

UPP foundation Civic University Commission 2018:¹

Evidence submission from the Association for Academic Outreach²

The Association for Academic Outreach (<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/afao/>) is a loose coalition of academics working in universities engaged with the world outside. The 92 members are from a wide range of intellectual, social and economic backgrounds, drawn from each and every subject area, discipline and type of institution. It therefore represents many of those most actively engaged in civic engagement at a personal level. We are conscious that the Commission is most likely anticipating submissions from institutions, but we believe that not every university will respond to the commission and those that will may not always be aware of the full breadth of activity in which their staff are engaged. This is because, in our collective experience, a significant proportion of outreach activity is either informal, developed independently of the university centre and/or an attendant feature of individual or group research projects. We invited members of the association to describe some of the activities in which they are engaged and the following represents a summary of some of the examples we received.

We are conscious that this does not answer the questions you raise but feel that these are more appropriately answered at an institutional level. It is also worth noting that civic engagement often rests upon the initiative, energy and commitment of individuals, acting individually or collectively, rather than top level direction. Most initiatives are bottom up rather than top down, reflecting a desire amongst many academics to engage with publics beyond the university as an end in itself, rather than for more instrumental corporate purposes. This is noteworthy, since civic engagement, unlike other activities, such as teaching, research and management, offers few tangible career or financial benefits to those engaged in it. The fact that it is undertaken so extensively despite this is testament to the ways in which colleagues view the university as an institution embedded in communities and to the desire of many academic colleagues to 'give back' to the public they serve. Moreover, when colleagues do 'give back', they do so in ways informed by their subject and disciplinary background, not only using skills attendant to their roles, but engaging with issues and ideas that are absolutely *not* subject-neutral. Civic engagement for a mathematician is wholly different to that of a sociologist. Recognising this is essential as, in our experience, a lot of top down initiatives rest upon activities and goods that are seen as subject-neutral and non-academic, devaluing the actual goods that individual academics can contribute in the process. As such, in order to appreciate fully the nature of the civic university at present, it is essential that the experience of academics individually and collectively through associations such as ours be recognised and accounted.

In what follows, we have grouped and summarised the submissions thematically. We refer to institutions for the sake of simplicity, but we emphasise that the activities and programmes noted are

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devised, designed and delivered by individual academics, acting individually or collectively, rather than by institutions as whole.

Adult learning

Traditionally, the main role that universities have played in civic engagement has been through the provision of unaccredited courses for adults. The origins of this go back to 1919, when the Ministry of Reconstruction produced a report recommending each university establish an extra-mural department for local people. The first of these departments were established in 1920 at Manchester, Aberystwyth and Nottingham. Today there are still examples of Extra-mural departments in many universities offering unaccredited non-formal learning,³ accredited short courses and access courses to full awards for those who do not meet the normal entry criteria.

An excellent example of contemporary, relevant non-formal learning is provided by the University of Warwick's Centre for Lifelong Learning (<https://warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/>). Following the Brexit vote, a course was provided in an area in which the vote to leave was very strong in order to help those on both sides understand the meaning and implications of the vote (<https://warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/about/cllteam/aawesti/>).

Many other universities maintain the tradition of providing courses relevant for members of the community. The University of Cambridge has recently confirmed its commitment to adult, lifelong learning in unaccredited and accredited courses at its Institute of Continuing Education (<https://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/>). The University of Sussex provides courses and careers advice through the Sussex Learning Network (<http://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/>). The Adult Continuing Education Centre at University College Cork delivers accredited, unaccredited and work-based programmes with employers and partner organisations (<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace/>).

Sciences

A second area of civic engagement that is of more recent origin reflects the concern of many scientists in respect of public understanding of, and engagement with, science. Increasing scepticism and distrust of scientists, allied to the centrality of science in many public discourses, has led to a number of initiatives to enhance understanding and, where possible, involvement. A further aim is to encourage young people to see science as a viable career option. This is important not just for the future of science but for the whole of society. Finally, concerns about the practical capacity of individual academics, research centres and institutions to engage in research independently has led scientists to engage in participatory research through endeavours such as citizen science.

Examples of civic engagement include Fulcrum at Newcastle University, which enhances public understanding of science through the arts (<https://www.facebook.com/FulcrumArtsAndResearch>). The University, as well as others such as Coventry (<https://thebiochemistblog.com/2017/08/16/scientific-outreach-grant-introduction-to-dna-fun->

³ Non-formal education is structured but not credit bearing. It may result in a diploma or certificate but is not recognised. Examples include CPD, company in-house training events, courses delivered by training companies, MOOCs and so on, as well as unaccredited courses delivered by educational institutions.

[activity-for-all](https://pintofscience.co.uk/events/newcastle)), is attempting to bring science to the community via the 'Pint of science' Festival (<https://pintofscience.co.uk/events/newcastle>). As the title implies researchers are presenting their work in pubs, restaurants and theatres. The University also runs 'Chemistry for all' sessions for children (<http://www.rsc.org/campaigning-outreach/outreach/scientists/chemistry-for-all/>).

A number of universities have collaborated to support the charity In2science (<http://in2scienceuk.org/>). In2science is designed to encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are traditionally under-represented in science and STEM subjects to apply to university to study science subjects and pursue scientific careers. Participants include the Universities of Bath and Oxford, along with UCL and Imperial. The University of Portsmouth runs a similar scheme, working with local schools and colleges. It also engages closely with local employers to ensure their needs for qualified employees are met (<http://www2.port.ac.uk/faculty-of-technology/staff/mr-david-hill.html>).

Social sciences and humanities

Many academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences believe that, in addition to their work concerning the study of society, individuals and groups, ultimately their purpose is to serve the public through projects designed to provide tangible social goods.

Recognising the need for transformative social scientific research methods, Lancaster University has facilitated a cross-cultural participatory research project in Politics to enable excluded communities from around the world to exchange experiences and to develop collective means of advancing their interests. Participants include members as diverse as those from Aboriginal Australian communities and the former mining town of Ashington, Northumberland. The project has resulted in two, hour long TV documentaries and much media coverage (<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/good-culture>).

Newcastle University describes itself as a 'Civic university' and has a long history of engagement with its locality. An example of this is in the Politics Work Placement module at Level 5. Students spend a minimum of 70 hours in placements with local organisations where they gain valuable work experience and assist the organisations by undertaking research projects. Examples of placements include those in MPs' Offices, food banks and charities relating to mental health, refugees, young people, homelessness and disability (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/modules/pol2096>).

The University of Brighton has Widening Participation Academic Champions (<https://www.brighton.ac.uk/studying-here/applying-to-brighton/schools-teachers/compact-brighton/compact-events/index.aspx>). Amongst many other activities, the university has held day long workshops for children designed to instil a sense of the history of their locality by examining the role of the Royal Pavilion and Brighton as a hospital for Indian Soldiers during the First World War.

Helping the community

Much of the activity undertaken by colleagues to assist their local communities cannot easily be delineated in terms of subject areas and is more corporate in nature.

Lancaster University facilitates a national and local political discussion forum and encourages students to volunteer their time to assist with local organisations, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, a Dementia Trust and Canal Trust (<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/study/your-global-experience/>). At Lancaster, colleagues in Philosophy are involved examining the ethics of outreach

(<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/ppr/about-us/people/luke-moffat>), while other colleagues, otherwise constrained by institutional, instrumental accounts of outreach, have developed independently of Lancaster forms of philosophy teaching for schools aimed transformatively at supplementing and addressing deficits within the national curriculum (<https://secondthoughtsphilosophy.com>). The University of Chester runs a Student Volunteer service to enable students to provide their services to local charities and other organisations (<https://www.chester.ac.uk/campus-life/support-for-students/development/volunteering/opportunities>). These include cancer and mental health charities and even a dog walking service for people no longer able to do it for themselves.

In addition to work in the locality, many academics in vocational subjects are active members of their respective professional bodies, often through the provision or facilitation of Continuing Professional Development. Examples include the Universities of Cardiff (<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/find-a-course/accredited-qualifications/cardiff-university/>) and Liverpool' (<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/education-and-careers/find-a-course/accredited-qualifications/university-of-liverpool/>) providing venues and active support for CPD events for the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Universities and regeneration

One specialist area of strategic significance is the involvement of universities in the regeneration of their area, so much so that it is an area of specialist study (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/research/university-regeneration>). Examples include Durham University's role in the regeneration of Teesside, Newcastle University's role in developing science and cultural centres in the city and the University of Cambridge's development of a new urban quarter to accommodate its post-doctoral research.

Global Service Learning

Universities now engage far beyond their immediate localities. In recent years, many have increasingly begun to offer their students the opportunity to include service learning, usually in developing countries. Students volunteer for practical work placements as part of their studies teaching English, engaging in conservation and other projects. The University of Chester, for example, offers an Experiential Learning Overseas module to all its Level 5 students (<https://www1.chester.ac.uk/international/study-abroad/experiential-overseas-learning>).

Conclusion

The summaries above reflect only a small proportion of the active work of the Association for Academic Outreach's members. A full and rich account of the myriad forms of civic engagement that exist can only be produced through engagement with academic colleagues, as opposed solely to with institutions, as much of that work is disincentivised, hidden and unrecognised. We hope that this submission assists in the development of a rounder account and stimulates further engagement with academics in order that civic work is both acknowledged and supported more fully.