

SEN16D028

Title: Managing and Developing Engagement Activities at UEA
Author: Professor Yvonne Tasker
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Issue

To provide an update for Senate on Engagement Activities at UEA in line the approach approved at Senate in May 2016.

Recommendation

Members of Senate are asked to note the update and to advise on any revisions to the management of engagement within Schools and Faculties following one year of operation.

Senate is asked to endorse:

- i. the continuation of the current approach for a further academic year;
- ii. interim evaluation of the approach to take place in Autumn 2017 following the finalisation of REF guidance (external) and revision of UEA 'Green Book' (internal);

Resource Implications

There is no additional request for resource. There is however a continuing need to ensure greater awareness of the value of public engagement both with respect to research (notably impact) and reputation building for the University.

Risk Implications

The most immediate risks remain as in 2016: decline in the range and quality of engagement work undertaken at UEA; failure to capitalize on the reputational and research gains of engagement work.

Equality and Diversity

The appropriate definition of benchmarks and thresholds for engagement activity within a School is necessary to ensure clarity of promotion criteria for academic staff. Incorporating engagement into appraisal, planning and performance review is compatible with Athena Swan processes (now applicable in all four Faculties). Although there has been a delay in revisions to the 'Green Book' the incorporation of engagement work and any equality and diversity implications will need to be considered.

Timing of decisions

The arrangements outlined for Senate in May 2016 were to be reviewed in May 2017. This will now take place in Autumn following the finalisation of REF guidelines post Stern.

Further Information

Professor Yvonne Tasker, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities x2799
y.tasker@uea.ac.uk

Background

Engagement is an expectation of RCUK-funded research. It has been shown to generate high quality impact case studies vital for REF2020. The Stern review of REF underlined the value of public engagement with research and the contribution this area of activity makes to strong impact case studies. Additionally public engagement plays an important part in promoting the University regionally, nationally and internationally.

In May 2016 Senate agreed a new approach to the management of public engagement activities which would be led by Schools and Faculties. The headlines of the approach were as follows:

1. School level responsibility for managing engagement activity, ensuring that it is factored into workload planning, appraisal and promotions procedures, and that it is aligned with the strategic goals of the School, Faculty and University;
2. PURE be used to capture engagement activities, providing Heads of School and Research Directors with an overview of engagement activities on behalf of ATR and ATS staff;
3. An annual half-day Engagement event will be established (on the model of the teaching day) in order to recognise and share best practice;
4. A regular network of academics with expertise in engagement (with past award winners taking a key role) will replace the current Engagement Executive;
5. A member of Executive Team to provide the academic lead on engagement ensuring oversight of training, support and web presence (to be confirmed for academic year 2017/18 onwards).

It is now proposed that an interim evaluation of the approach will take place in Autumn 2017 following the finalisation of the REF guidelines (external) and the revisions to the Green Book (internal).

A summary report will be made to Senate in November 2017.

Discussion

It was argued by some that these proposals risked generating an internal perception that engagement is not valued at UEA – this at the point when both RCUK and competitor Universities are increasing their emphasis on this aspect of University activity. Given the problems of operating the proposed network and the lack of a standalone engagement half-day in 2017, such concerns seem, to a degree, to be justified.

However, the range and quality of applications for UEA engagement awards continues to increase. Moreover, the incorporation of training and networking on public engagement within PGR PPD units and the REN-led impact week (including involvement from the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement) has ensured a greater degree of integration of public engagement activities and expertise.

UEA is in the process of developing a bid to RCUK for funds under its recent strategic call to expedite embedding public engagement with research. That scheme should enable the continuation of integration of public engagement with research into larger research planning and support. It would also provide an opportunity to improve internal awareness of the value of excellent public engagement as a vital contributing element to the UEA plan.