

Public Engagement Strategy

April 2019

Who we are

The Wellcome Centre for Ethics and Humanities (WEH) is a collaborative partnership between the Ethox Centre, The Oxford Neuroscience, Ethics and Society Group (Neurosec), The Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, and the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine (WUHMO).

Our mission

- Providing a flexible multidisciplinary research platform, capable of engaging with new and profoundly difficult ethical questions presented by advances in neuroscience, big data, genomics and global connectedness.
- Leading debate on the ethical requirements for scientific research and technological innovation capable both of improving health and of commanding well-founded public trust and confidence.
- Establishing a critical mass of research excellence in ethics and the humanities interdigitated with major initiatives in data-driven science, genomics, neuroscience, and global health.

Context

This plan will sit within the overall context of the [University of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research \(PER\) strategic plan](#), as well as reflecting the PER priorities of Wellcome (our primary funder). As part of the Nuffield Dept. of Population Health, WEH also adheres to the principles of the [Athena SWAN Charter](#).

Our vision for Public Engagement at the Centre

We use the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's definition of public engagement (PE):

"Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit."

We view PE as key priority for WEH and as an integral part of our research practice. Actively embedding PE into our work will bring benefits to the skills and attitudes of all those taking part and ensure our research is socially conscious and relevant.

We propose three interconnected strands of engagement activities:

1. Informational activities

Through informational activities, we will inspire publics to engage in discussion of these important ethical issues.

2. Consultation

We will ensure that the research conducted at our Centre is informed by public views, concerns, perspectives and priorities.

3. Collaboration

We will collaborate with a variety of different non-scientific audiences to encourage involvement in our research.

We intend to establish different and innovative approaches to promoting and supporting discussion and debate about important ethical issues with our key audiences. Our engagement will be an iterative process that is regularly reviewed and reflected upon by our PE Advisory Group.

Our priorities

Over the life of the current funding, we aim to:

- Develop a culture in our Centre where PE is embedded as part of research, from initial project design through to final dissemination of outputs.
- Build capacity within the Centre, so that our staff and students will be able deliver a variety of high quality PE activities.
- Engage with publics on the subject of 21st Century ethics through a varied PE programme.
- Contribute to the inclusion of discussion of ethical issues in the cultural life of Oxfordshire.
- Establish a research programme in public engagement that focuses on the ethical parameters of science communication more broadly.

Our public engagement activities will be representative of the research themes of WEH and developed in response to opportunities and perceived needs. PE formats will include: public debate and discussion events; theatre, music and the visual arts; participatory film/video diaries, and a range of social media activities.

The Centre's engagement programme will be developed in close collaboration with the wider University of Oxford public engagement programmes, and particularly those led by the Humanities (e.g. [TORCH](#)) and Medical Sciences Divisions. They will also be developed in close collaboration with the Wellcome Trust's Engagement and International Engagement teams, and where possible with other Wellcome Centres across the UK and internationally.

Key stakeholders

In the development and implementation of our programme of engagement activities, we will pay careful attention to the identification and building of partnerships with relevant publics and key stakeholders. While we encourage our researchers to work with the public most appropriate to the purpose of their engagement activity, WEH key groups will include:

- Research participants and patient groups (who have the potential to better inform and shape our research),
- Health professionals and medical researchers (who can contribute to a cyclical dialogue of current research strands affected by ethics),
- Children and young people in Oxfordshire (who can initiate conversation on the implications WEH research may have for their future and the future of others).

We plan to engage publics from a variety of backgrounds. It is essential to our PE work that the diverse Oxfordshire community is represented and welcomed at all of our activities. This will not only ensure a broad discourse that will hopefully challenge and shape our research, but will provide an inclusive platform for all voices and opinions from the region to be heard.

How we will implement this strategy

Capacity building within the Centre

- We will provide initial PE training to our researchers, responding to the interests and skill gaps of our staff and students. This will range from bespoke outreach training, to more generalised media training.
- We will highlight opportunities to get involved with existing Centre, Department, University and external PE activities (eg. through The Oxford Trust).
- We will develop a funding proposal to compliment a major programme of public engagement activities.
- We will provide support for PE funding applications, being developed by WEH researchers through one-to-one sessions and advice, both as part of applications for research grants and for individual PE projects.
- We will reward and recognise staff and students that take part in, and especially lead, PE activities. The annual PER Awards at the University provide one such mechanism.
- We will map our PE activity throughout the Centre, in order to ensure we are achieving our goals. An annual mapping exercise in reference to the [IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum](#) guide will ensure our PE capacity is progressing in line with this aim.
- A Public Engagement Advisory Group will be established to advise on the development of our public engagement programme and its alignment with our strategic aims. First stage development will focus on development of PE plan and capacity building within the centre.

Building and maintaining good relationships / learning from others

Our PE programme will learn from models of best practice in Oxford and elsewhere. Examples of initiatives we will collaborate with are:

- Engagement teams at the Wellcome Major Overseas Programme (AAPs) in Africa and South East Asia.
- The Global Health Bioethics Network.
- Engagement Officers at the Oxford-based Wellcome Centres for Human Genetics and Integrative Neuroimaging.

- Other Wellcome Centres in the UK (i.e. the Wellcome Centre for Cultures and Environments of Health in Exeter, and the other humanities centres in Edinburgh and Durham).
- The Oxford University Medical Sciences Division, and Humanities Division PE teams.
- Museums, libraries, and local charities to share expertise, when appropriate. This can include non-science focused, cultural and arts organisations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of PE activities is important but also challenging. We aim to learn from best practice and to make an active contribution to the development and testing of new models of evaluation and monitoring the extent to which activities enable our audiences to meaningfully engage with our research. We will embed monitoring and evaluation into our PE work from the outset, referring to [evaluation toolkits](#) provided by the NCCPE. Through appropriate monitoring of our PE outputs we will:

- Increase the number of researchers leading/taking part in PE activities.
- Diversify representatives from WEH being involved in a PE activity before the end of the current grant provision.
- Increase external funding for PE activities being brought into the Centre.
- Enhance our researchers' awareness of current public attitudes to and understanding of 21st Century ethics
- Continue to improve and enhance public feedback from our events, and events we take part in.