably being pushed to protect their financial interests; both in attempts to secure paying students and to carefully assess the institution’s bottom line (and making cuts where deemed necessary). Despite this, there are many examples where a compassionate and positive response has been achieved.

Example: UUK’s #WeAreTogether

UUK’s hashtag is intended to showcase the wide variety of ways in which universities are addressing the pandemic. There are examples of institutions sharing their resources, expertise and time to support the NHS in recent months, or to address needs in the community. The campaign also seeks to maintain a welcoming and inclusive global community, with examples of positive institutional and individual responses on this broader scale.
4. Mobilising knowledge

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobilising knowledge</td>
<td>Failure to connect research with needs and expertise o/s academia</td>
<td>Co-creating and sharing meaningful and useful knowledge that makes a difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Institute for Community Studies

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the Institute for Community Studies had begun work on a project which sought to determine which areas of research were important to certain communities and people, and to direct research efforts along those lines. This has since been re-contextualised in the wake of the pandemic; however, the ambitions of the project have remained the same. The emphasis is placed on the stories and values of ordinary people, and the ways in which collaboration and trust building between communities and organisations can foster positive change.

A recent report from the institution collated a number of responses from members of the community, when asked about the issues of most importance to them. The fourteen themes can be seen below.

![Image of community issues](image)

The ICS’s research agenda is available [here](#).
5. Demonstrating accountability

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating accountability</td>
<td>HEIs perceived as unaccountable and secretive</td>
<td>HEIs are demonstrably acting in the public interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:

Some of the aspects of the sector which ensure accountability, and which the NCCPE and public engagement professionals work with, include:

- The REF
- The Knowledge Exchange Framework
- The Knowledge Exchange Concordat
- Research Fish: an example driving particular kinds of activity in the sector.

The REF and KEF, in particular, give researchers an opportunity to articulate the value of their work. Some of the above examples also necessitate a focus on inclusivity and equality, as researchers must report on their audiences and actively consider the ways in which inclusivity is ensured throughout the engagement/exchange activities.

6. Remaining relevant

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remaining relevant</td>
<td>Sector perceived as irrelevant and out of touch, contributing little</td>
<td>Able to rapidly re-imagine and re-focus activity and demonstrate value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The previous five focal points all help to contribute to the perceived and actual relevance of HEIs. But many have ‘gone the extra mile’ during Covid 19. The example shared was of Newcastle University, and their current homepage, which places their response to the virus front and centre:
Responses from delegates

- ‘I think this is helpful and interesting for institutions to map their response against. And to plan future work also.’
- ‘Glasgow Caledonian University have released their response to the crisis, published here.’
- ‘In terms of 'working responsively' I think there has been a really broad spectrum of actions by different universities! I have seen some interesting examples on the news and on Twitter.’
- ‘It has been difficult to move ‘public engagement with research’ up the list of priorities at the moment…’
  o Sophie notes that this is definitely a challenge, and that we need to be sensitive to this; universities are exploring a whole host of separate issues during this time, and PE is not necessarily prioritised.
- Cassandra Hugill: ‘One of the things I’m currently considering is a strategy review, as the landscape has changed considerably in the last few months. This framework is helpful to examine how we are responding to COVID-19, and whether our strategy still fits anymore.’
  o Sophie agrees this is a good decision: many strategies created at the beginning of / before the pandemic no longer apply to current needs and priorities, or take into consideration the possibility of economic downturn resulting from the crisis.
- Amy Cameron: ‘I’ve worked on giving a voice to members of our School community about what has been happening for them during this time: link. Often it is the lead scientists who feature in press releases.’
From the Francis Crick Institute: ‘We also are reviewing our engagement strategy - we found that the mission and objectives still hold, but that the activities that we are doing will shift quite radically.’

Paul notes that the successful examples provided may be useful in persuading universities into taking courses of action; comparisons between institutions can cement an argument and demonstrate that certain things are possible, and not just abstract ideas. Collating further examples and stories could be very useful for all PEPs in this regard.

Cat Vicente: ‘It is also difficult if you work for a very devolved institution, where your power of influence might be restricted’

Nichola Stock: ‘I agree with Cat - I think we will be able to use these ideas to look out our own PER strategy (single research institute within large university) but the wider university seems to be very focused on teaching, research and comms at the moment.’

Susan Grant: ‘R.e Nicola’s point – this especially applies if PEPs are furloughed.’

Cat Vicente: ‘It’s also interesting to think about where PER fits in institutions where the journey is still very much embryonic. Could go either way!’

Breakout groups

During this session, delegates were given the choice of five different breakout group topics. The available rooms were:

- Being trusted and ethical
- Acting on inequality and inclusion
- Working responsively
- Mobilising knowledge
- Demonstrating accountability

Only two topics were chosen by delegates in this instance: ‘Acting on inequality and inclusion’ and ‘Working responsively’

Group 1: Working responsively

‘Existing internal networks of PE practitioners (and those that work collaboratively with members of the local community) often enable PEPS to be more agile and responsive to community needs going forward. Where this network does not exist, a case needs to be
made; using successful examples and comparisons from other institutions is a good way to do this.’

- ‘Those working on PE belong to different areas of the university- it can be tricky to collaborate.’
- In some institutions, teaching is taking priority over engagement.
- There are clear priorities in research.
- ‘At the University of Exeter, professional services staff have been told they will be working from home for rest of calendar year. They may be allowed some access to campus - but won’t have access for the most part.
- ‘It’s hard to balance responsiveness (e.g. working with schools, delivering sessions online) - but then, it's difficult to plan ahead when guidance from the university has been lacking. Delivering things from home can feel unprofessional’.
- Some institutions have good existing networks and have managed to keep in touch online.
- ‘People are still being reactive, dealing with immediate interactions and challenges in their own lives. It does feel like things are still in the early stages...’
- ‘Some are worried that the public have high expectations about what universities are capable of providing e.g. schools asking for support with funding (where the council have none).’
- While it’s unlikely that society will revert to ‘business as usual’ in the near future, public perception seems to be that things are returning to normal.
- ‘We are working with external members of a PE panel to ensure they are aware of the university’s situation - we have limitations, but want to continue working with external members and communities.
- ‘Some universities are behind other organisations, or out of sync with social perceptions in terms of managing the risks and ‘moving on’ from social distancing. For example, health and safety policies for campus events might be far more extreme than people’s expectations for a community event.’
- We risk increasing distinctions between ‘town and gown’ e.g. if university staff wear masks and publics don’t (this is a very visible distinction).
- ‘We need to justify own existence and be professionally rewarded; can't reduce the work to catching up on emails etc. until next year...’

**Group 2: Inclusivity and diversity**

- ‘PE teams are often engaged in thoughtful work around ideas of inclusivity and inclusion. However, institutions often use these examples to strengthen their own narrative, without examining the further areas for improvement across the entire spectrum of the organisation. PEPs have much to offer when advising on inclusive practices – but there is a
danger that these practices become limited to the PE team, without influencing the rest of
the organisation as they should.’

- ‘Often the language used to articulate practice shies away from the celebratory, even when
the practice itself is positive; there is a shyness to owning one’s collaborative or community
centred work. As a result, these stories are not told, despite being exemplary examples of
practice.’

- ‘I have been involved in comms work around inclusion, where BLM, and PE have been front
and centre. We are looking at examples of good practice; there is a lot of positive action
happening, but these examples are not necessarily brought to the foreground. People
understate their successes, and some examples can also be more embedded in wider
projects.’

- ‘Comms & PE are currently not happening, as we are furloughed. At this moment in time, I
am able to devote energy in a voluntary capacity for a community group - some projects,
however, are continuing with work picked up by others. The Food for Thought programme,
for example, is run by community partners.

- ‘I’m finding it difficult to stay away when furloughed!’

- ‘Some were worried about being furloughed, and that the work they had set in motion
would then crumble.’

- ‘At some HEI’s, the PE journey is still in its infancy. Last week, the University of Lincoln had
an internal PE conference, and it was apparent that researchers were really listening to
members of the communities in which they are working. This has also been helped by the
recent Senior-level support for BLM; there is a feeling that people are taking this seriously
in terms of being inclusive and diverse.’

- ‘We need more people from within the communities working within the universities; being
a broker, for example. At our institution, one community partner occasionally uses a desk
space in our office.

- ‘In terms of collaborative research practice: HEI people are working in community settings,
while VCO people are working in HEI’s. There are issues about equality within projects.’

- ‘There are challenges in determining who is the ‘gatekeeper’; this is not necessarily the
‘loudest’ person, but the person most tuned in to the community. These gatekeepers are
also crucial for projects to actually get off the ground.’

- ‘We also have to be careful, ethically speaking, not to privilege some community groups
over another. Sometimes these connections can be serendipitous, and so difficult to
replicate with other groups.’

- ‘The NCCPE’s ‘Around the Toilet’ project is an interesting example; when different interest
groups were asked their thoughts around what a safe, accessible toilet space looked like,
each interest group had a different perspective.’

- ‘It’s important to use your status as a researcher to explore your skills and experience as a
human too - not just as a HEI representative.’
Additional comments

- ‘The Dundee Science Centre led science @ home packs news story: graingerpr.co.uk/dundee-science-centres-20th-birthday-gift-to-citys-most-deserving-children’
- ‘For our work-experience week, we are working with the local council to supply devices and/or internet dongles for local pupils to take part. This is another example of partnership working driven via community partnerships and relationships with local councillors.’
- ‘I was impressed by Imperial’s community work:
- ‘Here is another example: a partnership project with Dundee Contemporary Arts’

Links shared in the chat

NCCPE

News

Blog post: Dancing in the Dark
publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/blog/dancing-dark-engagement-and-risk

Online training for individuals – available through August
publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/professional-development/training

NCCPE PEP network page:
publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/professional-development/public-engagement-professionals-network

18th of June PEPtogether write-up:
publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/upload_18.06.2020_pep_together_edited_write-up_scenarios_pm.pdf

18th of June PEPtogether scenario compilation:
publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/nccpe_covid19_scenario_planning_resource_pack_june_2020_2.pdf

Public engagement and COVID-19 research project:
https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/news/pep-insights-research-study
Session

Leaving lockdown report:  
https://traverse.ltd/recent-work/reports/lockdowndebate-learning-rapid-online-deliberation

UKRI BLM statement:  
ukri.org/news/ukri-statement-on-black-lives-matter

We are Together campaign:  
universitiesuk.ac.uk/covid19/supporting-national-effort/Pages/we-are-together-campaign.aspx

Institute for Community Studies film link:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=41&v=1t2spoaHGSw&feature=emb_logo

Institute for Community Studies ‘Safety in Numbers’ report:  
https://icstudies.org.uk/our-approach/safety-numbers

Delegates

Glasgow Caledonian University response: ‘Why our universities need to be turned inside out’  
https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/18530468.universities-need-turned-inside/?fbclid=IwAR3CnUbccuh43MnNa3JvrdrqbgBOHH65ki2BXsaaYC1JLDiC8Q4qc_pDpo

Imperial Community work:  

Dundee Science Centre led ‘Science @ home’ packs - news story:  
https://www.graingerpr.co.uk/dundee-science-centres-20th-birthday-gift-to-citys-most-deserving-children/

Partnership project with Dundee Contemporary Arts:  

University of Dundee: COVID stories from the SLS Community  
https://www.lifesci.dundee.ac.uk/research/news/covid-stories-sls-community