

Reflections on co-producing training interventions

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Background

In first phase of [ChallengeCPD@Bath \(2017-2019\)](#) we identified how the training offer for public engagement with research only occasionally puts the learner at the centre of the intervention. This, we felt could be a contributing factor affecting the uptake and impact of professional development for public engagement. The key areas we identified where learners could be more actively involved included:

- Identifying their existing skills, knowledge and expertise and how they could be applied to their public engagement practice
- not all learning interventions are intended to be learning interventions
- recognising that learning can take time to realise
- involving the learner in the development of the intervention

With additional resources we decided to test how we could involve the learner more actively in developing a training intervention and created a funding call specifically for researchers to bid for a grant to co-produce training with us. Over two rounds we iteratively tested this idea.

Round one (May 2018)

In collaboration with our Advisory Group we developed a funding call using the term *DIY Training*. As well as this, we also made suggestions in the call document (Appendix 1) that were relatively light-touch interventions to reassure potential applicants that this need not be an onerous commitment, but with a clear emphasis on working with us at the Public Engagement Unit.

We put the call out on 3 May 2018 with a deadline of 28 May 2018.

Total funds available for this call was £2,000.

What happened

We received two applications one of which was a request for video-making training for social media and another for speaker fees for a collaborative design thinking event. Through discussion with the applicants we developed the ideas to bring them more in-line with our needs:

- In-house training for video making / social media – with a linked practical opportunity at European Researchers' Night (this also supported the Social Media Officer in developing their training offer)
- Documenting the design thinking process through the use of video so that others could use it in the future

Second round (January to March 2019)

For the second round of this funding call we changed from *DIY Training* to *Choose Your Own Training*, to emphasise the personalised nature of the training rather than an independent DIY approach and opened the call in early 2019. Taking into account the feedback from the Advisory Group and researchers we amended the call guidance for the funding (Appendix 2). For example, there was more time to apply, more support available, more promotion of the opportunity on campus and we also gave specific examples of topic / format differentiation.

We put the call out on 22 January 2019 with a deadline of 7 March 2019.

Total funds available for this call was £5,000.

What happened

We received three applications which is not a significant increase on round one. Two of these applications were from professional services staff. We had specifically put in the call guidance that we wanted this to be researcher-led. However, reflecting on our experiences year 1 of *ChallengeCPD@Bath* that training and professional development is not highly valued in universities which suspected that this may mean that offering co-produced training is doubly unappealing. Because of this, rather than not do anything, we decided to continue with the three applications to determine what we could learn by working with both researchers and professional services staff.

The three projects were:

- Leadership Fellow programme in the faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences from the faculty's Operations and Project Manager in the faculty
- Media training programme within the Science faculty to develop a sustainable method for developing media-savvy PGR and ECR from the Department of Communication's Science Media Manager
- Data Visualisation training proposed by a lecturer in the department of Mechanical Engineering

What we found out

Even factoring in some of the external disruptions that we faced during this period (industrial action and unseasonable changes to weather), the offer had less interest than we'd expected. Through the two rounds of co-producing training through an open funding call, we've concluded that co-produced training is not an appealing offer to academics at the University of Bath.

We deliberately took our mantra of "putting the learner first" to an extreme. If we were chastened by our initial work of assuming a deficit approach to training we wanted to see what would happen if we swung the pendulum to the other extreme.

What do we note:

- Low numbers of people responding suggest it is not appealing
- Traditional forms of training suggested in terms of both format and content: video making, social media, data visualisation, workshop-based one-offs or programmes...

- Professional services colleagues can identify training needs (perhaps more readily than our researchers?) and may have more capacity to hold a programme, and certainly can reach more people
- Making the programmes sustainable takes a lot of time on our part. The concept of developing something with a life beyond the funding requires a change of mindset to normal university funding processes. This applies to both our academic and professional services colleagues. In this specific case it is perhaps because the concept of devising and delivering training is not embedded in many roles or departments.

It is always hard to assess why something does not work. I think that we have to acknowledge that training / professional development is not an appealing thing to get involved with (we know the word puts people off) and that going into a collaborative process is also unappealing (knowing how time-pressured researchers are).

It is also possible that we at the Public Engagement Unit hold more developed thinking on both training and public engagement (or are perceived to). This can mean that researchers are doubly unsure as to what to propose. Perhaps we should have heeded one of our researchers in an Advisory Group meeting who told us that we are the experts and that researchers just need to be told what to do. Clearly, it is not as simple as that. It's not just knowing what people need to know, it's about getting the format right. We listen carefully to our academic colleagues to inform everything we do and will continue to do so, particularly when there's a deafening silence!

Appendix 1 - DIY Training (2018) funding call guidance

Do you have a great idea for training for public engagement? If so, read on!

As you may know, the Public Engagement Unit secured funding from RCUK last year to examine professional development and training to support public engagement with research. You can read more about the project in previous [blog posts](#). As a result of this project we would like to pilot some new (to us) professional development tools and activities. We are inviting researchers at any stage in their career to work with us to develop and test them so that these activities are relevant and meaningful.

We have identified three possible areas that we would like to explore (but we are also open to suggestions):

- Self-assessment of existing skills / competencies - just because you've not done public engagement with research before, it doesn't mean you don't have the skills already. How do we surface skills from all areas of our lives to feel prepared for doing public engagement?
- Mentoring / buddy system – It can be useful to share your experiences of public engagement with someone else. You might just want to talk about what you did, or perhaps you want to talk with someone else who's already done it from your department or faculty or beyond. How can we set up and run a mentor or buddy system to support learning and confidence in public engagement?
- Job swaps / placements – stepping into the shoes of people you want to work with can be really beneficial. Media Fellowships are commonplace and the University runs a Policy Fellowship scheme. What can we do to enable learning between community partners and researchers by spending time with a partner organisation?

Something else entirely different – tell us what you'd like to try and why it's needed.

We have a small budget of £5000 to help with the development and delivery of materials or to cover other expenses (e.g. travel and subsistence) but this will not cover staff time.

Process

If you would like to work with us, please send an email to public-engagement@bath.ac.uk outlining:

- Which of the areas you would like to work on and why
- What you will do, including a timeline
- How you would like to work with the PEU, including outlining what you need from us (we are flexible about when this works takes place)
- How you will assess success
- How the work could be sustained after the funding period (assuming it is successful in this pilot phase)
- Budget (with justifications)

We are looking for proposals with no greater value than ~£1500. If proposals of a smaller scale are submitted we will be able to fund more of them.



Please send your proposal to public-engagement@bath.ac.uk no later than 5pm on Monday 28 May. We will let you know if you have been successful on 4 June.

Assessment

We are looking for:

- Ideas that are new to us (but can be tried and tested in another setting)
- Tools and activities that can be scaled up, rolled out across departments or faculties, or used again in some way
- Feasibility
- Willingness to collaborate with the Public Engagement Unit – for example by getting in touch to discuss your idea before the deadline

Appendix 2 – Choose your own training (2019) funding call guidance

The Choose Your Own Training Fund aims to develop training activities and interventions that work for you. By working with you to develop researcher-led training and development activities, we hope they will be more relevant and more effective.

This is an opportunity for you to directly shape the types of training and development activities that will help you with your public engagement thinking and activities.

We'll be holding a short information session on **6 February** from **14:15 – 15:05** in the **Claverton Rooms** if you want to find out more or explore your ideas with the Public Engagement Unit or colleagues across the University.

Please note: this is the first time we've developed training in this way (it's possible we're the first in the country), so if you wish to get involved please be aware that we'll be learning with you.

Format

Examples of activity formats we could be interested in supporting include (but are very much open to others):

- Mentoring / buddy systems
- Written materials and guides
- Site visits e.g. We The Curious
- Self-assessment of existing skills
- Job swaps / placements

Topic

Examples of topics we already cover include:

- Introduction to Public Engagement
- Effective collaborations
- Evaluating Public Engagement
- Object handling
- Working with industry
- Public engagement through exhibits
- Reflective practice
- Supervising students doing public engagement

We are interested in proposals that:

- 1) cover an existing topic in a new format
- 2) cover a new topic in an existing format
- 3) cover a new topic in a new format

Funding available



We have £5000 to help with the development and delivery of materials or to cover other expenses (e.g. travel and subsistence). We are looking for proposals up to the value of ~£1500. If proposals of a smaller scale are submitted we will be able to fund more of them.

Who can apply:

This funding is open to all researchers (including doctoral students) at any stage in their career.

Assessment

We are looking for:

- Ideas that are new to us (but may be in use in another setting)
- Willingness to collaborate with the Public Engagement Unit – for example by getting in touch to discuss your idea before the deadline
- Activities that can be sustained beyond this initial phase by you or by the Public Engagement Unit
- Feasibility

What we are not looking for:

- A single intervention, run by an external expert which has little / no chance of being delivered again without the same repeat costs.

Assessment Process:

Application forms must be emailed to public-engagement@bath.ac.uk **no later than 17:00 on 28 February** with ‘Choose Your Own Training’ in the title

Applications will be reviewed by the Public Engagement Unit.

Timetable:

A launch meeting will be held on **Tuesday 12 March** from **11:15 – 12:05** in **8W, 2.12 (TBC)** for all successful applicants.

Call Opens	Call Closes	Awards Start from
22 January	24 February	7 March

If you are considering an application, we would strongly encourage you to speak with a member of the Public Engagement Unit about your project prior to application submission. Please email Helen Featherstone and Robert Cooper via public-engagement@bath.ac.uk