

THE ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

Public engagement at Bristol includes all the ways in which University staff and students interact with members of the public, encompassing talks, debates, festivals, performances, widening participation, research with, and driven by, communities, volunteering, lifelong learning, action research and engaged learning. The Centre for Public Engagement works alongside colleagues throughout the University to support, reward and celebrate engagement activity. Here we cover some of the vast array of such activity that took place in 2008/09, to the mutual benefit of the public and the University.

The University's priorities in this area are to:

- support and promote dialogue between staff/students and the public;
- play a leading role in setting the national agenda on public engagement in higher education;
- respond positively to community needs;
- play a positive role in the affairs of the city, region and nation;
- nurture relationships with alumni and other friends of the University;
- behave responsibly as an institution.

Involving the public

The University is committed to sharing its teaching expertise and research findings with members of the public. One of the ways it does this is through organising or promoting an extensive programme of free public events. In 2008/09, these included:

- a series of lectures to celebrate the University's centenary, featuring renowned speakers such as Jonathan Kestenbaum on innovation, Leonard Susskind on Darwin and the cosmic landscape and Will Hutton on the shifting global economy;
- a major exhibition of photographs of life in China at the Grant Bradley Gallery in Bedminster. The five-week Picturing China 1870-1950 exhibition was accompanied by a series of evening talks about China past, present and future, a schools outreach programme to primary and secondary schools involving more than 500 local children and a Chinese New Year celebration in conjunction with the City Museum;
- a series of 'citizen science' activities co-ordinated by researchers in the School of Biological Sciences (during National Science and Engineering Week and at the Festival of Nature) that involved hundreds of schoolchildren in the task of identifying and recording invasive moths and their pest-controlling parasites, bringing the issue of biodiversity alive for thousands of people;
- Brain Awareness Week, hosted by Bristol Neuroscience and supported by The Physiological Society and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

This annual event, which involved more than 60 Bristol neuroscientists this year, gives the public the chance to meet experts in the field, try their hand at interactive neuroscience activities and learn about new research at Bristol;

- a series of informal 'Twilight Talks' held just after work where members of the public met academics to hear about and respond to their latest research.

Leading role for CPE

The University's Centre for Public Engagement (CPE) went from strength to strength in 2008/09, co-ordinating efforts to ensure that engagement is embedded in the University's culture. As well as organising engagement events in partnership with others, it gave presentations to departments and faculties throughout the year, and to Court and Council, outlining the ways in which it can support academics in sharing their work with wider audiences. It also organised the University's first Engage 2009 conference, providing an opportunity for staff and postgraduates to hear from national figures in public engagement, share experiences and ideas, and find out about the range of public engagement activity at the University. Another new initiative, aimed at helping staff to capture and articulate the value of their public engagement activities, was the creation of a public engagement stories website (www.bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories).

Engaged University Forums

The Engaged University Steering Group, which oversees this area of the University's work, has organised a series of forums to enable external organisations to play a part in setting the institution's engagement strategy. Three key areas in which the city of Bristol excels – sustainability, creativity and ideas, and connectivity and digital media – have been identified as potential areas for further engagement work. In May 2009, the Engaged University Forum on Sustainability brought together representatives from the University (research staff, support staff and students) and from external organisations, including Bristol City Council and the Green Capital Momentum Group, Sustrans, Arnolfini, Bristol Zoo, Wildscreen and the University of the West of England, to identify areas where the University might add value to current work in the sustainability arena. Outcomes included proposals to develop multi-partner research bids, training for undergraduate and postgraduate students in sustainability-related skills and shared visions of Bristol as an eco-city.

Setting the national agenda

The University continues to play an active part in the activities of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The Centre, which is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust, is working to embed public engagement across the higher education sector. Its steering group is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The University's own Centre for Public Engagement represents Bristol on the NCCPE project group, which provides valuable opportunities to share learning, propose joint work and co-ordinate with counterparts at the University of the West of England. Joint work during 2008/09 focused on training for public engagement and on the research impact agenda, which asks academics to articulate the economic and societal impacts of their work. This learning will be shared across UK higher education with a view to securing the culture change sought by funding bodies.

Kathy Sykes, Professor of Sciences and Society, was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours and has contributed to national strategies on science engagement by advising funders, government, learned institutions and others. She also co-authored a report on the use of dialogue and public consultation in shaping government policy.

Responding to community needs

The University continues to encourage members of staff to take part in volunteering activities in Bristol communities by awarding an extra day's annual leave for the purpose. Students, too, have always made a huge investment in the well-being of the local area through volunteering and more details of their activities can be found on p15.

The Centre for Sport, Exercise and Health is involved in a wide variety of community projects. Among the year's highlights was the Festival of School Sports and Culture. The three-day event, held at the Coombe Dingle Sports Complex and involving 18 Bristol secondary schools, aimed to celebrate sport participation and achievement and provide pupils with a positive experience of sport.

The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children is engaging further with the local community by turning participants from its Children of the 90s study into young researchers themselves. It has set up a Teenage Advisory Panel, which provides a forum for the young people to contribute their views on the study and inform its future direction.

The University maintained its involvement in the Merchants' Academy in Withywood, South Bristol, which has completed its first year of operation. As co-sponsor with the Society of Merchant Venturers, the University played a significant role in the establishment of the Academy, including its education strategy. Three members of staff at the University continue to serve as governors.

Bristol ChemLabS, one of the University's two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, won a prestigious Big Tick award in Business in the Community's Awards for



Top: Participants in the Children of the 90s study
Bottom: Brain Awareness Week

Excellence 2009. It was judged to be making a strikingly positive and sustained impact on the community through its strong schools outreach programme. This is the first Big Tick ever awarded to a university department for outreach activities and is also the first awarded to an educational programme in the chemical sciences.