FROM PIECEMEAL TO PURPOSE: AN INITIAL REVIEW OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH

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1. CONTEXT

1.1 Goal 3: Social responsibility and public engagement with research

Social Responsibility (SR) is one of the three core goals of the university and it has strong and productive overlaps with many facets of University core business. When James Thompson became the new Associate Vice-President for SR in 2014, it was decided to create three Academic Lead roles to support and develop the SR agenda, one of which was the Academic Lead for Public Engagement (PE) with Research. As well as providing academic leadership to existing PE activity, James requested current opportunities and challenges in PE activity at The University of Manchester to be reviewed.

1.2 Public engagement

Public engagement (PE) is a wide term which describes the multitude of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research is shared with and also informed by the public. PE encompasses all subjects and is mutually beneficial to staff, students and the public, enabling better connections with the public and stimulating new areas of research. PE can encompass:

- sharing our resources, research and knowledge with the public including schools, communities, businesses, stakeholders, policy makers
- involving the public and stakeholders in driving/developing our research
- widening participation and recruitment
- inspiring future generations
- stimulating awareness, discussion and debate
- promoting the University "brand"
- contributing to pathways to impact and Impact (REF)
- driving inter-disciplinary collaboration
- co-research- involving stakeholders in shaping research.

1.3 Beacons for Public Engagement initiative

From 2008-2012, the University was part of the 'Beacons for Public Engagement' initiative that was funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust. The aim of the initiative was to inspire culture change in how universities engage with the public. The project has provided a foundation for training and initiating PE across the University.

The Beacon may have dissolved but the legacy of PE initiatives continues with all funding bodies supporting PE initiatives and new drivers such as "Pathways to Impact" and REF impact cases seeking to qualify the added value of universities and research to the public and key stakeholders. Furthermore, PE has continued to evolve and has become a research subject in and of itself, leading to new methodologies to involve the public in research such as citizen science projects and new ways of evaluating project success, to name but two.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 One initial task as Academic Lead has been to map out and define what is happening with PE in the post-Beacon era and assess the importance and value that is placed on PE currently. To do this it was necessary to assess not only efforts across all four faculties and cultural institutions in the University, but also to consult with other notable UK Universities, including former Beacon partners.

2.2   Internal Review

Over four months, 1:1 interviews with key staff representatives have been undertaken, including academic and PSS staff from all four faculties and the University's Cultural Institutions (Whitworth Gallery, Manchester Museum, Jodrell Bank and John Rylands Library). Meetings are ongoing. In parallel, a survey was undertaken with staff to invite feedback on PE. This assessed who took part in PE, their reasons for taking part, what activities they took part in (or didn't) and what the barriers were to doing PE. There were 251 responses from across the University.

2.3   External Practices in PE

Targeted visits were undertaken to other universities including Cambridge, UCL, MMU, Bristol and the University of Essex.

3.   INITIAL KEY FINDINGS

Initial findings suggest that PE activity has a number of strengths at Manchester. These include:
- PE stars who develop innovative projects and gain recognition at the national level
- collaborations with institutions/organisations such as Manchester Histories/Manchester Museum /Jodrell Bank etc. to develop exhibitions/events for wide audiences
- projects that contribute to four star impact cases in REF
- widening participation activity and enhancing student recruitment
- platforms such as Science Spectacular/policy@manchester that enable people to try PE in a supportive environment
- patient participation in research (PPI).

However, these strengths are not evenly spread across UoM and rely on a few focused individuals/ partnerships. This reliance on a few individuals puts sustained excellent activity at risk as pressures for other roles take priority and colleagues do not perceive a necessity of being involved. Our cost effectiveness currently is questionable with the cumulative costs of staff time spent in event planning, event coordination, small grant application and resource development. Furthermore, compared to other HEIs, it is apparent that Manchester could do considerably more to focus and enhance its efforts to ensure sustained and enhanced PE with impact. For example:
- there is not currently an explicit strategy for PE activity
- until recently there has not been an academic champion of this activity within or outside of the University
- there are a lack of resources within the University (personnel and non-pay resources).

To ensure we stay at the forefront of PE, ensure sustained contribution to Pathways to Impact/REF and to build on the legacy of the Manchester Beacon, we need to consider how we move forward to become excellent and distinctive in this area.

A more detailed summary of findings can be found in Appendix A.

3.1   Internal

Evidence collected from colleagues internally suggested the following:

3.1.1   *Lack centralised PE staff/support*
Where PE activity was undertaken, both funding and staff were insecure. Many people do it as a subsection of their job, so had little time to develop it fully, or evaluate what they were doing. Often, funds had been reduced and contracts were part-time or temporary, thus making their contribution to PE vulnerable.

3.1.2   *Co-ordination*

People stated that they wanted to link up across schools/faculties to enable cross-faculty collaboration. Some examples existed, but there were no centrally-based staff or a 'unit' with expertise or capacity in this area and there was a lack of awareness and coordination of who to talk to, how to facilitate this or how to develop long term projects with greater impact.

Staff felt that University PE activity, products and events should be professional and of a high standard, but that they lacked expertise and time to do this. Those that did develop skills like film making, event planning and exhibit planning were often either part-time or on temporary contracts, so there was a small pool of expertise that could be lost. Additionally, PE activities were not consistently tracked and there was no staff motivation or impetus to do so, which hindered coordination and the sharing of good practice.

3.1.3 *Publicity/University branding*
Many PE projects ran 'under the radar' and represent missed opportunities for promoting the University and acting as resources for others to access. There was also often a lack of consistent branding and few places to host videos, etc. For example there was no consistency or policy about having The University of Manchester "brand" at key national events such as the Big Bang, the Royal Society Summer Exhibition or the Cheltenham Festivals. These are missed opportunities.

3.1.4 *Evaluation*
Evaluation of PE is only rarely undertaken. There was a lack of awareness about what can be done and a lack of time to do it. This can mean that activities cannot contribute to future REF assessment and be less valuable for RCUK's Pathways to Impact.

3.1.5 *PE has contributed to impact cases (either as part of cases or stand alone)*
In collaboration with the Impact team an investigation into the granularity of PE contribution to impact case studies is being undertaken. Headline data suggests, however, that PE was under-used as there was a lack of research-linked PE and a lack of evaluation. These issues were also important for Pathways to Impact, with research councils now asking for evidence of impact.

3.1.6 How s*taff/students value PE*
People who did PE said it provided job satisfaction, they enjoyed sharing knowledge, feeling connected, learning new skills, and gaining new knowledge. PE was in some cases able to drive research projects and helped shape research direction, but it was felt opportunities were not always seized due to lack of awareness or retro-fitting projects with PE/public partners.

3.1.7 There were real concerns about reward and recognition and variance across the University as to how PE was rewarded or perceived. Rewards can be under the radar and not celebrated publically, for example "Rewarding Excellence" awards exist, which can be for PE, but there were not enough examples of awardees being publically celebrated, either internally or externally.

3.1.8 *What support were research staff asking for?*
Staff asked for the following types of support:
- a unit, person or persons providing dedicated professional support services to PE activity
- website to centralise information/resources etc.
- database of who does what, resources
- case studies of excellence
- widen view - internal and external
- evaluation toolkits
- training
- money to develop projects
- place to direct enquiries to
- rewards and recognition
- networking opportunities.

3.2 External

3.2.1 *Centralised PE staff/support*
All the universities consulted had a core PE team lead, usually by a level 7/8 PE Head, Director or coordinator expert. Team size varied, but most had 7-11 core staff, with secure full-time roles responsible for areas such as PR and communications, training, event management, web design, evaluation, support with grant writing, and writing award applications (e.g. NCCPE Engage awards). Funding was substantial and largely core funded, with additional contributions coming from sources such as the Wellcome Trust ISSF and the EPSRC Impact Accelerator Fund.

3.2.2 *Co-ordination*
Each university had its own strategy and priorities, but overall there was considerable overlap in their vision of PE. Most institutions future PE strategies were about realigning with the research agenda, by ensuring there were academic facing staff or housing PE within impact teams. To facilitate this and improve co-ordination, most had, or were moving to, developing posts that provided academic links with research schools/faculties. Training was also prioritised, including newer areas like social media/video/media.

3.2.3 *Evaluation*
As PE was centrally coordinated in most universities, PE activities were tracked and evaluation was supported with training provided. The model varied, where teams delivered work for academics or teams worked with academics to deliver and evaluate events.

3.2.4 *Impact cases/Pathways to Impact*
Having a PE team was seen as providing added value and a competitive advantage to both Pathways to Impact and REF. Contributions to REF14 varied. Some were nervous about how PE would be evaluated with issues around activities being research driven, but there were clear examples of four star impact cases with strong PE.

3.2.5 *Value of PE to the institution*
All the universities spoke with stated that their institution valued PE as it brought rewards and esteem. PE was seen to create added value, for example by supporting grant writing and Pathways to Impact and by applying for stand-alone PE grants. An example was at UCL, where the PE Team contributed to £46.2M grants and 40 projects during 2014-15.

3.2.6 *Reward and recognition*
At most of the universities, PE was part of promotion criteria but contribution and importance varied. Many offered awards for PE, or recruited staff based on PE excellence. Some institutions allowed staff to "buy" time to increase PE contribution.
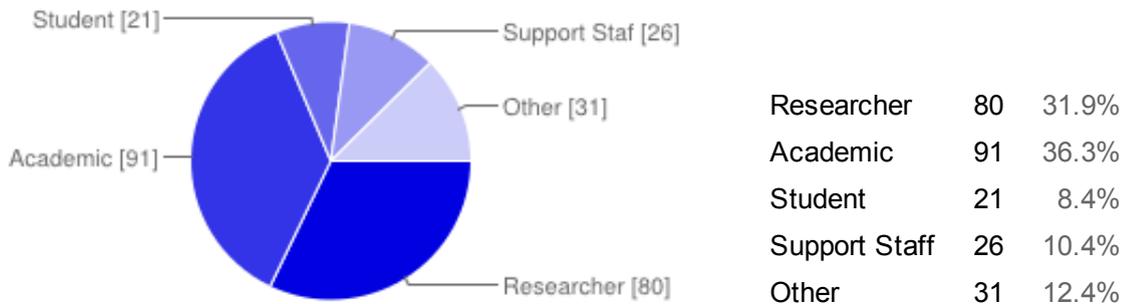
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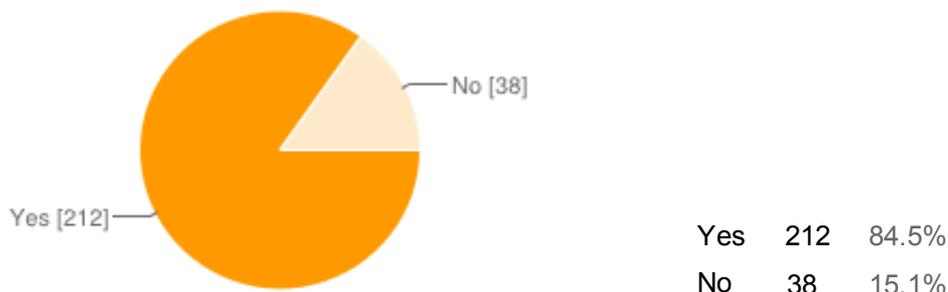# PE with research survey results

251 responses

Summary

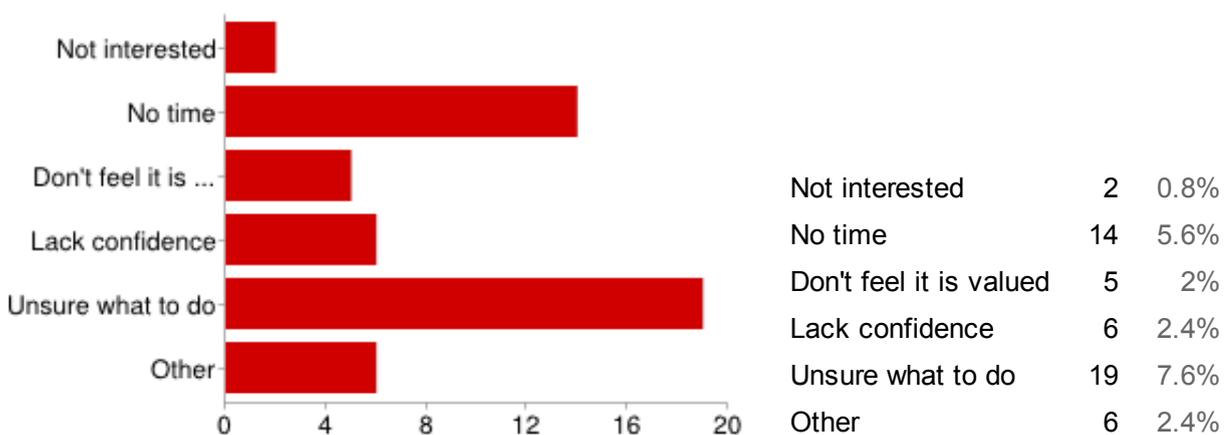1. Are you a researcher, academic, student or member of support staff?

Researcher	80	31.9%
Academic	91	36.3%
Student	21	8.4%
Support Staff	26	10.4%
Other	31	12.4%

2. Are you involved in public engagement with research?

Yes	212	84.5%
No	38	15.1%

Responses from those selecting NO to Question 2.

3. Why do you not engage with the public?

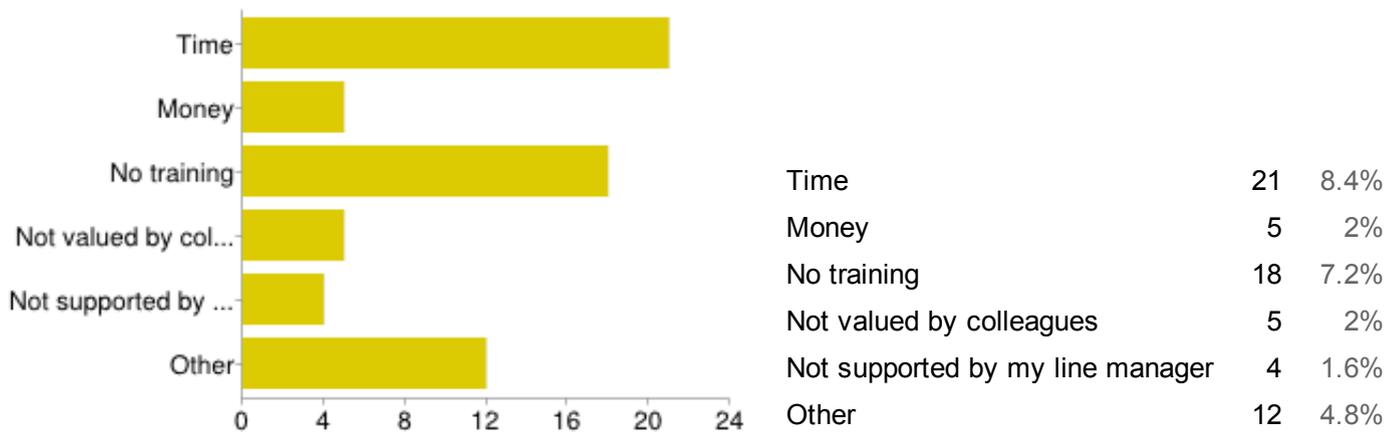|		
Not interested	2	0.8%
No time	14	5.6%
Don't feel it is valued	5	2%
Lack confidence	6	2.4%
Unsure what to do	19	7.6%
Other	6	2.4%

Sample comments include:

"I'm not really sure how this would apply to my area of work and how we would go about it. It's not on our list of team priorities so no time is allocated to finding out more."
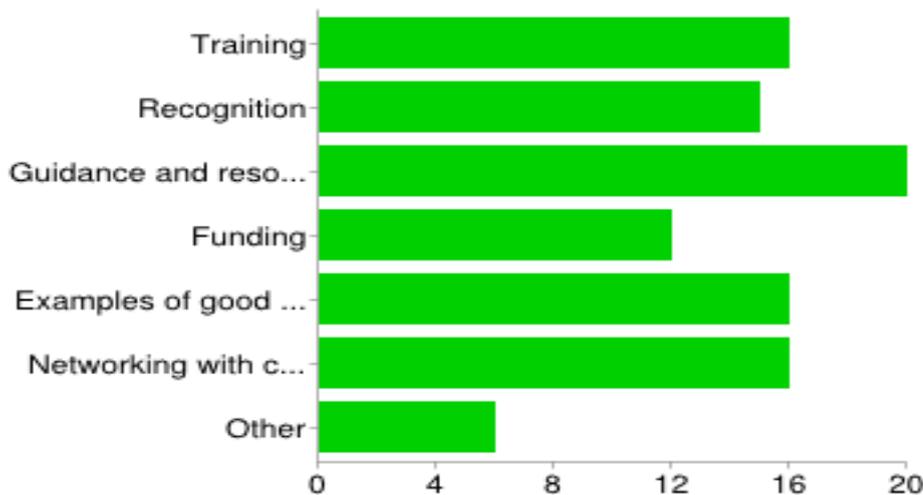
"I really enjoy public engagement but feel the time pressures too acutely to commit to doing much at all right now. I feel under pressure to produce papers / grants and this limits the time I spend on engagement."

"There doesn't appear to be an easily accessible route to do this e.g I would be reluctant to conceive of a public engagement event and try to "make it happen/execute" because I am a relatively junior member of staff and this would involve me organising etc. However if someone else provided the format ... I would gladly get involved as the scale of what I would have to do would be manageable."

## 4. What barriers make it hard for you to engage with the public?

Time	21	8.4%
Money	5	2%
No training	18	7.2%
Not valued by colleagues	5	2%
Not supported by my line manager	4	1.6%
Other	12	4.8%

5. What would you find useful to help you overcome these barriers?

Training	16	6.4%
Recognition	15	6%
Guidance and resources	20	8%
Funding	12	4.8%
Examples of good practice	16	6.4%
Networking with colleagues who do engagement	16	6.4%
Other	6	2.4%

Responses from those selecting YES to Question 2.

3. Which audiences do you engage with?
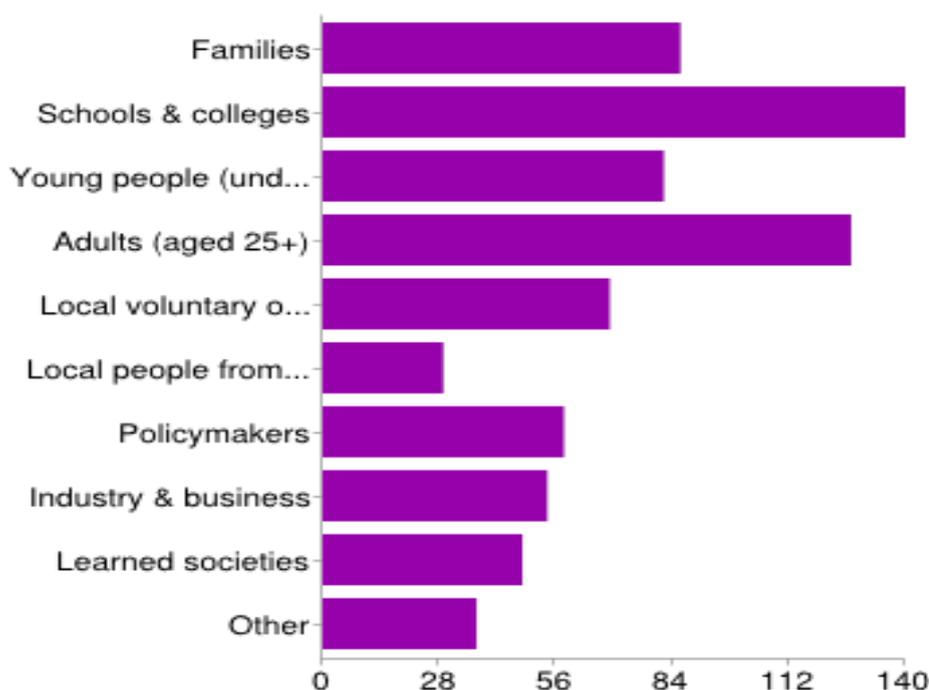
Families	86	34.3%
Schools & colleges	140	55.8%
Young people (under 25) not in a school group	82	32.7%
Adults (aged 25+)	127	50.6%
Local voluntary organisations & charities	69	27.5%
Local people from neighbouring wards	29	11.6%
Policymakers	58	23.1%
Industry & business	54	21.5%
Learned societies	48	19.1%
Other	37	14.7%

4. What public engagement activities do you do?

No. responses mentioning ...

78	Working with Widening Participation, schools and young people
37	Social media (eg. blogs, Twitter), media and publications
29	Public involvement with research
27	Public lectures, talks and dialogue events
27	Festivals, open days, community days and busking
24	Museums and galleries
19	Advisory boards, policy, consultation, reports
18	Manage, co-ordinate, advise, organise, write strategies

5. On average how much time in an academic year do you think you spend on engaging the public with your research?
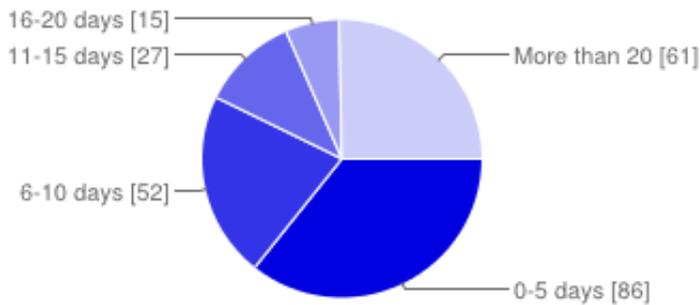
0-5 days	86	34.3%
6-10 days	52	20.7%
11-15 days	27	10.8%
16-20 days	15	6%
More than 20 days	61	24.3%

6. Is your public engagement recognised and valued in your faculty or department?
(1 is poorly valued and 5 is highly valued)
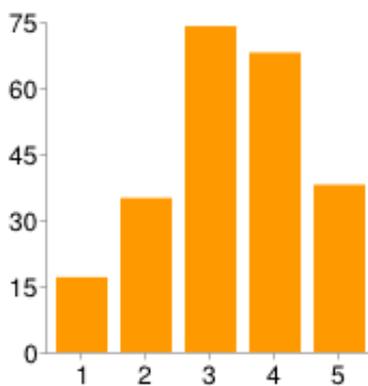
1	17	6.8%
2	35	13.9%
3	74	29.5%
4	68	27.1%
5	38	15.1%

Sample comments include:
"Public engagement is not seen as part of my job role and therefore not recognised. Public engagement activities have to be done in your own time, in addition to usual work."

"I do it all in my spare time - I usually end up using my holidays to do school visits. There seems no opportunities for research staff to be officially involved (or recognised) in out reach in my department."

"Viewed as useful in principle but not really promoted or encouraged." "I do not do a lot, and I don't advertise the fact that I do/have done it."

"Although public engagement is recognised as required impact for the department, time allocation is scrutinized, and small funding pots are not recognised."

"Recognition is given to activities that are part of the structure of what we do, however, outside of these structures there is limited apparent value for more self directed public engagement."

"Plenty of support from colleagues, and recognised in professional development. But little administrative or logistical support."

"I value it - both for impact statements and promotion."

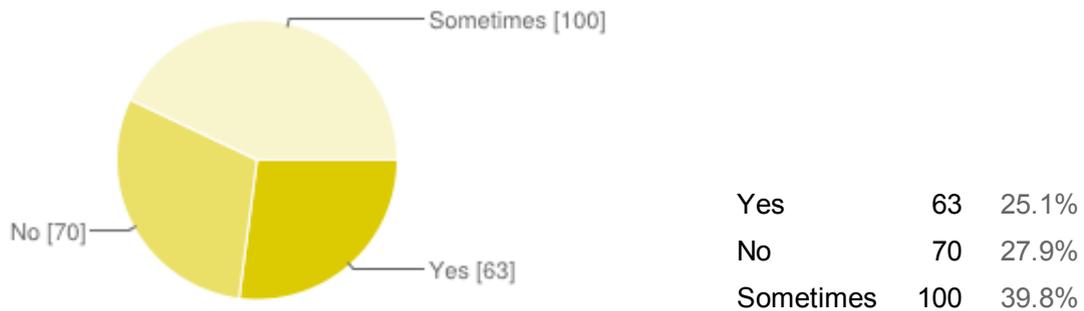"Colleagues are encouraging and positive about my engagement work."

7. Are public engagement activities recorded in your faculty/department?

Yes	95	37.8%
No	36	14.3%
Sometimes	97	38.6%
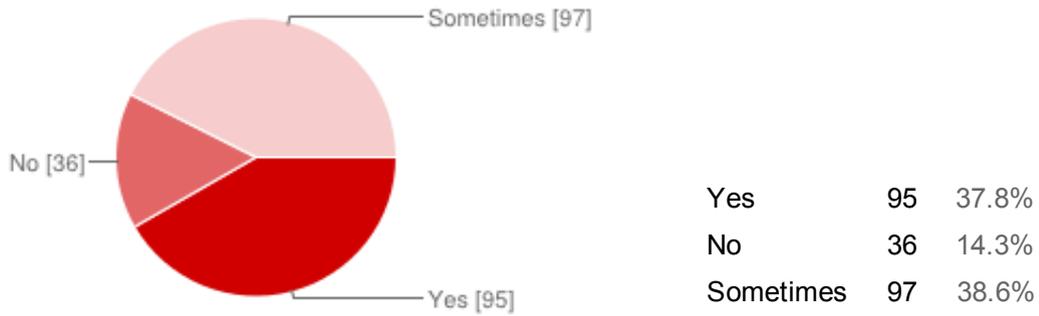
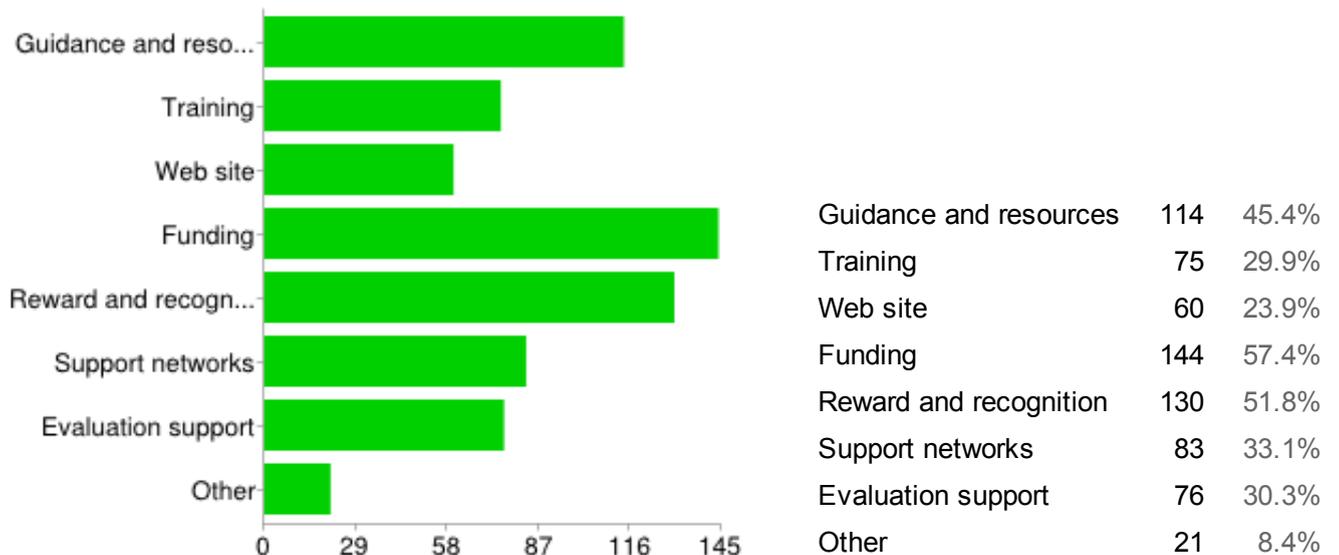Sample comments include:

"Very ad hoc - depending on who happens to get to here about activities."

"We have formal and less formal engagement activities - not all are picked up in metrics or academic evaluation activities."

"Activities are recorded by our line manager."

"The big stuff is I guess, but I don't know for sure. My activities are certainly not."

"Spreadsheet on networked drive."

"They are sometimes recorded as part of my PDR."

8. Do you evaluate your public engagement activities?

Yes	63	25.1%
No	70	27.9%
Sometimes	100	39.8%

9. What would you find useful to support your engagement activities?

Guidance and resources	114	45.4%
Training	75	29.9%
Web site	60	23.9%
Funding	144	57.4%
Reward and recognition	130	51.8%
Support networks	83	33.1%
Evaluation support	76	30.3%
Other	21	8.4%

10. Is there anything else you would like to mention about public engagement?

Sample comments include:
"I think the cultural perception of public engagement within the University is changing which is good, but I don't think it is universally accepted as a good use of our time... yet!"

"It is time consuming to run and develop these type of activities- it is done in addition to a normal work load and therefore perhaps we could do an even better job if there was additional help - in form of funds and therefore additional pairs of hands."

"It's extremely rewarding and as the Uni is mostly funded by the public directly or indirectly, the Uni should take engaging with the public much more seriously."

"There is incredible enthusiasm amongst staff - the main challenge is effectively engaging across schools, faculties and the University as a whole."

"There is much institutional rhetoric about public engagement but little or no practical support, training, funding or recognition and reward for those of us who actually put the work in to make such activities happen."

"Much more joined up thinking about PE would I believe lead to better engagement activities, allowing for more impact."

"I think there needs to be a strategic vision for Public Engagement, and resources and staff also need to be in place for it to function in an effective and strategic way across the University."

"It should be viewed as part of the university's impact agenda."

"In my opinion, I think public engagement is not sufficiently recognized as an 'essential part' of young researcher's careers. Building in more mechanisms of support/ recognition for this kind of work would therefore be a way forward to get this issue higher up on the agenda."

"There is a need to recognise public engagement with teaching more centrally as well."