

THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

A Manifesto for Public Engagement



National
Co-ordinating
Centre for
Public Engagement



Introduction

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) supports universities to increase the quality and impact of their public engagement activity. Founded in 2008, the centre is hosted by the University of Bristol and UWE Bristol.

“ We are immensely proud to be part of the NCCPE.

The principles of the Manifesto for Public Engagement animate our work, and we are particularly delighted to host the NCCPE here in Bristol, which is a deeply connected and engaged city, with both universities playing their part to support and sustain a vibrant public sphere. The ground we’ve covered, collectively, in the last 10 years is impressive – but we are convinced that there is much more that we can all do, as individuals, teams and institutions, to embed the principles of the Manifesto and to make an even greater contribution to society.”

Professor Steve West
Vice-Chancellor, UWE Bristol
Manifesto signatory since 2010



“ The University of Bristol is a founding partner of the NCCPE and continues to value its role in facilitating good practice across the sector.

As a leading research institute and a global civic university, we recognise that public engagement activities create opportunities for people outside the institution to shape and participate in our research and understand its significance to their lives. Public engagement enables us to build trust, and create dialogue and connections, helping us build a locally and globally responsible and relevant university that works with others for mutual benefit.”

Professor Hugh Brady
Vice-Chancellor, University of Bristol
Manifesto signatory since 2010



The NCCPE’s Manifesto invites universities and research institutes to commit to three principles.

Our Commitment

We believe that universities and research institutes have a major responsibility to contribute to society through their public engagement, and that they have much to gain in return.

We are committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and skills with the public, and to listening to and learning from the expertise and insight of the different communities with which we engage.

We are committed to developing our approach to managing, supporting and delivering public engagement for the benefit of staff, students and the public, and to sharing what we learn about effective practice.

Since the Manifesto was launched by the NCCPE in 2010, much has changed inside and outside the UK university sector, reinforcing the need for engagement, and its value to universities and for society. It has become increasingly important for universities to develop a strategic approach to engagement.

With over 80 institutions already signed up, the NCCPE’s 10th anniversary in 2018 provides an opportunity to celebrate some of the exceptional activity that is underway and the work of the many universities and community organisations who have joined us on this journey.

The NCCPE’s vision is of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity. Our Manifesto is a great way to affirm a shared commitment to this goal. If you haven’t already signed up, please take this opportunity to help build a growing movement committed to higher education and research as a public good.

Over the following pages, you’ll find snapshots of the public engagement work being undertaken across the UK by our Manifesto signatories.

You can find out more about their work at www.publicengagement.ac.uk/manifesto

Goldsmiths, University of London signed the Manifesto in 2011. They shared this quotation from Stuart Hall’s work to remind us of the vital role public engagement can play in sensitising academic work to the world around us. Originally Hall was writing just about Cultural Studies – but Goldsmiths adapted the quotation as they believe his words apply to any academic discipline.

“Against the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in god’s name is the point of [insert academic discipline]?... At that point, I think anybody who is into [insert academic discipline] seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we’ve been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don’t feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook.”

Professor Stuart Hall (1932–2014)





Images of engagement Science and community: sparking connections

University of Kent
Manifesto signatory since 2017

“How can you resist the anticipation in the child’s face as they wait for a spark to connect the circuit? I feel like I’m there, in the room, on tenterhooks to find out what happens next.”

Judges’ panel
NCCPE Images of Public Engagement 2018 competition

In 2016, a disused nightclub in central Ramsgate, Kent, became the unlikely location for a pop-up ‘Chemistry Shop’. Over four weeks more than two thousand people attended workshops run by the University of Kent and Discovery Planet CIC, packing the dance floor and bar areas more tightly than even a Bananarama medley could have achieved in the building’s heyday.

This photo was taken just as a young audience member was about to complete an electrical circuit and see a spark of electricity leap from his fist – Zapp!

© Pete Bateson

What is public engagement?

“Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.”

Public engagement is a term that is widely used in a variety of sectors, from arts and heritage to science policy and local government. Whilst in some sectors it has a precise definition, in others it is used more flexibly.

The NCCPE define public engagement broadly, to encompass the many and varied ways that university staff and students engage with others outside the institution. Community engagement, civic engagement, community-based learning, cultural engagement, patient involvement, are some of the terms that describe engagement, and therefore our definition seeks to include these, and other engagement approaches.

Mutual benefit is at the heart of our definition. High quality public engagement benefits all those involved. These benefits might include developing new skills, gaining new insights or ideas, developing better research, improving how things are done in the world, building stronger networks between people, raising aspiration, and inspiring learning.



Images of engagement Older People as Co-Researchers

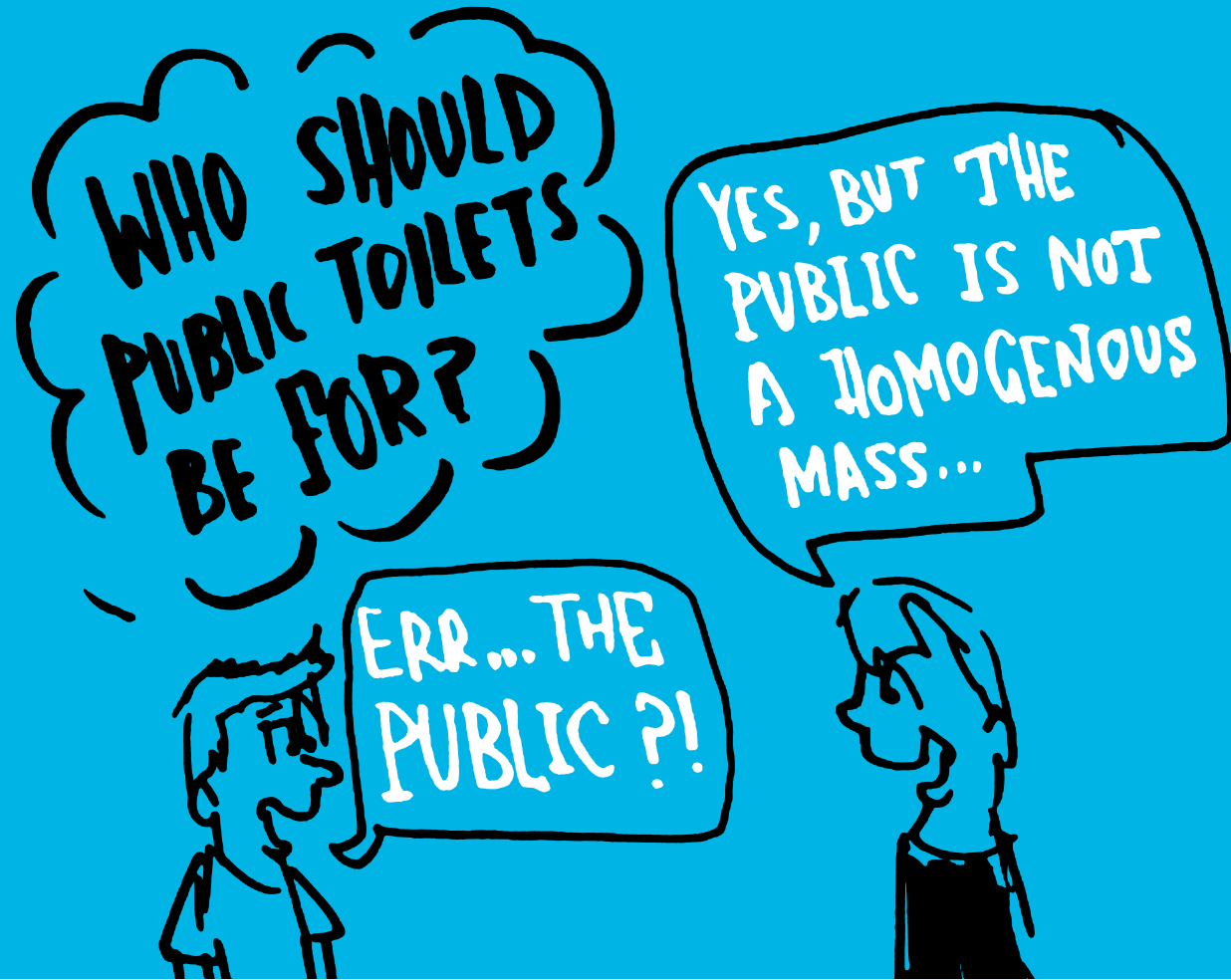
The University of Manchester
Manifesto signatory since 2011

“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

This project involved older people as co-investigators leading a study designed to improve the quality of life in low-income communities and to develop neighbourhoods responsive to the needs of people as they grow older. A partnership with The University of Manchester, Manchester City Council and local community organisations, older people were recruited and trained as co-researchers, taking a leading role in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of the research.

This project won the Working in Partnership category in the NCCPE's 2016 Engage Competition.



Images of engagement Around the Toilet

Sheffield Hallam University
Manchester Metropolitan University
University of Leeds
The University of Sheffield and partners

“The judges were delighted to see early career researchers leading the way with excellent, ambitious and purposeful engagement. No one should have to stay at home because existing toilets don’t meet their needs.”

Judges’ panel
NCCPE Engage Competition 2016

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 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 shape 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.

Around the Toilet won the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences category in the NCCPE’s 2016 Engage Competition.

Committing to engagement

“We have signed the NCCPE Manifesto as it aligns with our belief that universities have a major responsibility to contribute to society through public engagement. As a civic university – a university founded for and by the people of the city – our research priorities should reflect societal goals. This cannot be done without public engagement being embedded in our research.”

The University of Sheffield
Manifesto signatory since 2011

While the benefits of public engagement can seem obvious, universities struggle to support it well. The incentives and pressures in the system can make engagement with the public feel like an ‘optional extra’.

However this is changing. With pressures on public bodies to be more accountable and relevant, the need to work hard to sustain public trust, and a range of policy changes including the Research Excellence Framework, universities are developing more distinctive and strategic approaches to engagement.

The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, backed by all the leading research funders in the UK, makes clear their expectation that research organisations will have a strategic commitment to public engagement, will recognise and value researchers for their involvement and will provide training, support and opportunities to enable researchers to get involved.

Universities have recognised that not only does it ‘feel right’ to engage with the public, but it also makes strategic sense to invest time and resources in striving for excellence in this area. For many universities this sees them returning to their roots as civic institutions.

NCCPE’s EDGE tool

Embedding effective support for public engagement takes time. The NCCPE has worked closely with many universities over the last 10 years to discover ‘what works’. Much of this learning is distilled in the EDGE tool: a simple self-assessment matrix that helps universities reflect on their current support for public engagement and establish where they want to focus their efforts to improve.

Three principles animate the EDGE tool: purpose, process and people—principles which are echoed in the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research.



Purpose

Setting a clear direction of travel
Engaged universities know why engaging with the public matters, and have developed clear priorities to guide their work. Leadership plays a vital role in animating this sense of purpose—at every level of the institution. The institution communicates this commitment internally and externally, opening opportunities for new connections.

“At Keele, we believe deeply in the capacity of education to improve the prospects of individuals, communities and societies, locally, nationally and internationally.

We are proud to sign up to the Manifesto because it demonstrates our determination to develop, share and, wherever possible, co-produce new kinds of knowledge.”

Keele University
Manifesto signatory since 2016



Poetry on prescription: the Emergency Poet, Keele University
Deborah Alma is a Lecturer and Honorary Research Fellow at Keele University. In her role as the Emergency Poet, she travels in an 1970s ambulance to literary, arts and music festivals, libraries, schools, hospitals, charity events and conferences, offering consultations and prescribing poems as cures. Deborah’s image won the NCCPE’s Images of Public Engagement competition in 2018.

Process

Getting your support systems in place
Engaged universities understand that high quality engagement doesn’t just happen. Offering professional development opportunities to develop skills and experience is critical to building capacity, as is developing support mechanisms to co-ordinate activity, and to enhance sharing and learning. Informal and formal recognition is an important way to value the engagement of staff and partners, and helps raise the profile of engagement across the institution.

“We have recently piloted a programme called the Evaluation Exchange which has the potential to transform the way we connect UCL researchers and voluntary sector organisations across London.

We are now thinking of how much more we could achieve, and how much faster, if we had institutional platforms in place to connect staff and students with our local communities.”

University College London
Beacon for Public Engagement and
Manifesto signatory since 2011



Eating for Eye Health, University College London
Dr Rose Gilbert of UCL embarked on the Eating for Eye Health project after becoming aware of the lack of treatment options available for her patients with dry age-related macular degeneration. Her project raised awareness about nutrition and eye health, and won the Individual-led Projects category in the NCCPE’s 2016 Engage Competition.

People

Involving people—inside and outside the institution—in making the change
People are at the heart of all engagement work. Engaged universities value their staff, students and the publics and partners that they work with. They seek to engage with all these groups to define the focus of their engagement work, and to ensure that it meets the needs, hopes and expectations of all those involved.

“We believe Public Engagement is a powerful tool for common good that can inspire, enrich, empower and enable.

Whether engaging local families with research as diverse as robotics on Mars, new food crops and artificial intelligence, or enhancing Wales’s A-level Science curriculum, developing creative projects with disadvantaged groups and informing government policy, we are building long-term relationships that deliver genuine benefits.”

Aberystwyth University
Manifesto signatory since 2014



SusNet, Aberystwyth University
A multi-disciplinary partnership between Aberystwyth University and local schools, SusNet engages students directly with practising researchers. Schools in geographically remote locations have few opportunities to take part in national events and exposure to contemporary research can be difficult to orchestrate. SusNet addresses these challenges by using online blended learning to engage students.

NCCPE's Engage Watermark

Our Manifesto signatories are keen to continue to develop their engagement work for the benefit of society. To this end we offer signatories the opportunity to apply for the Engage Watermark. This is an award granted by the NCCPE to higher education institutions to recognise their strategic support for public engagement and their commitment to improve the support offered. Just as a watermark runs through the fabric of a document, an Engage Watermark indicates that engagement runs through the fabric of an institution.

Queen Mary University of London

Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) became the first institution to be awarded the Engage Watermark, in 2016.

“ Queen Mary University of London has long been dedicated to the practice of public engagement, recognising that it is not only the role and responsibility of a university to create and disseminate knowledge, but to reach outwards and interact with the individuals and groups that surround it.

At Queen Mary we never forget our historic roots in London's East End, and by following this ethos to educate and inform we look forward to building new partnerships and new worlds of knowledge with all we encounter.”

QMUL
Manifesto signatory since 2012



Festival of Communities, QMUL
Created by QMUL in collaboration with Tower Hamlets community groups and organisations, the annual Festival of Communities brings together hands-on demonstrations of local research and services with family activities, food stalls and live performances.



We Want Your Soil, University of Dundee

Professor Nicola Stanley-Wall (middle) is the academic lead for public engagement at the School of Life Sciences at the University of Dundee. Here she's pictured at a citizen science event held at Tayport Community Garden in 2017.

NCCPE's Engage Watermark

University of Dundee, School of Life Sciences

In 2017, the University of Dundee's School of Life Sciences was the first Engage Watermark Faculty Award winner.

“ This award demonstrates the fantastic work and commitment to public engagement by the School of Life Sciences that has been built up over several years.

Their achievement and approach to public engagement including partnership working with others across the University, the City of Dundee and beyond reflects our core University values of working together as a community, making a difference and pursuing excellence.”

Professor Sir Pete Downes

Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Dundee
Manifesto signatory since 2016

Gold
Engage
Watermark

National
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Writing Back, University of Leeds

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. Led by Dr Georgina Binnie, the project was a finalist in the NCCPE's 2016 Engage Competition.

Looking to the future

While great strides have been made in the quality of public engagement over the last ten years, there is no room for complacency. As we look to the future, one thing we can be sure of is that public engagement will keep evolving...

“ We see public engagement becoming part of Engagement. Engagement that serves education, research, the university and its community.

Across a university a number of units serve a particular aspect of engagement: school outreach, public engagement, patient involvement, alumni and philanthropy, life-long learning, business engagement and knowledge exchange, cultural engagement through museums, galleries and theatres, student and staff volunteering, massive on-line open courses and various specific partnerships. Collaborating across these teams has the potential to unleash new benefits and opportunities and anchor universities further into their communities.”

University of Leeds
Manifesto signatory since 2015

There are a host of creative and strategic challenges which our Manifesto signatories are grappling with, as they evolve their approaches to public engagement. Here are just a snapshot of some of the talking points preoccupying our signatories in 2018.

Equitable partnerships

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is exploring how to develop more equitable partnerships with community organisations. Following a consultation with external partners that highlighted how power imbalances left some external partners feeling exploited, GCU has been experimenting with different models.

“ One solution we have found to this imbalance and to have a true partnership of equals is to share the funding between university and community.

We have had to adapt our funding structures to make this happen. We would be interested in other ways universities or organisations have overcome this barrier to true partnership working.”

Glasgow Caledonian University
Manifesto signatory since 2012



Glasgow Caledonian University

Glasgow Caledonian sees itself as the University for the Common Good. Its mission is to make a positive difference to the communities it serves and to put this at the heart of everything it does, particularly in social innovation, teaching and research.

Looking to the future

Opening up Higher Education

Every university brings a distinctive ethos and approach to its public engagement. The Open University draws on its long tradition of openness to all – for instance through its investment in online learning and broadcasting – to shape its unique approach to public engagement and engaged research.

“Openness should not just be a strategy or marketing ploy. It is embodied in every aspect of the university and the people who work, study and engage with us.

At the Open University we’re always redefining what ‘open’ means in theory and in practice to provide genuine equality of opportunity as people seek to learn and live. [...] Our challenge to the wider education sector is to embrace the different interpretations of open, and how they benefit learners and society more broadly.”

The Open University
Manifesto signatory since 2013



Blue Planet II, The Open University
Academics at The Open University partnered with the BBC’s Natural History Unit to produce Blue Planet II. The series galvanized a huge public response, and encouraged people to take their interest further, using learning materials provided by the university.

Creating platforms for civic debate

Universities can play a vital role in connecting public and policy debates.

“Northern Ireland’s devolved government has not sat since 9 January, 2017. In the absence of this crucial political structure Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) opened its doors to become a platform for civic debate and a space for meaningful dialogue.

These conferences and platforms for civic debate at QUB highlight and promote the relevance of the University and its research throughout the government structures, locally and nationally.”

Queen’s University Belfast
Manifesto signatory since 2013



Seminar on the Street, Queen’s University Belfast
A powerful image, this cross-community ‘seminar on the street’ took place in West Belfast and was organised by the Living Legacies 1914–18 Public Engagement Centre.

Addressing international agendas

The pursuit of high quality engagement is opening up a host of exciting new partnerships and projects for our Manifesto signatories, locally and on the global stage.

“De Montfort University (DMU) has been selected as the global lead by the United Nations for one of its Sustainable Development Goals.

DMU is the only university in the world to be granted the honour of spearheading work into an SDG, in our case, goal 16, to promote peace, justice and strong institutions. However, the university is not just committed to SDG 16, but all of those goals. Academics are drawing up plans to integrate the 17 goals into all aspects of DMU’s teaching, learning and research.”

De Montfort University
Manifesto signatory since 2016



De Montfort University and the SDGs
The United Nations has identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at transforming the lives of millions of people by 2030. It is a programme endorsed by 193 countries across the globe with 169 individual targets within the SDGs.

REF, impact and more

The Research Excellence Framework welcomes case studies which feature impacts arising from public engagement. However, our Manifesto signatories recognise that public engagement contributes value across all aspects of their work.

“While recognising that public engagement can be an important ‘pathway to impact’ for research, we are careful to not instrumentalise it in the service of REF.

We see public engagement as valuable in its own right and part of our civic role. We try to refer to publics in the plural – so as to be clear about who we’re engaging with and to maximise benefits – and we try to base engagements on long-term, mutually-beneficial, two-way partnerships.”

Royal Holloway, University of London
Manifesto signatory since 2015



Public engagement and the REF
The NCCPE has been supporting the development of the REF, ensuring high quality public engagement is recognised as a route to impact. Our analysis of the REF 2014 case studies demonstrated how extensively public engagement featured, and the nature of its contribution.

Get involved with the NCCPE

The NCCPE supports institutions to create the conditions where engagement can thrive. Here are some of the ways we can help.

Manifesto for Public Engagement

Signatories of the Manifesto can access support from the NCCPE to develop their institutional approach to engagement. You can find profiles of all our current signatories on our website, as well as details of how to sign up.

Support for professional development

We run a host of bespoke training courses and development programmes, including a national network for public engagement professionals, year-long Engage Academies for professionals and researchers, as well as our annual Engage conference which provides a fantastic introduction to the world of public engagement and a chance to catch up on the latest trends and developments.

EDGE tool survey

If you would like to gauge how your students and staff currently engage with the public, and how they would assess your institution or faculty against the EDGE self-assessment tool, we can help. We create a bespoke survey for your institution, which you then send to staff and students. We synthesise the results, and send you our key recommendations as to how you can develop your work.

Engage Watermark

The Engage Watermark is an award granted by the NCCPE to higher education institutions to recognise their strategic support for public engagement and their commitment to improve the support offered. The award is based on a rigorous assessment of key documents; site visits; surveys of staff, students and partners; and your plans for the future. You will gain critical insights into the support you currently offer; how staff and students are making sense of public engagement; help with developing a longer term plan; and have the opportunity to win an award that celebrates your achievements.

Resources and guides

The NCCPE website hosts a range of in-depth guides and resources to help you tackle each EDGE area, drawing on the experiences of institutions who have begun to address them successfully.

Consultancy and advice

We can provide expert help with all aspects of public engagement. Please get in touch if you would like to explore how we can help.

Find out more and access support at www.publicengagement.ac.uk or contact us at nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk



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 UK Research and Innovation, the devolved Higher Education funding bodies, and Wellcome, and has been hosted by the University of Bristol and UWE Bristol since it was established in 2008.

**National Co-ordinating Centre
for Public Engagement**

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