



People Science & Policy

# Independent Review of Beacons for Public Engagement Evaluation Findings

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Final Report for RCUK, HEFCE and the Wellcome Trust

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# Independent Review of Beacons for Public Engagement Evaluation Findings

Final Report for RCUK, HEFCE and the Wellcome Trust

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## Summary

### Introduction

The Beacons for Public Engagement initiative (the BPE) is funded by the UK higher education funding councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust. The initiative has supported six independent Beacons situated across Great Britain and a National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The BPE has five aims, which are to:

- create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students;
- build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved;
- ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level;
- create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise; and
- enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning.

This review was commissioned to synthesise the available evidence on the degree to which these aims are being delivered, or could be delivered, by the actions being taken by the individual Beacons and the NCCPE. The sources of evidence that we have reviewed include:

- the proposals submitted by the successful Beacons and the NCCPE;
- annual and other reports submitted by the Beacons and the NCCPE to the funders;
- reports from the BPE national evaluators (Oakleigh Consulting);
- reports from individual Beacon evaluators; and
- other documents supplied by the Beacons.

### BPE and Individual Beacon Aims

The six Beacons have evolved in different ways and have their own aims and objectives. We reviewed the initial plans submitted by the successful Beacons and the NCCPE so that we could see the way that the aims of the individual Beacons and the NCCPE mapped onto the five BPE aims. The invitation to tender for this review refers to investigating the “consequences, positive and negative, of the funders’ open-ended approach to defining the description of a Beacon” and the mapping suggests that the commissioning approach has led to a programme capable of delivering the five BPE aims.

### Create a Culture within HEIs, Research Institutes and Centres

This aim relies not only on formal and embedded systems but the response of members of staff within these institutions to the systems and other influences from peers, partners and the wider world. We recommend that it would be helpful to think in terms of two sets of cultural indicators. Top-down indicators that show the presence of formal systems, and bottom-up indicators that show that the culture is embedded in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals at all levels within an institution.

We have found evidence across the BPE initiative of actions to promote a culture that will support public engagement, these actions include:

- programmes of work to have public engagement activity included in promotion criteria;
- inclusion of public engagement in the responsibilities of senior managers;
- appointment of ‘champions’ for public engagement;
- development of training for public engagement;



- grant and other funding schemes; and
- prizes/awards for public engagement.

There is also some evidence of bottom-up indicators for example the high levels of demand for training, the number of enquiries made of Beacon staff and the levels of interest in awards and prizes.

This BPE aim does not necessarily require changes in institutional culture to be measured; instead it sets out a particular culture that is desirable and a critical factor is assessing whether it exists.

Despite the evidence that we have found of significant progress at the institutions participating in individual Beacons, there are still widespread barriers to the development of a truly supportive culture.

## **Build Capacity for Public Engagement**

Across the BPE, there have been three main methods of capacity building:

- encouraging more individuals to become involved in public engagement;
- training individuals so that they could be more effective participants in public engagement; and
- developing institutional infrastructure that would support the involvement of individual members of staff in public engagement.

Many Beacons have used small amounts of funding as a tool used to foster involvement in public engagement and we have found clear evidence that staff new to public engagement have become involved because of Beacon activities. Providing training has been a high priority across the BPE and there is evidence of positive feedback on the quality of the training and support provided. A major barrier to building capacity is the relatively limited resources of the individual Beacons in relation to the size of the participating institutions.

Long-term sustainability of capacity and capacity-building is inextricably linked to institutional culture and whether or not an institution chooses to invest in public engagement capacity.

## **Incorporate Public Engagement in Strategic Plans**

Different approaches have been taken to embedding public engagement in the strategic plans of institutions participating in the individual Beacons. Some institutions have taken a top-down approach, whilst others have taken a more consultative approach to strategy development. There is no strong evidence yet as to which approach might be more effective in the long run.

Within academia, culture can be quite localised, sometimes at a faculty or departmental level, but often at a research group level. Maintaining a cascade process so that local plans include public engagement activities will be a critical part of building a supportive culture.

## **Create Networks and Share Good Practice**

We have found evidence of the use of partnerships to develop public engagement activities and networks to provide support for individuals involved in public engagement by individual Beacons and the NCCPE. Where partnerships have developed between universities and other organisations, we have found that the driving force has generally been the university, or the Beacon of which it is a part. However, there is a reasonable amount of evidence that external partners are valuing the resources and individuals that Beacons and universities can offer. This suggests that in the longer-term there may be more external drivers for partnership than has been the case to date.

There is evidence emerging that opportunistic partnerships are important. Partnering for a specific purpose seems to generate the most value for the partners. Some Beacons are finding that activity-led partnerships are proving more important than some of those set out in the initial application.



Building partnerships and running networks require resources. At present the BPE is providing these resources, but longer-term sustainability may be in question without the additional resources provided by the BPE.

## Test Methods and Share Learning

There are differences of style and approach emerging across the Beacons, but at this stage there is no evidence to suggest that any of the models are inherently “better” or “worse” than the others.

This review has found evidence that all of the Beacons are achieving some successes against the BPE aims. Those that have tended towards an activity-led approach seem to be delivering more quickly than those that are embedding public engagement within research. However, an activity-led approach requires the resources to support activities, whereas an embedded approach has the potential to lead to a more sustainable style of public engagement.

Just as we do not feel that there is conclusive evidence that any of the Beacon approaches currently stand out as weaker or stronger, we are not convinced that there is evidence that any of the management structures and initial partnerships offer clear advantages or disadvantages.

At this stage we have highlighted the features that seem to make activities successful, these are:

- willing members of staff;
- the establishment of supportive systems within the institution or Beacon;
- partnerships with organisations/communities that have access to defined audiences;
- partnerships with organisations/communities that have specific goals; and
- a clear focus.

## General Barriers and Drivers

The main drivers for public engagement that were reported included:

- maintaining a licence to operate;
- recruitment of future generations of students and researchers;
- the objectives of research funders;
- the Research Excellence Framework (REF);
- benefits to researchers; and
- the foundations that have been established by the BPE.

The main barriers to public engagement that were reported included:

- the start-up time required at the commencement of the initiative;
- the capacity of individual Beacon teams;
- an over-emphasis on internal focus;
- the capacity of staff in participating institutions to participate in public engagement;
- the Research Excellence Framework (REF);
- definitions of public engagement;
- funding.

We found more references to barriers than drivers, suggesting a general culture that views public engagement as not yet part of the mainstream of academic life and therefore something that is constantly under threat. For public engagement to be a mainstream part of academic life, and thus sustainable, it needs to support the wider institutional culture in every university and be aligned to its core mission.



## Conclusions

Our main conclusion is that **the BPE pilot has been successful so far in that a number of different styles of Beacon have been established and all are contributing to the attainment of the five over-arching BPE aims.** More specifically we have concluded that:

- the BPE initiative has stimulated considerable relevant activity;
- the fundamental issue is one of institutional culture; and
- the BPE initiative has made progress towards, but not yet fully delivered, the desired culture within the institutions participating in the Beacons.

The goal of the BPE should not be to foster changes in culture, but rather to see a 'cultural standard' in place by the end of the initiative. This **cultural standard would be exemplified by a number of features:**

- **the role(s) of, and rewards for, public engagement are recognised in strategy documents at all levels of the institution;**
- **behaviours reflect the roles that are set out;**
- **rewards affect behaviours;**
- **an appropriate proportion of members of staff take part in public engagement;**
- **members of staff from a full spread of the disciplines and grades within the institution take part in public engagement;**
- **there are internal systems, appropriately resourced, to facilitate involvement in public engagement;**
- **potential partners have a clear access point within the institution;**
- **external stakeholders (partners and audiences) recognise that a supportive culture exists.**

We suggest that these features can be used to provide indicators of an institutional culture with regard to public engagement that draws together the establishment of top-down systems and the presence of bottom-up attitudes and behaviour amongst **staff from a full spread of the disciplines and grades.**

## Recommendations

Our principal recommendation for the funders is that the **Beacons and the NCCPE should be encouraged to continue to implement their plans across the range of aims,** but with encouragement that **the central indicator of success will be institutional cultures** at the conclusion of the initiative.

Our other recommendations relate to evaluation of the BPE pilot

1. **We do not think that it offers good value for money to commission a further large-scale national evaluation.** Instead **the focus should be on the individual evaluations of the six Beacons and the NCCPE.**
2. **To assess the culture within the participating institutions it is likely to be necessary to undertake quantitative research within the Beacons. It is vital that this work yields data that is representative of each institution.** The funders should investigate with the Beacons, as a matter of urgency, whether their existing evaluation budgets will allow for this work and whether their evaluators have the technical capacity to complete it.
3. **It would not be good value for money to undertake a representative survey of staff in HEIs that are not participating in a Beacon.** Further qualitative research with managers and staff from non-Beacon institutions could be a useful addition to the later stages of the evaluation.
4. It will be important that the funders are able to draw the individual evaluations together. **In order to build a complete picture, it may be necessary to undertake some synthesis work to draw together key points from the individual evaluations as the initiative draws to a close.** Such a synthesis could be undertaken by one of the funding organisations or be commissioned out in similar fashion to this review.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Beacons for Public Engagement initiative (BPE)

The Beacons for Public Engagement initiative (referred to as BPE throughout this report) is funded by the UK higher education funding councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust. The initiative has supported six independent Beacons situated across Great Britain and a National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE). The invitation to tender (ITT) for this review set out five aims of the BPE, which are to:

- create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students;
- build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved;
- ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level;
- create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise; and
- enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning.

These five aims have set the framework for this review.

### 1.1.1 Individual Beacons

One of the features of the competition was that bids should be tailored to take advantage of locally available expertise and meet local needs and priorities. This means that the six Beacons have evolved in different ways and have their own aims and objectives and while all of these contribute to the overall BPE aims, they are in some cases more specific than the overall BPE aims. This specificity needs to be considered in the individual evaluations commissioned by the Beacons, but for this review we have focused on the way that the Beacons' activities contribute to the over-arching BPE aims.

## 1.2 This review

The invitation to tender for this review described the purpose as being to:

- synthesise and interpret findings from the second phase of the evaluation, in comparison with the baseline data and report;
- review the evaluation findings from individual Beacons and NCCPE; and
- draw conclusions from the available evidence on the consequences and impact of the Beacons initiative.

The review was a desk-based exercise, reviewing documentation provided by the Beacons, the NCCPE, the BPE evaluators, the individual Beacon evaluators and the funders of the BPE initiative.

### 1.2.1 Approach

In this review, we have been looking, proactively, for evidence of plans, activities and achievements that have started to deliver the BPE aims set out above, or have the potential to deliver these aims. The potential for delivery is arguably as important as actual delivery at this stage, given that the four year pilot still has some time to run. In addition to noting that the initiative is still underway, as section 8.2 describes, there is evidence which suggests that individual Beacons and the NCCPE were not able to start as quickly as originally envisaged, meaning that it may be more realistic to highlight potential at this stage. In situations where there is no clear evidence to report we have simply stated that evidence is not yet available and if appropriate suggested ways in which such evidence might be gathered.



## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.3.1 Sources of evidence

The sources of evidence that we have reviewed include:

- the proposals submitted by the successful Beacons and the NCCPE;
- annual and other reports submitted by the Beacons and the NCCPE to the funders;
- reports from the BPE national evaluators (Oakleigh Consulting);
- reports from individual Beacon evaluators; and
- other documents supplied by the Beacons.

Appendix 1 provides a full list of the material reviewed.

### 1.3.2 NVivo

Taking all the sources together there were a considerable number of documents to review. To aid the capture of critical findings and the recording of emergent themes so that these could be tracked across the different sources and positioned within the review framework we have used the qualitative analysis tool NVivo. NVivo has allowed us to link the various documents together in a single work unit, so that electronic annotations can link themes, data and issues across different documents.

## 1.4 This report

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the way that the five aims of the BPE initiative are supported by the individual Beacons' aims and objectives. Then chapters 3 to 7 address each of the aims in turn, detailing the activities that we have identified that could lead to these aims being delivered, emerging evidence that they are being delivered, barriers to the achievement of the aims, drivers that are encouraging their delivery and the sustainability of the actions. Chapter 8 describes general drivers for, and barriers to public engagement, and finally chapter 9 sets out our conclusions and recommendations to the funders based on the evidence that we have reviewed.

In developing this report we have concentrated on synthesising information and have used figures and tables to distil the evidence that we have extracted. Our aim has been to keep this report tightly focused, so the text is our synthesis of the evidence, while the evidence we have extracted is presented in appendices. These appendices are referenced in the relevant sections of the report and include:

- a full list of the materials reviewed<sup>1</sup>;
- maps of the individual Beacon aims and the five BPE aims;
- tables of activities, achievements, barriers and drivers relating to the five BPE aims; and
- tables of general barriers and drivers.

### 1.4.1 Caveats

The BPE initiative is ongoing and this review can only provide a commentary on the evidence available at a given point in time. As we were completing the review, new progress and evaluation reports for the individual Beacons and the NCCPE were being prepared. It is therefore inevitable that this review will date as new evidence emerges and it should be regarded as a snapshot of the evidence.

We should like to record our gratitude to the members of staff of both the Beacons and their evaluators who supported this review by providing copies of relevant material. This review has required the analysis of a great deal of material and it does not report every point of detail. Where details have been omitted, we apologise to those who provided material. However, the review is intended to synthesise the evidence and draw conclusions and doing this has inevitably required some detail to be omitted.

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<sup>1</sup> This appendix, Appendix 1 is included in this report, all other appendices are in a separate document.



## 2 BPE and Individual Beacon Aims

The five BPE aims provide the structure for this review, but before considering how the Beacons, both individually and collectively, have delivered these aims, we reviewed the initial plans submitted by the successful Beacons and the NCCPE so that we could see the way that the individual Beacon aims mapped onto the five BPE aims.

We have summarised our detailed review in a map for each of the five BPE aims showing how individual Beacon aims support the over-arching aims. These maps are included in the following sub-sections.

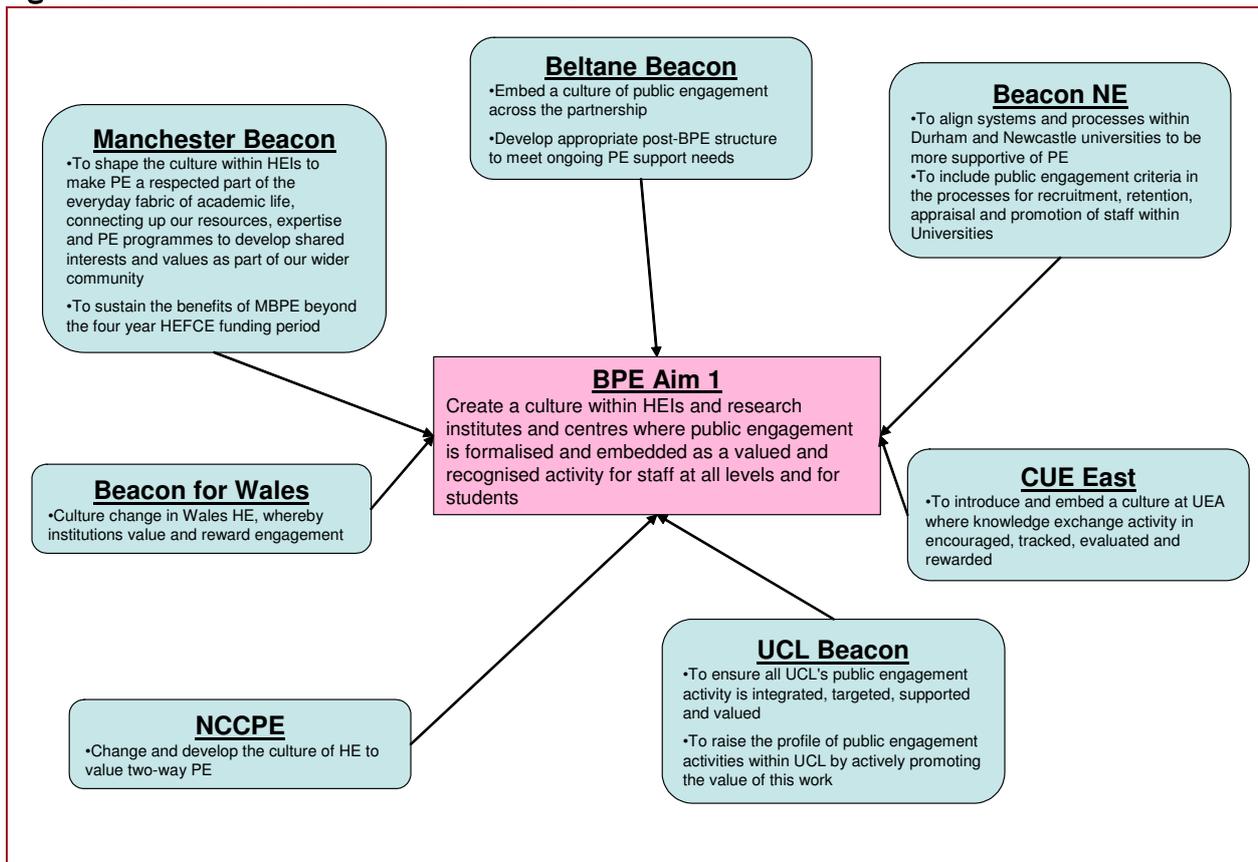
### 2.1 Create a culture

The first aim of the initiative was to:

*“create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students”*

The figure below shows that all of the individual Beacons and the NCCPE have at least one top level aim that is addressing institutional culture. We have also included aims associated with sustainability here as a key factor in the development of institutional culture over time will be the degree to which activities and procedures initiated under the BPE initiative are sustained.

Figure 2.1 Individual aims and BPE Aim 1





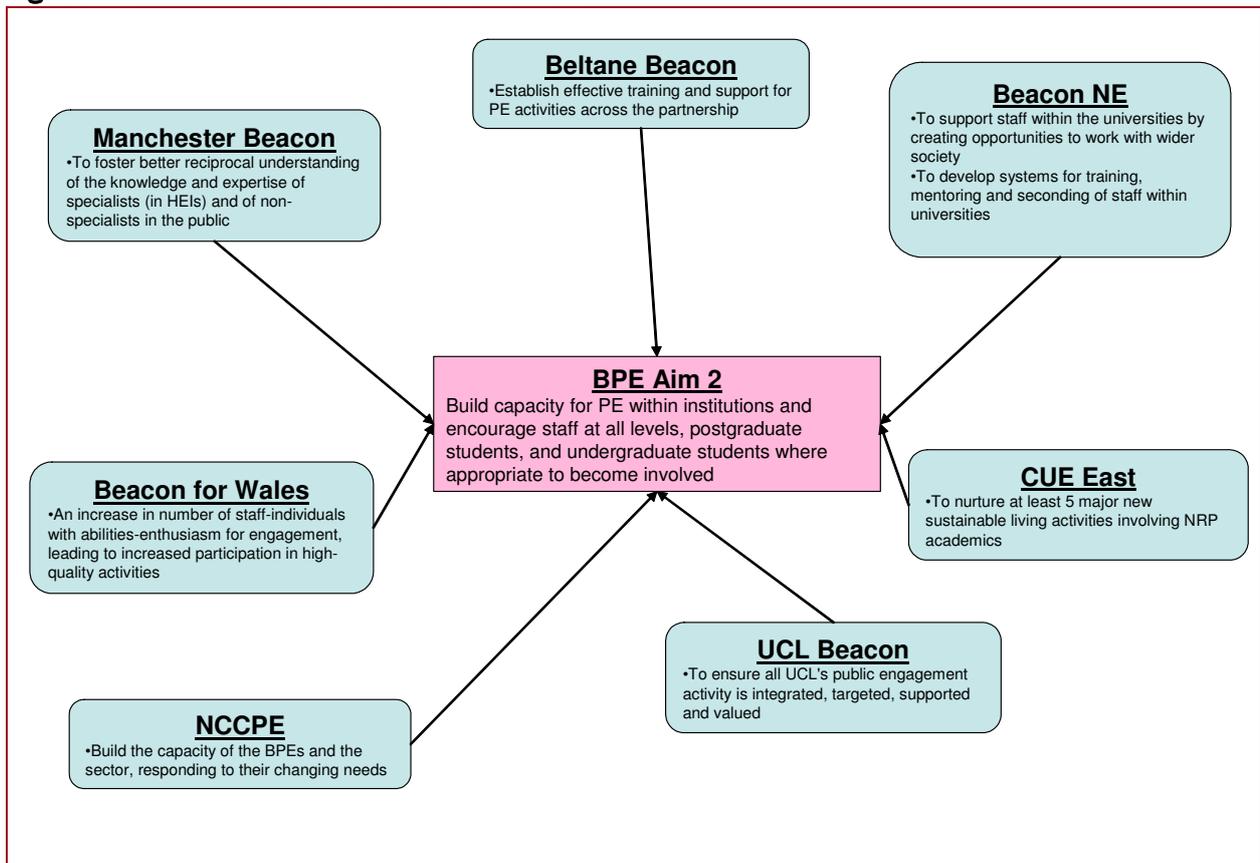
## 2.2 Build capacity

The second aim of the initiative was to:

*“build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved”*

As with BPE Aim 1, the high profile given to increasing capacity in the invitation to apply resulted in capacity building being very prominent in the individual Beacons’ top-level aims, as shown in the figure below, which shows that a number of ways to achieve an increase in capacity were proposed including the involvement of more people in public engagement, including people new to public engagement, the provision of training, and mentoring and developing public engagement infrastructures.

**Figure 2.2 Individual aims and BPE Aim 2**





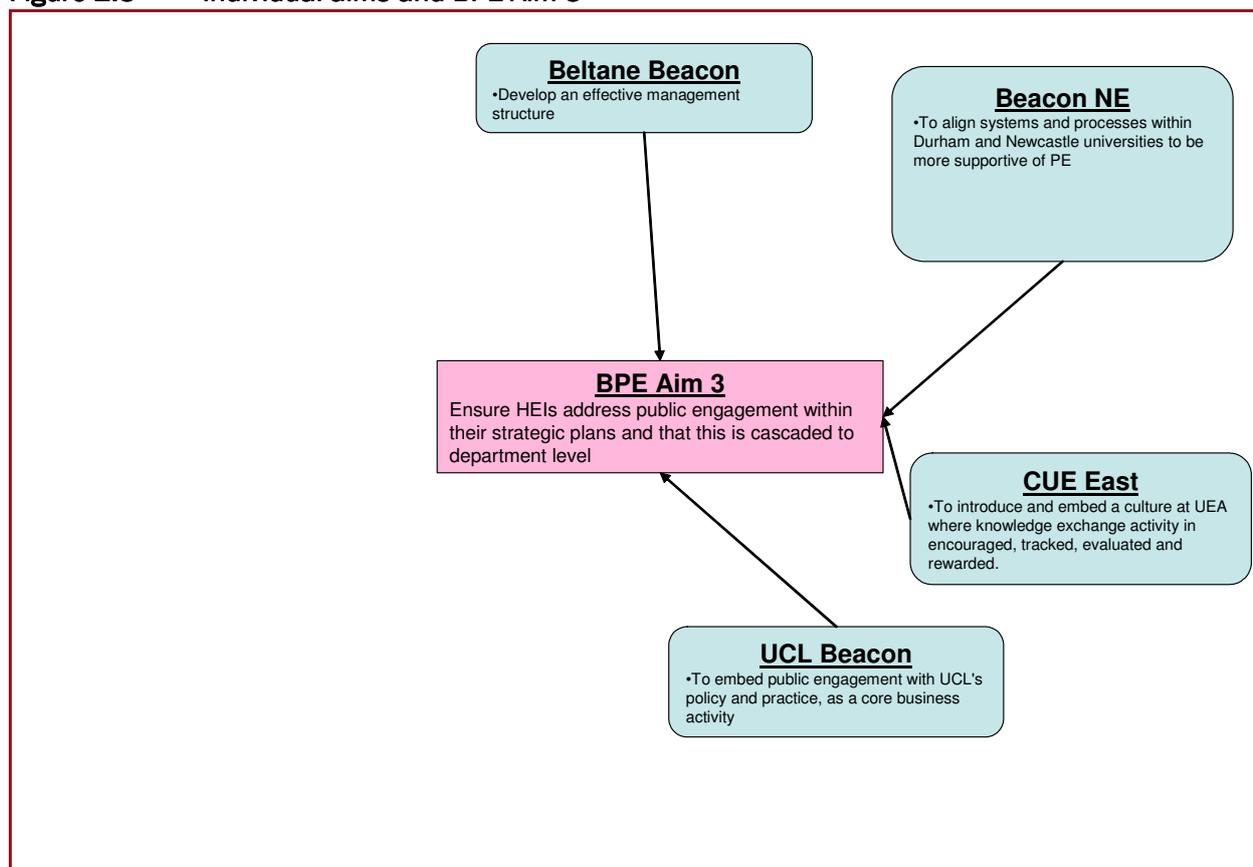
## 2.3 Strategic plans

The third aim of the initiative was to:

*“ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level”*

The figure below shows how the individual Beacons have addressed the third BPE aim relating to the inclusion of public engagement in strategic plans at both the institutional and departmental level. **Not all of the Beacons included top level aims relating to institutional plans, with some including their proposed actions to deliver this BPE aim at an operational rather than strategic level in their proposals.**

**Figure 2.3 Individual aims and BPE Aim 3**





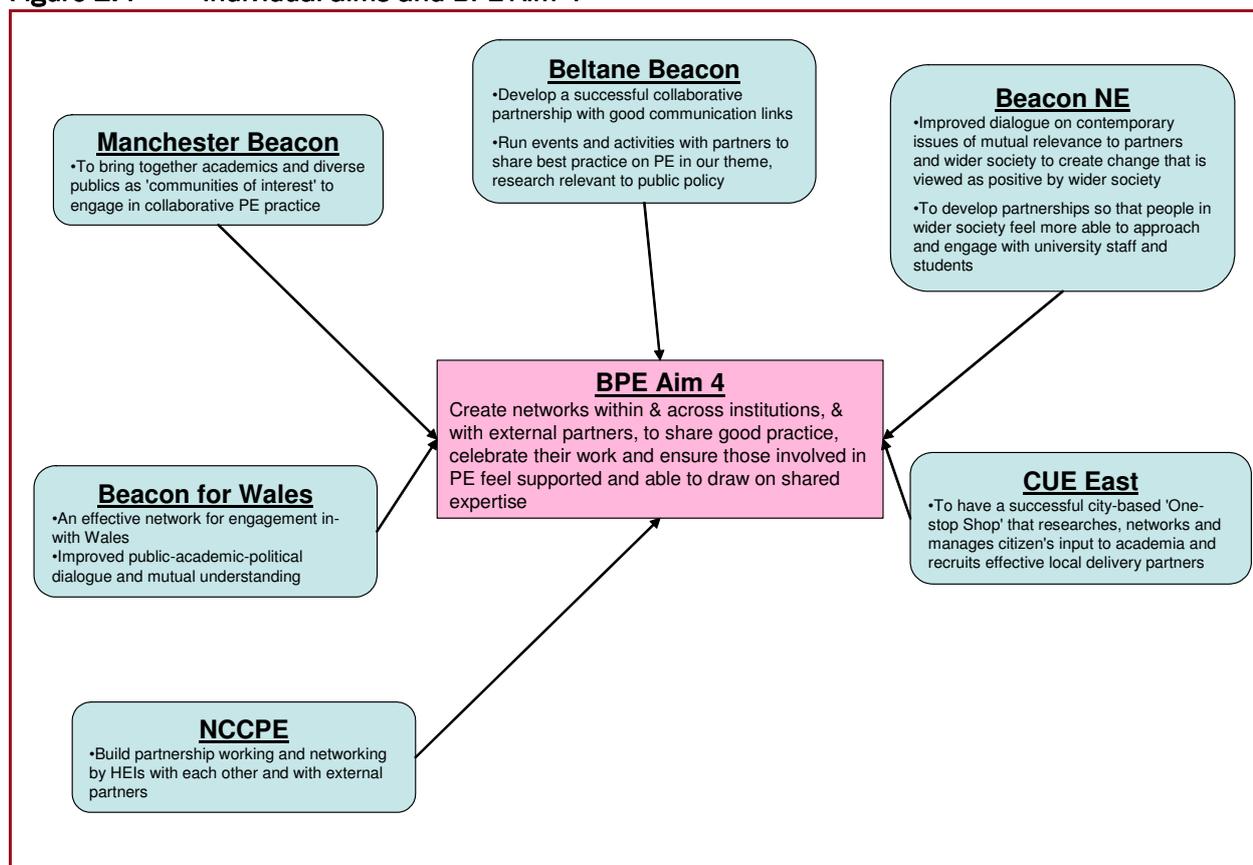
## 2.4 Create networks

The fourth aim of the initiative was to:

*“create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise”*

Almost all of the Beacons have included top level aims that relate to this BPE aim as shown in figure 2.4. **The one Beacon that did not have a relevant top-level aim includes networking in its second-level objectives.**

**Figure 2.4 Individual aims and BPE Aim 4**





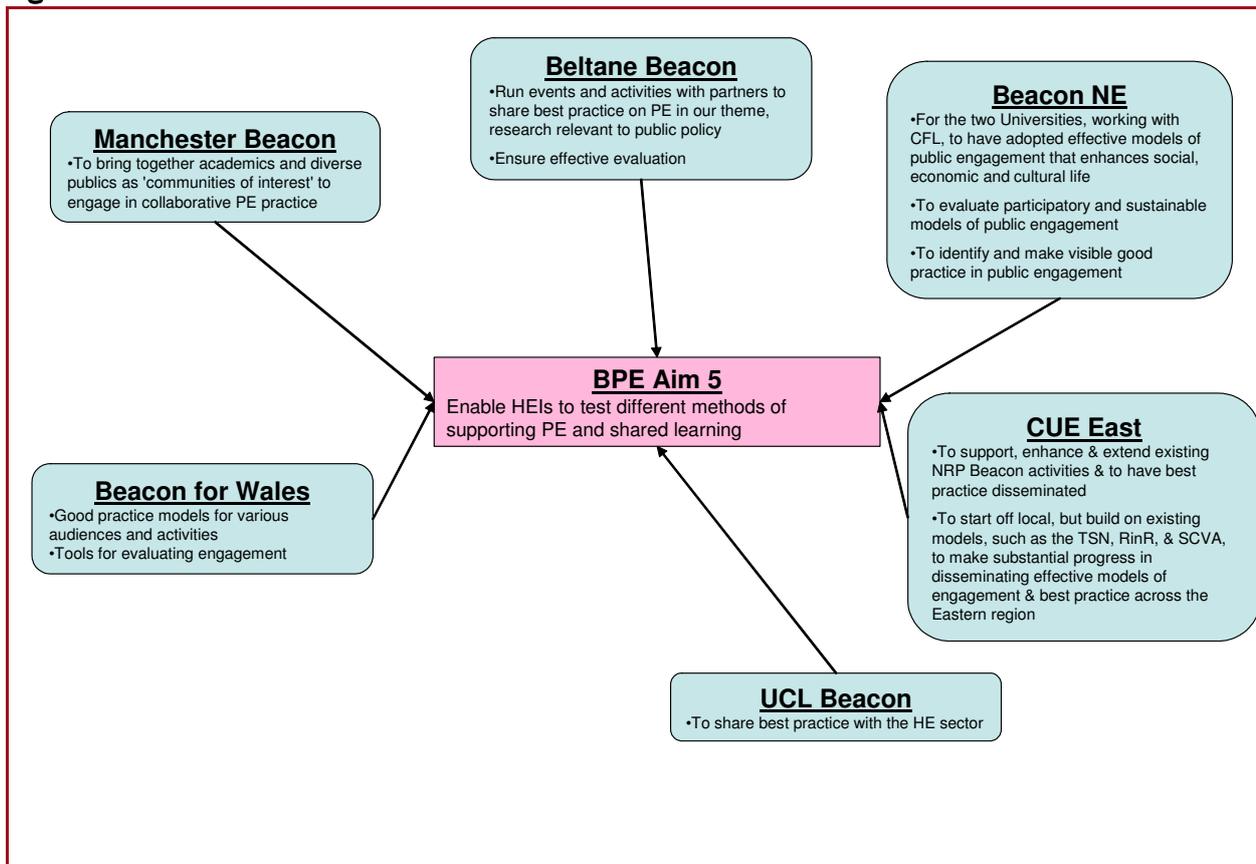
## 2.5 Test methods and share learning

The fifth aim of the initiative was to:

*“enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning”*

The initial description of the initiative as a “pilot” and the encouragement to “consider ... some degree of experimentation” led to proposals from the successful Beacons that described in some detail plans for testing methods, evaluating them and sharing learning at either a national or local scale. In this case national includes Scotland and Wales as separate countries as well as the UK overall, as two of the Beacons have a specific remit for supporting activity across their own country.

**Figure 2.5 Individual aims and BPE Aim 5**



## 2.6 Conclusions

This part of the review provides solid evidence that the funded Beacons were established with aims that were capable of delivering the overall aims of the BPE initiative. This is important because the invitation to tender for this review refers to investigating the “consequences, positive and negative, of the funders’ open-ended approach to defining the description of a Beacon”.

One potential negative impact of the open-ended approach to commissioning could have been a suite of high quality individual projects that, as a programme, did not necessarily address all of the BPE aims. This mapping exercise has confirmed that this has not been the case. In fact, even though the Beacons have different foci, they all address the five over-arching aims to some extent, either through their top-level aims or secondary level objectives. This suggests that **the commissioning approach has led to a programme capable of delivering all of the five over-arching aims.**

The next five chapters examine each of the BPE aims in more detail and describe the progress that is being made towards their delivery.



## 3 Create a Culture within HEIs, Research Institutes and Centres

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim to “create a culture within HEIs and research institutes and centres where public engagement is formalised and embedded as a valued and recognised activity for staff at all levels and for students” relies not only on formal and embedded systems but the response of members of these institutions to other influences from peers, partners and the wider world.

We recommend that it would be helpful to think of two sets of indicators for a formal and embedded culture. The first set would be top-down indicators that show the presence of formal systems, the second would be bottom-up indicators that show that the culture is embedded in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals.

That said, the most obvious first step for an organisation wishing to create a specific culture is to provide formal confirmation that the institution values, and will reward, particular types of behaviour. It is therefore no surprise that the successful Beacon bids refer to planned activities to change institutional practice relating to rewarding and recognising public engagement activities. For the six Beacons, activities are targeted at influencing local culture, whilst the NCCPE has the remit to influence culture in academia more widely and its plans reflect this wider remit.

### 3.2 Actions

The plans set out in the Beacons’ proposals have led to a wide range of activities. The table in Appendix 2 summarises the evidence we have extracted, which reports activities across the BPE initiative that have the capacity to contribute to the achievement of this aim. Appendix 2 summarises the evidence of actions for each of the Beacons and while each Beacon has taken a different approach, there are some types of actions that have been adopted by most, and sometimes all, of the Beacons.

The types of actions that appear across the Beacons include:

- programmes of work to have public engagement activity included in promotion criteria;
- inclusion of public engagement in the responsibilities of senior managers;
- appointment of ‘champions’ for public engagement;
- development of training for public engagement;
- grant and other funding schemes; and
- prizes/awards for public engagement.

The actions can be categorised into two broad types, those that seek to demonstrate that an institution regards public engagement as an integral part of its work and those that seek to foster staff involvement in public engagement.

### 3.3 Achievements

Within the wide-ranging list of actions are various themes, which we have used to categorise the achievements of the BPE thus far. The themes are:

- promotion criteria;
- institutional change & formalising PE;
- profile raising;
- training and support; and
- awards and recognition.

The evidence collated in Appendix 3 shows that significant achievements are already being reported. These tend to be operationally-based, for example that promotion criteria have been introduced, and



are thus achievements that have the potential to build a culture that is supportive of public engagement rather than indications that such a culture is in place.

There is however some evidence of bottom-up indicators for example the high levels of demand for training, the number of enquiries made of Beacon staff and the levels of interest in awards and prizes.

A key task for the individual Beacon and NCCPE evaluations during the remainder of the initiative will be to assess how the systems that have been introduced feed through into the culture of institutions as perceived by members of staff. That is identifying bottom-up indicators alongside the top-down ones.

### 3.3.1 Assessing culture

In order to understand an institution's culture it is necessary to gather information from members of the institution about their perceptions of the types of practices that are accepted and valued and the factors that make them so.

The BPE aim does not necessarily require changes in institutional culture to be measured; instead it sets out a particular culture that is a desirable end point and the critical factor is assessing whether this end point has been reached. The individual Beacons have set up local independent evaluations and the Beacons and their evaluators have established theories of change models that should allow each of the Beacons to make an assessment of the prevalent culture in participating institutions as the pilot draws to a close.

The situation for the NCCPE is more complex as it aims to both support the other Beacons and the achievement of the five BPE aims at a national level. It may not be cost effective to construct a representative survey of the situation across higher education at the end of the pilot to establish whether the desired culture is prevalent. However, the qualitative evidence gathered during the national interim evaluation of the BPE provides a useful insight into the culture within academia more widely and a cost effective option is likely to be to undertake further qualitative work amongst non-Beacon institutions towards the end of the initiative.

## 3.4 Barriers

The proposals submitted by the Beacons set out a number of barriers to the achievement of the desired culture within higher education institutions. Subsequently, reports to the funders and reports by evaluators have confirmed the continuing presence of five types of barriers<sup>2</sup>, namely:

- finite Beacon resources;
- institutional inertia;
- institutional constraints;
- staff awareness/co-operation; and
- wider national barriers.

The first two issues are related as a number of the evaluation reports that we have reviewed have reported comments about the size of the task to achieve supportive cultures in institutions as large as the participating universities compared to the amount of resource available through the BPE. An investment of almost £10 million by the BPE funders is a significant amount, but the institutions participating in individual Beacons have, between them, almost 100,000 employees<sup>3</sup>, notwithstanding the requirement that the NCCPE foster a supportive culture across higher education in the UK.

Some of the evaluation reports highlight academics' concerns about whether or not public engagement is, or ought to be, a priority and a confounding factor is the degree to which the individual Beacons' profiles within their own organisations have been sufficient to engage staff.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 4 summarises the evidence we have found illustrating the presence of these barriers

<sup>3</sup> HESA data 2008-9



### 3.5 Drivers

The previous section has described some distinct barriers to the development of a culture that values public engagement. There are however drivers that would support development of this culture. One of the strongest internal drivers within the institutions participating in the Beacons is the apparently high level of interest in undertaking public engagement that has been reported in some evaluations. Section 4 will show that this is resulting in people new to the activity becoming involved. Previous work has shown that many within academia regard public engagement as something of a duty, albeit an enjoyable one for many<sup>4</sup>. There are also external drivers that have been reported, these include:

- requirements from research funders for public engagement work; and
- inclusion of public engagement in other areas of higher education policy, such as knowledge transfer and impact assessment.

The strength of the external drivers will depend on the degree to which any requirements impact on individuals' job descriptions and the resources available to complete tasks. As the barriers section suggests any sense that public engagement is a passing fashion will undermine these drivers.

### 3.6 Sustainability

The timescales associated with building a particular institutional culture can vary widely, depending on a variety of factors. Such factors could include perceptions of external pressures, quality of internal leadership, receptiveness of staff to particular aspects of the culture and the perceived institutional commitment to a particular culture.

The multiplicity of factors that contribute to an institution's culture mean that of all the BPE aims this is the one that has the potential to be difficult to achieve in a short timescale. Universities are large organisations and culture change can be slow, but actions can be taken to build a momentum of culture change. If a culture is established, which values public engagement, then the very factors that make it difficult to achieve this culture quickly, will tend to make it sustainable once achieved.

Sustaining a culture that is supportive of public engagement would not be cost free. Where provision of funding or resources is involved and their withdrawal would provide a driver for culture change, costs are very clear. However, time is also a major cost, to use the example above, if a senior manager has a leadership role in public engagement then s/he will not have the capacity to do some other task. This will either result in the need for another member of staff to complete the other task or a decision made that it should not be done with whatever ramifications are entailed. The barriers section above has already emphasised the multiple calls on staff time.

### 3.7 Conclusions

There is strong evidence that institutions involved in the Beacons are establishing systems that could contribute to the development of institutional cultures that value and recognise public engagement. The responses of members of staff at Beacon institutions indicate a potential receptiveness to these changes, for example through enquiries made of Beacon staff, attendance at events and the behaviour of senior members of staff. There is some evidence that the culture observed at institutions within the Beacons is mirrored nationally, with institutions not participating in the BPE reporting a higher profile for public engagement.

Despite the progress made to date there are still significant barriers reported to the development of a truly supportive culture.

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<sup>4</sup> As reported in *Reward and Recognition – A literature review* (2009) People Science & Policy Ltd, Report for the Science for All Expert Group, November 2009



## 4 Build Capacity for Public Engagement

### 4.1 Introduction

The Beacons have interpreted the aim to “*build capacity for public engagement within institutions and encourage staff at all levels, postgraduate students, and undergraduates where appropriate, to become involved*” in a variety of ways.

The three main methods of capacity building that were identified in the Beacons’ proposals were:

- encouraging more individuals to become involved in public engagement;
- training individuals so that they could be more effective participants in public engagement; and
- developing institutional infrastructure that would support the involvement of individual members of staff in public engagement.

This section explores how the plans have been converted into actions and then describes the evidence of achievements related to this aim.

#### 4.1.1 Baselines

The phrasing used in the aim is to “*build capacity*”, which implies an overall increase in the capacity to take part in public engagement work. However, the difficulty of assessing how much public engagement activity existed prior to the Beacons initiative has been referred to in a number of the documents we have reviewed. This applies both to institutions within the Beacons and those not formally involved with the BPE initiative.

The main indicators for building capacity that we have looked for in this review have been take-up of training and involvement in public engagement activities. It will be important that the ongoing evaluations are able to consider how the support provided has led to an increase in the quality of capacity as well as quantity.

### 4.2 Actions

Appendix 5 sets out the actions that have been reported by Beacons and their evaluators, which appear to have an explicit role in developing capacity for public engagement both within the institutions participating in Beacons and more widely. It shows that providing training has been a high priority across the BPE. In addition, the use of local funding mechanisms has been a widespread tool used to foster involvement in public engagement. There are also signs that Beacons have focused on building public engagement structures that will facilitate the involvement of staff in public engagement. These include examples such as staff to support the development of applications for public engagement, web sites containing advice and contacts and people to broker opportunities for public engagement.

### 4.3 Achievements

Appendix 6 summarises the evidence that we have found showing evidence of increased quantity and quality of capacity under the three broad headings of:

- staff uptake;
- positive feedback; and
- structures to support PE.

We have found clear evidence that staff new to public engagement have become involved because of Beacon activities. There is also evidence of positive feedback on the quality of the support provided. In addition to evidence about the immediate impact of Beacon activity, there is also evidence that the Beacons are stimulating infrastructure changes within institutions to build capacity for public engagement. Such infrastructural developments could help to embed public engagement in



institutional cultures, thus ensuring that efforts made in support of BPE Aim 2, also support the long-term achievement of BPE Aim 1.

## 4.4 Barriers

Despite the advances that have been made so far, there are still barriers being reported to the development of public engagement capacity within institutions. Appendix 7 summarises the evidence we have found showing barriers to the development of greater public engagement capacity these can be categorised as:

- limited staff engagement at Beacon institutions;
- limited Beacon resources; and
- other practical barriers.

The other practical barriers included issues such as a partner's new facilities being under construction, a trainer being unable to honour commitments at short notice and the time taken for partners to agree actions.

## 4.5 Sustainability

Long-term sustainability of capacity is inextricably linked to BPE Aim 1. If the culture of an institution values public engagement, then the resources to develop capacity will be allocated to the task. At the moment the evidence we have reviewed suggests that building capacity is quite heavily dependent upon the work of the Beacons and that without this additional source of funding, there may be less resource available to support capacity-building. In this review we have found evidence of a relatively small number of other sources of funding.

## 4.6 Conclusions

The Beacons have invested heavily in capacity building both through the provision of training and funding for individuals. The investments are yielding returns in terms of increased quality and quantity of public engagement effort. The returns achieved so far will continue to exist, but the sustainability of the capacity building activities would be in doubt without the funding made available through the BPE.

Capacity and culture are heavily linked. Investment in building capacity requires a culture that will support the decisions to make such investments. A supportive culture will drive capacity upwards because members of staff will be attracted to participate in activities that are both rewarded and valued, that in essence have a future.



## 5 Incorporate Public Engagement in Strategic Plans

### 5.1 Introduction

The BPE aim to “ensure HEIs address public engagement within their strategic plans and that this is cascaded to departmental level” is intended to add impetus to the development of systems that demonstrate that public engagement is a central and valued part of institutions’ activity. Such systems can play a part in shaping the development of culture specified under BPE aim 1, although the simple presence of systems within strategic and developmental plans will not set a culture in isolation. The individual members of staff also need to feel that management behaviour supports the written systems.

### 5.2 Current situation

It should be noted that different approaches have been taken to embedding public engagement in the strategic plans of institutions. Some institutions have taken a more top-down approach, writing public engagement into strategy documents, whilst others have taken a more consultative approach to strategy development. Appendix 8 shows the current situations at the various institutions participating in the Beacons.

Many of the institutions involved with the Beacons have already incorporated public engagement within their strategic plans and some degree of cascading to departmental level is happening. In addition, our review has also found evidence of plans for further actions at both the institutional and departmental levels. Appendix 9 describes the plans to further incorporate public engagement into institutional strategies

#### 5.2.1 Barriers

We have found little evidence of systematic barriers to the inclusion of public engagement in either institutional or departmental strategic plans. However, the national evaluation baseline report suggested that the extent to which public engagement figured in the mission statements and strategic plans of the HEIs that are involved in BPE partnerships varied considerably. In particular, even though a majority of the institutions within the Beacons had, or were developing, institutional plans, the extent to which this had filtered down into lower level plans varied. For example, not all institutions have plans at the faculty/school or department level.

One reported barrier referred to the planning cycles within institutions, which might mean that there was no suitable window for the re-drafting of departmental plans during the lifetime of BPE. This was explicitly mentioned at one institution, but could also be a factor for others.

#### 5.2.2 Local factors

In many of the participating institutions, departments or faculties are extremely large entities in themselves and there will be local influences in the shape of individuals whose personal convictions could affect the degree to which strategic plans are adopted. These individuals could be research group leaders, individual line managers or key administrators and importantly they can just as easily be powerful drivers of, as well as barriers to, public engagement. However, we have not found widespread evidence of “middle-management saboteurs” with qualitative research identifying the presence of champions as well as blockers at all levels of institutions.

### 5.3 Sustainability

There is no requirement to make additional investments once public engagement is incorporated in institutional or departmental plans. However, the critical issue is not whether the plans are sustainable but whether they are supporting and encouraging a sustainable culture that is supportive of public engagement. In this regard, the degree to which cascading continues during the remainder of the initiative and evidence accrues that plans are driving behaviours, will provide an indication of sustainability.



## 5.4 Conclusions

Many of the institutions participating in the BPE have now embedded public engagement within their institutional strategies. When taken alongside the management functions and processes described in section 3, there is considerable evidence to show that the Beacons' institutions are making serious commitments to developing structures and frameworks that can support a culture that is conducive to public engagement. However, as we have made clear in section 3, culture depends on the perceptions and behaviours across an institution, not simply on the presence of corporate plans.

Within academia, culture can be quite localised, sometimes at a faculty or a departmental level, but also often at a research group level. Maintaining the cascade process so that local level plans incorporate public engagement and support public engagement activities, will be a critical part of underpinning culture.



## 6 Create Networks and Share Good Practice

### 6.1 Introduction

The fourth aim of the initiative was to “*create networks within and across institutions, and with external partners, to share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported and able to draw on shared expertise*”.

In the invitation to apply for funding, there was an emphasis on the importance of networks and partnerships. Applicant Beacons were encouraged to work with other providers of public engagement to ensure “*best practice*” and avoid “*unnecessary duplication*”. Applicants were also advised that they should be aiming to “*create a true ‘beacon’ with strong networks with other organisations*”.

### 6.2 Actions

#### 6.2.1 Beacon structures

The Beacon applications show that all of the applications were made by a lead institution on behalf of a partnership of organisations, including both HEIs and other local and national organisations. The national interim evaluation describes the different structures adopted in detail, but in essence there are different numbers of HEIs involved ranging from just one in CUE East to seven in the Beltane Beacon. Beacon North East (BNE) the Beacon for Wales and the UCL Beacon all had two HEIs identified in the proposal and the Manchester Beacon three. All of the successful applications included non-HEI partners, with CUE East, naming 22 partners, being the largest initial partnership.

#### 6.2.2 Ongoing development

The individual Beacons and the NCCPE have all taken different approaches to the development of partnerships and networks. Appendix 10 summarises the very wide range of approaches and activities reported across the Beacons. In addition to the work to engage other institutions as partners, the Beacons have supported the development of networks to allow individuals to work together. Some of these networks are very tightly focused, for example the UCL early-career researchers’ network, others are much broader, for example Manchester’s overarching network comprised 606 people, including 322 staff, 202 community representatives and 82 local businesses at the start of 2010.

### 6.3 Achievements

Simply having partners or being involved in networks will not deliver the central aspect of the BPE aim that Beacons “*share good practice, celebrate their work and ensure that those involved in public engagement feel supported*”. This sub-section focuses on the evidence that we have found that partnerships and/or networks have added value to the work of the Beacon, the partner(s) or both.

Appendix 11 summarises the evidence to demonstrate that partnership and networking activity has been valued. There is evidence that partners have experienced clear benefits from their involvement with Beacons. Partners have reported satisfaction with activities and this satisfaction has catalysed further work. Sometimes this has been through the attraction of new partners to an existing activity via peer referral and sometimes Beacon activity has facilitated entirely new partnerships.

A key factor in the growth of existing partnerships and the development of new ones is the recognition of mutual benefits to both the Beacon institutions and their partners. There is evidence available that shows that the image of some Beacon institutions is changing as they are starting to be seen as more approachable and interested in working with local partners.

### 6.4 Barriers

Across the BPE it has become clear that building and maintaining partnerships are tasks that require the commitment of time (and money where travel is involved). The main barrier to effective partnership



building and networking is the amount of resource available for the task. In Appendix 12 we have grouped the way that limited resources create barriers to effective partnerships under three main headings:

- responsiveness of Beacons;
- external communication; and
- internal communication.

CUE East has reported difficulties associated with trying to manage a large partnership, which led the national evaluation to conclude that smaller partnerships were likely to be more effective. We have some sympathy with this view, but the key is not necessarily the size of a partnership, but whether or not there is sufficient resource to maintain it. Larger partnerships can bring in more people with wider ranges of experiences and skills, different resources and access to different communities, but take much more management. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that the critical factor is having the right partners for a specific activity, and that these may be a sub-set of a wider group of partners with which a Beacon works.

There is some evidence from evaluations that some external partners have been disappointed by their perception of a focus on internal systems in the Beacon institutions.

## 6.5 Drivers

We have found little evidence of external drivers for partnership building. Most activity appears to have been driven by the Beacons, or the universities within the Beacons, with the offer of funding or access to people or facilities appearing to engage external partners. However, the reports of successful partnership activity leading to increased awareness of what can be offered by HEIs could lead to increasing numbers of opportunistic partnerships. The basis for successful partnerships is unsurprisingly mutual benefit. The perception that the Beacons, in the first instance, and HEIs more widely can provide benefits to partners will help to foster partnerships. In the longer-term building capacity within partner organisations may benefit the Beacons as well as the partners and reduce the current requirement for the Beacons to lead partnership building and maintenance.

The second UCL Annual report contained the following, which sums up what many Beacons have found, which is that an opportunistic approach to partnership is of critical importance.

*“We’re forming all sorts of new partnerships based on opportunity and need, and some of these are becoming more central to the programme of works than our original, formal partners are.”*

## 6.6 Sustainability

Once opportunities are identified it is critical that the Beacons have the capacity to respond to them. This means that partnerships are only sustainable if the Beacons, or their host HEIs, have resources available to maintain the partnerships. As with the BPE aim relating to capacity, the fundamental factor will be whether the culture of any given institution values public engagement highly enough to allocate resources to this task above some others.

## 6.7 Conclusions

There is compelling evidence that the investment made by the Beacons in partnership work is opening up new public engagement opportunities that are benefiting both the Beacons and their partners. Identifying, building and maintaining partnerships are however resource intensive activities and the evidence we have found is that, so far, most partners have expected the Beacons to provide this resource. This has clear implications for the sustainability of partnerships that have been built thus far and the potential for developing new partnerships once the BPE pilot is complete.



## 7 Test Methods and Share Learning

### 7.1 Introduction

The fifth aim of the initiative was to “enable HEIs to test different methods of supporting public engagement and to share learning”.

The invitation to tender for this review refers to investigating the “consequences, positive and negative, of the funders’ open-ended approach to defining the description of a Beacon”. The different public engagement methods proposed and used by the Beacons demonstrate that they have interpreted the role of a Beacon in different ways.

### 7.2 Actions

Appendix 13 summarises the actions taken to test public engagement methods across the BPE.

The documents that we have reviewed suggest that there are some differences of style and approach emerging across the Beacons. For example BNE appears to be focusing on public involvement in research, working towards co-production as a model for research and engagement. UCL on the other hand appears to be building a model of enabling its researchers to engage with people at places that members of the public would visit of their own accord, such as museums, festivals and other commercial venues. CUE East’s activities are driven by its “sustainability” focus. Manchester has a focus on reaching out to communities that are less affluent and less involved with academia. Both the Beacon for Wales and the Beltane Beacon have built more structured links to their national Governments and have the aim of providing national services, which makes them different to the more locally focused English Beacons.

The documentation gives a feel for the emerging styles, but at this stage there is no evidence to suggest that any of the developing models are inherently “better” or “worse” than the others. This review has highlighted that all of the Beacons are achieving some successes against the BPE aims. Those that have tended towards an activity-led approach seem to be delivering more quickly. However, an activity-led approach requires the resources to be found to support activities, whereas there is the potential that the embedded approach could lead to a more sustainable style of public engagement as the intention seems to be that resources will be earmarked within research budgets.

### 7.3 Learning and sharing

Appendix 14 sets out the learning that has been reported thus far and ways in which successful actions have been replicated and learning has been shared.

Appendix 14 shows that much of what has been reported so far is generally positive. However, learning often comes through making mistakes and an important role for the initiative as a whole is to draw out the learning from less successful activities. In the first instance this will help the individual Beacon to improve the way it works, it is also however, vital that learning is shared across the BPE so that Beacons learn from one another. It can be culturally difficult to admit to mistakes or to being less successful than anticipated, but within a pilot programme this is to be expected if the proposals funded are genuinely experimental.

The funders have a role to play in encouraging open and frank assessments of the techniques used, their strengths, weaknesses and potential for replication or modification elsewhere. The reporting systems in use encourage the Beacons to share learning with the funders and we have found evidence that problems are being reported along with the associated responses. There is also some evidence of bi-lateral and multi-lateral sharing amongst the Beacons, some (but not all) facilitated by the NCCPE. However, to maximise the value from the pilot, disseminating learning should be a priority for the remainder of the funding period.



In the national evaluation report there was some criticism of the degree to which the initiative and specifically the NCCPE had reached out to other HEIs. The NCCPE's strategy has been to steadily build a higher national profile as learning from the individual Beacons and the research that the NCCPE has commissioned provides an intelligence base to share. Delaying major communication activity until there are substantive things to say seems reasonable, but given the amount of good news that this review has uncovered we think that communication with the remainder of the HE sector should be the priority for the NCCPE for the remainder of the initiative.

### 7.3.1 The NCCPE

We have been asked to comment on the recommendation in the interim national evaluation that:

*“It would have been better to have appointed the NCC before the BPEs so that the NCC could have assisted with developing the terms of reference for the BPEs and could have established themselves to be in a position to provide help and support to the BPEs when they needed it during the initial stages of the initiative.”*

Interim Evaluation of Beacons for Public Engagement, Oakleigh Consulting Ltd

This recommendation arose out of reported problems with defining the NCCPE's role and particularly its relationship with the Beacons.

Our initial response was that this might have been logical, but on reflection we think that a more sequential commissioning approach would not have been appropriate. There are two reasons for our conclusion.

The first reason is that having the NCCPE in place would have indicated that it had a role in setting the agenda for commissioning the other Beacons and this could have constrained the creative approaches taken by the successful applicants. To maximise the learning from the pilot it is important that some fundamentally different models are tested. We do not expect that there will emerge a model that should be rolled out across higher education, but with the positive stories emerging from the Beacons so far we could envisage a menu of options to foster public engagement, which other HEIs could select from and adapt to meet their own needs.

The second reason is the practical one that sequential commissioning would have taken far longer and it would therefore have taken much longer for learning and good practice to emerge. Indeed given the financial changes since the pilot was launched, a longer commissioning process might have meant that the opportunity to establish the local Beacons and test methods could have been missed.

## 7.4 Drivers

A driver for experimentation seems to be the use of small grant schemes to enable academics to devise new activities and engage new communities and audiences. All of the Beacons have used this sort of mechanism, but it is crucial that the Beacons ensure that there is knowledge exchange so that the individuals in receipt of funds can share learning and experiences. Within each Beacon there is evidence of such sharing mechanisms and reports of positive experiences could act as a driver for additional involvement in the future, adding capacity and further building a supportive culture. The UCL baseline highlights the importance of enjoying doing public engagement as a motivating factor and this has also come through in other work<sup>5</sup>.

## 7.5 Barriers

Some of the Beacons have reported barriers to developing new models of public engagement. The evidence that we have found shows that the barriers reported are generally associated with the difficulty of mobilising staff and creating methods of interaction with the public.

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<sup>5</sup> As identified in *Reward and Recognition – A literature review* (2009) People Science & Policy Ltd, Report for the Science for All Expert Group, November 2009



In a number of Beacons, a lack of capacity to get work moving quickly has been cited as a barrier and we will return to that subject in section 8.

## 7.6 Sustainability

Most of the activities reported require the input of resources by the institutions participating in the Beacon, whether through staff time or hard spend. To sustain these activities these resources will have to be provided by the institution in the long-term whether funded internally or externally. The BNE approach of embedding public engagement in research is an interesting experiment. Given that all spending is likely to come under pressure in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review it might be that stand-alone public engagement activity could be especially at risk.

## 7.7 Structures and models

Within this review we have been asked to consider “*differences and similarities in approach between Beacons and any indications of successful models and methods*”. This consideration of the role played by the different governance, management and partnership approaches does not map directly onto any of the five BPE aims, but seems to sit best within this chapter on testing methods.

The national evaluation report commented on the features of successful partnerships. Amongst other points, the report suggested that Beacons that have large partnerships might be less appropriate and that Beacons, which bring together HEIs that are quite different in nature might be more effective. We suggest that both of these conclusions may be premature.

Larger partnerships take more resources to manage and it appears to be difficult to keep all partners equally involved, this has been reported by CUE East. However, it seems that increasingly the Beacons are constructing opportunistic partnerships for specific activities. Thus they may well have large numbers of partners, but work more closely with different individual partners, or subsets of partners, at different times, meaning that large networks of partners can be effective if managed properly.

With regard to the types of HEI within a Beacon, there is only one Beacon that includes only similar universities, BNE. This Beacon has taken the approach of embedding public engagement within research. This approach may well have a longer lead time to fruition than those that have used activities to drive public engagement, but might be more sustainable in the long run. We therefore think that it is too early to suggest that similar HEIs are less likely to produce a successful Beacon. It may also be that in the long-term BNE provides a model for public engagement that is particularly relevant for other research intensive universities.

## 7.8 Conclusions

It is too early to draw definite conclusions regarding the comparative strengths of different models of public engagement across the Beacons. However, there are already some clear examples of successful practice across the programme. At this stage we think that the most helpful thing to do is to highlight the features that seem to have helped activities to be successful, these are:

- willing members of staff;
- the establishment of supportive systems within the institution or Beacon;
- partnerships with organisations/communities that have access to defined audiences;
- partnerships with organisations/communities that have specific goals; and
- a clear focus.

There are some examples of activities being shared and replicated across Beacons and by other partners. If the BPE is to be successful then ensuring that good ideas are shared and, where appropriate, replicated, should be a central task for the remainder of the initiative.



## 8 General Drivers and Barriers

In this section we describe the general drivers for, and barriers to, public engagement that are reported in the documents we have reviewed. Some of these have been referred to in earlier sections, but we think that it is worth summarising them separately for clarity.

Many potential drivers and barriers are the opposite sides of the same factor. For example the requirement by research funders that researchers address public engagement has been identified as a strong driver, whilst the potential withdrawal of public engagement funding by the same research funders is viewed as a barrier. Similarly the Research Excellence Framework is seen as potentially a driver for, and a barrier to, public engagement, depending on its final nature.

The twin nature of benefits and drivers was encapsulated in BNE's May 2010 Annual Review Report:

*“The current political and economic environment poses both opportunities and challenges for the next phase of BNE work and the long term sustainability of any achievements.”*

Few, if any, of the identified drivers and barriers are new, but the fact that they continue to be reported by the Beacons and their evaluators is important given the funders' central aim of embedding in higher education a culture that is supportive of public engagement.

### 8.1 Drivers

The main drivers for public engagement that were reported are summarised in Appendix 15. The drivers include:

- maintaining a licence to operate;
- recruitment of future generations of students and researchers;
- the objectives of research funders;
- the Research Excellence Framework (REF);
- benefits to researchers; and
- the foundations that have been established by the BPE.

### 8.2 Barriers

The main barriers to public engagement that were reported included:

- the start-up time required at the commencement of the initiative;
- the capacity of individual Beacon teams;
- an over-emphasis on internal focus;
- the capacity of staff in participating institutions to participate in public engagement;
- the Research Excellence Framework (REF);
- definitions of public engagement;
- funding.

Evidence relating to these barriers is summarised in Appendix 16. Comparing the weight of evidence in Appendices 16 and 17 it is apparent that barriers are more frequently cited than drivers.

#### 8.2.1 Defining public engagement

We found regular references to potential problems associated with definitions of public engagement and how this might lead to confusion within Beacon institutions and amongst partnerships. The NCCPE has done a good deal of work on a framework defining public engagement to address these concerns. However, having completed this review we think that concern about definitions of public engagement is inappropriate.



In chapter 3 and subsequently we have emphasised the central position of institutional culture with regard to public engagement. There is however, a wider institutional culture in every university that is aligned to its core mission. In order to achieve sustainability of public engagement capacity, networks and activities, an institutional culture that values public engagement and encourages decision-makers at all levels in the institution to allocate resources to this work is required. This culture will only exist if public engagement activities support the core mission of the institution. Against a background of reduced financial capacity resource allocations will be linked to achieving the central objectives of individual institutions. Thus in the long-term public engagement is likely to be a tool used by universities to achieve one or more of the following:

- a licence to operate;
- better community relations;
- recruitment of students;
- recruitment of researchers;
- better research;
- more satisfied staff; and
- more (secure) funding.

This list may not match that produced by the NCCPE, or indeed the definition used by the funders in the original BPE invitation to apply. However, once specific funds to support public engagement are no longer available to drive the agenda, the focus of individual institutions will depend upon their circumstances, resources and objectives.

### 8.3 Conclusions

The far greater prevalence of evidence cited for barriers could be indicative of a widespread culture that views public engagement as not quite part of the mainstream of academic life and therefore something that is constantly under threat. This means that there are not necessarily the drivers in place to overcome barriers.

There are many references to the confusion caused by different interpretations of public engagement. Our response to this is that for public engagement to be a sustainable part of an HEI's culture then it must reflect the individual institution's priorities. Whether this is public relations, co-production of research, student recruitment, community relations or dialogue with policy-makers is less relevant than whether it meets the institution's needs. That said, when external funders are paying for the public engagement then it should reflect the funders' definitions. In the case of the BPE, this was set out in the invitation to apply for funds.

*“For the purposes of this initiative the term ‘public engagement’ covers a wide range of activities. Any good public engagement activity should involve specialists listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with non-specialists. It covers schemes that involve non-specialists in the work of HEIs and research institutes and centres, and can include participatory processes and activities in museums, arts festivals and science centres. However, it does not include activities where the primary purpose is to generate approval or acceptance of the institution (such as might be carried out by an organisation's public relations department), or to recruit students, for example through open days.”*

This sets out the requirements for the BPE, but for long-term sustainability, individual institutions should set their own priorities.



## 9 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter sets out our over-arching conclusions from the evidence that we have reviewed and the associated recommendations for the remainder of the initiative.

### 9.1 Conclusions

Our main conclusion is that **the BPE pilot has been successful so far in that a number of different styles of Beacon have been established and all are contributing to the attainment of the five over-arching BPE aims**. More specifically we have concluded that:

- the BPE initiative has stimulated considerable relevant activity;
- the fundamental issue is one of institutional culture; and
- the BPE initiative has made progress towards, but not yet fully delivered, the desired culture within the institutions participating in the Beacons.

#### 9.1.1 Relevant activity

**Across the Beacons a wide range of actions have been undertaken in support of the five BPE aims**. The actions generally fall into two broad categories, those to address internal management systems and those to encourage staff to participate in public engagement activities. Both types of **actions have yielded success**. Evidence is available that revised management systems have led to desired behaviours, for example promotions, justified by public engagement activity. Equally there is evidence that the establishment of new public engagement activities, and especially internal systems to support staff wishing to participate, have led to new activities that have been enjoyed and valued by both staff and external stakeholders (partners and audiences).

The Beacons have not found it easy to balance the two different types of actions. **There is evidence that some external partners have been disappointed by the focus on internal systems** and that staff at participating institutions have been confused about the role of the Beacons. We believe that **for the BPE to offer something genuinely new over past funding regimes for public engagement, addressing internal systems is absolutely crucial**. As the next sub-section describes we believe that widespread public engagement is unsustainable without a supportive institutional culture and while the development of culture requires both top-down and bottom-up contributions, **the BPE has offered clear support for the top-down elements in a way that has not been done before**. Most previous schemes have focused on supporting individual members of staff undertaking, or wishing to undertake, public engagement activities.

#### 9.1.2 Culture

As we reviewed the evidence relating to the five individual BPE aims, **it became increasingly clear that aim 1 – relating to culture should in fact be the central feature**.

**To achieve sustainability of public engagement capacity, networks and activities, there must be an institutional culture that values public engagement and encourages decision-makers at all levels in the institution to allocate resources to this work**. Against a background of reduced financial capacity such decisions will be linked to the needs of individual institutions. Thus public engagement is likely to be a tool to achieve one or more of the following:

- a licence to operate;
- better community relations;
- recruitment of students;
- recruitment of researchers;
- better research;
- more satisfied staff; and
- more (secure) funding.



The focus of individual institutions will depend upon their circumstances and needs.

In chapter 3 we suggested that the goal of the BPE should not be to foster changes in culture, but rather to see a ‘cultural standard’ in place by the end of the pilot. This **cultural standard would be exemplified by a number of features, which are set out below:**

- **the role(s) of, and rewards for, public engagement are recognised in strategy documents at all levels of the institution;**
- **behaviours reflect the roles that are set out;**
- **rewards affect behaviours;**
- **an appropriate proportion of members of staff take part in public engagement;**
- **members of staff from a full spread of the disciplines and grades within the institution take part in public engagement;**
- **there are internal systems, appropriately resourced, to facilitate involvement in public engagement;**
- **potential partners have a clear access point within the institution;**
- **external stakeholders (partners and audiences) recognise that a supportive culture exists.**

We suggest that these features can be used to provide indicators of an institutional culture with regard to public engagement that draws together the establishment of top-down systems and the presence of bottom-up attitudes and behaviour. Table 9.1 below shows how such cultural indicators could be developed for each of the other four BPE aims.

**Table 9.1 Indicators of a ‘Cultural Standard’**

<b>BPE Aim</b>	<b>Top down indicators</b>	<b>Bottom up indicators</b>
Build capacity for public engagement	Investment in capacity More people participating Better qualified people participating	Staff report willingness to become involved in activities Staff wish to participate in training
Ensure HEIs embed public engagement within strategic/departmental plans	Institutional plans at all levels highlight public engagement	Plans are used and valued
Create networks, share good practice and expertise	Resources are made available to foster networks Resources are made available to signpost good practice and expertise	Staff report willingness to become involved in networks Staff demand for signposting resources
Test different methods, share learning	Resources are made available for novel activities Resources are made available evaluation/learning	Staff report willingness to become involved in activities Staff report willingness to evaluate activities and share learning

The use of the phrase bottom-up indicators in conjunction with staff attitudes and behaviour is not intended to imply that this means junior staff only. As the list at the top of this page makes clear, we mean **staff from a full spread of the disciplines and grades within the institution.**



### 9.1.3 Progress towards a cultural standard

**The evidence presented in this report, and particularly the barriers in chapter 8, has led us to conclude that participating institutions have made progress towards, but not yet reached, a cultural standard.**

However, the BPE is not yet complete and across the Beacons there are many 'green shoots' that indicate that elements of the cultural standard are being developed. The sense that we have from the evidence reviewed is that it will be difficult for institutions to achieve a culture that fully values public engagement by the end of the initiative, but that there is a distinct opportunity to have developed cultures that provide a chance of longer-term sustainability for many of the actions that have been stimulated.

## 9.2 Recommendations

### 9.2.1 Culture

Our principal recommendation for the funders is that the **Beacons and the NCCPE should be encouraged to continue to implement their plans across the range of aims**, but with encouragement that **the central indicator of success will be institutional cultures** at the conclusion of the initiative.

**The focus on institutional culture does not mean that Beacon teams should be forsaking the support and facilitation of public engagement activities** for wholly internal actions. In fact for a cultural standard to be achieved there needs to be bottom-up recognition of the value of public engagement as well as top-down requirements. The evidence that we have reviewed suggests that **one of the most effective ways to build bottom-up recognition of value is for members of staff to become involved in public engagement**. Those who have been involved have reported a number of personal and professional benefits including enjoyment of activities and the stimulation of new research ideas. If this individual recognition of benefits is allied to institutional rewards then there will be complementary drivers of culture in place.

### 9.2.2 Evaluation

Our other recommendations relate to evaluation of the BPE pilot. Against the likelihood of constrained budgets for the public sector funders **we do not think that it offers good value for money to commission a further large-scale national evaluation**. Instead **the focus should be on the individual evaluations of the six Beacons and the NCCPE**. Each of these appears to have been developed against a theory of change model that could encompass the idea of a cultural standard and make a valid assessment of the overall success of each individual Beacon and the NCCPE.

**To assess the culture within the participating institutions it is likely to be necessary to undertake quantitative research within the Beacons**. It is vital that this work yields data that is representative of each institution. This will require actively managed surveys using properly drawn samples and reminder systems to maximise response rates to ensure that the results are robust. We also recommend a common approach across the Beacons so that the findings across the participating institutions can be aggregated to allow additional analysis. There may be scope within the individual evaluations to fund this work and the evaluators may have the capacity and experience to do this. **The funders should investigate with the Beacons, as a matter of urgency, whether their existing evaluation budgets will allow for this work and whether their evaluators have the technical capacity to complete it**. If this work cannot be delivered to the appropriate standards from existing local budgets, the funders should consider commissioning this work separately. If budgets are available, but expertise is not then the funders should consider commissioning expert assistance for this work. **We recommend that it would not be good value for money to undertake a representative survey of staff in HEIs that are not participating in a Beacon**.

**Qualitative research with managers and staff from non-Beacon institutions could be a useful addition to the later stages of the evaluation**. This work would help to identify wider factors driving, or inhibiting, public engagement across academia. It would also shed light on the degree to which the BPE generally and the NCCPE specifically have reached out to non-participating institutions. Depending on the precise



remit of the NCCPE evaluators this work may be covered in the already commissioned NCCPE evaluation.

Without an over-arching national evaluation it will be important that the funders are able to draw the individual evaluations together. In this context it is important that the evaluations are not only collecting data that is relevant to the specific Beacon, but that can be summed across the BPE. **In order to build a complete picture, it may be necessary to undertake some synthesis work to draw together key points from the individual evaluations as the pilot draws to a close.** Such a synthesis could be undertaken by a member of staff at one of the funding organisations or be commissioned out in similar fashion to this review.



## Appendix 1 Sources of Evidence Reviewed

Beacon	Source of evidence
CUE East	Sustainable Living Festival Report
	Gadgets to Go Green Evaluation Report
	Darwin Radio Series Evaluation Report
	CUE East report by Lisa McDaid
	CUE East Evaluation Framework
	CUE East bid- text only
	CUE East Annual review year 2
	CUE East annual report- year 2
	CUE East annual report- year 1
	CUE East Annual Evaluation Review Year 1
	BBC Making History Workshop Report
Edinburgh	Edinburgh- The History of Future Method (possible eval method)
	Edinburgh -report from year 1 interviews
	Edinburgh- Interviewee responses to follow-up questions
	Edinburgh bid
	Edinburgh- Base line report e-survey findings
	Edinburgh annual report- year 2
	Edinburgh evaluation briefing
	Edinburgh annual report year 1
	Edinburgh interim review material (Final Draft 22-07-2010)
	2010 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarterly report final
Manchester	Manchester annual report-year 1
	Manchester annual report-year 2
	Manchester bid
	Manchester evaluation briefing
	Interim evaluation
North East	North East annual report- year 1
	North East annual report- year 2
	North East bid
	North East evaluation briefing
	North East- Baseline DRAFT 24March 2010
	North East- REVISED Aims + Objects (MARCH 2010)
	North East- Aims + Objects (Original)
	BNE Case Study Two (30 04 10)
	Annual Review Report May 2010



Beacon	Source of evidence
	BNE Case Study One (10 12 09)
UCL	UCL evaluation framework
	UCL annual report year 1
	UCL annual report year 2
	UCL evaluation briefing
	UCL bid
	UCL baseline report
	UCL baseline survey
	BPE UCL Aims
	UCL Early Career Researchers and PE
	UCLBPE_Review_March10 FINAL
	Summary of completed funded projects 03/10 (excel)
Wales	Funders' Report Sep 09
	Update for Dec 09 Management Board
	Update for Feb 09 Management Board
	Update for Mar 10 Management Board
	Update for May 09 Management Board
	Update for Oct 08 Management Board
	Wales annual report- year 1
	Wales annual report- year 2
	Wales bid
	Wales evaluation briefing
NCCPE	NCCPE evaluation briefing
	NCCPE annual report- year 1
	NCCPE annual report- year 2.doc
	NCCPE bid- with tables removed
	NCCPE External Evaluation Report 2008-09
	NCCPE Evaluation report year 2
Overall baseline	App 3 Interviews with Sector Bodies
	2010 stakeholder interview report appendix3final
	Baseline response table all BPEs
	Comparison of Non PEs interviewed for baseline and interim evaluation
	Interview with Alice Frost, HEFCE
	Notes of interview with Kerry Leslie and Chloe shepherd
	Responses of Non BPEs Interviewed only for the Interim Evaluation
	2010 Response Wales v3 0
	App 2 Interviews with non BPEs



Beacon	Source of evidence
	BPE_2008 survey
	BPE_2010 survey
	Explanation of overall Beacons data
	Oakleigh baseline report v final finaldoc
	App 1 Evaluation framework
	App 4 E-survey report
	Appendix 5 BPE and NCC Profiles
	summary of BPE evaluation interviews JO POTTER 1
	BGF 02-09 Annual reports from Beacons
	Copy of BPE survey 2010
	Excel- all responses
	Excel BPE sample
	BOE survey 2010_processed data_AM
	Non BPE sample
	Non science sample
	Science sample
<b>Overall follow-up</b>	2010 stakeholder interview report appendix3 final 30 July
	anonymised Non BPE responses summary appendix 2
	App 5 Evaluation framework
	Beacon North East profile App6D
	BPE evaluation interview guide Appendix 1
	CUE East profile App 6A
	Edinburgh profile App 6B
	E-survey report_2010_appendix 4 final 30 July
	evaluation report final 30 July
	Manchester profile APP 6C
	NCC Profile APP6G
	Profile of Beacon Wales App 6F
	UCLprofile APP6E