

Insight into engaging with the wider Cambridge community



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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Purpose of research

The purpose of this research was to understand how the Public Engagement Team at the University of Cambridge can develop their practice engaging with the people who live and / or work in Cambridge, whilst also considering what best practice looks like across the country and what a small section of the community actually need from the University.

1.2. Introduction

The ‘town and gown’ divide is central to Cambridge’s identity, and one that needs to be addressed to enable the city to no longer hold the title as the country’s most unequal city.¹ This divide means that people who do not have relationships with either the institution of the University of Cambridge or its employees/ students have little reason or interest in engaging with the University, indeed the University was described by Nicky Shepard, CEO of Abbey People, as ‘a mythical being over the rainbow or the railway track’, whilst Cllr Sam Davies commented ‘well, why should people be interested in engaging with the University?’. Therefore the University of Cambridge needs to challenge the institution, staff and researchers to find ways to overcome this inequality, not just through the Public Engagement programme, to give people a reason to want to engage with the University – an institution that owns unknown swathes of land in the city, employs 10,000 people, and has huge influence on how the city they live in is managed and delivered.

‘There is an important philosophical point which is absolutely that this sort of work is the sort of work that universities should be doing. It is not just about corporate and social responsibility, it is about a moral duty to be working with the communities that we serve.’ - Elizabeth Hault, South East Coastal Communities Coordinator, Canterbury Christchurch University²

‘It is just arrogant to say we sit in the community without taking responsibility for the economic development of the area. Without partnerships like The Works or our work with Ardwick Community groups we are basically using our local area as a car park.’ - Mags Bradbury, University of Manchester

The University of Cambridge currently has an effective and respected programme of Public Engagement that meets researchers needs, but it was identified in the research that it does not meet the community needs. After all the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement states that:

“Public engagement’ has been an established term used by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to imply, often, an educative relationship between universities and the public, where universities ‘share’, ‘transfer’ or ‘exchange’ their knowledge.”³

Public Engagement is therefore about looking out from a university to show what they want to offer to the wider public. But the University of Cambridge needs to consider if the future is far more collaborative, with new ways of working that value people who have lived experience as much as

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jan/12/beyond-cambridge-spires-most-unequal-city-tackles-poverty#:~:text=Cambridge%20is%20officially%20the%20UK's,the%20inequality%20in%20the%20city.>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h30hD94Nwhc>

³ <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/NCCPE%20-%20Defintions%20of%20Public%20Engagment.pdf>

people with academic knowledge and also acknowledges that the University is central to the placemaking of the city that it is based, as an institution, collection of buildings, employer as well as centre for learning.

As a result many universities are looking at new ways to engage with the local community, whether it is creating relationships that encourage more civic engagement, as can be seen in the [Civic University Network](#), or through creating community engagement that focusses on community development by being directly responsive to what the community want and need. But what is key to all successful public/ community/ civic engagement is that the policies, strategies and accountability structures are in place from the top of the organisation and not just with the people who are doing the hands on delivery.

This report therefore looks beyond the knowledge transfer of Public Engagement and considers the type of policies and strategies that need to be in place to enable the University of Cambridge to become a more socially responsible institution and employer in the city of Cambridge, whilst also setting out principles that should feed into the delivery of any public/ community/ civic engagement.

1.3. Resulting key questions

As a result of the research there are some key questions that the University of Cambridge Public Engagement Team, and more widely across the University, need to consider:

- Does the University of Cambridge only want to deliver Public Engagement or does it also want to work with the local community to deliver civic engagement and community engagement?
- Does the University of Cambridge want to support the wider community in the city of Cambridge to help reduce the social inequalities in the city? Therefore, does it want to have a more civic role in the city, like there is in Manchester or are they more interested in the knowledge exchange model in Edinburgh? Can it be both? If so how?
- How does the University of Cambridge currently address the social responsibility agenda? Does this need to be expanded? If so, can the University think about how social responsibility is integrated across the whole University to include Public Engagement, but also procurement, building use, employment conditions etc?
- Does the University want to have relationships that are more embedded and strategic like the University of Brighton or more piece meal like the University of Edinburgh?

1.4. Process of research

There were three stages to this research:

Initially eight members of the University of Cambridge staff were interviewed to consider the University's Vision for Public Engagement and the work that their departments are currently undertaking to engage the public and to assess what they could be doing in the future.

Online research was then carried out into six universities that were identified as leading the field in Public Engagement in Higher Education. The research was supplemented with an online conversation with a key person within each university's Public Engagement (or equivalent) Department.

The final section of this research was a mixture of online and face-to-face interviews with eight people who live and/ or work in Cambridge. The interviewees were chosen in consultation with the Public Engagement Team and are a very small snapshot of a variety of ways the city of Cambridge works, including community leaders, councillors, teachers and a community business.

1.5. Key recommendations

Below are some of the key recommendations that have come from the research, however there is more detail within the body of the report.

Policy and strategy

Creating a programme for Public Engagement cannot be seen outside of the development of policies and strategies within the wider University of Cambridge. There is no point in delivering programmes if the ‘town/ gown divide’ is still so strong that people do not want to engage with the University in the first place. Therefore, the University’s strategies and policies need to be re-examined to establish how they can make the University more inclusive and open to the local community. Below are some of the key recommendations around strategy and policy that need to be considered before a programme of public/ community/ civic engagement with the local community can be delivered effectively.

- There is some interest in participating in co-produced projects but only if it is within a wider civic/ community/ public engagement strategy so that it is not a piece meal approach.
- Public, community and civic engagement need to be seen as a core purpose of the University, until they are integrated into the University’s vision, strategy and action plans there will always be difficulties with getting local and regional communities engaged with the University.
- Consider developing a Civic Agreement that brings together the Universities with Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority to create an agreement that sets out how the city will be developed and delivered for the future. But being aware that the residents and communities need to have a strong voice in this agreement and that it will be difficult to create due to the complexity of the governance of the city.
- Create a social responsibility policy and strategy that is applicable across the University and colleges and includes public engagement, procurement, funding, construction, employment strategies etc.
- The University needs to incorporate being a ‘good neighbour’ into its policies.
- The University needs to be aware of the impact that the short term contracts of the researchers and staff in the University has on the local community because people move on too fast to become embedded into their community, resulting in a very transitory city.
- There needs to be a Cultural Strategy that covers the whole of Cambridge and looks at all elements of culture, from museums, galleries, heritage sites, housing, shops and environments. It needs to be developed by a cross-section of city institutions and in collaboration and consultation with the people who live and work in Cambridge.
- There needs to be a Community Engagement Strategy developed that strategically looks at where the University needs to engage based on the geography of the city, the land owned

by the University, the demographics of the residents and also the cultural and education opportunities in the different areas.

- Create a Community Engagement Programme Board to oversee the work that is delivered in public/ community engagement, to include University staff but also community members. Each community member should be paid £600 a day for participating as it will demonstrate that people with lived experience are valued as highly as academics.
- The role of Pro-Vice-Chancellor for University Community and Engagement needs to advocate for the University to work more closely with the local community across all areas of the University.
- Everything above needs to be developed through a thorough process of consultation with local residents and community groups.

Breaking down the barriers

There are principles that need to be implemented to start the journey of working with the wider community of residents and workers in Cambridge.

- The University should consider giving free access to local residents to:
 - the Botanic Gardens;
 - college grounds, particularly in the city centre
 - the university libraries and online resources;
 - theatres outside of term time;
 - the sports facilities.
- All education establishments in Cambridge should be exempt from paying rent to the University/ Colleges as they should be trying to meet the same objectives.
- Free public transport/ parking/ access to a mini bus is essential for any community engagement projects.
- University staff need to maintain regular network opportunities with local community groups and residents to understand what they want from the University.
- There needs to be a central hub where the local community groups and residents can go to to discuss developing opportunities with the University. It is essential that this is as easy as possible for the community otherwise they will not engage with the University.
- Take the University and associated opportunities to the local community, rather than expecting them to come in to the University buildings and sites.
- Community leaders and people with lived experience need to be paid for their time to work with the University. But payment for participation needs to be responsive to people's needs. Therefore people on benefits may prefer vouchers or a lesser amount so that the payment does not interfere with their benefits payments.
- Create simple methods for paying people with lived experience for participating in programmes with the University, where they do not need to create invoices or be put on to a system.

Principles for the development of community and public engagement projects

Below are some guidelines for the development of community and public engagement projects.

- There needs to be an agreed definition or description of Public Engagement for all of the University of Cambridge. The meaning and purpose currently depends on each department or institution and what they need it to mean: some are seeing it as the wider research community, others as community groups who they can work with for research purposes and others to meet the community's needs.
- At least one member of staff needs to be on a permanent contract where their role is to network with and talk to the local community about what they want from the University.
- Utilise intermediary organisations such as Cambridge Junction and Museum of Cambridge and individuals whose volunteering or paid work involves connecting people such as Bob Bragger or Sam Davies to engage with communities and individuals.
- Advertise engagement and funding opportunities through the Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service and the CHS group. However not all community groups and networkers use them, therefore these networks must be used within a larger suite of marketing and community engagement opportunities.
- Co-produced projects need to have a long lead in time to ensure that the community needs are met as well as the University's.
- There are basic starting points that are needed for any projects co-produced with the University:
 - Community groups need to invoice for their time, in the same way as the new NHS [Integrated Care System](#) has valued community members time by paying them.
 - Vouchers are needed for participants.
 - Travel costs need to be included to cover bus/ taxi or to provide mini buses as needed/ free parking.
 - The cost of youth workers/ child minders needs to be included.
 - Disabled access as well as fully accessible toilets are needed.

Community and public engagement projects

Below is a sample of the community and public engagement projects that could be developed if the starting principles and strategies outlined above are in place first. There are far more examples within the body of the report.

- Create large and small grants programmes where staff support the application process which is not reliant on large form filling but could include the option of creating a video to explain why the grant is needed. Funding programmes need to include the opportunity to claim for core as well as project costs.
- Value people with lived experience by creating a grants programme to invite people who are not usually heard of in academic settings into a conversation.
- Create a support programme to encourage staff to volunteer in the community – this needs to be more than one or two days a year, but a part of the University's social responsibility agenda.

- Use the skills of academics, researchers and students to support local residents, such as having a Legal Advice Clinic offering free legal advice.
- Create opportunities that encourage all University of Cambridge students to work in all the schools in Cambridge to support the teaching of humanities as well as STEM.
- Utilise the links that the University's employees have into the community – particularly the non-academic staff.
- Deliver festivals that do not include research but are about bringing the communities together, and as part of this festival avoid using University of Cambridge branding.
- Participate in the Being Human Festival.
- Develop programmes that enable people to be more active in their engagement with the University and not just as audiences to lectures.
- Develop work experience, work awareness and apprenticeship programmes that get secondary school children, local young people, unemployed and over 55s into the University to build skills and experience that will result in increased employability within and outside the University, but not necessarily related to the academic work of the University.
- Work with local community organisations to upskill and increase confidence of local residents so that they feel comfortable applying for and working within the University, such as the Abbey Works project outlined in Appendix C.
- Create a programme that supports University staff to become trustees in local community organisations and governors of local schools.
- Most of the staff interviewed identified that engaging local state schools with the University is exceedingly difficult and the two schools that were spoken to had very little engagement with the University. The teachers were unaware of the Department for Engineering's Schools Liaison Officers; therefore, these roles need to be delivered centrally so that they can advocate for research, volunteering and opportunities across the all areas of the University directly to the local schools.
- Create a network for local schools where they can meet each other and also the University departments to make substantive links.
- However, it should be noted that Rowena Burgess from the University of East Anglia said that any partnership project is about *'the right combination of people and it is about capacity. There is a percentage of researchers who shouldn't do public engagement and a percentage who won't do public engagement'*

Staffing

- There needs to be Public Engagement staff who are responsible for knowing the researchers and the University and Community Engagement staff who have extensive networks into the local community.
- Appoint a local resident as a Community Engagement Officer on a permanent contract to ensure that the links are made and maintained for the long term.

- The Public Engagement Team need to have more staff on permanent contracts whose roles are outward looking around Community Engagement and Civic Engagement to create links within the city that could result in engagement and empowerment and embedding engagement with the University into the city.
- There needs to be a senior management post directly responsible for advocating for public/ community/ civic engagement.
- HR systems need to be looked at to see how lived experience can be valued in the same way as academic qualifications.

Funding

- The lack of central funding of Public Engagement means that the programme is reliant on the enthusiasm and interests of individuals to drive the agenda and as a result staff are leaving their roles and there is uncertainty for the future. Therefore funding for public, community and civic engagement staff needs to be through core funding rather than project grants.
- Philanthropy from alumni needs to include either a specific pot for local community investment or consider giving a % of all money raised from the alumni to address education, climate change and food poverty in the local community.
- Develop projects that are funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Arts Council England as these will require significant community engagement.

Communications

'It is your responsibility to tell us what you are doing, not ours to find out.' – Nicky Shepard, Abbey People

- Internal communications need to be improved, so that staff across the University know the Vision for Public Engagement and how it can impact and shape their work.
- The Public Engagement staff need to have new and varied opportunities to share their experiences both internally and externally, using talks, social media, printed local media, newsletters into schools and community groups.
- Create an external website that sets out how University students and researchers can work with local communities and how communities can approach the University. This needs to be easily found for anyone looking for support within Cambridge and possibly external to the University of Cambridge website.
- Utilise the volunteer, faith and community based groups and networks to get people aware of funding and other opportunities.
- Tell the stories of the work that the University and the researchers do in compelling and dynamic ways that engage the local community. This includes evaluating impact and ensuring that any resulting publicity explicitly links the results of the research and opportunities to the University of Cambridge.

Additional research needed to support the above

- A mapping exercise is needed of where the University is engaging with the local communities, based on geography and demographics.

- A mapping exercise is needed to see where the University owns land in Cambridge and the impact it could have on reducing inequality in the city. It should be noted that the new campaign group [Cambridge Land Justice](#) are also working on this and could be a useful partner.
- A mapping exercise about the impact the University has on the city as an Employer, Research Institution, Landlord and Anchor Institution.
- Further consultation with community groups and residents is needed to find out what they want from the University and barriers to engagement.
- Research needs to be undertaken into the impact that the Public Engagement training is having on the staff who receive the training and the ongoing influence the training has on their career.