

The engaged university

Public engagement at Bristol includes ways in which staff and students interact with the public and plays an important role in the University's external communication and interaction with a wide range of stakeholders. Activities range from talks, festivals, volunteering and performances to research with or driven by community groups, lifelong learning and engaged teaching. Departments involved in these activities are brought together on the Engaged University Steering Group, which sets public engagement strategy and acts as a guardian of the quality of activities. This group is chaired by Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Avril Waterman-Pearson.

The University's priorities in this area are to:

- support and promote dialogue with 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.

Supporting and promoting dialogue

Examples of activities that supported engagement in 2009/10 include the following:

- The Department of Earth Sciences secured a grant for £295,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for engagement activities about the Bristol Dinosaur. It is now developing a programme of activities to engage school children, family groups and adults that will be rolled out in 2010/11.
- The School of Biological Sciences held an interactive exhibition in Bristol's Cabot Circus in March. The event included a citizen science project about natural pest control. Dr Darren Evans and Dr Michael Pocock subsequently secured a £19,000 grant from the Natural Environment Research Council to roll out the Citizen Science Leafminer project nationally.
- Four public engagement grants were secured from Research Councils UK, and three public engagement grants from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). The BBSRC-funded projects include engagement activities with schools on biodiversity and a project to raise awareness about the importance of bees.

Setting the national agenda

The University, through its Centre for Public Engagement and other parts of the Communications Division, has been working closely with the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), among other things to develop its Manifesto for Engagement, which will be launched

in December 2010. Through the NCCPE, the University was able to submit comments about public engagement to the Higher Education Council for England's consultation on the Research Excellence Framework.

Responding to community needs

The Engaged University Steering Group hosts public engagement fora throughout the year, to bring together representatives from organisations around the city with academics to explore opportunities for collaborative working. Fora were held this year on Creativity and Ideas, and Connectivity and the Digital Media. Outcomes from previous fora include cross-organisation research bids and work on student volunteering.

Public events

Events run throughout the year, including festivals, exhibitions, performances and work with schools. Highlights in 2009/10 included:

- 'Discover', the University's biennial public celebration of research, in Bristol's city centre shopping malls. The interactive exhibits represented all six faculties and were manned by over 100 academics and students. Over 4,500 members of the public attended, including more than 700 school children;
- opening the Wills Memorial Building, Royal Fort House and the new Nanoscience and Quantum Information building to more than 2,500 people on Doors Open Day and associated events;

- two tents full of interactive exhibits at the Festival of Nature in June. The three-day event included a dedicated schools day attended by more than 800 primary school children. The University also worked with the Bristol Natural History Consortium to deliver Bioblitz – a race against time to identify species in a given area. This project was trialled in Bristol last year and has now been taken up by over 20 other cities in the UK;

- a continuing programme of public lectures and talks. These included the final lectures in the popular centenary series and twilight talks on topics as diverse as farm animal minds, lovesickness in Renaissance literature and human-computer interactions.

Improving outcomes for young people

The University has supported a series of leadership fora with city leaders and teachers to investigate how outcomes for young people can be improved in Bristol and beyond. All the events have been well attended, and have tackled thorny issues such as children's services and leadership in times of change.

Lifelong learning

Although the University's lifelong learning programme is much smaller than it used to be, there are still courses on offer in a number of subjects, including archaeology, modern languages and English. The part-time degree in English Literature and Community Engagement is now entering its third year. It continues to be over-subscribed and attracts people from the poorest areas of Bristol.

Community sport

Sport, Exercise and Health has an active programme of community events. A highlight in 2009/10 was a sports day for over 60 10- and 11-year-olds from the Bridge Learning Campus in Hartcliffe. The event enabled pupils to try out new sports and provided students and staff with an opportunity to get involved with a community project, experience the rewards of volunteering and develop new skills.

Behaving responsibly as an institution

Once again, the University took part in the 'Universities that Count' index, a corporate social responsibility index run by Business in the Community that rates universities on environmental management and social responsibility. This year, the University's score improved to 75%, and it received special commendation for its work on equality and diversity and public and community engagement.

More information about the University's continuing efforts to improve the sustainability of the physical estate can be found on pp22-23.

Nurturing relationships with alumni

Throughout 2009/10, the Campaigns and Alumni (CAR) team continued to support and encourage alumni to engage with the University and with each other, through communications, activities and events, and volunteering opportunities. For instance, in autumn 2009, over 600 alumni met the Vice-Chancellor and others from the University at a series of 12 events in nine countries around the world, and Professor Stafford Lightman presented a Centenary Alumni Forum in London on stress and the brain.

CAR supports the work done by Convocation, the University's alumni body, in alumni outreach, alumni branch activities around the globe, and through Convocation events. In 2009/10, these included a presentation on the future prospects for Africa by Paul Boateng at the London Branch of Convocation centenary lecture.

CAR continues to encourage alumni to return to Bristol to meet current students. It has been developing online social networking sites to help facilitate such interaction, and there are now over 4,000 users signed up to Bristol alumni Facebook and LinkedIn web pages.

CAR also encourages charitable donations from alumni and other friends. More details can be found on p27.



Top: Penguin ice sculpture, one of the exhibits at 'Discover'
Bottom: Visitors at the Festival of Nature