



# External engagement and Co-Production: Research and practice review summary







research and related activities and ensure new knowledge is created in collaboration with those who stand to benefit directly, or who are in positions that can affect change.

Broadly, external engagement refers to activities which connect researchers to non-academic audiences. This might be through consulting the general public and/or potential end users, or involving people as collaborators and co-producers. It may also entail working with non-academics as partners to help translate knowledge. Following consultation across the higher education sector, the NCCPE (N.d: N.p) describe public engagement as:

There are several definitions of co-production, though SCIE (2013) encapsulate its essence concisely:



accountability and transparency (Nass et al., 2012) and the opportunity for the voices of those of those traditionally less engaged to be heard (Beckett et al., 2018; Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016; Walker, 2007).

Adopting elements of external engagement is not without challenges, such as confusion around responsibilities (Gagliardi and Dobrow, 2016), administrative burden (Kothari and



### *Box One, External engagement: Some basic tips*

#### Partners

1. Involve the right people: people who have lived experience relevant to the health condition/social care situation etc. being researched, and where relevant senior management and/or decision makers.
2. Ensure people who may normally be excluded are enabled to take part.
3. Involve enough people to provide a reasonable breadth and depth of views on the issues that are likely to be important to the people the study will aim to recruit, and who it is intended to benefit.
4. Involve people in as many aspects of the study as is feasible, productive, and appropriate to the research.
5. Clarify the purpose and motivations of research partners and check assumptions (e.g. professionals may regard academics as more 'detached' from end users)

#### Design

6. Research questions and purpose: be clear about goals and purpose at the outset.
7. Consider different approaches to research design: will this take place 'centrally', or be more responsive and evolve based on views of external stakeholders/service users.
8. Give regard to the kinds of knowledge that will inform evidence and how the different voices in the research will be heard and contribute to knowledge production.
9. Make it informal, avoid it looking too "professional". Key to this for Christian Aid (2017) was having a toolbox of creative methods and approaches that could be adapted, refined and added to accordingly.
10. Avoid jargon, which can be associated with tokenism and top-down decision making, using language that people understood and describing activities in ways that make sense to people is vitally important.

#### Practicalities

11. Who is implementing the research, what roles are needed to make it a success, who is designing, collecting and analysing data, is there space to co-develop, share learning? Need a shared understanding of 'data'
12. Ensure there are enough resources to cover what will be needed (e.g. does it require a training budget, reimbursement, refreshments, venue hire etc.). INVOLVE (N.d), run by NIHR, provide detailed guidance.
13. Establishing roles, responsibilities and ways of working, identifying if any additional support is required. Important to think about spaces of communication.
14. Factor in time to build relationships and trust and understand the priorities and norms of different communities. This time must be costed appropriately.
15. Ensure meetings give regard to accessibility, flexibility and resources. Take it slow, have regular breaks, use plain English, ensure different sectors/individual contributors are mixed up, more group work – fewer presentations, acknowledge power differentials, be creative.

#### Reflective practice

16. Take stock of the resources that each party can bring, including individual attributes, formal training/qualifications, institutional capacity.
17. Take time to map out and understand nature of the partnership, who is responsible for internal communication, how to facilitate communication across different languages, agendas and interests and regularly review 'during' the partnership.
18. Ensure any findings or changes as a result of involvement are communicated back.



## Examples of external engagement

This section considers existing examples of research and related activities carried out across the spectrum of external engagement, from communication (Setting up networks,



Other ideas might include running or attending online networking sessions, such as the ['Melting pot lunches: online series'](#) run by Kaleidoscope Health and Care, which brings together diverse groups from academia, the NHS, and beyond (e.g. Dr Sana Suri,







Co-research models have been successfully applied to research with older people, such as to support [improved quality of life](#),



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