



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Birmingham City University

Public and Community Engagement Strategy

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Public and Community Engagement Strategy

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to outline the context in which our Public and Community Engagement (PCE) approach is set and to create a clear roadmap for future public and community engagement up to 2025. It sits alongside our BCU Strategy 2025. Our goal is to achieve top quartile performance in the Knowledge Exchange Framework for our cluster and to drive leading edge practice in this space. The strategy focus whilst local and regional, seeks to create best practice that can also be applied to national and international PCE activity. The strategy reflects our passion for practice, partnership and our approach which is embedded and enabling with an emphasis to empower and use our resources as agents for change.

BCU's PCE Strategy is set against a backdrop of BCU's commitment to transforming student's lives. For the purpose of this strategy public and community engagement is defined as the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of our work in teaching, learning, research and knowledge exchange can be shared with the public (and communities). Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.

2.0 Background and Context

Birmingham City University (BCU) is a dynamic, **practice** facing, anchor institution with over 25,000 students from nearly 100 countries, engaging with 13,000 businesses. The university has a dual mission of **enabling** personal transformation, and to be the University *for* Birmingham and the region. Our roots date back more than 175 years to the creation of the Birmingham Government School of Design in 1843. This heritage is reflected in its current unique education offering, and status as one of the largest providers of arts education in the UK. The award of the Queen's Anniversary Prize in 2019, in recognition of the outstanding work of the University's School of Jewellery, emphasises the continuing importance of its practice focus.

Our work is **embedded** in the community we serve; two-thirds of students are drawn from Birmingham and the West Midlands. Over half our students are from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, whilst 42% are from the lowest areas of deprivation. Our engagement with our community is at the heart of our business and our mission. As such, BCU has a transformative and place-shaping role. We recruit from a wide variety of communities into a dynamic higher education institution to deliver talented and diverse graduates for the local and global workforces of tomorrow.

The University plays a vital role as an Anchor institution in the West Midlands Region:

In celebrating our civic responsibilities. BCU's University *for* Birmingham mission reflects its role as both an anchor institution, but also as a civic university, driving open innovation, Public and Community Engagement, and contributing to Local Growth and Regeneration. It's 2025 Strategy further celebrates this role by placing community at the core of its ambition, enabling students and staff to work with all parts of the city, to improve the breadth and depth of social, community and cultural engagement. External recognition was received in 2019/20 through awards from the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, the Knowledge Transfer Network, and AGCAS.

In recognising the importance of driving inclusivity and actively searching for ways to better mirror the amazing diversity of our city. BCU has a firm commitment to support and embed equality, diversity and inclusion in its working practice and activities. Across 2018/19 the gap in BME attainment, for example, was narrowed from 18.6% to 11.8%, with a target to reduce the gap by 2% each year. In 2020 BCU appointed a Stonewall Project Manager and submitted a return to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index underlining its commitment to LGBT equality against 10 areas of employment policy and practice. Recent activity to reflect the diversity of our community includes the launch of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity in 2020, as well as celebrating Black History Month and International Women's Day.

In contributing to and driving creative thinking and practice through BCU's International research; national contribution to thinking and debate; supporting the importance of creativity and the potential of STEAM practice (Science Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths); and through our unique, specialist and internationally significant teaching programmes including our Horology courses, taught at our Queen's Award winning Jewellery School, which are critical to the future of the sector.

Furthermore, BCU's wide and varied creative and cultural programming adds to the region's overall artistic offering, with the Conservatoire welcoming nearly 20,000 members of the public in 18/19 academic year. These events cover a range of musical styles and genres (classical, contemporary, folk, jazz, musical theatre, opera and world music) as well as dance, drama, film, comedy and spoken word, and feature international artists such as Sir Lenny Henry, Sir James Galway, Nigel Kennedy, John Rutter and Julia Donaldson.

In addition, BCU's focus for widening participation can be seen through BCU's Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Junior department which provides specialist music tuition to 250 talented school-aged pupils from across the region, and offers a busy arts education programme, reaching in excess of 5,000 young people from some of the most deprived parts of the UK every year.

In boosting the productive potential of local people. In the 2017/18 academic year, the University drew 6,700 (28%) of its students from the city, and a further 8,000 (33%) from the rest of the West Midlands region. Six months after graduating, 69% of BCU students remained within the West Midlands region, adding to the skilled labour pool available to local employers.

In fostering innovation in Birmingham and the West Midlands region. With its wide-ranging research helping both to generate new ideas and apply them in a business setting. The University's STEAMhouse centre, opened in Digbeth in 2018, has become home to Birmingham's

innovation community—and is set to expand into new facilities at the Belmont Works in the City Centre upon completion of the project's £60 million second phase.

In being part of and contributing to developing practice. The University's focus on practice-led education, applied research and innovation, is supported by the engagement of business leaders in course design and validation, driving up skills and productivity; and through close working with policy makers to shape the Strategies and Plans for our region. All courses offer professional experience opportunities ranging from placements (year long, accredited, and micro), live briefs, employer-led projects and entrepreneurship. This is complemented by a mentoring scheme which in 2019/20 connected 362 students and graduates with industry professionals.

Delivering extensive business support programmes for firms (particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs) in the local area. Over the three years from 2017/18, BCU delivered 1,425 instances of business support, with SMEs benefiting across 11 projects. This support helped bring 16 new products and services to market, while also **enabling** the expansion of businesses offering existing products.

Making a £392m gross value added contribution to regional GDP (£532m nationally and supporting thousands of jobs in the area. The University is investing £340 million in its estate, including a major expansion of our city centre campus at Eastside, providing students with an enviable range of facilities. The Complete University Guide ranked BCU as a top 30 UK university for spending on facilities in 2015.

The current mission commitment of BCU is to be the 'University *for* Birmingham', reflecting our role as both an anchor institution in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands, but also as a civic university. PCE supports the delivery of our mission and is central to this place-based approach, with aligned strategic priorities clearly articulated in the 2025 Strategy, including:

- Enabling students and staff to work across the city, to improve the breadth and depth of social, community and cultural engagement to address social need;
- Widening access to the University and its resources;
- Having a physical presence (beyond its campuses) in at least three areas of the city which suffer from high levels of disadvantage;
- Supporting staff to deliver at least 10,000 volunteering hours by 2025; and each student to undertake voluntary work in the community.

Such engagement facilitates benefits to our University and beyond. Our approach is underpinned by 3 strategic priorities:

- Supporting an excellent **student experience**
- Driving new knowledge and new **practice to work in partnership** with the communities we serve.
- Reinforce our **approach to support the economic and social vitality** of our region through the creation of a collaborative ecosystem that enlivens and facilitates innovation and social progress.

Our public and community engagement approach seeks to utilise the incredible talents of our students who are connected to the heart of our region, with the passion and expertise of our staff, and our excellent facilities, reviewing how these assets can work in partnership to support fundamental impact to all the communities we serve. In addition, these communities provide a rich and resourceful mix of guidance, insight, live data and opportunities.

“Birmingham City University has a longstanding reputation in delivering technical skills for its local economy and producing talent from the region for the region. Our Public and Community Engagement Strategy outlines our continued commitment to our community in support of our mission to Transform Lives and shows how our students staff stakeholders and community play a central role to the delivery of this endeavour.”
Professor Philip Plowden, BCU Vice-Chancellor

3.0 Thematic Pillars of Public and Community Engagement

Our Public and Community Engagement strategy is framed around four thematic pillars of activity:

- Partnership to Advance Growth and Innovation;
- Championing and Supporting Diversity;
- Knowledge Making, Sharing and Exchange;
- Cultural and Creative Identity.

Our thematic pillars define the focus of our work and outline the key Strategic Actions needed to facilitate progress.

3.1 Partnership to Advance Growth and Innovation

The University is located in an area where 99.6%¹ of businesses in our region are SMEs (≤249 in size)- they are the beating heart of our economy. The industrial heritage of our region was built on **collaboration** – bringing the artist and the engineer to develop inspired new solutions to complex challenges. The changing needs of our internationally led economy needs a swift realignment of skilled talent to meet future challenges, created through a more connected and collaborative ecosystem.

Our public and community engagement will advance growth and innovation by leading programmes, projects, events and outreach through **collaboration** allowing a **partnership** approach shaped beyond the University to advance regional growth in a global world.

Our goal is to ensure BCU is a recognised, proactive partner in social, cultural and economic development through:

¹ Nomis official labour market statistics 24/9/20 produced for GBSLEP
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- **Innovation** – We will establish infrastructure to drive innovation and promote progress.
- **Strategic Engagement and Collaboration** – We will create the resources and networks to widen reach.
- **Business Support** – We will create a clear, efficient and engaging route for external engagement.

3.2 Championing and Supporting Diversity;

Our University is embedded in a rich mix of people, cultures and beliefs that deliver a unique force for progress in a region that is the most diverse in Europe. Our student base is reflective of that diversity and this is celebrated in all that we do (66% from the West Midlands and 54% BAME). As the University *for* Birmingham, reflecting our staff and students is central to our purpose. This makes us a powerful default choice for local people. We recognise the importance of celebrating and elevating its importance in a thriving region to create an inclusive society. We actively seek to promote the benefits of diversity whilst supporting programmes of work that allow diverse communities to grow, flourish and have a say - understanding our role in bringing different people together to unlock problems.

Our public and community engagement approach for Championing Diversity and Inclusion will reimagine how our staff, students and campus - using the power of our knowledge, partnerships and our infrastructure - can connect with all citizens.

Our goal is to prioritise a voice for all and build trust to bring about change that addresses identified social need through:

- **Access and participation** – where we will demonstrate openness and intervention around community needs to deliver impactful and representative outreach.
- **Disruption through infrastructure** - where we will invest in activity to challenge current thinking and infrastructure to support progress.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration** – where our work will focus on a balance in relationships through co-production and equity.

3.3 Knowledge Making, Sharing and Exchange

BCU's academic experts and specialist staff work with hundreds of businesses and organisations regionally, nationally and internationally to create leading, **practice-based** research and new knowledge that delivers real-world, societal or business impact. Extensive sector linkages have also been developed driving research, **collaboration** and innovation around identified priority areas and key economic strengths such as smart specialisation, creative and digital, engineering, advanced manufacturing and health-related life sciences. Our work in communities and alongside **practice** facilitates a vibrant insight and an opportunity to exchange and share knowledge to create drivers for change.

Our public and community engagement approach will ensure we work meaningfully with the public by recognising the value of BCU's expertise across communities and through **empowering** and supporting our academic community so that they can grow **partnerships**, facilitate interdisciplinary approaches and co-production, and support the building of communities of **practice**.

Our goal is to make an impact on policy and support and inspire communities to build new insight and practice, on their terms, that is transformational for the communities that we serve through:

- **Commitment** – we will build the infrastructure required to ensure our academic community are resourced to optimise institutional impact.
- **Connect (interdisciplinary/ inclusivity/ developing)** – we will create ways of working that actively promote porosity across the Academic community and our partners to ensure inclusivity and promote interdisciplinary working.
- **Celebrate** – we will ensure we make active effort to celebrate our community and its impact on the public.

3.4 Cultural and Creative Identity

Our strong cultural heritage since 1843, is supported by substantial investment in the arts. Our internationally renowned arts training provision includes specialist conservatoires of music and acting; a leading media school; a school of English producing world-class research (REF 2014); and a significant UK centre for art, architecture and design education, including Europe's largest Jewellery School. The University offers 133 courses within the creative industries and we have a diverse and specialised creative and cultural portfolio within the UK universities sector. We produce more graduate talent in these areas than anywhere outside London.

The University supports Birmingham's "Big City Culture" strategy, which promotes the city's world-class excellence in the arts, culture and creativity. Our Mission Statement for 2020 states we will 'actively participate in the cultural and creative sectors of the city and region.' Our active engagement at regional, national and international level in supporting, developing and influencing creative and cultural policy represents our passion for supporting its impact on social and economic progress.

Our public and community engagement will support, celebrate and showcases the region's creative credentials as a centre of cultural excellence, to a global audience, with an emphasis to transform and embrace all identities.

Our goal is to use our people, knowledge, space and place and the power of creativity to widen participation across boundaries, and drive economic, entrepreneurial, environmental and social impact through:

- **Cultural citizenship** – our people will support and champion the plurality of our citizens and amplify globally.

- **Future creative** - we will use cultural knowledge, **partnerships** and enterprise for economic, social and sustainable progress by ensuring our graduates are ready for the needs of our future creative economy.
- **Progressive space** - we will use our creativity, cultural policy, space and place to realise transformation in our economy.

4.0 Enabling Public and Community Engagement

4.1 Our People

We recognise our people are key to future transformation. Our 25,300 students and 3,155 staff have the power to make a difference.

We will ensure that our staff are at the heart of our work to create an excellent experience for our students and the support we give to the wider community.

Our values will focus on how we can deliver an embedded approach which enables and empowers our teams to support **partnership, collaboration** and co-creation, using our **practice**-based approach so that we can serve our communities as **agents for change**.

In our recruitment we will have particular regard to our role as the university for our city by supporting recruitment from our communities, including our graduating students. We will ensure that our processes for recognising and developing the talents of our staff, encourage their engagement in support of the wider public good.

We will focus on being inclusive and work relentlessly to ensure representation at every level so that our BCU community advocates and reflects those we work with, and serves and mirrors our strategy commitments to diversity and inclusion.

4.2 Our Place

Birmingham is a vibrant city with opportunity and challenges. The social mobility report² highlights that place and local labour markets drive the greatest inequality and local areas side by side can have vastly different outcomes. The City has a vibrant employer base but our diverse communities have differing levels of opportunity. Our work with our community needs to address the real opportunity of diversity and challenge inequality.

We will embrace this young, connected, creative and innovative place, where opportunity and challenge present in equal measure to springboard our public and community engagement work to facilitate progress through skills, inclusivity and citizen engagement, and drive growth through creative **practice**, teaching, research, innovation and **partnership**.

² Social Mobility Commission, The Long Shadow of Deprivation Research Report Sept 2020
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5.0 Reporting and Implementation

The University's PCE Strategy commits to timely reporting of impact and sharing of results from PCE activity and to ensuring it is effectively communicated to the widest possible audience. A range of mechanisms will be employed, reflecting the breadth of different stakeholder groups and beneficiaries engaged.

We will review the outcomes and impact of our work through appropriate governance and leadership. Investments will follow our stringent internal review process led by:

- Faculty internal review.
- Quarterly Performance Review.
- Dedicated project review where specific internal funding is provided to support project outcomes.
- Dedicated external funding review where external funding is provided to support project outcomes.

Our Public and Community Engagement Strategy will be monitored through the individual priority thematic pillars, assigned nominated leads, and will be evaluated quarterly through the performance process to review the effectiveness of each thematic strand.

Finally, BCU will use its formal mechanisms for student feedback and its annual staff survey to explore understanding of strategic mission, values and internal communication. This will be further reinforced with ongoing public consultation and outreach on strategy and performance through an outsourced perception survey, which captures views from community leaders, schools and colleges, local employers, leaders from relevant professional or sector bodies, and HE representatives.

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Professor Philip Plowden
Vice-Chancellor

Professor Julian Beer
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Research Innovation and Enterprise