

## Strategy for Effective Public Engagement in the School of Biological Sciences

School of Biological Sciences (SBS) has a small team of public engagement (PE) practitioners who, along with our students, researchers and other staff, deliver high quality engagement to thousands of people of all ages across Edinburgh, the Lothians and beyond. This document presents our vision for achieving successful and meaningful audience engagement with our research, with biological sciences, and with science. SBS adheres to the following definition of PE:

*Public engagement describes 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.*

National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)<sup>1</sup>

### Vision

*To establish SBS as a leader in the provision of creative and effective PE activities for multiple audiences to stimulate meaningful discourse around science, our research and its impact.*

*To be responsible neighbours and use our benefits and expertise to support and inspire local communities and schools, and deliver positive change.*

*To enable our researchers and research students to embrace PE as an integral component of their roles and to be willing and confident participants.*

### Mechanisms for success

#### *Deliver effective engagement that meets audience demands*

- Endeavour to: engage publics with our research and biological sciences; connect audiences and researchers; enable people to form opinions and make informed choices; stimulate meaningful discourse around research; aid an understanding of the importance of science and research; raise aspirations; break down barriers; foster mutual trust; provide a positive experience of science and scientists.
- Maximise reach by targeting a range of audiences (e.g. local communities, school pupils, teachers, family audiences, young adults) via a variety of delivery methods including public and community events, science festivals participation, schools and teacher events and online activities.
- Place our researchers at the heart of engagement activities.
- Strive for inclusion by targeting a diverse audience, including socio-economically deprived areas e.g. according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)<sup>2</sup> and people with low *science capital*<sup>3</sup>.
- In schools, support teachers in delivering the *Scottish Curriculum for Excellence*<sup>4</sup>, champion STEM learning and careers, raise aspirations, and support widening participation.
- Support communities close to campus.
- Foster partnerships with like-minded organisations, e.g. National Museum of Scotland and community partners.
- Maintain quality through evaluation.



### *Empower researchers to get involved*

- Promote PE as an integral component of research roles, alongside research, teaching and learning.
- Promote the PE Team as a valuable and approachable resource that researchers can access for support.
- Support researchers by providing training and mentoring, enabling their participation in existing activities, and assisting development of their own activities.
- Remove barriers to participation by providing varied opportunities and delivery methods, and different levels of involvement to suit different needs, calendars and time commitments.
- For PhD students, implement PE training and participation as an assumed part of their studies and student experience.
- Include researchers of all levels, and strive to ensure diversity in participants.
- Support researchers in applying for PE funding in their research grants, and in obtaining funding for their own PE projects.
- Facilitate researcher involvement in external PE initiatives.
- Elevate the status of PE in SBS by working to ensure Head of School, Heads of Institutes and senior management are engaged and actively supportive of it.
- Champion participation in PE as a suggested part of staff PDR assessment, and hence as a valued component of a research role.

### *Value a connected approach*

- Be informed by PE strategies at University<sup>5</sup> and College level, and by the University Community Plan<sup>6</sup>.
- Interact and collaborate with PE practitioners and networks in the College and University.
- Work with central University PE staff in Edinburgh Research Office and utilise their support<sup>7</sup>.
- Utilise the SBS Academic Lead for Public Engagement to champion PE in the School.
- Promote positive PE culture change in the University, in line with National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) *Manifesto for Public Engagement*<sup>8</sup>, of which the University is a signatory.
- Share best practice and maintain skills by actively participating in UK and international PE practitioner networks and conferences.

1. <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement>

2. <https://simd.scot>

3. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/departments/education-practice-and-society/science-capital-research/science-capital-teaching-approach>

4. <https://education.gov.scot/curriculum-for-excellence>

5. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/strategy-2030>

6. <https://local.ed.ac.uk/our-community-plan/community-plan-2025-30>

7. <https://research-office.ed.ac.uk/public-engagement-with-research>

8. <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support-engagement/strategy-and-planning/manifesto-public-engagement>