National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

NCCPE Updates

- Videos from the NCCPE's Engage 2020 online festival can now be found on our **YouTube** page. We have posted a wide range of available content, from the Plenaries and Watermark awards, to examples of best practice in PE and reflections from delegates concerning the last year.

- 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**.

- The PEP Insight research team have been working alongside the NCCPE in order to conduct a study into the impact of COVID-19 on UK public engagement professionals and engagement work at universities. The research seeks to collate the perspectives of a wide range of people throughout the sector, including those in the PEP network, to find out more about the challenges faced, opportunities taken, and lessons learned, which can be put into practice within the sector going forward into the future.

  (Please note: the PEP Insight survey has now closed, though our blog post concerning this element of the research is still available to read: **https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/blog/make-it-count-participate-our-survey**)

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

Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) - presentation

- KEF returns are now being published by a number of universities. This includes the narrative and self-assessment aspects of the framework: all narratives are expected to be published within the year.

- The NCCPE is currently evaluating the effectiveness of the KEF; the following questions were put to members of our network who have been involved in the process:

- o Did the templates and questions enable providers to give an effective overview of their Public and Community Engagement goals, activities and impact?
- o Did they elicit useful intelligence and evidence about HEI's P&CE goals, activities and impact?
- o Were areas of the template unclear to providers, i.e. responses given were interpreted very differently by different providers?
- o What types of evidence were recorded for levels 1 – 5 of each aspect?
- o Did the types of evidence provided for the different scores seem consistent, or were some people marking themselves more generously for a similar type of evidence?
- o Were any metrics used by providers to support their narrative that may be considered as future KEF metrics?

- The NCCPE is also assisting in the production of the Knowledge Exchange Concordat. Further information can be found **here**.
- There are a number of upcoming workshops dealing with aspects of the concordat, which may be a good opportunity to meet and network with Knowledge Exchange professionals: an event calendar can be found **here**.

Themes arising from Engage 2020: Funding Engagement and People-centred research

Engage 2020 revealed a wealth of knowledge and experience emerging from the sector, which will prove invaluable in the coming year. In this PEPtogether, our presentation focused on one of the key plenaries from Engage 2020 – the Funding for Change session, during which UKRI's engagement policy was discussed, and the ever-increasing need for collaboration with the aim of public good.

The speakers at this plenary were:

Steven Hill, Director of Research at Research England

Dawn Austwick, Chief Executive of The National Lottery Community Fund

Ottoline Leyser, Chief Executive of UKRI

Below is a quote from Steven Hill, which aptly framed the session:

"To rise to the profound challenges we face and build a better, more inclusive, more resilient society, we're going to need universities and researchers to work ever closer and in more integrated ways with civil society and the communities that make up civil society"

Understanding people, their roles, and how best to support them

- UKRI are thinking about how to best support the research system, by shifting focus to the people involved in this broad network and the many ways that people can contribute to it. PE and KE professionals specifically are, however, absent – a matter of inclusion that we need to push in future.
- *"So we want this outstanding research and innovation system that crucially gives everyone the opportunity to contribute and to benefit" – Ottoline Leyser*
- UKRI want to use multiple tools to convene, catalyse and invest in close collaboration with all partners to build an inclusive Research and Innovation system that is connected to public needs
- The National Lottery Community Fund have worked hard to understand the relationship to place and context, including deliberately moving staff from central offices to being community based and community led, with a greater emphasis on 'place' and the 'local'.

- *"To be able to make really informed decisions you need to have the networks and the relationships and the knowledge that goes with having that kind of local presence" – Dawn Austwick*

We need to emphasise the humanity of research

- *"You watch a two year old, exploring the world. And you can see that it's deeply part of who humans are. 'What's this? How does this work? How can I work make this work for me? How can I solve this problem?' These are absolutely fundamental questions that people ask all the time. And science and research are really just a formalised set of tools for allowing us to work through those questions in a way that allows us to build, year on year, on how we understand the world and how we can interact with it well, and how we understand each other indeed. So it's absolutely core to being human.*
"I would like to shift the whole concept of what the research and innovation system is and how it should work – from brilliant scientists discovering things that are then translated into products – to focus on the many people inside and outside HE that contribute" - Ottoline Leyser.

We need to eradicate the divide between research and society
- *"I would like the whole concept of research and innovation to be so deeply embedded in the way we think about society that the idea of two communities engaging kind of goes away" (Ottoline)*

What's wrong with the current situation?

- It narrows the range of people coming into the heart of the research and innovation system.

- It makes it much harder to connect that system to societal needs, which is crucial for the kind of bonds that we need between that system and society at large.

- It deprives people of agency by setting research up as a specialist thing that other people do, it makes it less accessible to people

- Dawn added that specialist language adds a barrier, and that communities feel a long way from power and agency. Power and agency needs to be more equally distributed.

"UKRI should steward an outstanding research and innovation system that crucially gives everyone the opportunity to contribute and to benefit"

We need to encourage cross-disciplinary working

- Ottoline reflected that it is important that we step away from the discourse of 'discipline vs discipline' and remember that diversity is a part of research excellence – that the wider research and innovation system needs to support cross-disciplinary working, rather than existing in silos.

- Dawn suggested that these discipline barriers aren't something that communities are aware of – that instead we must find connections, share interests, and invest in them

- Reflecting on the suggestion that NLCF and UKRI could work together more in the future, Dawn suggested that although the specifics aren't clear at the moment, finding the common good that could be achieved by working together would be the place to start. Ottoline agreed, and added that UKRI wants to act as 'stewards' for the sector, and think about who needs to be brought together to support diversity.

Discussion

During the plenary, Ottoline suggested that "the hooks of curiosity, collaboration and the meaningful roles for the public can help us 're-brand' research and create much more interest and involvement''.

Delegates were separated into Breakout rooms and asked to discuss the following two topics:

Group 1: **Finding a 'people-centred' narrative for engagement**

- Could we develop a much more inclusive, engaging narrative about research?

    o What are the examples we could draw on?

    o Who are the heroes / heroines? What are the plotlines?

- How could we exploit UKRI's enthusiasm for a different narrative about research to actually leverage culture change within our institutions?

Group 2: **Co-investment in engagement funding**

- Can you share examples where you have worked on project with twin funders – research and a civic society funder?

- What were the benefits? What were the challenges?

- What practical considerations would co-investing funders need to consider to overcome potential tensions and challenges?

Discussion results:

Co-investment in engagement funding

<u>Thinking about the current state of play</u>

- There are lots of funding calls that don't fit together – each funder wants their own, bespoke, way of doing it.
- With individual funding pots, could institutions do more to coordinate them better and encourage collaborative, cross-disciplinary working?
- We need institutions and funder to work together – people-centred work is great, but unless institutions and researchers are on board there are lots of barriers to this.
- Funding follows funding – some funding schemes are only available to people who have an existing track record. How do you get new and diverse voices into pots of funding and challenge the academic status quo?
- For PEPs, there are many institutional barriers to accessing funding, e.g. constantly evolving finance processes. Although funders talk about changes to the system, until PE isn't just the domain of PEPs, things aren't going to change.
- Regarding funding in community and civic engagement – PEPs would be the best people to lead, but non-academic PIs aren't recognised.

<u>What would the challenges be of co-funded projects?</u>

- The sector might see it as reducing the number of funding opportunities – although the opportunities themselves could be bigger, and involving more people/institutions.
- Trying to align the processes and expectations of two funders would be very challenging.
- There's a risk that co-investment, e.g. between a research funder and civic agency, would still lead to certain disciplines being pushed out – such as social science and arts and humanities.
- Would co-investing produce new barriers? I.e. would certain disciplines/organisations/networks end up corralling all of the funding?

<u>And the opportunities?</u>

- Jointly funded bids encourage cross-disciplinary working, so would address the issue of those internal barriers.
- Brings together multiple perspective to address a shared goal.
- Co-funding occurs in many different places – yet PEPs have a tendency to assume they must 'start from scratch'. If it is happening already within the university, can we persuade

the university that PE is also eligible, especially where a common goal is shared i.e. multidisciplinary projects, projects in which data is managed etc?

Examples of co-investment

- This seems to happen more in healthcare than other disciplines – perhaps because there are more charities and agencies acting in that space. For example: Cancer Research UK has many jointly funded programmes across disciplines and countries – the funding is collaborative and therefore so is the work.
- 'Curiosity' was a £2.5 million funding partnership between Wellcome and Children in Need.
- The funding calls around Big Data became very cross-disciplinary thanks to the clear focus
- InnovateUK supports lots of work between businesses and other agencies.
- There are also lots of examples of hybrid funding in space research - lots of private funders there as well as medicine.

Finding a 'people-centred' narrative for engagement

The group shared examples from their own practice where they have tried to foreground the 'people' angle on research, for example:

- The Rough Science series, produced by the BBC / Open University which focused on the process of science (can they solve a challenge) and foregrounded people (can they pool their specialist knowledge and work together to solve the challenge). It worked well in drawing new audiences to science.
- Opening up university labs to visitors and making them feel very welcome. This really helps people to see what happens inside a university, de-mystifies research, and brings people together who wouldn't normally meet.
- An example of a Welsh Cancer charity (Tenovus) which pioneered a scheme to bring early career researchers into their charity shops to meet customers, and help them understand how the money that was being raised is being spent
- Bringing together patients with researchers – for instance people living with rare genetic conditions with researchers who are working in this area. This bringing together of different kinds of expertise can be very powerful.
- Lancaster University is involved in an ambitious plan to build an Eden North in Morecambe bay. We reflected on how the first Eden really shook up approaches to engaging people in the natural world, for instance by creating really strong emotional connections, and using arts and culture to offer a range of ways of responding (not just sharing 'facts')
- Edinburgh University is developing an 'Edinburgh Local' programme to encourage staff and students to do more in the city, and to work within their own communities. This is blossoming
- We reflected on how lockdown has brought all of us closer to the communities we live in, given so many of us are working from home. We have been involved in lots of conversations about the pandemic – and many of us have been asked about the research that is going on. The conversations themselves don't have an agenda. These kinds of informal, day to day conversations are incredibly important in realising Ottoline's vision –

and probably more important than more formal, traditional kinds of public engagement like lectures and events.

Questions and responses from delegates

- 'Often Universities think within a global scope, and overlook the local. Overcoming potential resentment, barriers and distance between the universities and the local community is a challenge, and needs to draw on the experiences, knowledge and backgrounds of university workers at every level.'

- 'I think inviting volunteers to meet the researchers is fantastic.'

- 'In my area of engineering education, I've created 'Engineering in Bag' challenges for families, which were being distributed through the city library. I made a map of engineering around Lancaster too as a way of giving families an exercise/curiosity/activity. I've resisted online activities because I can't visit kids at home (plus it shuts out lots of children).'

- 'There are also lots of examples of hybrid funding in space research! Lots of private funders there as well as medicine.'

- 'I remember SciArt funded by Wellcome. That was fascinating and did cover quite a few genetic projects.'

- 'Regarding the discussion on bringing volunteers into labs: a lot of charity funders have some form of engagement team, but they tend to have slightly different aims. As someone who used to work in engagement for Cancer Research UK, I can tell you that a lot of these topics are completely new to me!'

Links shared in the chat

- Engage 2020 videos: **https://www.youtube.com/user/NCCPEBristol**

- PEP Network: **https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/nccpe-projects-and-services/professional-development/public-engagement-professionals-network**

- PEP Insights blog: **https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/whats-new/blog/make-it-count-participate-our-survey**

- Knowledge Exchange Concordat docs: **https://www.keconcordat.ac.uk/documents/**

- KE Concordat Event Calendar: **https://www.keconcordat.ac.uk/event-calendar/**