

A qualitative baseline report on the perceptions of public engagement in University of East Anglia academic staff.



Report Ref. No. RS7408

Author: Lisa McDaid
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FOREWORD

In November 2007, UEA and Partners were awarded the status of a national Beacon for Public Engagement, one of just six, alongside Newcastle, Manchester, Wales, Edinburgh and University College London. In our bid for Beacon status, we considered the importance of research and evaluation for the four year pilot project, especially the need to document the existing culture at UEA in relation to public and community engagement. Like the Beacon Funders (the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust), we acknowledged what is often described as the 'research-driven culture' (including pressure on researchers to publish, attract funding for and build careers on 'hard research') which means that relatively less emphasis might be placed on public and community engagement.

Our local Beacon is called Community University Engagement East (CUE East), and as a part of the programme we commissioned City College Norwich to employ a 'Beacons Researcher' to conduct inductive research and formative evaluation for our four year pilot. From the outset this has played an integral role in the programme's development and this report represents a vital element of the inductive research. We welcome its findings and recommendations and we will be using them to refine and improve our programme.

UEA's Corporate Plan 2008-2012 aims to 'expand our contribution to public policy and public engagement' and under the theme of 'Resourcing the Vision: People', we refer to an opportunity for staff to contribute to the University's enterprise and engagement agenda, '...especially our work as a Beacon for Public Engagement.' We have also devised Faculty Enterprise & Engagement Plans. Our long-term aim is to transform the culture of UEA, a research-intensive university, but we recognise that such change is driven by and demonstrated through, both structural and informal mechanisms and may take a generation to achieve.

We recognise that it is difficult to define 'public engagement' and that it can often be a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that can mean different things to different people. With that in mind, we have started to develop a framework that encompasses the different forms that engagement can take such as communicating knowledge and enriching cultural life (a one-way engagement through for example public lectures), providing a service and being in dialogue with the public and communities (a two-way engagement through for example volunteering, user involvement in research, forums, focus groups and workshops) and finally, being in dialogue with the public and policy-makers (a three-way engagement through for example governmental committees involving the academic as the 'expert').

We are using this framework to build recognition of public engagement as a recognised, valued and rewarded part of academic practice across all disciplines at UEA. For example, for UEA staff we have used it as the basis for devising new promotions criteria on public and community engagement, which will be implemented in 2009. We are also introducing engagement to annual appraisals and ultimately hope to include it in job descriptions. In addition, we are introducing an individual awards scheme that will reward those whose engagement activities have made a significant contribution

towards enhancing teaching, research, the student experience and the University's relationship with communities. Our aim is to make awards to academic and non-academic staff and to students and all of which will be presented at our Congregation Ceremony in July 2009. All those who receive awards will make excellent role models for engagement activity.

We are aware that recording of engagement activity is patchy. Our annual Community Engagement Survey, first introduced in 2005, is carried out at school and departmental level and does not capture all activity by any means. In 2009 we shall begin piloting our Engagement Tracker which is based on a model first devised by UEA's School of Biological Sciences. The Tracker can be used by individuals, both staff and students, to record their activities and build their 'engagement profiles', which can be used as evidence for promotion boards and in CVs.

Over the past year, through CUE East, we have started to provide support, encouragement and training for staff and students and an infrastructure dedicated to building capacity at all levels. Due to the broad nature of engagement and the range of initiatives involved, it will take time to define how we might build an institutionally coherent approach to the support and coordination that is needed. We also note the report's recommendation for a small funding stream that can be used to pay for the basic costs of engagement activities. This could be offered as part of an institutionally wide support package and we will be creating such a fund in 2009.

At a national level, we are working with the Beacons National Coordinating Centre and the Beacon Funders on all aspects of the programme. The Research Councils, for example are asking academics to think more about the potential impact of their work from the very start of the research grant application process. They will also be including engagement in peer review and creating a framework to guide researchers' involvement in public engagement by establishing the outcomes that they wish to see from engagement. In addition, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) will be commissioning an analysis of the public engagement aspects of universities' Higher Education Innovation Fund strategies; the Hefce fund that resources university business and community engagement.

In conclusion, we thank City College Norwich for this baseline report, which we warmly welcome. We hope you find it instructive and helpful, and we welcome feedback, comment and queries, all of which should be directed to julie.worrall@uea.ac.uk or through the website at www.cueeast.org.

Professor Neil Ward, member of UEA's Executive Team



Professor Keith Roberts, Chair CUE East Steering Group



(Part of the CUE East evaluation; UEA's BEACONS project)

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Thank you also to the CUE East team and the Human Resource Division at UEA for their support with aspects of this research.

Executive summary

In 2007, the University of East Anglia (UEA) successfully bid to host a Beacon for Public Engagement. Funded by the UK higher education funding councils, Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Wellcome Trust, the four year pilot initiative aims to achieve a more joined up and embedded approach to public engagement across Higher Education.

Six Beacons were established, including others led by institutions based in Cardiff, Edinburgh, London, Manchester and Newcastle, with a co-ordinating centre in Bristol. Each Beacon has a different emphasis and approach but, importantly, the common goal of working more closely with communities and the wider public.

The UEA led Beacon, Community University Engagement East (CUE East), will be both inward looking (seeking to stimulate a change in university culture with regard to increased levels of public engagement) and outward looking (encouraging genuine dialogue and debate with the public).

Key activities include:

- Establish a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) focusing on training and development around public engagement
- Develop an online engagement tracker to allow staff and students to record their engagement activities
- Initiate a Public Engagement Awards programme, to reward those demonstrating excellence in public engagement
- The launch of three funding streams: 'Sustainable Living Partnership Fund', 'Festival Fund' and 'Enhancement Fund' to distribute money to university and community collaborators
- Establish an interface for public engagement at The Forum in Norwich city centre

The overall goal of this research study was to explore academic attitudes towards public engagement and the factors affecting their involvement. This would provide a baseline against which change in institutional culture, with regard to making public engagement a greater part of university life, could be assessed. This work forms part of a wider strategy to evaluate CUE East.

The research involved 55 interviews with a cross-section of academic and research staff at UEA (hereafter academics). The research was carried out by The Research Centre, City College Norwich, between May and December 2008.

Key findings

Baseline evidence

The research highlighted a number of key findings about academics' views on public engagement and the factors affecting involvement. These include:

- There lacked a shared understanding of term 'public engagement'. To some academics the term was unfamiliar, whilst others used it in a number of ways. Views were strongly shaped by discipline area; each with different models of public engagement, at various stages of development.

- Of the academics interviewed, 84% said that they had personally been involved in some form of self-defined public engagement. The interview sample included a high proportion of senior academics, thus it was unlikely that the 84% will apply to the wider UEA academic community. Much of the activities cited were one-way communication activities, such as media work, public lectures and writing for a non-specialist audience. A smaller number of two-way dialogue activities, such as participatory research and interactive events, were given as examples.
- The interviews highlighted that most academics believed public engagement was important but not as important as other activities, such as research and teaching, and for some, administration.
- A number of barriers to public engagement were identified, these included: time; career progression; peer approval; the research-led culture; perceived risk; funding; attitude towards public engagement; the media; and, the challenges of engaging people.
- Academics believed there was a lack of strategic support for public engagement, although some pockets of support were available. It was suggested by interviewees that support was individually based dependent upon a Head of School or senior manager's perceived importance of public engagement, rather than institutional.
- There was no institutional mechanism for individuals to record their public engagement. Therefore, it was difficult to know the true extent of public engagement at UEA.
- Public engagement was not rewarded in any formal way.
- Evaluation of public engagement at UEA was minimal. Most academics had not even considered evaluating their public engagement activities. The lack of evaluation makes it difficult to improve practice or identify the impact of activities.

CUE East

Academics were asked a small number of questions about CUE East and its proposed activities. Key findings from this activity include:

- CUE East had already begun to establish itself by the time the baseline research was carried out. Just over one third of respondents had already heard about CUE East. However, further analysis showed that this was predominantly amongst more senior figures, showing communication about CUE East had yet to filter down the organisational hierarchy.
- There were a range of opinions on the proposed activities of CUE East, sometimes these were completely opposed. This was not unexpected in an organisation the size or as diverse as the UEA.
- Overall, there was a positive response to setting up a programme of continuing professional development training on public engagement and establishing a base for public engagement at The Forum in Norwich city centre. The responses to the Engagement Tracker, an online toolkit for recording public engagement, and Public Engagement Awards programme were mixed. Predominantly because these were perceived as more challenging or complex to implement. Those that were regularly involved in public engagement were, in the main, very supportive of the proposed activities.

Recommendations

A number of actions for consideration have been identified to address the issues raised in this report. These have been divided into general recommendations and those specific to the activities set out in CUE East's Business Plan:

- The term 'public engagement' should be clarified and a typology of activities developed.
- It is important that CUE East communicates its internal offer to staff and students; this should include creating better awareness of what public engagement is and why it is important to get involved.
- Efforts should be made to embed a greater confidence of longevity in regards to public engagement, by formalising it in institutional strategies and structures, to ensure that public engagement is not just seen as a short-term, government driven agenda.
- Improved co-ordination of current public engagement activities at UEA, through better recording, recognition and support, should be seen as equally important to encouraging new public engagement activities.
- There is a need for better communication and a clear understanding of responsibilities by those supporting public engagement at UEA. It would be helpful to review the current co-ordinating infrastructure for public engagement to ensure an institutionally coherent approach.
- Consider identifying a public engagement 'champion' or 'exemplar' in each School to help raise the profile of public engagement and provide CUE East with a clear link for working with each School.
- The barriers to public engagement that have been identified should to be considered, along with any practical steps to address them. It appears that CUE East has identified a number of activities in its Business Plan which might facilitate this process.
- As career progression was identified as a key barrier to public engagement, public engagement activities should contribute to the career progression of academic staff at UEA, through inclusion in job descriptions, appraisal and promotions criteria.
- A small funding stream should be made available to pay for the basic costs of public engagement activities. The application process should be quick and simple, with minimal conditions attached.
- Work with the National Coordinating Centre to make the case to Research Councils and other Higher Education research funders to increase the emphasis on public engagement as a condition of awarding grants. Encourage monitoring and impact measurement of public engagement to also be attached.

The following recommendations are specific to CUE East's planned activities:

- Consider developing and running 'bit sized' training courses as part of the programme of continuing professional development training for public engagement.
- It would be helpful if the Engagement Tracker had the facility for users to view their own record and a built in reminder system. It would also be

advantageous if there was the facility to view other public engagement activities taking place across the institution.

- There were a number of points for consideration raised in this report in relation to the Public Engagement Awards. These should inform discussions on the structure of, and criteria for, the awards. It would be encouraging to have a Public Engagement Award for students as well as staff.

1. Introduction

The Beacons for Public Engagement project was set up to achieve a more 'joined-up' and strategic approach to public engagement across the UK higher education sector. Funded by the UK higher education funding councils, Research Councils UK (RCUK) and the Wellcome Trust, the main aims for the £9.2 million initiative, as listed in the invitation to apply for funds, were to:

- *“create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students*
- *build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved*
- *ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level*
- *create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise*
- *enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning.”* (HEFCE, 2006, p.5).

Six Beacons in total were assigned to the pilot (Table 1). They will be assisted in sharing learning and best practice by a National Co-ordinating Centre (NCC) based in Bristol. Each Beacon was established as a partnership between one or more universities and a number of other organisations, such as museums, voluntary organisations, media agencies, schools, colleges and businesses.

Table 1: The locations of the six Beacons for Public Engagement involved in the pilot project showing the main institutions and their partners.

Location	Partners
Wales	University of Cardiff, University of Glamorgan, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, BBC Wales, Techniquet
Edinburgh	University of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt University, Napier University, UHI Millennium Institute and other partners
London	University College London, Southbank Centre, British Museum and other partners
Manchester	University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan, University of Salford, Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester:Knowledge Capital
Newcastle	University of Newcastle, Durham University, Centre for Life
Norwich	University of East Anglia and 21 other partners

Community University Engagement East (CUE East), the UEA based Beacon, will be both inward and outward focusing. Inward-looking activities aim to stimulate “... a change in university culture with regards to public engagement being truly embedded as a worthwhile activity” (CUE East, 2008), while outward-looking aim to encourage and enable genuine and meaningful engagement activities that “... promotes questioning from the public, and listening and involvement from staff and students themselves” (CUE East, 2007).

Inward-looking activities include:

- Setting up a programme of Continuing Professional Development focusing on training and development around public engagement
- Looking at developing internal processes, such as appraisals and promotions, so that public engagement can be formalised within the structures of the University
- Developing an online engagement tracker to allow staff and students to record their engagement activities
- Establishment of a Public Engagement Awards Programme, to reward those demonstrating excellence in public engagement
- Offering a ‘brokerage’ service, helping to link public engagement practitioners with each other and with community partners, businesses and other stakeholders within the region

- Launching a 'Sustainable Living Partnership Fund', open to collaborative bids from university and non-university partners. The fund aims to support 5 large-scale public engagement activities.
- Launching an 'Enhancement Fund' which aims to support, enhance and extend exemplar University of East Anglia (UEA) and Norwich Research Park public engagement activities.

Outward-looking activities include:

- Establishing an interface for public engagement at The Forum in Norwich City centre
- Launching a 'Sustainable Living Partnership Fund', open to collaborative bids from university and non-university groups. The fund aims to support 5 large-scale public engagement activities.

Many of the outward-looking activities will be driven by staff and students themselves and will be indirectly influenced by CUE East through the inward-looking activities listed above.

About this report

This report describes findings from qualitative research carried out with a cross-section of academic and research staff at UEA between May 2008 and October 2008. The work forms part of a wider strategy to evaluate CUE East – the Eastern Region's Beacon for Public Engagement¹. Led by UEA, the four year pilot programme will promote awareness, understanding and encouragement of public engagement.

The overall aim of this research was to provide a qualitative baseline against which change in institutional culture, with regard to making public engagement a greater part of university life, could be assessed. Specifically, the research sought to access views on university public engagement and explore cultural and institutional barriers to involvement.

¹ Further details can be obtained from The Research Centre, City College Norwich.

2. Methodology

Qualitative data collection consisted of 55 semi-structured interviews, conducted either face-to-face or by telephone with a sample of academic and research staff at UEA. The interviews were carried out between May and August 2008.

Due to time and capacity constraints, it was decided to use a purposive sampling approach (sampling with particular predefined groups in mind). The target population for the study was 'UEA academic and research staff' and the criteria for selection was based on both 'Faculty' ('Science', 'Social Science', 'Arts and Humanities' and 'Health') and 'Grade Level'. Individuals were categorised on the basis of their job title to one of the following four grades: 'Senior Academic', 'Academic', 'Senior Researcher' or 'Researcher' (Table 2).

Table 2: *Breakdown of 'Grade' Categories*

Senior Academic	Academic	Senior Researcher	Researcher
Professor	Lecturer	Senior Research Associate	Research Associate
Reader	Clinical Lecturer	Senior Research Fellow	Research Fellow
Senior Lecturer	Teaching Fellow		Research Assistant
Senior Clinical Lecturer	Associate Tutor		

A full list of academic and research staff, categorised using the criteria outlined above, was provided by the Human Resource Division at UEA. Two individuals from each 'Grade' and 'Faculty' were randomly selected from the list, totalling 32 individuals. A number of specific individuals were also targeted for interview, including the 23 School Heads, the four Associate Deans for Knowledge Transfer, the four Associate Deans for Research and one Pro-Vice Chancellor. In total, the target sample size was 64 individuals. However, some individuals occupied more than one role, so the actual target sample size was 60. The distribution of the target sample is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Breakdown of target sample

	Science	Social Science	Arts & Humanities	Health	Total
Head	5	6	9	3	23
Snr Academic	2	2	2	2	8
Academic	2	2	2	2	8
Snr Researcher	2	2	2	2	8
Researcher	2	2	2	2	8
AD KT	1	x	x	1	2 (4)
AD Research	x	x	1	1	2 (4)
Total	14	14	19	13	60*

* Including one Pro Vice Chancellor

x Included in multiple capacity

Figures in () indicate actual number targeted, including those included in another capacity

All participants were sent an introductory email about the research that was followed up with a telephone call or email to pre-book an interview. The breakdown of interviews achieved is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Breakdown of achieved sample

	Science	Social Science	Arts & Humanities	Health	Total
Head	5	6	7	3*	21
Snr Academic	2	2	2	2	8
Academic	2	2	2	2	8
Snr Researcher	2	2	2	2	8
Researcher	2	2	1	2	7
AD KT	1	x	X	1	2 (4)
AD Research	x	x	0	0	0 (2)
Total	14	14	14	12	55**

* Including one nominated representative, not Head of School

** Including one Pro Vice Chancellor

x Included in multiple capacity

Figures in () indicate actual number achieved, including those included in another capacity

Interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 20 minutes in duration. The interview schedule was structured to explore people's attitudes towards public engagement, their opinions on barriers to engagement, and levels of recognition, support and reward for public engagement at UEA. Towards the end of each interview, a small number of questions were included on the CUE East programme. After each interview, detailed summaries were written forming the basis of the thematic analysis applied to the interviews. A selection of relevant quotes are included in this report to illustrate each theme derived from the interview data.

Terminology

This report attempted to strike a balance between protecting people's anonymity and attributing comments using the sampling categories identified above. Where comments have been included from those individuals that were specifically

targeted, including the Heads of Schools, the Associate Deans for Knowledge Transfer, Associate Deans for Research and one of the Pro Vice Chancellors, extra caution has been taken to maintain confidentiality. In the main body of the report the term 'academic' has been used throughout to refer to both academic and research staff, unless specified.

3. Background

Literature Review

The term 'public engagement' was a relatively new concept within the higher education (HE) sector, introduced to the UK in the early 1990s and has origins in a range of government policy contexts. In local government, for example, the Modernising Government White Paper (1999) and Local Government Act 1999 set a precedence for public engagement as participatory democracy, in which the public was actively engaged in local matters and given greater influence over the decisions that affect their lives. In health and social care, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 place a duty on NHS trusts, Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities to make arrangements to involve and consult patients and the public in service planning and delivery. In science, the British Select Committee on Science and Technology report (2000) cemented a shift in thinking from the top-down, or deficit, model of science communication to the more recent emphasis on public engagement. The report highlighted that:

"Today's public expects not merely to know what is going on, but to be consulted; science is beginning to see the wisdom of this, and to move out of the laboratory and into the community to engage in dialogue aimed at mutual understanding." (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 2000, 5.1).

In higher education, the notion of public engagement has, in part, been influenced by this mixed history and, therefore, covers a diverse range of university activities. This has been complicated further by the fact that public engagement closely aligns with a number of other policy initiatives in higher education, such as widening participation, inclusion and knowledge transfer (Hart *et al.*, 2008). For the purposes of the Beacons for Public Engagement, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has defined public engagement as:

"... specialists in higher education listening to, developing their understanding of and interacting with non-specialists ... It covers schemes

that involve non-specialists in the work of HEIs and research institutes and centres, and can include participatory processes in museums, arts festivals and science centres. However, it does not include activities where the primary purpose is to generate approval or acceptance of the institution. The term ‘public’ includes individuals, groups, young people and their families who do not currently have a formal relationship with an HEI through teaching, research, knowledge transfer, but who may have an interest in these activities.” (HEFCE, 2006, p.5).

The rationale for public engagement, according to Ian Diamond, from the RCUK Executive Group, was “*People get to see the opportunities open to them in higher education and research and are empowered to take part in democratic decisions about issues affecting their lives*” (RCUK, 2007). Whilst people in higher education will find their research, teaching and learning enriched by better contact with society.

The idea of a university for the 21st Century was in stark contrast to the traditional image of a university as a ‘ivory tower’ that has little involvement with either the local community or wider society and instead was “... *preoccupied with lofty and isolated intellectual pursuits*” (Kappor, 2003: p.211). Yet this idea of an institution with a civic responsibility was not a new one. Indeed, Watson (2007, p.9) argued that the “... *constitutional origins of all but a very few universities are grounded in just such a role*”.

The primary purpose for most UK-based universities has, for many years now, been both to deliver excellence in teaching and research activities. However, higher education institutions face increasing pressure from the government and wider society to redefine their purpose and become more engaged in ‘third stream’ activities that fall outside these two core roles. Higher education institutions are expected to improve accessibility, contribute to policy development, have connections with industry, be entrepreneurial and now, increase their engagement with the wider society. The common theme in these activities is externalising the work of institutions and ensuring that they have wider intellectual, economic and social benefit. As universities begin to evolve and become more outward-looking, it is only natural to question the implications of this for university life and its embedded culture.

There was very little literature on the university cultural change, in regard to engaging with the public, nor many studies that have attempted to measure it. There were some international benchmarking tools available. For example, The Carnegie

Foundation Elective Classification for Community Engagement for US universities (2008). This included a set of indicators for measuring institutional culture and institutional commitment, such as whether the university rewards public engagement through campus-wide awards or whether the university maintain systematic campus-wide tracking of public engagement activities.

One key study that did provide some insight into academics' attitudes towards public engagement and perceived institutional and cultural barriers was The Royal Society commissioned survey into the factors affecting science communication (2006). The study, in which 1,485 scientists were surveyed, found that 74% reported having taken part in at least one science communication or public engagement activity in the past 12 months. In terms of importance, only two fifths (39%) of the respondents viewed engagement with the non-specialist public as important. Follow-up qualitative interviews showed the reason for this was that public engagement was often perceived to be less important than other activities. In terms of factors that inhibit engagement, 64% said that spending time on research was stopping them getting more engaged, whilst 20% said that those who were engaged were less well regarded by scientists. The qualitative interviews also found that public engagement was thought to be bad for their careers.

The national evaluators of the Beacons for Public Engagement, Oakley Consulting, conducted a similar study with both Beacon and non-Beacon universities in early 2008. However, at the time of writing, the findings had not yet been made available. The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement was also seeking to commission a literature review on the topic of 'culture change'.

It appeared that the body of knowledge exploring and measuring cultural change in HEIs, in regard to public engagement, was in development at the time this short literature review was conducted. Throughout the course of the Beacons for Public Engagement it will be significantly built upon and this qualitative baseline study aimed to contribute to that process.

UEA structure and embedded culture

Universities are complex institutions with a distinctive culture, though a culture not impervious to increasing pressures of change brought on by factors such as: growing student numbers, cuts in core government funding and requirements to monitor

performance (e.g. the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) or its replacement the Research Excellence Framework (REF)). This section provides an overview of the structure and culture at UEA in order to highlight the challenges of implementing a university-wide programme that aims to stimulate cultural change. Moving UEA towards “... a culture where public engagement is a valued activity for staff and students...” (CUE East, 2007).

UEA was established in the early 1960s. Located on the outskirts of Norwich, UEA is a traditional campus based university. There are 23 Schools of Study, which were restructured into four Faculties (Science, Social Science, Arts and Humanities and Health) in 2004-05. In addition there are a number of specialist Research Centres and Institutes associated with each of the Faculties. A high level of diversity was recorded between the Schools in terms of size and resources. For example, the School of Environmental Science (ENV) employed a total of 222 staff, including 21 administrative staff. Conversely, the School of Language Linguistics and Translation Studies (LLT) employed only 38 staff, including 2 administrative staff. In the larger schools it was not unusual to find dedicated staff members responsible for outreach, knowledge transfer or user involvement; whilst in smaller Schools, these jobs were assimilated into the roles of all staff.

Before restructuring into Faculties, the devolved School structure at UEA had led to variations in practice and low levels of inter-School working. The introduction of Faculties was in part an attempt to streamline this by improving efficiency, integration and communication between Schools as well as positioning them to attract research funding (UEA, 2003). However, despite increased synergy, there were still noticeable variations in practices and each School maintained its own individual culture. The Faculty structure, with its greater devolved management and financial decision-making responsibilities, can also make it difficult to implement and monitor centrally delivered programmes (The Royal Society, 2005).

In addition to the structural challenges of implementing a university-wide programme, the culture at UEA, like most universities, has been built upon greatly by traditional academic values. The old idea of a university with the insular lone scholar held up in their ivory tower with little interaction with the outside world is slowly becoming one of the past (Kapoor, 2006). However, in this study some senior academics at UEA did display a certain nostalgia for “... *the good old days* ...”.

UEA is categorised as a research-intensive university (UEA, 2006), which places pressure on academics to attract research grants and produce research publications. This allows little time to focus on other activities, such as public engagement. Such a research-led culture was reinforced by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which did not incorporate public engagement, nor does its proposed replacement the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Measuring culture change

Culture is implicit in people's attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as explicit in people's behaviours. Therefore, a mixed-method approach was selected to measure culture change over the four year programme: qualitative interviews to explore in-depth people's opinions and attitudes; a quantitative survey providing numerical data on levels of activity and measures of attitudes to public engagement; and, document analysis. However, the quantitative survey conducted by the national evaluators, Oakley Consulting, produced a very low response rate for UEA (n=46). The results from the qualitative interviews are presented in the following sections of this report.

4. Interview results

4.1 *Baseline Evidence*

4.1.1 What is understood by Public Engagement?

Public engagement was "... *not familiar language...*" amongst most academics interviewed at UEA. Indeed, interviewees often deflected the question about what the term might imply back to the researcher. At the most basic level, there was consensus that the term public engagement meant: activities through which the university seeks to connect with a non-academic audience. However, when talking more specifically, responses varied according to a number of different factors, which included:

- a) The purpose of public engagement
- b) The meaning of public
- c) The different levels of engagement
- d) The role of discipline area

The remainder of this section will explore each of these four factors in more detail.

a. The purpose of public engagement

Interviewees expressed some very different opinions on the purpose of public engagement, and at times these were contradictory. When talking about public engagement many academics conceptualised it in terms of existing university agendas. At the extremes, some academics talked about public engagement solely in the context of admissions or public relations. However, most responses were multifaceted. Public engagement was discussed as part of, or in relation to, the following university agendas:

- Admissions
- Public relations
- Knowledge transfer
- Consultancy and enterprise activities
- Aimhigher and widening participation
- Schools outreach
- Research
- Teaching
- Continuing education
- Volunteering

The relationships between public engagement and these agendas was often unclear. For example, a number of interviewees questioned whether “*Public engagement and KT [knowledge transfer] are the same thing ...*” or whether knowledge transfer was “*... the previous guise ...*” of public engagement. Indeed, the activities associated with each agenda often overlapped, for example, visits to schools. This may be done in an admissions capacity or for the “*... enrichment of school education ...*” or even for more personal reasons, such as an academic wanting to share their enthusiasm for a subject more widely. However, such activities often contributed to all three of these agendas to some degree. Another example of overlapping agendas was in Computing Sciences, when the Urban Modelling Group were awarded a contract from The Forum Trust to develop a virtual representation of what the area in front of The Forum might look like with a ‘London Eye’ style big wheel situated there. Whilst not specifically intended as public engagement, the public were able to see the 3D model, ask the designers questions and as a consequence learn about the technology developed by the group. Therefore, public engagement was an outcome of an enterprise activity. Such examples may not be typical but illustrate how the boundaries of what is classified as public engagement can be blurred.

There were a range of other reasons cited for engaging the public, which included: discipline or subject promotion, educating (in its widest sense) and building community bridges. This latter point was highlighted by UEA's proximity to one of the most deprived neighbourhoods within Norwich.

b. The meaning of 'public'

The purpose of public engagement was likely to vary according to the public you were talking to. The term 'public' was understood by interviewees to hold different meanings depending on the context. In simple terms, interviewees drew the distinction between members of the public in their capacity as citizens and other university stakeholder groups. A range of different terms were used by academics to describe the former, these included: 'lay-public', 'general public', 'non-aligned public', 'non-specialist public', 'civic society', 'non-organised public' and 'mass public'. These terms imply people who do not already have a "...*defined relationship in relation to the knowledge being produced ...*" or who were not experts in that given field.

Interviewees also distinguished between different geographic publics, such as local, regional, national and international. However, within these, there was deliberation about definition. For example, "*What is meant by local?*" This might refer to the whole of Norfolk, the City of Norwich, or just the immediate area surrounding UEA campus. For academics working overseas, such as many in the School of Development Studies, engagement with the 'local' community potentially implied an entirely different geographic group. Therefore, the meaning attached to different 'publics of place' depended upon a person's point of reference.

A number of interviewees talked about different 'publics of interest' when giving examples of engagement activities. Some interviewees talked about audiences such as 'school children', 'patients' or 'women'. There was even reference to more organised publics such as all, or parts, of the voluntary and community sector, the faith sector or business sector. Other interviewees spoke about "... *policy communities ...*" or "... *policy-makers ...*" as a target audience for public engagement activity. This included work with government departments and other professional bodies.

c. The different levels of engagement

A number of interviewees talked about the different levels of engagement, while others did so indirectly through describing activities that they considered as communication. This ranged from the class linear or one-way model “... *in which knowledge gets translated as it goes through various communication channels, with the hope that the wider public will understand it and find value in it ...*” (Head of School) through to “... *genuine dialogue activities where the public are given opportunity not just to inform but to influence what we do ...*” (Senior Academic).

The term ‘knowledge transfer’ (KT) was sometimes used to refer to the one-way public engagement activities that transfer knowledge from academics to others. In particular how the findings from research might be applied in policy and practice. This was distinguished from the ‘knowledge exchange’ or ‘engagement’ activities that involved a two-way flow of information and an exchange of views. However, knowledge transfer had become known to some solely in terms of commercial activities, such as consultancy work and spin-out companies, including those given the responsibility to champion the agenda.

“... KT activities which are increasingly seen, I think, as generating income streams.” (Head of School).

“I think knowledge transfer has got a bad reputation for a number of reasons. It’s all about how does my knowledge have financial use for industry.” (Head of School).

Therefore, using the terms ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘public engagement’ to distinguish between different levels of engagement can be problematic.

d. The role of discipline area

The ‘Faculty’ that a respondent was employed in appeared to directly influence their definition of public engagement, and the language they used to define it. As one academic suggested, “*I think my perspective is coloured really by the School I work for*”. For example, in the Faculty of Health public engagement was synonymous with ‘user involvement’, showing the direct influence of the National Health Service (NHS) user involvement agenda. An academic from this faculty stated:

“I suppose the Faculty of Health is uniquely placed in that public engagement comes in a particular focused way which is about service users. We are shaping a strategy in the Faculty around service user involvement; both in developing the curriculum and within the curriculum.” (Head of School).

In the Faculty of Science, 'science communication' occasionally featured in people's responses. Interviewees from other Faculties regularly talked about public engagement in terms of promoting their subject area or disseminating research findings but there was no shared terminology in use.

There were also differences between Schools in terms of how 'public facing' certain disciplines were. Discipline areas, such as the social sciences and health, have always had a level of interaction with the public, as they concern the study of people. One interviewee in the Faculty of Health said "... *the very nature of a medical School is to engage with the public ...*", whilst another in the Faculty of Social Sciences suggested "...*as a researcher in my field I have to get out in to the community and speak to people ...*". The difference, perhaps, was whether people were perceived only as subjects or whether they were involved in a more meaningful way that encouraged genuine dialogue and debate.

4.1.2 Involvement in public engagement

Most of those questioned during this study were involved in some form of public engagement, when defined in its broadest sense. However, not all would have necessarily conceptualised their activities in such terms. When interviewees were asked if they had been personally involved in public engagement, 46 (84%) said that they had. However, there was a bias in the interview sample, with more senior figures included as a result of interviewing all the Heads of Schools, so it was unlikely that this figure was representative of the whole academic population at UEA.

Involvement consisted largely of one-way information flow activities, such as public lectures, media work or writing for non-academic audiences. A range of two-way activities were also cited, such a pro-bono work, blogs, participatory research and involving the public in democratic decision making, involving patients in the development of curriculum and teaching, working with schools to shape curriculum, activity days and dialogue events, sitting on charity boards and other bodies. A range of examples have been provided in Box 1. Again, respondents found it challenging to respond to a question about their involvement in public engagement with little certainty about what it referred to. However, as the research was exploratory, the researcher was reluctant to provide too many prompts.

The type of engagement activity and level of engagement appeared to be influenced by a range of factors. These included subject area, research topic, stage of research and seniority. On this latter point, one senior academic suggested *“At senior level you are obviously called much more to public platforms and bodies ...”*. Whilst in terms of subject area, demand-led public engagement was certainly stronger in some areas than others. One interviewee from the School of Mathematics stated, *“Put it simply, nobody has come knocking on my door with a microphone or a camera”*.

In general, involvement in public engagement was voluntary. Often people were doing public engagement in their own time, such as in the evening or at weekends. This was unless it had already been integrated into their role in some way, such as a condition of funding or engagement as a research methodology. The fact that public engagement mostly took place in academics personal time was a point of contention for one academic, *“We all do it in our spare time and then the University takes the credit.”*

It was stressed by a number of interviewees that public engagement was not suitable for all academics: *“A lot of people became academics precisely because they didn’t want to engage with the public”*. A small number argued that it was not suitable for all research areas, as one academic stated *“Public engagement is not always a natural extension of research”*.

Box 1: Examples of public engagement activities

Engaging young people – some academics had participated in large-scale events aimed at engaging young people. Others participated in much smaller-scale activities but by no means of lesser value. For example, the *Streetlaw* event, held in June 2008, which was a day of quizzes, games and mock trials aimed to help young people get a better understanding of the law and how it affects them. The event was attended by 230 school students, from 8 different schools, with over 20 UEA students and 6 UEA staff involved in the planning and running of the day. In contrast, one academic regularly attended fairs and fetes at the weekend to put on demonstrations about wildlife for young people.

Public lectures – most academic Schools at UEA put on public lectures, with some programmes more extended than others. The School of Philosophy (PHI), for example, held an annual public lecture series as part of the Royal Institute of Philosophy Public Lecture Series. The School of Film and Television Studies (FTV) had established a strong partnership with the local art house cinema 'Cinema City', with academics regularly giving talks there. The School of American Studies (AMS) had delivered talks on the recent American elections to help the public gain a better understanding of the electoral process.

Media work - many academics discussed involvement in media work. One academic wrote regularly for newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, whilst another had a monthly radio slot. Others less formally gave comments on certain topics, ranging from Big Brother to climate change, or discussed research findings in the local, national and international press and media.

Charitable boards and volunteering - academic staff sat on the board of trustees or volunteered for a range of charitable organisations, including: Norfolk Education and Action for Development (NEAD), Norwich Historic Buildings Group, The New Writing Partnership, Princes Trust, Mind, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), British Red Cross and many others. A number volunteered for local schools either as governors or to help out in the classroom.

Participatory research – in the School of Environmental Science (ENV) academics had worked on analytical deliberative processes with the general public and experts to explore topics such as organ transplantation and radio active waste and associated risks. Another researcher in the Faculty of Health (FoH) had used a co-learning and participatory research strategy for their research design which involved working with people with a particular illness.

Public involvement in teaching – in the School of Nursing and Midwifery (NAM), members of the public had been invited to participate in teaching either to demonstrate their disability or illness to help students understand it or to demonstrate how they live with their disability or illness.

Developing school curriculum – one academic in the School of Literature and Creative Writing (LIT) was talking to a group of A level English teachers about the way that they teach literature, as the A level syllabus had changed to allow more creative writing. As part of this process the academic had invited literary critics and novelists to address the teachers.

Engaging parents – academics and students from the School of Chemistry (CAP) had repeatedly put on a programme of activities for parents on admissions days so that they were not just left hanging around. This involved demonstrating experiments in the labs and communicating with them about what actually goes on in the School.

4.1.3 The importance of public engagement

A lot of the academics interviewed saw public engagement as important but not as important as other activities, particularly core activities like teaching, research, and even administration. The following quotes illustrate this:

“There’s no doubt that your teaching and your research, and especially your research, is the key thing in your career from a promotion and progression point of view. Whereas public engagement is seen as a little bit on the outside of this, so it is not important in the sense of getting ahead but I think in terms of your sense of what you are there in the world to do it’s very important.” (Head of School).

“It’s very difficult to stay because it almost comes into a different category because it is not part of my job description or one of the measures against which I think I will ever be measured ... it’s more like deciding do I want to go for a run today? It’s something I enjoy and it’s important but I don’t really see it as part of my paid job.” (Senior Researcher).

“It’s a good additionality thing. If you’ve done all you have to do and find time to do this on top - that’s brilliant!” (Head of School).

There remained some academics who could not “... see the point ...” of public engagement or weren’t clear “... that it actually makes that much sense”. One Head of School argued whether academics were really the best placed people for engaging the public and pondered whether it ought to be “... the job of the BBC or whatever to translate what we do into public facing activity”. Another felt that public engagement was not always positive for academic progress: “There is a danger that you loose sight of the really important academic issues if you keep looking for things that appeal to the outside world”.

For two of the researchers interviewed this question held less meaning. Both were involved in participatory research projects where research and engagement were interlinked and, therefore, one could not be given priority over the other.

There was variation between the Heads of Schools in terms of how important they viewed public engagement. It was commented by one academic that a lack of public engagement leadership by the Head of School can sometimes “... rub off ...” because they set the priorities for that School.

There was the shared view amongst the Heads of School that when managing a School budget it was not always easy to justify academic time being spent on non-

core activities, such as public engagement, or to give priority to them, particularly when it was unclear what the impact for the School would be.

“... the increasing commercialisation of universities, more bureaucracy, targets et cetera and as a Head of School you have to manage this and when the benefit of public engagement is less tangible it is hard to prioritise.” (Head of School).

“Because I am a manager, in the end I would have to ask the question ‘where is the income stream?’” (Head of School).

Academics viewed public engagement as important for a number of reasons. At an individual level, the main reasons included:

- Accountability for public funding
- Self-worth
- Improving public understanding of a given subject
- Stimulate interest in a subject
- Improving the validity of research

One academic stated, *“I love what I do and I love talking about what I do so I’ll find any excuse”*.

For the university more widely, these main reasons included:

- Community relations
- Recruiting more students and staff
- Income generation
- Demystifying higher education
- Ethnic and cultural relations

4.1.4 Barriers to public engagement

There were a wide range of barriers to public engagement cited by interviewees. Some of the institutional barriers were specifically explored through the interview schedule, such as support and reward for public engagement. These are discussed in Sections 4.1.5 – 4.1.8. The other barriers given are presented here:

Time

Almost unanimously, time was seen as the greatest barrier to public engagement. Academics felt increasing pressures on their time; most often working far in excess of

their specified work hours. There was particular concern that time spent on public engagement would take away from research and teaching. Furthermore, that it would affect the quality of the students learning experience. The barrier of time was compounded by the fact that public engagement often featured at the low end of an academic's list of priorities or that it was not thought of as "... *core business* ...".

Career progression

Public engagement was not seen as good for career progression by most interviewees, either at UEA or in the wider higher education sector. The HE sector was seen as an increasingly competitive environment where academics were judged solely in terms of publication outputs and grant income. The following quotes illustrate academics views on this:

"It's not going to be anything we can use on our CV for future job applications, so I suppose the brutal truth of it is it's got to be done as an act of social citizenship rather than anything else." (Senior Researcher).

"I can't really see anyone getting promoted on the basis that their public engagement was enormous and they hadn't brought in any research grant and they hadn't published anything." (Head of School).

There was some concern expressed for young academics. It was felt that for those with no academic track record behind them, the lack of career recognition for public engagement activities could act as a major disincentive to getting involved.

A very small number of academics from across Schools saw public engagement as positive for their careers, suggesting that it "... *demonstrated a particular attitude, like drive and enthusiasm* ..." or that it could help you "... *forge links that can be used in the future* ...".

Peer approval

Some interviewees were worried about their reputation amongst fellow academics. There were concerns that one risked being deemed a "... *popular thinker* ..." or that "... *public engagement is going to be seen as a kind of dilution of your work or a dumbing down of your work*". Such views seemed mainly targeted at those academics with significant involvement with the media, illustrated in the following quotes:

"Academics are prejudice against it as it isn't seen as proper scholarship, mere journalism". (Senior Academic).

“I get the impression amongst certain colleagues that they disapprove. It might be the spotlight factor that some people may not appreciate.” (Academic).

“There are certain types of academics, such as the media or the cultural intellectuals, that turn up and spout about anything and these are actually the people that infuriate academics because they talk nonsense most of the time!” (Head of School).

The research-led culture

Strongly interlinked with career progression and peer approval, the research-led culture and pressure to publish was often cited as a barrier to public engagement. In particular, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was thought to be a major reinforcing factor in maintaining the research-led culture.

“If you take the RAE, the kind of work that it gives the highest rewards to is exactly the kind of work that doesn’t get on television, so there is a tension between the popular and the scholarly.” (Head of School).

“Most people are only doing work that is recognised by the RAE criteria.” (Senior Academic).

Risk

For some academics, public engagement involved getting out of their “... *comfort zone* ...” and “... *working in unfamiliar territory* ...”. A couple of academics expressed concern that they did not know what the public wanted or whether an activity would be worthwhile.

There was concern about being misinterpreted or that public engagement might “... *damage [the] reputation* ...” of the individual academic, their School, or the University, if the engagement activity was not received favourably. This view intensified where potentially controversial topics were involved. One academic suggested “... *if public engagement is going to stir up the wrong reaction then it is safer not to do it*”. However, not all saw controversy as negative:

“It was a debate. Not everything that will be said about that conference will necessarily be positive but the fact that it sparked the public’s imagination and the press’ imagination in that way is really important.” (Academic).

Funding

Increasingly funders were requesting public engagement be included as part of research grant outputs and this has provided some resources to carry out public engagement. One academic from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities commented that *“Three out of the four applications that I put in last year for funding asked about the potential for knowledge transfer and engagement”*. However, no School had a specific budget line for public engagement. Those carrying out smaller, less formalised activities, often wanted access to a small pot of funds to cover basic costs, such as room hire and marketing materials. A couple of the academics interviewed had actually paid for activities out of their own pocket; although they hadn't always approached the School to see if they could have funding. One academic stated *“I haven't asked but I don't think it would be forthcoming.”*

Attitude

No respondent directly suggested that attitude towards public engagement was a barrier. However, it was clear from the interviews that those academics who viewed public engagement as a positive activity were much more likely to be involved in it.

The challenges of engaging people

Engaging the public was not always seen as easy, particularly when a sustained dialogue relationship was to be achieved. Academics made a range of comments on the challenges of engaging people. Some of the issues are illustrated in the following quotes:

“Part of the problem is actually sparking engagement in the first place. Not all events have the same ‘grab’ ... It's an issue of grass-roots interest and finding a public audience. I've done a variety of events that have been variously attended. It depends on the promotion these things get. It depends on what the topic is.” (Academic).

“It is extremely difficult to engage these people fully and equally. It is the ‘equally’ bit which is very important. So for example, if they have no knowledge about what Higher Education is about then it can be really difficult to develop curriculum. You have to go back to the basics about how HE courses are structured.” (Head of School).

“The occasional outcome of research is that it is easily digestible but the vast majority of the outcomes of research are not so easily packaged.” (Head of School).

A couple of academics discussed “... *engagement fatigue* ...”, particularly in relation to research engagement where the same ‘public’ was repeatedly targeted. In one story an academic discussed having to withdraw part of an undergraduate course because the community felt over consulted.

Media

There were mixed views about the media. Whilst some academics experience of the media was very positive and they perceived the media as a key partner in engaging the public, others had much more reserved views. One academic refused to have the interview recorded on the grounds that they had been “... *stung* ...” before by the media and as a consequence no longer liked to be recorded. Another discussed having to “... *fit in to the medias own agenda* ...”, whether this was your viewpoint or not. Therefore, this sometimes difficult and untrusting relationship with the media was seen as a barrier to public engagement.

4.1.5 Recording public engagement

Very little recording of public engagement activities took place. In fact several interviewees reported that they had carried out public engagement activities but had not reported them through any official channels, or in some cases, mentioned to anybody at the University. According to one academic the lack of any such record has led to the “... *whole thing becoming invisibilised* ...”.

In the School of Biology a ‘Bio-Tracker’ was being piloted; a basic online tool for individuals to report their engagement activities. The School of Environmental Sciences published annual reports, which captured some of the public engagement activities and events that have taken place in the School. Some Schools put “... *special announcements on their websites saying what public engagement people have been doing*”; although this was done with variable organisation and frequency. A small number of academics included public engagement activities, such as media work and public lectures, on their CV’s. It was also suggested that ‘Media Watch’, on the back of the Broadview magazine, was also a form of monitoring public engagement and made it more visible.

The annual Community Engagement and Outreach Survey was cited by the researcher as an existing mechanism that captured some of the public engagement activities at UEA. However, only a small number of the Heads of School and the

other senior figures interviewed seemed aware of the survey. However, this was not to say that they hadn't completed and submitted the survey before.

There was concern expressed amongst some academics about capturing their public engagement outputs through fear that a manager might think they were spending too much time on it. One interviewee suggested:

"Nobody knows whether it counts towards their work time, so it dis-swags people from doing it or telling people they are doing it because they might be called upon to fill up those hours somewhere else." (Researcher).

One academic also suggested that the fact public engagement was not recorded sent out the message that it was not important. The academic commented:

"It's the old story that when you start measuring things you start influencing them. The very fact that these things are not automatically being captured, that people aren't being asked to indicate their degrees of engagement, is sending a signal to colleagues about the extent to which that is being taken seriously." (Academic).

4.1.6 Recognising public engagement

There was a mixed response to this question, with some categorically stating that public engagement was not recognised. Other interviewees said that it was recognised but only at the School level and some felt only the "...*highlights are recognised really well...*". For example, activities that make it into Broadview or other media. Some interviewees definitely felt that recognition for public engagement was growing, as in all universities, as the government and funders push the agenda.

4.1.7 Supporting public engagement

There appeared to be some level of senior management support for public engagement, but as one academic commented, "*Support is personal rather than organisational...*" and, therefore, varied between the Schools. Interviewees gave examples of being allocated the time to go and do one off public engagement activities or where the School had paid for their travel expenses, but this was very ad hoc. A couple of interviewees had received funding from the Alumni Association to support public engagement. The lack of coordinated support for public engagement is highlighted in the following quotes:

"Do I feel supported by the University? Not in any tangible sense." (Head of School).

“Public engagement is not part of an overall strategy which is positively encouraged or where people sign up to it. It happens because someone with a bit of public spiritedness says oh we should be doing this for the Schools.” (Senior Academic).

One academic stated that, at the School level, public engagement had “... *actively been discouraged ...*” because it was seen as a distraction from core activities. Academics were not always clear who to approach regarding support for the public engagement. Even when support was available, it wasn’t always known. One academic said:

“I’ve only just found out that all the resources and equipment that I’ve had to source myself are actually freely available from [name of academic] in the School.” (Academic).

Again, definition of public engagement was important when asking about support. One academic said, *“If you are talking about public policy engagement then that is definitely encouraged and supported.”*

Some academics, in particular those from the smaller Schools, raised the issue of a lack of, or dispersion of, administrative support, especially since the restructuring into Faculties. This presented a challenge when “... *coordinating and organising ...*” engagement activities, which typically took up a substantial amount of time.

At the strategic level there appeared to be a strong willingness to support public engagement. However, a small number of these simply regarded public engagement as a public relations exercise or a way to generate more income in the long-term.

It was felt that the institution needed to provide a clearer mandate for public engagement. One academic said, *“It doesn’t take a great deal for an institution to show from the top what degree of support there is for this type of activity”*. Another stated *“The signals for academic staff are diverse, complex and contradictory”*. Some suggested that having the Beacon status was the clearest indication yet that public engagement was rising up UEA’s strategic priorities.

4.1.8 Rewarding public engagement

Public engagement was not rewarded in a formal way at UEA. At most, it was commented by Heads of Schools that public engagement had been brought up in promotion application discussions, as “... *a testament of character ...*” or included in

a job reference as an indication that the individual was "... a fully rounded academic ...".

It was suggested by a couple of academics that there was scope to promote people for their public engagement work under the knowledge transfer heading in the promotions criteria. However, there was no evidence, from those interviewed, that anyone had been promoted because of their public engagement activities. However, an academic might get "... a pat on the back ..." informally or a "... commendation and encouragement ..." for their engagement work.

4.1.9 Evaluation

Very little evaluation of public engagement activities at UEA took place. Formalised events sometimes were evaluated using basic event evaluation forms, but aside from these, much of the feedback was anecdotal:

"We don't evaluate, only in an anecdotal way, nothing systematic. Time and resources, I think, are a big part of the problem here."

One academic, who did activities at fairs and other public gatherings, also commented that they didn't feel evaluation was always appropriate:

"Just the thought of handing them a questionnaire at the end of it and saying can you fill that in and hand it back is, well it would put me off doing it really. It kind of distracts from the friendly atmosphere you are trying to impart." (Academic).

Whilst funders were increasingly asking for public engagement as part of their grant applications, there appeared to be a lack of accountability in terms of requesting that the impact of these activities was suitably measured.

4.1.10 Reflection on findings

Public engagement can take many different forms within the context of a higher education institution; from the one-way communication activities, like public lectures that aim to share knowledge more widely, to work with schools or participatory research, where the public are engaged in dialogue. The findings from this study highlight that there was no one definitive level of public engagement; different levels or combinations of levels were best suited to differing circumstances. However, that said, where possible the highest level of engagement should be sought. Engagement in which there is sustained dialogue and debate between academics and publics.

Whilst not wanting to constrain the meaning of public engagement through definition, it was important to develop a shared understanding of public engagement. Academics' opinions on this varied widely, across a number of dimensions and at times these were coloured by discipline area. Developing a shared understanding of public engagement may also help foster a broader understanding. For example, whilst health related academics may have a certain view of public engagement centred on involving users and patients, this does not mean that they should not be doing other types of public engagement activities as well.

A clearer definition of public engagement is particularly important for measurement purposes, as without operationalising the concept it would be a challenge to measure its impact. For the same reason, it is important to be clear about the meaning of 'public'. The term clearly had different meanings depending on the context. Because of the various uses of public, there were slight concerns that public engagement might become the sweeping term for all university 'engagement' activities. In the researcher's view, public engagement with non-specialists was only part of a broader university engagement agenda, which might include work with other institutions or businesses.

The low priority given to public engagement at present did not mean that academics thought it to be unimportant or were not involved in it. Indeed, most of the academics interviewed had been involved in some form of public engagement. However, the sample did include a disproportionate number of senior figures. The Royal Society report (2006) suggested that senior scientists were more likely to be involved in public engagement than junior colleagues, thus the 84% recorded here was likely to be an over estimate.

Very little recording of public engagement took place at UEA and what did get recorded appeared to only happen at the School level. The lack of regular monitoring regarding the level or nature of public engagements taking place at UEA highlights the need for a more formalised system. As public engagement becomes more visible and academics become more aware of other colleagues involvement, they might feel more inclined to do it themselves. However, it will be a challenge to stimulate more activity until public engagement is considered as part of people's jobs, or at least recognised as an activity that is valued by the institution.

A number of barriers to public engagement were cited by academics at UEA, from individual barriers, such as attitudes and skills, to institutional barriers, such as support and recognition for public engagement. These barriers were compounded by outside pressures within the HE sector, such as those placed upon institutions to produce research outputs, which in turn shape pathways for career progression. Addressing these barriers not only needs to take place within the individual institution but more significantly throughout the whole HE sector.

The findings suggest that public engagement was not strategically supported at any level at UEA, though some pockets of support were available. There appeared to be a strong willingness at the strategic level to support public engagement. However, in the researcher's opinion, it was felt the reasons for this were sometimes misguided. In particular, a small number regarded public engagement as simply a public relations exercise or, for those that saw it as solely knowledge transfer, a way to generate increased income.

The lack of any clear mandate for public engagement, prior to being awarded Beacon status, had made it challenging for those in managerial positions to actively provide encouragement and support. Limited financial resources to support public engagement, coupled with the perception that public engagement didn't bring in any income, made financial-based decision-making difficult. And whilst increasingly one of the conditions of many research grants was public engagement outputs, it was suggested that this was often tokenistic as academics were not being held accountable by funders.

Interviewees thought it to be particularly important to encourage and support young academics and postgraduate research students when they undertook public engagement, as they were the future academics. However, it was these young academics that were most influenced by the lack of recognition of public engagement for career progression, which operated as a barrier to public engagement.

There were no formal rewards for undertaking public engagement reported. This lack of formal recognition was often cited as a barrier to public engagement by academics. Rewarding academics through promotions was seen as the main way public engagement could be formally rewarded.

Very few academics were evaluating their public engagement activities, other than receiving anecdotal feedback. In fact most had not even considered evaluation. The difficulty with evaluating public engagement was that it was not just about numbers, it was about impact and that was not always easy or cheap to measure.

In summary, public engagement at UEA has been flourishing in spite of the lack of strategic institutional support. Nevertheless, there is much scope to stimulate greater levels of activity, in particular activities that focus on dialogue, to better coordinate existing activities and to develop and share best practice. Developing a culture at UEA where public engagement is a highly valued activity for staff and students will require time. However, this seems a timely opportunity for CUE East to begin to address some of the barriers to engagement, such as developing formal structures to recognise, support and reward it.

4.2 Community University Engagement (CUE) East

4.2.1 Knowledge of CUE East

All participants were asked whether they knew about CUE East prior to being contacted for the baseline interview. Of those interviewed, 35% said that they had heard of CUE East. This included 12 Heads of Schools, four Faculty members, two Associate Deans for Knowledge Transfer or Research and one Pro Vice Chancellor (Table 5).

Table 5: Breakdown of respondents that had heard of CUE East

Role	N^o Interviewed	N^o 'Yes'	% 'Yes'
Head of School	21	12	57%
Faculty sample	31	4	13%
Associate Dean for KT/ Research*	2	2	100%
Pro Vice Chancellor	1	1	100%
Total	55	19	35%

*In total 4 Associate Deans for Knowledge Transfer (KT) and 2 Associate Deans for Research were interviewed. However, those that occupy more than one role, have been included in this table in their main capacity as Heads of Schools.

This greater proportion of senior members of UEA staff that knew of CUE East, in particular the Heads of Schools, was most likely due to the fact they had directly been sent publicity about the programme prior to the interview. In addition, by the time the interviews took place, public engagement had already been included in UEA's Corporate Plan. However, the hierarchical organisational structure at UEA can

mean that it takes time for a strategic initiative to get "... *filtered down to the foot soldiers ...*".

Of those that had heard of CUE East, very few were clear about its objectives or what it was planning to do, who was involved, or how they could contact. The few academics that had already worked with the CUE East team regarded them very highly: "... *I've heard nothing but good things about them*" and "... *they're determined ...*".

At the time of carrying out the interviews, it was noted that the CUE East team had yet to establish formal links with each of the Schools. However, they had already established some good links with individual academics.

4.2.2 Engagement tracker

There were mixed responses to the idea of introducing an online engagement tracker. Many interviewees voiced resistance to the idea. There was a strong feeling amongst the academics that they were being over-regulated. Hence they were inevitably resistant to the suggestion of what appeared to be additional bureaucracy. As one academic stated:

"The trouble is that we live in an audit culture and people are bitter, and resentful, and every single bit that seemed to make sense by itself actually adds to the other 50,000 audits that people are being required to do for some unspecified performance management system". (Head of School).

There were examples given of negative experiences with UEA 'Track' system, which monitors the hours academics worked. This was particularly by Heads of School who were left with the additional responsibility of having to chase people to fill in their records.

In fact, those that were actively involved in public engagement were very supportive of the idea and were keen to have a mechanism through which they could capture and report on what they do: "*If you're doing it why not count it...*", was one response. However, the biggest challenge appeared to be how to ensure people completed the tracker once launched.

There were a range of views on how to encourage the use of the Engagement Tracker. A number of interviewees stated that the benefits of completing the tracker must be made clear, including what the data would be used for. It was thought that it might be helpful to tie the tracker in to some incentive scheme and that “... *offering a carrot would be better than beating with a stick ...*”. It was also suggested that it should be made clear what public engagement was and what counted. It was thought that prompts and examples would help convey this. Also it was frequently stated that the tracker must be simple and logical to complete.

Also suggested by a couple of individuals was that the tracker should have “*An email prompt to remind you to use it, saying ‘what public engagement have you been up to?’ ‘Have you remembered to record it?’*” It was felt that despite any good intentions to enter activities, people would more than likely forget to do so. However, a caution was raised that “... *reminders shouldn’t be too frequent otherwise it would be discouraging ...*”.

Two interviewees worked at both UEA and the Norwich Research Park (NRP) and both commented on how much more organised the reporting systems were at their NRP organisation. They discussed benefits of the ‘Measures of Esteem’ approach, such as being able “... *to push a button and print all your activities of ...*”. This retrieval function was one of the perceived benefits to recording public engagement activities using an Engagement Tracker. One academic commented:

“I think I would use it if you could access it and I needed to update my CV or something and I could see it was all there and I could use it for that; so it wasn’t just for the university to see how much public engagement was going on but it had a practical use for me.” (Researcher).

Indeed, those who had been piloting the ‘Bio Tracker’ to capture public engagement activities had said that not being able to view entries was one of its limitations. One academic said, “*I just enter it and it disappears. It’s very basic. It would be useful to view it and also maybe what other people in the School are doing so if it’s similar you can go and have a chat with them.*”.

Those who were against the idea of an online Engagement Tracker were asked what alternative approach should be used to capture public engagement. The main alternative suggested was to encourage the inclusion of public engagement on people’s CV’s. Similar to how people record conferences attended or presented at,

public engagement could become another heading on the academic CV. However, there would still be an administrative duty with this approach in order to collect and process the data centrally. Another suggestion was to appoint a key individual in each School to collate this information. Indeed, some Schools, typically the larger ones, already had an individual that was responsible for knowledge transfer or communications.

4.2.3 Continuing professional development (CPD)

The most frequently mentioned areas in need of training were communication skills and working with the media; although these might just reflect people's interpretation of public engagement. Most felt that academics should already be equipped with communication skills, particularly those involved in teaching. The communication skills thought to be required for public engagement that were most frequently cited included 'empathy' and 'understanding your audience'.

In regard to training for working with the media, it appeared that not all who had suggested this were aware that training was already available through the Centre for Staff and Educational Development (CSED) at UEA. However, the small number that had been on the training rated it highly. Academics seemed particularly interested in practicing different types of media engagement, such as "*Giving people a sense of how different interviews can be*".

A few academics suggested that help was needed to come up with ideas for a public engagement activity or identifying opportunities and then assistance with turning this into practice, including having a 'safe' audience or 'sounding board' to test things on. One academic in the Faculty of Science commented:

"What do you think the general public will want to know about science? Do they actually want to know it? We think it is important but are we just stuffing it down their throats?" (Senior Academic).

Academics suggested the follow areas as training needs:

- Introduction to public engagement
- Marketing and publicising your engagement activity
- Working with children and young people
- Diversity and cultural needs
- Shadowing public engagement practitioners

Reviewing the actual structure of the training courses, some academics thought that training should be focused on individual Schools, or at least, individual Faculties to improve relevance. It was commented by a couple of academics that the generic CSED courses were not always relevant to their subject area. However, there was a stronger argument that training should be across Schools, as one of the main benefits of such activities was the potential for collaborative inter-School work. One academic summed it up as *'It opens your eyes to a bigger community'*.

It was explicitly stressed that training should be non-compulsory as it would hold little relevance to those that were not thinking of carrying out public engagement. In terms of the length of training, it was commented that the maximum should be one day. There was interest in short 'bite-size' courses or 'short sharp bursts' run over half a day or even at lunch time. Some people commented that any longer and it would be difficult to 'justify', unless it was specific to your role.

A number of academics said the public engagement training should be made available to PhD students.

"I think it would be really useful for PhD students to have access to that kind of training. If they go on to other jobs they are probably going to need it and if they haven't had that sort of training it can actually be quite daunting at first". (Academic).

4.2.4 Public Engagement Awards

The Public Engagement Awards provoked mixed responses, both in terms of the concept and structure. A small number of academics chose not to answer this question, one stating *"I honestly don't know where you would start"*. Some academics were opposed to the idea of public engagement awards *per se*. One academic described UEA's Excellence in Teaching Award as a *"... political hit or miss ..."*. Others were 'delighted' on hearing that awards for public engagement were going to be made available.

There were a range of views on how the public engagement awards should be structured. All interviewees thought there needed to be multiple awards; public engagement was felt to cover far too wide a range of activities and UEA was deemed to be too diverse an institution to capture this in one award.

"I think it needs to be flexible enough to recognise activities that might range from public lectures all the way through to providing academic leadership for community based groups and work with organisations like

Aimhigher and organisations like the BBC. I think that you will need several different types of awards that reflect that variety.” (Lecturer).

This then prompted discussion about what the criteria for the different awards should be. There were a number of points raised for consideration. These included:

- Will the awards be for individuals, projects or Schools?
- Will the awards be split by Faculty, type of public engagement activity or level of engagement?
- Will there be an award for students?
- How do you compare one-off activities with longer-term ones?
- Will funded activity, such as that required as part of a grant application, be compared with that done in an academics spare time or off their own backs?
- Are the awards looking to reward “...*excellence in public engagement or encourage innovation ...*” or both?
- How will the awards ensure that longstanding commitment to public engagement is rewarded and not just high profile activities, “... *so we have awards to reward colleagues who have been committed to this even when it wasn't fashionable*”.
- What evidence of impact will be accepted?

A small number of interviewees voiced the opinion that “... *a role of honour ...*” approach would be more suited, especially if the aim was more than just to reward individuals, but also to make the range of public engagement activities more visible. Furthermore, this would provide “... *lots of ideas to others ...*” about the public engagement activities that were going on.

4.2.5 Promotions criteria

When talking about rewards for public engagement, academics often discussed the inclusion of public engagement in promotions criteria. This was seen by many as the main mechanism through which public engagement could be formally rewarded at UEA.

At the time of undertaking these interviews, the promotions criteria already included a section on knowledge transfer. However, academics were less clear on how this was working in practice. One academic stated that “... *it's not tightly structured like research output or teaching where it is very clear how it gets broken down ...*”.

Three main concerns with the promotion criteria emerged: what public engagement activities would be included; how quality as well as quantity of output would be measured; and, what weight, if any, would be given to such activities in practice, even if public engagement was included in the promotions criteria. One academic commented, *“How would they measure a good idea or what would constitute a good engagement model compared to an average one?”* Further questions were raised in respect to whether public engagement would be included in workload allocation and potentially people’s job descriptions.

Another issue raised by an academic was about the transferability of an academics public engagement record, even if UEA embraced such activities within its own promotions criteria. This was of particular significance for academics that moved between institutions, for promotion or more personal reasons. The academic commented:

“In order to make any progress with your own career you have got to publish ... even if views or attitudes within UEA change, unless it was to become the case that other universities had started accepting academics on the grounds of their public engagement, I can’t see this changing.” (Senior Researcher).

However, overall it was viewed that including public engagement in promotions criteria would give recognition to those that do a lot of it.

“Whilst some academics won’t be terribly good at it, what it does mean is that those that are good at it and spend a lot of time doing it and are doing it well can at least be recognised for their contribution to the Universities wider aims and objectives.” (Academic).

4.2.6 CUE East at The Forum

Almost all academics responded positively to the idea of CUE East establishing a contact point for public engagement at The Forum, located in the centre of Norwich. Specifically, the attraction seemed to be having a venue off campus, as this was seen as an important factor in attracting new audiences that had not attended similar events before. However, any use would ultimately depend on the costs attached. Those that had held public engagement events at UEA complained about having to pay for room charges and struggling to find the funds without a specific School budget for this. One academic stated:

“I think part of the problem with running your own activities is that the University charges enormous amounts, even for internal events, so if

there is space somewhere off campus to use, which is less expensive, then you [CUE East] might find yourself overwhelmed with requests.” (Academic).

Most interviewees had a lot of ideas of things they might be able to do with the base at The Forum and interactive media facilities in the ‘Open Zone’; from communicating research findings or having themed weeks right through to using the facilities to pose questions to the public or to show student films. However, at the time the interviews took place it was unclear what space and facilities would be available or the level of access UEA staff and students would have to these. Therefore, the responses to this question were just hypothetical.

A number of academics commented on the potential roles for a UEA representative based at The Forum. Individual responses included media contact and event organiser, specifically having a responsibility for attracting audiences. A couple of academics suggested that this individual might be responsible for asking the public what they want UEA to do in terms of public engagement, as many were not sure. However, some were very cautious of this, suggesting it was important not to raise expectations, *“You can’t have someone go out there asking people what they want and then we’re not able to deliver it.”*

4.2.7 Reflection on findings

CUE East had already begun to make its mark by the time this baseline qualitative research was carried out; at least in terms of getting its own name and the broad purpose of the Beacons for Public Engagement known. There appeared to be still some way to go in terms of creating awareness of the programme amongst senior figures at UEA, and even further still in filtering this message down to the lower tiers of the organisational hierarchy. Interview respondents were keen for CUE East to clarify the meaning of public engagement, what activities it involves and what the programme will be doing to offer support.

There were a range of opinions on the proposed activities of CUE East. At times these were completely opposed. This was not unexpected in an organisation as large and diverse as UEA. Overall, there was a positive response to the CPD training and CUE East at The Forum. The responses to the Engagement Tracker and Awards Programme were more mixed, but this seemed to be a reaction to online monitoring or awards programmes in general, rather than specifically in the context of public

engagement. Both were very much supported by those who were regularly involved in public engagement and only time will tell whether in practice these activities will be a success.

It appeared vital that greater details on the nature and extent of public engagement at UEA is developed. The successful uptake of the Engagement Tracker will depend on its ease of use and ensuring that there are benefits for the academic, such as being able to retrieve their own record or to view what other engagement activities are taking place in the School or across the university.

The Public Engagement Awards were considered the most challenging proposal to turn into practice. Public engagement was thought to involve far too many diverse activities to differentiate between them in one award. The difficulty, therefore, was deciding on what the award categories and criteria should be to ensure inclusivity. However, the awards do not necessarily have to be inclusive of the breadth of public engagement that takes place. CUE East might, for example, want to use the awards to encourage a particular type of public engagement, such as that which focuses on dialogue or based on a particular themes.

In terms of promotions, it was thought that any changes in UEA's promotions criteria needed to also be reflected throughout the HE sector; because if public engagement is not recognised elsewhere then it is much less of an incentive.

5. Summary and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

When academics were asked to explain what the term 'public engagement' meant to them, responses varied widely. Some saw public engagement as a new umbrella term for existing higher education activities that involve an external audience, such as recruitment, public relations or knowledge transfer. However, most responses were multifaceted and depended on a number of different variables. These included the meaning of the term 'public', the dimensions of engagement and, interestingly, an academics subject area. The need to clarify the meaning of the term 'public engagement' was very apparent.

Based on their own definition of public engagement, 84% of the academics interviewed said that they had personally been involved in some form of public engagement. Although the interview sample included a high proportion of senior academics, so it was unlikely that this figure was representative of the academic community as a whole. Much of the activities cited were one-way communication activities, such as media work, public lectures and writing for a non-specialist audience. A smaller number of two-way dialogue activities were also given as examples, such as participatory research and public debates.

The research set out to explore academic attitudes towards public engagement. It was found that most thought that public engagement was important but when asked to list it in order of importance alongside research, teaching and other academic responsibilities, such as administration, public engagement was typically placed last. One of the main reasons for this was that public engagement was not considered a core activity, like these other activities.

A number of barriers to public engagement were cited, with apparent inter-relationships between many of these. These included individual barriers, such as attitudes and skills, institutional barriers, such as support and recognition for public engagement. In addition, external pressures within higher education, like the pressures placed upon institutions to produce research outputs to receive grant funding and on academics to progress their careers, were also cited as barriers. Addressing these barriers not only needs to take place within the individual institution but more significantly throughout the whole HE sector.

At UEA it was found that public engagement has been flourishing in spite of the lack of strategic institutional support. There was very little recording of current activities and there were no formal rewards for those involved in public engagement. Some pockets of support were available, but this was very much dependent on individual networks and relationships rather than a coordinated institutional approach to support public engagement. There appeared significant scope to improve the coordination, recognition and reward mechanisms for the public engagement activities currently taking place, whilst also encouraging new activities.

CUE East's Business Plan included a number of activities to be implemented over a four year period. Feedback from this research will help, in part, to shape these. Changing the culture at UEA, so that public engagement is a highly valued activity for

staff and students, will not happen immediately and will need the support of the institution and Higher Education funders. However, this seems a timely opportunity for CUE East to stimulate this process.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations

This research report presented a number of findings and suggests the following actions should be considered. These have been divided into general recommendations and those specific to the activities set out in CUE East's Business Plan:

- The term 'public engagement' should be clarified and a typology of activities developed.
- It is important that CUE East communicates its internal offer to staff and students; this should include creating better awareness of what public engagement is and why it is important to get involved.
- Efforts should be made to embed a greater confidence of longevity in regards to public engagement, by formalising it in institutional strategies and structures, to ensure that public engagement is not just seen as a short-term, government driven agenda.
- Improved co-ordination of current public engagement activities at UEA, through better recording, recognition and support, should be seen as equally important to encouraging new public engagement activities.
- There is a need for better communication and a clear understanding of responsibilities by those supporting public engagement at UEA. It would be helpful to review the current co-ordinating infrastructure for public engagement to ensure an institutionally coherent approach.
- Consider identifying a public engagement 'champion' or 'exemplar' in each School to help raise the profile of public engagement and provide CUE East with a clear link for working with each School.
- The barriers to public engagement that have been identified should to be considered, along with any practical steps to address them. It appears that CUE East has identified a number of activities in its Business Plan which might facilitate this process.
- As career progression was identified as a key barrier to public engagement, public engagement activities should contribute to the career progression of academic staff at UEA, through inclusion in job descriptions, appraisal and promotions criteria.
- A small funding stream should be made available to pay for the basic costs of public engagement activities. The application process should be quick and simple, with minimal conditions attached.
- Work with the National Coordinating Centre to make the case to Research Councils and other Higher Education research funders to increase the emphasis on public engagement as a condition of awarding grants. Encourage monitoring and impact measurement of public engagement to also be attached.

The following recommendations are specific to CUE East's planned activities:

- Consider developing and running 'bit sized' training courses as part of the programme of continuing professional development training for public engagement.
- It would be helpful if the Engagement Tracker had the facility for users to view their own record and a built in reminder system. It would also be advantageous if there was the facility to view other public engagement activities taking place across the institution.
- There were a number of points for consideration raised in this report in relation to the Public Engagement Awards. These should inform discussions on the structure of, and criteria for, the awards. It would be encouraging to have a Public Engagement Award for students as well as staff.

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