

RCUK PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH STRATEGY

Introduction

Research improves lives. It brings benefits to individuals and societies, as beneficiaries of research and through a sustained engagement between researchers and their publics, stimulated by new knowledge and understanding.

Relevance, trust, accountability and transparency are the cornerstones of the relationship between research and society. It is vital that the public have both access to the knowledge research generates and the opportunity to influence the questions that research is seeking to address. In enriching citizenship and providing wider perspectives on research, public engagement improves the quality of research. It inspires people of all ages, firing the imaginations of our future researchers and feeding the skills and knowledge that are essential to the UK's economy.

As a world leader in research, the UK must embrace the opportunities a changing research environment and wider cultural shifts provide to build on current successes and deliver future innovations that place research and its benefits at the centre of national economic, cultural and social prosperity.

The Research Councils and public engagement

The Research Councils fund excellent research with impact. This includes the contribution that public engagement makes to quality research, and the pathways it provides to economic and societal benefits, as an opportunity for researchers to develop transferable and career-enhancing skills, and as an inspiration to the next generation of researchers. Individual Research Council's public engagement strategies are complemented by the collective vision of RCUK, and this strategy sets out that collective vision.

A national and international leader in public engagement

The Research Councils are all charged with the responsibility to "generate public awareness; communicate research outcomes; encourage public engagement; disseminate knowledge; and provide advice". We lead, in partnership with others, the national debate on public engagement with research. Since 2007 Research Councils have collectively:

- delivered a clear and compelling framework for reward and recognition for public engagement, working with partners, including other funders, to foster public engagement through the RCUK-led Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research;
- inspired positive culture change in the research environment through the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), Beacons for Public Engagement, Schools-University Partnership Initiative, and the Public Engagement with Research Catalysts;

- created, in collaboration with the Science Learning Centres and with leading researchers, an innovative *Bringing Cutting Edge Science into the Classroom* continuing professional development programme, to deliver the latest knowledge, and support the teaching of science subjects at GCSE and A levels;
- initiated, through the School-University Partnerships Initiative, a step change in the way universities engage with schools, producing sustainable and productive partnerships;
- taken a lead on understanding public attitudes and values relevant to RCUK funded research (e.g. synthetic biology, LWECC Citizen Advice Forum, geoengineering); and
- maintained excellent working relationships with other UK research funders through convening the PE Funder's Groups meetings and maintaining awareness of international developments, seeking to influence policy development based on the UK experience.

Our strategic interventions have been recognised in the UK, and internationally, as models of best practice. We collaborate with a wide range of bodies across national, sectoral and other boundaries to increase the impact of our work and to ensure that, with the support of partner bodies, research and its benefits extend beyond academia. Ensuring our work reflects, reaches and is relevant to all communities within society is also crucial to our work, and we ensure our practices and processes reflect that commitment.

In addition, we are responsive to the changing relationship between research and society; for example, the emerging opportunities provided by the rise of social media, increasing openness through open access, open data and connections to open policy making, and working with business to catalyse innovation, growth and resilience. Finally, we ensure that our work is evaluated, in order to achieve the best possible outcomes and to inform our future work.

RCUK PER VISION AND STRATEGY

Vision

RCUK's vision for public engagement with research is to generate dialogue and trust between research and society in order to; inspire and inform the public, enhance quality and impact of research, and contribute to the future UK economy and well-being of society.

Strategy

We will deliver our vision through focussing our strategic work on:

1. stimulating a reflexive and responsive research community that engages the public within the research process;
2. enabling public views to inform policies and research strategies across Research Councils and the broader community; and
3. helping to secure and sustain a supply of future researchers and enable the next generation to act as informed and involved citizens.

Collective interventions

1. Stimulate a reflexive and responsive research community that engages the public within the research process:
 - *We will continue to support culture change in the sector so that researchers are recognised and rewarded for quality public engagement in all disciplines, and build capacity through training, skills, and sharing best practice. This will be achieved by building on and disseminating learning from the RCUK PER Catalysts, Beacons for Public Engagement, School-University Partnerships Initiative (SUPI) and the NCCPE's resources.*
 - *We will investigate and review the role of ethics and responsible innovation in our research funding, through working closely with other UK and international research funders to maintain our leadership position.*
 - *We will support collaborative and co-produced research (e.g. citizen science, community engagement and social participation), facilitated through the fostering of a research culture supportive of public engagement, building on learning from the RCUK Catalysts and SUPIs.*
 - *We will ensure coherent and consistent communications with the research community about the contribution public engagement can make to Pathways to Impact and Knowledge Exchange, emphasising the shared objectives of creating dynamic engagement with wider society. This will be achieved through close liaison between Councils and with the RCUK Impact Team, and attendance at key sector conferences and events, to disseminate these messages.*
2. Enable public views to inform policies and research strategies, across Research Councils and the broader community:
 - *We will facilitate culture change within our organisations, so that public engagement is appropriately embedded within systems, processes and policies, to ensure consistent and effective incentives in the wider research environment.*
 - *We will ensure public attitudes and values are considered, using collective learning on the impact of dialogues and sharing best practice, to ensure future dialogues are influential and cost effective.*
3. Help secure and sustain a supply of future researchers and enable the next generation to act as informed and involved citizens:
 - *We will connect young people with research and researchers (informal and formal learning), continuing to build on learning from SUPI, Bringing Cutting Edge Research into the Classroom Teacher Continuing Professional Development and Nuffield placement experiences, to maximise these opportunities for young people.*

- *We will continue to work with key partners such as the DfE and the Wellcome Trust to influence education policy and encourage teachers, curriculum bodies and others to include contemporary research contexts.*
- *We will ensure that researchers gain the benefits of schools engagement, in terms of skills development focussing on the key knowledge, behaviours and attributes that can be acquired through or used in public engagement activities. We will continue to work with Vitae, ensuring that public engagement is integrated within the Researcher Development Framework.*