



## Centre for Public Engagement



**Promoting dialogue:** supporting engagement



## Public engagement

### Connecting the University with the wider community

'Public engagement' describes the many ways in which University of Bristol staff and students interact with the public. A vital and rewarding part of University life, it is integrated in the institution's Vision and Strategy. It also benefits our research and teaching and, more widely, our city and society.

Public engagement explores new ways of communicating with the public. It means listening as well as talking, working collaboratively, appreciating local knowledge and recognising different perspectives. Public discussions and cultural celebrations, lifelong learning courses and citizen experiments, blogs and community reading groups are just some of the ways in which our staff and students share their work, creating two-way conversations between the University and society at large.

The University of Bristol has become one of UK higher education's pioneers in public engagement. It benefits from the support of Professor of Sciences and Society Kathy Sykes, a dedicated Centre for Public Engagement and close connections to the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), part of the Beacons for Public Engagement initiative.

## So why get involved?

Universities' role in society is changing. The Government, funding bodies and the public expect universities to be more open, responsive to society and engaging to the public than ever before. Sharing research brings benefits to people who expect to learn and develop throughout their lives, but it also benefits our staff by:

- raising the profile of University research
- helping to access new funding streams and strengthen research funding proposals
- opening up new avenues of research.

Above all, connecting with the public is fun, exciting and satisfying, often leading to new ways of seeing problems or opportunities.

*"Engagement activities work best when integrated into research and teaching. It makes more sense of staff time because it's feeding into a bigger picture and you're learning at the same time."*

Dr Shelley Hales  
Department of Classics and Ancient History

## Centre for Public Engagement

### How we can support you

The Centre for Public Engagement (CPE) provides support for public engagement at the University, working with those already involved and encouraging others to take their first steps. A small department within the Communications Division of the University, the Centre works to:

- capture case studies of the latest public engagement activities *see our online collection at [bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories](http://bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories)*
- host events that bring together academics, students and the public *such as Twilight Talks, exhibitions and other discussion events, promoted through our What's on guide*
- provide support for training, communications and accessing funding *through email bulletins, web resources and individual approaches tailored to your needs*
- build an engagers' network, a body of staff active in engagement *through meetings of departmental engagement representatives and public engagement conferences*
- collaborate with external organisations interested in engaging with the University *through Engaged University fora and membership of groups such as Science City Bristol.*

Public engagement is already well established at the University. In many cases, it takes place independently of the Centre for Public Engagement. That many departments have embraced public engagement as an integral part of their teaching and research is inspiring. This contributes to the shared process of building a positive internal environment for public engagement across the University.

*"It is quite striking how much people have enjoyed getting involved in the research. They realise that they are taking part in a real experiment which they find very exciting."*

Dr Casimir Ludwig  
Department of Experimental Psychology



- [bristol.ac.uk/university/vision](http://bristol.ac.uk/university/vision)
- NCCPE — [www.publicengagement.ac.uk](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk)

Please see our website for details of how we can help – [bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe](http://bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe) or [bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories](http://bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories) for examples of colleagues' activities

# Picturing China: 1870-1950

Inspired by the academic work of Professor Robert Bickers in the Department of Historical Studies, this public engagement project, coordinated by the Centre for Public Engagement, centred around an exhibition of historical photographs — *Picturing China 1870-1950: photographs from British Collections*. From that exhibition sprang a schools outreach programme, a student photographic competition, media work, two public talks and a day of celebration to welcome in the Chinese Year of the Ox.

The University and local Chinese community groups put on lion dancing, music and Kung Fu performances, and ran a wide range of stalls. The celebration, run in collaboration with Bristol's City Museum and Art Gallery, also furthered academic research in a way that was quite unexpected.

*“...academic endeavour really is being advanced. Yesterday, [we] were lent the most extraordinary set of photos I think we have yet received: 23 colour Kodachrome slides of China in late 1945. I have never seen colour photographs of China in this period, and of this quality. And they live in Bristol.”*

Professor Robert Bickers  
Department for Historical Studies

If it hadn't been for this public engagement event, it is doubtful that the connection between the academic and the owner of the photographs would ever have been made. As it was, it opened up a completely new avenue of research, right in the heart of Bristol. Public engagement really does set in motion things you can't predict.

[bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories/stories/55.html](http://bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories/stories/55.html)



## Get in touch

### Contact us if...

- You are already involved in public engagement and would like to discuss ideas, find funding or help colleagues get started
- You are completely new to this field and would like to find out more
- You would like a presentation from the CPE to your Department, Institute or team
- You have experiences or events to share.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Centre for Public Engagement  
University of Bristol  
Senate House  
Tyndall Avenue  
Bristol BS8 1TH

T +44 (0)117 331 8313

E [cpe-info@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:cpe-info@bristol.ac.uk)

W [bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe](http://bristol.ac.uk/cms/cpe)

[bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories](http://bristol.ac.uk/publicengagementstories)