NCCPE Updates

- Future PEPtogether sessions will be held on a fortnightly basis, with each session extended to 75 minutes in length. This change is designed to allow space for longer conversations and the discussion of more complex issues; however, we welcome any feedback from delegates regarding this decision.

- The next PEPtogether webinar will take place on the 7th of May, during which we’ll explore the ethics of engagement. After this, the sessions will continue fortnightly and the PEPtogether on the 21st of May will be a celebration of PEP stories – do let us know if you’d like to contribute a story of experience!

- Notes from last week’s PEP together webinar (23.04.2020) are available on the NCCPE website. The themes of the session revolved around community engagement and the maintaining of relationships with participant groups.

- Next week, the NCCPE will release a blog reflecting on the changes to the final version of the Concordat for the Advancement of Knowledge Exchange in Higher Education, which seeks to enhance knowledge exchange within universities through the exchange of good practice. We were pleased to see that the final version reflected NCCPE feedback, placing greater emphasis on the principles of collaboration and social inclusion.

- Applications for the NCCPE’s Engage Academy will close on Friday (01.05.2020), with the first two sessions held online.

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

Civic Engagement and Public Engagement

The topic of this week’s webinar was Civic Engagement and Public Engagement, examining the relationship between while two and showcasing the ways in which PEPs are working (or adjusting their work) to cover each area.
Poll: To what extent is Civic Engagement part of your role?

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The Civic Engagement Agenda: Introduction by Paul Manners (NCCPE)

The rise of the ‘civic’ agenda is strongly linked to a growing focus on ‘place’ and ‘social inclusion’ in HE policy. In summer 2019, and at a time of intense discussion about ‘left-behind places’, NCCPE was commissioned by UKRI to run a short project to explore how universities and civil society organisations were responding to challenges around equity and place. The contents of the [project report](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/achieving_equity_in_place-based_research_summary_report_september_2019_final.pdf) have informed the development of the Enhancing Place Based Public Engagement scheme funded by UKRI.

The UPP-funded Civic University Commission has played an important role in bringing Civic Engagement up the policy agenda. The ‘[Truly Civic](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/achieving_equity_in_place-based_research_summary_report_september_2019_final.pdf)’ report focused on strengthening the connection with ‘place’, and a key recommendation was that universities should commit to creating Civic Agreements with local partners.

What might be in a civic university agreement?
The definition of a civic agreement is wide in scope. Below are some of the potential areas identified by UPP.

a) Supporting the educational growth of a place:
Widening participation activities
- Raising attainment
- Adult learners
- Public service training
- Research and Knowledge exchange

b) Supporting the economic life of a place:
- The university as an employer
- Procurement
- Convening power
- Economic catalysts
- Universities as global actors

c) Supporting the cultural wellbeing of a place:
- Culture
- Physical presence

Collaborating with the Department for Education, Carnegie UK Trust and Arts Council England, UPP invited organisations to bid to host a civic network. The NCCPE has partnered in a successful bid led by [Sheffield Hallam University](http://www.sheffieldhallam.ac.uk) to run the network.

The COVID-19 crisis is likely to bring the civic / place agenda more into the spotlight. For example, in his post for WonkHE last week, Andy Westwood (University of Manchester) identified three objectives for the future of HE policy, with the third placing a greater emphasis on ‘place’ based relationships, addressing regional inequalities, and levelling up, contributing to an enhanced civic agenda: [https://wonkhe.com/blogs/imagine-a-higher-education-system-beyond-covid-19/](https://wonkhe.com/blogs/imagine-a-higher-education-system-beyond-covid-19/)

This is a space in which PEPs need to be comfortable operating, as Civic Engagement and Public Engagement will be closely linked going forward.

**Civic Engagement and Public Engagement**

This session’s speakers were:

- **Tom Pearson**, Head of Special projects at Imperial College London. For the last four years, Tom has been involved in developing Imperial’s community engagement approach.

- **Helen Featherstone**, Head of Public Engagement at the University of Bath.

**Tom Pearson**
- During his talk, Tom explained the development of Imperial’s civic engagement approach. While not originally a civic institution (Imperial was originally orientated primarily as a national / international institute for education and research in science and technology, and didn’t operate in a defined region), a new campus and new president has ensured that greater steps have been made in recent years to incorporate a civic agenda.

- Imperial has created a second campus situated in White City, a diverse and vibrant neighbourhood, which nevertheless has pockets of very significant poverty and deprivation – different from Imperial’s main campus at South Kensington.

- The programme for Imperial’s civic engagement has been developed at White City campus, with key theme areas of ‘education’, ‘research’, ‘enterprise’, ‘employment’ and ‘health’. The campus has a dedicated space for community engagement, with the aim that Imperial’s ‘innovation ecosystem’ is developed with inclusivity in mind.

- Regarding the relationship between Public and Civic Engagement at Imperial, Tom says that while there is a degree of overlap between the two, they are treated as distinct areas. Each is developed by separate teams, but with a common leader and shared strategy uniting them.

- One of the key differences between the two is that Public Engagement is research and education orientated, while Civic Engagement is concerned with establishing a long-term relationship with the geographically-based community, covering a wide range of issue areas such as skills, employment and place.

- The Community Engagement team acts as a bridge between the community and the university, providing a connecting and coordinating function, helping to find and develop areas of mutual fit and develop new projects and collaborations. It has a complimentary relationship with the public, the schools outreach team, as well as a broad range of other academic and non-academic departments within the university.

- Tom notes that community engagement doesn’t need to be complicated; the most important thing is providing clear lines of contact between the community and the university.

- Regarding Imperial’s response to COVID-19, the organisation has sent weekly updates to the local community, updating recipients with research while also providing STEM related activities to do at home. They have been focusing their engagement on working with vulnerable members of the community; for example, their ‘What the Tech’ initiative provides free support for the use of digital devices at home – an essential service for many elderly residents.

- The university has also been developing ‘offline’ STEM activity packs with the local council’s Family Assist Unit, to support those families who might otherwise have the least access to STEM learning support and help.

- While Imperial has not yet signed the civic university agreement, they will be considering and evaluating their decision in the coming year.
Helen Featherstone

- At the University of Bath, Public and Civic engagement are distinct areas of work. While Civic Engagement is focused on organisational behaviour, Public Engagement is based around research and research quality. Each has very different agendas and drivers behind them.

- Like Imperial, Bath was not originally a civic university, and is a comparatively new institution. The Public Engagement team is a small unit (under three people).

- In 2012, the University of Bath secured funding for a catalyst project focused on embedding Public Engagement with research. This operated primarily on the definition of engagement with regard to research, rather than a broader institutional definition.

- ‘Publics’ are defined as non-academic communities – ‘engagement’ is two-way mutual benefit. PE with research brings non-academic voices into the process of knowledge generation; the PE team supports researchers in their engagement practice, and work to embed the practice into how research is carried out at the university.

- PE with research has added value for universities for example, good engagement activity can provide content for newsletters, press and PR.

- Civic engagement, as Tom has noted, is focused more on institutional practice and behaviour.

- There have been issues in which universities have ignored their local communities, focusing primarily on the international at the expense of local engagement. For some HEIs, this move towards the civic has only occurred in recent years, with some universities only now trying to play a positive role in their more immediate community and region; in part, because of the wider realisation that a university depends on the permission of its local community and place to exist.

- Like many universities, we have prioritised our international reputation and engagement, unfortunately this has been at the expense of our local community rather being an equal priority. With new leadership this has changed resulting in a strong commitment for the University to play a more positive role in our city and region. In part, this is because a university cannot deliver its core business without the permission of its local communities to exist.

- While this is a recent priority for Bath University, it is being placed at a high-level, operating alongside the core strategic priorities of research and teaching. This has sizeable operational implications for the work, involving HR and Procurement processes etc.

- Community engagement should reflect the local community’s needs; providing access to the core business of a university (research and teaching), and institutional knowledge (i.e. employment practice, grant-writing, fundraising etc.), as well as the organisation leading by
example e.g. through transport policies, environmental commitments and procurement practice (I know I didn’t actually say this because I didn’t have time, but I thought it might illustrate the point).

- The University of Bath has signed the civic university agreement, which acts as a public statement about the organisation’s intent; Helen and the PE team are taking a lead on this, while maintaining their support for public engagement with research.

Questions and responses from delegates

Q. Do you feel the barriers and motivations for civic engagement are similar to those for public engagement?

- Tom notes that you can’t pick and choose who you engage with when engaging locally; you have to manage your relationships carefully, and consider who might be included. However, he has noted a general desire within the institution to be grounded and connect locally, with lots or requests to volunteer and get involved with local community.
- Helen says that Bath’s PE is tightly defined by research, and how to enhance and enrich that research; however, civic engagement is a separate piece of work with its own challenges. Lobbying for time is a specific factor; while PE should already be embedded with research, the civic is a separate area which influences other departments such as HR etc. While staff are enthusiastic, having enough time is the prevailing issue.

Q. ‘Helen, you said that PE and Civic Engagement are treated as very separate agendas; do you think having the PE Unit lead on both areas will create any challenges and any confusion?’

- Helen points out that her department is one of the only ones in the organisation willing to take it on; while navigating this dichotomy may be awkward, it’s a necessity at this time.

Q. ‘How do you define your geographical ‘place’ or area?

- Helen notes that while there is no definite area for her institution yet, the decision may be determined by the boundaries of ‘local area’ and responsibility set by other universities. There is also a need to determine where the university might help best, or areas with the most need (such as rural areas).
- Tom says that Imperial began with a mile radius, and worked at building community engagement one area/ community at a time, focusing on areas with high deprivation.

Q. ‘Is there ever a mismatch between community concerns and academic strengths, staff availability, staff time, budget for activities etc?’

- For Helen, the mismatch is ongoing, but the organisation should play to its strengths and locate experts/ resources within itself i.e. finding people who understand fundraising etc.
- For Tom, it’s also an ongoing problem; Imperial has to be very selective about which projects to take forward, and ensure the best ones are chosen, prioritising quality over quantity. Naturally, this process requires a lot of patience and toil.

C. ‘I think it’s really important to flip things on their head when defining geographies too- who feels they have an affiliation and are based within your vicinity? Rather than who you think is in your geographic community?’

Group discussion: How are you currently engaging with community organisations?

Discussion surfaced lots of different approaches to linking ‘civic’ and ‘public’ engagement, shaped by institutional culture, focus and geography:

- There are a variety of ways the civic is being addressed in universities – we need to make sure it’s meaningful.
- Some delegates noted that while their university describes itself as a civic institution, they have yet to sign the agreement.
- Queen Mary University London has a central public engagement team, which includes community engagement as well as PE with research. The civic is very much a part of QMUL’s ethos, and forms part of the remit of the centre for public engagement. They have signed the agreement, rather timely considering current circumstances. The agreement fits well with work they are already doing regarding their impact on local area (Tower Hamlets). The organisation is looking to define their boundaries; there are many London universities, and this creates complexity about catchment areas for community engagement. They will be doing lots of stakeholder engagement and listening to inform this work. QMUL have a community engagement officer.
- The University of Edinburgh is working on inequality in access to engagement with science. They are working with community groups such as those who provide support to carers, and operating from the perspective of a ‘community need’ to problem solve. while trying to reach people who are more isolated. The university has large scale community projects which seek to support hyper-local areas of high deprivation around the campus (though they feel it’s important not to ‘over-engage’ pockets of high deprivation. Edinburgh’s approach is focused around working together and co-developing any engagement. They seek to listen to experts in this (social and support workers of those community groups, etc.) rather than trying to engage on their own with those groups.
- At Newcastle, the social justice department keen for social responsibility ethos – however, there have been misunderstandings around how ‘civic’ is defined.
- Liverpool is assessing sections of its research strategy, with the vision to be a modern civic university. An attendee from Liverpool stressed that there is a need to understand what their communities are. There is a lot happening in terms of research, and the plan to be a 'modern civic uni’.
- Heriot-Watt are considering signing the Civic University Agreement, but are in the initial stages of the decision, and are assessing it along similar lines to the University of Bath. HWU leadership are keen to sign the Agreement, but need to make sure their approach is meaningful and can link to existing initiatives, such as the Edinburgh City Deal. They will...
also need to assess how the agreement will work for their other campuses (Orkney and Borders).

- At the University of Manchester, civic principles are folded into the university’s social reasonability- while they are in line with Manchester’s thinking, it could be argued that they are approached in a more global sense. It’s interesting to consider how people will use these principles to address global issues (such as climate change) on a local basis, while embedding initiatives in the local community.

- At Dundee, the relationship is with a comparatively smaller city, with more of a village feel to it (and therefore, more locally linked).

- CE depends on strengths of university and whether basic science, applied science, the role of publics in research needs to be relevant to the institution.

- CE also depends on the needs of your local community too. No one size fits all. This can actually be something of an exciting prospect, as each institution will tell its own story.

The Civic provides an opportunity for PEPs

- The Civic University agreement should be seen as an opportunity
- The KEF is a good driver
- It’s possible to tell the bigger story through the KEF, and tap into civic agenda without being led by the civic agenda

There are lots of challenges / issues to tackle

Clarifying the intersection of ‘civic’, ‘community’ and ‘public’

- Community Engagement and PE with Research are not the same thing. Both are not only concerned with face to face engagement, but also with how we do things – how do we push through these big changes in areas such as procurement?
- Newcastle and QMUL have made a good start at looking at how they can define communities in terms of their geography. There has been, however, some mismatch with the definition of civic at senior management level
- It may be important to consider other geographies beyond the physical; e.g. areas of need, lack of access to universities etc.
- Public Engagement with Research leads to social and economic impacts. Therefore, civic and public engagement contribute to similar things.

- Confirmation bias- for example, the ‘biomedical bubble’. There are aspects to sci-comms that revolve around a positive public buy-in; PE, albeit reinforced by what’s visible or clearly succeeding. With civic issues, however, the focus is often on what’s failing, and how to address these issues; there is less allure there.

Clarifying the contribution PEPs can make to civic engagement

- Regarding the skills for CE and PE, what are the crossovers?
- There is a trend of passionate PE workers taking on the Civic Engagement responsibility; but what does this mean for the PE we do, and will we have to shift our resource and priority?
- The agenda offers a bit more leverage for job security for the engagement team. Universities are becoming more socially responsible but also thinking about this from the perspective of individual disciplines e.g. archaeology embedded in the community etc. It’s important to consider how this might contribute to economics of place - e.g. tourism

- A lot of institutions have been civically orientated for some time - while there are a lot of people there with the necessary skills, they aren’t in the room when it comes to discussion. We have to make deliberate incentives and reach out, admitting that we need help and need others to provide it (without the institution taking advantage of people with that expertise).

**Impact on resources and capacity**

- Civic responsibility has an economic aspect now; there’s a chance there will be a swift pivot into the area for the sake of income. How much will CE be picked up by institutions due to the economic benefit- and what might fail due to the surface level, financially motivated approach?
- There are concerns CE will be set as a competitive challenge, and further problems if it becomes monetised
- Balancing individual approaches vs strategic university approaches
- Lack of capacity
- Mapping the resources available
- There will be an inevitable labour gap due to certain staff being on precarious contracts; there may be a recruitment freeze post-crisis.
- There are concerns that there may be no change in process, with institutions using the same tools and processes to address new civic issues which may fail - we need to assess the skills required beforehand, rather than focusing entirely on post-project evaluation. Of course, this is a challenge in itself; how can we tell what we will need to know, before we know it?

**Managing expectations and demand**

- What can you do for your community, and what is the role of the university alongside the Local Authority and other community groups?
- It’s important to consider different geographical connections.
- How units based out of the city should operate in rural areas (prior focus has been central)
- Questions of managing expectations depending on capacity, once the project is already underway.
- Local people appreciate the opportunity to input their own needs, ideas etc. It’s important to speak to those beyond the usual subjects when doing research about local priorities
- Local networks help you to know what has already been done, so that work isn’t needlessly repeated, which will exhaust people
- When it comes to engagement, we want to think about satisfying our audience in a way - but we need to allow space to acknowledge discord and unease in these relationships, and the difficulties in how long-term relationships change over time. We’re used to short-time relationships where we can avoid certain conversations or difficulties simply because the relationship is ending; the sort of community practice needed for long-term relationships is something institutions may be missing. Short term funding too can constrain relationships.
- How could universities engage with our local communities via the staff we employ from said communities?
- A lot of appropriate thinking and skills are being developed in humanities disciplines - is it being referenced, drawn on etc.? In Orkney, archaeology is the biggest contributor to economy. It’s also an activity local people do in the summer - helping out at excavations etc.