

Public Engagement Strategy

November 2022

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 Oxford Centre for the History of Science, Medicine and Technology based at the University of Oxford.

Our mission

- Providing a flexible multidisciplinary research platform, capable of engaging with new and difficult ethical questions presented by advances in neuroscience, big data, genomics, artificial intelligence, infectious diseases 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 Strategic Plan](#), as well as reflecting the public engagement with research (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 an integral part of our research practice at WEH. 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:

- **Consultation**
We will ensure that the research conducted at our Centre is informed by public views, concerns, perspectives and priorities.
- **Collaboration**
We will collaborate with a variety of different non-scientific audiences to encourage involvement in our research.
- **Informational activities**
To reach a stage where public consultation and collaboration can occur, we will plan and deliver informational activities that share our research aims with key public groups.

Our core priorities

Through engaging publics in our research, we aim to:

1. Develop a culture in our Centre where PE is embedded as part of research, to ensure that relevant public views are considered and included throughout the research process.
2. Build capacity within the Centre, so that our staff and students can design and deliver a variety of high quality PE activities with confidence.
3. Engage with publics on the subject of 'Rethinking Ethics' through a varied PE programme, to better inform our research and to enhance public trust and confidence in our work.
4. Contribute to the inclusion of discussion of ethical issues in the cultural life of Oxfordshire, to inform local publics of our role in global health research and foster collaborations that are of mutual benefit.

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 debates and discussion events, theatre and the visual arts, Citizens' Juries, documentary films and podcasts. This engagement work will be linked to a range of online and social media activities where practicable.

Key publics

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:

- Arts communities and institutions; who have the creative capacity to communicate our research in new ways, encouraging different perspectives on our research strands for both researchers and publics alike.
- Children and young people in Oxfordshire; who can initiate conversations on the implications WEH research may have for their future and the future of others.
- Research participants, patient groups and medical researchers; who have the potential to better inform and shape our research.

We intend to engage publics from a variety of backgrounds and encourage diversity across all of our activities, as broader perspectives will enrich and better inform our work. We will endeavour to produce accessible digital PE projects and content, that enables those unable to participate in person to do so virtually. This will ensure a broad discourse that will challenge and shape our research, whilst providing an inclusive platform for all voices and opinions 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 pursue opportunities to get involved with existing Centre, Department, University and external PE activities (eg. [The Oxford Trust](#) and local festivals, along with other Humanities and Social Science UK Wellcome Centres and the [Global Health Bioethics Network](#)).
- We will provide support for PE funding applications from 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 provides one such mechanism.
- An annual 'WEH Mapping Method' will continue to be developed and implemented to identify and monitor changes to internal PE culture. This method will be devised with reference to the [National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement EDGE Tool](#) targets.

Governance

A Public Engagement Advisory Group will regularly advise on the development of our public engagement programme and its alignment with our strategic aims. This group includes; five WEH staff from all career levels representing the four constituent research groups (including WEH PE Manager as chair), a student representative from WEH, PE representatives from our partner groups in OUCRU, Vietnam, and MORU, Thailand, and the PE Coordinator for the Medical Sciences Division at the University.

This PE Strategy, our Evaluation Framework and our PE Programme will be reviewed annually by both the PE Advisory Group and our external WEH PE mentor.

WEH's engagement programme will be developed in collaboration with the wider University of Oxford public engagement programmes, in particular those led by the Humanities (including [TORCH](#)), the Medical Sciences Divisions and the Oxford-based Wellcome Centres for Integrative Neuroimaging and Human Genetics. We will also continue to liaise with external colleagues in the Global Health Bioethics Network and other UK Wellcome Centres in the Humanities and Social Sciences. We will communicate regularly with Wellcome Trust's national and international engagement teams and where possible, with other Wellcome Science Centres across the UK and globally.

Monitoring and Evaluation

We aim to learn from best practice and to make an active contribution to the development and testing of new models of evaluation, exploring the extent to which activities enable our audiences to meaningfully engage with our research. We will develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for our strategic plans for WEH, ensuring that our PE work continues to meet our core aims. Through appropriate evaluation of our PE outputs we will monitor:

- Responses from different publics to our PE activities; including audience demographics where appropriate, the number of people involved in our engagement work and evidence of its impact.
- Evidence of culture change in WEH; through monitoring the number of representatives from WEH participating in, leading and developing their own PE activities and number of PE funding applications.
- Lessons learnt from our PE activities and ways we can continue to improve upon this work and share this learning.