

Social Engagement by London's HEIs

Mapping HE-social engagement interactions in London

June 2009

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Summary

During the first phase of the social engagement project, interviews were carried out with staff at 14 London universities and higher education (HE) colleges largely between March and August 2008 on community outreach and social engagement activities.

Information from 53 interviews was condensed into a matrix of social interaction by HE institution. From a total of 46 categories, 33% covered schools outreach work, 20% were concerned with physical and mental wellbeing (arts, sports, libraries) and 15% encompassed community cohesion (e.g. health clinics, urban regeneration). There appeared to few specific activities for older people.

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Introduction

As part of the project on “Social Impact by London HEIs”, attempts were made to obtain baseline information on the various types of social and community outreach activities undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) in London.

Activities of interest covered a range of “third stream” HE-community interactions, such as engagement with children and young people; lifelong learning (especially extra-mural activities involving older people); skills (unemployed and employed); disadvantaged communities, and the use of HEIs as public space.

Methods

Using a flexible discussion guide (Appendix 1), informal interviews were carried out at selected universities and HE colleges with staff involved in widening participation, volunteering, business services and community outreach work. Discussions were held largely between March and August 2008.

Notes from interviews and a preliminary matrix of HE-community interactions were sent to all interviewees for comments and feedback.

Results

Meetings were held at 14 London HEIs and supplementary information was provided from discussions with three third sector organisations, two regional development bodies and one lifelong learning network.

A total of 53 meetings were carried out at HEIs, of which 46 (78%) were done in person (“face to face”), with information being provided by email from the remaining contacts on specific topics such as museum projects or use of sports grounds.

Notes from discussions were transcribed and summarised as a diagram of HE social engagement interactions which produced 46 categories (Figure 1).

Fifteen categories (33%) related to children and young people, largely involving schools outreach programmes. Approximately 20% of discussions were with schools and widening participation officers. Some interviewees mentioned the loss of the Aimhigher regional office and thematic partnerships, resulting in greater time and effort required to coordinate events and maintain links with schools.

The next highest area of interaction encompassed physical and mental wellbeing (taken here to include arts, libraries, sports and health clinics) with nine categories (20%). Seven categories (15%) encompassed community cohesion (e.g. health clinics, “pro bono” legal advice, work with faith leaders). Five categories (11%) covered knowledge transfer and business services or sustainability and “green” issues.

Very few examples were found on HEIs and specific interactions with older people, which may not be surprising as they are not a major focus for HE engagement. However, changing demographics indicate the 50+ age group will comprise about 50% of the UK population in 10 years (Office for National Statistics http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/svg_pyramid/default.htm).

The ELQ (equivalent or lower qualification) policy introduced in 2008/09 has led to reductions in provision of extra-mural courses offered by London HEIs and it was considered to have had a negative impact on adult continuing education and lifelong learning in London.

Acknowledgements

Funding for the project was provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). London Higher wishes to thank all members of the [project advisory panel](#) for their help in the work.

Figure 1: Mapping social engagement by 14 multi-faculty and specialist institutions in London

AREA	ACTIVITY	LONDON HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (ANONYMISED) Social engagement activity denoted by grey rectangle													
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Y	I	J	K	L	M	N
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	inward/outward visits with schools and colleges ambassadors/mentoring/e-mentoring/researchers in residence workshops/masterclasses out of hours clubs/homework clubs/Saturday clubs subject or course "taster sessions" exhibitions/shows/lectures/tournaments summer schools sports outreach application support events -specialised support/medicine, healthcare -specialised support/arts, drama, music work experience projects specific learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia) hard to reach groups (BAME, no tradition of HE, young offenders) not in employment, education or training (NEET)														
KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER	student placements with companies student modules/courses on entrepreneurship CPD/short courses/vocational updates consultancy and advisory services for local businesses facilities for small business start-ups														
ELDERLY/RETIRED GROUPS	specific inward visits theatre/music/film clubs targetted lifelong learning courses														
ARTS AND CULTURAL EVENTS	partnerships with local galleries/theatres/museums recitals/performances/exhibitions in local venues use of HEI facilities for performances/exhibitions														
LIBRARY & INFORMATION SOURCES	access by public, 6th form and/or FE students access by local businesses library loans available to general public														
SPORTS FACILITIES FOR PUBLIC	outdoor sports grounds indoor gyms sports injury clinics														
COMMUNITY COHESION	local events sponsored by HEI student-led community radio stations work with faith groups work with minority groups urban regeneration (e.g. courses, outreach, projects) health clinic drop-in centres/ community medicine legal advice centres/ roadshows														
STUDENT/STAFF VOLUNTEERING	student volunteering (student union-led or individual) staff volunteering														
SUSTAINABILITY AND GREEN ISSUES	green community projects and campaigns green building/estates plans (e.g. carbon footprint reduction) sourcing of sustainable materials gardening clubs community/urban design														

Appendix 1

INTERVIEW/QUESTIONNAIRE ON TYPES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT INTERACTIONS MARCH 2008

The purpose of the first phase of the SILH project is to obtain information on the range of activities carried out by London HEIs with local communities. It is proposed that interviews are carried out at selected universities and colleges with appropriate contacts involved in widening participation, volunteering and other work with local communities.

There will be no formal questionnaire but discussions on various topics which will be sufficiently flexible to cover any examples of interactions which have not been listed in previous discussions with other HEIs.

Interactions of interest include work with children and young people, lifelong learning (extra-mural activities with retired/elderly groups); skills (unemployed, employed groups); disadvantaged communities and HEIs as public space.

This document will be sent to out before meetings so HEI contacts are aware of the types of work we are interested in covering. The topics for discussions include:

ARTS/CULTURE

Resources, e.g. galleries, museums

Work, e.g. exhibitions, school visits, public lectures, tasters, summer schools

SCIENCE RESOURCES

Resources

Work, e.g. ambassadors, school visits, public lectures, tasters, summer schools

LIBRARY/ITC/INFORMATION SOURCES

Resources, e.g. public library,

Work, e.g. training at library or at community venues

SPORTS FACILITIES

Resources, e.g. pitches, joint teams

Work, e.g. expert classes/tutorials, sports injury clinics

OTHER OUTDOOR FACILITIES

Resources, e.g. allotments, botanic gardens

Work, e.g. gardening clubs

HEALTH CLINICS

Resources - medical/healthcare facilities

Work, e.g. drop-in centres,

LEGAL ADVICE

Resources - legal studies on curriculum

Work, e.g. drop-in centres, roadshows to employers, local union branches

STUDENT/STAFF VOLUNTEERING

Resources, e.g. registered societies, student unions, links with volunteering organisations

Work, e.g. fundraising, community improvement schemes, campaigning (e.g. environmental issues)

Additional - is work always around the "campus area" or is it throughout London?

OTHER CATEGORIES:

- **TRAINING PROFESSIONALS**
- **COMMUNITY COHESION**
- **EMPLOYABILITY**
- **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**