Department of History

Public Engagement Strategy

2012-2016

Background: The purpose of this document is to inform policy-making and the work of colleagues with regards to public engagement activity. It was drafted by the Public Engagement Coordinator in November 2011, in consultation with the Department Research and Innovation Committee, and approved by the Department Meeting on 14 December 2011.

1. Our vision

As a Department, we believe that professional historians working in Universities should actively shape public discussions of the past. The Department of History has a long tradition of engaging with the public, complementing the work we do to communicate research findings through our publications and teaching. Where our research has potential public relevance, we are committed to sharing our expertise with audiences at a local, national and international level. In this way, the Department makes an important contribution to politics, culture, quality of life and public policy; some of our work also generates economic benefit for our external partners. The Department strives to support this activity in a number of ways, and along with opportunities provided by the Faculty of Arts & Humanities and the University, it fosters the creativity of our researchers as they develop ways to engage a wider public. Through our public engagement activity we communicate our high-quality research about the past, driven by our passionate belief in its relevance to the present and the future.

Our public engagement can be broadly characterized in two ways:

a) Many of our activities take the form of public dissemination and engagement. Through activities such as advisory roles to policy groups, public lectures, the provision of online resources, TV and radio appearances, trade books and journalism, we make our research available to a wide public audience and encourage active participation and feedback.

b) Other activities build on partnerships with external organizations, enabling knowledge exchange. Through collaborative events such as workshops and exhibitions, we work with partners to build our research findings into shared outputs, a process which often enhances our own research.

2. Strategic Objectives:

2.1 The Department enriches public audiences’ appreciation of the past and its relevance to their lives today in qualitatively significant ways.

2.2 Members of staff organize or participate in public activities that reach a wide range of public audiences.

2.3 The Department and individual researchers publicise our public engagement activity in the Department, the Faculty and the University.

2.4 The Department fosters public engagement activities across the full range of research in the department, so that individual members of staff in all sections and clusters are able, where appropriate, to integrate public engagement into their personal research strategies.
2.5 We explore the opportunities offered by new and developing technologies for communicating our research to the public, and explore new ways of making a contribution to public life.

2.6 Supported by the Department, Faculty and University, our staff endeavour to establish the reputation of the Department of History as an innovator and leader in public engagement, in Sheffield, Britain and the world.

2.7 Individual members of staff, where appropriate, strengthen existing long-term relationships and develop new relationships with external partners, so that the Department of History is part of a network of organizations, including non-HE educators and third sector agencies, in the City of Sheffield.

2.8 The Department endeavours to extend our commitment to public engagement beyond Sheffield, to reach national and international audiences.

2.9 Staff share our experience of public engagement with undergraduate and postgraduate students, encouraging them to participate in outreach activities where appropriate, and to draw upon their knowledge of and training in history as thoughtful and reflective members of society. The department trains historians of the future for their role in public engagement and public debate.

3: Modes of Public Engagement

In the medium term, the department has identified and supports the following modes of public engagement in order to encourage long-term partnerships, raise the profile of public engagement activity undertaken within the Department, and facilitate individual and collaborative activities of reach, significance and scale. This is not an exhaustive list and our work with externals is subject to change.

3.1 History Partners

The Department of History has a large number of well-established relationships with external partners. Many of these are located in Sheffield, and allow us to make a significant impact on various audiences in and around the City. Staff also work with partners nationally and internationally in a number of sectors. These partnerships facilitate public engagement and position the Department within a network of cultural and educational organizations who work directly with the public.

3.2 The Internet

- Our Departmental research webpages include a public-facing section. We also have a separate public website which is designed to be more accessible to those outside the institution. These pages showcase our research, list past and forthcoming events, and provide an opportunity to create new partnerships. This increases the reach and significance of the impact of our public engagement.

- The Department is a pioneer in the creation of freely-accessible, interactive internet resources. Supported by the scholarship of our staff, these provide access to important collections of historical content, and encourage public historical practice. We also explore the use of social media in disseminating our work. This work deliver the insights of our work to audiences across the world.

3.3 Public Lectures & Events

Our staff disseminate their research to local, regional, national and international audiences through public lectures and events. One-off talks take place both at the University and as collaborative events alongside the work of our partners at museums, historic houses and musical performances. The Department also organizes public lecture series in association with a range of partners. These events provide public audiences with direct access to our
3.4 Public Discourse

The research of staff in the Department is held in high esteem and colleagues are frequently invited to contribute to national and international debates in the press, radio and television media. Through publications for a trade and popular audiences, our staff further shape public discourse. These interventions in public discourse enable staff to communicate with the public in immediate and high profile ways in areas of recognized public significance.

3.5 Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites

The museum and heritage sector is crucial to the public understanding of the past. As such our staff work with researchers, curators and educators in these organizations, informing their interpretation and collaborating on exhibition displays. Staff also disseminate their research in exhibitions they curate for public spaces within the University. Our participation in exhibitions disseminates our research to public audiences and third sector organizations, and also widens the participation of public audiences in the life of the University.

3.6 Policy and Political Engagement

The advice and expertise of our historians is valued by policy-makers and advisory groups, in both Britain and overseas. Research by colleagues has had a tangible impact on political life. Drawing on their disciplinary expertise, our professional historians contribute to political life and government practice.

3.7 Schools History Network

The Department works closely with many local schools through its ‘Schools History Network’. We organize free events for different cohorts of school pupils, liaising with the teachers in the network to align the topics with those in the curriculum. These activities enhance the learning of school pupils with the findings of our research, and allow teachers to incorporate this research into their teaching for future pupils.

3.8 Our Teaching

In our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, students reflect critically on the use of historical knowledge in public discourse and also have the opportunity to contribute to public history. In the MA module ‘Work Placement’, students work with external partners in the city of Sheffield and carry out significant public engagement activities. Public engagement activity in our curriculum makes a difference to our external partners, our students, and the communities our students work with now and in the future.

4. Strategic Priorities 2012-16

4.1 A Department Public Engagement Coordinator will take a lead in promoting and championing public engagement, informing colleagues of funding opportunities, providing advice, collating information on our public engagement activities and actively promote such activities outside the Department. The Public Engagement Coordinator will present an annual report on our public engagement, showcasing achievements in this area.
4.2 The Public Engagement Coordinator will serve as a primary Departmental contact for public audiences, and take a lead in responding to enquiries, brokering relationships when helpful and overseeing the Departmental webpages on public engagement.

4.3 This Departmental Strategy for Public Engagement, and strategic uses of Department Research Funding, will create an environment that fosters and responds to the creativity of our staff in the area of public engagement.

4.4 Individual Research Support Meetings will support and encourage public engagement, and generate records of staff public engagement activity.

4.5 Individual staff will, where possible, collect information on their public engagement and its reach and significance, using attendance lists and evaluation forms as appropriate, in order that we can improve our ability to engage in effective and meaningful ways with public audiences.

4.6 Where appropriate, individually and collaboratively staff will develop public engagement activities and external partnerships, seeking external funding to support these when available. All staff will consider appropriate forms of public engagement for the ‘impact statement’ required when applying for Research Council funding.

4.7 The Department and its staff will participate in Faculty and University projects and events, and align with Faculty and University strategies, benefitting from these wider networks and systems of support.

4.8 The Department will, where appropriate, include work on public engagement in its undergraduate and postgraduate modules, and create opportunities for students to participate in public engagement activities in informal ways.