Good Practice in Engaged Research

Engaged research and engaged teaching and learning are crucial aspects of the Newcastle University vision of being a "world class civic university" and our guiding principle of "excellence with a purpose". They are core to the Institute for Social Renewal which addresses the question "how can people, communities and societies thrive when faced with rapid, transformational change". By working with others to understand and/or address a societal need, the outcomes of engaged research and engaged teaching and learning can have a much richer impact for all involved.

We have developed this document to provide information to assist those colleagues who are considering engaged research as part of their proposals to the NISR Funding Call. We receive a number of applications that involve aspects of engaged research, to our NISR Funding Call. It is important that engaged research is undertaken in a well thought out, sensitive way. This NISR Good Practice document is to be read in conjunction with the Newcastle University Policies and Guidance on Research Ethics. These policies must be adhered to (relevant links are included at the end of this document). For more information on Research Ethics contact the Research Team for your Faculty.

1. Key Considerations for Engaged Research

2. Examples of Engaged Research Projects

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1. Key Considerations for Engaged Research

When we use the term 'engaged research' we take it to include research that involves external individuals, groups or organisations. (Other terms to specifically define research that is jointly produced between academics and non-academics are 'co-produced research' or 'co-inquiry'). Engaged research recognises the importance of different types of knowledge and experience. We will define this as involving one or more 'community of interest'. A community of interest could be people who share a topic (e.g. societies, hobbies, small businesses etc); a professional group (e.g. teachers); a geographic grouping (e.g. neighbourhood, city) or a grouping defined by a social category/division such as gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, disability or age.

This type of research seeks to avoid research "done to" a community of interest, and aims to undertake research "done with" a community of interest. This type of work is often complex (involving a range of differing perspectives), sensitive (the topic may be affecting participants’ everyday lives), time consuming (interacting with many contributors) and dynamic needing to be mindful of fluxes in the environment or within the community of interest. However it can be extremely powerful, enlightening and rewarding for the project lead and the community of interest, and lead to credible, evidence based knowledge. There is no one way to do engaged research, it is more about the relationship that develops between those involved and the ways in which research aims and objectives are worked out and evaluated. It can be helpful to think of the different levels of engagement as along a continuum, with terms such as co-produced or co-inquiry most usually associated with research where the ‘community of interest’ has been a partner from the very beginning.
involved in setting the research focus and question, and other types of research, where at a later point, external
groups become involved as having an engagement aspect to them.

The following are presented as key considerations to be used in the planning stage of engaged research:

**Starting Point:**
- What is the purpose of the research? Why do you want to involve the ‘community of interest’? Why should it
  be ‘engaged research’?
- When to bring ‘communities of interest’ into the research process? Are they part of setting the focus and
  problematic to be investigated?

**Community of Interest - Building Successful Relationships:**
- Who are you looking to involve and how do you define that ‘community of interest’? How do you guard
  against stereotyping? What links do you have with that ‘community of interest’ and what evidence do you
  have that they will want to engage with the research idea and with you?
- What methods will work for communicating with this community of interest’? How long will it take to
  contact them and build trust and understanding? How will you keep communication regular, up to date and
  open?
- How will you handle any queries, particularly questions about the merit of the research?
- How will you present and define yourself with this group and guard against potential/perceived concerns
  that you are exploiting their social problems for academic gain or will be tokenistic in your use of their
  knowledge and expertise?
- How will you establish credibility and trust between yourself and the community, and between the
  community?
- How will you address University Ethics Policy (in particular, Informed Consent, Fair Treatment of Others,
  right to privacy), is there anything you need to do differently than standard ethics practice (for example does
  anonymity mean groups can’t be recognised for their input into the research process?)
- How will you set clear parameters with communities on their level of input and say on the research process,
  gathering of data, analysis and findings?
- Will you provide resources to support the community’s time on the project either in terms of expenses or
  some form of fee?
- How will you manage their expectations of the research and its outcome(s)?

**Research Topic and Method:**
- What sensitivities are there around the research topic, and how will you address these and ensure
  compliance with the University Ethics Policy (e.g. The principle of ‘Beneficence’ (the requirement to promote
  the interests and well being of others) and ‘Non-maleficence’ (the principle of ‘not doing harm’) are applied
  to & must be integral to all Newcastle University research)?
- How will you define the research question, scope and timeframe? What involvement will the community
  have in designing and agreeing those definitions?

**Aims of Research:**
- What are you seeking to achieve through the research?
- What outputs are you looking to deliver (joint presentation, briefing notes, tools for the ‘community’ to use,
  non academic publication, academic publication) and how will you work with the community to achieve
  these?
- How will community participation be acknowledged in dissemination?

**Sustainability of Research and the Research Relationship:**
- What will you do when the research project is complete, and how will you ensure that you do not simply
  ‘parachute in’ and then out again (See also Newcastle University Research Ethics Toolkit ‘Debriefing’ section)
- How will you manage the relationships that you have created beyond the terms of the project?
2. Examples of Engaged Research Projects

As a way to think about your own plans for engaged research, it can be helpful to consider other examples of engaged research. This can have the benefit of suggesting methods, sensitivities, practicalities and also point to the tremendously informative and rich research results and knowledge exchange that can be gained through engaged research approaches.

Case Study Example (a)
Prof Janice McLaughlin, Professor of Sociology, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University has developed an excellent track record of research working with communities of interest.

Janice’s research examines childhood disability and family life, over time she has built up research relationships with organisations that support and represent families and also with health and social care professionals who work with families and provide care and treatment for children.

As an example of recent work, Janice and her colleagues (Edmund Coleman-Fountain, Allan Colver, Patrick Olivier) worked with 17 young people from the North East on an ESRC Funded Project called “Embodied Selves in Transition: Disabled Young Bodies” which explored disability and the disabled body. Please visit the ‘Body Matters’ website which includes examples of the findings from participants in their own words, and images to represent the findings. http://research.ncl.ac.uk/thebodymatters/whattheyoungpeopleshared/

“I have learnt a huge amount from working with different organisations, communities and individuals and it would be impossible for me to do the research I do without their involvement. They shape what it is that we examine, how we do it, the analysis we draw out and the routes through which we disseminate findings. Over time I have tried to do more (but I know not enough) to find ways to both resource their involvement and also acknowledge their influence. This can happen in a number of ways, whether formally naming them as investigators on a project (which supports both recognition and enables resources to be attributed to them), or having them on board as advisors who receive compensation for their time and efforts, or other strategies.

Often things can be done in kind to acknowledge the help they provide, for example volunteering with an organisation that has been involved in a project or providing our time to examine a problem they wish to have looked at. It is also important to think about approaches and techniques which can aid their involvement and facilitate trust building; this can be something simple like meeting in their space, or ensuring you use techniques for discussion and sharing information that that are appropriate to the way they interact with the world and learn things. The benefits far outweigh the challenges, but nevertheless challenges remain. I think involving external actors in thinking through what it is that will be researched is invaluable but often, given it comes before a project is funded, means we are asking for their input when (a) we cannot guarantee the research will happen, and (b) we can provide little compensation for their time. People’s lives can be complicated (particularly in the context of disability) and organisations can be stretched (particularly third sector organisations representing and led by families), so problems can emerge with their ability to stay involved with a project over time – this problem has noticeably increased in contexts of austerity. Overall, though in many ways research is far more likely to be done well, usefully and in a socially responsive way if we develop partnerships with others from outside academia.”
Case Study Example (b)

Understanding Bee Health Stakeholders

Karen Scott, Research Fellow, Centre for Rural Economy and oral history specialist Sue Bradley worked on a programme of work over three years looking at the social science of bee health. Although much media interest had been concerned with pollinator decline, the focus has been on the natural science side of things. However, there are many social issues related to pollinator decline and long standing conflicts between different groups of bee health stakeholders. With some seedcorn funding from the University, Karen and Sue started speaking with beekeepers in Durham and Orkney in order to find out their issues and concerns. They worked through in depth interviews and oral history methods, but also through visiting their hives and joining in with hive inspections, attending meetings and beekeeping training courses. This sort of contact helped the researchers to understand what the most relevant and useful research questions were for a national project which could be useful to address key issues of concern for the sector. This then fed into a Defra funded national project called Understanding Bee Health Stakeholders (with Mark Reed at BCU and Ros Bryce at Aberdeen University). Defra wanted to find out what the relationships were between different stakeholder groups (beekeepers, farmers, business, environmental groups, policymakers, researchers, funders etc) and how people could work together better. The national study was informed by key stakeholders who helped (at workshops in London and via email) to shape the research and fed back on findings at various stages. The experiences and knowledge from this process helped inform a National Pollinator Strategy and some of those original beekeepers were part of that. Without building good relationships over time and knowing in depth what issues and concerns, practices and attitudes bee health stakeholders have it would be impossible to conduct research that could lead to useful policy.

‘I could not possibly do the sort of research I want to do without being engaged with the relevant communities of interest in some way. The sort of knowledge I work towards can only come about through close attention to different perspectives and experience and this often helps to formulate research questions and is always crucial in answering them. However, engaged research is difficult to do really well, it can be very time intensive, it needs a certain ethical awareness, a non-judgemental approach and a commitment to flexibility. When working over a period of time with groups where there are very different, sometimes conflicting, perspectives I need to be particularly vigilant about the messages I am giving out about my own personal attitudes. In busy academic lives it can also be hard to sustain the momentum of communication needed for responsible research relationships. That’s the thing I find most difficult and I often feel guilty that I haven’t kept in contact with people as much as I should. As research projects stretch and develop it can also be difficult to define an end point. Therefore I think it’s important to try to think through at the start how I will keep in touch with people and build that into the timetable for the project, know what everyone’s expectations are. Depending on the project it could be important to mark an ending with some form of celebration or social event. I’ve done that in the past and it’s been really nice for everyone. It’s a chance to say thanks, feed back findings and just enjoy the relationships you’ve built whilst acknowledging an end to the formal project. Flexibility is very important as we are often asking people to give up their time freely for an activity we are getting paid for. I am also now careful not to say that the university is ‘helping’ as this might suggest a patronizing idea of a one way knowledge transfer which couldn't be further from the truth.’
Useful Links

There are a number of national organisations which promote engaged research in practice:

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE): [http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/)

Range of resources available on its website about involving people in your research.

**Involve**: [http://www.involve.org.uk/](http://www.involve.org.uk/)

This is an organisation which exists to support organisations, politicians and public officials to transform the way they engage with citizens.

Useful Documents

**Research Councils UK Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research**: The Concordat consists of a set of key principles for the future support of public engagement within the Research Councils, and under each principle, an explanation of how it may be embedded into institutional practice

"Community Based Participatory Research – A Guide to Ethical Principles and Practice" (Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, and NCCPE, 2011) See in particular pages 9 to 11

**The Engaging Researcher** (Vitae and NCCPE, 2010) Short and simple leaflet which includes some ‘top tips’ on how to involve the public (but is more focused on dissemination of research than developing co-inquiry based research).
3. Newcastle University Policies on Research Ethics

All research undertaken within the University must follow Newcastle University Research Ethics Policy and Procedure. Comprehensive information can be found from the University website section on Research Governance and Ethics.

The University must ensure that all its projects undergo appropriate ethical review before commencement. This covers both internally and externally funded projects, and includes undergraduate and postgraduate projects. The University has a two stage process. The first stage is a preliminary review. This is a simple online questionnaire that assesses whether your project is high risk and which directs you to the appropriate internal or external committee for further review if it is required. All projects whether unfunded or funded, staff / student / course should go through this preliminary process before any work at all begins. Please use the online questionnaire from the link below, to begin the stage of Preliminary Review.

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/research/ethics_governance/ethics/procedures/routes_for_approval.htm

Ethics ToolKit

(see http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/research/ethics_governance/ethics/toolkit/index.htm )

This is an excellent resource which includes information on Participants and Consent, which is very relevant to planning and undertaking Engaged Research.

Working with Human Participants
Adults Lacking Capacity
Working with Children & Young Adults
Other Consent Situations – Crime, Internet, Organisation/Workplace, or Medical Research
Project Information
Consent Form
Consent FAQ
Debriefing

The Toolkit also includes information on Confidentiality, Data Collection, and Data Retention/Storage.

For more information on Research Ethics visit the Newcastle University Research and Enterprise Services website http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/research/ethics_governance/index.htm

Research Ethics Policy and Procedure

(see http://www.ncl.ac.uk/res/research/ethics_governance/governance/index.htm)

“All research is subject to ethical considerations concerning purpose, source of funding, methods to be deployed and wider value impact. It is important that risks in carrying out a piece of research are clearly articulated and weighed against the potential value of it so that those involved (researchers, researched and third parties) proceed with informed consent” (Source: Research Ethics Policy and Procedure)