

**An Introductory
Guide for Higher
Education Staff**

CampusEngage

Network for the Promotion
of Civic Engagement
in Irish Higher Education

Policy Drivers for Community- Higher Education Engagement



Policy Drivers for Community-Higher Education Engagement

This guide aims to encourage the effective use of policy – by practitioners and policy-makers at institutional level – to support community engagement. Whilst there are many examples of good engagement practice e.g. community-based learning (CBL) and community-based research (CBR), they often remain on the margins of the higher education institution (HEI). The best way to ensure that community engagement thrives is to bring it into the heart of the HEI, by aligning initiatives with external policy drivers that incentivise, legitimise or support this work.

This guide highlights relevant policies, from Ireland (North and South), the UK and the EU. We understand policy to be a purposeful and consistent approach to action – at institutional, national or international level. Within Ireland, we have a promising framework with a raft of legislation, policies and strategies which provide levers to influence policy and practice at institutional level. We outline how these drivers can be harnessed to support community engagement within the core activities of higher education, as identified by the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (The Hunt Report).

Opportunities

Engagement – The Hunt Report refers to engagement as one of the three core roles of higher education, alongside teaching and research. Engagement involves taking on civic responsibilities and cooperating with the needs of the community that sustains higher education. This includes business, the wider education system and the community sector. The strategy commits HEIs to engagement at local, national and international level and reaffirms the provisions of the *Universities Act 1997*

in terms of the role of higher education. UK Universities have been encouraged to sign up to the *Manifesto for Public Engagement*, committing themselves to engagement outside the institution. The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) has produced briefings for managers and researchers on how to implement the Manifesto within their institution. The *EDGE tool* serves as an evaluation framework to assist with this process. Across Ireland, there have also been concerted efforts from a range of national policy agencies to incentivise engagement.

In response to the *Performance Evaluation Framework 2014-16*, HEIs within Ireland are producing their own evaluation framework and key performance indicators (KPIs). The framework, which explicitly supports diversity of mission, sets out system level objectives and indicators. HEIs are asked to respond in their distinctive ways, in accordance with their mission, strengths and strategic plans. This represents a significant opportunity to include engagement activities as key indicators and deliverables.

Teaching and learning – The Hunt Report emphasises educating students for their role as citizens who add to the richness of society as parents, community leaders and teachers, echoing one of the purposes of higher education as identified by the Council of Europe – preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society. *National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)* represents the single most influential policy in Ireland when it comes to programme design. 'Insight' features as one of eight dimensions for all awards within the NFQ. 'Insight' is to be demonstrated in students' interaction with social and cultural structures of their community and society. CBL/CBR is uniquely positioned to support this, with opportunities for students to 'scrutinize social norms and lead action to change them', as stated, for example, for Level 10 awards. The *Framework Implementation Network* supports institutions when implementing NFQ policy in programme development.

Graduates should have a range of skills and achievements which are relevant to their future employability and to the economy. The *Dublin Descriptors* developed as part of the Bologna process

offer statements of learners' typical achievement at Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral level. At all levels, interpreting data, applying knowledge, problem solving and communicating to specialist and non-specialist are prerequisites for achieving a degree. *Project 6* within the *Graduating to Success Strategy (NI)* focuses on graduate employability and suggests that students must be provided with opportunities to develop skills, attributes and experiences that give them an advantage. Evidence suggests that students learn best from experience – and CBL/CBR provides these opportunities.

These policy initiatives facilitate and legitimise the involvement of students and staff in CBL, CBR and volunteering, which develop employability skills and citizenship. These policies provide a rich source to draw on when incorporating engagement as a key element of institutional teaching and learning strategies.

Research – Research is another sphere of activity where effective engagement can enhance process, outcomes and impact. Higher education policy in the UK and Northern Ireland has acted as a significant enabler in the area of public engagement with research. UK Research Councils have sought to promote a research culture that values, recognises and supports engagement. The *Concordat for Public Engagement* commits funders and researchers to public engagement to benefit the UK society and economy. Aligned with that goal, the *2014 Research Evaluation Framework* has been developed with impact factors counting for 20% of the overall assessment.

This emphasis on impact is echoed in *Horizon 2020*, the biggest EU research and innovation programme to date, with €80bn available 2014-2020. Ireland has ambitious targets for *Horizon 2020*. Funding criteria include impact in identifying and addressing societal challenges. This represents a real opportunity for research that can provide tangible evidence of engagement with communities impacted by social or economic issues.

Conclusion

An enabling policy framework can help to embed community engagement in the life of a HEI – if practitioners and policy-makers at institutional level avail of such opportunities. If a CBL or CBR initiative helps an institution to achieve its goals e.g. student engagement, employability, applied research (or even wider goals such as widening participation), it is less vulnerable to a changing funding environment. It is more likely to be sustainable, even if key personnel move on. Practitioners can collaborate with senior managers within their HEI to develop a shared understanding of how and why engagement delivers on the institutional mission. A *Practical Guide to Developing Policy and Strategy* provides valuable guidance. Policy work takes time, energy and commitment by practitioners and other key agents and can be easily neglected in the need to focus on the day-to-day work. Policy work, however, is a vital element in ensuring the success of community engagement and practitioners and academic leaders should commit time and resources to it.

Online resources

Bologna Process

www.eurireland.ie/programmes/bologna-process.128.html

Capturing the Insight Dimension of the NFQ

campusengage.ie/groups/capturing-%E2%80%98insight%E2%80%99-dimension-framework-qualifications-learning-civic-engagement

Concordat for Public Engagement

www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe/concordat/

Dublin Descriptors

ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Dublin_Descriptors

Edge Tool

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/support/self-assess

Framework Implementation Network

www.nfqnetwork.ie/

Graduating to Success

A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland:

dera.ioe.ac.uk/14162/

Higher Education System Performance Framework 2014-16

www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/HEA-Higher-Education-System-performance-Framework-2014-2016.pdf

Horizon2020

ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/

Manifesto for Public Engagement

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/why-does-it-matter/manifesto

National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

www.publicengagement.ac.uk/

National Framework of Qualifications

www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/

National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030

www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_strategy_for_higher_education_2030.pdf

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CAMPUS ENGAGE is a network for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish Higher Education and is open to all higher education institutions staff, students, community organisations and local companies in Ireland.

The network aims to strengthen the relationship between higher education and wider society, through civic engagement activities including community-based research, community-based learning, volunteering and knowledge exchange.

Online resources (*continued*)

NQAI Policies and Criteria for Awards

www.nqai.ie/documents/polandcrit.pdf

Practical Guide to Developing Policy and Strategy

www.qub.ac.uk/sites/ScienceShop/Publications/APracticalGuidetoDevelopingPolicyandStrategy/

Research Evaluation Framework (2014)

www.ref.ac.uk/

Universities Act (1997)

www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0024/

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For more information on Campus Engage and to access a database of case studies and resources go to:

www.campusengage.ie