The project brief

Students were given the opportunity to competitively bid for funding for public engagement and enterprise projects in a 'safe' space, where they have been encouraged to reflect on the intellectual and practical aspects of the process. The project bids were linked to a seminar series which explored public engagement in a critical way, to allow PGR students to interrogate models of public engagement as well as provide them training in practical skills.

Key impacts

Students have developed key skills in project management (including managing budgets), writing funding applications and have gained invaluable experience of working with external partners in collaborative environments. Students have also benefited greatly from the opportunity to work collaboratively with their fellow PhD researchers.

The project has enabled those who were given funding, to reflect more clearly on the relationship between their orthodox academic research and the wider public. Students gained experience in all aspects of public engagement, including promoting and disseminating their work.

Outcomes observed

Students have developed a greater confidence in the scope, reach and potential of their research. Students have also commented that their own knowledge of the value of working with external partners and the expertise that they can bring to a project has been improved.

The legacy

The project’s outputs have had a number of clear long term benefits for participants and their audiences, such as:

- the digital outputs from one of the funded project will be used in teaching (via youtube)
- one of the students developed an exhibition working alongside local residents, she is now anticipating that this will feed directly into her postdoctoral applications
- the theatre performances funded through the project have informed the next steps of a significant public-facing research project related to ageing
- the establishment of the ‘Comics in the Community’ project has drawn together a wide range of practitioners to engage in the intellectual aspects of their work – in this new field, the researcher in question is working innovatively with public partners.

Moreover, the students have, on the behalf of the University, established fruitful partnerships with community organisations.
Such was the success of the project that HEIF backing has been granted to replicate the scheme for a new cohort of PGR students.

It has also led to a successful bid to the Faculty Arts Enterprise fund for a project which partners PhD students with a professional photographer to create an exhibition of photographs of research.

**Enterprise**

The Passages Theatre Project led by *Bridie Moore has been a huge success in engaging a wide range of audiences: the performances of her company (essentially a work exploring research questions relating to ageing) was hugely popular with performances at the University, The Winter Gardens, St Mary’s Community Centre and a care centre in Wincobank. The theatre company draws together a range of amateur performers (all over 50) to co-produce innovative, but accessible work.

**Innovation**

In the young field of Comics Studies, *Richard Finn’s work has been profoundly innovative. He has created a network for the discussion, dissemination and co-production of creative and theoretical work relating to his research. Bringing together academics, enthusiasts, practitioners and artists, RF’s work illustrates the way in which complex theoretical concepts might be re-imagined for a wider audience.

(*based in the School of English)

**Quotes and personal experience**

“Another thing I learned is the importance of advertisement / dissemination. Although I got wonderful output, I couldn’t make people around me know it. It’s a great shame.”

“It has driven home to me just how worthwhile the enterprise can be.”

“I learnt about the importance of planning a long time in advance, and in being extremely clear about deadlines.”

“From our perspective, it has been rewarding to empower students to develop enterprising skills and the pedagogical challenges of this have been consistently stimulating.”

“It is extremely rewarding and will make you reassess and re-evaluate your research in very exciting ways- it can be frustrating in the organisation and will sometimes make you question the entire utility of your research- but it’s worth it!”

**To find out more contact**

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