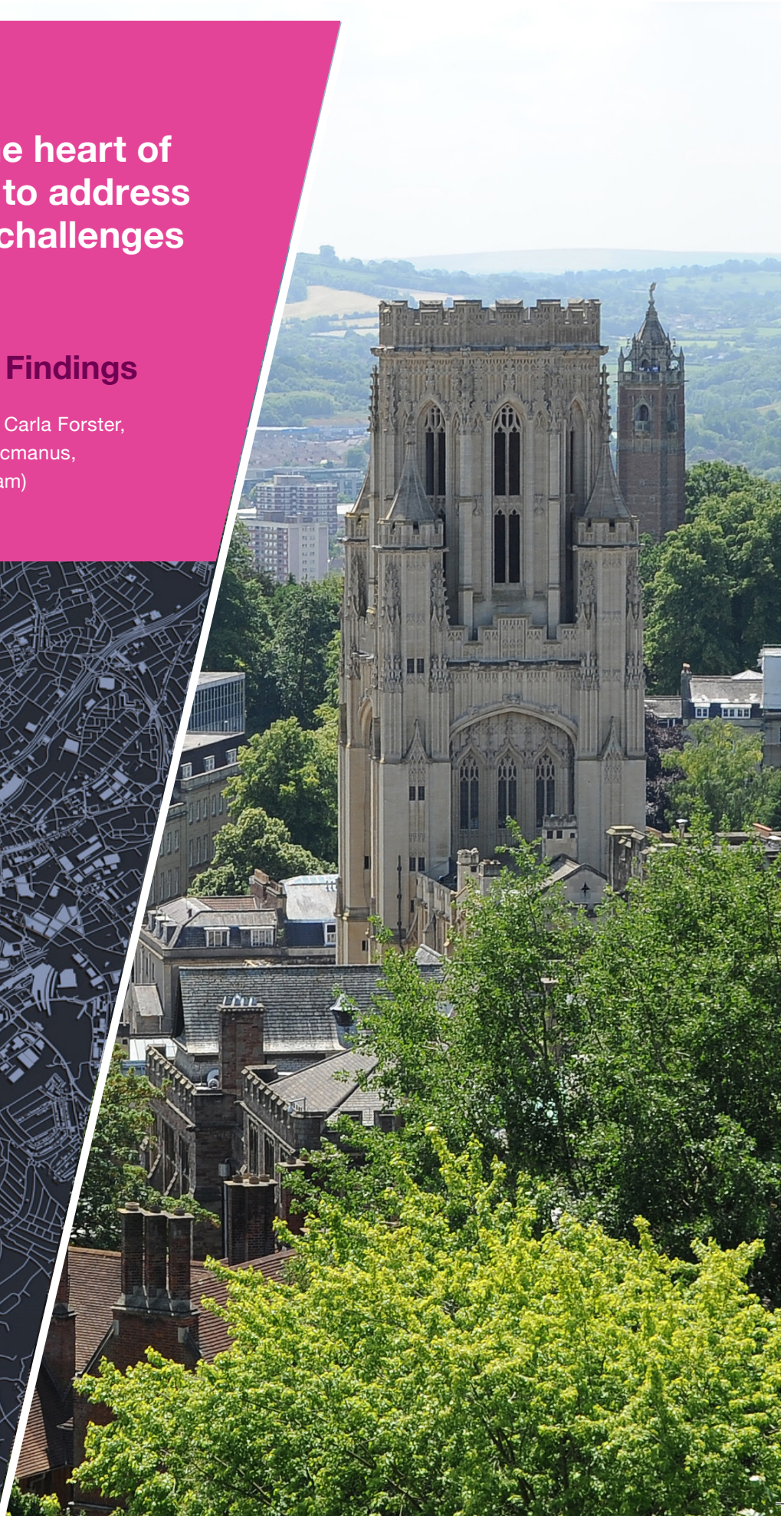


# The Bristol Model: Putting students at the heart of knowledge exchange to address social and economic challenges

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## Executive Summary and Findings

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## Background

The Bristol Model Project grew from an innovative partnership between the University of Bristol and Bristol City Council (BCC), which began in autumn 2018 and was brokered by the Faculty Professional Liaison Network (PLN). The partnership featured a project, where a research team from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law worked with the City Council to investigate how two agencies, commissioned by the Council to provide targeted youth services, built resilience in the organisations and young people they worked with. The research team was led by an academic, managed day to day by a Research Associate (a PhD candidate) and included six undergraduate students as Research Assistants. The academic PI received a time allowance, the Research Associate was issued with a contract for 1.5 days a week, the student researchers were contracted for 140 hours of work. The project was funded from the Q-step internship scheme and with a financial contribution from the City Council. The success of this project and that of a similar one arising from the association between the University and the Wellspring Settlement, was the basis for a successful bid to expand the project with funding from Office for Students and Research England.

The current Bristol Model project began in September 2020 (postponed from Spring 2020) and ended in February 2023.

### Its aims are:

- To leverage the impact of social science research to address complex social and/or economic challenges
- To put students at the heart of the University's civic mission by embedding them in social sciences research co-produced with a range of external partners within the Bristol city region
- Shift perceptions of what is possible within the University setting, creating a deeper culture of knowledge exchange (KE), blurring boundaries between KE, teaching and learning, and research

The project recruited six partners and six academics to work, with appointed Research Associates and Student Research Assistants, on six separate research projects. Each project employed six student researchers for a total of 200 hours each. This increase in hours per student was based on the experience of the City Council projects. In all other respects the Bristol Model reflected the structure of the pilot projects.

## The Evaluation

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A seventh strand of the project involved an evaluation of the Bristol Model, using the same structure, and also employing student researchers.

**The agreed aims of the evaluation were:**

- To understand the operation of the Bristol Model and its outcomes from the perspective of all participants and stakeholders.
- To identify key components or features of the Bristol Model that delivers maximum value for knowledge exchange between all participants and stakeholders: student researchers, partners, lead academic PIs and Research Associates, the University.
- To identify the enabling factors and barriers to establishing and maintaining knowledge exchange partnerships.

Methods used were mainly qualitative. The evaluation team conducted in-depth interviews with all types of participants. Interviews with academic leads, partners and research associates were repeated over the course of each project, as a minimum at the start and end of a project. Student researchers were interviewed on exit or at some time after their involvement with a project. In addition, some quantitative research was done to establish patterns of participation by students, and there was desk-based research into knowledge exchange, student internships, Bristol University internships, PLN history and activity.

## Executive Summary

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- **There are many different ways in which the Bristol Model can be interpreted.** The core components of the Bristol Model - an Academic Lead, a Partner organisation, a Research Associate, and a group of paid student Research Assistants engaged in research activity of benefit to the partner organisation - was consistently present across the projects. However, each of the seven Bristol Model projects was unique in the way it was structured, carried out and managed. The timings for the recruitment of the six student researchers varied. The ways the student Research Assistants were deployed were different. The length of projects was different. Academic Leads and Partners were differently involved in a project. **In all structures used, involvement in a project appeared to have positive outcomes for all involved, most particularly for the students.**
- **The flexibility offered by the Bristol Model may be a key factor that led to productive participation and positive perceptions by all participants.** The varied implementation of the Bristol Model makes it difficult to identify specific factors which are more or less associated with successful outcomes in terms of knowledge exchange, or gains for the academic staff, for the partners or for the students. Nor is it possible to propose a template for such activity. The evaluation can, however, provide evidence of aspects of all projects which have been identified as contributing to the delivery of desired outcomes and those that have at times impeded that process, or created difficulties or challenges for those involved. In terms of sustainability of the model, or its development, these may be helpful.
- **The Research Associates in the project rose to the challenge of having to be experienced researchers as well as designing and managing learning experiences.** They were also aware of the need for a quality outcome for the partner organisation. Managing the balance between providing for and supporting student Research Assistants, conducting research themselves, and deciding priorities was challenging. **The pedagogic expertise they deployed or developed is invaluable to any future development of this approach.**
- **A model of internship is a different approach to teaching and learning than students are used to.** In the Bristol Model, the undergraduate learns about research and acquires research skills while being employed as a member of a research team. This approach involves them as learners, practitioners, employees, and as persons. The students articulated this difference and associated it with the experiences they saw as positive, successful and productive in their development of skills and knowledge.
- **Students referred to numerous and varied benefits of participation, related to skills and understanding, to employability, and to confidence.** These included: understanding of the processes of social science research (it's often messy); developing research skills; working independently and in a team; problem solving; surviving being out of their comfort zone; seeing the application of knowledge in 'real world' contexts; communicating academic research to non-academic audiences; being a paid employee; having a greater or changed view of Bristol as a city and community; enhancing their CV; seeing possibilities for future career pathways; testing their ideas for future career pathways. Above all students talked about having increased confidence, personally and professionally as a result of their experience. This was gained in a context where they felt supported, respected, encouraged, and able to respond to high expectations. They also felt they benefitted from working with students from different subject areas, different year groups and different backgrounds.

- **The most involved academic leads demonstrated a commitment to civic engagement and an interest in the pedagogy of relatively unconventional approaches to student learning.** All were already working in the community with partner organisations. To expand this type of activity there is a need for more academics who share these characteristics.
- **Partner organisations were as committed to the aims of involving students as they were to being involved in collaborative research to benefit themselves.** They all spoke of the projects as being of mutual benefit – ‘everybody wins’. A key factor in the relationship between the partners and the university was trust. It worked when there was equity and acknowledgement of the value each brought to the partnership.
- **Partners were generally flexible about time scale and this was helpful in managing student workload to accommodate academic and personal demands.** Where the partner had a definite deadline for an output this had to be negotiated and met. Dealing with conflicting perceptions and demands appears to be a necessary concomitant of flexibility and open-endedness. Clarity about outcomes/outputs, agreed time-scales and deadlines were helpful.
- **Collaboration and coordination across the university is crucial if this opportunity is to be rolled out on a larger scale.** The ‘Bristol Model’ was originated and supported within PLN, an administrative support agency within the Faculty. Other agencies across the university are involved in similar initiatives, especially with civic engagement and partnerships, yet the PLN’s administrative position means the project sits oddly in the perceived hierarchy of the University. Enrolling partners for an activity like the Bristol Model project cuts across ‘territory’ conventionally occupied by others. As a hybrid blend of research and student learning, the model does not match standard definitions and categories nor sit comfortably within existing systems and processes. The projects have been frustrated and impeded by, for example, long delays in issuing contracts, drawn out negotiations for necessary equipment.
- **The Bristol Model is based on an approach to research that requires all involved to be able to work with flexibility, be skilled at building and maintaining relationships, and be comfortable with uncertainty.** For the academic leads and research associates, this needs to be underpinned with a sound understanding of the research process and good pedagogical skills, to support the student researchers’ development.
- **The Bristol Model is resource-intensive yet offers value for money, due to the scale of the benefit to those involved.** Significant beneficiaries include participating students and the partners.
- **The evaluation has demonstrated proof of concept and much learning to inform possible future developments. However, such a project requires planned funding over time,** rather than being dependent on bids for research grants and pots of money that become available. The question of how future funding would be obtained is beyond the remit of this evaluation. We simply raise the issue. Because the Bristol Model can be interpreted in many different ways, and individual projects are shaped according to the needs and interests of those involved, the exact outcomes and benefits are not predictable in advance. This means that funding models would need to be those that embrace unpredictability and uncertainty, in terms of exactly what benefits and outputs would be achieved. The consistent and more predictable benefit across all projects, however, is the pedagogic benefit to students.

## Findings

### Findings related to Academic Leads

Involvement in The Bristol Model Project was open to all academics in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law. All who responded and participated in the project were or had been engaged in some way with student internships, with PLN and with activity outside the University. They were committed to building civic links and to using students' capacity to engage in different ways with intellectual ideas, the research process, and the community. They were also open to experimental ways of working together with students and developing a pedagogy to support their learning in this specific context of 'real world' research as well as to enable the production of knowledge. This commitment to civic engagement and student learning was important in ensuring the success of a project.

All academic leads had some kind of prior relationship with the partner organisation they were working with. In most cases this was longstanding, in others relatively undeveloped. Clarity in relation to the shared aims and objectives of the study, and good communication between the academic lead and the partner organisation were associated with successful projects. Each project devised its own systems for communication.

The Bristol Model allowed lead academics freedom in how they discharged their role. There was no role description or any specific expectation. In general, all were involved in initial conversations with partner organisations and with the recruitment of the Research Associate, and the student Research Assistants. They set the overall intellectual direction of the project and provided support, specifically with research design and with the acquisition of ethical approval. Academic Leads varied in their direct involvement with the research and with the student Research Assistants. Most took a 'light touch' approach, leaving the project management to the Research Associate and providing support as needed. Some were more active and took part in one or more of the following activities: attending meetings, formal and social; training students in literature review and research methods; working alongside students in data collection; being involved in writing and editing.

Academic Leads received an allocation of 0.1FTE over 18 months for participation in the Bristol Model Project. This could be used flexibly to accommodate the particular time-scale of a project strand, which was not prescribed. Almost all felt that participation in the projects would have been impossible without this specific time allocation, given the already heavy demands of their academic roles. They felt a responsibility for sustaining the 'trusted relationship' with the partner organisation through any vagaries or dips in the research activities, for supporting and developing their Research Associate and for providing appropriate learning experiences for the student researchers.

*“ Because it's bridging the teaching and research type of position, pedagogy is important...the students are having to come along with you on a kind of journey of learning, as well as also producing knowledge.*

**Academic Lead**

*“ The real-world problems are fantastic for student learning. They are much more effective than the kind of abstracted case studies, all the stuff we provide in books.*

**Academic Lead**

*“ I'm very positive about using students to do this kind of work. I think it's good for them and it's good for us.*

**Academic Lead**

*“ I wouldn't do research where I didn't have that partnership there, because I think they are the experts. They have their own forms of expertise, the workers, the practitioners. Our relationship needs to be a recognition of both sides of that equation.*

**Academic Lead**

**i** In general the use of 'partner' refers to the staff member of an organisation who was the main contact with the Bristol Model Project, and gave evidence to the evaluation. In most cases they had been involved, sometimes with a CEO or other persons, with the negotiation of the partnership.

**“** I've really enjoyed developing that working relationship with the university. And seeing the students go on to do things, and realising how valuable it's been for them in their careers and in their confidence. That means everything, because then everybody wins.

**Partner**

**“** Our evidence base is often anecdotal. We wanted to be driven by evidence from research...we wanted the legitimacy, credibility that comes from a link with the university in a research partnership. It was quite exciting.

**Partner**

### Findings related to Partners

Most of the partners were charity and local community and activist organisations in the third sector. Projects were also set up with larger civic and regional councils, and with a government think tank. Partnerships with larger corporate organisations were not possible given the time constraints of the project. Students whose partners in the project were involved in mediating information/support to SMEs had contact with a variety of organisations.

Many partner organisations had a well-established history of association with the University of Bristol – whether stemming from close personal links with researchers whose focus of interest lay in the activities of the partner organisation, usually third sector organisations with a moral or social imperative to effect social change; or more tangentially, as named associated bidders on research applications across the University.

In all cases the project that was negotiated and agreed sprang from an area of need identified by the partner organisation.

All partners saw their involvement as of 'mutual benefit'; 'everybody wins'. They were supportive of the involvement of student researchers. Perceived benefits for themselves included: access to university academics with relevant knowledge; access to university research power/rigorous approach; the energy, 'fresh eyes' and creativity that the students brought to the project; independent verification of the partner's operation – 'gold dust'; students' increased awareness of possible career pathways related to the partner's activity. Perceived benefits for the students included: personal development; development of research skills, experience of academic theory in practice; widening knowledge base; enhanced CV; increased awareness of the partner's area of operation.

There was general acceptance that this kind of research project was different from consultancy, or more conventional academic research. It was also different from traditional paid or unpaid internships. The time-scale wasn't always predictable; there was a need for flexibility in when students were available to work

Partner involvement in the project varied with the type of organisation and the nature of the project. Three of the partners described their involvement as 'light touch'. After close engagement in agreeing aims and objectives, research question and general approach, the partners received periodic updates and/or participated in meetings with Academic Leads and Research Associates, sometimes with presentations from student researchers. They were more engaged at the end of a project with discussions around outputs, especially about formats for publication/dissemination. Some partners provided resources for design of outputs. The other three partners were involved much more throughout the project: working with the Research Associate and with the student researchers, eg training them in the use of an organisation's database, monitoring progress, providing contacts to interview, being available in person and remotely to answer questions and provide advice. This was partly a reflection of personal interest and commitment, partly necessary for the project to move forward.

All partner organisations signed a Letter of Agreement with the University. The format of this was based on the outcomes of lengthy and time-consuming exchanges in the creation of the pilot partnership with BCC. In contrast to the 'pilot' projects with BCC none of the newly-recruited partner organisations in the RE/OFS project made any direct financial contribution to the project. Their contribution 'in kind' was in the form of time provided by the 'partners'. This varied: where training, one-to-one support, monitoring/communication and supervision of the student researchers was undertaken by the 'partner', the time given was considerable.

Partners were involved, with Academic Leads, in the recruitment of Research Associates. Some were involved in the recruitment of student Research Assistants.



### Findings related to Research Associates

The Research Associates were crucial to the successful operation of the projects, and vital in ensuring successful outcomes, in particular for the students.

The Research Associates were PhD students who were shortly to complete or had already completed their doctorates. In all there were five Research Associates. Some were already working with the Partner organisations. One was the Research Associate on two pilot projects and continued in this role; another had been involved with student experiential learning and both brought considerable experience in the management and supervision of students. The most experienced Research Associate was invited to share experience and advise one other of the projects. This was welcomed. However, there was no system created by which Research Associates could meet or share practice or problems and this they regretted.

The Research Associates were interviewed by the Academic Lead and the partner organization. In some cases, the appointment of the Research Associate led to some shift in focus of the research project; this was because of the particular knowledge/expertise that the Research Associate was bringing and was of interest to the partner and the Academic Lead.

Those new to the role were motivated to apply by the relevance of the project to their academic discipline, their interest and their career aspirations. Bristol and the university were seen as attractive and appropriate places. A career within the university sector was an aim, possibly within the University of Bristol.

The Research Associates' contract was for 1.5 days a week across a given period. Given the wide-ranging demands of the role, this was not really a sufficient allocation. Commitment to the project was such that all Research Associates did what was necessary to ensure success. Three of them had to delay completion and submission of their theses but all said that the experience of working on the projects and the relationship with their academic partner had been of benefit to the work on their doctorate.

All Research Associates were clear about the importance of providing good experiences for the students. They were also aware of the need for a quality outcome for the partner organisation. Managing the balance between providing for and supporting student Research Assistants, conducting research themselves, and deciding priorities was challenging. Having the support of the academic lead was seen as important in responding to this.

The contract for one Research Associate ended before the project was finished. This was a frustrating and disappointing outcome. The evaluation has not been able to discover the reason for this, or why an extension was not sought. Data analysis and the creation of the promised output were left in the care of the academic lead and student researchers.

### Findings related to Student Research Assistants

Despite each project being unique in aim and structure, very similar outcomes of students' experience were achieved in all of them. The freedom to produce research and make nuanced decisions for themselves, played a crucial role in fostering the growth of confidence, knowledge and skills. Students felt they had learned, adapted and grown, both personally and professionally.

For many students the focus and aims of the partner organisation was an important factor in deciding to apply for these posts. For some, the focus matched their personal interests and previous experiences; for others, it offered an insight into possible future career paths including academic research and policy change

*“ It really reinvigorated my ability to see a future in a university that could be personally very fulfilling because of the relationships that we built, and the kind of work we did.*

**Research Associate**

*“ You're working with six new people and six new minds, and you can't work with six new people without learning something from them and something through your work together. So yes, I've learned a lot.*

**Research Associate**

*“ I've found the flexibility to be very reassuring and I've been able to put more time into the project than I thought I would.*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ I think we all come from the undergrad experience where there are mark schemes and there's guidance. Academic research is a lot of like, you know, figuring out your way around projects, things looking very different at the end than they did at the start.*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ If I had this opportunity in second year, it would have changed my third year.*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ A big, big thing for me was that it's nice to feel like I had ownership of the project and take it the directions I wanted. And that was definitely, translated into how I was supervised, where they let me get on with it.*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ I think it was the right balance of knowing that we had guidance if we needed it, but also throwing us sort of in the deep end to try and plough through it and stay afloat.*

**Student Research Assistant**

Students were recruited from across the Faculty and included students whose degree programmes did not include any primary or empirical data collection; qualitative data collection in particular. The projects were able to train students with no prior knowledge in research methods, literature review, and the importance of gaining ethical approval.

Autonomy, independence and ownership were identified as factors in the increased confidence and skills mentioned as the most significant impact from students' experience.

The encouragement to take ownership of the project, with oversight and support from Academic Leads and Research Associates, was a principal factor in this positive outcome. Students had learnt, adapted and grown, both personally and professionally.

A majority of student Research Assistants reported feeling more self-assured and capable in both their professional and personal lives after completing their projects. Earning the respect of Academic Leads and Research Associates, as well as their peers, combined with seeing progress through training and other reflexive tasks helped to build confidence in their own abilities. This change in self-awareness and self-image was reported as mostly apparent with hindsight, when looking back at the experience.

While it was more directly relevant to some projects, most students reported changed perceptions of Bristol as a community. Those that worked within the community, with specific marginalised groups or in-person research in the city, got hands-on experience that would likely not have been otherwise possible. Students whose experience was second hand reported positive attitudes towards bursting the 'student bubble' of what was familiar and getting a chance to perceive Bristol from a different perspective.

The working environment substantially differed between projects. Interview responses suggested that the most successful and enjoyed working set-up was partnerships among a larger team. This combined with regular in-person meetings, or regular discussions as a team were "perfect conditions". Lone working was common across all projects; a hybrid approach involving working alone, in pairs and in wider teams was associated with more positive experiences.

Where students were recruited in sequence rather than at one time, they were less likely to gain experience of the whole research process, and of working in a team. However, recruiting in sequence made it possible to recruit for specific aspects of the research as it developed. Having students in sequence meant that Research Associates, and in some cases Academic Leads, had to plan for transition and induction which was time-consuming.

Students who mainly worked alone and remotely expressed reservations about workload and having less space to voice concerns. A flexible approach from supervisors mitigated some of these issues. Flexibility in the management of the project allowed students to both excel at their personal academics and their internship commitments. A majority of students claimed they felt their university work was prioritised by supervisors, and as a result their degrees were not neglected.

Students who were able to be present in the workspaces of the partner organization saw this as important in feeling part of a team and in developing understanding of tasks. It was felt to be a valuable and valued aspect of their experience of the project work.

Overall, almost all students reported being happy with their supervisors in terms of support, speed of response to questions and communication. Attentive supervisors who created well-structured programs which naturally progressed into more autonomous roles were seen as producing good intern attitudes. Almost all students described or recognised an initial stage of anxiety, bewilderment, being 'out of my depth' and 'treading water'. Being supported with encouragement meant that all felt they 'learned to swim' or 'find your feet' and this was a very positive process. Being taken so acutely out of their comfort zone was not an experience they had met in their undergraduate studies.

Paid internships of this kind provide students with a way to progress in their academic and professional development. Soft skills of communication, teamwork and working towards deadlines were all mentioned by respondents as valuable assets to take on to the next stages of their academic and professional life. The project allowed for a wider and deeper scope of research than degree programmes offer: students noted that the project gave them core research skills that have enabled them to deal better with the demands of their degree, particularly their dissertation.

The students were positive about working with students from different subject areas, different year groups, different backgrounds, and perspectives. They felt it allowed them to take a holistic approach towards developing desired research outcomes, catering to each other's individual interests, as well as playing into their strengths when delegating different tasks. Working as a team was enjoyable as well as a useful skill for career development.

Across all strands, respondents shared similar career-related motivations for applying to the Bristol Model Project. The experience would contribute to their CV, and serve as a topic for discussion at future interviews.

It was important to students that the posts were paid. For some, especially students recruited using widening participation criteria, this was an economic necessity that enabled them to take part. Generally, students felt that being paid shaped their attitude to the work and the attitude to them of those who had appointed them. This was 'real' and 'serious' and required a responsible commitment.

Comparisons can be drawn between the structured nature of the Research Assistants' time as students, with little autonomy over what and how to learn, and the independence given to the Research Assistants throughout the research project. This was highlighted by many respondents as essentially bridging the gap between university and the responsibilities of the working world. Work life can appear very distant while at university and our findings suggest that the Bristol Model made it more of a reality in a positive sense.

### Other Findings

The Covid pandemic had a profound impact on four of the projects. The start of the whole Bristol Model project was delayed until September 2020. Projects that preceded the RS/OfS funding and were continuing with it into a second phase were particularly badly affected, particularly one where the research design involved interviewing young people. All communication, and data collection by interview, was online, and people were working remotely. The process of easing was gradual and the University and some project partners remained cautious about in-person contact. Students were not able to be and work in the partner organisation's workplace. Research teams or groups could not meet in person and there was more lone working than had been envisaged. There were losses, especially in interpersonal contacts, but projects managed to continue and produce results. Post-Covid the greater familiarity and ease with online communication and remote working benefitted the two projects which started later. Also, for some projects, partner organisations' interest in the impact of the pandemic on community and business was able to be incorporated into the focus of the research.

*“ We're coming from different disciplines and stuff like that. But all of that has felt really like positive, and healthy and enjoyable and made it really interesting as well.*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ I really do credit that for a lot of my integration into Bristol as a city as well as the university*

**Student Research Assistant**

*“ It feels really collegiate. Like we're all properly engaging with each other and the topic. I can see the things that come out of that process, which is really satisfying.*

**Student Research Assistant**

The Bristol Model project was fortunate in having lead academics with well-established partner links which were the foundation of the successful RE/OfS bid. When one of the planned partnerships became impossible, it was necessary to find a replacement. The time and effort required by PLN and academic lead to achieve this demonstrates the challenges in setting up new partnerships for this purpose. Negotiations with organisations were unsuccessful for a range of reasons: the 'model' needs to be explained and understood; lack of match between the organisation's interest/need and the expertise/research interests of the lead academic; participation seen as a risk/too time-consuming. In addition, there were issues around 'ownership', 'hierarchy of decision making', 'contribution' that had to be negotiated within the University and the potential partner organisation. There is a dependence on personal and professional networks. Protocols and administrative systems for creating partnerships are not co-ordinated.

A key factor in sustaining the seven projects was the support provided by PLN. The skill and knowledge in carrying out this administrative role is considerable.

There was informal updating from projects to PLN, and support for issues encountered. However there was no formal required reporting mechanism for the PIs to follow. Knowledge of progress on projects and outputs was sometimes lacking.

In setting up the BCC projects, which were the basis for the Bristol Model, negotiations within the University over Letters of Agreement with partners, contracts for partners and student researchers, definitions of research activity, systems for gaining ethical approval were lengthy and complex. This was because much of the activity did not fit into established university/faculty systems and definitions. To an extent, learning from this experience was of benefit to the Bristol Model project. However, because activity like the Bristol Model is atypical, there were still problems. For example, contracts for student researchers took a very long time to be issued and this was detrimental in delaying the start of some projects; provision of technical equipment such as phones and cameras for data collection by student researchers was difficult and slow. The project as a whole has created administrative and technical challenges for University systems, all of which have served to impede the research process. Current School, Faculty and University established systems and definitions do not necessarily find it easy to accommodate this kind of activity or can situate it easily within the administration and management of research in the University. All this has needed to be addressed by PLN.

### Discussion

The findings of the evaluation show positive outcomes for the Bristol Model project, especially for students and partners. Can the project be sustained or developed?

The model of social science research as a systematic, rigorous and purposeful process of investigation into society, creating new knowledge, is replicated in the projects. Within each project, the rigour of the research process, research design, ethical approval etc underpinning each project are consistent with the values and procedures of social science research. However, most notably because it involves an overtly pedagogic element in the form of student Research Assistants and an equal participatory involvement of a partner, the process is different from that of conventional notions of social science research dominant within the Academy. The Bristol Model of research partnerships, and other similar innovative projects, supports more equitable and less hierarchical forms of working. In this version of civic research there is a shift from the status of the University as the sole arbiter and repository of good research to its re-location where the community partners are equal partners and collaborators in the production and ownership of research. This presents a model of research *with* the community, as opposed to *on* the community. It has been described by academic and project leads as a 'deinstitutionalisation' of research or its 'democratisation'. 'What counts as research?' is problematised or democratised depending on the relative positions of the university and its systems, or of the partner.

*“ To try and develop ways to involve people outside of academia in the ways in which research questions are identified, in the ways in which research is done. So....actually trying to provide different perspectives on how we might make a more inclusive and co- produced research approach....knowledge base.*

In its practical application, the research conducted by student researchers is not only significant for its contribution to the partner organisation but it also has a pedagogic value, a uniquely rich opportunity to learn and apply social science research methods in a real world setting. The pedagogy developed for the project has been largely in the hands of the Research Associates. The knowledge, expertise and skill they have developed in this area of learning should be acknowledged and shared.

The evaluation suggests that students gain whatever their experience. There is, however, a tension inherent in the structure of the model: quality of outcome/output for the partner versus quantity of students engaged. Achieving quality outcomes of a project, particularly in the analysis and report stages, is a challenge. It takes time and an in-depth understanding of the aims and process of a project. In some projects this has been achieved by having fewer students more engaged and with additional contract hours. This tension needs to be considered, and if possible resolved, when making decisions about numbers of students, hours available, use of hours available, length of contracts etc.

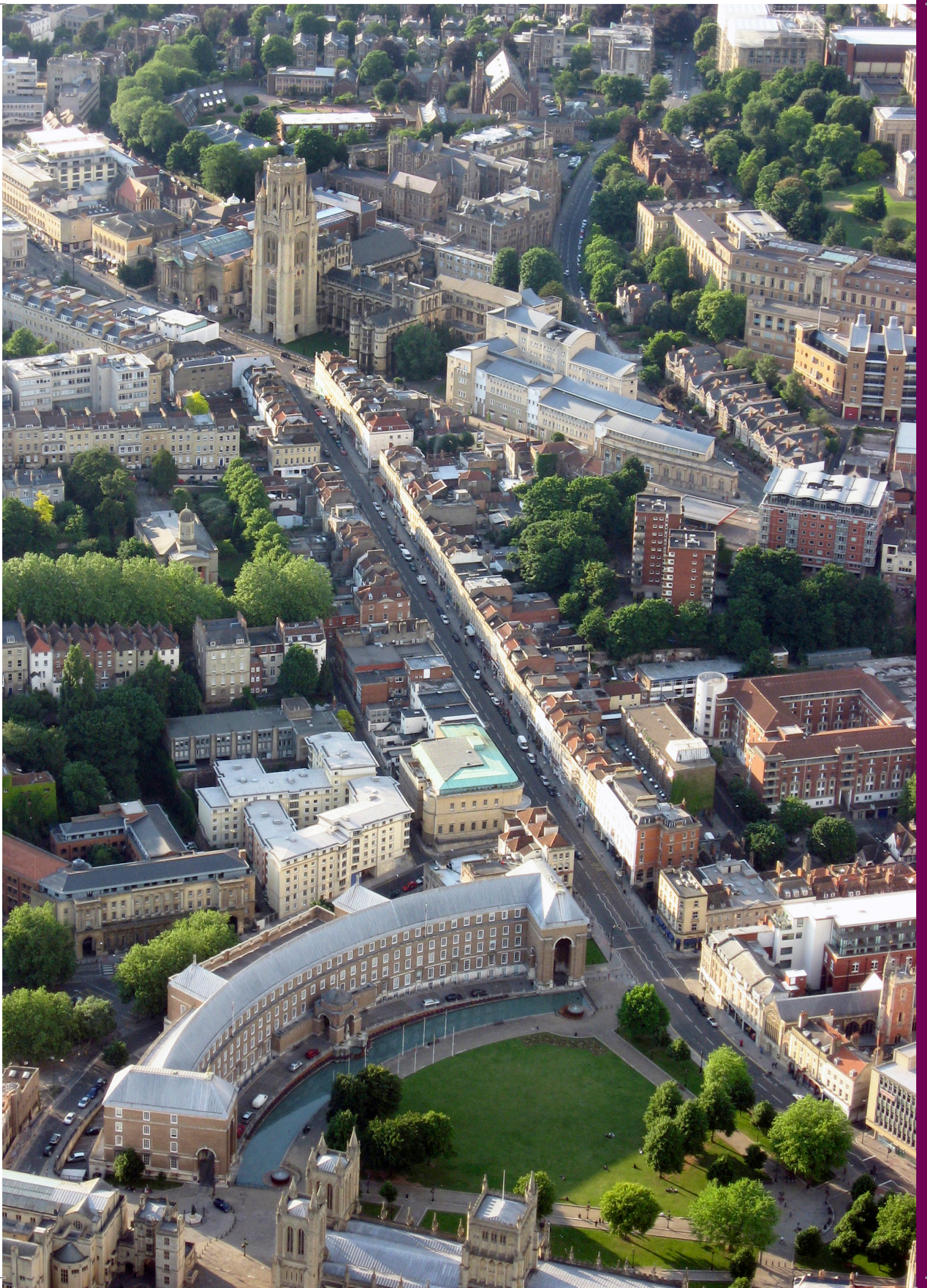
Social science research with a community partner requires academics with commitment to civic engagement and support to enable this new way of working. So far, the evidence of the Bristol Model suggests these are not in large numbers. While the Research Associates who are vital for the success of a project are employed on short term, part-time contracts, there is a possibility of losing their knowledge and expertise in the search for a more permanent position.

This valuable innovation, with the benefits this project has evidenced, has been funded by OfS and RE. It is a costly model of innovation. Sustaining and developing such initiatives requires time and resources for the academics and partners. It involves networks of communication and relationship building which can be lost if the academic or partner changes role or leaves. Could these partnerships be sustained if the university created a formal role to support or manage these relationships? Could the university use its expertise in obtaining research funding and knowledge to support partners in seeking their own funding to 'commission' similarly structured research? This model of knowledge transmission would enable the University to sustain its mission to be a civic university and allow for the development of the more equitable research partnerships demonstrated by the projects.

We do not address the issue of funding for sustainability in this evaluation as this is beyond our remit. But we can say that the project provides value in terms of the uniquely rich opportunity it offers to the students to demonstrate their skills, creativity and vigour to the wider community – but whether this experience can be sustained without external funding, can in some way be offered to more or all students in the University, is a challenge worth considering for the University.

*“ We have our own institutional cultures. And being able to see some of that and how that must feel from the other side is an important part of being in a partnership. We have to be able to see what are our own internal systems or how there might be barriers.*

*“ A really radicalized civic agenda - that's going to require cultural change in terms of the ways that many academics, think about themselves and their disciplines. But also huge changes in the way that the university thinks about its time and spaces, its accounting regimes , its measurements of labour... so many things that need to alter in structuring and culture in the university for that to happen.*



## The Evaluation Team

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