

# Participatory Research @ Bath

## Participatory Research benchmarking report

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## 1. Introduction

This report summarises findings from desk and interview-based research into how other higher education institutions in the UK support long-term participatory research at institutional level. It is part of the *ParticipatoryResearch@Bath* project.

This report contains key recommendations based on my findings; details of the research methodology; a list of people interviewed; a list of people and projects for potential follow up in the future; and headline findings from the interviews. Much longer interview notes are saved as separate documents. Some interviewees shared resources with me and these are also saved separately, and detailed in the interview headlines section.

## 2. Recommendations for the University of Bath

### 2.1 Define your terms

- Have a clear definition of what participatory research means for Bath, why you want to do it and in what contexts. Participatory research needs to be relevant and meaningful, and avoid being tokenistic or mandated. Don't force people to do it, or do it just for the sake of it.
- Be clear in your use of language. The interviews indicated that there is no real consensus within the Public Engagement/HEI sector around terms, and terms are used interchangeably e.g. participatory research, co-production, partnership working, collaborative research. There is also overlap between participatory research and patient and public involvement (PPI) – for instance, much of the work that Co-Production Collective supports seems to be very high-quality PPI with health research. More consensus would be useful within the sector. (See interview notes for Vicky Brightman, Andy Gibson (PPI report)<sup>1</sup>)
- Be honest about what is participatory research and what is actually research, involving research subjects and therefore requiring ethics approval. (See interview notes for Jo Stubbs, Vicky Brightman).

### 2.2 Take time

- Acknowledge and accept that good participatory research takes time – a lot of time! – and resources. It's important that this is recognised at senior management level.
- Academics need to be given time, space, and funding to build meaningful relationships with communities without pressure to produce specific outputs (such as projects, or even grant applications). (See interview notes for Virginia Elgar<sup>2</sup>)

### 2.3 Fund it

- Set up a seed fund that can be used to fund early-stage conversations and relationship building with communities. At present it is straightforward to write public participants into a grant application, but much harder to find money to pay people to get involved in developing the applications themselves, or nurture and establish the relationships that need

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<sup>1</sup> *"There is an understanding gap, you can often be in meetings where it takes a while to work out what exactly we are all talking about when we use these terms."*

Andy Gibson, UWE (see PPI report)

<sup>2</sup> *"[It takes] time and space...to build a relationship and trust and just get to the point where people feel they can work with you, feel that we have something in common, we can have honest conversations that may lead to something. This needs to happen before the blue sky thinking around project proposals."*

Virginia Elgar, ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health, Kings College London

to form before you even reach the application stage. UCL have a fund called [Listen and Learn](#) for this purpose. One interviewee (who asked to remain anonymous) told me that they had recently needed to work with a public contributor on a grant application, but couldn't access any funding to pay for the contributor's involvement. They ended up paying the contributor with their own money! They would have loved to have been able to involve the contributor more but couldn't afford to. (See notes for Lizzie Cain/Co-Production Collective)

#### 2.4 Put key people in place

- Recruit university-employed, long term, paid 'community liaison officers' (or similar) who are embedded in the communities Bath would like to work with. Give them a budget to fund community activities (e.g. cooking sessions, coffee mornings, walks – ask them what they want!) with the aim of establishing and maintaining good, trusting and respectful relationships that academics can then access. (See interview notes for Jo Stubbs)

#### 2.5 Work with partners

- Well-chosen partner organisations (e.g. charities) are essential, both for their expertise and their access to the communities Bath may wish to work with.
- If a project involves sensitive issues or vulnerable groups, partners can help to keep everyone working on the project – public contributors, facilitators, coordinators, curators – protected and safe. Seek out partners who have expertise in this area, whether this is working with people with learning disabilities, health conditions or lived experience of trauma. Think about what issues (personal questions, emotionally intense experiences) may arise and have measures in place e.g. signposting to other information or organisations who can support, chill out spaces, people on hand to talk one-to-one, opportunities for project participants to reflect, share and learn. Have clear boundaries and consider safeguarding – just as researchers get training when working with vulnerable/challenging groups as research subjects. (See interview notes for Ed Watts, Jo Stubbs<sup>3</sup>)
- Recognise that partnership working can be challenging, especially for people who are used to working in traditional, hierarchical, academic contexts. Be open to critical feedback from partners, and be aware of power imbalances around money and decision making. (See interview notes for Virginia Elgar, KCL)

#### 2.6 Value contributions

- Have a clear payment policy and make getting set up on the system and getting paid as simple as possible. Almost everyone I spoke to mentioned financial bureaucracy as a huge source of frustration and a significant barrier to participation. (See interview notes for Virginia Elgar<sup>4</sup>)
- It would be useful to have a UK-wide standard for payment – could UKRI develop national guidelines for this, in the same way as there is the NIHR framework for good practice in PPI? And liaise with the DWP/Jobs Centres to find a way of avoiding conflicts with benefits.
- Recognise that there are many ways of valuing the role of partners, in addition to payment – developing transferable skills; experiences that they can put on their CV; participation

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<sup>3</sup> "Qualitative researchers get trained in basic safety for when they are doing research with people with issues – seems like a real omission that...coordinators don't get this when they often come into contact with the same groups."

Jo Stubbs, Elizabeth Blackwell Institute, University of Bristol

<sup>4</sup> "It's the most important thing...we have definitely lost people because of payment issues".  
Virginia Elgar, Centre for Society and Mental Health, Kings College London

certificates; vouchers; being named as co-authors on publications. Ask them how they would like to have their contributions recognised – what would be of value to them? (See notes for Co-Production Collective, Jen Wong)

## 2.7 Consider venues

- Having a beautifully designed, comfortable and appealing place to come to can help with recruitment and retention of certain communities (see interview notes for Jenny Sutton, Ed Watts). For other communities, it will be important to go out to where that community is, to meet and work with them in their own spaces.

## 2.8 Provide training and support

- Academics need to develop listening skills and be prepared to change the way they talk about their research (slower, without jargon). They need to understand what motivates public participants to get involved, and the challenges they may face. They also need informal peer-to-peer support and mentoring, and a safe space where they can reflect and share their successes and failures. (See interview notes for Virginia Elgar)
- There is a need for a national forum for peer sharing and support for academics and PE professionals who are trying to do participatory research. So many people I spoke to (Vicky Brightman, Alison Thomson, Virginia Elgar) were interested to hear what other HEIs are up to and how other organisations have approached spending the RE money. It would be useful to get people together to share their experiences, challenges and learnings. Could Bath ask RE/UKRI to set this up? And/or consider proposing/convening a session at the NCCPE's Engage conference in December 2022?

### 3. Methodology

#### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out between March-July 2022 with key people at selected organisations. Organisations were chosen on the following basis:

- Sector leaders – recognised as being high performers in the area of participatory
- Comparators – similar to Bath in terms of size and scale; or also in KEF cluster X

Through the interviews I was interested in finding out how universities, and the practitioners who work for them, practically go about encouraging and supporting researchers to do participatory research. What are the structures and processes that need to be in place? What challenges do our HEI colleagues face, and how do they mitigate these? What do they consider to be the essential ingredients for quality and meaningful participatory research, and what is their advice for Bath?

Interviews were conducted over Zoom, for between 45-60 minutes. Interviewees were told that the findings will be used to inform changes and build an improved culture of support for participatory research at the University of Bath. Several of them expressed interest in seeing the results and having further conversations.

#### Interviewees

- Ed Watts, Head of Civic Engagement and Learning, Whitworth Art Gallery, part of the University of Manchester
- Vicky Brightman, Head of Public Engagement, Imperial College London
- Jenny Sutton, Producer, Heart n Soul
- Jen Wong, Head of Programming, Science Gallery London, part of Kings College London
- Virginia Elgar, Centre Manager, ESRC Centre for Society & Mental Health, Kings College London
- Lizzie Cain, Co-production and Learning Manager, Co-Production Collective, UCL (by email)
- Jo Stubbs, Public Engagement Associate, Elizabeth Blackwell Institute, University of Bristol (also included in PPI report as our conversation touched on both areas)

#### 4. Future follow up

I came across lots of interesting people, organisations and projects that I didn't have time to look into further during this project. These could be useful to follow up on in the future.

**Co-Production Collective @ UCL** – I didn't manage to have a live conversation with them as they were experiencing a very busy time with some personnel changes. However, I did attend one of their monthly online 'Co-Pro Cuppa' community get togethers and had a useful email exchange with one of the team, Lizzie Cain. From what I've seen I consider them to be sector leaders in good practice, and it would be worth seeking to have a further conversation with them once Bath knows more about what it would like to do, to get their advice on specifics. Lizzie is leaving, so founder Niccola Pascal would be a good person to contact instead [n.pascal@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.pascal@ucl.ac.uk)

**Brighton University** – I really tried! But had no response to multiple emails. I thought that these teams would be interesting to speak to:

- Participation, Power and Social Change Team at the institution of development studies, based on the Sussex Uni campus but part of Brighton Uni. Email: [ppsc@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ppsc@ids.ac.uk) Websites: <https://www.participatorymethods.org/> <https://www.ids.ac.uk/clusters-and-teams/participation/>
- Dr Nicolette Fox, named contact for Brighton Uni's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP). Email: [cupp@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:cupp@brighton.ac.uk) Website: <https://www.brighton.ac.uk/community-partnerships/index.aspx> This sounded really interesting, but the email address didn't work.

**QMUL** – they were short staffed and delivering a festival during the project. Sarah Barnes, Interim Head of Public Engagement, would be the best person to speak to [sarah.barnes@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.barnes@qmul.ac.uk)

**Sarah Yardley** – clinical doctor in palliative care based at UCL, interested in meaningful engagement and inclusion. [sarah.yardley@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.yardley@ucl.ac.uk) or on Twitter @lavendercrew

**Trellis** – a UCL project that brings together EPSRC researchers, artists and members of communities to co-create artworks. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/trellis-public-art> Lizzy Baddeley is the person to contact to find out more about this work and what it involves: [e.baddeley@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:e.baddeley@ucl.ac.uk)

**Mark Williams** – Artistic Director/Chief Executive of Heart n Soul <https://www.heartnsoul.co.uk/about-1/2018/11/12/our-history> I had a good conversation with Jenny Sutton, project manager, about the nuts and bolts, but I think it could be interesting to get Mark's perspective also, as someone more senior who has driven the organisation/cause forward for decades and will have a bigger picture view. He sounds like a very charismatic and persuasive advocate for disability rights and co-produced working.

Suggestions from Jenny Sutton re organisations with similar ethos to Heart n Soul in the south west:

- **Alex Lupo** [alex.lupo@bristolbeacon.org](mailto:alex.lupo@bristolbeacon.org) An inclusive music practitioner who may be able to point you in the right direction when it comes to looking for partner organisations in the south west.
- **Props Bristol** <https://www.propsbristol.org> Based in Fishponds, Bristol. "Our mission is to support adults with learning disabilities to achieve their full potential in our community. We achieve this by providing access to practical learning, skills development and worthwhile, accessible work-based experiences."

**Heart n Soul** produced 'The Little Book of Brainwaves', a book of drawings and top tips for successful co-production. Hard copies are available to buy here: <https://www.heartnsoulshop.com/the-hub>

Suggestions from Ed Watts at the Whitworth of other cultural venues and organisations that are doing good co-production:

- **Baltic in Newcastle** – they have a similar programme of working with others to define their programme
- **Middlesborough Institute of Modern Art** – they have taken on the art school, so the art gallery now delivers the art programme for the university, an interesting approach
- **Manchester Museum** – working with South Asia collectives
- **Battersea Arts Centre**, London – they work with art researchers and put on scratch performances/works in progress, always learning and changing
- The Whitworth was lucky enough to be one of the first **Gulbenkian Foundation's awards** for civic arts – they always have a great shortlist of people so this would be a good place to find other places and people to talk to.

**Imperial** used part of their RE participatory research money to fund participatory research projects led by Imperial academics. I asked them for examples of participatory research outside of healthcare, and they shared the following projects.

- **Rebecca Stewart**, Lecturer, Dyson School of Design Engineering – Smart Pillow Workshops. A series of public workshops to design and build a smart pillow using smart textiles, which allows the user to control streaming services by touch when connected to a laptop. The workshops will address new research questions and will be used to support future EPSRC grant applications.
- **Poppy Lakeman Fraser**, Global Change Ecologist and Citizen Science Manager, Centre for Environmental Policy – SustainAbleYou2. Connecting young people in a small rural community in Dorset with local residents, businesses and councils to find inspiring approaches to a more sustainable future. Phase 1 of the project involved discussions with students, community consultations, idea refinement, partnership with local organisations and launch of a festive food waste campaign with Litter Free Dorset. Phase 2 will enable students and community groups to record the environment in and around their town and turn their discussions into a fully-functioning participatory research and action project. [www.imperial.ac.uk/people/p.lakeman-fraser](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/people/p.lakeman-fraser)
- **Stav Friedman**, environmental scientist – collaborative project with citizen scientists to monitor British freshwater rivers for chemical contaminants in five English waterways. Part of the project aims to establish a network of citizen scientists who can continue ongoing sampling projects if the opportunity arises.

The PE team also ran a recent internal conference for Imperial staff and students, where academics spoke about their participatory research. You can see recordings of the talks [here](#) and summaries of their talks/projects are as follows:

- **Madalina Sas** – Synch.Live. Madalina discusses Synch.Live, an art experience and open technology research framework that allows scientists to study collective behaviour and collaboration.
- **Poppy Lakeman Fraser** – Taking the citizen science cycle back to basics. Poppy will share the array of approaches that she has used as a Citizen Science Manager. She will delve into the journey she took, from appreciating the value of traditional research, to participant-led enquiries.

Further information about the day, including links to their project pages etc can be found here: [Engagement Day 2022 | Be inspired | Imperial College London](#)

If you would like to find out more and contact any of these researchers directly, get in touch with Charlotte Coales, Engagement Manager (Capacity Building) who can e-introduce you.

## 5. Interviews – headline findings

I have summarised the main findings from each of the interviews below. More detail can be found in the much longer interview notes, which are saved as separate documents.

### 5.1 Ed Watts, Head of Civic Engagement and Learning, Whitworth Art Gallery, part of the University of Manchester

#### About Ed

Ed leads on research, projects and community engagement to explore how the gallery's collections can open up new ways to connect with traditionally under-represented audiences within cultural participation, including men over 75, and parents who have experienced baby loss. Curators work together with audiences and Manchester academics to co-produce exhibitions.

#### Interview headlines

- If Bath is interested in partnering with an art gallery (the Edge, Holburne etc.) then it would be good to talk to Ed again, and potentially also someone from the university's Department of Social Responsibility who (I think) manage the relationship between University of Manchester researchers and the gallery.
- It's important to bring in third parties who can support with any sensitive issues – to support pastoral care and safeguarding for the programming team and the public participants. E.g. they worked with the charity Sands on a project about baby loss.
- Co-production takes longer and is more complex than taking unilateral decisions. Systems, institutions, and infrastructure aren't necessarily built for this way of working.
- Challenge of legacy: Good co-production is about establishing and maintaining relationships, throughout the project and beyond (so people don't end up feeling used). This takes resource (particularly staff capacity, in his case programming teams).
- Challenge of how to show the workings behind outputs (workshops, relationships) and how to make this appealing to a general visitor. He recognises that exhibitions based on co-produced work aren't as much of a draw to visitors as more traditional art shows.
- They have reimbursed people as volunteers, paying expenses and transport. They have also recently set up paid roles of Community Representatives who will help to shape and advise on their programme. These roles then are paid at the Whitworth's freelance artist/creative practitioner rate of £90 a session or £180 a day.
- James Thomson, a researcher at the University of Manchester, is using the gallery spaces for his project 'Beautiful Care', about the aesthetics of care (e.g. Maggie's Centres) and the impact on patients of having beautiful spaces to go to. NHS counselling sessions that used to happen in the hospital now go over the road to the newly refurbished Whitworth Gallery.
- **Resource:** A Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men

### 5.2 Vicky Brightman, Head of Public Engagement, Imperial College London

#### About Vicky

Vicky leads on the College strategy and operational delivery for public engagement programmes and initiatives. As part of this role, Vicky is Director for the Great Exhibition Road Festival. She also takes a leading role in work to embed a culture of societal engagement across Imperial through training and skills development programmes for staff and students, developing staff networks and supporting fundraising.

## Interview headlines

- Scepticism re new buzzword of participatory research' – this is essentially what we've been doing for years: working out how to connect researchers with communities in a meaningful way
- All about the balance of power and mutual benefit – what are participants really getting out of their experience? Be honest and call it what it is – if it is research then call it that
- Need to properly fund central PE team and central PE infrastructure – she observes that money goes to researchers and their projects but there is none available for her and her team – this is very annoying

## 5.3 Jenny Sutton, Producer, Heart n Soul

### About Jenny

Jenny is a producer at Heart n Soul, an arts organisation that works with people with learning disabilities and autism as equal partners. During 2018-2020 they were resident in the Hub at Wellcome Collection in London for a two year project that brought people together and created projects and surveys that explored the participants', and public's, attitudes to learning disability.

### Interview headlines

- It was sometimes hard for academics to snap out of their normal ways of working – talking slower, getting rid of jargon. She saw a big part of her role as a bridge between the academics and the people with learning disabilities.
- Ideal academic personality type for co-production: people who aren't too attached to their own part in a project, who are prepared to let go of power, to let the direction change, are happy to not have too much of a fixed idea, and who can communicate clearly and slowly.
- If academics wish to work with people with learning disabilities they need to partner with organisations like Heart n Soul who have long established relationships built on lots of trust. It's not feasible for academics or HEIs to build these relationships by themselves. And partners need to be brought in from the beginning, as collaborators and not service providers.
- Everything took about five times as long as expected – there was a need for more sessions, more time, more space (to ensure that everyone was on board, understood and consented to the process). This felt very intense.
- Managing emotions was challenging – the research went to the core of participants' experience of living with learning disabilities, and the content (e.g. public responses to a survey) had the potential to be triggering.
- Having an amazing, well-designed space for people to come to (the Hub at Wellcome Collection) made people feel valued and raised their aspirations for themselves and the project. Helped with recruitment and retention of participants.
- Looking after people is really important – they did a check in each morning to see how people were feeling and ease them in, and again at the end of the day. Always had someone on hand who could have a quiet conversation in a separate area if need be.
- Need for strong, charismatic personalities who can create a sense of belonging, purpose and equal power within the project team – Mark and Pino, co-founders of Heart n Soul, do this through force of personality and strong belief in what they are doing, which carries people along with them.

- They were prepared with information and other organisations they could signpost to in the case of being asked about personal matters e.g. benefits, housing issues.
- A surprisingly large part of the budget was on taxis. It was so important for people to be able to be independent and not dependent on a support worker or parent to bring them. Taxis are less stressful than public transport – so worth it to get people to arrive to the project space in a good mood, feeling relaxed and calm.
- Payment – really want to pay people, but don't want to cause more trouble for them. There is lots of worry around losing benefits. There is a big issue that the benefits system doesn't allow flex! One way they got around this was to put money into a pot for individuals, once it had built up a bit they would buy them something big that they wanted/needed.
- 'The Little Book of Brainwaves', a book of drawings and top tips for successful co-production, is available here: <https://www.heartsoulshop.com/the-hub>

## 5.4 Jen Wong, Head of Programming, Science Gallery London, part of Kings College London

### About Jen

Jen runs the exhibition and events programme at Science Gallery London, King's College London's flagship public space that brings together academics, researchers, students, and local communities. They present exhibitions, events, performances, live experiments, open discussions and festivals. Jen has a background in exhibition development and experience production.

### Interview headlines

- They worked with young offenders on a project about drugs policy for the SGL's debut exhibition about addiction, Hooked. There were challenges associated with working with people who are institutionalised, in terms of access – they couldn't visit the resulting exhibition and see their work in a public context, which the SGL team felt uneasy about.
- Important to have an evaluation framework in place that can capture all outputs, including those that are less obvious e.g. publications, other public outputs (exhibitions, art works), impact on academics and public participants, what they go on to do next. SGL have learned how to do this better as time has gone on.
- SGL sees itself as providing a platform for participatory research happening at KCL. Not yet set up to do PR themselves (yet).
- The next exhibition at SGL, due to open in July 2022, is called Embodied Lines and features three research projects that use co-production methodologies and will, hopefully, result in publications with the community co-researchers named as co-authors.
- All researchers want to do co-production – but no researchers have skills, knowledge or infrastructure to actually do co-production!
- Jen thinks that co-produced research can feel transactional/extractive. The challenge is – what is the benefit for people who are giving their contributions? The research process is just so slow – crunching the data, writing a paper, peer review and waiting for publication – it takes too long, and participants have moved on by the time any outputs emerge. Even if there is a paper at the end of it, why would you re-engage with it? We need to articulate what the value is for people taking part in the first place – what do you get out of it if you're a non-academic partner?

## 5.5 Virginia Elgar, Centre Manager, ESRC Centre for Society & Mental Health, KCL

### About Ginnie

Ginnie manages the Centre, which works with partners and people with lived experience to explore mental health and trauma. They ran a festival with their partners called Partnering for Change, 18-23 June 2022 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/events/partnering-for-change>

### Interview headlines

- It takes a lot of time and space to build relationships and trust and just get to the point where people feel that they can work with you, where honest conversations can be had that *might* lead to something (i.e. a project idea, an application). Relationship building needs to come before ideas.
- One of their partners is McPin who advocate for people with 'expertise by experience' to play a central role in shaping research priorities and methods. More about them here: <https://mcpin.org/about-us/>
- It is so important to pay people for their time – people with lived experience often work as freelancers, so time spent contributing on advisory boards is time they are not able to spend doing other paid freelance work.
- There is clear value for young people in being trained as co-researchers – they get trained in research methods, write up findings, analyse data, and can put this on their CVs
- There is an incompatibility between how research happens and what communities want – communities need things to happen quickly, research happens slowly – so participatory research is not a quick fix. We need to be honest about this and manage expectations. But we need to be bolder too – ask ourselves (and funders), do we really need five years of data collection before we act? The communities know what is needed – trust them
- They are trying to open themselves to critical feedback from their community partners. One piece of feedback they have had is community partners questioning the power dynamics of funding: “why does the money sit with you? To address the power dynamics why not just give it to us?” and they tried to use this approach for their recent festival – gave money to their partners to use as they wanted, and offered support. The Centre has had millions of pounds of funding, and Ginny is very conscious that if you are talking to a community organisation that scrapes by on a shoestring budget then there is often a very real sense of power imbalance and inequity.
- Need to support researchers to have these potentially messy and challenging conversations with public participants (about mental health) – need for peer support and spaces where they can share their experiences, and decompress
- Payment “is the most important thing”. If people don't feel confident that they'll be paid then they won't participate. “We have definitely lost people because of payment issues”. Bureaucratic financial processes can be horrendous, and people have a lot of anxiety around having to fill out forms, and how payment will affect benefits. She would love a simple way of paying people that is understood and recognised by the Job Centre and DWP as separate from paid employment.
- She would love a forum for peer sharing and support for people working in participatory research. Could UKRI lead on this? Being able to tap into others' experiences and share knowledge is so powerful, as we are all learning as we go.
- Connections are made on shared values – not the fine details of a particular project. The sense that you are all pushing together in the same direction, that you both (academics and community partners) have the same goals and want the same outcomes

- Don't be afraid of the individual relationships – often the strength of the relationship comes from a rapport with a single person and then the relationship with their organisation develops from there. They used to get anxious thinking that they needed to make a connection with their partner organisations as a whole, then relaxed and let individual relationships blossom.
- They have created a course about peer and community research: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/research-methods-a-practical-guide-to-peer-and-community-research/1>

## 5.6 Co-Production Collective, UCL

### About Co-Production Collective

Formerly known as the UCL Centre for Co-production. They support co-production in health research, innovation and practice locally, nationally and internationally, and especially in relation to the needs and priorities of less-often heard communities. They do this by bringing together a diverse network of researchers, patients, practitioners, carers and community members to generate and share learning around co-production, facilitate co-production projects and build the co-production movement. “Whatever our identity and lived, living or learnt experience, we work together in equal partnership to create better outcomes for everyone. We work with individuals and organisations including universities, charities, funders, NHS bodies, local authorities, housing associations and grassroots groups.”

Co-production Collective are delivering a project using UCL's allocation of the Research England funding <https://www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/news/help-us-showcase-the-value-of-co-production>

Co-production Collective run monthly Co-Pro Cuppas, online sessions for the co-production community where ideas and challenges can be discussed and shared among peers. I went along to the May session and spoke with practitioners, researchers and experts by experience. These are the headlines from that session:

- Communities are fatigued and cynical after tokenistic and flash in the pan interactions with research
- Researchers need to be skilled in active listening. These so called 'soft skills' are so important for researchers and respectful interactions, otherwise they risk being told what they want to hear and missing out on real insights.
- Problem of lack of true representation in PR/PPIE – tokenistic (often researchers get one person with LE on board and assume they speak for all people with LE) and reluctance to approach all groups who could contribute important different perspectives because of fear/assumptions about lack of capacity (e.g. palliative care patients, carers)
- Seed funding needed for 'blue skies co-production'. Funders are getting more interested in funding co-production, but not the work that needs to happen beforehand in order to come up with project ideas and co-produce applications – things that don't have a clear or certain outcome. Money is needed to pay people to get involved at the ideas generation stage, to establish links with communities, ways of working, to create and maintain relationships. CPC do v small pots of seed funding at UCL e.g. ['Listen and Learn'](#) – tiny amount of money for researchers to have conversations with community groups – to pay people for their time. Bath should consider doing the same.

- Payment – have processes in place from the beginning to avoid delays and creating barriers/disincentives for people. Universities are notorious for their bureaucracy. Ask people how they want to get paid/be valued and have options.

## 5.7 Lizzie Cain, Co-production and Learning Manager, Co-Production Collective, UCL

Following the Co-Pro Cuppa I had a long email exchange with Lizzie Cain

### Headlines from our correspondence

- They are co-producing their payment policy (still in progress):
  - <https://www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/news/recap-co-creating-our-payment-policy>
  - [Summary of co-creation sessions](#)
  - <https://www.coproductioncollective.co.uk/news/co-creating-our-payment-policy-a-personal-reflection>
- Academics need training in how to meaningfully collaborate with people from different backgrounds – how they make space, the language and jargon they use, the approaches they take. Traditional academia is very hierarchical so it is important – and also very hard – for them to ‘unlearn’ their previous ways of working.
- Crucial ingredients for good co-production:
  - Funding (e.g. seed funds for relationship building and having conversations that might feed into funding applications further down the line)
  - Support from the top
  - Time and space for academics to build meaningful relationships without pressure.
  - Building a community of practice (official or otherwise) is so important – it can feel very isolating to be going against the grain so connecting with others for peer support is so helpful for learning and development.
  - Clear policies around practicalities like how to pay co-producers. Managing the practical challenges can be so frustrating, so developing guides for this is very valuable.
- Lizzie is leaving Co-production Collective this summer, but Bath should consider speaking to Co-production Collective again in the future for more specific advice, as they seem to be doing really good work in this area. Founder Niccola Pascal would be a good person to contact [n.pascal@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.pascal@ucl.ac.uk)

## 5.8 Jo Stubbs, Public Engagement Associate, Elizabeth Blackwell Institute, University of Bristol

### About Jo

Jo helps researchers engage with the non-academic world. This includes creating conversations between community groups and researchers, working with local partners, and collaborating with public audiences.

### Interview headlines

- PE/PPI professionals are needed to facilitate conversations between researchers and communities, and to take things forward afterwards – don’t leave it all up to researchers.
- At the heart of PR are these questions: who is a partner, what is their role in the project, and how is their status recognised? It can be hard to get everyone to fully sign up to the idea of

equal partnership, particularly academics. Jo has experienced the issue of some people (e.g. health researchers) perceiving artistic partners more as service providers/contractors/consultants than equal partners on the projects she ran.

- Another big question is what is the difference between PR and actual research – are you actually using your partners as interviewees/research subjects, and recruiting them to your study (and therefore should obtain ethics approval for their involvement)? This is a grey area and Jo doesn't feel qualified, as a non-researcher, to judge the difference.
- She argues (as have several others) for the need for universities to fund a community engagement officer (or similar) whose role is to be embedded within communities and build relationships, and who can act as a conduit between researchers and the communities they want to reach. This would also help avoid the current problem of community groups being bombarded by too many requests.
- Communities can feel used by researchers – people contribute their health story, which can sometimes be very personal, but they don't necessarily get something back from it as researchers don't always follow up or return to share findings.
- For community engagement and relationship building you have to be a people person and really enjoy the work – and not be too focused on outcomes.
- Her experience is that most stuff that people say is co-produced research is not actually that.
- Language issues: 'Collaborative research' (a bigger umbrella term than PR) – seems that any kind of working together can be described as this. 'Co-production' is the real buzz word currently and she doesn't really understand what this means.
- More training is needed for PE coordinators re working with vulnerable groups – we are not experts in every vulnerable group and need preparation and support. Also safeguarding – coordinators need to set boundaries and protect themselves personally. Qualitative researchers get trained in basic safety for when they are doing research with people who have specific health conditions or experience of trauma – it seems like a real omission that PE coordinators don't get this when they are often coming into contact with the same groups.