

Developing mechanisms to incentivise, monitor and assess university engagement activities

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This paper will outline the various types of engagement, underpinned by research, undertaken by universities in the United Kingdom and the journey taken by HEFCE to encourage these activities across the higher education sector to foster a culture where engagement is valued and rewarded.

We will reflect on the origins and development of a specific funding stream to support engagement and knowledge exchange, the Higher Education Innovation Fund, and its recent shift from a capacity building fund to one that rewards performance, also outlining the key mechanism by which this performance is captured at institutional level through the annual HEBCI survey^{iv}. We will outline fundamental shifts in the way in which HEFCE research funding is to be allocated as we move from the RAE^v to the REF^{vi}, a system which for the first time explicitly assesses and addresses not only the inherent quality of research but also its impact both within the academy but also on research users and the wider economy and society.

We will reflect on characteristics of the culture within the higher education sector which allow external engagement to flourish, drawing on the learning from Strategic Development Fund projects such as South East Coastal Communities^{vii} and, in particular, the Beacons for Public Engagement^{viii}. The Beacons initiative sought to create a culture where public engagement was formalised as a valued activity for staff at all levels, and for students, and the six Beacons and the NCCPE sought to achieve this in a variety of innovative ways, reflecting characteristics of their host universities. Here we will synthesise aspects of this learning focusing on what have emerged as the key characteristics of an engaged culture and the mechanisms to aid embedding of these characteristics.

We will conclude with consideration of how far we have come on the engagement journey and discuss next steps with the audience.

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^{iv} Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey

www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/buscom/hebci/

^v Research Assessment Exercise www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/reform/

^{vi} Research Evaluation Framework www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/

^{vii} www.coastalcommunities.org.uk/

^{viii} jointly funded with Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about/beacons