

Public Engagement, Historians and Higher Education: A Retrospective UK Case Study

Fiona Williamson

*School of History, Politics, and Strategy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Focussing on the practice of public engagement and the teaching of history in higher education, this article will argue that public engagement is a welcome platform for sustaining humanities education through the economic stagnation and educational changes that have impacted Europe in the early 21st century. However, effective public engagement is becoming an increasingly important practice that universities are implementing all over the globe. Based on a case study of a course module run at a UK university for final-year undergraduates, this article proposes a practical framework for humanities departments to embed public engagement into departmental teaching programmes. It will demonstrate from the real-life experiences of staff and students engaged on a pilot programme how humanities subjects can also be practical skills-based learning experiences. The first section will review the current field of public engagement practice and methodology and explore why the subject has received much more attention over recent years, particularly within a UK context. The second section examines the case study itself, which was conducted during the 2009–10 academic year. The concluding section provides reflection and considers the possibilities for adopting a public engagement initiative within humanities departments in the future.

Keywords: Higher education, public engagement, teaching practice, case study

INTRODUCTION

Public engagement has been described as a ‘process of maximising the flow of knowledge and learning between universities and society’ that can contribute ‘to social justice and corporate responsibility’, stimulate ‘creativity and innovation in

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 20 December 2012

Accepted: 6 January 2015

E-mail address:

ionaw@ukm.my (Fiona Williamson)

academic research' and transform the educational experience (NCCPE, 2010). The practice of public engagement by universities (the term is sometimes used interchangeably with 'outreach') is thus a two-way process whereby the public are not considered the passive recipients of knowledge, but as active channels in which ideas are communicated and generated. In this way, the public help build and inform academic research through activities, discussions and projects.

Public engagement initiatives at universities currently attract a great deal of positive attention yet it has been only in the last decade or so that universities have promoted engagement activities with any regularity. This is especially true of humanities departments where, although public lectures or courses have traditionally been available, there has been a disjuncture between daily academic practices and local communities. Even in the last 10 years there has been a lack of information and research on engagement as a principle and as a practice (Platter, 2011); some misunderstanding of what public engagement means and how it might be approached has led to a degree of reluctance on the part of some departments to become actively involved. As Watson (2007) argued, "there has been a dearth of scholarly attention to the practice (as opposed to the rhetoric) of civic engagement by universities and colleges in various cultural contexts".

Certainly, academic history has had a rather complicated relationship with public, popular history. Academic history has

attracted criticism for being too distant from the general public, and the practitioners of local history and antiquarians are too often seen as the old-fashioned poor relations to academic, institutionalised scholars (Mandler, 2002; Tyrrell, 2005). The separation of public and academic history is rooted in the normative practices of academia. Academic networks exist within national, international and virtual frameworks, rarely within local communities or public forums. Research is often conducted in an isolated way at archives or in libraries. Much of this research is so grounded in intricate theoretical detail that it is hard to translate it to a popular audience or in many cases, simply not practical. It perhaps comes as no surprise then that professional academia has been accused of having little interest in, or relevance to, the public. As American public historian Patricia Mooney-Melvin (1995) explains

The profession as a whole, despite the efforts of numerous individuals and a few organisations, has proved remarkably resistant to altering a definition of historian and audience that has grown static ... the profession's resistance to change ... has laid the ground-work for its own marginality ... and has contributed to the general breakdown of the larger civic community.

This is partly the result of a debate over the purpose of popular history (Estes,

2006).¹ Taking sides in this debate is perhaps not useful here, but it is necessary to understand how this issue lies at the core of successful implementation of public engagement initiatives. Public engagement crosses the line between academic and popular history; academics can be unsure how they can contribute to a popular history market already saturated with museums, television companies and trusts, how to make history accessible without ‘dumbing down’ and how to reach the public from the university.

A survey conducted by NCCPE revealed that only around 35% of the 22,000 British academics questioned about their public engagement profile were participating in ‘some form of outreach’ in 2009; the year the pilot module discussed below was launched.² As there were 181,595 higher education academics in Britain that year (HESA, 2009) we could argue that this equates to only a very small number who were active in engagement activities. A survey conducted by Cambridge University also concluded that ‘outreach’ was placed below teaching, research and even administration, in respondents’ workload (Abreu, 2009). This neglect is, in part, because public engagement (or outreach) is not easy to entrench within normal academic roles. Whilst there may be some expectation for staff to be involved in outreach, it is difficult for humanities staff to conceptualise how

public-facing activities can be part of their everyday responsibilities.

This situation is not helped by the lack of scholarly pedagogical literature. That specific to public engagement in UK higher education practice is recent and largely limited to institutional reports by governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement or the UK-Innovation and Research Centre (Grinevich et al., 2010); or subject specific case studies (for example Miller, 2013 or Universities UK, 2010b) or to reports generated by universities themselves. That produced in 2011 by the Open University’s Centre for Higher Education and Research (CHERI), which considers more broadly the role of higher education issues, including public engagement, in modern society is one such example. In addition, the national press Times Higher and Guardian Educational supplements both featured articles on the subject during 2013. A great deal of pedagogical literature also stems from the American higher education system, where ‘public history’ (that is, the taught academic subject as opposed to museology and heritage theory) has been routinely added to history programmes (see Trask et al., 1983; Frisch, 1990; Leffler & Brent, 1990; Scarpino, 1994; Storey, 1995; Gardiner et al., 1999; & Tyrrell, 2005 for discussion of the American public history field over the 1980s-2000s).

This article presents a case study detailing one way in which academics can entrench public engagement into the daily

¹ A good example of the heat generated by this debate can be found by reading Estes (2006) and the series of critical responses to this article at: <http://fusilier.wordpress.com/2007/12/06/john-adams-david-mccullough-and-popular-history/> and <http://hnn.us/articles/12073.html>

² <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/what#1>.

practice of teaching, conceptualised during the reading of the abovementioned reports: a final year undergraduate module developed with the theoretical principles of public engagement in mind. It will explore the context for, and development of, the module along with a consideration of the application in practice and an evaluation of the module with the hope that the information provided here will be a useful model for other history departments.

EDUCATIONAL POLITICS: PROVIDING A CONTEXT FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN BRITAIN

Britain has a long-standing positive reputation for higher education provision but, since the 1980s, a series of economic downturns combined with a university participation rate of 30% (a rise from 6% in the 1960s) changed educational thinking at the governmental level (Barr et al., 1998). During the 1990s, higher education fees for many below a certain income bracket were subsidised by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) but, with a near doubling of student numbers between 1990 and 1996 (Barr et al., 1998), the question of free higher education became the subject of intense governmental debate and scrutiny. In 1996, an investigation into university fee structures conducted by the Dearing Committee under John Major's Conservative government made a series of recommendations of which Recommendation 78 was crucial in ushering in a new era of thinking about funding, that is, the principle of "income contingent terms for the payment of any

contribution towards living costs or tuition costs sought from graduates in work" (UK National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: Summary Report, 1997).

The Dearing Report proved to have greater longevity than the Conservative Party, who were to have less than one year left in government, replaced by New Labour in the 1997 general election. Tony Blair's government broadly adopted the Report's recommendations but shifted responsibility for funding students away from LEAs to a system based more heavily on student loan companies. The period is characterised by a process of rationalisation of higher education providers, in a shift toward a "gradual marketisation of the system" whereby "all or a significant proportion of the costs of teaching are met from tuition fees" and there "is an increased amount of information to enable students ... to choose between alternative producers" (Brown, 2011). This shift gained momentum after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government came to power in 2010. Making key changes to higher education funding and student fees, university departments can now, theoretically at least, charge students up to 9,000 pounds (GBP) in fees per annum. Funding was also squeezed after the announcement of the coalition government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in October 2010. This placed a cap on student numbers and challenged university spending, hitting higher education from above at the same time as departments were struggling to understand how increased fees would affect student intake. The arts and humanities

(including history) were the worst affected, with up to 40% cuts (with immediate effect) in some cases as funds were redirected to protect science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Universities UK, 2010a). In response to these changes, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), a set of guidelines for assessing the quality of research in academic institutions for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), emphasised the need for universities to “provide accountability for public investment in research and demonstrate its benefits” (HEFCE, 2011). In particular, universities must demonstrate “social, economic or cultural impact or benefit beyond academia” to fulfil future funding criteria (HEFCE, 2011).

The idea that history departments should contribute to “national wellbeing” as well as to the “expansion and dissemination of knowledge” (as stipulated by HEFCE, 2011) has engendered a change of perspective. Whilst the full implications of financial restructuring are being absorbed, it is clear that the combination of REF criteria for research funding and calls from students (and their parents) for universities to justify charging higher fees and provide evidence of future employability signals an increased marketisation of universities.

Recent shifts in the UK’s educational outlook may have forced the issue of public engagement, yet universities are well placed to champion new initiatives as originators and developers of research and pedagogical thinking. It is within this context then that the premise for a new module that addressed

the issues discussed above was conceived: one that could fulfil a demand for regular public engagement activities on one level but also provide students with practical employability skills on the other.

CASE STUDY: HISTORY, HERITAGE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT – A 14 WEEK FINAL-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE MODULE

With concerns of developing departmental public engagement initiatives and enhancing student employability in mind, a threefold premise for a new undergraduate module was conceived: to design a module with public engagement at its heart; to enhance student’s post-university employability; and to fulfil the demands of HEFCE’s recommendations relating to impact and public engagement (HEFCE, 2011).³ Module development began by researching the format of history modules currently on offer at the University of East Anglia and those on offer in other humanities schools. This initial research, conducted in-house and online for other British universities, quickly demonstrated that whilst modules combining elements of archaeology, art or museology, for example, frequently involved practical components (project work in the local community or with local heritage providers, for instance); the standard format for most history modules was based around a series of lectures and seminars utilising in-house academic expertise. Assessment was primarily through a combination of essays,

³ The module was developed at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK by Drs Christopher Bonfield and Fiona Williamson for delivery in the 2009-10 academic year.

examinations and oral presentations (the latter conducted before classmates and staff) with occasional project work. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this tried and tested format, given the excellent heritage facilities in Britain, it seemed natural that our history students should have the opportunity to make better use of facilities off campus. This research and reasoning informed the idea that a module based around history, heritage and public engagement should take place largely away from campus, thereby taking advantage of external expertise. Incorporating heritage as an element of the module allowed more opportunities for public engagement and working with local communities through museums, archives and other related organisations.

A module outline was thus created incorporating three elements: theoretical sessions, practical sessions and project work. The premise was to introduce students to theory and then enable them to put the same into practice in real-life situations. The theory sessions were designed to introduce students to aspects of public engagement and heritage management theory (see, for example, Moore, 2000), delivered in a series of lectures by experts in the heritage field. This marked a departure from other modules where, with a few exceptions, modules were delivered largely by internal expertise with the occasional guest lecturer. Bringing in outside expertise broadened the student learning experience and kept sessions fresh and interesting. The practical sessions were designed to introduce students to new, contemporary skills sets that were

not currently available within the history teaching programme, including developing content for a blog and documentary film-making. In this way, students would not only explore ways of disseminating history to a public audience, but also consider the theoretical principles behind making history accessible, including improved strategies for interpretative displays (Lipscomb, 2010).

The final component of the project drew the practical sessions together with the taught heritage management and media theory. Here, students were expected to work with local heritage organisations in developing projects that would be seen and used at the organisation in question by the public. The theoretical reasoning behind this was, as Buckley (2013) argues, that “a lot of the focus is currently on public engagement with research, but students also get involved in public engagement activit[ies]”⁴ and students, as volunteers act as the “bridge” between the public, the heritage organisation, and the university (Miller, 2013). The students worked off-campus for this element of the module, spending time with experienced officers at their organisation of choice and thus achieving invaluable work experience as well as producing a product that could be used by the external partner for public engagement. This module then fulfilled one element of public engagement criteria for the university in that the students were the intermediary between the university and the public, but the students were also a direct

⁴ Buckley’s quote can be found at: <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/jun/17/university-public-engagement-top-tips>

beneficiary of this relationship, because they gained invaluable skills and experiences outside of academia. Thus, their role as intermediaries had a direct and positive impact on their learning experience.

The final section of module planning was arranging with whom the students could work for the project component of the module. Our choices were informed by the excellent history and heritage providers in the local area as well as by personal contacts. Our final partners were: the Education and Outreach Team and Visitor Services at Norwich Castle Museum, a space dedicated to the history of the city of Norwich and situated within a 900-year old castle, now run by Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service;⁵ the Norfolk Record Office (NRO), a four-star archive (ranking by the UK National Archives' self-assessment programme);⁶ and the Friends of Norwich's Historic Churches, part of Norwich's Historic Churches Trust (NHCT), the latter set up in 1973 to address the problem of the many surviving, but now disused, medieval churches in the city.⁷

One remaining issue that has not yet been mentioned is that of finance, especially considering students were expected to

work away from campus. Students should not be expected to find additional costs for undertaking new modules (such as travel) when they have already paid university fees. Equally, it was considered that a small amount of funding would enable students to get the most from their experience by enabling them to have more flexibility around their choice of project. At the same time, module organisers proposing to work with external partners have to ensure that such partners (often supported by local government or charities) could be reimbursed for any related costs. To this end the organisers submitted a funding application to the university and were awarded 3,000 pounds (GBP) for perceived expenditure.

MODULE DELIVERY: WEEKLY BREAKDOWN AND ANALYSIS

The pilot module was delivered in the 2009-10 academic year at the University of East Anglia for nine final-year undergraduate history students. Two of the nine had some prior experience in working as heritage volunteers. All the students were engaged in completing degrees in medieval, early modern and modern British and European history. The module was pre-advertised by staff to second-year students during the later end of the 2008-9 year and was also incorporated into the student's module handbook for 2009-10.

Weeks One–Three: Theory

The first theory session was delivered by a heritage expert who had previously worked

⁵ http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/Visit_Us/Norwich_Castle/index.htm

⁶ The Norfolk Record Office is an archive of national, and international, importance. In 2005 they became the first county record office to have its collections "designated as being of outstanding importance by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council"; they host the only UK sound archive outside of London, and most recently, their collection relating to the medieval Great Hospital of Norwich was recognised by UNESCO in the UK Memory of the World register. See <http://www.archives.norfolk.gov.uk/nrohhistory.htm>

⁷ <http://www.norwich-churches-friends.co.uk/about/about.shtm>

at Hampton Court Palace in London, who introduced the students to the problems faced by maintaining “authenticity, academic integrity, historical ‘truths’ and ... engagement” in the presentation and preservation of heritage sites (Lipscomb, 2010). It was useful for the students to connect with these fundamental challenges early on, as this awareness gave them a framework for their project and enabled them to explore more fully the problems inherent in presenting history to the general public. Session two was conducted by a Museum Interpreter at Dragon Hall in Norwich, a restored medieval merchant’s house now open to the public. The interpreter conducted a site tour and gave a talk on the challenges of working with the public. This was followed by a question-and-answer session on the theme and included information on employment within the heritage sector. A similar session was conducted at Norwich Castle Museum in week three, when students were introduced to the Castle’s public engagement and marketing officer, a Contemporary Art Curator, and an access curator who gave a ‘behind-the-scenes’ tour of the museum’s facilities and spoke about creating an exhibition for the public.

Weeks Four–Six: Using Technology to Present History–Theory and Practice

The next two weeks were spent exploring the uses of modern technology in making history accessible to the public. Students learned about online history resources and ways of presenting academic research to the public. There was a hands-on session teaching skills

such as digitisation, uploading content and writing for a website, and a day was spent at the BBC’s television training facility where the students created short films about Norwich.⁸ At this stage in the module, the students were also asked to produce a theoretical essay on heritage and public engagement; the premise was to embed the theoretical elements of working with the public early on. Essay themes included: Effective strategies for interpretative history and marketing theory, Consumerism and Historical presentation.

Weeks Six–Twelve:

From week six, the students worked away from campus on public engagement projects with their chosen heritage partner. The choice of project was to be left to individual discussion between the student and the heritage partner but each project had to either involve, or be made available to, the public and be useful to the heritage partner. The heritage partners thus directed the student’s projects in line with their own needs at that time or related theme to internal project development.

Three students worked with the Norfolk Record Office to research and produce a public information leaflet about one of the archive’s collections. The archive uses such leaflets to guide visitors as to their collections and how to begin researching a particular topic; thus, these leaflets had to be credible, accurate and informative yet

⁸ The student’s films can be viewed on You Tube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D82XA06N2k0> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9VLupEx3L8&feature=related> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHwGeGHR2SI&feature=related>

aimed at a popular, as opposed to academic, audience. The students therefore had to consider the selection of topic, grading of their language and what information a member of the public might need to commence their research. Their final chosen topics were the city's important shoe industry through the ages, the archives of a local hospital, and the history of local breweries. Each student began by examining current information leaflets and the NROs publication guidelines. They then conducted a detailed survey of the archive's records on each topic and collated an inventory. They then incorporated this into their public information leaflet to include a brief history and introduction to their topic, the main archival sources and references alongside useful information such as suggested reading and tips on using the archives' search room.

Five students worked with the Castle Museum and tackled different themes. Two worked with the museum's marketing team to conduct a visitor survey as part of the organisation's marketing strategy. Another two students paired up to study a contemporary exhibition about feasting and food during the medieval period (within the context of a Christmas feast possibly held at the Castle itself) and produced a touch-screen multi-choice survey to gauge public opinion on the exhibition. The fourth student worked on a commentary of one of the Castle Museum's new public exhibition about crime through the ages that was then extant in the Castle's dungeon. Finally, the last student worked for the Friends of

Norwich Historic Churches. The student's project was to create a detailed development plan to effectively utilise a redundant church whilst paying due attention to the sensitivities involved in working with a listed building.⁹ The student devised two strategies, an organic food market and a clothing shop, and worked up a business plan for the latter. The student's plan was presented to the Trust at the end of the module.

Weeks Thirteen-Fourteen: Assessment

The final stage of the course was presenting the finished projects. Students were expected to analyse their project in the form of a report to include: a discussion of the project's premise, design and outcomes, the completed project itself and a post-project analysis delivered in the form of an oral presentation to students, staff and the heritage partners. Assessment weightage was as follows: Essay (c. 2500 words) 40%; Oral Project Presentation 30%; Written Project Report 30%.

Ensuring Quality

All written submissions were assessed by an external examiner in addition to the module organisers, and student presentations were viewed by heritage partners and other members of school staff as well as fellow students and lecturers. The reasoning behind this was to emulate the conditions that students might find themselves in in having

⁹ In a UK context, a 'listed' building is one that has been placed on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, see <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/listed-buildings/>

to deliver a business presentation or public exhibition in employment. However, this process also formed part of the assessment of the module itself in its pilot year. The module went through a rigorous assessment procedure to ensure that the university's standards for teaching quality were met. This was completed in two ways: an internal and external review and anonymous student feedback. The comments of the external assessor for student's written work replicated in many ways those of the internal markers but suggested in some cases, that the marks awarded could have been higher. The following comment deserves particular mention:

The idea that students produce a handbook or leaflet style piece of work seems a very good one indeed: a wonderful introduction both to the uses and handling of sources, and the kind of activity that shows how academic historical approaches can be utilised to benefit a wider public. Also quite neat, as it gives students a concrete, practical but manageable task: as in the case of dissertations, this will allow truly motivated students to shine, without unnecessarily penalising the weaker ones.¹⁰

The module was also evaluated by the students who used anonymous Module Evaluation forms to register whether they agreed, disagreed or were undecided about

particular aspects of the module: a standard format for the school. It is hoped that the practice of anonymity will allow for a degree of honesty. Ultimately, the information from the Module Evaluation forms was collated into an annual Module Monitoring exercise (MM1) that all module organisers are required to complete. A summary of student feedback is as in Table 1.

The forms follow a generic standard, but provide a good starting point for assessing how a module has been received. The results demonstrate that students enjoyed and learned from the module, but there is work to be done on providing clearer module aims at the start and improving guidance for students on completing their coursework. With hindsight, the three areas which all needed attention relate to the very broad scope of the module, particularly in relation to the fact that students choose their project topics *after* they sign up for the course.

Both formal and informal feedback, however, suggested that the students took much from their experience of working off-campus with heritage partners and developed useful links and contacts in the process. One of the students continued working with the Castle Museum as a direct result of this module. Of course, this is satisfying for the module organisers, but the most rewarding part was the skills and experience that the students gained.

The external assessor's comments were positive overall, and student feedback demonstrated that all participants enjoyed the module; made new networks and contacts in the heritage sector and developed

¹⁰ Bjorn Weiler, External Examiner for the School of History, Final Comments, June 2011

new skills. They learned how to create professional presentations, to develop confidence in public speaking, to understand and use new technologies and platforms such as web design, blogging and film editing and they gained practical experience of marketing, educational research and business planning.

REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The module fulfilled its engagement aims by asking students to act as the face of the university by working with the public or by

producing projects designed to engage the public. In the process, the students learned far more about the practice of history outside of the immediate circles of academia; the challenges faced by the heritage sector in dealing with the general public and creating history that is both accurate *and* engaging. The experience strengthened existing links between the university and the local heritage sector and forged future working relationships. The module facilitated public engagement with history and higher education by taking undergraduate students

TABLE 1
A summary of student feedback

Student Feedback Form		Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Overview of the Unit	Module aims were clear	6	3	0
	Teaching was well organised	9	0	0
	Documentation provided was useful	6	3	0
	Intellectual level was about right	8	1	0
	I would recommend the module to others	9	0	0
Delivery of Teaching	I attended most or all of the lectures	9	0	0
	The lectures were interesting and improved my understanding	9	0	0
	I attended seminars and contributed	9	0	0
	The seminars improved my understanding	9	0	0
Workload, Assessment and Feedback	Class preparation load and coursework was about right	9	0	0
	I received helpful guidance when preparing my written work	7	2	0
	Feedback on written work will help me to improve in future	9	0	0

into the community to work with the public on different projects, and secondly, by bringing local heritage organisations closer to the university through a collaborative partnership. Finally, the student's projects were displayed to the public at our partner organisation's facilities or, as in the case of the touch-screen survey and information leaflets, became part of our partner's ongoing marketing and information strategies.

The module was a success but its implementation was not without its share of problems. The most obvious was the broad subject matter of the student's projects. Normally, a history module is designed around a lecturer's own field of expertise and therefore assessment falls within the parameters of a topic on which the lecturer is confident. In this case, student projects were tailored to our external partner's strengths, facilities and staff specialisms, all essential for fulfilling public facing projects. However, this meant that our partners became the student's primary contact and main source of knowledge for the latter part of the module and the lecturers could not be expected to have prior knowledge of each project field. From our partners' perspective, this resulted in extra responsibility. From the university's perspective, monitoring student's progress and assessing their projects became much more difficult. This was not an insurmountable problem, but it is a warning for anyone interested in running a similar module. External partners need to be made fully aware of their expected roles and responsibilities before they agree to take part, and the problematic issue of

assessing non-subject specific projects must be addressed before the module commences.

CONCLUSION: A POSITIVE FUTURE FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

History is one academic subject that should not see public engagement as a new phenomenon. The teaching and practice of history has long been embedded into local communities in the activities of local history societies, antiquarians and heritage (Kelley, 1978; Karamanski, 1990). The 20th century saw the remarkable rise of charitable organisations like the National Trust and English Heritage that invested in preserving sites of historic interest for the public and an increasing role for local government in running museums and investing in local historical projects after the Second World War (Jordanova, 2003). Likewise, since the 1960s, there have been far more historical texts and novels, television programmes and ways of bringing history to the public than ever before (Rosenzweig et al., 1996, 1998).

This changing perception has been inspired by the phenomenal interest in history shown by the public over recent years and the many success stories demonstrating how the popular and the academic can be integrally connected, with academic historians such as Cambridge University's Simon Schama or Mary Beard (to name but two), some of British television's most well-known history presenters making programmes that are at once grounded in scholarly academic research yet accessible to a general audience. At the same time,

magazines like BBC History or Channel 4's Time Team presented by Tony Robinson, utilise sound academic expertise yet are not primarily aimed at an academic market. Such publications and programmes are part of a burgeoning field of popular history and public engagement with history that shows no signs of abating.

Research reports and inquiries developed at governmental and non-governmental institutions across different countries have also proved significant. In the US, for example, the American National Council promotes the idea that academic historians can fulfil the same public engagement role as heritage professionals, as "historical consultants, archivists, teachers, cultural resource managers, curators, film and media producers, policy advisors, [and] oral historians" (NCPH, 2014). In 2002, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) produced a formula for successful engagement, which included the "strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens" (Hart, 2009). In Britain, the government invested in supporting organisations and institutions dedicated to promoting public engagement in higher education, including the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), established to maximise "the flow of knowledge and

learning between universities and society" (NCCPE, 2010).

Building on this background, public engagement is now framed as a crucial part of the development and progression of academic research in Britain. Certainly, bodies such as the Wellcome Trust, the Arts Council England or the Arts and Humanities Research Council have increasingly favoured the funding of academic research that prioritises elements of public engagement. Some universities, like University College London (UCL), Cambridge, Bristol, Cardiff or East Anglia (UEA) have teams dedicated to developing engagement projects or work in partnership with national funding bodies to support engagement initiatives.¹¹ It seems these enterprises are working. A 2010 report by Universities UK also suggests that even in the current economic climate universities have "been helping to support local employers ... and build for the future" by offering "access to specialist facilities ... bespoke education for company workforces ... consultancy services ... [and] continuing professional development for local businesses and their employees". In this way, universities are fast becoming 'knowledge exchanges' within their local communities (Universities UK, 2010). At the time of writing there are also 110 public

¹¹ Cambridge University's HEFCE funded 'Rising Stars' initiative allows undergraduates, postgraduates and early career academics the opportunity to take part in community activities: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/case-studies/rising-stars>; www.bristol.ac.uk/public-engagement/; www.cardiff.ac.uk/communityengagement/index.html; The UEA worked with local museums on an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) project entitled 'The Art of Faith' during 2010. Other projects include: 'The Butterfly Effect – Climate Change and the Norfolk Broads'.

engagement project case studies currently registered on NCCPE's website: www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/case-studies.

This article was intended to demonstrate one way in which universities can incorporate public engagement activities into teaching programmes easily and effectively, without having to rely on external funding or allocating time to large projects. The experience of developing and teaching this module demonstrates that there is much scope for combining public engagement activities with everyday academic roles. Indeed, rather than being an onerous task, the challenge of finding ways of embedding public engagement into academic practice actually inspired a new approach towards teaching and learning. Drawing from the success of the module, a full inter-disciplinary public engagement programme has been developed, linking different schools and faculties by the efforts of a dedicated team of lecturers. Aimed at undergraduate and taught masters-level students, participants can enrol for the whole programme, completed as an interdisciplinary 'pathway' in the arts and humanities, or can pick and choose one module as a free choice. The proposed programme has appeal to students of history, art history, museology, film studies, archaeology and even business and marketing. Public engagement should thus not be seen as a 'just another job' for the academic but should be used as a tool for inspiring fresh teaching methodologies, personal development and lifelong learning. The method can be as rich and rewarding

for staff, as for the students. As Carl Becker, then President of the American Historical Association in 1931, has stated, historians should "adapt [their] knowledge" to the "necessities of the present" rather than "cultivate a speech of dry professional arrogance growing out of the thin soil of antiquarian research" (Rosenweig, 1983).

REFERENCES

- Abreu, M., Grinevich, V., Hughes, A., & Kitson, M. (2009). *Knowledge exchange between academics and the business, public and third sectors*, Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.
- Barr, N. A., & Crawford, I. (1998). The Dearing Report and the government's response: A critique [online]. London: LSE Research Online. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/00000283> Made available online from June 2005.
- Becker, C. (1983). Everyman his own historian quoted in R. Rosenweig. Everyone a historian. In R. Rosenweig, & D. Helen (Eds.). *Popular uses of history in American life*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, pp.177–189.
- Benson, S., Brier, S., & Rosenweig, R. (1986). *Presenting the past: Essays on history and the public*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Brown, R. (2011). Looking back, looking forward: The changing structure of UK higher education, 1980–2012. In J. Brennan, & T. Shah (Eds.). *Higher education and society in changing times: Looking back and looking forward* (pp.13–23). CHERI: The Open University.
- Estes, T. (2006). The unpopularity of popular history in the academy: An academic's thoughts on David McCullough's visit to campus, *Oakland Journal*, 9–26.

- Frisch, M. (1990). *A shared authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*. New York: New York Press.
- Gardiner, J., & LaPaglia, P. (1999). *Public history: Essays from the field*. Malabar: Krieger Publishing.
- Hart, A., Northmore, S., & Gerhardt, C. (2009) *Briefing paper: Auditing, benchmarking, and evaluating public engagement*. Bristol: National Co-ordinating Council for Public Engagement.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (2011, March). *REF, decisions on assessing research impact: A report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England*, 1–2.
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Report 2010, 2009.
- Jordanova, L. (2003). *The Practice of History*. London, Arnold Publishing.
- Karamanski, T. (1990). Making history whole: Public service, public history, and the profession. *The Public Historian*, 12, 91–101.
- Kelley, R. (1978). Public history: Its origins, nature, and prospects. *The Public Historian*, 1, 16–28.
- Leffler, P., & Brent, J. (1990). *Public and academic history: A philosophy and a paradigm*. Malabar: Krieger Publishing.
- Lipscomb, S. (2010). Historical authenticity and interpretative strategy at hampton court palace. *The Public Historian*, 32(3), 98–119.
- Mandler, P. (2002). *History and national life*. London: Profile Books.
- Miller, R., et al. (2013). V factor: Volunteers as a bridge between museum scientists and the public. *Journal of Natural Science Collections* 2013, 1, 48–58.
- Mooney-Melvin, P. (1995). Professional historians and ‘destiny’s gate’. *The Public Historian*, 17, 9–24.
- Moore, K. (2000). *Museums and popular culture*. London and Washington: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (2010). *The engaged university: A manifesto for public engagement*. Bristol: NCCPE.
- Platter, W. M. (2011), Collective leadership for engagement: Reclaiming the public purpose of higher education. In J. Saltmarsh. J. & M. Hartley (Eds.), *To serve a larger purpose: Engagement for democracy and the transformation of higher education*. Temple University Press, pp.102–129.
- Rosenzweig, R., & Thelen, D. (1998). *The presence of the past: Popular uses of history in American Life*. New York: New York Press.
- Scarpino, P. (1994). Common ground: Reflections on the past, present, and future of public history and the NCPH’. *The Public Historian*, 16(3), 11–21.
- Storey, B. A. (1992). Hanging by four pine needles (or, confessions of a public historian). *The Public Historian*, 14, 11–22.
- Trask, D., & Pomeroy, R. (1983). *The craft of public history: An annotated select bibliography*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Tyrrell, I. (2005). *Historians in public: The practice of American History, 1890-1970*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- UK National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: *Summary Report: 1997*.
- Universities UK. (2010a). *The future funding of higher education: Briefing for parliamentarians*. London: Universities UK.
- Universities UK. (2010b). *Universities: Engaging with local communities*. London: Universities UK.
- Watson, D. (2007). *Managing civic and community engagement*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill International.

