

Public Engagement Strategy for the Wellcome Centre for Cell Biology 2018

Introduction & background

This strategy for public engagement has been prepared by the Public Engagement Manager in consultation with the centre Public Engagement Advisory Group, and the Wellcome Trust.

Vision and aims

The **overall vision** of this program is to engage our target communities in our cell biology research, and why we do fundamental research, to the mutual benefit of the communities we engage with and our centre.

From our perspective, one of the biggest issues is to understand how people think about fundamental scientific research and the impact it can have on society. We believe that progress in fundamental understanding leads to many societal benefits, but previous engagement has not tackled this issue explicitly. Creating engagement around fundamental research will enable greater mutual appreciation and understanding of the place of fundamental research in the world.

Specific aims:

Engage our target communities in order to:

- Establish a relationship of mutual trust between them, us and our research. Create a safe space for discussion.
- Empower the public to make informed decisions about our research and biomedical & fundamental research generally. Ensure a two-way dialogue.
- Encourage curiosity and science as a way of thinking, and a way to systematically look for answers.

Continue to improve our reach to disadvantaged groups and those with [low science capital](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0t70bwPD6Y) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0t70bwPD6Y>).

Create a culture of valuing public engagement in the centre.

Lead best practice with peers in engagement.

Target communities

Our target communities include:

- People not yet engaged with biomedical science, those with low science capital and disadvantaged audiences (low Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation SIMD).
- The education sector prioritising where we fit best into the curriculum*. We will continue good relationships with schools local to our campus, targeting schools who have had little involvement with the University in the past.
- Communities local to our campus.
- Patients groups relevant to our research.

**In education we will prioritise pupils in P5/6/7 (approx. age 8-12) and S4/5/6 (approx. age 15-18), work with teachers and SSERC to deliver CPD.*

Methodology

We need a mutually beneficial approach. Our vision is that engagement is not purely altruistic, but will benefit all parties.

Benefits for our centre and our target audiences might include:

- Gaining new insights or ideas.
- Being inspired.
- Developing skills.
- Encouraging a plasticity of thinking and expressing ideas and concepts, which could lead to better research and collaborations. Understanding other points of view/perspectives.
- Researchers becoming better advocates for fundamental research.
- Creating ongoing conversations, so that new research is not a shock to external communities.
- Improved relationships and mutual trust with our communities. Communities that feel confident to talk to each other.

In every project, we should work with community participants and partners to identify the benefits to them.

We will achieve our aims by working in the following ways:

- Begin projects with dialogue with researchers, partners, target audiences and communities to find out everyone's needs and expectations.
- Establish and respect relationships with partners and communities.
- Run an innovative and diverse program of projects to attract a wide-range of researchers.
- Create a supportive environment for everyone that gets involved and those who want to lead their own engagement.
- Acknowledge and celebrate success of engagement projects.
- Help embed culture change regarding engagement across our university.
- Broaden the communication skill set of our researchers using tailored training, exposure to innovative methods and engagement opportunities.
- Evaluate our activities and events and the overall success of our program.
- Support other engagement practitioners – be a leading light in engagement.

Activities and outputs

We are open to new and innovative project and collaborations.

We currently run and support the following projects:

Cell Block Science: reaching prison communities with diverse engagement activities.

Glass Lab project: using glass to create beautiful objects and exhibitions in public & non-university spaces.

Tattoo my Science: using temporary body art, based on our research, to start one to one conversations. Designed for use at festivals with adults and teenagers.

Life Through a Lens for public events: a suite of mostly microscope-based activities for a wide range of audiences that can be used to start conversations about scientific thinking and cell biology.

Pupils in Labs: getting senior biology school pupils (S5 & S6) into our building for a day, using teaching labs to do a practical they cannot access at school and to spend time in our research environment.

Life Through a Lens workshop for primary school pupils (P4-P7): experiments and a play in five acts, leading pupils through scientific thinking, basic microscopy, and our research.

Genetic Engineering workshops, engaging S3 & S4 pupils in how genetic engineering works, what it can be used for and how they feel about different uses.

Internally we wish to run the following initiatives

Create a systematic approach to rewarding engagement, with a tiered system of acknowledgment:

- Bronze – taking part in a single day's activities
- Silver – supporting a more complex project with several days of delivery or development
- Gold – developing, running and evaluating a new engagement project supported by the centre PE team
- Prize - 'Prize for Outstanding Public Engagement' by a centre team or individual, awarded annually. Award money to celebrating success: money both for personal use, rewarding volunteers & further engagement.

Support researchers to write grants to support their own engagement projects.

Create an internal engagement funding stream to which non-grant holding staff can apply in order to support their own engagement projects.

Create a cohort of Engagement Ambassadors each year who take part in preparing and delivering a big engagement event or trip over several days and thereafter stay involved as ambassadors for the following year.

Attend, and aim to present at, engagement conferences such as [BIG](#) or [Engage](#). Aim to publish our work in newsletters and peer-reviewed journals.

Evaluate individual projects for ongoing improvement, and evaluate the overall PE programme against intended aims and outcomes.

Outcomes (short-term impacts)

People whom we engage:

- Know we listened to them and their views.
- Enjoy engaging with us and rate the interaction positively.
- Have their curiosity encouraged and feel a sense of wonder.
- Are empowered to express their views about our research, or other biomedical & fundamental research.
- Have an awareness of science as a way of thinking and a way to look for answers.
- Have increased confidence to make decisions about biomedical research.
- Are from all sectors of society. Including those with low science capital and those who have limited access to research engagement.

People in our centre:

- Feel inspired, gain new insights, ideas and perspectives.

- Know that their engagement work is acknowledged and valued by the centre.
- Feel more confident discussing the value of their research & fundamental research.
- Have improved skills as a result of their engagement.
- See engagement awards and prizes being made to staff and students who do engagement work.

Our engagement team:

- Write short reports about our larger projects, that includes evaluation data from participants, and disseminate to funders and partners.
- Share our best work and innovations with peers at workshops, conferences and in publications.
- Pay ongoing attention to an evaluation framework.
- Are encouraged and supported to be creative and innovate, and to reflect and develop their own practice.

Inputs

In order to meet the requirements of the strategy, the following is advisable.

- Employ a Public Engagement Manager and Engagement Associate.
- Director and PIs support for public engagement should be stressed to all centre staff and as part of the centre strategy. Genuine support for engagement from these senior levels.
- Researchers are encouraged to spend at least 1-2 days annually on engagement as part of their working week.
- Allocate an annual budget in the region of approx. £90,000 (£25,000 budget and £65,000 salary costs).
- Run and contribute to the centre Public Engagement Advisory Group.

Long-term impacts

Those people we engage with have a lasting, increased confidence in their own involvement with the science and technology that shapes their lives.

Researchers who value the chance to engage with the public and see it as a positive, important part of the research process.