This year it is noticeable how many projects have been working in partnership with community organisations, charities, NGOs, cultural organisations, museums, artists, policy makers, film makers – the list goes on; reminding us that there are lots of ways to do engagement, and lots of people with relevant expertise to help us do it well.

Given the breadth and depth of entries, the assessment process has been both inspiring and challenging. We have been grateful to our assessors and our judges who have deliberated hard to come up with the list of finalists. We provide a taster of these projects in this booklet, but you can find out more about them on our website www.publicengagement.ac.uk, alongside lots of resources to help you develop your own engagement work.

On behalf of the team here at the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and our funders, the Higher Education Funding Councils, RCUK and Wellcome, we want to congratulate all the finalists for their inspiring work.

Engagement matters. It makes a difference, to research, to researchers, and to those they work with, generating mutual benefit and public value. We hope you will be inspired by our competition finalists: that they encourage you to engage others with your work and ensure that public engagement is well supported in your institution.

Paul Manners
and Sophie Duncan
National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

The Engage Competition 2016 shortlisted projects have been arranged into six categories representing a range of subjects, scales and types of engagement. In each category you will find a snapshot of each Award Finalist.

01 Engage Competition 2016
02 Celebrating Excellence
03 Award Finalists
04 The Engage Competition is a highlight of our work at the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. It provides a unique measure of the health of public engagement with research across the UK, and uncovers amazing people, projects, partners and research. With over 180 entries, this year did not disappoint. The quality of the applications has been really high, showcasing the very best of engagement practice across all disciplines, participant groups, and scales.

05 The quality of the applications has been really high, showcasing the very best of engagement practice across all disciplines, participant groups, and scales.
Forty-five percent of Yorkshire’s 12-year-olds have rotten teeth, which is the second-worst regional prevalence in the UK, and is correlated with social and health inequalities. Whilst largely preventable, it is a challenge to reach the most vulnerable young people to tackle this problem. The COHESION Pilot catalysed a cross-faculty partnership in Leeds with students from Performance Arts and Dentistry working with local school pupils to co-develop the “Don’t Smile” play and debate about oral health, with an aim to inspire change. One unexpected outcome of the project was that pupils and teachers were keen to co-develop participatory oral health research with the School of Dentistry. Co-creation of “Don’t Smile” involved all partners and representatives of the key audiences participating in a workshop where patients and their families shared their lived-experience and dental students described treating dental conditions. A script was developed and tested out with the SMILE AIDERS Patient and Public Involvement team and dental students. Following an extensive week of rehearsals and a premiere performance to the public, performances were held in schools in Batley and Bradford, areas of known significant oral health inequality.

**COHESION Pilot**

Category
Engaging with Young People

Project Partners
- University of Leeds
- Theatre of Debate
- Batley Girls High School

**The COHESION Pilot presents an excellent opportunity for our students to work with a professional theatre company and turn medical research into a dynamic and engaging performance.”**

Dr Rebecca Collins, University of Leeds

The panel were impressed by how the project had taken a potentially really difficult topic – engaging young people with oral health – and found a really creative way to involve them and engage with it.”

‘Judges’ panel comment
There is still relatively little work with younger children as researchers: most approaches are aimed at children over 11. This project empowered children aged 7 to 11 years old to carry out research within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to advocate for change informed by their research. Children learned about the UNCRC and were trained as researchers – learning to identify research questions and select their research methods. The children developed skills in research, consultation, analysis, presentation and persuasion, presenting their findings and recommendations to their peers in the school community plus invitees from relevant positions of authority. This has resulted in positive change, from small adjustments within the schools, to potentially far-reaching changes in policy and practice. They also submitted a report based on their own research to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the first ever to be based on research by children of this age group in the 25 years of its existence.

The approach recognises that genuine participation moves beyond consultation to children leading their own research about matters which concern them.

Lleisiau Bach yn Galw Allan – Little Voices Shouting Out

We have learned that children in this age group can produce strong, evidence-based conclusions based on their own selection of research methods and we have learned that this can have a significant impact when presented to duty bearers in positions of authority or power.”

Applicant comment

The panel felt this project took an exemplary approach to involving young people – as young as 7 – as active researchers, using research to reflect critically on issues that really mattered to them, and to communicate their findings to key decision makers.”

Judges’ panel comment
Rabies is a horrific killer in Africa, but is preventable. As those most affected, this project empowered young people in rural Tanzania, and their communities, to prevent rabies, by identifying and overcoming barriers to action. Measures often focus on education in schools, but many young people in rural Africa do not attend school. Socio-economic factors, such as high costs and long distances to facilities, often exclude children and their parents from accessing emergency vaccination.

The team consulted a broad range of community and professional stakeholders who can help prevent rabies in children and young people, including the young people themselves, health/vet professionals, local dispensary staff, teachers, parents, grandparents, religious leaders, traditional healers, local associations and associations of motorcycle taxi drivers, who can help get bite patients long distances to treatment. Local musicians helped young people produce a song that was aired on radio, getting the message out to others at risk, including those in remote areas.
Our Health, Our Future

Despite Manchester containing some of the leading experts and researchers in health, it has some of the poorest health outcomes in England. Our Health, Our Future enabled 85 secondary school students (aged 12–17), from areas of Manchester with very low health outcomes, to work with university and NHS-based researchers from the Manchester Academic Health Science Centre (MAHSC). The students and researchers worked together to address public health research challenges in local school communities including health behaviours, smoking, obesity and alcohol.

The students were invited to address the question: “How should MAHSC spend £10 million to address health in your community?” Hands-on activities, a schools conference, and innovative drama stimulated debate and informed decision making.

The project culminated in a thought-provoking performance from the young people involved, reaching 650 researchers as part of the MAHSC conference in December 2014, and inspiring the development of MAHSC public engagement initiatives.

School students perform “Our Health, Our Future” at the MAHSC conference.
One in three women will face physical or sexual violence in their lifetime: None in Three is a domestic violence prevention project based in the Caribbean that calls on whole societies to commit to changing this reality. After a review of local research and a multi-stakeholder consultation with local agencies, the project has reached people through social media to engage them in project activities. The public engagement approach is multi-faceted and includes: collaborative research with marginalised women; engagement of men and young people to explore the causes of domestic violence and action needed; training for civil society organisations; creation of a computer game to be used as an educational tool in schools; and the development of new methods for assessing youth attitudes to violence.

None in Three: Preventing Domestic Violence in the Caribbean

One in three women will face physical or sexual violence in their lifetime: None in Three is a domestic violence prevention project based in the Caribbean that calls on whole societies to commit to changing this reality. After a review of local research and a multi-stakeholder consultation with local agencies, the project has reached people through social media to engage them in project activities. The public engagement approach is multi-faceted and includes: collaborative research with marginalised women; engagement of men and young people to explore the causes of domestic violence and action needed; training for civil society organisations; creation of a computer game to be used as an educational tool in schools; and the development of new methods for assessing youth attitudes to violence.

Category
Health and Wellbeing

Project Partners
- University of Huddersfield
- Sweet Water Foundation
- Florencena Consulting

In researching a sensitive and difficult topic like domestic violence, it has been extremely heartening to have overwhelming support from the public, local agencies and government departments. Public engagement is so integral to this project that it has grown on me like a second skin – I simply cannot imagine doing the research without it.”
Professor Adele Jones, University of Huddersfield

The panel were impressed by the variety of stakeholders involved in the project, and the whole community approach to addressing this sensitive issue.”
Judges’ panel comment

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SPHERE: Co-design and Co-production in a Home Sensor System for Health

SPHERE is a large, multidisciplinary research project bringing together over 100 researchers to develop a unique system of sensors for the home to capture accurate information about health-related behaviours. Future applications include detection of early stage dementia and enabling people to self-manage their health, for instance by predicting when someone might fall.

SPHERE’s engagement work explores how to utilise data in relevant ways as well as understand the challenging ethical and privacy issues involved in designing and installing potentially intrusive technologies in homes.

The team works in partnership with future end-users and local citizen scientists who have the unique experience of living with these new technologies in their homes. Innovative and participatory methods of involvement, engagement, and co-working enables the technology and research processes to be acceptable, appropriate and relevant.

"We believe that high-quality and embedded engagement is key to development of new technologies, especially within private home settings where views and opinions of members of the public must take priority over all other considerations."

Applicant comment

"The panel thought this was a fine example of responsible innovation, taking on board the views and needs of stakeholders as well as academics in developing an engineering project."

Judges’ panel comment
Boingboing is both a network and a social enterprise that seeks to enhance positive mental health outcomes for young people. A key dimension is forming Communities of Practice (CoP) with young people, practitioners, parents and academics developing a shared approach to building resilience, and informing co-produced research. A monthly resilience forum is part of the CoP approach. The Boingboing project also develops freely available tools including Resilient Therapy and the schools-based Academic Resilience Approach which offer principles, frameworks, toolkits, and educational games to guide practice and help young people make ‘resilient moves’.

The Boingboing youth participation project involves 15 University of Brighton staff and student volunteers; four young people with complex needs, who are employed by Boingboing and have community fellow contracts with the University; and another ten young people volunteers. They take part in (or lead) everything, including drafting bids and other applications (this one too!), conducting research, setting up/facilitating the Resilience Forum, running training, attending conferences and giving keynotes (UK and internationally).
Older People as Co-Researchers: Developing Age-Friendly Communities in Manchester

By 2030, two-thirds of the world’s population will reside in cities, with at least one-quarter of their populations aged 60 and over. This project involved a partnership with the University of Manchester, Manchester City Council and local community organisations, to develop neighbourhoods responsive to the needs of people as they grow older.

This project was unusual in involving older people as co-investigators leading a study designed to improve the quality of life in low-income communities. Older people were recruited and trained as co-researchers, taking a leading role in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of the research. The 17 co-researchers conducted 68 qualitative interviews with socially isolated older people living in low-income neighbourhoods in Manchester, who were experiencing isolation, poverty and/or health problems. The project led to tangible policy outcomes for the City Council to advance ‘age-friendly’ communities.

What attracted me to this project was that I still have a lot to give. I wanted to see what other people of a similar age wanted and how we could shape future thinking around ageing in cities.”

Female co-researcher, 71

The panel thought this was an excellent example of working with older people to conduct research that makes a difference. It involved a range of partners, who all contributed to and benefitted from the project.”

Judges’ panel comment
Fostering Hope used participatory research to shift public perceptions of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in foster care. A local fostering service, TACT, was facing challenges recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers to meet the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The team ran workshops with young asylum seekers, providing activities such as art, music and climbing.

The project sought to promote accounts of the young people’s lives in foster care to challenge misconceptions and negative stereotypes. In order to access these accounts, participatory methods were chosen that recognised the young people’s competence and promoted their involvement. Photo-voice was a particularly appropriate methodology as it enabled the team to communicate and engage effectively with a group of young people for whom English was not their first language.

Photographs taken by the young people were shown to foster carers in a focus group and then shared as posters at public events during Refugee Week.

Showcasing the talents and strengths of young people, in order to challenge misconceptions, and to put the child first and the labels of asylum seeker and refugee second.
SMASHfestUK

February 2016—a solar storm is about to hit Deptford. Electricity, electronics, communications and infrastructure will all be hit. Deptford—and the world—will plunge into darkness as hospitals collapse, water supplies dry up... life and health are at immense risk...” SMASHfestUK Scenario 2016

SMASHfestUK is an anarchic, interactive science festival which uses a narrative-driven and inquiry-led model of engagement to attract a young local audience. Each year SMASHfestUK is driven by a disaster scenario and all of the festival activities are linked to this theme and the related research. Festival activities include theatre, auditorium cabaret and variety shows, interactive science experiments and demonstrations, astronomy, comedy, art and games. It takes a hyperlocal and inclusive approach so everything is always free of charge. The team deliberately refrains from branding it publicly as a science festival, aiming to break down barriers to inclusion, and activities are developed by a team of collaborators, artists, performers, and researchers. Young people are recruited as explainers, providing an opportunity to get involved behind the scenes.

I met science experts—like an epigeneticist and someone from an organisation that sends satellites to the sun and tried a virtual reality headset. Seeing what other people do was mind-blowing as I'd never actually met people who work in such scientific fields or pursue academic careers. It was so positive and made me think—‘if they can do it—why can’t I do it too?’”

A level student, one of a team of Young Science Explainers for SMASHfestUK

The panel loved that this project was hyper local, and the effective ways with which they engaged young people.”

Judges’ panel comment

Visitors have lots of opportunities to engage with SMASHfestUK.
The Heart and Lung Repair Shop and The Heart and Lung Convenience Store were science pop-up shops—empty retail units temporarily transformed into vibrant hubs for creative and playful science engagement with a local community audience. Scientists and clinicians from the National Heart and Lung Institute (NHLI) at Imperial College London collaborated with artists and designers to develop visually captivating spaces and interactive experiences that stimulated discussion about cardiovascular and respiratory research topics, and their social, ethical and cultural implications.

Participants took the roles of explorers, questioners, debaters, browsers, spectators, experimenters and game players. Each of the shops had a range of interactive installations and exhibits plus a daily programme of ‘shop demos’ and workshops, all facilitated by researchers. Highlight activities included a Lung Capacity Competition and a Heart and Lung Lottery Scratchcard.

Engagement activities in the shops included voting installations to seek public opinion about NHLI research and to stimulate two-way conversations between researchers and visitors.

Thinking about and implementing appropriate metaphors for research really means you have to consider what you’re doing deeply. I find that invaluable for research ideas, hypothesis generation, and explaining research to other groups of people, whether that’s the public or grant reviewers. The different experiences and knowledge of artists is invaluable in stimulating this.”

Researcher

The panel loved the creativity of the pop up shops, the commitment to learn from others before getting started, and the willingness of the team to share what they have learned. They were encouraged to see this project leading to a longer term partnership with charity shops.”

Judges’ panel comment
The Turtle Project

High levels of poaching in the Cape Verde archipelago have seriously affected the sea turtle population viability. The QMUL research team and their partner NGOs developed a science-driven and education-led conservation programme aiming to protect these critically endangered species—where previous attempts have failed. By involving local communities and local university students in long-term citizen science projects, this project has led to changed attitudes and raised awareness about the importance of the sea turtle populations in the country. The local citizens involved in the project have acted as both researchers and ambassadors—collecting important data as well as spreading the conservation message to friends and family.

Central to the project are the Cape Verde university students, who are trained in the research methods and act as educationalists and advocates, working in placement in local communities, raising awareness of the turtles, and equipping local people to participate as researchers.

Over the last seven years, a valuable and unique dataset about sea turtles has been created and there has been a significant reduction in turtle poaching.

Our project has catalysed people’s energy (volunteers, NGOs and scientists) and we hope to spread this model to influence more research projects to work closely with communities and NGOs.”

Applicant comment

The panel were impressed at how the team sought to engage local people in citizen science, thereby raising awareness of the need to protect turtles, whilst gathering important research data.”

‘Judges’ panel comment
Around The Toilet

The toilet is often considered a mundane space. However, for many without suitable toilet provision, toilets are a crucial practical issue. Around the Toilet is a cross-disciplinary research project exploring the toilet as a place of exclusion and belonging which draws on people’s experiences and expertise to imagine how toilets could be different. The team is a diverse collection of activists, artists, students and academics. The project used arts-based workshops to engage with disabled, queer and trans people, people with religious beliefs that affect their toilet experiences, as well as parents, lorry drivers, and school children. People participated in various ways at different stages of the project, taking on different roles as the project progressed.

The research has been publically accessible from the outset: through creating videos and ‘easy read’ documents explaining the project, utilising social media, holding public engagement events, and involving key organisations. Story telling has been key, and these stories are shaping research outputs including animated films and a toilet design toolkit. The team is now communicating their findings to architects with the aim of developing more inclusive toilet spaces.
The Lived Experience of Climate Change: A Story of One Piece of Land in Dhaka

Dhaka, Bangladesh is on the front line of climate change, but what does that mean to the people living in its slums? Dr Joanne Jordan spent months in the slums of Dhaka talking to over 600 people in their homes, workplaces, teashops and on street corners, to understand how climate change is linked to many other problems experienced in their ‘everyday’ life. Her findings are explored in collaboration with the University of Dhaka through a ‘Pot Gan’; a traditional folk performance, featuring melody, drama, pictures and dancing, which encouraged slum dwellers, researchers, practitioners and policymakers to reflect on the day to day realities of living with climate change.

Over 80% of the people who saw the Pot Gan performance said they had learned something new about climate change as a result. A documentary of the performances, that was filmed in Dhaka, has now been viewed over 100,000 times, broadening the reach—and potential impact—of the project.

It was a very powerful experience. This made us care, that is something that neither science nor policy is successful in doing. We as an audience became aware that we can change something. That moment was very powerful.”

Applicant comment

The panel were impressed by the strength of personal commitment animating the project and the powerful personal responses encouraged in the participants through the use of the Pot Gan theatrical medium.”

Judges’ panel comment
The material heritage of medieval Swansea is almost invisible today. Wartime bombing and later re-development of the city centre have almost completely obscured its rich historic legacy. The City Witness project worked with partners in Swansea to research the city’s medieval heritage and make it accessible to local communities and visitors. Transferring playful engagement methods into research practice provided new ways to approach questions about medieval landscapes and identities.

A key source of information was a manuscript in the Vatican Library, recording eye witness testimonies to strange events in Swansea in 1290, when a Welsh outlaw was hanged by the Anglo-Norman Lord and then came back to life! The researchers examined these testimonies to explore how medieval people experienced Swansea. They produced an exhibition at Swansea Museum and a website, which presented the research materials, as well as a GPS-enabled tour map linked to pavement markers, and a game. The project activities have contributed to the regeneration of Swansea city centre and the City Council’s development of a new Castle Quarter.

Follow in the footsteps of William Cragh, Swansea’s medieval hanged man who miraculously came back to life...”

City Witness website

The panel were interested to see how the team brought a creative approach to making Swansea’s “invisible” heritage visible through the use of interactive mapping.”

Judges’ panel comment

Interpreting Medieval Swansea: City Witness Project.
Eating for Eye Health

There are limited treatment options available upon diagnosis of dry age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which progressively threatens central vision and quality of life. As a doctor, Rose Gilbert wanted to raise awareness of the research that suggests nutrition may help protect against the progression of AMD, and encourage patients to cook and eat food that could support their eye health. The project engaged patients suffering from dry AMD through a focus group and a community cookery day organised in partnership with the Macular Society.

At the focus group, participants listened to short talks from clinicians about diet and health. Participants shared their views on how their eye problems have impacted their lifestyle, their thoughts on the changing trends in diet and nutrition, and what they perceived as barriers to changing their lifestyles. Insights from the focus group shaped the community cookery day, where the participants took part in a “Food Bingo” activity, followed by cooking a three course meal, which they then ate. This led to increased knowledge and confidence in preparing food for eye health.

I wanted to raise awareness of the research that suggests nutrition may help protect against the progression of AMD. I was inspired to do it by the patients who are affected by the disease.”

Rose Gilbert

The panel was impressed by the researcher identifying and then addressing a community need in a sustainable way. A great example of what one person’s enthusiasm and drive can do with a small budget.”

Judges’ panel comment
Take 7: 7 Families, 7 Prepayment Meters, 7 Solar Roofs, 1 Estate

Can solar panels reduce vulnerability to fuel poverty and support moves to a low carbon electricity system? Led by Nicolette Fox, Take 7 examined what happens when you give social housing tenants the opportunity to generate and use renewable energy. This PhD project engaged solar PV households in research and encouraged peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, using stories and materials developed in collaboration with them. It is believed that Take 7 is the UK’s first longitudinal study to explore these issues in households with prepayment electricity meters.

This research uncovered the difference solar power was making to the lives of the families and the skills they were developing. For example, the mother who could now afford to wash her children’s clothes more frequently, or another who could buy her son new shoes when he needed them because of the savings from the solar power.

"The families were learning how to use the solar power and were happy to share their experiences if it meant other people could benefit too. I felt it was a privilege to be given such insights and a responsibility to ensure that their stories were shared with others who could benefit from their knowledge."

Nicolette Fox

"This is multi-level engagement built in sensitive way that reached out to underserved people, connecting them with research, and sharing their stories to encourage others to benefit."

Judges’ panel comment
Writing Back

The British Red Cross state that more than 3.7 million people over the age of 65 are thought to live alone, and a third say they have no one to turn to. Loneliness doesn’t just affect older people: a 2010 study by the Mental Health Foundation found that 18 to 34 year olds were more likely to feel lonely than their older counterparts.

Writing Back targets loneliness and social isolation in young people and older people by matching University of Leeds students as pen pals with older Yorkshire residents, and encouraging them to engage with the Yorkshire archives by sharing historic photographs in their letters. Georgina Binnie’s project aims to increase the emotional wellbeing of participants – by creating a unique friendship, the pen pals’ views of the university or of older people are consistently challenged. The project uses loneliness measurement tools to evaluate how letter writing can function as an aide to emotional wellbeing, and provides a rich data source of archived letters and loneliness questionnaires completed by participants.

“The thing I like most about letter writing is that you can go back and read them again. With winter coming, and long nights drawing in, there’s plenty of time to sit and construct a reply. I keep busy, and have a computer so I email and use Facebook, but writing a letter is so much better. You look out for the postman coming.”

Doris Gagen, project participant

The panel thought this was a simple, elegant, and effective project that addressed challenges faced by two different groups of people in a low cost way.”

‘Judges’ panel comment
The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) is internationally recognised for its work supporting and inspiring universities to engage with the public. We work to change perspectives, promote innovation, and nurture and celebrate excellence. We also champion meaningful engagement that makes a real and valued difference to people’s lives.

The NCCPE is supported by the UK Higher Education Councils, Research Councils UK and Wellcome, and has been hosted by the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England since it was established in 2008.

If you are inspired to develop your own public engagement work, we can help. For further information please get in touch.