

Vitae – Beacon for Wales conference:

Workshop: Public engagement and the Researcher – Heather Squires

This session will explore the link between PE and research - the range of engagement activities that can support understanding, promotion and involvement in research, and the relationship between good quality research and good quality engagement. Reference will be made to the researcher development framework and complimentary resources under development.

Workshop – 25 people

- A. **Introduction** – me, NCCPE and Beacons, hands up for whether involved in research, or research support, or both (mixed audience with most involved in research):
- B. **Brainstorm** – PE and Research: Examples of 'Engaged Research':
 - a. School visits
 - b. Exhibiting art work
 - c. Gathering people's ideas to feed into research
 - d. Disseminating research
 - e. Talks to clubs and societies
 - f. Conferences
 - g. Community involvement in defining research agenda
 - h. Websites
 - i. Blogs
 - j. Using different methods – study of methods – for involving different publics
- C. Show of hands for who's done what: people involved in all areas, some involved in multiple
- D. **Un-packing engaged research**
 - a. Closely tied to knowledge creation – both research and teaching
 - b. Individual and institutional elements
 - c. Varying emphasis on each of the P, E or R (vs small 'p', 'e', or 'r') [triangle diagram]
 - d. Varying emphasis on 1-way, 2-way, or 3-way
 - e. Examine 'locus' of decision making with the activity/approach
- E. **Knowledge creation and Engaged research**
 - a. Graduated progression from
 - i. **Preservation** of research findings (depositories, libraries, knowledge management)
 - ii. **Dissemination** of research: mostly 1 way
 - iii. **Application** of research (research into use)
 - iv. **Generation** of research and research agendas (including co-generation)
- F. Possible benefits of engaged research: increased relevance, impact, legitimacy, reputation
- G. Appropriate type of engaged research depends on:
 - a. subject area/discipline,
 - b. individual PE/ communication skills and confidence,
 - c. career stage
- H. **Small group exercise**: Examine 1 of 3 'trigger quotes' from NCCPE action research – do you agree or disagree, do you have similar or opposing examples? What might improve the situation?
 - a. **Risks and risk management**: 'Public engagement done poorly is worse than no engagement at all'. How to limit the risks around engagement? What kinds of supports are needed?
 - i. Important to recognise that there can be unforeseen risks, and have supports for staff in place. E.g. doing community oriented work where trying to improve situations – can

upset the power balance; certain people don't want situations to change – can have ethical implications – researchers don't normally want to upset situations – being a 'change agent' can cause problems, even after you've left.

- ii. What can existing structures do to manage risk (ethics committees etc)? Maybe no new structures needed – better alignment?
 - iii. E-technologies can open a whole new level of risk: people can be tweeting and making assessments/statements on your research when you're speaking to even small groups.
 - iv. Risks exist even in normal research generation
- b. **Formal incentives:** formalising PE – making it a requirement, can squash enthusiasm in those who are passionate and produce bad engagement in those who don't want to do it?
- i. Ideals of how it should happen can be set but in reality it can be very different
 - ii. Need to encourage the 'stars' and those who might like to move into it, but not force
- c. **Promotions:** Even with formal promotions criteria for PE, people can still not be rewarded/acknowledged for this work. Does this need changing? How do we know 'good' engagement?
- i. Cardiff university has brought in a 3rd band which includes engagement excellence; at least some people have been promoted with this taken into account (need excellence in 1 of the 3, plus competence in other 2); it is possible to build in
Reference to NCC AR quote: *"Research is banded local, national and international. But for PE it's more a case approach – someone makes a case. As people bring examples forward you start to see an idea of what it could be"* (AR group)
 - ii. Big variations in universities and even within departments and units – can't have one approach for all
 - iii. Recognition depends on who you answer to (the 'boss') and whether they value engagement.
Reference to NCC AR quote: *"For some, doing PE is a guilty secret – because the Head of the Dept might not approve of this type of thing"*

I. Resources

- a. Vitae Researcher Development Framework (under development)
- b. Vitae-Beacons booklet: Public engagement for the Researcher
- c. NCCPE – toolkits, manifesto, action research, and related (individual and institution focused)
- d. Research Councils: RCUK guide for public engagement and research, fellowships, etc.
- e. Beacons for Wales – engaged researchers group, other.
- f. Other?