

The Engaged University

The University Strategy is premised upon the idea of being a global civic university. This will involve deep, ongoing and high quality engagement between the University and its partners, stakeholders and publics on at least four levels:

1. Partnership and collaboration in teaching and research
2. Contributions of staff, students and services to the public sphere
3. Valuing and learning from external expertise
4. Creating platforms for advancing public knowledge

To achieve this aspiration will require coherent working between all groups concerned with building relationships between the University and its partners, stakeholders and publics. This document outlines the strategic intent of the institution in respect of its role as an Engaged University, and how this complements the vision laid out in the University's Strategic Plan.

Engagement is defined here as a two-way process of interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit. This document seeks to describe a vision for engagement and to provide a lens through which engagement activities across the University can be viewed. It neither seeks to dictate or mandate any specific activities. It simply allows us to ask the question whether engagement activities in any given area are both relevant and complete, and enrich our research and educational programmes.

In this complex, resource-constrained environment, engagement cannot be seen as an end in its own right. Focus must remain on those activities that clearly add value in excess of the resource required. This way we maximise the benefits gained from the limited resources available and we do not create unrealistic expectations, either internally or externally.

Why should we engage?

In recent years there have been massive changes, both in the higher education sector and in wider society – and in particular how they interact. Engagement between universities and all facets of society is increasingly valued because of the following drivers:

- Universities have a remit to look into the future, and are a key source of longitudinal knowledge, innovation and entrepreneurship. There is consequently **an increased desire from organisations to engage with us** as a partner of choice, along with an **increased interest from society in research and its outcomes** more generally, especially around the societal and ethical implications of research.
- It is acknowledged that knowledge is not only generated in universities, and that many grand challenges cannot be solved by individual disciplines and academics in isolation. As such, this **plurality of knowledge** in society enriches our work.
- There is a greater focus on the **educational and experiential offer made to students and early career researchers**, providing an education that will equip both UK and international students better for their future lives.

- In the face of rising fees, there is an increased focus on **ensuring fair access** for students from all backgrounds, coupled with a desire to raise attainment in schools and **inspire young people about research** and relevant careers.
- The current **funding environment for universities** is challenging and there is a greater call for accountability in the use of public money. The impact agenda requires academia to consider the economic, social and cultural impacts that might, and do, arise from research and teaching.
- **Academic career development and progression models have evolved** to incorporate and value engagement with people and organisations external to academia, and to recognise the skills developed during engagement. Academic recruitment and selection processes are evolving to reflect these new values and skill sets.
- **The use of evidence to inform decisions** is central to the policy agenda. Research has the ability to provide some of this evidence, thus creating a need and appetite for engagement between researchers, policy makers and people who influence and inform debate.

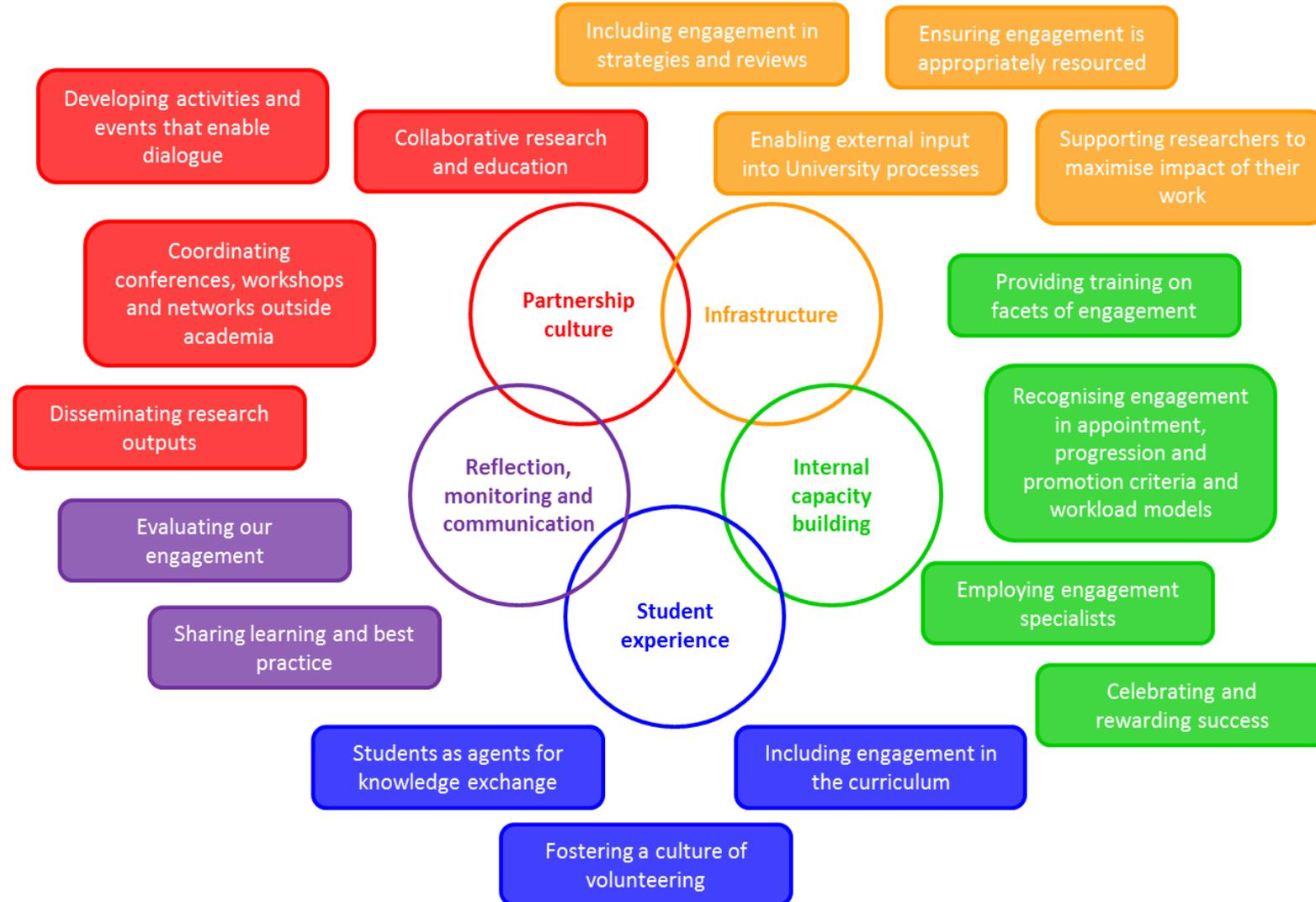
A culture of engagement

The vision for Bristol as an Engaged University involves fostering a culture of engagement throughout all parts of the University. Our priorities are:

- **Partnership culture:** Staff, students and systems are open and responsive to the expertise and partnership of the university's stakeholders at all levels from the local to the international. This culture enriches our work and delivers better research and educational programmes and outcomes. This includes investing time and resources to deliver mutual benefits over a sustained period, and an ability to share responsibility for outcomes.
- **Infrastructure:** The systems and infrastructure of the University actively support collaboration between the University and its local, national and international stakeholders. The University provides a supportive environment for engagement which is embedded in research and teaching and occurs at a variety of levels – from individual staff members and students, through research areas and departments, to the University as a whole.
- **Internal capacity building:** Academics, Professional Services and students are equipped to develop productive partnerships, collaborations and engagements with the relevant publics and partners and stakeholders. Staff and students are given recognition for the delivery of a range of engagement activities and outcomes with the understanding that such activities are part of the development of careers.
- **Student experience:** Engagement is embedded in the student experience and curriculum for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. All students have the opportunity to undertake engagement activities through their degree courses or as part of their extra-curricular activities.
- **Reflection, monitoring and communication:** The various teams and groups involved in partnership, collaboration and engagement are working productively together, with activities collectively monitored, reflected upon and communicated.

Engagement activities

As an engaged university, our aim is to facilitate engagement between our staff and students and society beyond academia, including:



Who do we engage with?

Throughout the University, we work with a wide range of partners, stakeholders and publics as follows:

- **Professional practice:** organisations operating in different domains to provide products and services, including education, media, health and social care, and culture and informal learning.
- **Civil society:** informal associations and voluntary networks along with charities and grass roots activist groups.
- **Policymakers:** organisations which create regulations and laws within which the professions work and which influence investment and budgets.
- **Business and industry:** including SMEs, entrepreneurs and social enterprises.
- **Publics:** including communities of interest and place as well as groups based on particular demographics.
- **University alumni and potential students**
- **International partners**

It is recognised that these groups do not exist in isolation from each other and there are often significant overlaps between them.

Benefits of engagement

The University recognises that interaction and dialogue will benefit society, staff, students, and the University as a whole, by:

- Maximising the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the University and society to catalyse further learning, research and innovation.
- Enriching research, teaching and learning – broadening academic thinking, providing different perspectives, enabling and stimulating new lines of enquiry and creating and developing partnerships.
- Enhancing the student experience, by providing educational opportunities that are relevant to the needs of society and develop employability and life skills.
- Ensuring that staff are aware of issues important to society that are relevant to their research, and enabling researchers to work with society in a range of forms (from the public to industry) to tackle its needs and challenges together.
- Motivating staff and students, helping them realise the relevance and utility of their work to wider society and to their own benefit and development.
- Developing a range of transferable skills for staff and students.
- Enabling partner organisations to deliver a range of benefits including making new products and services, making processes more effective and efficient, improving healthcare, developing creative arts activities and influencing governmental policy.
- Raising the level of public discussion and increasing public access to, interest in and contribution to knowledge and its generation and curation.

- Encouraging school students, from all backgrounds, to consider further academic study – and thereby contributing to the University’s goals for widening participation and recruitment.
- Encouraging members of the community and the University to become involved each other’s work and activities.
- Raising the profile of the University and increasing its distinctiveness, locally, nationally and internationally as an engaged university, and as part of an engaged city.
- Building links between the University and alumni worldwide, in ways which further increase the flow of top-class international students.
- Helping the University to achieve greater openness and accountability, and engendering trust between the University and society.
- Contributing to social justice and the University’s goals for corporate responsibility.
- Increasing opportunities for funding and resources for research, student support and engagement activities.
- Fulfilling research funders’ expectations for engagement.