Public and Community Engagement with Research at King's – Community Consultation

Background

- Following King's poor KEF1 results for Public and Community Engagement, and as part of a wider strategic review, the Impact & Engagement Services Team received a mandate in Spring 2022 for strengthening support for Public & Community Engagement with Research (PCER) across King's.

- This lead to the establishment of a 'Communities & Partnerships Working Group' made up of PCER professionals from across the College.

- The working group identified a priority action should be to run a community consultation to ensure King's new strategy for PCER reflects and responds to the needs, interests and concerns of the external communities that engage with King's research and who stand to benefit from it.

Consultation Purpose and Scope

Aim:

To co-develop a set of recommendations with local communities to inform the development of King's new strategic approach to PCER.

Research questions:

1. What are communities' understandings and perceptions of Kings College London?

2. How do communities understand PCER, and what are their motivations for getting involved in research?

3. What are communities' experiences of PCER at King's and perceptions of how well King's engages communities with its research?

4. What are some of the key barriers or challenges to engaging with research at King's?

5. How do communities want to be involved in research at King's?

6. What makes a good (and inclusive) relationship from the perspective of communities?

Approach

- Consultation designed by Impact & Engagement Services, with support from The Social Innovation Partnership
- Six interviews with members of organisations with experience of engaging with King's research
- One workshop with 11 PPI Reps with experience of engaging with Nursing, FoLSM, and IoPPN research
- Two workshops with 32 local residents in total from Southwark and Lambeth with varying levels of experience engaging with King's research

Organisation/ group interviewed	Faculty connected with	Type of Engagement
Black Thrive Global	SSPP, IoPPN	Co-researchers
ECHO	FoLSM	Patient engagement, Dialogue, dissemination
Migration Museum	A&H	Collaboration
Patient advisory panel	Nursing	PPI
Citizens UK	SSPP	Collaboration
Coin Street	FoLSM	Dialogue, Civic Challenge partner

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Findings: Understandings and perceptions of King's

- Confusion over boundaries between King's and hospitals
- Seen predominantly as a place for education and healthcare, rather than for research

	Positives	Negatives
PERCEPTIONS	Prestigious and aspirational, innovative and leading the way	An exclusive place, separate from its local communities and unwelcoming, inaccessible and not interested in serving those outside of the institution
	Well-connected and a 'pillar of influence in our local society'	White and middle-class (not reflective of the diverse nature of the boroughs it sits within), and researchers unaware of issues faced by local communities
	A place with lots of opportunities	A gatekeeper of knowledge
	A centre for good healthcare – where the medical professionals care and want to help people	A provider of poor healthcare (especially historically)
		Not active in the local community, and unsupportive of local community activities

Understandings of PCER and perceived value

A vision for PCER at King's

"Our vision is to enhance the quality and relevance of King's research to society through support and encouragement for meaningful P&CE with research, allowing diverse voices to shape any or all aspects of our research process."

"Our vision is to improve the quality and relevance of King's research to society through meaningful public and community engagement and involvement"

Feedback:

Supportive of vision as benefits both communities and research. But, language:

- Reinforces feelings of 'us' and 'them'

- Maintains the status quo of an organisation that lacks diversity, relying on the diversity of external groups to do better research

This second vision received more positive feedback, but was felt to be meaningless without details of how it will be achieved.

Defining PCER

"Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit" – NCCPE definition of Public Engagement

"There are many ways that public and community groups can interact with and shape research. Meaningful engagement and involvement should equally value academic and non-academic skills and expertise, and aim to generate benefits for everyone."

The spectrum of PCER activities

- *Transmission: One-way, focuses on informing, educating or inspiring*
- *Dialogue: Two-way, takes on board the views, knowledge or experience of those outside academia to inform decisions*
- *Collaboration: Co-created knowledge or joint decision making*

- *Dissemination: One-way, focusses on informing, educating or inspiring*
- *Conversation: Two-way, takes on board the views, knowledge or experience of those outside of academia to inform decisions*
- *Collaboration: Involvement of the public and communities, co-created knowledge and shared decision making.*

Feedback:

- Simplify language
- Term 'engagement' off putting to some – 'involvement' is better
- Engagement is more than just the benefits of research being shared with the public – researchers should be transformed as well.

- These refined definitions aligned more closely with participants' pre-existing understandings of PCER

Perceptions and experiences of PCER at King's

	Positives	Negatives
EXPERIENCES	King's made useful connections and allowed networks to grow	Researchers lacked understanding of where community was under-resourced
	Researchers took the time to build relationships, understand needs and constraints, and ensure genuine mutual benefit	No formalised agreement in place
	Provided access to the university's infrastructure and resources	Community not involved at the start of the project, and at a stage that was too late to influence its direction meaningfully
	Researchers communicated well and consistently throughout project	Researchers did not communicate well (leading to feelings of being undervalued and not important)
PERCEPTIONS	King's researchers are more willing and supportive than other institutions to work with communities.	King's is inflexible and bureaucratic (though no worse than any other university)
	King's is more willing than most to support with their infrastructure	King's is not good at communicating or supporting communities to connect with its research (especially those who haven't engaged with research before)
	King's is an enabler and a doer	King's researchers are too busy

Key barriers and principles to overcome them

Key barriers to engaging with King's research	PCER best practice to minimise barriers
Recruitment of community groups based on their demographic, rather than their expertise	Communities involved in intentional and non-extractive ways
Researchers parachuting in, and no commitment to long-term working	
Lack of recognition	
Not feeling valued or respected	Taking a human-centred and values-based approach
History of mistrust	
No agency in shaping what research is done, or how its carried out	Sharing of power and resources
Over-reliance on, and taking too much from, organisations with limited resource	
Not taking the time to understand the community group and their needs, interests and capacities	Responsiveness, flexibility and openness to new ways of working (which are then formalised)
Different timelines	
Unclear pathways around how to get involved in King's research	Accessible, timely and consistent communication
Communication of King's research not relatable, accessible, or engaging	
Little communication during projects, and no follow-up	
Exclusion of groups based on their location, background, complexity of needs etc	Commitment to working inclusively and accessibly with the communities who stand to benefit the most
Over-reliance on a single person to speak for a entire community	
Use of inaccessible comms channels and digital platforms	

Further findings

The communities consulted had a further desire for:

- Opportunities to get involved at different levels with research, depending on their interests and capacities
- Porosity between the university and the local community
- Communities to have an ongoing role in shaping how King's involves communities in research

"Unless you have representation from all the stakeholders at all levels, will always be an 'us' and 'them' culture. Communities should be key stakeholders. They should be sitting next to you in the management organization. There should be constant clear lines of communication going up and down. It should not just be tokenism".

Recommendations

Strategy:
- The vision and language used to describe PCER at King's should be simple and not reinforce feelings of 'us' and 'them'
- The strategy should include details on how a culture of non-extractive, inclusive and values-based PCER at King's will be developed
- PCER activities should complement those of London and Service, to contribute towards King's being an active and supportive neighbour
- There should be a genuine commitment to shifting power to communities
- Consideration should be given to the continued involvement of communities in shaping PCER at King's

Support:
- Community engagement training and toolkits should be created/collated and shared with King's researchers
- Develop pathways for community members to find out about King's research, and get involved (e.g. contribute to community newsletters, develop a network of community connectors, programmes to develop skills and confidence)
- Support activities that welcome communities into King's, as well as those in the community, that are responsive to what communities want (e.g. through seed funding)

Building on success:
- Gather and share case studies highlighting best practice, both within King's and with communities
- Experiment! Try new things, and learn from them e.g. community research residencies

FULL REPORT COMING SOON!