ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Background and Context

Institutional Principles and Approaches to Engagement

Strategic Objectives
Newcastle University developed as a civic university in response to the regional demands of an emerging industrial economy in the 19th century. It had its roots in a School of Medicine in 1834 and then developed physical sciences, teaching training and research to meet the demands of local industries – shipbuilding, mining, heavy engineering and agriculture. The University expanded to become a comprehensive university in the 20th century with a continuing commitment to training and professional development.

During the 1980s there was a growing emphasis nationally in the ‘Third Mission’ of universities (additional to teaching and research) which was seen initially as deeper interactions with business and knowledge transfer, and then as wider engagement with community, voluntary groups and marginalised communities. With the advent of the ‘so called’ knowledge economy, engagement began to be seen by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Research Councils and government departments, as an embedded activity. The University contributed strongly to this agenda from the late 1990s, working with the Regional Development Agency’s strategy to put universities ‘at the heart of the region’. In the early 2000s there was a renewed focus on the role of the University in economic regeneration, and the unsuccessful bid for the City of Culture in 2005 left a legacy of collaborative working with the Councils of Newcastle and Gateshead on cultural regeneration.

Since 2007 there has been a much stronger focus on the civic agenda, led by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Brink, who has a deep commitment to strengthening the relationship between the University and civil society. Newcastle was one of the first universities to appoint a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement. In 2011 this portfolio was taken on by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. In 2008 the ‘good practice’ of the University in engagement was recognised by the award of one of six RCUK funded Beacons for Public Engagement with Durham University and the International Centre for Life. By 2010 the University had developed a rich and established portfolio of engagement practice, ranging from collaborative applied research (such as the Social Inclusion through the Digital Economy (SIDE) project), institutional level activities supporting CPD, widening participation activities and volunteering, to individual contributions on governing bodies and professional associations.

Notwithstanding our current strengths in this area we need to continue to emphasise the distinctiveness of the University and to respond to new
external drivers that place renewed focus on the importance of engagement and impact. These include:

- The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) with its emphasis on the wider impact of research on a range of private, public and third sector groups on society.
- The Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research, published by the Research Councils UK in 2011, outlining the expectations and responsibilities of funders with the aim of embedding public engagement into universities and research institutes.
- The increased emphasis placed by funding bodies at a national and European level on the importance of impact as a condition of funding.
- The growing competition between universities and the emphasis on demonstrating the value of universities to the economy and society.
- The growing recognition at both the national and EU levels of the importance of universities in responding to the ‘Grand Challenges’ facing societies.
- The national steer for higher education to become more employer responsive through developing the higher level skills of the workforce and enhancing graduate and postgraduate employability (Wilson Review 2012).
- The commitment by the University to offer all students the opportunity to develop their skills.
- Higher expectations of universities to engage with schools.
- The impact of the recession and austerity measures on the community and voluntary sectors which places new demands on the university sector.

The ‘impact’ agenda is a challenge for universities since it can be difficult to demonstrate a causal, linear, impact of research on policy and practice in a time-limited period. A successful Engagement Strategy can support the Research and Innovation strategy by increasing the number and diversity of interactions with wider society. This leads to improved communications and understanding and, most importantly, opens up ‘occasions of influence’ for researchers and the University. The Engagement Strategy can also help to transfer collective ‘tacit’ knowledge which can often have considerable impact.

The Societal Challenge themes, which are demand-led, are an important framework for the articulation of societal need and University research. The Engagement Strategy can also help to reduce the so-called ‘impact’ gap by
increasing understanding of the research work of the University and by opening up opportunities for public and professional debate. All Schools and Institutes have engagement activities for deepening the student experience and for strengthening the quality of research. Some have a more clearly defined engagement strategy and a clear sense of purpose, drawing together multifaceted engagement activities.

The Faculty of Medical Sciences integrates numerous engagement activities with the NHS through its institutes such as the world leading, engaged informed Institute for Ageing and Health. Its professional programmes e.g. in Medicine and Dentistry and Clinical Psychology are closely linked with users. The Faculty has a clearly articulated Patient & Public Engagement Strategy which has benefits for learners, trainers/leaders, and for patients and members of the public.

In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the Newcastle University Business School uses relationships with local, national and international businesses and other external organisations to create the platform for improving teaching, learning and the quality of the student experience and research. Engagement exists at many levels from the school-level International Advisory Board which is responsible for corporate links, to relationships that individual staff have with organisations. Placements and internships form a key part of this strategy. The School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences houses the North East Aphasia Centre, where both staff and students work with Aphasia patients, the Research Centre for Teaching and Learning and the North Leadership Centre, both of which support capacity raising in regional schools.

In the Faculty of Science, Agriculture & Engineering the policy focussed Centre for Rural Economy has contributed to supporting (through evidence based research) the University’s links with Northumberland and, through the Northern Rural Network (with more than 1,000 members), works to address socio-economic challenges facing the sparsely populated areas of the UK’s three most northern regions. The engagement work of the Newcastle Institute for Research on Sustainability is coordinated through the ‘Living Lab’ project which ensures that leading research is translated into real life solutions. The application of novel research outcomes to partners’ commercial activities allows academics to work closely with businesses on practical initiatives to promote sustainable development and economic growth.

These are just a few examples of the good practice we need to share across the University to ensure better organisational learning around engagement. We also need to ensure that the ‘whole is more than the sum of the parts’. For example, the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences’ extensive activities in school leadership development, training teachers and CPD could be used more effectively to support our widening participation and outreach activity. The intensive and extensive links with the
City, both through research and professional service links, could be harnessed for more strategic initiatives. The Science City programme, the Societal Challenge Themes and our cultural strategy are important vehicles for structuring our engagement activities. The Engagement Strategy and the resource to support engagement and impact activities centrally will further focus our efforts. **We need to continue to ensure that all our engagement activities have visibility and impact and help to position the University, and enhance rather than detract from our core functions of teaching and research.**
The Engagement Strategy is central to the University’s mission to be a leading civic university with a global reputation for excellence. As articulated in Vision 2021, engagement is integral to ensuring that our research, teaching and professional activities have genuine economic, cultural and social benefits and impact. Through engagement we contribute to our reputation for world class research addressing key societal themes, we improve our ability to deliver relevant research informed programmes, we ensure fair access to our programmes and continue to deliver an exceptional student experience. The University regards engagement as one of its core activities which, while carried out in the sense of good citizenship, is firmly anchored in our research and teaching. The Engagement Strategy is therefore a coordinating strategy which needs to be articulated closely with the Research and Innovation Strategy, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the Internationalisation Strategy and the Faculty strategies. It is strongly underpinned by the Public Relations Strategy.

For many the notion of a civic university lies in the relationship between the university and its immediate neighbourhood – the city or region. While this is important to us we also emphasise that the key feature of a civic university is its sense of purpose – how it relates to wider society regionally, nationally and internationally.

Our vision of engagement is enabled by three factors:

**PEOPLE**

*Those who lead on creating ideas, delivering projects and developing collaboration*

Fundamental to the success of the Engagement Strategy is the need to develop and nurture an institutional culture in which engagement is seen and embraced by all as an essential and embedded element of our activities. Both individual and institutional successes should be acknowledged and celebrated, and a sense of institutional pride and mutual support championed amongst our staff, students and alumni.

**Staff**

The University is a major employer and the University houses a wealth of expertise and experience across the 5,000 members of staff who contribute to our teaching and learning, research and innovation and the
University’s professional and support services. Many make significant contributions, individually as school governors, volunteers and active citizens. The members of our Council, Court and Honorary Graduates and friends of the University are also critical to our engagement mission as they provide an essential link with business, industry and the professions. The University needs to develop staff and students as ‘knowledgeable ambassadors’ and informed citizens in their interactions with wider society.

**Students**

Our students contribute to and benefit from the University’s engagement activities. For the wider public they are the most visible face of ‘the University’ and it is important that we work to build positive links between students and their local communities. Newcastle University Students’ Union is critical to student engagement and through its societies and clubs, its Student Community Action Network (SCAN) and its support for enterprise contributes extensively to the engagement agenda. The University works closely with the Students’ Union, Northumbria University, the City Council, Residents’ Associations and the police to ensure that students are good residents and neighbours. It is acutely aware of the need for students to respect neighbours and others in their community. The University and the Students’ Union work closely to promote the Student Charter, which includes standards of behaviour and the message that students have a responsibility to behave at all times in a reasonable manner. The University is represented on the Newcastle City Council’s Student Forum that brings together the two universities, the college, councillors, residents and professional services.

For many years the University has had a wide offering of extracurricular opportunities for students that enhance their experience and personal and professional development (badged under Ncl+). In 2012 this was enhanced by the introduction of a University-wide entrepreneurship module, an enhancement of the Career Development Module and the Newcastle Work Experience programme that supports students’ projects in local companies. All these activities contribute to both the quality of Newcastle graduates and to strengthening links with local employers. The University has a strong track record in knowledge exchange through collaborative PhDs, industrial placements on many of our professional programmes and Masters’ projects. Over 2,500 students participate in community work throughout the year and students raise thousands of pounds for local charities. Recent examples of student-led projects include organising free classical music concerts, creating an art group for people with aphasia and photographic competitions for local school children.

The University has consistently shown itself to be a net importer of graduates to the region. Our students go on to be doctors, dentists,
planners, engineers, journalists, administrators and lawyers in the North East. Of the Newcastle graduates entering the labour market in recent years, just under 50% have done so in the North East region. This supply of graduates into the labour market has had an undoubted positive impact on the region’s economy and helps address its well-documented skills shortage.

Alumni

Our alumni relations programme capitalises on deep rooted connections to the University and the City and aims to encourage continued engagement and involvement with the University, and it promotes the reciprocal benefits of such cooperation. The programme also aims to cultivate a climate of mutual support in terms of knowledge, expertise, philanthropy and opportunities.

Stakeholders and Communities

Our research, teaching and engagement activities benefit a wide range of stakeholders and communities with which staff and students interact. These include: national and local government; the private sector; public sector organisations including schools and colleges; charitable organisations; voluntary and community sector partners, parents and families; local residents and the wider society. The University is better informed and equipped to respond to societal need in its teaching, training and research by working with and learning from these diverse groups. That can bring new ideas and opportunities into the University.

PLACES

The areas where we work, study, congregate and learn

Newcastle University is unusual in the centrality of its campus to the City centre. One of our greatest assets is our City Centre campus and much work has gone into developing the accessibility and aesthetic of our buildings, open spaces and thoroughfares. Engagement is a key facet to our activity in the International Centre for Life, the Campus for Ageing and Vitality, and in the plans for Science Central. The University-wide Coherent Campus Group has ensured attention is given to the physical environment in which we study and work, from the commissioning of public art through to our commitment to identifying, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across the University estate. Our campus is a welcoming, vibrant location and, as such, we attract a significant number of festivals and events, for example:

- Insights Public lectures series regularly attracts around 11,000 people a year and the associated Live! in the King’s Hall concert series brings a further 3,700 people to the campus annually.
• British Science Festival, Europe’s largest, longest established and most media-worthy science event with 50,000-80,000 attendances expected in 2013.

• !VAMOS!, a festival combining cuisine, art, film, theatre, dance, music, literature, fashion, sport and education, in celebration of Spanish and Portuguese speaking cultures in Newcastle and Gateshead.

The University houses some important facilities that support engagement: the Great North Museum: Hancock – the most popular attraction in the North East - the Hatton Art Gallery and the Northern Stage theatre. These cultural hubs serve the local community and are a key way of engaging varied groups in the University. Many of our institutes and schools have engagement and outreach facilities, for example, the Chemistry Outreach Laboratory and the Dove Marine facility at Cullercoats, which is principally used for engagement with local schools and the public.

We also recognise the importance of working across the region in a range of locations and venues that enhance our engagement activities, and we look to strategic partnerships (such as the link with Seven Stories Children’s Centre for Children’s Books) with public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support our work in the wider community.

**PURPOSE**

*The work we undertake and the principles we adhere to, to ensure that our partnerships, collaborations and external activities are meaningful and mutually beneficial*

The Engagement Strategy enhances the quality of research and supports the transfer of research into practice. It ensures the best possible experience for our students during and after their studies and serves to enhance the status and reputation of the University.

The University adheres to the following principles in its internal and external engagement activities and these need to be upheld at an institutional, school, service and individual levels:

• **Openness** – we perceive the University as a learning community and we wish to make the boundaries of this community permeable, particularly where circumstances, structures and social relationships may otherwise present barriers.

• **Mutuality** – we recognise that we have much to learn from society to which we belong as well as a lot to contribute. We see engagement as a two-way process rather than something which the University ‘delivers’ to society.
• **Humility** – we recognise that the University has no monopoly on knowledge and that we must look to ‘experts by experience’ to shape our own understanding.

• **Accountability** – there must be clearly communicated and transparent processes by which individuals and communities can question our processes and practices.

• **Integrity** – if our engagement is to be credible and have impact we need to display consistency between what we say and what we do.

• **Inclusivity** – to provide experience and opportunities to engage with all of society, irrespective of background. We need to focus on ‘hard to reach’ groups.
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objective 1
To develop the public understanding of Newcastle as a world class civic university

- Encourage and facilitate active staff participation in relevant agenda and policy fora and contribute intellectual leadership to inform debate and policy.

- Shape the national agenda on higher education.

- Encourage staff to engage actively in relevant professional networks.

- Work with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching to use engagement to support the raising of expectations and aspiration for widening participation students to study at a research intensive university; attract talent into higher education through engagement with schools, FE colleges, local authorities, youth partnerships and community groups.

- Ensure that students during their time here recognise their potential and role in contributing to civil society.

- Provide a platform for engagement of citizens in research activities, communicate our research with non-academic audiences, and encourage debate and challenge from non-academic audiences.

- Support and encourage our alumni to continue to promote the University.

- Promote greater internal understanding of the research, teaching and values of the institution.
**Strategic Objective 2**

*To position Newcastle as a recognised leader in the social, cultural and economic development of the North East of England*

- The University is an anchor institution in the City and region and, as such, has responsibilities to the wider community.

- Provide active leadership on the critical issues affecting the growth of the City and wider region by engaging in strategic forums that bring together a range of public, private, community and voluntary sector groups, for example, the Newcastle Fairness Commission.

**Social/Cultural**

- Support and celebrate cultural diversity through our engagement activities.

- Deliver and support a vibrant and responsive programme of cultural events in the City and region.

- Work with communities and minority groups to ensure accessibility to University activities and resources.

**Economic**

- Promote innovation in the translation of knowledge into economic, social or cultural advancements.

- Create a culture of innovation and enterprise across the institution and encourage entrepreneurial activity in staff and students. Enterprise and innovation activities are intended to generate a financially viable portfolio of activity but individual transactions may have strategic drivers other than financial return.

- Support academic staff to increase the number and scale of interactions with business and industry at a regional, national and international level through consultancy, the provision of CPD, student placements, collaborative Research and Development, contract research and partnering to exploit our intellectual property for the benefit of society.

- Facilitate knowledge exchange to and from a wide range of organisations through KTPs, CIPs, CASE studentships and secondments.

- Support academic staff and students to produce and grow spin out and start-up companies from the institution’s research and knowledge base.
• Forge deeper and longer-term partnerships with industrial partners, including the development of the Science Central site in terms of co-location with partners themed primarily on sustainability.

Strategic Objective 3  
To attain national and international recognition for the University as a leading institution in respect of the three Societal Challenge Themes

• Establish flagship programmes of activity that provide coherence and profile to each of the Societal Challenge Themes.

• Set up user and/or community oriented research and provide effective knowledge transfer around the themes to a wide range of organisations and stakeholders.

• Establish and nurture strategic partnerships underpinned by mutually beneficial activity to support the University’s ambitions in respect of research with impact.

• Enable students to focus on Societal Challenge themes in a wider civic context.

Strategic Objective 4  
To develop the public profile of Newcastle as a City of Science

The University plays a leading role in the public understanding and appreciation of Newcastle as a City of Science from our partnership with Newcastle City Council in Newcastle Science City and through our wide ranging science engagement activities throughout the City region. We aim to maximise the potential of our science and engineering base by helping to create new businesses, attract investment, strengthen science networks and ensure that local people can become part of our continued scientific achievement. As part of this we are committed to engaging public and private sector partners in a wider City of Science alliance to maximise and sustain the impact of Newcastle Science City and inward investment through the NewcastleGateshead Initiative.

• Promote and support inward investment onto the three sites of the three scientific fields – Science Central (sustainability), the Campus for Ageing and Vitality (Ageing and Health) and the International Centre for Life (stem cells and regenerative medicine).
• Promote Newcastle’s scientific expertise externally and ensure business and community engagement in science and technology.

• Focus on business engagement and networking, and work with partners to ensure that there is appropriate support for businesses of all sizes, including high growth and science related activities and the creative and cultural sector.

• Promote the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) educational pathways and liaise with business, and education and training providers to help ensure good alignment between the demand and supply of skills.

• Continue to raise awareness of the University’s specialised facilities, scientific and academic services and, through developing partnerships, seek to ensure stronger engagement with commercial organisations and user communities through the operation of these services.

Strategic Objective 5
To develop and maintain good relations with stakeholders, alumni and the wider public

• Ensure that our recruitment, selection, promotion, reward and recognition policies place a strong emphasis on engagement and impact as part of our research and teaching agenda.

• Work with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Innovation to ensure a more strategic approach to Business Engagement activities.

• Build institutional and individual capacity for engagement by providing initial and continuing professional development to support engagement.

• Ensure engagement activities are taken into account in workload models.

• Consolidate and sustain a number of key relationships and strategic partnerships, based on the principles of co-inquiry mutual benefit shared learning. This can be at an institutional level (MoU with Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council and Gateshead Council; the work of the Student Community Action Group [SCAN]; Students into Schools), Faculty level (Voice North) or at subject level (Street Law project set up by Law students to advise young people on legal rights). Our professional support services can also work effectively with their counterparts at the local authorities.
• Ensure that the ‘University’ (research, teaching and knowledge transfer) effectively communicates with, and becomes more accessible to, outside organisations.

PROFESSOR ELLA RITCHIE
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

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