

DRAFT Attributes Framework for Public Engagement for university staff and students

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Background

In February 2010 the NCCPE commissioned Graphic Science to support the development of an attributes framework for public engagement. The work was framed as follows:

The brief

In order to better equip the HE sector to embrace public engagement, the NCCPE wishes to work with a range of stakeholders to develop a simple framework that articulates the core skills, aptitudes and competencies involved in engaging the public.

Purpose of the framework

This framework will be used for a variety of purposes:

- To provide a shared framework to help funders, policy makers, managers, practitioners and training providers to coordinate their efforts to support public engagement
- To map the existing provision and identify gaps
- To inform the development of the NCCPE's planned 'practitioner's toolkit': a suite of resources to support professional development of staff, and enhance the quality of PE activity in universities and research institutes. The proposed 'competency framework' will provide a backbone for this toolkit.
- To allow public engagement to be integrated into other HR / staff development frameworks
- To support staff to reflect on and develop their own skills

The remainder of this report details the results of the consultation and proposes a simple framework which has been developed with input from the beacons for public engagement, RCUK and Wellcome and a range of other stakeholders and experts.

Rationale

This attributes framework for public engagement is intended to act as a guide for staff and students in UK Universities with regards to the personal attributes and skills required for different public engagement (PE) activities. Its purpose is to inform the provision of training and development for public engagement, and we hope that staff in universities, research institutes and professional networks (such as learned societies and professional membership bodies) will use it flexibly to integrate support for public engagement into their existing staff development and training frameworks. The framework is also informing the development of the NCCPE's practical resources to support staff and students develop their public engagement practice. We will be launching a comprehensive online toolkit in December 2010, which will provide case studies, guides and practical advice on how to develop and deliver effective engagement and which will be cross-referenced with this framework.

The framework is not meant to be comprehensive or to articulate every nuance of public engagement practice: our goal is to provide some high level prompts to guide and inform thinking and to encourage discussion and collaboration. Every institution is likely to approach this area differently, and we hope this simple framework is a useful tool that supports a diversity of approaches to embedding support for public engagement.

The research and consultation process

The framework has been informed by the work of the Science for All Training sub-group, who were tasked to perform a consultation on competency in PE by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in autumn 2009. The Science for All research report¹ explored the provision of training opportunities, PE activity and the implementation of competency frameworks in four sectors: academia, engineering, government and health. Learning from this research, along with an in-depth look at effective competency frameworks developed by the Sanger Institute (the Professional Development Framework for Scientists Involved in Public Engagement Work²) and the Civil Service (the Professional Skills for Government Competency Framework³), directed initial drafting of this attributes framework.

The framework was then subject to consultation, first with representatives of the six Beacons for Public Engagement and then with a number of stakeholders from within the PE community. The framework also took into account the work already done by the Edinburgh Beltane Beacon and the Manchester Beacon, each of whom had developed competency frameworks of their own.

The framework attempts to draw a balance between the differing views of those stakeholders consulted, along with the recommendations from the original Science for All report.

¹ 'Informing the development of a competency framework for public engagement', accessible from <http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/scienceandsociety/site/all/2010/02/09/science-for-all-report-and-supporting-documents/>

² <http://www.sanger.ac.uk/about/engagement/docs/professionaldevelopmentframework.pdf>

³ <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/improving/psg/index.aspx>

One of the key findings from previous work for the Science for All group, which was echoed by our stakeholders, was that members of the academic community may be reticent to adhere to a framework which might assess them as incompetent⁴. A key recommendation stated that “there should be a limit on expectations of how far most people can be reasonably expected to develop.” It was felt therefore that the language used in the framework was very important and that we should avoid any indication of mandatory skills sets or too much emphasis on levels. It was felt that the framework should instead acknowledge the demands on time experienced by many academics and should also embrace the diversity of PE activity types, without implying a hierarchy.

One recommendation from the Science for All research report was that: “The ability to undertake self-reflection should be used as a key indicator of PE skills and the level of PE activity which can be reasonably expected of practitioners.” This was supported by our stakeholders who agreed that reflection is extremely important. For this reason reflection became a key element in the framework. It was felt that self-reflection and evaluation should be integral to any PE activity.

The framework was initially broken down into three broadly defined areas: Communication, Reflection and People. Feedback from stakeholders regarding the breakdown of these three broad areas was favourable. Though they felt that certain attributes could be threaded through the entire framework, it was acknowledged that the breakdown was useful for the purpose of clarity.

There was however some confusion over the term ‘People’, and concern that it indicated merely working with and identifying audiences, rather than the consideration of audience motivations and the development of partnerships. It has been replaced with the word Empathy.

Though it was contrary to recommendations made by the Science for All report, the established PE competency frameworks we reviewed offered levels progressing from basic skills through to skills which were more challenging. The initial draft of this framework therefore split the framework into levels 1-3. There were some stakeholders who strongly recommended that this indicator of progression was key to ensuring professionalism and quality in the delivery of PE activity. They also pointed out that academics are familiar with demonstrating competency and that advancement through levels was crucial to professional development and reward. However, the majority of stakeholders remained concerned about the use of levels and suggested instead that we focus the framework by emphasising types and purposes of PE activity (i.e. presentation versus consultation).

We have settled on a compromise. We have removed named levels from the framework, but have provided for each of the key areas an indication of ‘core’ and ‘advanced’ skills and attributes to acknowledge the progression needed to deliver the more complex and sustained types of PE activity.

We have also offered a categorisation of different purposes for public engagement – informing, exchanging and collaborating – to help staff think through the different demands of different types of engagement activity.

Feedback from stakeholders indicated that the framework did not take into account the project management skills required by members of an academic team developing a PE activity. It was felt

⁴ There was, for instance, considerable concern that a correlation between commitment to PE and competency may well result in early career researchers being deemed more competent than established, senior researchers

however that, though highly important to PE, project management skills are comprehensively treated in other development frameworks and it would therefore be redundant and repetitive to include them in this framework.

A key suggestion arising from the consultation with stakeholders was the need to bring the attributes 'to life' and to use case studies to help researchers envisage different PE activities and how to prepare for them. The NCCPE's online toolkit that is currently in development will provide exactly that practical guidance and context, and the framework and toolkit will be carefully integrated and cross-referenced when they are launched in December.

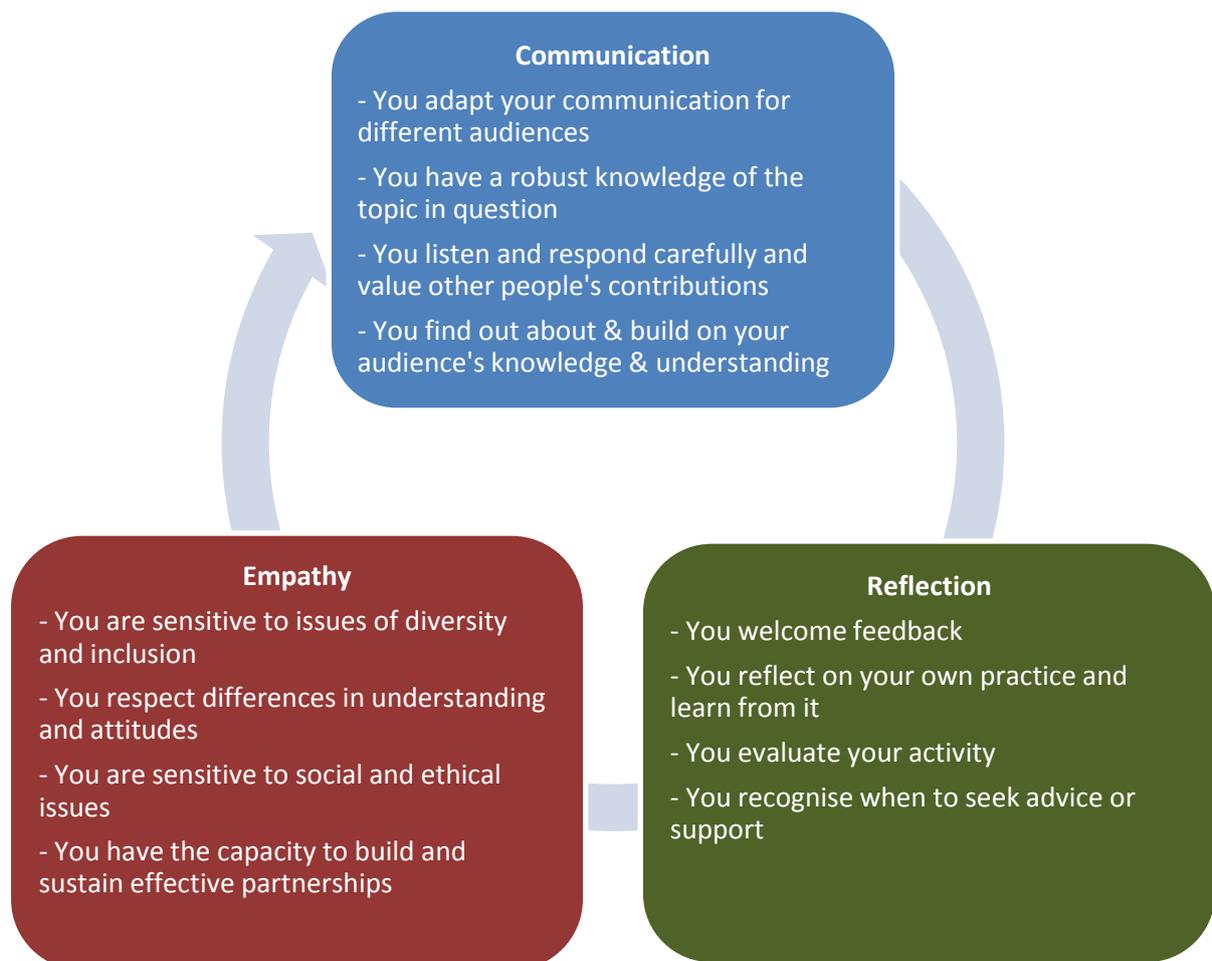
What next

- We are working with Vitae to ensure effective integration between this framework and their emerging 'Researcher Development Framework'. As part of this, we are developing a 'public engagement lens' for the RDF.
- We are also working with the JISC Business and Community Engagement team, on a CPD framework for staff working in the area of Business & Community Engagement, aiming for close integration.
- We continue to work closely with RCUK, Wellcome and a range of other training providers to develop a more 'joined-up' approach to training and development for researchers.
- We welcome feedback on this paper and on the approach we have outlined. Please contact us at nccpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk

The Attributes Framework

The attributes framework identifies three domains that are critical to developing effective public engagement:

Figure 1: The three domains



Exemplar attributes and skills

We have provided the following breakdown of attributes and skills for each of the three domains to encourage discussion and reflection. They are not offered as comprehensive and complete listings.

COMMUNICATION	
CORE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can speak and write clearly and without jargon • can differentiate how they speak or write for different audiences • can provide an overview of their area of expertise • can communicate their personal commitment and interest in the topic • adapts language to the needs of particular audiences • Has a secure knowledge and understanding of the topic they are engaging about • respects and values inputs from others • is able to make presentations using props and av resources • is willing to provide supporting information • can provide examples, stories, activities and metaphors that the audience can relate to • can answer related questions • can elicit and answer audience questions • operates in a professional manner at all times
ADVANCED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can speak and adapt to almost any audience • can work with different publics / audiences at the same event • can be flexible in their approach, changing tasks to meet the situation • can speak or write on a number of given topics • is prepared to answer questions beyond the scope of the topic at hand • ensures there is space for all contributions • is willing to provide evidence and opinion • can build on an audience's prior knowledge and conceptions, making links between their knowledge and the areas being discussed • can leave the security of factual content to explore values and opinions • can manage groups effectively, using appropriate techniques to stimulate discussion or deal with challenging behaviour • has a secure knowledge and understanding of a wide range of engagement approaches, including discussion, debate and deliberative approaches • embraces the open ended nature of dialogue

REFLECTION

CORE

- understands their own motivation for engagement
- is open to new ways of working
- is open to constructive feedback
- reflects on their practice and tries to learn from their experience
- is prepared to be disagreed with
- gathers feedback on activities
- shows evidence of learning
- is willing to consider differing views
- is willing to incorporate new views into their own understanding
- uses feedback mechanisms that are accessible to the publics they are working with
- is able to recognise when professional help is needed

ADVANCED

- is able to conduct formative and summative evaluation activities
- distils learning from evaluation
- incorporates learning from evaluation into the generation of new PE opportunities
- is willing to provide an expert opinion
- is willing to change their mind
- understands their role as participative rather than informative
- can empathise with opinions which conflict with their own
- incorporates learning from evaluation into the generation of new PE opportunities
- shares their learning / evaluation with others

EMPATHY

CORE

- is sensitive to needs of audiences
- considers the audience's motivation for engagement
- is sensitive to issues of diversity and inclusion
- respects difference in understanding and differences in attitudes
- can provide effective facilitation of discussions
- responds to questioning positively and fully without being judgmental
- relates well to different groups e.g. students, teachers, general public, other academics
- appreciates how partnerships can enhance PE activity
- responds positively to the expertise and insights of other professionals and non-experts
- is aware of requirements or sensitivities regarding discussion of sensitive topics with different audiences
- identifies social, political and ethical issues of relevance for particular audiences

ADVANCED

- understands the implications of the dialogue exercise for the audience
- is aware of relevant controversial / ethical issues within the field and takes these into account in their engagement activity
- shows awareness of background issues and experiences that will inform the values of different sectors of the audience
- can broker effective relationships and partnerships
- identifies key stakeholders and ensures their inclusion
- identifies appropriate partners for particular roles
- can adopt an oppositional or critical stance as required
- can manage conflict and achieve resolution
- ensures transparency throughout the process
- keeps channels of communication open with all participants at all times