

Manifesto of the Beltane Public Engagement Network

November 2018

Purpose, scope and context of this document

This document – the Manifesto of the Beltane Public Engagement Network – outlines the form, mission, identity, principles and values of the Beltane Public Engagement Network from November 2018 onwards. It has been written and approved by public engagement professionals at Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University and The University of Edinburgh, with approval from academic leads for public engagement with research at each of these organisations. The Manifesto is not legally binding, has no set expiry date and is not accompanied by any financial commitments; however, it demonstrates and articulates each signatory's institutional commitment.

What and who is the Beltane Public Engagement Network?

The Beltane Public Engagement Network is a partnership between Edinburgh Napier University, Heriot-Watt University, Queen Margaret University and The University of Edinburgh. The partnership was originally formed in 2008, when the universities in Edinburgh were awarded over £1 million of funding to become an RCUK Beacon for Public Engagement. From 2012-2017, the Network was funded by the four universities in Edinburgh to provide a central team based at The University of Edinburgh. This funding has now ended, but the partnership continues, in keeping with the pooling and collaborative approaches that are characteristic strengths of the Scottish higher education sector.

The partnership operates as a cooperative:

- There is no central team or overall lead individual or institution. Instead, each partner university has a delegated key point of contact for the Beltane Network, usually a public engagement professional sitting centrally within the university, and a senior research academic who supports the Network and can act as a champion for the Network in their home institution.
- Partner universities share opportunities and resources, showcase good practice, and collaborate on projects.
- Staff and students at Beltane partner universities may automatically consider themselves to be Network members.
- Any organisation or individual from the wider community wishing to engage with the research and/or researchers of these universities is welcome to collaborate with the Network.

Delegated key contacts liaise within their own institutions to share information about any activities which are organised by the Network or its members, and to ensure as many of their staff and students as possible are able to contribute to activities developed by Network members. Some of these activities will be organised by the key contacts, but the key contacts can also help raise awareness of engagement activity organised by other Network members.

Mission of the Beltane Public Engagement Network

The mission of the Beltane Network is to support and advance a culture of public engagement with research at its partner universities. It aims to make it easier for researchers to undertake excellent, impactful public engagement with research and for partner organisations and individuals to locate and work successfully with our researchers. The Network acts as a focal point for community partners and external organisations to be signposted to research and researchers in the four universities. The Beltane Network also aims to lead by example with values that reflect its practice: openness, mutual benefit and transparency.

What is the definition of public engagement used here?

The Network supports public engagement with **academic research**. The Network helps its partner universities to share their research with the audiences most likely to benefit from it; these could be individuals interested in a personal capacity, or members of organisations and institutions acting in a professional or voluntary capacity. The Network does not provide support for commercialisation of research but recognises that commercial and public engagement can sometimes go hand-in-hand.

At times, the Network's definition of public engagement may overlap with activities that might be termed 'civic engagement', 'community engagement', 'patient involvement' or something else, but engagement with academic research is always present in any activity falling under the Network's definition.

The Network's definition draws on that adopted by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement>), but is not identical, having a tighter focus on research engagement.

The Network's defining principles

The Network's support and advancement of a culture of public engagement with research at its partner universities relies on the following principles:

- **University staff and students involved with the engagement process adopt the principles of Engaged Practice:** They are engaging, interesting, relevant, responsive, reflective, respectful, collaborative, supportive, creative, constructive, innovative and trustworthy.
- **Researchers are equipped with the skills they need, then enrich and cement their learning through practical application of those skills, then share this experience** (the Meet, Learn, Try, Reflect, Share and Recognise approach developed in the early days of the Beltane partnership).
- **Organisations wishing to work with multiple universities, especially at scale, have a clearly identifiable entry point** (the Network's key contacts). In addition, there is a system for onward communication from that point (for example, the Edinburgh Napier Public Engagement Forum and, at the University of Edinburgh, the Edinburgh Public Engagement Forum).
- **Public engagement with research is a two-way process, with activities occupying a spectrum of purpose** – ranging from informing to consulting, then involving, and eventually co-producing or even giving direct control of research.

The Network's values

The Network encourages staff and students to express the following values in their engagement practice. The Network also aims to embody these values in its operation and approach.

- **Collegiality:** Individuals take shared ownership and responsibility of activities and relationships, and are collaborative, congenial and respectful to everyone they work with.
- **Transparency:** For example, the purpose of the engagement is clear to all involved with the engagement process from the outset, avoiding later disappointment or mistrust. Similarly, Beltane partner organisations will be open-handed in how they work together.
- **Mutual benefit is essential:** For example, the engagement approach employed is the most appropriate (as opposed to just the easiest to implement), maximising positive outcomes for everyone involved.
- **Diversity is valued and valuable:** Diversity of individuals' needs, experiences, strengths and identities is not only recognised and accommodated but is used to strengthen the work of the Network and its members.
- **Experimentation and adaption is business-as-usual:** Doing things less than perfectly in the beginning is an inherent part of development, whether that is learning a new skill or starting a new engagement project. We will reflect and learn through evaluation, and try again with an improved approach to meeting desired outcomes.