

THE RESEARCH COUNCILS UK (RCUK) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT¹ WITH RESEARCH (RCUK PER) STRATEGY

Who we are

Research Councils UK is the strategic partnership of the UK's Research Councils. We invest annually around £3 billion in research.

Our focus is on **excellence with impact**:

- We nurture the highest **quality research**, as judged by international peer review providing the UK with a competitive advantage. Global research requires we sustain a diversity of funding approaches, fostering international collaborations, and providing access to the best facilities and infrastructure, and locating skilled researchers in stimulating environments
- Our research achieves **impact** – the demonstrable contribution to society and the economy made by knowledge and skilled people. To deliver impact, researchers and funders need to engage and collaborate with the public, business, government and the third sector.

Research Councils UK Public Engagement with Research (RCUK PER) is the collective programme of RCUK Strategy Unit and cross Council initiatives in the area of public engagement with RCUK funded research.

RCUK vision for public engagement

Our vision is:

- to enable society to value and have confidence in research processes and outputs;
- for public engagement to inspire young people to pursue research careers; and
- to increase the societal impact of research by creating a culture where:
 - the research sector and researchers themselves value public engagement as an important activity;
 - an awareness of social and ethical issues informs research decisions

If we involve and listen to the public (and encourage our research communities to do so) then our decisions and research will be informed by their views, and therefore more likely to have enhanced impact in return for the investment.

Similarly, **if we talk with the public** (and encourage our research communities to talk to the public) about the outputs of our research and their implications and applications then society will share in the benefits of that knowledge, whether for their health, wealth or culture, and therefore helping to maximise the impact of that research.

And **if we encourage researchers to interact with schools** to enrich students' experiences then we can help improve the supply of skilled people to the research base and the UK economy and encourage more to act as informed citizens.

¹ Public Engagement (with research) is defined by RCUK as an umbrella term for any activity that engages the public with research, from e.g. science communication in science centres or festivals, to consultation and public dialogue. Any good engagement activity should involve two-way aspects of listening and interaction.

What are RCUK's public engagement priorities for the future?

RCUK will:

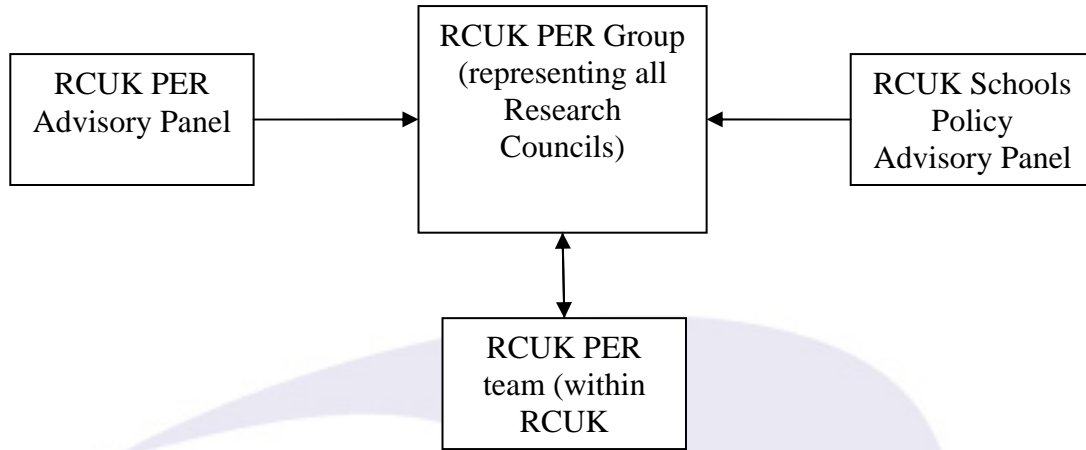
- embed public engagement throughout its core business and support culture change within RCUK to enable public aspirations and concerns to influence Councils' policies and research strategies (e.g. through public dialogue).
- continue to encourage researchers to engage with the schools sector to demonstrate the attractiveness of research careers and so improve the supply of skilled people from a diversity of backgrounds to the research base and the UK economy and enable more to act as informed citizens
- embed within UK higher education a culture where researchers demonstrate and value an awareness of the wider environment and context in which their research takes place.
- work with partners to improve recognition and rewards for researchers who engage with the public, and to achieve a more positive culture for public engagement.
- ensure its public engagement work is informed fully by relevant research and best practice
- clearly articulate the link between public engagement and impact to help to increase the economic and societal impact of research.

Governance and implementation

The RCUK PER strategy is implemented by the RCUK Public Engagement with Research Group (representing the seven Research Councils) supported by the Public Engagement with Research (PER) team in the RCUK Strategy Unit. The PER team maximise efficient delivery, ensure effective evaluation and that best practice is shared, and provide a single point of contact.

The Research Councils together provide the RCUK Public Engagement with Research budget of £2.5 M. This is in addition to Councils' significant investment in their individual public engagement activities which support separate Council strategies for public engagement. The RCUK PER strategy provides a framework for these.

The Public Engagement with Research Group receives advice and guidance on strategy development from the Public Engagement with Research Advisory Panel and Schools Policy Advisory Panel, comprising expertise from across a range of sectors.



The Public Engagement with Research Group also works closely with other areas of Research Council business, ranging from knowledge transfer and economic impact to research careers and research programmes in the UK and abroad.

RCUK Public Engagement with Research Group also seeks to influence wider stakeholders to help achieve the RCUK vision for public engagement. For example, informing the development of BIS's Science and Society strategy through representation on their Expert Groups.

The RCUK vision and priorities for public engagement will be delivered through three aims. These are:

AIM 1. Recognising and responding to public views

Identify public attitudes and values to be considered through the lifecycle of research, and foster debate that will enable public aspirations and concerns to contribute to Councils' policies and research strategies.

Strategy

RCUK will:

- Take a lead on researching public attitudes and values, from diverse perspectives, relevant to RCUK funded research, including public dialogue as well as keeping abreast of other such studies.
- Implement and support existing mechanisms such that the outcomes of these studies are considered within individual Research Councils' planning and decision-making processes at appropriate levels.
- Communicate the outcomes of any RCUK public dialogue programmes to the relevant research communities, as well as making them accessible to the public.

Recent achievements

RCUK PER has:

- **Commissioned a public consultation**, involving qualitative and quantitative research, into experiences, understanding and attitudes towards scientific research into ageing to help shape the cross-Council initiative on Lifelong Health and Wellbeing.
- **Led on the largest ever public and stakeholder (including science, medicine, industry, ethics and religion) dialogue on stem cells** fed into Research Council and government decision making, for example in developing guidelines for consent and in forming policy on cord blood banking.
- **Conducted a public dialogue on nanotechnology and healthcare** to inform the development of the scope of the 'Nanotechnology for healthcare' grand challenge call
- **Published and disseminated results from the latest government-sponsored national survey of public attitudes to science and technology** (*Public Attitudes to Science Survey 2008*).

Ongoing activity and future developments

RCUK PER will:

- **Bring public attitudes and values into their decision-making processes** for example, in considering findings from attitude surveys and dialogue activities and through advisory panels that represent diverse perspectives and expertise across societal issues

- **Continue to support the current cross-Council research programmes on public engagement**
- **Ensure that, where appropriate, future cross-Council research programmes have public dialogue or consultation** built in at an early stage.
- **Continue to be actively represented on the Government's Sciencewise Panel**, helping influence policy on public dialogue and collaborating with others in the field.

Targets

By March 2011, RCUK PER will have:

- Further worked to utilise and disseminate the ESRC research into Public Engagement with Research, ensuring that the public engagement with science community has access to evidence-based best practice through sources such as the ESRC Research Syntheses.
- Implemented actions to embed public engagement across all disciplines within the Research Councils' and within the cross-Council research programme themes, as identified by the Public Engagement with Research Group. These include:
 - Explore mechanisms for providing training for RCUK staff² to consider ethical and social issues.
 - Produce a briefing document that identifies the major definitions, drivers and benefits of PER to the Councils.
 - Provide online information and resources for staff to help improve quality, capture learning and support a network to share enthusiasm and good practice.
 - Hold a workshop for those tasked with implementing public engagement in the cross-Council research programmes (a PER network) to support them in identifying public engagement opportunities.
 - Hold regular meetings with the PER network and theme leaders to support them in delivery of their public engagement plans.

² To include staff from all the Research Councils and the RCUK Strategy Unit

AIM 2. Inspiring young people

To help secure and sustain a supply of future researchers to support the research base that is critical to the UK economy by encouraging engagement between young people and researchers

Strategy

RCUK will:

- Enhance the experience of contemporary research for young people and school teachers, encouraging more young people from a diversity of backgrounds to pursue relevant studies beyond 16 and follow R&D careers, and enabling more to act as informed citizens
- Work towards research environments where public engagement with schools becomes a standard part of skills development opportunities on offer to researchers.
- Work to influence education policy in order to increase the role of contemporary research in the school curriculum.
- Ensure that teachers, curriculum bodies and others involved in the post-primary classroom who wish to involve contemporary research have the opportunity to do so.
- Encourage partners who are delivering extra-curricular and informal education to include contemporary research contexts.

Recent achievements

RCUK PER has:

- **Launched a £1million programme of Continuing Professional Development for science teachers in the UK**, in conjunction with the Science Learning Centre Network, which uniquely bring together researchers and teachers to create curriculum-relevant contemporary research updates.
- **Conducted a review of schools policy, resulting in an approach that brings researchers and schools together** to ensure benefits to the researcher as well as the young people involved, and allows for improved market identity of schemes in this area and more strategic use of resources.
- **Worked with a range of DCSF and BIS initiatives to ensure that RCUK outputs support ongoing developments** e.g. the new Science Diploma development, Science: [So what? So everything] campaign, the Big Bang festival.
- **Funded the British Science Association CREST scheme** for science and technology projects with over 18,000 awards made to young people aged 11-19 from across the UK. RCUK also sponsored a prize at the National Science and Engineering Competition at the Big Bang Fair in March 2009.

Ongoing activity and future developments

RCUK PER will:

- **Continue to collaboratively fund and develop our flagship scheme supporting researchers to work with schools - Researchers in Residence.**
- **Continue to fund the Nuffield Science Bursary Scheme and support CREST**, both national schemes that engage young people and help teachers better inspire students by connecting them to contemporary research.
- **Contribute to the evidence base relating to education in general**, working with ESRC to disseminate relevant findings of research in this area to PER audiences in government, education and academia.
- **Ensure that all relevant Research Council schools resources continue to be available via a single online portal** – the Association for Science Education schoolsience.co.uk website.
- **Further develop partnerships with bodies involved in the *funding and provision of enrichment activities for students***, to bring the excitement of RCUK funded research into extra-curricular activities for post-primary students. Partners will include the National and Regional Science Learning Centres, the Association for Science Education, the British Science Association, the UK Funding Councils and the Nuffield Foundation.
- **Further develop relationships with bodies involved in the *co-ordination of enrichment activities for students and provide advice to DCSF Ministers*** through partnerships which support the national STEM strategy and membership of both the STEM High Level Strategy Group (HLSG) and the 5-19 STEM Programme Board

Targets

By March 2011, RCUK PER will have:

- **Identified where RCUK involvement in the development of school curricula could be beneficial, and identified how research and researchers can better contribute to schools curriculum development.** Through this we aim to better ensure that what is taught in schools is better connected with the world of contemporary research.
- **Identified ways in which researcher skills development and working with schools can be better aligned and/or co-developed.** We will convene a researcher focus group to develop attributes guidelines specifically for researchers working with schools, which will make more transparent the specific skills development taking place for the researcher involved and what is on offer to schools.

AIM 3. Supporting researchers

Achieve culture change in the HE and research sectors so that public engagement is embedded alongside research and valued as an important activity through encouraging researchers to engage with the public and supporting and rewarding those who do so.

Strategy

RCUK will:

- Continue to provide flexible and responsive funding, training and best practice support to enable RCUK funded researchers to develop the capacity and capability to engage with the public effectively and sustainably.
- Work with partners to improve recognition and rewards for researchers who engage with the public, and to achieve a more positive culture for public engagement.
- Provide opportunities for researchers to engage with non-specialist audiences by working in partnership with expert deliverers such as the mass media, science centres and festivals across the UK

Recent achievements

RCUK PER has:

- **Commissioned a study into the benefits of public engagement for research and researchers**, to demonstrate the personal, professional and institutional advantages to be gained from undertaking this work using.
- **Published a Statement of Expectation for Societal and Economic Impact** in July 2008 specifying the behaviour and attitudes RCUK expect from researchers to ensure that public engagement is recognised as an important part of UK research. These include: demonstrating an awareness of the social and ethical implications of their research; taking account of public attitudes towards those issues; and engaging actively with the public at both the local and national levels about their research and its broader implications.
- **Supported the Beacons for Public Engagement including the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement** which has:
 - Produced a briefing paper on the roles of auditing, benchmarking and evaluating university public engagement
 - Published a Framework for Public Engagement to develop a Manifesto of Public engagement for universities.
 - Re-launched its website to include resources around ‘getting started’ in public engagement and information on training opportunities for researchers
 - Commissioned a research synthesis with the ESRC on academic promotion criteria for third stream funding
- **Supported regional science festivals and organised local events** including in 2009 panel discussions on Digital Economy at the Cheltenham Science Festival and Living with Environmental Change debates at the Bristol Festival of Nature and the British Science

Association Festival, providing researchers the opportunity to engage with over 800 members of the public.

- **Supported National Science and Engineering Week awards** to enable 27 RCUK funded researchers to hold public engagement events in National Science and Engineering Week 2009, reaching approximately 11000 young people and adults.

Ongoing activity and future developments

RCUK PER will:

- **Continue to fund the Beacons for Public Engagement until the end of 2011**, in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales, and the Wellcome Trust. This £9.2M pilot four-year initiative seeks to secure a step change in the way public engagement is recognised and rewarded throughout the higher education sector and encourage culture change within those organisations.
- **Organise public debates in partnership with the cross-Council research programme themes.** These will be held at science and arts festivals across the UK to provide researchers with the opportunity to engage with wider audiences.
- **Continue to work together with RCUK Research Careers and Diversity to support the cohort of RCUK Academic fellows' public engagement activities.**
- **Work with Research and Careers Diversity colleagues** to endeavour that all guidelines for the HE sector and researchers include reference to the importance of public engagement and present the information in a coherent and easily accessible manner.

Targets

By March 2011, RCUK PER will have:

- Developed a model to support embedding of public engagement with other partners including the Funding Councils and Wellcome Trust.
- Explored developing a Concordat on the expectations and responsibilities of research funders and institutions with respect to public engagement.
- Disseminated the outputs from research into the benefits of public engagement for research and researchers by late 2009.
- Supported the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement in providing:
 - A Manifesto for Public Engagement
 - National and regional events to communicate learning from the Beacons for Public Engagement project.
- Planned two public debates on a cross-Council research programme theme.
- Engaged with Brunel University and Podium to develop opportunities identified for a programme of Public Engagement with Research programme for the 2012 Olympic Games,

in connection with the International Convention on Science Education and Medicine in Sport.

