

Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health

ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

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This strategy should be viewed as a work-in-progress, to be reviewed regularly, and co-created with partners.

Comment from WCCEH's Critical Friend, Rachel Purtell

However good the strategies, policies or knowledge, a Culture of Engaged, and Engagement with, Research will only develop when each member of the Centre considers and reflects on their own interactions against the conditions and the aspirations stated. Cultures are built from within, otherwise they remain an outward face that is insubstantial when examined. The Engagement Implementation Strategy means you!

1. Vision of the WCCEH

The vision of the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health is to foster transformative research by engaging with diverse partners to create and sustain cultures that enable health and well-being across the life course.

2. Why engage?

Building on the Centre's vision, the aim of the engagement implementation strategy is to ensure that at all stages, the Centre's research is influenced, created, conducted and engaged in with and by people whose lives are affected by the research and its outcomes, on the basis of mutual and reciprocal respect. This begins with the articulation of the nature of the problem, the co-identification of issues to be researched and the co-creation of research questions, and leads on to collaborative research and the delivery of research outcomes that are beneficial for all partners,

Members of the Centre are committed to ensuring no individuals, groups or sectors of society are excluded from possible collaboration and engagement with the Centre's research.

The rationale for focussing on an engaged research approach is the conviction that researching in an engaged way is fundamental for enabling transformative research. If research is about making a difference, understanding issues, solving problems and raising expectations, Centre researchers should seek to understand the nature of problems and the context for solutions by meaningfully engaging with those who have first-hand experience of the issues.

The Centre's commitment to transformative engaged research means our research should:

- influence policy and practice
- build on a culture of reciprocity
- respect different expertises and diverse values
- arise from and respond to the needs of diverse partners
- have outcomes that are beneficial (although not necessarily the same) for all partners
- be of the highest ethical standards
- be sensitive to partners' wishes for privacy and confidentiality

3. Descriptions

Like health itself, engaged research is a process that evolves and develops over time. Engaged research and engagement with research offer the potential to have real and multiple impacts on health and wellbeing across the life course. It has overlaps with universities' impact agendas and strategies but importantly, we believe that engagement is not an end in itself, an "add-on" or stand-alone activity but rather a means for doing the best possible research.

Engaged research and engagement with research are inherently multi-directional and active, not passive. We recognise that there are multiple ways in which people, groups and organisations can connect with the Centre, and that these activities may create pathways that lead to engaged research and engagement with research. However we do not consider research communication, outreach, consultation with individuals, groups or organisations, or research that gathers information or data from human participants to be engaged research or engagement with research, as such practices do not allow people to influence the research or support active co-creation and collaboration.

Engaged research

Engaged research encompasses the many ways in which researchers and people outside the university meaningfully work together throughout the research process, from understanding and expressing the nature of the problems, to agreeing the issues that need to be researched, to creating questions together, to delivering research in partnership and ensuring outcomes that are beneficial for all partners.

Engagement with research

Engagement with research encompasses the opening up of research to people outside academia for the encouragement of dialogue, interaction and mutual listening. It includes the use of a variety of media and forms of participation.

Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health: Engagement implementation strategy

Both engaged research and engagement with research draw on themes of connexion, dialogue and mutual benefit. Whilst we believe that it is important that the Centre supports both forms, it is our ambition that to secure the transformative aims expressed in the Centre's overall vision, engagement evolves to its next intellectual and practical stage, engaged research.

4. How do we do engaged research?

There is no one "right" way to do engaged research, nor can we specify in advance who we will work with; both will emerge from our activities. However, we do consider there to be a set of necessary conditions.

- The process starts with creating the conditions that enable a shared understanding of the nature of the problem being addressed
- It recognises the value of experience, scholarship, expertise and skills
- It addresses questions that have emerged from meaningful, continuing, engagement
- It is clear about the practical parameters of the research and what the research can achieve in itself
- It has considered questions of sustainability and legacy beyond the period of funding
- It does not exclude the participation of any individuals, groups or sectors of society

5. What will we do to support the creation of a culture of engaged research?

We believe that the most effective way to create a culture of engaged research is to build a community of engaged researchers, including academic and non-academic researchers, individuals and communities, private, voluntary sector, public, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and more. This engaged community will bring a wealth of experience to the co-creation of and collaboration in research, and offer support and advice to researchers in the Centre and beyond.

Ways in which we will support the engaged research culture of the Centre will include:

- developing beacon/flagship projects that epitomise the Centre's engaged research vision
- supporting projects that draw together engaged researchers (for example through research support funding grants)
 - building a library of 'case stories' that represent and exemplify engaged research and transformative engagement (see example below)
- hosting a programme of engaged research seminars and workshops/training
 - bringing together people interested in research and researchers to build relationships and create the conditions for collaborative research
 - workshops for people outside the university about research processes and working together to understand what issues they would like to research, be research partners in or see researched
 - training in conducting engaged research for academics and other interested people
- competitive funding for engaged research including for example support for relationship building, realising the nature of the problem, co-creating proposals
- extending the hospitality of the Centre, including access to academic articles, to people and groups from outside the university, both physically and virtually
- offering non-university-based researchers in our projects affiliate membership of the Centre
- ensuring no one is excluded, whether physically or financially, from accessing Centre events and online materials or from the possibility of developing, participating in, or leading engaged research

6. How will we know if we have succeeded?

Reflecting on how, why, when and where engaged research has been successful will be key to the Centre being recognised as the leading hub for this approach to research. The criteria for success will include:

- all research conducted by the Centre can offer evidence that it has been and is engaged
- the Centre's structures and processes of engagement and engaged research are responsive to the needs of all individuals, groups and sections of society engaging in or with our research
- all research support awards are open and accessible to people from outside the university
- Centre members have worked with people from outside academia to support their applications for research support funding awards and PhD scholarships
- the Centre can show evidence that it has developed an engaged research community and the resulting relationships can evidence the transformative impact of this on the research
- the Centre can show that its researchers have engaged with overlooked and under-served communities
- the Centre can offer evidence that its research and projects leave a legacy of sustainability that lasts beyond the involvement of Centre researchers
- the Centre can evidence new ways of delivering effective engaged research and engagement approaches as well as drawing on existing knowledge and evidence
- the Centre has generated new understanding, approaches and evidence regarding cultures and environments of health across the life course

Case study: Transforming engagement

Background: The Health Complexity Group [HCG] at the UoE has conducted research over a number of years that has led to the development of the Connecting Communities [C2]. C2 comprises an experiential learning programme and implementation framework. It aims to create local operational partnerships in very low income neighbourhoods to support dynamic processes of change leading to significant and sustainable health and wellbeing outcomes. To date, C2 has collaborated with more than 20 neighbourhoods and communities across the UK. In more recent times, C2 has become a charity – C2NN – which aims to support the development of regional delivery hubs.

The engagement process: Over the course of ongoing discussions with members of the C2NN board of trustees, three overarching questions emerged;

- Can the regional hub model be developed into a sustainable framework for delivering C2?
- Can this delivery model enable the transfer of successful processes of change to new neighbourhoods and communities?
- Can local operational partnerships evidence that the changing nature and quality of relations that emerge from participating in C2 lead to better health and social outcomes?

HCG researchers then collaborated with C2NN trustees and members of local operational partnerships to outline a programme of work which might have the potential to respond to these questions. The next phase of this collaboration was to develop conversations with potential C2 delivery hubs, through which they could consider whether they wanted to be part of the research, and whether in doing so the work that they were delivering in their local communities would be supported (for example in developing funding bids/delivering on commissioned briefs). Finally, a plan for a two day event was outlined, which would celebrate the achievements of C2 partnerships and begin the concrete work of developing regional C2 programmes that would build on the successes of these C2 partnerships. Following these conversations, an initial research proposal was drafted and shared with partners.

Delivery of the research: The proposal is for ongoing co-delivery of the research work by community-based researchers, who are known and trusted within the study sites. The research involves rapid cycles of data collection and feedback, generating qualitative data through stories, pictures, conversations as well as relational data pertaining to networks of trust and support. The project team is a mixture of academics, service providers and community researchers all of whom have a say in how the research is being conducted.

How this is transformative: This process has enabled the co-development of a new, distributed, model for delivering C2. This new model offers the potential for trialling new means by which successful process of change can be transferred to new areas – “scaling across”. The overarching research questions have been co-identified by researchers, service providers and residents. The methods for delivering the research will enable to data collected to be tailored to the specific needs of the participating communities. The innovative research methodology has the potential to provide answers to profound research questions pertaining to the relational, and community, bases of health and wellbeing.