

Public engagement at the University of Bath



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Introduction

Public engagement means different things to different people. At the University of Bath, we have drawn on the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's definition but have found most helpful to focus our work on public engagement with research. Meaning that we use this as our working definition:

"The myriad of ways the activity and benefits of 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."

Over the last 10 years, engaging people outside of academia with research has become an important part of the research landscape at the University. There is a thriving culture of public engagement right across the University. Public engagement is seen as:

- central to the approach of research centres like the Centre for Death and Society and the Milner Centre for Evolution
- essential in the training of the next generation of researchers at UKRI centres for doctoral training such as the interdisciplinary Centre for Accountable, Responsible and Transparent Artificial Intelligence and the Centre for Circular and Sustainable Technologies
- core to researchers' approach and leadership of research networks including the five Bath Beacons and the Healthy Later Living network
- a key feature of successful grant applications such as the ESRC funded The Mathematics of Deep Learning and the UKRI funded MyWorld project led by CAMERA.

The Public Engagement Unit

Established in 2012, after successfully securing funding as part of the [RCUK's Public Engagement with Research Catalyst programme](#), the [Public Engagement Unit](#) works to embed, foster and sustain a culture where public engagement with research is recognised, practised, and valued.

In 10 years, we have worked across all Faculties and the School of Management and with researchers from doctoral to professorial level, supporting them to develop their practice engaging public groups with their research. Over this time, amongst other things we have:

- Developed and delivered 157 professional development opportunities such as workshops, masterclasses and seminars that have reached over 2,700 researchers to develop their knowledge, skills, and expertise of public engagement with research.
- Invested £120,000 in 72 projects led by researchers.
- Celebrated the public engagement with research achievements of 21 colleagues with the Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards.
- Embedded public engagement with research in probation and promotion criteria and academic role descriptions, as a means to demonstrate excellence in research.
- Supported over 300 researchers in development of activities for research funding grant proposals that engage public groups with research.



How we work

The Public Engagement Unit is a capacity and capability building unit which supports researchers to develop and advance their own practice engaging public groups with their research. Working in partnership with researchers and other professional services, including Research and Innovation Services, Communications and Press, and Human Resources, we aim to facilitate and create opportunities to meaningfully involve people and public groups outside of academia with all stages of the research cycle.

We operate several strategic initiatives over four strands of work to help achieve our aims:

- **Doing Public Engagement** – we provide opportunities for researchers to get started in engaging people by running several engagement activities for them to take part in. We also offering grants for those who want to develop their practice and foster relationships with community partners and public groups.
- **Training and Professional Development** – we offer a wide variety of opportunities including training workshops, online resources, seminars, help, advice and guidance and one-to-one mentoring.
- **Celebrating Public Engagement** – we run the Vice-Chancellor's Engage award scheme that rewards those with a longstanding commitment to public engagement, create case studies to showcase high-quality public engagement activities and use communication channels to raise the profile of engaged researchers.
- **Leadership** – we lead the public engagement agenda at the University and contribute to the broader sector through our work and thought leadership for funders, the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement, and other universities, helping to position the University of Bath as one of the leaders in public engagement with research.

All of our work involves a process of reflection and learning. Using this approach our academic colleagues have told us that undertaking meaningful and high-quality public engagement activities has enabled them to refine research questions and methods and improve the quality of their research, consider the broader societal context of their work, and increase the likelihood of its impact, develop key transferable skills, enrich their teaching, and enhance the profile of their research and the research of the University.

This way of working has also allowed us to develop and refine our understanding of what public engagement with research is at the University of Bath. We can confidently describe, based on evidence from our academic colleagues, that public engagement with research involves people from outside academia in settings where they have agency, generates mutual benefit, and relates to specific and active research.



Engagement highlights

Over 10 years the Public Engagement Unit has facilitated collaborations between University researchers and a variety of public groups that have included creative practitioner and community and civil society groups, to develop and deliver opportunities that engage people with research. We have used our annual Engage Grants programme and our help, advice, and guidance on engagement activities in grant proposals to advance the practice of public engagement at the University and support researchers to develop their skills and expertise. Through our work with colleagues since 2012 we believe that high-quality public engagement can inform people about research, listen to their views on research and involve researchers and people working together to address societal issues. The below are some highlights of the projects we have funded and supported:

Community Matters



Researchers with their community partner, Triumph Over Phobia during the Community Matters showcase event

Using a community-based participatory research methodology, [Community Matters](#) ran for three years and involved asking local organisations to identify issues and problems they were facing and working with researchers to address them. Five different community organisations from across Bath and North East Somerset were paired with 13 researchers from several departments to investigate issues such as the impact on young people of outreach services in areas experiencing poor play provisions, the role supplementary schooling can play in narrowing the educational achievement gaps between different ethnic groups and tools to encourage people with anxiety problems, amongst others. Using the evidence from this research, the community groups and researchers worked together to develop solutions to address some of these issues.





The Fostering Hope project team, Caroline Hickman, Justin Rogers and TACT practitioner

[Fostering Hope](#) was a participatory research project that brought together Justin Rogers and Caroline Hickman (Department of Social & Policy Sciences) with Bristol-based fostering charity The Adolescent and Children's Trust with the aim of utilising each other's skills and expertise to investigate a challenge the charity faced, finding new foster carers for refugee children. Working collaboratively, the team sought to understand the challenge from the perspectives of young people and foster carers using a variety of tools including focus groups and participatory arts techniques. Using this insight, the team worked with young people to create an exhibition that the charity used to challenge some of the many of the misconceptions that exist and act as barriers to fostering.



Policy Labs in Bath



Participants at a Policy Lab in Bath session

Rachel Forrester-Jones (The Centre for Analysis of Social Policy) innovated with the traditional model of a 'policy lab' to involve a range of people with real-life experience of the issue being addressed alongside the usual participants of researchers and policy-makers. The *Policy Labs in Bath* project carried out several sessions focusing on the theme of healthy ageing which looked at and addressed social policy issues in this area. The project aimed to centre and give voice to the experiences of older adults, users of social care and their carers and civil society organisations such as Age UK and social care providers to help inform research and policy on the theme.





Live watercolour painting event as part of the River is the Venue exhibition

Bringing together an engineer, Chrysoula Papacharalampou (Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering) and an education researcher, Simon Hayhoe (Department of Education), *River is the Venue* was an interdisciplinary project that aimed to develop unique, inclusive public artworks about the history of flooding in Bath. Collaborating with local artist studios gallery 44AD and the art programme at the Royal United Hospital, Art at the Heart, the project involved several participatory workshops and focus groups with people in Bath from a diverse range of backgrounds including members of the community traditionally underserved, particularly those with disabilities to devise and commission public artworks looking at historic floods and contemporary flood-related research along the River Avon.



The Cubicle: Changing Rooms, Changing Views



The Cubicle installed in a shop in Bath city centre

[*The Cubicle: Changing Rooms, Changing Views*](#) was an arts-research collaboration between body image researcher, Melissa Atkinson (Department of Psychology), and local theatre makers Kilter Theatre. Through *The Cubicle* (an immersive and interactive performance) Body Positive Café discussion events and body image workshops with artists the project engaged people with body image research at the University of Bath. This project aimed to collect perceptions and experiences on concepts related to positive body image to help inform both research knowledge and inspire a range of different artistic expressions that challenged people's thinking and misconceptions around body image.





Researchers from the Healthy Later Living Network engaging older people at a community venue

Bringing older adult's experience of ageing into research is at the heart of *The Listening Project*. Working with a range of community groups like the Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizen Association, the project is a series of informal conversations between researchers from several disciplines in the Healthy Later Living network and older adults. With the broad themes of mental and physical health, there is no set agenda to these conversations other than to create an environment that allows everyone's voice and opinion to be heard. By taking this approach the researchers aim to use this insight to help inform the network's research priorities.





Young Researchers visiting a lab with their doctoral student mentor

A mentoring scheme for young people aged 13-17, [Young Researchers](#) was a partnership between the University led by Paul Shepherd (Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering) and the Bath Royal Scientific and Literary Institution (BRS LI). Running annually between 2014 and 2019 the project aimed to develop young people's skills in scientific enquiry and develop doctoral students' and early career researchers' skills in public engagement. Young people were paired with a researcher from a range of different departments to develop and carry out a meaningful research project using real-world research techniques and shared their research at a local science festival.



Spotlight on engaged researchers

Working closely with researchers from across the University has been an important part of our approach to building and sustaining institutional capacity for public engagement with research. This work has taken many forms such as showcasing their practice at our training seminars and workshops, celebrating their achievements through the Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards, offering advice and guidance on engagement activities for grant proposals and supporting applications to external bodies that rewards and recognises their engagement work. We have compiled a rich library of case studies of [engaged researchers](#) and [engagement stories](#) from right across the University. The below are just a taster of a community of engaged researchers that continues to grow each year.

Winners of the Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards



Winners of the 2019 Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards presentation and showcase event

Established in 2013 and run by the Public Engagement Unit, the Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards aims to reward and celebrate the work of colleagues from across the University of Bath who are engaging non-academic audiences with their research. Winners of the Vice-Chancellor's Engage Awards have included:

Sally Adams (Department of Psychology)

Sally's research covers alcohol use, harm reduction, recovery and sobriety and in 2018 a paper about the effects of alcohol hangovers on the way individuals think and behave generated significant media interest. Her work was covered by over 300 news outlets globally and led to taking part in local, national, and international interviews about her research. Sally won an Engage Award in 2019 for how she sought to capitalise on this media interest to create further opportunities and activities to engage people with her work. One example was her work with Public Health Bath to co-produce a public health campaign on alcohol awareness in working male drinkers, which also provided an opportunity for her to gain insight into the experiences of this group.



Chris Budd (Department of Mathematical Science)

For 20 years Chris led the way in activities that engage people with his research and mathematical sciences at the University, often taking a leading role delivering activities himself, most recently as Gresham Professor of Geometry delivering 24 Gresham lectures at the Gresham College, London, Chris won a Vice-Chancellor's Engage Award for his leadership in setting up public engagement activities and initiatives that as well as engaging people with science and engineering have been used to support colleagues' professional development in public engagement.

Paul Shepherd (Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering)

Before entering academia, Paul was a practising engineer investigating how computers can be used more effectively in the design of the built environment and for him, public engagement is fundamental to his attitude towards his research. Paul won the inaugural Engage Award in 2013 in recognition of his pioneering leadership within the department, creating numerous opportunities for colleagues to develop their public engagement practice and working with engineering and maths education charities developing and delivering large-scale public engagement activities.

Kit Yates (Department of Mathematical Sciences)

Kit has extensive experience using the media to engage with his research in mathematical modelling, appearing most recently on a range of national television programmes and national and international news discussing the COVID-19 pandemic. Kit won a Vice-Chancellor's Engage Award for his public engagement work after impressing the judges with how he has been able to transfer the skills he has honed through his media work to his teaching and highlighting how the increased profile he developed has helped him forge new research collaborations.

Departmental Directors of Public Engagement

Directors of Public Engagement are researchers who are not only advocates for public engagement but have a formal role within their department's management having been appointed by department's executive committees, reflecting how strategically important public engagement is to the department. These roles have been established in several departments and are led by people who are passionate about the value of public engagement, with experience in undertaking public engagement activities and willing to offer advice and support colleagues in their department to develop their skills and expertise. As a central team, we make ourselves available to support these colleagues with any help, advice, and guidance to advance the public engagement practice and strategy within these departments. These include:

- Sarah Bailey (Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology)
- Janet Bultitude (to 2021) and Punit Shah (2021 onwards) (Department of Psychology)
- Simon Hayhoe (Department of Education)

Public engagement rewarded and recognised

Our academic colleagues have told us that one of the benefits of undertaking public engagement activities for them is that it raises the profile of them and their research which has often led to new research collaborations, funding opportunities and connections with policy makers. We offer help, advice and guidance to researchers in not only developing public engagement activities for grant proposals but also in applications for awards, participation in prestigious showcases and public engagement schemes that reward and recognise their public engagement expertise and achievements. Researchers we have supported in applications have included:



Yvonne Jewkes (Department of Social & Policy Sciences)

Public engagement with her research on the impact of penal architecture on prisoners and prison staff has been part of Yvonne's approach to her work which has led to more progressive and innovative prisons in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. This work was recognised by the Economic and Social Research Council when she was awarded the [Outstanding Societal Impact award at the 2020 Celebrating Impact Awards](#).

Darragh McGee (Department for Health)

Darragh was the first researcher from the University to be successful in becoming a [New Generation Thinker](#), a scheme run by the BBC and Arts and Humanities Research Council to use broadcast media to share arts and humanities research. Using his research on the changing cultural significance of gambling in society, Darragh worked with broadcast producers to develop his skills in storytelling and communication to create a [Free Thinking essay](#) broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

William Wadsworth (Department of Physics)

William and the Centre for Photonics and Photonic Materials spent a week in July 2016 at the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition sharing their research on photonics and optical fibres. Visited by over 10,000 members of the public and 2,500 school students, William and the team participated in this prestigious showcase to not only raise the profile of their work but also develop their communication and engagement skills. A variety of demonstrations, videos, and interactive activities, including a 100m bubble display were created by the team that have become a valuable resource for the Centre and used regularly to communicate the science behind their research.



Leadership in public engagement with research

Our expertise and leadership in the field of public engagement with research has resulted in the University being invited to contribute to sector-wide strategic decision-making such as sitting on funding panels for large awards, sitting on several strategic panels for peer institutions, participating in strategy-setting workshops by funders such as Wellcome and UKRI, and providing mentorship for other individuals and teams in similar roles at universities and research institutes across the UK such as the University of Nottingham, the University of Leicester and a number of Wellcome Centres. We have been successful in grant proposals to help advance the understanding of public engagement with research through practice and research. These have included:

ChallengeCPD@Bath



Participants taking part in a training session run by the Public Engagement Unit

In 2017 we were awarded £78,000 from UKRI to investigate the provision, uptake and impact of training and professional development opportunities for researchers in public engagement as part of the Strategic Support to Expedite Embedding Public Engagement with Research call. Over the course of the two years of [ChallengeCPD@Bath](#) we used the opportunity to radically rethink our professional development programme, which included creating an online learning tool, the Public Engagement Knowledge Hub, experimenting with researchers to co-produce training and developing skills self-assessment toolkits, better reflecting the needs and interests of our researchers. We used this funding opportunity to also maintain the University's position at the forefront of public engagement thinking and practice by sharing our findings through national and international conferences, in publications including blogs and peer reviewed journals and at workshops for peers.





Alessandro Narduzzo from the Department of Physics taking part in a FUTURES activity

With the University of Bristol, we have led a consortium of partners in delivering a large-scale public engagement festival, [FUTURES](#), as part of European Researchers' Night. Since 2018 *FUTURES* has secured over €1.25 million from the European Commission and is a unique public engagement collaboration with Bath Spa University, University of Exeter, University of Plymouth and a range of cultural venues and community partners including amongst other the Holburne Museum, S.S. Great Britain, National Marine Aquarium and the Natural History Consortium. This funding has allowed us to offer targeted training and professional development opportunities for researchers to develop their public engagement skills and expertise. We have also pushed the boundaries of programming for public engagement with research, producing a range of experimental and innovative activity formats online and in-person. These have included participatory workshops, hands-on experiments, theatre performance, community radio, science shows, games, quizzes, talks, competitions, and exhibitions. Taking place over the last weekend in September, *FUTURES* has involved nearly 1,000 researchers engaging with over 90,000 people from across the South West.

