

Expanding public engagement in science and research

Date(s) Friday 12th October 2012 (09:00-16:30)

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Public engagement is a key component of academic endeavour, but traditional views of its place purely as a vehicle for dissemination of research outcomes are now being challenged by increasing emphasis of patient and public involvement in research design and delivery. A major critique has been the homogeneity of the 'engaged' public which belongs to a particular societal constituency which already has a degree of scientific literacy and the ability access and mobilise resources. This leads to an unequal sharing of the goods of scientific research across society, particularly in 'hard to reach' groups.



The aim of the workshop with academic leads sharing experiences and ideas around each theme will be to explore:

- Concerns about the capacity of current arrangements to deliver on the engagement agenda.
- Different ways in which the benefits of scientific research can be accessed more widely by a more heterogeneous and socially, ethnically and culturally diverse public.

This will involve the exploration of an 'upstream' model of engagement which seeks dialogue with different publics at an early stage of knowledge production, recruiting the public as an active democratic partner in science rather than as passive recipient. Such a model will involve collaborating with third sector organisations, NGOs and patient/ public associations, and participation in policy making, for example. This has the potential to make a significant contribution to scientific research and innovation within the University of Birmingham, itself part of a city which is home to 10% of the UK population and has a diverse socio-economic and ethnic mix.

Workshop themes

Cultural competence: Cultural competence in research is defined as 'the ability of researchers and research staff to provide high quality research that takes into account the culture and diversity of a population when developing research ideas, conducting research, and exploring applicability of research findings' (Harvard Catalyst 2010). Bringing cultural competence to study design and implementation, analysis and interpretation of results, and conclusions and presentation of findings can help to ensure that research is applicable to ethnically diverse populations.

Co-production of research: The College of Social Sciences has run a successful 'Community Researchers' programme, which trains and deploys members of the community on social science research projects, offering the ability to reach research participants outside of conventional circles. We will explore the applicability/relevance of this model to other disciplines across the University.

International Comparative engagement: The engagement of patients, communities and public in research has been an international theme and different countries have addressed it in different ways. For example, the European Patients' Forum is a coalition of patient groups across the EU to promote the patient's voice in health care research and policy; the Community Health Innovation and Research programme at Harvard has been set up to engage communities in research and facilitate the speedy uptake, integration and evaluation of research evidence to improve public health, addressing community priorities. We will explore different models and their impact for different disciplines across the University.

Ethics of online community interaction: The internet and online communities present a potentially fruitful platform for public engagement with research. Collaboration between bioethical, philosophical, medical, social science and legal perspectives may help to provide useful strategies for researchers to produce ethically sound online research protocols.

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