

Common challenges when engaging with schools

Below are common issues that researchers might face when trying to engage with schools alongside suggestions for potential solutions. These ideas are drawn from a public engagement conversation on 'Engaging with Schools' held at the University of Bath on 21 October 2015 (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/marketing/public-engagement/get-involved/pe-conversations/index.html>). As such, thanks for the below ideas are due to the panel at the event – Claire Wood & Chloe Anderson from the Research Council UK's School-University Partnership Initiative (SUPI - <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe/PartnershipsInitiative/>); Dr Janet Goodall (Dept. of Education); and Drs Gan Shermer & Antoine Buchard (Dept. of Chemistry).

If you are looking to engage with schools and wish to chat through your plans, do feel free to contact the University's Public Engagement Unit at: public-engagement@bath.ac.uk

Common challenges	Potential solutions
<p>I'm struggling to gain access to a school. In particular, I'm finding it difficult to reach widening participation (WP) schools and disadvantaged students</p>	<p>Avoid writing emails to a generic 'admin' address. Wherever you can, try to find a named contact.</p> <p>Really think through the 'hook' for the school of engaging with you – what's in it for them? Have a careful look at their website which will give you an idea of their mission, values, curricula etc. How might working with you help the school to achieve things that are important to them?</p> <p>The University has its own Widening Participation Office (http://www.bath.ac.uk/study/teachers-advisers-parents/widening-participation/our-team/index.html) that, over recent years, has built strong links with a variety of WP schools in the region. Several of the University's WP officers are ex-teachers and so can advise you on how best to work with schools. They might also have relevant named contacts for you.</p> <p>Once you have contacts, keep them 'warm' – don't just use them and drop them!</p>

<p>I'm dependent on a single point of contact in a school</p>	<p>Try to build your profile (or that of your research centre) amongst a network of senior teaching staff in the school.</p> <p>Make use of infrastructure organisations that work regularly with school teachers providing them with CPD opportunities – e.g. The Science Learning Network: https://www.sciencelearningcentres.org.uk/</p> <p>Other infrastructure organisations that might be of use are: the School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS - https://www.sgoss.org.uk/) and the e-Learning Foundation (http://www.e-learningfoundation.com/)</p>
<p>I'm struggling to find a mutually convenient time for myself and the school to work with one another</p>	<p>SUPI has created a School-University Calendar Coordination Tool aimed at enabling school and university partners to identify pressure points in their respective calendars – see: http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/school-university_calendar_coordination_tool.pdf</p>
<p>I'm not sure how best to build an effective, mutually beneficial collaboration with a school</p>	<p>There are a number of 'top tips' to bear in mind if you want to ensure an effective collaboration with your partner school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to sit down face-to-face with your teachers for a detailed discussion of what you're looking to achieve through your engagement. This will help you to build trust • Ensure that both researchers and teachers have an equal voice in the collaboration. You could achieve this by, for example, co-developing activities together, setting up Teacher Advisory Boards (these are common in the US – see: http://recipe4success.org/about-us/teacher-advisory-board.html),

	<p>or asking teachers to input into your activity's development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate regularly with your collaborator – email bulletins, web portals, face-to-face catch ups etc • Be clear as to the 'what's in it for them' question. Why should teachers take time to engage with you? What's the benefit to them and to their students? • Be patient with schools. Building any collaboration takes a long time so allow plenty of time to get a project or activity off the ground
<p>I don't think the teacher has time to work with me</p>	<p>Use SUPI's School-University Calendar Coordination Tool (see above) to find a mutually convenient time to work with one another.</p> <p>Remember that, if a teacher has to be out of a classroom to engage with you on an activity, it costs for a replacement teacher to cover their absence. So if necessary, factor this cost into your activity plans.</p>
<p>I'm not sure that the teacher is interested in working with me</p>	<p>It might be worth checking a few things before you give up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you presented yourself? Have you used an appropriate tone – the words 'research' and 'surveys' can be a bit off-putting if teachers receive them 'out-of-the-blue' • Have you been clear on your ask and importantly, your offer? Is it obvious to the teacher how they might benefit from working with you?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your activity provide a clear link to the school curriculum? If not, it won't be as attractive to teachers • Have you approached the teacher at a convenient time of year (again, check using SUPPI's Calendar Coordination Tool)? • Could your proposed activity fit into an event that the school is already planning? If this event is an annual one, that will help ensure the sustainability of your activity
<p>I don't have money to engage with teachers</p>	<p>Many research councils and learned societies have public engagement grants that can be used to fund activities with schools. See, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESRC's Social Science Festival - http://www.esrc.ac.uk/public-engagement/festival-of-social-science/ • Royal Society Partnerships Grants – https://royalsociety.org/grants-schemes-awards/grants/partnership-grants/ • The Ogden Trust - http://www.ogdentrust.com/ • Institute of Physics public engagement scheme - https://www.iop.org/about/grants/outreach/page_38843.html • The Biochemical Society's Outreach Grants - http://www.biochemistry.org/Education/Publicengagement.aspx • The Royal Academy of Engineering's Ingenious Grant - http://www.raeng.org.uk/grants-and-prizes/ingenious-grant <p>To keep up-to-date with the latest funding schemes, you can keep an eye on the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's funding pages (http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/plan-it/funding) or you could register to the JISCMail group, PSCI-COM (https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=PSCI-COM)</p>