

UK Research
and Innovation

UKRI Vision for Public Engagement

September 2019



UKRI's vision for public engagement

UKRI supports world leading research and innovation to create a more prosperous, healthy and sustainable society. Creating opportunities for people to discuss, create and participate in research and innovation is an important way to achieve this: it makes research and innovation more relevant, impactful and trusted.

Our ambition for public engagement

We believe that research and innovation should be responsive to the knowledge, priorities and values of society and open to participation by people from all backgrounds.

To achieve this, we need to change the way UKRI supports public engagement. The creation of UKRI means that for the first time, the funding of all types of research and business innovation has come together in one organisation. This allows us to develop a more strategic and unified approach to engaging society in our work.

Building on a rich history of public engagement at the research councils, we have identified a number of areas where we need a more strategic approach:

- What is the best way of incentivising and supporting the researchers we fund to do more and better public engagement?
- What is the best way of measuring the impact of public engagement?
- How can we more systematically involve society in discussions and debates about research and innovation priorities?
- What role could public engagement play in the work of the businesses that we support?

To answer these questions and more we will commission research, pilot new ways of working, support new collaborations and collect evidence.

Our goals for public engagement

Following research and consultation, we have developed four goals to guide our public engagement programmes and funding as we develop our longer-term approach.

We will support researchers, innovators and institutions to:

1) Engage under-represented communities and places with research and innovation

Some groups in society have many more opportunities to participate in activities related to research and innovation than others. We are committed to closing this gap through our public engagement programmes and partnerships.

We want researchers, innovators and institutions to broaden the focus of their engagement activities and include more under-represented groups. To achieve this, we will open new funding calls to support universities to test and develop new approaches. We will work with partners such as museums, galleries and community organisations to pilot new approaches to informal learning. We will support and fund community-led approaches to public engagement with research and innovation. We will also commission research that contributes towards building a robust evidence base.



Researchers discuss the future of community spaces at the Bristol Thinking Futures event, part of the ESRC-funded Festival of Social Science. Credit: ESRC



A public dialogue project on genomic medicine Credit: Ipsos Mori

2) Actively involve a wide range of people in their work

Active participation in research, such as citizen science or co-designing research projects with communities, can improve research quality, make it more relevant to society and have significant benefits for those who participate. We want to help researchers and innovators shift the balance of public engagement, from communication of research findings to active participation.

We are making a long-term commitment to citizen science. Citizen science involves working with volunteers to collect and analyze data and develop better questions. We plan to launch a range of funding calls and pilots to understand what our long-term approach to supporting citizen science should be.

We also need to ensure that public engagement is recognised, incentivised and rewarded as part of a research career. For innovators, we need to improve our understanding of how we can help businesses to involve a more diverse range of people in the innovation process, building on concepts such as inclusive design and open innovation.

3) Nurture a future generation passionate about research and innovation

The UK needs an outstanding, diverse workforce if we are to secure our place in the world in the 21st century. Informal learning experiences at museums, science centres, festivals and school clubs are an important way for young people to engage with research and innovation. All young people should have access to these experiences, no matter what their background or where they live.

The STEM Ambassadors programme, British Science Association's CREST awards and Youth Grand Challenges are examples of UKRI programmes that aim to inspire and involve young people. We will build on these programmes with a series of new activities around young people and climate change. We will test digital approaches to help schools access informal learning activities and explore options for supporting young people to participate in citizen science. We will also commission research to improve the evidence behind informal learning experiences.



Creating pollinator-friendly habitats – citizen science can improve research and promote science learning. Credit: Poppy Lakeman Fraser

4) Listen to public concerns and aspirations

The UK has pioneered approaches to understanding public concerns and aspirations for research and innovation, for example on the future of genomic medicine and driverless cars. As the pace of innovation continues to increase, it is more important than ever that policymakers, funders, researchers and innovators are able to engage society in the development of plans and priorities.

The Sciencewise programme is one example of an important tool that UKRI can use to help Government, councils and public sector bodies to understand public concerns and aspirations and involve society in shaping the direction of research and innovation.

Alongside this, we will pilot new approaches to develop and expand the ways in which UKRI can engage society as we develop our plans and priorities, drawing on developments in technologies and research methods.

Next steps

Our vision for public engagement is based on a wide range of stakeholder engagement activities, research and previous experience in the research councils.

As we implement our new programmes, we will engage with the research and innovation community to ensure that we are building on the latest thinking and practice. We will also bring in diverse voices and broaden our expertise by forming a Public Engagement Advisory Group.

We will publish updates about these activities at:
www.ukri.org/public-engagement/

For any questions please contact:
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