

# UCL Public Engagement Strategy

UCL is an open, publicly engaged university. We value collaboration, partnership and dialogue to maximise our collective impact in society, now and in the future.

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## Our vision

Public engagement is essential to achieving UCL's core mission of transforming how the world is understood, how knowledge is created and shared, and how complex problems are solved<sup>1</sup>. Public engagement is a key pathway to enhance the university's impact in society, and a route to inform and influence public discourse.

Building upon UCL's history, experience and knowledge, the challenge is to embed and sustain a culture in which staff, students, departments, and the institution as a whole proactively listen to and engage with communities. UCL's distinctive public engagement will be characterised by three things:

- A focus on collaborative models of engagement;
- Involvement of diverse public groups, particularly those whose voices are heard less often;
- A spirit of experimentation from which learning can emerge.

In this way, UCL will play a leading role in creating a culture of sharing within the higher education sector and beyond.

The UCL Public Engagement Unit (PEU) will work with the UCL community and their community partners to make this vision a reality. This strategy builds on what the UCL Public Engagement Unit does now as well as proposing new ways of working over the next 3 years (2017-2020). It allows us to build capacity for institutional change, and the multiple individual journeys that combine to create the momentum for change.

## Our strategic aims

Four strategic aims guide our work:

Aim 1: Enable UCL to become a global leader in listening to communities and engaging with public groups

Aim 2: Champion a culture of public engagement across UCL

Aim 3: Enable the UCL community to be effective in public engagement activity

Aim 4: Put UCL at the centre of London conversations, creating London-wide impact and being a good neighbour

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<sup>1</sup> UCL 2034: a new 20 year strategy for UCL

## What we will do to achieve our aims and embed UCL's distinctive model of public engagement

### **Our definition of public engagement and our focus on collaborative engagement**

It is important to define what is meant by the term 'public engagement'. The definition of public engagement which informs UCL's work is from the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) which describes engagement as "... the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit."

Public engagement at UCL reflects the spectrum of public engagement: to inform, to consult and/or to collaborate. The purpose behind any public engagement activity is important as it informs what actually happens in practice. Thinking about purpose helps to distinguish between the different formats and activities to listen to communities and engage with the public.

The UCL Public Engagement Unit supports all types of public engagement, recognising that the type of engagement needs to be tailored to purpose. However, sector-wide good practice shows that public engagement is most effective when it is taken beyond informing or consulting and towards collaborative, participatory activities. Through such interactions UCL's research and teaching can be influenced and enhanced. Thus the PEU's programmes, resources and expertise prioritise collaborative activities.

### **Broadening the conversation**

UCL seeks to listen to and engage with diverse groups in society, particularly those whose voices are heard less often. The more diverse the communities we listen to and audiences we engage with, the richer the institution will be.

In terms of defining the public groups or communities with which UCL engages, it is important to understand that the public or community is not a uniform group. Engagement tends to focus on a specific issue or topic and involves interaction with those communities most relevant to a specific piece of research, teaching or learning, wherever and whatever that might be. As London's Global University, UCL staff and students have worked and will continue to work with a diverse range of communities with wide geographic spread.

### **Experimentation and learning**

Inevitably, public engagement requires openness to trying new things and recognition that there is a chance of failure as well as success. Unexpected and unpredicted outcomes are all part of engagement. The UCL Public Engagement Unit takes an action research approach to its own operations, and encourages

others to apply the action-reflection cycle to their own public engagement to maximise the learning for themselves, the wider institution and society, and to inform future activity.

### **Public engagement as a journey**

The UCL Public Engagement Unit works to support both institutional change and the multiple individual and departmental journeys which combine to create the momentum for change. Each public engagement experience and activity is unique, and public engagement by its nature is fluid and responsive. Consequently we choose to frame public engagement as a journey, whether it is undertaken by individuals, groups, departments or institutions.

Effective public engagement is based on one or more of the five phases of the public engagement journey. Importantly, public engagement at UCL is not a journey that individuals take on their own. In its role as an enabler, the PEU supports staff and students to plan and navigate their way through the five phases of the public engagement journey:

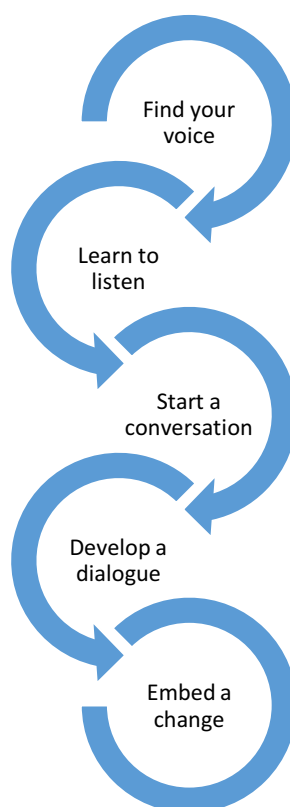
**Find your voice:** develop the ability and confidence to communicate research, teaching or learning in a way that others (e.g. non-academics) can understand and respond to.

**Learn to listen:** of equal importance is the ability to listen to and learn from others' experience and expertise, particularly those individuals and communities who offer a very different perspective.

**Start a conversation:** UCL's staff and students need the skills and confidence to develop a space for the exchange of views – where conversations start and questions are raised that reflect a diversity of experience, knowledge and values.

**Develop a dialogue:** bringing together different groups to make collaborative decisions, thinking and acting together. The engagement is participative rather than informative and the core foundation of this step is collaboration.

**Embed a change:** all those involved in public engagement have the ability to embed change, be that within their own life, their work, their values, and/or the organisation that they work for or in the life and work of others.



### **Building capacity within departments**

While continuing to offer a range of activities open to the whole of UCL, the UCL Public Engagement Unit will also adopt a more targeted approach within the Schools and Faculties. In consultation with UCL's senior leadership team, the PEU will work with specific departments or research teams over a finite period to maximise their long term public engagement capacity (i.e. skills, knowledge, networks and infrastructure) and impact potential. The intention of working in this way is also to raise awareness across UCL of the possibility of individual and departmental change. It is envisioned that this way of working will create a sense of commitment to, and ownership of, the public engagement that is undertaken whilst providing examples from which others can draw inspiration. As a small team in a large multi-disciplinary university, this is how we will embed a sustainable culture of public engagement.

### **Collaboration within and beyond UCL**

Just as the UCL Public Engagement Unit prioritises collaborative public engagement activity within its programmes, we know that more can be achieved by working collaboratively within UCL and beyond. It is important to recognise that the PEU is not alone in championing a culture of public engagement at UCL. This strategy builds upon the networks of public engagement leaders and practitioners within UCL, recognising the opportunity to share their experiences and practice more widely within the institution.

UCL Culture is an engine for creating research impact through engagement, performance and exhibitions, a supporter of learning and research through objects,

performance and collaboration with communities, and a training school for UCL staff and students in working with the cultural industries. Within UCL Culture, the UCL Public Engagement Unit will work alongside UCL Museums and Collections and UCL Bloomsbury Theatre and Studio to spark connections between people and ideas, inside and outside the university. As a department, we support and co-create breakthroughs that make change possible.

Engagement cuts across numerous university agendas and more can be achieved by collaboration with colleagues in the Volunteering Services Unit, Innovation and Enterprise and the London Strategy, Public Policy and Impact, the Global Engagement Office, Organisational Development, the Doctoral School, Development and Alumni Relations Office, Widening Participation, Grand Challenges, the Centre for Advancing Learning and Teaching, and the Connected Curriculum team. The PEU is keen to work with others within and beyond the institution to discover new ways of working to achieve our mutual goals.

### **Making it happen**

The strategic aims and UCL Public Engagement Unit's corresponding key strands of activity are outlined in detail in Table 1. It is important to note that the table presented, and the activities listed, should be seen as an emergent list which will be developed in collaboration with our partners over time.

### **How will we know that we have achieved what we set out to do?**

The UCL Public Engagement Unit integrates monitoring and evaluation throughout its operations. The PEU sees evaluation as a reflective learning process to ultimately improve practice. The Evaluation Officer, within the PEU, has a dual role: to advise on the evaluation of public engagement activities by UCL staff and students, and to evaluate the PEU's impact on culture change. Our evaluation will involve the following aspects:

- The PEU's evaluation framework provides a structure and a skeleton for the appraisal of its programme. The framework includes an evolving list of indicators, linked to the four strategic aims, providing reporting information.
- The PEU works together with those undertaking engagement at UCL to carry out learning reviews to collectively understand the achievements, surprises and challenges in the practice of engagement.
- The evaluation process will reflect the voices and experience of external communities involved in the PEU's programmes.
- The new targeted way of working within the Schools and Faculties will provide an opportunity for strategic evaluation exercises, working collaboratively with communities (both within and external to UCL) to ensure that a range of people's voices are involved in the evaluation process, to test core assumptions and understand the impacts of public engagement.



Evaluation leads to action – the PEU uses the learning from evaluations to make decisions, plan activities, develop resources (i.e. top tips, toolkits, advice, case studies, presentations, action points, summary reports) and advise others. UCL’s commitment to evaluation provides the means to celebrate and share best practice and to further connect with public groups.

The PEU’s evaluation approach is based on action research and we will continue to consult and collaborate with colleagues, researchers and practitioners to ensure that our approach constantly evolves. Our evaluation process also provides an opportunity to engage with the wider UCL community and beyond. The questions that we want to explore with others are:

How can we enable UCL to become a global leader in public engagement? How can we champion a culture of public engagement across UCL? How can we enable the UCL community to be effective in public engagement activity? How can we put UCL at the centre of London conversations, creating London-wide impact and becoming a good neighbour?

If you are interested in working with us to address these challenges and answer these questions then do get in touch.

### Contact us

Laura Cream, Head of Public Engagement  
UCL Public Engagement Unit, UCL Culture  
Bidborough House  
38-50 Bidborough Street  
London  
WC1H 9BT

email: [publicengagement@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:publicengagement@ucl.ac.uk)  
telephone: 020 3108 8913

## Table 1: Making it happen

The strategic aims and UCL Public Engagement Unit's corresponding key strands of activity are outlined below:

### **Aim 1:**

Enable UCL to become a global leader in listening to communities and engaging with public groups

We will:

- Catalyse and identify innovative UCL public engagement practice
- Create a culture of sharing: sharing our practices, innovative programmes and experiences with other universities and partners through publications, conferences, courses (i.e. CPD courses), networking and collaborative activities
- Set up an international community of practice for public engagement (aligned to UCL's Global Engagement strategy)
- Stimulate and expand knowledge of the theory and practice of public engagement by continuing to champion a culture of open and transparent evaluation; we will also expand our evaluation framework to better reflect the voices and experience of external communities involved in our programmes
- Provide guidance, advice and resources based on existing and emerging best practice drawn from the UCL community's public engagement experience
- Collaborate with UCL public engagement leaders and practitioners to publish and share good practice on public engagement (through routes such as Research for All)
- Support UCL's distinctive approach to bringing cross-disciplinary expertise and different knowledges to bear on global challenges
- Underpin UCL's submission to the next Research Excellence Framework

### **Aim 2:** Champion a culture of public engagement across UCL

We will:

- Create a movement, working with public engagement practitioners and leaders across the UCL community, that inspires others within UCL to embed public engagement in their work
- Strengthen reward and recognition of public engagement within institutional policies and procedures
- Enable and support effective networks and relationships with and between UCL staff and students and communities beyond UCL
- Fund and support innovative public engagement projects, and novel ways of listening to communities, that are linked to learning, research and teaching at UCL
- Use our knowledge and expertise to provide advice and guidance on external grants and impact statements

- Maximise the longer-term impact of our work by developing a tailored programme of public engagement activity for a finite number of specific academic departments or research groups per year in dialogue with senior academic leadership

**Aim 3:** Enabling the UCL community to be effective in public engagement activity

We will:

- Facilitate public engagement journeys for UCL staff and students, no matter what their role, through one-to-one guidance, provision of public engagement opportunities and access to funding for public engagement (both internal to UCL, i.e. Beacon Bursaries, and external)
- Provide tailored, formal and informal, training to staff and students to develop confidence and skills for public engagement
- Support a programme of formal training through UCL's Doctoral Skills Training Programme to ensure that UCL's early career researchers have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills to undertake public engagement
- Facilitate reflective engagement practice for research students, staff and members of professional services
- Further develop guidance, top tips and toolkits on effective engagement for the UCL community, collaborating with public engagement leaders within departments and drawing upon evidence and learning (i.e. one stop shop of techniques and tools for public engagement)
- Develop public engagement opportunities which draw on the wider resources and expertise of UCL Culture
- Reward and showcase examples of excellence and innovation in the field of public engagement

**Aim 4:** Put UCL at the centre of London conversations, creating London-wide impact and being a good neighbour

We will:

- Act as a champion within the university to facilitate the transformation of our operations to enhance the benefit to local communities
- Create, sustain and expand networks between UCL staff and students interested in public engagement and London's communities and voluntary and community sectors through the organisation of events and activities
- Ensure that community and public engagement is at the core of UCL East work and strategically coordinated across UCL, supported by the creation of internal and external networks linked to UCL's engagement work
- Ensure that London's diverse communities, voluntary and community sectors are represented within UCL's London Strategy and Grand Challenges programme

## What else do you need to know?

### Context

UCL is an open publicly engaged university, locally and globally, which builds on its founding ethos of being an inclusive and open institution. A principal theme of UCL 2034 is: “an accessible, publicly engaged organisation that fosters a lifelong community”, which states that “we recognise our responsibility to contribute effectively to society and our local community and encourage a dialogue that will inform our activities”.

As we make plans for the future, it is important that we recognise past achievements. The UCL Public Engagement Unit (PEU) has been part of UCL since 2008, starting as an externally-funded project (The Beacons for Public Engagement programme (BPE)) and now internally funded and situated within UCL Culture as a core part of the university. The Beacons for Public Engagement programme aimed to promote excellence in public engagement and encourage a culture change within UK universities to recognise, reward and support public engagement. As a Beacon, the PEU has led culture change both within UCL and as a major contributor to national higher education policy development; UCL was the first signatory to the NCCPE’s ‘Manifesto for Public Engagement’ and informed the development of the Concordat for Public Engagement. The team has been successful in creating an independent structure and model for public engagement, and has addressed many barriers traditionally faced by higher education institutions undertaking public engagement<sup>2</sup>. The PEU has worked to embed public engagement within UCL through funding opportunities, training schemes, high profile public events (e.g. Bright Club) and bespoke support for departments and UCL staff and students. This work comes together in an annual awards ceremony, hosted by the Provost and celebrating the public engagement efforts of all UCL staff and students.

### Drivers for change

The scope of UCL’s Public Engagement Strategy is shaped by a combination of a number of strategic drivers, facing both the UK higher education sector, UCL and the UCL community.

It is a challenging time for UK higher education institutions operating against a backdrop of financial, cultural and political change, and an increasingly polarised society. One thing we know for certain is that universities will need to work ever more closely with the private and public sectors and the multiple communities that make up the society we live in. Now more than ever it is considered pivotal to reconsider the relationship and interactions between higher education and society. Simply, there is a pressing need to communicate and engage effectively with the world and ensure that the work of universities is informed by, and engages with, societal and civic concerns.

The Research Excellence Framework 2014 was the first exercise to assess universities on the basis of the impact of research outside of academia. Impact was defined as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public

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<sup>2</sup> UCL led-Beacon Final Evaluation Report, 2012

policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'. A number of teams support UCL academics to achieve impact from their research; the PEU is one of those. Public engagement is an important tool for demonstrating the impact of research, and engagement-driven processes are key as higher education institutions reach out to communities. UCL's Research Strategy<sup>3</sup> notes the need to increase the impact of the university's research through scholarly outputs, education, public engagement, translational research, commercial and social enterprise, policy and professional practice. Furthermore, public engagement is amongst the expectations of research funders including the Research Councils<sup>4</sup>.

UCL's relationship with the world and within London forms a key part of UCL's 20-year strategy, UCL 2034, which states that UCL is "London's Global University, in London, of London, for London". The Global Engagement Strategy<sup>5</sup> aims to increase our global impact and puts partnerships at the heart of achieving this. The desire is for us to deliver sustainable and globally relevant impact in research, education and enterprise for the benefit of humanity. However, we also need to address UCL's position in London, increasing our impact and making a difference to our city. UCL East, the creation of a new campus at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, presents an exciting opportunity to demonstrate UCL's innovative approach to engagement within London. UCL East will be a new model of how a campus can be embedded in the local community for the benefit of generations to come. The Public Engagement Unit, UCL Culture teams and wider UCL community will: empower staff and students to be agents for change in the community; enable and support productive relationships with local communities; work with Olympic Park partners to support the delivery of the Olympic legacy; engage with communities to deliver successful construction and transition to operation.

Another key driver is the experience of the individuals within the university, i.e. what it means to be a student, academic, researcher, lecturer or professional services staff member in contemporary society. UCL's Doctoral Education Strategy<sup>6</sup> outlines the university's goal to produce research leaders working with integrity and motivated to make positive impact on society. The commitment to enhance the student experience and to strengthen the relationship between our research excellence and student education through the research-based education agenda will help to ensure that the next generation of researchers and academics are aware of, and equipped with, the skills needed to deal with the issues facing society.

There are compelling messages about the value of public engagement, notably in addressing some of the challenges within the higher education sector. There is also a growing body of evidence of the benefits and value of public engagement to universities, with the key drivers outlined below in Box 1.

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<sup>3</sup> UCL Research Strategy, Delivering a Culture of Wisdom, 2011

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe>

<sup>5</sup> UCL Global Engagement Strategy, 2016

<sup>6</sup> UCL Doctoral Education Strategy, 2016

**Box 1: Drivers for Public Engagement****The business case:**

- public engagement can contribute to the generation of better quality and more successful research grant applications;
- public engagement is amongst the expectations of research funders;
- public engagement is an important tool for demonstrating the impact of research, which is now assessed in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

**The moral case:**

- public engagement can contribute positively to a more equal and open society;
- engagement can increase accountability for publicly-funded research;
- research that has had some element of public engagement is more likely to be transparent and relevant to society.

**The academic case:**

- public engagement can help researchers explore new perspectives and new research angles;
- public engagement experience is increasingly being used as a promotion criteria;
- public engagement can increase awareness or support of a particular research area.

**The personal case:**

- public engagement enables the development of new skills;
- public engagement activities can be fun and enjoyable;
- it is key to our education function and an expectation of the national Vitae Researcher Development Framework<sup>7</sup>;
- it offers variety to work;
- it can challenge and revitalise.

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<sup>7</sup> Vitae Researcher Development Framework, 2010