



NCCPE Training and CPD Consultation

Summary brief

Background

In order to review and refresh our capacity building work, and to ensure it is fit for purpose, the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) ran a consultation between September and November 2017 to ask the sector about provision and demand for training and continuing professional development (CPD) related to public engagement. We wanted to find out the current state of play and the existing needs for researchers, and for those in professional services roles who support and embed engagement within higher education institutions – who we have termed public engagement professionals (PEPs).

This brief¹ summarises the results of this consultation and sets out the resulting priority interventions that the NCCPE plans to take forward.

¹ A longer report, setting out the full details of the consultation process and reviewing the evidence, will be available in due course.

Aims and objectives

The NCCPE is recognised as providing high quality sector services, build on 10 year of experience working in the higher education (HE) sector. We remain committed to ensuring that what we offer is suitable to our target audiences, and that we are regularly adapting our provision to meet emergent needs. As such, we initiated this consultation, focused on training and CPD, to take stock of the work we currently do in this area, to test out our current provision, and to explore if and how it should change.

Consultation focus

The consultation explored three main questions:

1. **What is the current ‘state of play’ for support for CPD for researchers and PEPs, in the context of the 2015 *Factors* survey²?**
2. **What training and development needs do PEPs have – and how could the NCCPE help to meet these?**
3. **What training needs do researchers have – and how could the NCCPE help PEPs to meet these?**

What we plan to do as a result

The point of the consultation was to help the NCCPE prioritise its future activity in this area. The insights we gleaned have led us to prioritise the following activities:

Support for PEPs

- **PEP Network:** We will set up a peer-learning and CPD membership network for PEPs with an annual programme of events across the regions of the UK.
- **Accreditation:** We will explore how the NCCPE can support members of this network to gain accreditation for the professional skills that they bring to their roles.
- **Engage Academy:** We will continue to offer our popular Engage Academy, providing transformational professional development for PEPs.
- **Engage Academy Lite:** We are considering bite-sized CPD opportunities to those who cannot commit the time or resource for the Engage Academy.

² Hamlyn, Shanahan, Lewis, O'Donoghue, Hanson, Burchell (2015) "Factors Affecting Public Engagement by Researchers: Reflections on the Changing Landscape of Public Engagement by Researchers in the UK", TNS-BMRB & Policy Studies Institute. http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/19384/1/Factors%20affecting%20PER_%20FINAL%20NOV%202015%2023%20Nov%2015.pdf

Support for researchers

- **Engage Researchers' Academy:** We have developed the Engage Researchers' Academy to support a cohort of dedicated engaged researchers.
- **Training Associates pilot:** To increase our capacity to fill the gap the consultation identified in terms of short-term targeted training for researchers, delivered at the point of need, we are piloting working with a small group of training associates.
- **Work with early career researchers:** We are keen to explore how we can support universities to develop the skills of early career researchers and PhD students.

The rest of this brief explains the rationale and evidence base for these activities, and provides more detail about how we propose to take this work forward. We look forward to your feedback.

What we did and who we talked to

We conducted an online survey, that gathered 81 responses, (56 PEPs, 7 researchers, 8 higher education leaders, 2 funders, and 8 others), six focus groups across the UK (in Liverpool, Edinburgh, Belfast, London and Bristol, covering a total of 60 participants), and six face to face or telephone interviews.

What you told us

THE CURRENT 'STATE OF PLAY' FOR SUPPORT FOR CPD FOR RESEARCHERS AND PEPs

- **Support for CPD for researchers and PEPs is patchy**
- **Uptake for researchers is relatively low**
- **PEP CPD is under-supported**

The context articulated by our respondents reflected the picture revealed in the 2015 *Factors*³ survey. We discovered a state of play where:

- Public engagement (PE) is patchily supported across the sector (both within and across institutions)
- Some aspects of the culture are unsupportive or immature

³ *Ibid.*

- There are positive developments, for instance an increasing enthusiasm for public engagement among younger researchers, and the opportunity that REF 2021⁴ provides to highlight the value of engaged research
- As reflected the Factors findings, there is some form of internal training on offer for researchers in most contexts – but uptake is relatively low. In some contexts external (or expert-led) training seems to have more cachet and appeal.
- PEPs face a challenging context for their work, with little CPD support available.

It is against this background that we dug deeper into the needs of PEPs and researchers.

PEP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

- **PEPs face significant challenges including structural issues, leadership issues, misconceptions about what PE is, and variations in quality of PE practice.**
- **There is a demand for support in various forms including: professionalisation of the PEP role, external CPD provision, network support and accreditation**

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The consultation suggests PEPs face a range of complex challenges, including:

Structural issues

- A lack of internal coordination
- A strong sense of isolation among many PEPs
- Insufficient levels of reward and recognition for researchers doing public engagement acts as an impediment to PEPs in their efforts to encourage this.

Leadership issues

- A lack of high level commitment or leadership from senior leaders

Misconceptions about public engagement or issues to do with framing

- Lack of clarity around definitions or conceptions of public engagement
- Engagement often falls between remits or competes with other overlapping agendas, such as impact, knowledge exchange, widening participation, or the REF. As a result, there is a sense that it is often not a clear priority, or can feel ‘diluted’ by other agendas.

Issues around quality or rigour

- A wide variety in the quality of public engagement activities
- Concerns over how often public engagement activity is evaluated, and the quality of that evaluation practice when it does occur.

⁴ <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

Many of these challenges chime with the work the NCCPE is doing to inspire and support universities to embed engagement into their core work. For instance, our work building on the EDGE tool, supporting universities to improve leadership commitment and reward and recognition; the work we are doing with the University of Manchester to develop a quality framework for engagement; and, support to REF panels' on their thinking around engagement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUPPORT

Respondents identified several important enablers of their work. These included internal institutional enablers that again speak to the culture change agenda that is part of the NCCPE's core aims, including strategic direction and leadership, evidence of the impact of public engagement, and resourcing. Several new trends emerged indicating demand for CPD or training support in the following areas:

- Recognition of the PEP role as a professional skilled role
- Support for PEP CPD and training
- Facilitating better ways to connect with peers, and share learning and support
- Formal accreditation for the skills of PEPs

RESEARCHERS' TRAINING NEEDS

- **PEPs feel that external providers were important sources of support and training for researchers' in their public engagement, but that the long-term aim should be that this is delivered in-house where possible.**
- **Train-the-trainer offers could help to build capacity to do this.**
- **In the meantime, externally provided training for researchers should be low-cost, require limited time input, and be delivered at the point of need.**
- **Training for early career researchers (ECRs) or PhD students provides an important window of opportunity to influence the next generation of researchers.**

A key challenge faced by PEPs is to support the training needs of researchers. Through this consultation we wanted to dig deeper and explore how best to support public engagement professionals in this role. This led to the following conclusions:

- **While external training provision is important, the long-term aim should be to build capacity in-house where possible.** Many respondents felt that external provision is a vital resource where institutions don't currently support this, and can set the agenda and drive demand if it comes from well-respected providers; suggesting an important role for the NCCPE in providing public engagement training/CPD to researchers.

However, there was a clear steer that while meeting this need in the short term, it's important to support the development and growth of training skills *within* institutions in the longer term, and we're keen to work with universities and PEPs to build capacity internally for this work.

- **Train-the-trainer provision can help to build capacity and expertise** in-house, supporting PEPs to provide a broader range of high quality training themselves, and to allowing them to operate at a more strategic level.
- **Time, cost and location of external training are key factors.** Researchers struggle to find time and secure funding for external provision. To maximise uptake, training should be provided locally and minimise the demands on researchers' time.
- **Working with ECRs or PhD students** could provide an important opportunity to embed PE understanding and expertise in the next generation of researchers.

What we plan to do as a result

PRIORITIES FOR THE NCCPE'S WORK WITH PEPs

- **PEP Network:** We will set up a peer-learning and CPD membership network for Public engagement professionals.
- **Accreditation:** We will explore to support PEPs to gain accreditation for the professional skills that they bring to their roles.
- **Engage Academy:** We will continue to offer our popular Engage Academy, and have refined the course to sharpen the focus on the professional skills and leadership roles of PEPs.
- **Engage Academy Lite:** We are considering how to offer short 'Engage Academy Lite' courses for those who can't access the Engage Academy

Our work with PEPs is a key priority for the NCCPE. They are the core change agents, ideally positioned to help us to achieve our strategic aims: to support excellent public engagement practice; to create the conditions for public engagement to thrive in universities; and, to build strong networks and partnerships to amplify our impact. It is also evident that, although roles and levels of support vary widely, this group face a number of significant shared challenges. We are therefore keen to offer effective support at all levels. Our consultation suggests there are some key ways that we can do this.

PEP NETWORK

PEP roles are often isolated, with significant challenges, and limited career progression opportunities. Our consultation shows a clear demand for more external provision of CPD for

PEPs, and support for a national membership network run by the NCCPE. A national network that can mobilise the collective experience and skills of this group would be of great benefit personally and professionally to PEPs, and the potential of this means of connecting, sharing solutions and problems, and accessing peer support was cited as a significant enabler. We recognise the importance of the PEP role to embedding high quality public engagement in their institutions. As such, we have prioritised the development of a membership network for PEPs. This network will have:

- An annual calendar of face-to-face meetings held across the UK regions
- More informal events, organised on a local or regional basis
- Opportunities for sharing and peer learning
- Opportunities to access to the latest PE thinking and policy
- Opportunities to access high quality training at a reasonable cost
- CPD for members at a variety of career stages, and with a variety of types of role
- An online learning and networking space
- Affordable membership fees
- Support for recognition of the professional skills and competencies involved in the PEP role

We are committed to launching a NCCPE PEP membership network at the start of the 2018-19 academic year.

ACCREDITATION

Our consultation found that there was significant interest in some form of formal recognition of the professional skills and experience of PEPs, and the majority of respondents were enthusiastic about the idea of accreditation, suggesting that this could further professionalise the role, and support better recognition of the value and importance of public engagement for UK HEIs. However, there were notes of caution, and a desire that the pros and cons of such an approach be considered carefully. We are committed to exploring this idea further, including doing further work and research to better understand the range and nature of PEP skills. We are also exploring opportunities to work with others on this endeavour, ensuring that any accreditation is recognised across the sector.

ENGAGE ACADEMY & ENGAGE ACADEMY 'LITE'

The Engage Academy has been a welcome opportunity for PEPs to develop their professional skills and provide opportunity for planning and reflection, and is highly regarded. In light of the consultation, we have made changes to the programme of our Engage Academy to include a greater focus on leadership, and individual and collective agency. The academy encourages participants to take a strategic approach in order to effect culture change, and provides participants with the opportunity to enrich their understanding of the wider engagement context, develop a working plan to overcome key challenges within their context, and access peer and

mentor support. Throughout this year-long professional development programme, drawing on horizontal, collective and connective leadership theory, we will support participants to reflect on their own agency and the (often hidden or informal) leadership roles that they play within their own institutions.

We will also explore how we can offer similar support to PEPs who cannot access the Academy, due to time or resources constraints, perhaps through bite-sized 'Engage Academy Lite' courses.

PRIORITIES FOR THE NCCPE'S WORK WITH RESEARCHERS

- ***Engage Researchers' Academy:*** This programme supports a cohort of dedicated engaged researchers to enhance their skills and share the passion and experience with others.
- ***Training Associates pilot:*** We're working with a small group of training associates to increase our capacity to fill the gap in terms of short-term targeted training for researchers, delivered at the point of need.
- ***Work with ECRs:*** We're keen to explore how we can support universities in providing public engagement training for early career researchers.

Our consultation data suggest (echoing the Factors survey) that there are still a significant number of researchers across the UK who do not have access to high quality public engagement training or CPD, despite improvements in this area in terms of both demand and provision.

Whilst the NCCPE is keen to work alongside PEPs and universities to make the case for internal provision for support and training for researchers, we recognise there are still gaps that need to be filled in the short term. Given our current capacity and the prioritisation of our work with PEPs, we have identified a small number of interventions that we feel will best support this approach.

ENGAGE RESEARCHERS' ACADEMY

With support from our funders, and building on the findings on the consultation, we have developed the Engage Researchers' Academy. The programme creates a challenging but supportive environment for delegates to reflect upon what it means to be an engaged researcher, and to explore the quality and value of engagement. It also supports participants to develop the skills and experience to work with others and improve the impact and relevance of their research. The intention is that these researchers will become leaders in engaged research, and will share their learning and newly enhanced engagement skills within their networks and their own institutions to multiply the impact of this intensive programme.

TRAINING ASSOCIATES' PILOT

The Engage Researchers' Academy can only reach a limited number of individuals and, although supported by RCUK bursaries, requires substantial investment from an institution and the researchers involved. The consultation also suggested that there is a need for shorter term more targeted training and support, delivered at the point of need in institutions across the UK. As such, we are piloting working with a group of training associates, who can help us to develop and deliver public engagement training and augment our capacity to reach more researchers. Our training associates, selected through a rigorous application process, will be experienced trainers and facilitators with a strong expertise in public engagement. They will work with us to update and add to our existing training portfolio to ensure that it is fit for purpose, including a review of train the trainer provision. They will support the delivery of our public engagement training, ensuring our training meets our high standards of quality and impact.

TRAINING FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

We are interested in further exploring how we can support universities to provide high quality public engagement training to early career researchers and PhD students, including through existing doctoral training and ECR training programmes.

Our training and CPD priorities for 2018-19

FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

PEP Network: *We will set up a peer-learning and CPD membership network for Public engagement professionals.*

Accreditation: *We will explore to support PEPs to gain accreditation for the professional skills that they bring to their roles.*

Engage Academy: *We will continue to offer our popular Engage Academy, and have refined the course to sharpen the focus on the professional skills and leadership roles of PEPs.*

Engage Academy Lite: *We are considering how to offer short 'Engage Academy Lite' courses for those who can't access the Engage Academy*

FOR RESEARCHERS

Engage Researchers' Academy: *This programme supports a cohort of dedicated engaged researchers to enhance their skills and share the passion and experience with others.*

Training Associates pilot: *We're working with a small group of training associates to increase our capacity to fill the gap in terms of short-term targeted training for researchers, delivered at the point of need.*

Work with ECRs: *We're keen to explore how we can support universities in providing public engagement training for early career researchers.*

We would welcome your comments and reflections on this brief and its recommendations. If you have any thoughts to share please contact heather.lusardi@uwe.ac.uk



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement



University of
BRISTOL

