PEP together session notes: April 2nd 2020

Over 90 people joined us for our second 'PEP together' session, which was run on the Blackboard Collaborate platform. The session started with brief updates from NCCPE:

- **Funding / policy** - The **REF has been postponed**, and the Concordat for Knowledge Exchange delayed. The KEF is currently going ahead for May submission but that is likely to change too. NCCPE has worked closely with RE on developing the P&CE perspective and have been involved in several webinars over the last couple of weeks, which will shortly be shared online. We have published a **briefing about the guidance**.
- **Civic Hub** – NCCPE is partnering in **new network** hosted by Sheffield Hallam; this is working with 50+ HEIs who have signed up to create Civic Agreements. The initial plans are being adapted in response to Covid19 – and linked to a national project being coordinated by UUK
- **UUK** – we are working closely with UUK on designing a 'rapid response' hub to prioritise and filter requests from different sectors. These will be themed – 'health', 'arts and culture', 'education', 'local government', 'community and voluntary sector' etc – each with a small team. Every VC has been contacted to nominate a senior contact point for this. We will be able to communicate about this shortly once UUK officially launch it. This provides a great opportunity for PEPs to contribute their expertise, so we will do everything we can to keep you posted – and provide updates each week
- **National STEM Forum** – the NCCPE provides the secretariat to the **STEM Forum**. We are working with the members currently to pool intelligence about the impact of the crisis on the STEM PE ecosystem – including the impact on small, freelance providers; looking at how funders in other sectors like heritage and culture have already responded decisively to help their fundees – and trying to take lessons across
- **Involve** – The NCCPE is partnering in a new **NIHR Centre for Engagement and Dissemination**, that builds on the previous work of NIHR INVOLVE

NCCPE Services
- We are moving the **Watermark** online
- We are redeveloping our **training and professional development** in response the current situation, re-designing courses for online delivery and considering gaps in provision
- We will be running the **Engage Academy** in 2020, kicking off in X with the first session at least delivered online. (update from Anja)
- We are running a number of **virtual workshops** with individual HEIs to explore their responses to the COVID crisis, and what this means for their PE provision. Please get in touch if this is of interest.
- We have completed our online guide to online engagement, crowd sourced from our networks. This will launch on Monday

Breakout discussions

Delegates were then invited to work in small breakout groups on discussion topics generated from our survey and last week's PEPTogether. Groups were asked to provide a brief overview of their discussion:

Emotional impacts and coping mechanisms.
- There's a risk of people running out of things to do and a need to make sure people who are geographically isolated and who remote work are kept in the loop (post docs for example). Trying to set things up to bring people together. Eg. Slack, Zoom. Microsoft teams. Coffee meetings!
- Those who are new to their jobs and who don't know people well are feeling more out of their comfort zone.
- New tech is a saviour but could also be creating anxiety and stress for some people. There is a lot of pressure to stay connected with everyone - maybe even more people than before! Difficult to maintain a work life balance.
- A lot of information being shared - bombarding people and causing confusion about what is right. e.g. which online exercise class to do! How to stay safe.
- Important to have messages from senior leadership that it's ok to take breaks and vary your day.
- Workplace Strava group or other mechanisms to encourage people to stay active.
- Taking work calls from the car – finding a quiet place when your home is busy and full of children!
- Communication is the primary challenge.
- Making sense of a shift in roles people can do, and re-prioritising.
- Guilt about turning your computer off at 5 if you feel your job is linked to the crisis and you could continue working/ helping.
- Shift to things which had been at the bottom of priority list.
- IT literacy is a problem and some people don't have access to a computer. We may be able to reach different people now, but will be missing others.
- KEY MESSAGE: Give people as much leeway as possible and appreciate that when you ask something of someone, they may not have the bandwidth to deal with it, emotionally and practically.

Effective approaches to engagement including online solutions
- Different online audiences are in different places.
- Don't just rush to make online content without looking at what works well in those spaces already.
- We talked about not rushing our activity
- Looking at podcasts, being mindful of accessibility. Facebook and Twitter was also mentioned as approaches.

The PEP skills group also discussed this and their notes are included here too:
- Greater London Authority tools and resources were recommended, and the notes from last week's PEP meeting. More emphasis on preparation, not do things for the same length of time as focussing can be quite draining: focus leads to more intense engagements.
- Don't digitalise, go digital. Don't just transfer to digital realm, think what the digital can do for you. Preparation is key: write yourself a script/prompts for things you want to happen

in the meeting, if there's anything you want people to do to give an example e.g. move to a room, vote, click. Have a facilitator and someone as a producer.

- It is important to handle transitions in events / meetings carefully: e.g. using people's names, passing the baton. You lose body language cues when everyone's face on online. You may need to invite people to participate. Prompt people more, but try to be gentle. Encourage everyone to have a fidget toy, to give people something to do with their hands.

Universities approaches to engagement in current times

- Could the NCCPE could offer some online training for researchers who may wish to look at public engagement as a consequence of growing interest, with 'white space' in their calendar etc? Can be done at own pace when appropriate to do so.
- Also - how experts can use opportunity to have experts answering questions live online. London School of Hygiene and Medicine had an excellent session
- Also from our group - REF is not being delayed in some unis, and staff are expected to still send in Impact Case Studies to same time frame. However difficult to get testimonials and some are still doing some large scale events that are cancelled

Utilising PEP skills in new ways

- Lots of advice and support for tools and techs, but same needed for researchers e.g. how different to host online meeting as opposed to face to face. Not just technical skills, personal skills too, particularly for co-production.
- Thinking about other ways of engaging people other than via online. We've been using a lot of our brokering skills to connect communities and staff up etc. e.g. we've been finding out what communities might need, and advocating for real effective listening rather than just assuming what people need.
- If you're looking into asking what your partners and communities might need, it's worth getting your story straight as an institution about what you can offer before you do this. A risk of a rush into producing a load of online content without asking whether there's demand / need for it! Different online audiences are in different places.
- Volunteer management skills have become important, how we train, reward and recognise online volunteers.
- New communities forming, e.g. PEP Together, Virtually Social (science communication). Usually would be able to engage with an NCCPE event once or twice a year, now once a week is amazing!
- Activities that have planned to be online have also had to change due to the situations people find themselves in, sensitivities will be ongoing.

Ethics of online engagement

- Converting in person workshops to individual phone calls is one possible route. How does this work?
- How to get informed consent from people who might not be comfortable with email or online platforms?
- Pros & cons of proceeding in a new way - or waiting until things are possible to do in person
- Are we underestimating people's willingness and ability to adapt to online tools in older age groups?
- A challenge is how to support people who want to be part of project to still make meaningful contribution

- Every platform has pros and cons, some will be excluded in online situations: how do you justify what works for your project
- Everyone's doing their best, don't sweat it too much
- If you're part of a university I'd say speak to your ethics committee/research team
- Humanities researchers are awesome, make use of them!
- how to have challenging conversations with people who are in their own home?

Where the mood takes you session: **a chance to set your own topic**
- Discussed what Universities are doing offline to help communities. There were some examples of what individuals have been doing, but there doesn't seem to be a lot of news around institutes. However, it could be that there's more going on than we know about as some people might not feel comfortable promoting it. Is now the time to recognise that they have massive resources and they should be trying to utilise them to help?
- How some universities are dealing with REF, some are sticking to the original timeline but it's proving really difficult to get testimonials as it's hard to reach communities in this time.

The next PEP Together meeting is Thursday 9th April 11.30 – 12.30