

Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research

An introduction and overview



The Discover Science event run by the University of Edinburgh at the National Museum of Scotland during the Edinburgh International Science Festival: an exciting range of hands-on science activities for families, provided mainly by University staff and students.

Douglas Robertson

Introduction

We believe that engaging with the public should form part of the role of researchers in any discipline. By engaging with the public researchers can improve the quality of research and its impact, widen research horizons, enhance their communication and influencing skills, improve their personal and institutional profiles, and build new partnerships. Public engagement can also help universities return to their roots, actively contributing to positive social change and the 'public good'.

This Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research is part of our efforts to support and encourage researchers to engage with the public and overcome barriers that they may encounter. It builds on the funders' previous commitments to public engagement and aims to add value to existing effective practice by providing a single, unambiguous statement of the expectations and responsibilities of research funders in the UK regarding this critical area. It complements the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Together, we believe the two concordats will help us work with the research community to improve the quantity, quality and impact of research for the benefit of UK society and the economy.

The signatories of the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research believe that much is to be gained by using the agreed principles to reconsider institutional policies and practice and develop an institution-wide response. We therefore invited the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement to produce these briefings to provide guidance for people working in universities and research institutes on how to embrace and embed the principles, drawing on the experiences of the Beacons for Public Engagement.

We appreciate your support in helping to create a culture in higher education and research sectors that values, recognises and supports public engagement, and in the process helps ensure that research contributes positively to society and results in greater relevance, accountability and transparency.



Professor Alan Thorpe,
Chair, Research Councils UK

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement and the Beacons

Funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust, the **Beacons for Public Engagement** initiative was set up to inspire a culture change in how universities and research institutes engage with the public. It consists of:

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), which co-ordinates, captures, shares and promotes learning between the Beacons, and across UK higher education institutions and research institutes.

Six Beacons: University-based collaborative centres that help support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement work. The six Beacons are based in Newcastle and Durham, Manchester, CUE East (UEA), UCL, Wales and Edinburgh.

To coincide with the launch of the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, the National Co-ordinating Centre has launched a **Manifesto for Public Engagement**. By signing up to the manifesto, institutions can declare their strategic commitment to public engagement, and access additional support and guidance from the NCCPE.

www.publicengagement.ac.uk

Concordat Principles

The Concordat lays out clear expectations for research organisations, and also provides some specific prompts for managers and supporters of researchers and for individual researchers:

Area of focus	Expectations of research organisations	Expectations of managers, supporters of researchers, and researchers
UK research organisations have a strategic commitment to public engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research organisations should hold an understanding and definition of public engagement, appropriate to their context, which is shared and used consistently across the organisation. Public engagement should be embedded within research organisations' missions, key strategies and operational plans to help to provide focus, meaning, emphasis and support for public engagement. This may include an organisational public engagement strategy led at senior levels and communicated effectively (internally and externally). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recognised that senior public engagement champions are essential in fostering public engagement throughout all researcher levels, and these individuals should be encouraged and supported by their research organisations.
Researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research organisations should consider whether public engagement is appropriately represented in staff policies and processes (such as for inductions, performance review, promotions criteria or workload planning) to allow researchers to be involved in public engagement activities without impairing their career. Research organisations are encouraged to celebrate and communicate their researchers' successes in public engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The benefits of public engagement to researchers should be clearly recognised and promoted at all stages of their career, including its valuable role in developing transferable skills. Those responsible for the implementation of such processes, including research managers and relevant supporters of researchers, should receive appropriate briefing and support.
Researchers are enabled to participate in public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research organisations are conscious of the attributes required for public engagement, recognising that such attributes are a subset of the skills, behaviours and personal qualities that researchers should be aspiring towards in their professional development (as outlined in the Researcher Development Statement and relevant professional qualifications). Research organisations recognise the importance of professional development in public engagement for researchers and provide access to relevant training and development opportunities (for example by integrating public engagement attributes into institutional professional development plans), ensuring that a lack of skills is not a barrier to engagement. Research organisations should facilitate opportunities for researchers to engage with the public. Research organisations should seek to provide practical support for researchers to engage with the public, whether delivered at a departmental, institutional or regional level (e.g. through deployment of staff). This could include administrative support, expertise, advice, access to information on financial assistance and/or signposts to examples of good practice and potential partners. Research organisations are encouraged to consider how public engagement is co-ordinated across the institution to enable the sharing of good practice and help ensure activities are consistent with the institution's policy. Research organisations should actively assess and manage potential institutional and personal risks associated with public engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research managers should support and encourage the development of their teams' public engagement practice (e.g. through professional development and appropriate participation in public engagement activities). Researchers share the responsibility for developing their engagement practice and are encouraged proactively to engage in appropriate professional development.

Area of focus	Expectations of research organisations	Expectations of managers and supporters of researchers, and of individual researchers
The signatories and supporters of this Concordat will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector's progress in fostering public engagement across the UK.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research organisations should themselves monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the public engagement they support in addressing their strategic aims and the extent to which they are meeting the expectations outlined in this Concordat. This could include seeking feedback from staff, students and the public. Research organisations should work together to develop and share good practice in public engagement and in the implementation of the Concordat. 	Although the Concordat states no explicit expectations of staff here, there are a number of ways that they can contribute to their organisation's activity, to review their public engagement activity, and share good practise.

The NCCPE was invited to translate these expectations into practical guidance for four key categories of staff:

Senior managers	Vice-Chancellors and Principals, Pro-Vice Chancellors, heads of faculties or support departments and directors of research institutes.
Managers of researchers	Those responsible for managing and supporting researchers, including: supervisors, principal and co-investigators, research team leaders, directors of research and heads of schools or departments.
Researchers	Researchers are broadly defined as individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed for this purpose. This can include postgraduate students and technicians. It is recognised that this broad category of staffing covers a wide range of staff with different disciplinary backgrounds, levels of training, experience and responsibility, types of contract, and different career expectations and intentions.
Supporters of researchers	Those responsible for supporting researchers in their administrative and other processes related to research as well as public engagement, including: research business managers, research administrators, finance officers, Human Resources staff, staff developers, careers advisors and mentors and outreach or public and community engagement officers.




Nutritionist Dr Amelia Lake was seconded as a public engagement fellow at Beacon North East. She is setting up an expert panel of young people who will influence public health research.
Picture courtesy of North News Pictures.

¹ The principal investigator takes responsibility for the intellectual leadership of the research project, for the overall management of the research and for the management and development of researchers

Implementing the Concordat principles: practical guidance

The following table provides the NCCPE's suggestions for how each key role can approach the implementation of the Concordat. Specific briefings are available for senior managers, managers of researchers, researchers and supporters of researchers, which elaborate on each area and give example of practice

Areas of focus	Senior managers	Managers of researchers	Researchers	Supporters of researchers
UK research organisations have a strategic commitment to public engagement.	Clarifying why engaging with the public matters to your institution; including public engagement in your institution's mission and strategic plans; having senior champions for public engagement across the organisation.	Championing public engagement in your school/department/team both informally and formally, and ensuring that it is supported in departmental strategy and operational plans.	Being informed about your institution's strategy for engaging with the public, and ensuring that you have thought through how and why public engagement is relevant to your area of research, and the benefits it can bring.	Being informed about your institution's strategy for engaging with the public; being an effective advocate and champion for that strategy; maximising the opportunities to translate that strategy into operational support.
Researchers are recognised and valued for their involvement with public engagement activities.	Considering whether public engagement is appropriately represented in institutional HR policies and that those responsible for implementing such processes receive appropriate briefing and support. Celebrating achievements in more informal ways across the institution (eg communications, networks, awards).	Supporting institutional HR policies (e.g. promotions panels or appraisal processes) to ensure any changes to include public engagement are implemented. Ensuring achievements are celebrated in your school/department/team.	Making constructive use of appraisal and developmental reviews to reflect on your engagement activity. Seeking opportunities to disseminate the outcomes of your public engagement activity with others, and to support colleagues' work in this area.	Proactively engaging with senior management to review institutional HR policies. Liaising with managers and researchers to ensure that formal and informal attempts to recognise and value public engagement are implemented effectively.
Researchers are enabled to participate in public engagement activities through appropriate training, support and opportunities.	Ensuring that researchers can access opportunities to engage with the public, appropriate professional development to advance their skills, and practical support. Public engagement should also be co-ordinated across the institution to share good practice; and risks should be assessed and managed.	Being aware of the attributes required for public engagement and their value to a researcher; recognising the importance of professional development and supporting researchers in accessing opportunities to engage with the public; and actively encouraging a culture of learning and reflection within your teams to enhance the quality and impact of the work undertaken.	Being proactive in securing informal and formal training and development to develop your skills and understanding and seeking out opportunities to engage with the public.	Providing appropriate professional development for researchers, ensuring that researchers can access opportunities to engage, and that there is practical support to help them engage; maximising the sharing of learning and expertise across the institution.
The signatories and supporters of this Concordat will undertake regular reviews of their and the wider research sector's progress in fostering public engagement across the UK.	Ensuring that mechanisms are in place to allow you to evaluate the public engagement undertaken in your institution, and to review the effectiveness of the support structures you have in place.	Considering setting explicit goals to help you monitor the quantity and quality of engagement undertaken by your school/department/team, and the effectiveness of support on offer; and undertaking appropriate evaluation and review processes to gather feedback.	Evaluating your own public engagement activities. Getting involved in any institutional or departmental reviews of engagement activity.	Proactively gathering insight and evaluation data to inform regular reviews of your department's/ institution's engagement activity.



Launch of the DrugsFutures project, bringing together specialists and non-specialists to shape the future of drugs policy through consultation. The project was funded by Sciencewise-ERC and co-ordinated by the Academy of Medical Sciences.

BA/Laura Mtungwazi



Other briefings to support the Concordat for engaging the public with research

You can also access the following individual briefings and guidance on implementing the Concordat from the NCCPE site:

- An introduction and overview
- Senior manager briefing
- Researcher briefing
- Managers of researchers briefing

You can download these briefings at:

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/concordat

Other NCCPE Resources

The NCCPE provides a 'one stop shop' for anyone in the university and research sector with an interest in public engagement. Set up in 2008 as part of the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative, our focus is on supporting university staff and researchers to develop their skills in engagement, and to assist senior managers to develop strategic approaches to supporting public engagement.

Our website provides:

- Advice on public engagement practice: an extensive collection of guides and case studies
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how
- Context: exploring what public engagement involves and why it matters
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/what and
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/why-does-it-matter
- Resources for managers: an extensive collection of resources to help institutions assess their own strategic and practical support for engagement, and a rich array of case studies and tools developed from the work of the Beacons and other institutions
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support
- The Manifesto for Public Engagement: by signing up to the manifesto, institutions can declare their strategic commitment to the Concordat principles, and access additional support and guidance from the NCCPE
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/why/manifesto

Other Useful Links

- Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research
www.rcuk.ac.uk/per
- Research Councils UK: Public Engagement with Research
www.rcuk.ac.uk/per
- Researcher Development Framework
www.vitae.ac.uk/policy-practice/234381/RDF-overview.html