



University of Oxford

Public Engagement with Research

Strategic Plan





1.0 Preamble

The purpose of this Plan is two-fold:

- 1.1 to frame an ambitious vision for Public Engagement with Research at Oxford;
- 1.2 to identify the key steps towards it that will be undertaken in the next three years and against which to measure our achievements.

2.0 Vision

- 2.1 At the University of Oxford we believe that public engagement enriches research and society and are committed to enabling our researchers to inspire, consult and collaborate with the public. Our vision is to embed high-quality and innovative public engagement as an integral part of research culture and practice at Oxford, enhancing our position as a world-leading research institution.
- 2.2 We are ideally placed to engage public constituencies with the forefront of research and aspire to earn a reputation for excellence in this activity and become an international champion for Public Engagement with Research. Oxford's exceptional research portfolio, outstanding museums, libraries and collections, and global networks provide a strong foundation on which Public Engagement with Research can flourish.
- 2.3 With 73% of researchers reporting that they are motivated by a strong sense of responsibility for public engagement (i), and growing significance of the impact agenda in the Research Excellence Framework and funder priorities, building this activity into the design and conduct of research becomes essential.
- 2.4 In order to fulfil this commitment, we will foster a culture in which public engagement is fully embedded in our activities by building on current successes and providing opportunities, training and support to staff across the collegiate University to engage new and varied audiences in the UK and across the globe.



3.0 Public Engagement with Research

3.1 Public Engagement with Research refers to a wide range of ways of engaging members of the public with the design, conduct and dissemination of research. The societal and research benefits of public engagement are varied but include collaborative approaches (e.g. involving members of the public affected by the issue being studied as active research collaborators); consultative approaches (e.g. seeking public views on research findings or forecasts); and informative approaches (e.g. reaching new public audiences through various forms of media or events).

3.2 In this context, the “public includes individuals, groups, young people and their families who do not currently have a formal relationship with a HEI through teaching, research or knowledge transfer, but who may have an interest in these activities or upon whom the research or its application could impact.” Research Councils UK (ii)

The three **purposes** of Public Engagement with Research are defined as follows:

To inform and inspire the public: Researchers informing and inspiring the public about their research. e.g. participation in festivals; talks and presentations; digital engagement.

To consult and listen to public views: To better inform researchers on the public’s views and concerns about their research, and also an opportunity to hear fresh perspectives and insights. e.g. public debates; online consultations; panels and user-groups.

To collaborate with the public: Whereby researchers and the public work together on particular projects or help define future research direction, policy or implementation of research outcomes. e.g. citizen science; co-production of knowledge; Patient and Public Involvement.

3.3 Effective public engagement can enhance research and scholarship by broadening, exchanging, and testing knowledge and expertise. It can also enhance the quality and impact of research, acknowledging the symbiotic relationship between the public funding of research and scholarship and the societal benefits arising from it in terms of public culture, democratic citizenship and economic prosperity.

Benefits for Researchers

“Public engagement can provide substantial benefits to the researchers involved in engaging the public, as well as providing a major contribution to society. Engaging the public can also improve the quality of research and its impact, by widening research horizons. We achieve this through involving, listening and interacting with the public”. Research Councils UK

- Enhance research and its impact
- Skills development
- Raise research profile
- Rewarding and motivating
- New research perspectives
- Gain access to funding
- New collaborations and partnerships
- Inspire future generations of researchers



4.0 Why now?

4.1 The profile of Public Engagement with Research has increased significantly in the last 20 years and is recognised and encouraged by many influential players in the UK and European (iii) research and innovation community. There is now an expectation by the UK's public research funders that Public Engagement with Research is actively supported at the institutional-level (iv).

RCUK is working with other funders of research to create a culture where public engagement is regarded as an important and essential activity by the research community *Research Councils UK (v)*

We expect all our major research groups to inform, consult and collaborate with the wider public over the lifetime of their research projects. *Wellcome Trust (vi)*

4.2 Over the last ten years, many other UK research-intensive universities have explored how best to encourage Public Engagement with Research by fostering changes in institutional culture and practice (vii). Oxford can build on the lessons that have been learnt, whilst developing a distinctive profile in keeping with our commitment to excellence. The University has some of the best researchers and collections – museums, gardens, libraries (with over 3 million visitors per year) – in the world coupled with extensive international networks. This creates the potential for an exceptional environment in which to conduct high-quality Public Engagement with Research both within the UK and overseas, where a significant amount of Oxford research takes place.

4.3 Now is an opportune time to articulate our vision and aims for Public Engagement with Research that is supported by the University's strategic commitment to widening engagement (viii) and the steps made to enhance institutional support for this activity including:

- The appointment of University's Academic Champion for Public Engagement with Research and the Senior Facilitator & Coordinator, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services.
- The Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Public Engagement with Research.
- Mapping and analysis of Public Engagement with Research activities and support across the University.
- Publication of the University's Public Engagement with Research online portal (www.ox.ac.uk/research/public-engagement)
- Inclusion of Public Engagement with Research indicative pricing checklist and guidelines within the University's costing platform, X5.



5.0 Public Engagement with Research at Oxford

5.1 An analysis (ix) of how effectively Public Engagement with Research is supported across the University and in comparison with other research-intensive HEIs demonstrates the need for increased strategic and systematic support for this activity. This is further evidenced by exploring the University of Oxford survey responses within the national study exploring *Factors Affecting Public Engagement by Researchers* (x), led by a consortium of the top 15 UK public research funders.

University of Oxford survey results (xi)

78% of researchers surveyed would like to spend the same or more time on Public Engagement with Research

60% of researchers surveyed feel that Public Engagement with Research is as important or more important compared to other duties

5.2 Oxford has excellent examples of Public Engagement with Research activity and mechanisms for supporting and building capacity in this area; and has demonstrated its commitment to this activity through inclusion within the University's Strategic Plan and Innovation Strategy and becoming a signatory to the *Concordat for Public Engagement with Research* (xii) and the *Manifesto for Public Engagement* (xiii). However, there is a clear gap between the significance that both the University and its researchers attach to this activity and the strategic and systematic support in place across the institution.

5.3 A key focus of this plan is to equip academics and researchers across the institution to plan and deliver high-quality Public Engagement with Research activities and to foster a culture in which they are recognised for their accomplishments. This will be achieved by:

- building this activity into the planning and resourcing of new research projects;
- facilitating opportunities for collaboration, in particular between researchers and the University's museums, gardens, libraries and collections;
- providing researchers with support and training and
- publicising and celebrating examples of best practice even more effectively both within the University and to the wider world.

5.4 Achieving the collegiate University's vision for Public Engagement with Research will require support across the institution. This may include the identification of 'academic champions' for Public Engagement with Research in Divisions, Departments and the museums, libraries and gardens, and its inclusion in key research planning activities such as preparation for the Research Excellence Framework, research training provision and the development of research strategies.



6.0 Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan – Objectives

6.1 Following extensive consultation, this plan identifies nine objectives in the delivery of the University's vision for Public Engagement with Research.

1. Increase awareness of the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan across the University and encourage buy-in.
2. Provide strong leadership to actively promote and demonstrate commitment to Public Engagement with Research.
3. Raise the profile of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research activities to the national and international research and innovation community.
4. Develop the best model for supporting Public Engagement with Research at the institutional, divisional and departmental level.
5. Equip staff with the skills, tools and knowledge to secure funding for Public Engagement with Research activities.
6. Align planning, executing and evaluating Public Engagement with Research activities with best practice.
7. Recognise and reward high-quality Public Engagement with Research activity.
8. Increase opportunities and coordination for staff and graduate students to get involved in Public Engagement with Research activities.
9. Increase the diversity of publics that take part in Oxford's research engagement activities.

Progress has already been made towards a number of these objectives, and hence we will be building upon the considerable work that is already underway.

Appendix

a) Delivery mechanisms

Staffing

Key staff that will lead and support the implementation of this strategic plan are:

- Academic Champion for Public Engagement with Research
- Senior Coordinator and Facilitator, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services.
- Director, Research Services
- Pro-VC (Research and Innovation)
- Public Engagement leads from the Divisions (including Oxford Sparks and The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, TORCH); the Gardens, Libraries and Museums, Continuing Education Department and the Public Affairs Directorate.

With the support of:

- Departmental Public Engagement Officers, Research Facilitators and Communication Managers; Public Affairs Directorate; appropriate College staff and other staff as may be required for particular actions.

Resources

The staff members listed above are currently funded via a variety of sources; and much of the emphasis will be on building Public Engagement with Research into existing activities; and increasing efficiency and productivity through additional coordination and partnership working.

Further development of the support available to enhance researchers' capacity to deliver high-quality and innovative forms of public engagement will require additional resources. A more systematic approach to the inclusion of public engagement in the scope of external funding bids and awards will be necessary to achieve this, including (i) institutional awards supporting the impact, innovation and knowledge exchange agendas (e.g. via Oxford's Higher Education Innovation Fund, HEIF; Research Council's Impact Acceleration Accounts, IAA; Wellcome Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund, ISSF); (ii) individual applications to Research Councils and other agencies for research projects and programmes, or centres for doctoral training funding; and bids to external funding schemes.

External funding will continue to be applied for support of Public Engagement with Research across the University as opportunities arise (e.g. Research Councils UK Catalyst Seed Funding; Research Councils; Wellcome Trust; the European Commission and other sources).

While external resources of the kinds identified here will form the principle means of resourcing the delivery of this Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan, these external resources will be used to leverage internal funds and contributions in-kind in support of Public Engagement with Research training and activity. These include the John Fell Fund; other innovation-related funds and budgets within Divisions and Departments.

Governance

University Research Committee: Will provide oversight and be ultimately responsible for the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan and its implementation. The Terms of Reference of this committee have been changed to include Public Engagement with Research. The Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the University Research Committee, which will include a report from the Public Engagement with Research Academic Advisory Network following its review.



Public Engagement with Research Academic Advisory Network: will be chaired by the Academic Champion for Public Engagement with Research; and membership will include academic representation from each of the Academic Divisions, Gardens, Libraries and Museums, Continuing Education Department and the Colleges. This group will meet formally once per year to review progress of the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan and consider any updates, as may be required over time. Members of this group will also act as ambassadors and champions (informally or formally, as appropriate) of Public Engagement with Research, within their constituent part of the University and provide support for other activities throughout the year.

Public Engagement with Research Advisory Group: Academic Support Staff group with representatives from across the University (set up in September 2015) meets twice a term and will provide guidance, advice and support on the delivery of the activity programme (see the Action Plan). Detailed proposals will be developed for each of the actions and discussed and agreed with this group. This planned programme of activities will be reviewed by this Advisory Group ensuring the key activities are on track and deliverables are being met.

Membership is as follows: Chair: Senior Facilitator & Coordinator, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services; Director, Research Services; Public Engagement Leads/ Professional Support Staff from the four Academic Divisions; Gardens, Libraries and Museums; Public Affairs Directorate; Continuing Education Department.

b) Action Plan: 2016-17; 2017-18 and 2018-19

This action plan describes the activities that will take place over the next three years with the aim of achieving significant progress towards each of the stated objectives of the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan.

OBJECTIVE	HOW
1. Increase awareness of the Public Engagement with Research Strategic Plan across the University and encourage buy-in.	Communications activities to academic, research and professional services staff across the constituent parts of the University including via: newsletters and websites; meetings; discussions at Divisional and Departmental committees and meetings; existing staff networks including Research and Innovation Support Network (RISN), Communications Network and College Communications Network.
2. Provide strong leadership to actively promote and demonstrate commitment to Public Engagement with Research.	Key senior staff to act as ambassadors for Public Engagement with Research: raising the visibility at a high-level and promoting its importance, value and benefits; ensure Public Engagement with Research is embedded into future strategic planning and decision making; including; the inclusion of Public Engagement with Research in strategic documents and top level communications. Include Public Engagement with Research as part of Oxford's Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) strategy. Establish a Public Engagement with Research Academic Advisory Network.
3. Raise the profile of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research activities to the national and international research and innovation community.	Communicate consistent, clear messages to validate, support and celebrate Public Engagement with Research across the University. Champion the inclusion of Public Engagement with Research into the agendas of International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU) and League of European Research Universities (LERU). Consult with leading universities overseas to share learning and best practice. Scope out the specific issues and ways to support Oxford's overseas academics and researchers to undertake Public Engagement with Research.

OBJECTIVE	HOW
3. Raise the profile of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research activities to the national and international research and innovation community.	Scope out the appetites and potential benefits of hosting an international Public Engagement with Research conference.
	Enable staff to take part in Public Engagement with Research conferences and workshops.
4. Develop the best model for supporting Public Engagement with Research at the institutional, divisional and departmental level.	Identify the resource requirements and create a financially sustainable model for supporting Public Engagement with Research at the institutional level; plans agreed for University expenditure in time for planning and budget rounds, setting out a sustainable model.
	Consult other communities, organisations and HEIs to share learning and best practice.
	Facilitate increased coordination and coherence of Public Engagement with Research training activities across the constituent parts of the University.
	Divisions, Gardens, Libraries and Museums and Cont. Ed set out plans to strengthen support for Public Engagement with Research utilising their own 'EDGE' analyses for guidance.
	Establish an annual internal Public Engagement with Research grants fund (£20k).
	Develop a planning tool and associated resources and activities that will enable researchers and support staff to develop quality Public Engagement with Research activities.
5. Equip staff with the skills, tools and knowledge to secure funding for Public Engagement with Research activities	Develop and disseminate the tools, resources and training to encourage and support Researchers (with assistance from Researcher Facilitators) to apply for Public Engagement with Research funding incl. through the Research Councils' Pathways to Impact and Wellcome Trust's Provision for Public Engagement.
	Identify and seek to address 'barriers' that researchers perceive or face in planning, carrying out, evaluating or reporting (including for the Research Excellence Framework) on Public Engagement with Research
	Monitor the extent to which researchers are including Public Engagement with Research in their funding proposals.
6. Align planning, executing and evaluating Public Engagement with Research activities with best practice.	Integrate Public Engagement with Research into the Research and Innovation Support Network (RISN); Communications Network and Research Services activities.
	Identify and promote best practice Public Engagement with Research case studies.
	Develop and deliver events and seminars for academics, researchers and professional support staff to share Public Engagement with Research learning and best practice.
	Support Research Facilitators and Researchers in preparing for the next Research Excellence Framework re: inclusion of Public Engagement with Research activity
7. To recognise and reward quality PER activity	Establish the Vice-Chancellor's Public Engagement with Research Awards as an annual or biennial activity.
	Explore formal recognition and reward in job descriptions, appraisals and promotions criteria.



OBJECTIVE	HOW
8. Increase opportunities and coordination for staff and graduate students to get involved in Public Engagement with Research activities	Develop, deliver and evaluate Oxford's European Researchers' Night: a high-quality, large-scale Public Engagement with Research University-wide event across at least 8 different venues in September 2017. Funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme.
	Develop and deliver 'train the trainer' sessions for staff responsible for delivering Public Engagement with Research training across the University to increase coherence of the messages and approach.
	Maximise opportunities for increased coordination of Public Engagement with Research activities across the University.
	Facilitate Public Engagement with Research partnership opportunities between researchers and the University's museums, libraries and garden.
	Conduct scoping exercise with regard to the current Public Engagement with Research opportunities provided through doctoral training centres/schools and opportunities for improved coordination and coherence.
9. Increase the diversity of publics that take part in Oxford's research engagement activities.	Provide opportunities to bring together event organisers to explore best practice in diversifying public audiences.
	Facilitate engagement with festivals that enable researchers and academics to take part in debates with the new audiences.

c) Evaluation

The EDGE analyses (xiv) completed in Michaelmas term 2015-16 benchmarks the institutional support for Public Engagement with Research across the University and will be used as a baseline measure; this analysis will be repeated in Trinity Term 2016-17 and Trinity Term 2018-19 to reflect on progress. The evaluation of the Public Engagement with Research plan will also gather both quantitative and qualitative evidence against each of the objectives.

- i. <https://www.wellcome.ac.uk/PERSurvey>
- ii. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/scisoc/rcukcatalystseedfundguidance-pdf/>
- iii. <http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/index.cfm?pg=policy&lib=engagement>
- iv. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/scisoc/concordatforengagingthepublicwithresearch-pdf/>
- v. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe/>
- vi. <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/funding/public-engagement/>
- vii. www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/nccpe_bridging_the_gap_brochure_0_0.pdf;
www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/current-projects/catalysts-project
- viii. www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Strategic%20Plan%202013-18.pdf
- ix. Utilising the EDGE tool: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/the_edge_tool.pdf
- x. <https://www.wellcome.ac.uk/PERSurvey>
- xi. National survey: 2,450 researchers; Oxford survey: 56 researchers
- xii. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe/Concordat/>
- xiii. <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support-it/manifesto-public-engagement>
- xiv. <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support-it/self-assess-with-edge-tool>

“The endeavour to widen engagement with society pervades Oxford’s activities, informing research, enhancing teaching and learning, and increasing our impact on society.”

Strategic Plan, University of Oxford, 2013-2018

