



“TO BUILD TRUST, WE NEED TO
BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.
COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL FOR
**MEANINGFUL
ENGAGEMENT;**
OUR STAFF AND STUDENTS
**GAIN AS MUCH
AS THE PUBLIC DO”**

Professor Steve Chapman, Principal of Heriot-Watt University

REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

15TH JUNE 2011

Introduction

The Edinburgh Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement held an event on 15 June 2011, focussing on 'Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities'. The event, part of the 'Big Ideas for Society' day of UK Universities Week 2011, brought together around 70 delegates to explore the concept of 'an engaged university'. Many aspects of public engagement were discussed including the benefits engagement already brings to Scottish Universities and strategies to embed engagement within institutions, in line with their individual mission and priorities. Key learning from this forum was immediately transferred to a lunchtime briefing at the Scottish Parliament, attended by MSPs, researchers, Scottish Parliament corporate staff, and Principals and Vice Principals of Scotland's Universities.

Key Learning points

- > Scotland's Universities are a force for positive social change.
- > If Public Engagement is a priority, it must be included in the staff development strategy - from recruitment to promotion prospects.
- > An interdisciplinary and cross-institutional approach to engagement has many benefits; there is a lot we can learn from each other. A public engagement 'pool' might help to achieve this.
- > Universities can offer practical help to politicians: academics can help to answer questions arising from MSPs' surgeries or committee meetings; contribute to consultations and take part in policy debates.
- > Our students have a role to play too. Thousands of our students are active in volunteering, student societies and other projects which make valuable contributions to communities, both here in Scotland and internationally.
- > To build trust, we need to build relationships. We can't wait until a crisis hits, we need to be transparent about the research that is happening, make an effort to correct misinformation, and listen to people's concerns.
- > We need to recognise the diversity of communities, and connect the right groups to the right information. A tailored approach is required to do this successfully; 'one size does not fit all'.
- > Engagement is about people connecting with people. Sharing our expertise and collaborating with communities is more effective than giving instructions; stories have more impact than messages.

Summary of the panel sessions

The opening panel shared their perspectives on the benefits of public engagement.

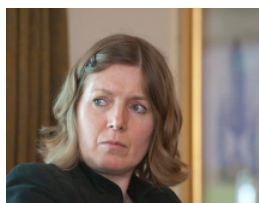
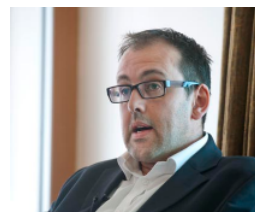


Dr Kathy Charles, a lecturer in psychology at Edinburgh Napier said, *“Public engagement allowed me to see small projects going on in the community which I wouldn’t have come into contact with if I was only reading journals. This experience has fed into my research and teaching - I can use real-life local examples, rather than research studies, and give a local context.”* Kathy’s input also benefited the people she worked with. *“I have also been able to give people who work with young offenders access to recently published knowledge and my own PhD work - I gave them ideas to add in to what they were doing with young people, and research methods to analyse their work.”*

Dr Anushka Miller described how The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) in Oban developed their engagement strategy. *“First we had to understand why people were not coming to events about the marine environment when their community is so based on it.”* To try and appeal to more people, Anushka and her team came up with the concept for the Festival of the Sea and involved local schools in developing the programme. The result was a rich mixture of art, performance, science, and activities with local schools and businesses, which *“allowed people to see the relevance of the science we do and how it fitted in with what they were doing. People started to see us as part of the community.”*



Robert Rae, Director of 3rd Horizons has an interest in public policy and described engagement in this area as a triangle between universities, the public, and policy centres. *“We need to understand the relationship between these groups if we want to see evidence-based policy. Most MSPs get information about research from the media; Universities need to be more proactive in presenting evidence to Holyrood.”*



Pauline Mullin, on behalf of the research councils, stated that genuine public engagement must be a priority: *“We do believe that there is great value for the research community. The public needs to know what research is and what it delivers - they can’t support it otherwise. It’s okay to spend time engaging with the public, its part of what research is about.”*

RCUK’s Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research was cited as evidence of the increasing expectation from funders that the institutions they fund (to do research) have an obligation to engage the public with their research.

Sophie Duncan, Deputy Director of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), recognised the *“fantastic work happening in universities already”* but also acknowledged that public engagement is not always well supported for a variety of reasons including work demands, time constraints and differing institutional priorities. However, help is available: *“The NCCPE has developed a toolkit for senior managers to help individual universities work out their purpose for engagement, assess the current support available to their staff and students, and then look to where they want it to be.”*



The University of Edinburgh and Heriot Watt University are among the institutions which have signed ‘The Engaged University: A Manifesto for Public Engagement’.

Professor Mary Bownes, Vice Principal for External Engagement at the University of Edinburgh, and Director of the Edinburgh Beltane, described the various ways of supporting Public Engagement within a university. *“Strategic commitment is important. This needs to filter down to several areas, including staff and student development and rewards and recognition. It’s also important to create opportunities for people to engage and to celebrate success.”*



Universities can
create positive
social change

Professor Steve Chapman, Principal of Heriot Watt University added *“Universities can create positive social change. We need to make sure people don’t feel alienated or frightened by new technology and ensure that universities are accessible. It’s not knowledge transfer; it is a two way exchange. Heriot Watt signed the Manifesto because our staff gain as much from public engagement as the public do.”*

Forum Discussion

The panel presentations prompted lively discussion with several strands emerging, including: the benefits of engagement; its legitimacy and the role of research funders; embedding engagement; and sharing best practice.

Benefits of engagement

The global challenges facing us present a compelling reason to engage. *“We want to be a leading technological university internationally. This involves dealing with big problems and in order to tackle those, we need to involve people beyond academia.”* Engagement is one way to *“find out what the public think about the relevance of universities and our research.”*

A partnership approach, with the aim of building ongoing relationships with our communities, can have many benefits. *“We can’t wait until a crisis hits, we need to be transparent about the research that is happening, make an effort to correct misinformation and listen to people’s concerns.”* *“To build trust, we need to build relationships.”* *“There are far more risks in not engaging than engaging.”*

Universities can collaborate with policymakers and the public in practical ways including: parliamentary questions and consultations; focussing on local or topical issues like housing, health and energy; and opening up membership of boards and advisory committees to members of the public.

Legitimacy of Engagement

There needs to be a clear message from funders that public engagement is a legitimate and valued activity. The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, and in particular the REF (Research Excellence Framework) and Pathways to Impact, have started to change some institutions’ priorities but many still feel that research funders could play more of a role: *“We need a stronger pull from research councils to challenge academics as to how they will integrate engagement into their research proposals.”... “If RCUK was more vocal, more demanding about what we do, that would give impetus and legitimacy.”*

“The key to doing public engagement is to get people to write it into their proposals. Then it becomes a legitimate resourced activity. Research councils need to make sure that applications have it and are enhanced by it.”

Embedding Engagement

For engagement to be sustainable it needs to be integrated into university processes, from the institution mission statement through colleges, departments, schools and faculties. This might involve development of central units to support researchers in their public engagement activities.



Our students have a role to play too!

Organisational culture plays an important role: *“People will ask ‘why should I bother engaging with the public if it doesn’t help, or hinders promotion?’ If it’s important, it needs to be clear it will be valued. That would take changes in university culture.”*

Including engagement in the career path of researchers was raised several times: *“To improve the culture, public engagement has to be part of the job description, and part of career development. This requires opportunities for training and taking part in PE.”* *“It needs to be part of the staffing strategy from recruitment to promotion”.*

It’s not just about staff. There are over 250,000 students at Scottish universities and thousands are already actively engaging with local communities through volunteering, student societies and research projects: *“Our students have a role to play too.”*

Best practice engagement

“We need to think of stories not messages. Really, engagement is about people connecting with people and sharing knowledge.” Communities are diverse: they can be based on geography, background, professional expertise and so on. We need to tailor our engagement strategies appropriately. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is not effective.

We also need to recognise that a community is made up of individuals, and remain flexible enough to accommodate different perspectives: *“People react very differently to different kinds of messages. We need to know a variety of ways to engage.”*

There is a lot to be learned from sharing best practice across disciplines and across institutions: *“Arts engagement with industry is a huge part of what we do, it’s core. Sciences might have more challenges but there could be overlap.”* It can also be valuable to work with public-facing partners: *“We need to be careful not to underplay the value of culture and engagement.”* *“TV programmes, museums, galleries, science centres, festivals: most engagement is cultural.”*

New technology is another area to explore: *“The internet has opened up new avenues to reach more people and share ideas.”* Rather than creating our own spaces, we should engage with communities where they are. For example, if people turn to Wikipedia for information, encouraging academics to edit pages relevant to their field could have a big impact.

A number of people discussed engaging with the media. *“The reason academics are frightened to engage with the media is the mismatch between what the media think the public want, and what academics want to convey as their message.”* *“Our challenge is to take the media and the community with us, and present it as a journey of discovery. This approach could allow us to engage better and include more people in debate and analysis.”*

Appendices

1. Organisations Represented in Discussions at the ‘Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities’ Workshop
2. Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities Workshop Programme
3. Biographies of Chair, Panellists and Speakers at the ‘Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities’ Workshop



Organisations Represented in Discussions at the 'Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities' Workshop

Scottish Universities

Edinburgh College of Art
Edinburgh Napier University
Glasgow Caledonian University
Glasgow School of Art
Heriot-Watt University
Queen Margaret University
Robert Gordon University
The Open University in Scotland
The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama
University of Aberdeen
University of Abertay, Dundee
University of Dundee
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of St Andrews
University of Strathclyde
University of the Highlands and Islands
University of the West of Scotland

Other Organisations

3rd Horizons
Edinburgh Beltane - Beacon for Public Engagement
Laura Grant Associates
Medical Research Council
National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
NUS Scotland
Our Dynamic Earth
Royal Observatory Edinburgh
Science and Technology Facilities Council
Scotland's Futures Forum
Scottish Funding Council
Scottish Government (Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser)
Scottish Universities Insight Institute
Universities Scotland

Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities Workshop Programme

WEDNESDAY 15th JUNE 2011

10.00am – 10.15am	Coffee and registration
10.15am – 10.30am	Welcome from Chair Lesley Riddoch , Award-Winning Journalist, Commentator, Broadcaster and current PhD Student (University of Strathclyde; University of Oslo)
10.30am – 10.45am	Perspectives on the benefits of public engagement <i>(Panel discussion; Questions & Answers)</i> Dr Kathy Charles , Lecturer, Edinburgh Napier University Dr Anuschka Miller , Head of Communications, Scottish Marine Institute (Oban) and Director of the Festival of the Sea Robert Rae , Director, 3rd Horizons Pauline Mullin , Head of Communications, Medical Research Council
10.45am – 11.30am	Manifesto for Public Engagement Sophie Duncan , Deputy Director, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement Professor Mary Bownes , Vice Principal (External Engagement), University of Edinburgh Professor Steve Chapman , Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Heriot-Watt University
11.30am – 11.45am	How can public engagement be supported at your institution, to help achieve your main strategic objectives and contribute to your future vision? <i>(Round table discussion)</i>
11.45am – 12.05pm	Strategic steps which can be taken to maximise the benefits of public engagement <i>(Plenary feedback)</i>
12.05pm – 12.20pm	Closing remarks from Professor Steve Chapman
12.20pm – 12.30pm	Lunch
12.30pm – 13.30pm	Close

Biographies of Panellists, Speakers and Chair at the 'Realising the Potential of Engaged Universities' Workshop

Panellists

Dr Kathy Charles, Lecturer, Edinburgh Napier University

Kathy is an Edinburgh Beltane Public Engagement Fellow. She is a lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University where she teaches specialist undergraduate modules in forensic psychology as well as research methods. She has a BSc (Hons) in Psychology with Sociology from the University of Leicester and a PhD in Forensic Psychology from Glasgow Caledonian University. She has always been keen to share forensic psychology with as many people as possible – both inside and outside of the traditional university environment. Her role as a Public Engagement Fellow allowed her to do this in a way which allowed psychological knowledge to be used practically by those who work directly with young people. It also enabled her to learn much more about the hands on work that is happening in Edinburgh.

Dr Anuschka Miller, Head of Communications at The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS, Oban)

Having a scientific background in climate relevant biogases, I have been specialising in the past decade in communicating science to the public and now head the communications department at the Scottish Marine Institute. I believe that direct communication between scientists and the public is valuable for all and constantly look for new ways of making it possible. Oban's 'Festival of the Sea' heavily involves the community while my latest initiative, the Scottish Ocean Explorer Centre, an exhibition and outreach centre, aims to integrate a visitor facility into the life of a research institute. I have also started working with film makers, students and artists to create films and art works that have long lifespans and are accessible from any computer. To improve the dialogue between scientists and the public further I champion student and staff training in a range of communication skills.

Robert Rae, Director, 3rd Horizons

Robert Rae is Director of the futures consultancy firm, 3rd Horizons and specialises in scenario planning and other futures tools. Formerly he was Director of Scotland's Futures Forum where he established the current partnerships with the Edinburgh Beltane and the Scottish Universities and Insight Institute. Robert sits on the Edinburgh Beltane Steering Group.

Pauline Mullin, Head of Communications, Medical Research Council

Pauline Mullin has 20 years experience in communication roles for a number of public and voluntary sector organisations. Following a science degree at the University of Edinburgh and a training post with Edinburgh Zoo, Pauline worked in press, campaigns and marketing for the Scottish SPCA and the Edinburgh International Science Festival. She was also General Manager of the Science Festival's schools touring division, Generation Science, where she doubled the size of the initiative until it delivered science shows and workshops to around 60,000 schoolchildren across Scotland each year. She went on to work for the East of Scotland KTP Centre, helping to set up and secure funding for knowledge transfer partnerships between academic teams and SMEs in the East of Scotland.

Pauline joined the MRC in 2006, initially as the Regional Communication Manager for Scotland and then as Head of the Corporate Communications Section where she has responsibility for public engagement, media relations, public affairs, internal communications and digital and print publications, as well as supporting colleagues and senior management in their interactions with stakeholders.

Speakers

Sophie Duncan, Deputy Director, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)

Sophie manages the overall work of the NCCPE including communications, partnerships and NCCPE projects. A physicist by training, Sophie started her career at the Science Museum in London where her work included exhibition development and public programmes. She became a programme manager with Science Year, before joining the BBC, where she managed the creation and delivery of national learning campaigns. Highlights included People's War and Breathing Places, a campaign which led to the creation of over 1000 new community wildlife spaces.

Professor Mary Bownes, Vice Principal (External Engagement), University of Edinburgh
Director, Edinburgh Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement

Mary Bownes is Vice Principal for External Engagement at the University of Edinburgh with strategic responsibility in postgraduate affairs, widening participation, recruitment, admission, scholarships, sustainability, community relations and alumni and development. She is a Professor of Developmental Biology, Director of the Scottish Institute for Biotechnology Education and Director of the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon for Public Engagement.

Science communication is of particular interest to Mary, especially the development of materials for use in schools and at science festivals to encourage people to take an active interest in biotechnology and how it affects everyday life. She is also very active in encouraging and enabling researchers in all disciplines to engage with the public about their research.

Professor Steve Chapman, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Heriot-Watt University

Steve Chapman received his Ph.D. from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1983. He then moved to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a NATO fellowship. In 1986 he returned to the UK to join University of Edinburgh. In 1996 he was appointed to a Chair of Biological Inorganic Chemistry and between 2000 and 2005 was Head of the School of Chemistry. In 2006 he became Vice-Principal at the University of Edinburgh and in 2009 moved to Heriot Watt University as Principal and Vice Chancellor. In 2001 he received the Interdisciplinary Award of the Royal Society of Chemistry, for his ground-breaking work at the interface of Chemistry and Biology. He has published over 200 scientific papers in prestigious journals. In 2005 he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Chair

This event was chaired by **Lesley Riddoch**, Award-Winning Journalist, Commentator, Broadcaster and current PhD Student (University of Strathclyde; University of Oslo)

Lesley Riddoch is one of Scotland's best known commentators and broadcasters. She has held many influential positions including assistant editor of The Scotsman and contributing editor of The Sunday Herald. She is perhaps best known for her broadcasting with programmes on Radio 4, BBC Radio 2 and BBC Radio Scotland, for which she has won two Sony speech broadcaster awards.

Lesley runs her own independent radio and podcast company, Feisty Ltd. She is a weekly columnist for the Scotsman and the Sunday Post and a regular contributor to the Guardian and Comment is Free.

Lesley was a member of the Scottish Government's Prisons Commission, a founding member of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust which led to the successful community buyout in 1997, and Chaired a Task Force on Rum in 2008 to transfer assets from Scottish Natural Heritage to the local community.

Lesley was editor of the Scotswoman – an edition of the daily paper written and edited entirely by its female staff and then founded Africawoman, a charity which trained African women journalists via the production of a monthly online newspaper. She wrote 'Riddoch; on the Outer Hebrides' about the challenge facing traditional Hebridean society in 2007. Since 2008 she's been the media partner for the EU's largest marine energy research project Equimar and her company is currently making an EPSRC funded film about marine energy for UK schools with Edinburgh academic Dr David Ingram.

She is doing a PhD jointly supervised by Strathclyde and Oslo Universities. She has set up a think tank called Nordic Horizons, and is currently writing a book about the cultural differences between England and Scotland.

www.lesleyriddoch.com | www.nordichorizons.org | www.equimar.org